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OUR SOCIAL WORLD

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Our Social World

Seventh Edition

To our beloved coauthor, Keith A. Roberts. His love for teaching through deep learning lives on in this book and in the lives of the many, many teachers and students he touched.

Our Social World

Introduction to Sociology

Seventh Edition

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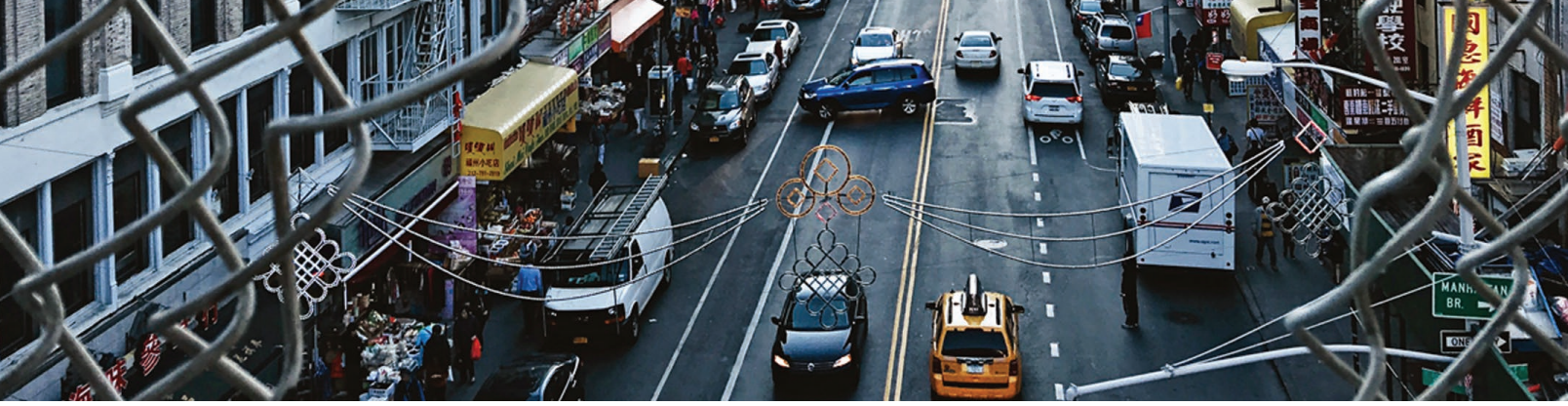

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PREFACE

To Our Students

This book will change how you view the social world—and your place in it. You will gain a sociological perspective on the world that will change what you notice and how you make sense of your social world. Some of you will become sociology majors. All of you will find the subject matter of this course relevant to your personal and professional lives. You will learn how society works—and how you can influence it, develop interpersonal skills, and gain new information about social life in small groups and global social systems. As the broadest of the social sciences, sociology has a never-ending array of fascinating subjects to study.

Sociology and this book ask you to think outside the box. Why? The best way to become a more interesting person, to grow beyond the old familiar thoughts and behaviors, and to make life exciting is to explore new ways to view your social world. The world in which we live is intensely personal and individual, with much of our social interaction occurring in intimate groups of friends and family. Our most intense emotions and most meaningful links to others are at this small-group "micro" level of social life. *As you use this book, apply what you read to your life and those in your social world.* This will make the book relevant to you and help you apply what you learn to your own life.

However, these intimate micro-level links in our lives are influenced by larger social structures and global trends. The social world you face in the job market of the 21st century is influenced by changes and forces that are easy to miss. Like the wind, which can do damage even if the air is unseen, social structures are themselves so taken for granted that it is easy to miss seeing them. However, their effects can be readily identified. Sociology's perspectives will help you to better understand your family, friends, work life, leisure time, and your place in a diverse and changing world.

Becoming Literate in Sociology

Each day you have routines, many of them involving other people and groups to which you belong or have a connection. Think about your roommate, classes, sports team, Greek organization, college you attend, and country in which you live. All these groups—and many more—make up your social world. Just as you learn the ideas, principles, theories, and frameworks in your other science and social science courses, so, too, sociology has key ideas, theories, frameworks, and models that fit together to give a picture of the social world and literacy in the field of sociology. Your text and course will introduce you to key elements that make up your individual social world. Each chapter provides a slice of the total sociological pie, and each different ingredient adds to the whole. When you finish this course you will have achieved basic literacy in sociology. You will see how you as an individual fit into your social world.

The following table shows an outline of the sociological competencies you will begin to learn in this course that will aid you in getting a job and navigating life. Advanced courses in sociology go into more depth in these competencies.

Essential Competency	Significance (Students Will . . .)
Apply sociological theories to understand social phenomena	Be able to identify how sociological concepts and theories relate to everyday life
Critically evaluate explanations of human behavior and social phenomena	Possess a critical lens for understanding human behavior and societies
Apply scientific principles to understand scientific methods and data	Articulate the importance of evidence and scientific methods for explanations and social phenomena
Rigorously analyze social scientific data	Be able to identify the characteristics of high-quality data and methods in sociological research
Use sociological knowledge to inform policy debates and promote public understanding	Use their sociological knowledge and skills to engage with and impact the world around them

The Social World Model

A well-constructed course needs to be organized around a central question, one that leads to other questions and intrigues the participants. For you to understand sociology as an integrated whole rather than a set of separate chapters in a book, we have organized this book around the *social world model*. The social world model demonstrates the relationships among individuals (micro level); organizations, institutions, and subcultures (meso level); and national societies and global structures (macro level). At the beginning of each chapter, a visual diagram of the model illustrates this idea as it relates to the topic of that chapter. This opening includes examples of issues related to the topic that have implications for the social world, influencing and being affected by other parts of society. No aspect of society exists in a vacuum. Note that this model does not assume that everyone always gets along or that relationships are always harmonious or supportive. Sometimes different parts of society compete for resources and conflict with one another over policies.

This micro- to macro-level analysis is a central concept in the discipline of sociology. It will help you to develop a *sociological imagination*, an ability to see the complex links among various levels of the social system, from the micro level of close relationships to the macro level of globalization. Within a few months, you may not remember all the specific concepts or terms that have been introduced, but if the way you see the world has been transformed during this course, a key element of deep learning has been accomplished. Learning to see things from alternative perspectives is a precondition for critical thinking. This book attempts to help you recognize connections between your personal experiences and problems and larger social forces of society. Thus, you will be learning to take a new perspective on the social world in which you live.

A key element of that social world is diversity. We live in societies in which people differ in a host of ways: ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious background, political persuasion, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. The most productive and creative organizations and societies are those that are highly diverse. This is the case because people with different backgrounds solve problems in different ways. When people with such divergences come together, the outcome of their problem-solving can create new solutions to vexing problems. Thus, diversity is a blessing in many ways to a community or society. However, diversity often creates challenges as well. Misunderstanding and "us" versus "them" thinking can divide people. These issues are explored throughout this book. We now live in a global village, and in this book, you will learn something about how people on the other side of the village live and view the world.

We hope you enjoy the book and get as enthralled with sociology as we are. It genuinely is a fascinating field of study.

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Emeritus, Hanover College

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William Paterson University

Your authors—teaching "outside the box"

INSTRUCTORS

How to Make This Book Work for You

How to reach students at their ability and interest levels and provide sociological principles they can grasp and use underlies the content and features of this book. Based on current pedagogical theory and recommendations for the beginning sociology course, the following discussion provides a curriculum map for the chapters and an introduction to the use of the *sociological literacy framework*.

Special features woven throughout each chapter support the themes of the book. These will help students comprehend and apply the material and make it more understandable and interesting. These features are also designed to facilitate deep learning, to help students move beyond rote memorization, and to increase their ability to analyze and evaluate information.

For students to understand both the comparative global theme and sociology as an integrated whole rather than as a set of separate chapters in a book, we have organized this book around the *social world model* that demonstrates the relationships among individuals (micro level); organizations, institutions, and subcultures (meso level); and societies and global structures (macro levels of analysis) (see following discussion). At the beginning of each chapter, a visual diagram of the model illustrates this idea as it relates to the topic of the chapter, including how issues related to the topic have implications at various levels of analysis in the social world.

Sociological Literacy Framework

In the past few years, sociologists in the teaching movement have developed a framework for teaching key topics and competencies in introductory sociology courses (Ferguson and Carbonaro, 2015). The individual ideas are not new, but together they lay out a comprehensive framework for teaching our discipline, and they provide a guide for what students should understand and be able to do when they complete the introductory course. Broad enough to include the topics we typically teach in the introductory course, the framework places loose parameters around the field and organizes content into a comprehensive and comprehendible format. *Our Social World* uses the key ideas and concepts in the framework for a systematic presentation aimed at undergraduate students and an up-to-date presentation of sociology's core content.

The framework represents what "students of sociology should understand" after completing an introductory sociology course, as determined by several working groups of teacher-scholars and sociologist task forces.* "To Our Students" includes a box outlining the six essential competencies.

"Think About It"

So that students can become curious, active readers, we have posed questions at the outset of each chapter that we hope are relevant to everyday life but are also tied to the micro-meso-macro levels of analysis that serve as the theme of the book. The purpose is to transform students from passive readers who run their eyes across the words into curious, active readers who read to answer a question and to be reflective. Active or deep reading is key to comprehension and retention of reading material (Roberts and Roberts 2008). Instructors can also use this feature to encourage students to think critically about the implications of what they have read. Instructors might want to ask students to write a paragraph about one of these questions before coming to class each day. These questions might also provide the basis for in-class discussions.

Students should be encouraged to start each chapter by reading and thinking about these questions, looking at the topics outlined in "What Will You Learn in This Chapter?," and asking some questions of their own. This will mean that they are more likely to stay focused, remember the material long-term, and be able to apply it to their own lives.

* For further information, see Ferguson and Carbonara, 2016.

A Global Perspective and the Social World Model

This book incorporates a global perspective throughout so that students can see not only how others live different but rewarding lives, but also the connections between others' lives and their own. Students will need to think and relate to the world globally in future roles as workers, travelers, and global citizens. Our analysis illustrates the interconnections of the world's societies and their political and economic systems and demonstrates that what happens in one part of the world affects others.

This global approach attempts to instill interest, understanding, and respect for different groups of people and their lifestyles. Race, class, and gender are integral parts of understanding the diverse social world, and these features of social life have global implications. The comparative global theme is carried throughout the book in the main text, in examples, and in boxes and selection of photos. As students read this book, they should continually think about how the experiences in their private world are influenced by and may influence events at other levels: the community, organizations and institutions, the nation, and the world.

Opening Vignettes

Chapters typically open with an illustration relevant to the chapter content that will grab the attention of students. For instance, in Chapter 2, "Examining the Social World," the case of Hector, a Brazilian teenager living in poverty in a favela, is used to illustrate research methods and theory throughout the chapter. In Chapter 4, "Socialization," Craig Kielburger, who at the age of 12 founded a major nonprofit organization fighting child labor practices around the world, begins the discussion. Chapter 7 opens with the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Chapter 15 begins with the experiences of Sally Ride, the first American woman in outer space. These vignettes are meant to interest students in the upcoming subject matter by helping them relate to a personalized story. In several cases, the vignettes serve as illustrations throughout the chapters.

Public Sociology and Sociologists in Action

Public sociology has become a major initiative within sociology, and students are often interested in what can be done with sociology outside of the academy. With that in mind, in each chapter we feature professional or student "Sociologists in Action" who describe how they use sociology to make a positive impact on society.

"Thinking Sociologically" Questions

Following major topics, students will find thought-provoking questions that ask them to think critically and apply the material they just read to some aspect of their lives or the social world. This feature encourages students to apply the ideas and concepts in the text to their lives, to develop critical thinking skills, and to use the material for better recall. These questions can be the basis for in-class discussions and can be assigned as questions to start interesting conversations with friends and families to learn how the topics relate to their own lives.

"Engaging Sociology"

Perhaps the most innovative feature in this book is called "Engaging Sociology"—and the double entendre is intentional. We want students to think of sociology as engaging, informative, and fun. These features—such as applying a population pyramid to the business world, taking a survey to understand why differences in social and cultural capital can make first-generation students feel alienated on a college campus, and reading a map and learning to analyze the patterns—help students understand how interesting and useful sociology can be.

Special Features

Featured inserts provide even more in-depth illustrations of the usefulness of the sociological perspective to understand world situations or events with direct relevance to a student's life. The "Sociology in Our Social World" features focus on a sociological issue or story, often with policy implications. "Sociology Around the World" takes readers to another part of the globe to explore how things are different (or how they are the same) from what they might experience in their own lives.

Key Concepts, Examples, and Writing Style

Key terms that are defined and illustrated within the running narrative and that appear in the glossary appear in **bold** with an italicized definition following. Other terms that are defined but are of less significance are italicized. The text is rich in examples that bring sociological

concepts to life for students. Each chapter has been student tested for readability. Both students and reviewers describe the writing style as reader-friendly, often fascinating, and accessible—but not watered down.

Social Policy and Becoming an Involved Citizen

Most chapters include discussion of social policy issues and the relevance of sociological findings to current social debates. Furthermore, because students sometimes feel helpless and do not know what to do about social issues that concern them at macro and meso levels, we have concluded every chapter with a few ideas about how they might become involved as active citizens, even as undergraduate students. Some suggestions in the "Contributing to Our Social World: What Can We Do?" section may be assigned as extra credit, service learning, or term projects.

Summary Sections and Discussion Questions

Each chapter ends with review material: a "What Have We Learned?" feature that includes a "Key Points" bulleted summary of the chapter's core material. The summary is followed with probing discussion questions that ask students to go beyond memorization and apply the material in the chapter to their own lives. Research indicates that unless four discrete sections of the brain are stimulated, the learning will not be long term and deep but surface and short term (Zull 2002). These questions are carefully crafted to activate all four critical sections of the brain.

A Little (Teaching) Help From Our Friends

Whether the instructor is new to teaching or an experienced professor, there are some valuable ideas in this text that can help invigorate and energize the classroom. As we noted earlier, substantial literature on teaching methodology tells us that student involvement is key to the learning process. In addition to the engaging questions and exercises in the text, there are teaching suggestions in the supplements and teaching aids for active learning in large or small classes.

Instructor Teaching Site

A password-protected instructor teaching site, available at edge.sagepub.com/ballantine7e, provides integrated sources for all instructor materials, including the following key components for each chapter:

- The *test bank*, available in Word and ExamView, contains multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter. The test bank provides you with a diverse range of prewritten options as well as the opportunity to edit any question and/or insert your own personalized questions to assess students' progress and understanding effectively.
- Editable, chapter-specific Microsoft *PowerPoint slides* offer you complete flexibility in easily creating a multimedia presentation for your course and highlight essential content, features, and artwork from the book.
- *Lecture notes* summarize key concepts on a chapter-by-chapter basis to help with preparation for lectures and class discussions.
- *Chapter-specific discussion questions* can help you launch classroom interaction by prompting students to engage with the material and by reinforcing important content.
- Lively and stimulating *ideas for class activities* can be used in class to reinforce active learning. The activities apply to individual or group projects.
- And much more!

Interactive E-Book

Our Social World is also available as an interactive e-book, which can be packaged with the text for just $5 or purchased separately. This interactive e-book includes premium video resources.

SAGE Coursepacks

SAGE coursepacks make it easy to import our quality instructor and student resource content into your school's learning management system (LMS) with minimal effort. Intuitive and simple to use, SAGE coursepacks give you the control to focus on what really matters: customizing course content to meet your students' needs. The SAGE coursepacks, created specifically for this book, are customized and curated for use in Blackboard, Canvas, Desire2Learn (D2L), and Moodle.

In addition to the content available on the SAGE edge site, the coursepacks include the following:

- *Pedagogically robust assessment tools* that foster review, practice, and critical thinking and offer a better, more complete way to measure student engagement, including the following:

- *Diagnostic chapter pretests and posttests* that identify opportunities for student improvement, track student progress, and ensure mastery of key learning objectives
- *Assignable premium video and SAGE Stats data activities* that bring concepts to life, increasing student engagement and appealing to different learning styles; the activities feed to your gradebook
- *Integrated links to the e-book version* that make it easy to access the mobile-friendly version of the text, which can be read anywhere, anytime

Student Study Site

An open-access student study site, available at edge.sagepub.com/ballantine7e, provides a variety of additional resources to build students' understanding of the book content and extend their learning beyond the classroom. Students will have access to the following features for each chapter:

- *E–flash cards and web quizzes*. These mobile-friendly resources reinforce understanding of key terms and concepts outlined in the chapters.
- *SAGE journal articles*. Exclusive full-text journal articles have been carefully selected for each chapter. Each article supports and expands on the concepts presented in the chapter.
- *Video, audio, and web links*. These carefully selected web-based resources feature relevant articles, interviews, lectures, personal stories, inquiries, and other content for use in independent or classroom-based explorations of key topics.
- *MCAT guide*. This guide summarizes the content in each chapter, highlighting the relevant topics tested on the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test). Each chapter entry also contains links to resources that allow students to understand and explore specific topic areas in more detail.
- And much more!

What Is New in the Seventh Edition?

In this major revision we have updated all data, added many new studies, and added new emphases in sociology, such as environmental sociology. The following list provides a summary of key changes:

- Thoroughly revised Chapter 15, bringing Urban Sociology and Population under the umbrella of Environmental Sociology and adding a new section on climate change.
- Included new Sociologists in Action features, such as Richard M. Carpiano's "Connecting Personal Health to Community Life" (Chapter 14).
- Revised the Engaging Sociology features, with opportunities for data analysis by students.
- Updated the Contributing to Our Social World: What Can We Do? features to provide new recommendations for how students can get involved.
- Added new and updated figures and maps.
- Added many new topics, including the influence of robots and artificial intelligence on workers, race relations in the Trump era, issues related to transgender identity and gender fluidity, sexual harassment in the workplace, declining marriage rates, the impact of tracking for students at all academic achievement levels, smoking as an example of health and inequality in the United States, gun violence and the student movement to control access to guns, and Facebook's handling of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The core elements of the book—with the unifying theme and the social world model at the beginning of every chapter—have not changed.

Finally, although we had been told that the writing was extraordinarily readable, we have tried to simplify sentence structure in places. In short, we have tried to respond to what we heard from all of you—both students and instructors (and yes, we *do* hear from students)—to keep this book engaging and accessible.

A PERSONAL NOTE TO THE INSTRUCTOR

What is truly distinctive about this book? This text tries to break the mold of the typical textbook synthesis, a cross between an encyclopedia and a dictionary. *Our Social World* is a unique course text that is *a coherent essay on the sociological imagination—understood globally*. We attempt to radically change the feel of the introductory book by emphasizing coherence, integrating themes, and current knowledge about learning and teaching (such as the sociological literacy framework), but we also present much traditional content. Instructors will not have to throw out the well-honed syllabus and begin from scratch, but they can refocus each unit, so it stresses understanding of micro-level personal troubles within the macro-level public issues framework. Indeed, in this book, we make clear that the public issues must be understood as global.

Here is a text that engages students. *They* say so! From class testing, we know that the writing style, structure of chapters and sections, Thinking Sociologically features, wealth of examples, and other instructional aids help students stay focused, think about the material, and apply it to their lives. It neither bores them nor insults their intelligence. It focuses on deep learning rather than memorization. It develops sociological skills of analysis rather than emphasizing memorization of vocabulary. Key concepts and terms are introduced but only in the service of a larger focus on the sociological imagination. The text is both personal and global. It speaks to sociology as a science as well as addresses public or applied aspects of sociology. It has a theme that provides integration of topics as it introduces the discipline. This text is an analytical essay, not a disconnected encyclopedia.

As one of our reviewers noted,

> Unlike most textbooks I have read, the breadth and depth of coverage in this one is very impressive. It challenges the student with college-level reading. Too many textbooks seem to write on a high school level and give only passing treatment to most of the topics, writing in nugget-sized blocks. More than a single definition and a few sentences of support, the text forces the student deep into the topics covered and challenges them to see interconnections.

Normally, the global perspective angle within textbooks, which seemed to grow in popularity in the past two decades, was implemented by using brief and exotic examples to show differences between societies—a purely comparative approach rather than a globalization treatment. They gave, and still give to a large extent, a token nod to diversity. This textbook, however, forces students to take a broader look at similarities and differences in social institutions around the world and structures and processes operating in all cultures and societies.

So, our focus in this book is on deep learning, especially expansion of students' ability to role-take or "perspective-take." Deep learning goes beyond the content of concepts and terms and cultivates the habits of thinking that allow one to think critically. Being able to see things from the perspective of others is essential to doing sociology, but it is also indispensable to seeing weaknesses in theories or recognizing blind spots in a point of view. Using the sociological imagination is one dimension of role-taking because it requires a step back from the typical micro-level understanding of life's events and fosters a new comprehension of how meso- and macro-level forces—even global ones—can shape the individual's life. Enhancement of perspective-taking ability is at the core of this book because it is a *prerequisite* for deep learning in sociology, and it is the core competency needed to *do* sociology. One cannot do sociology unless one can see things from various positions on the social landscape.

This may sound daunting for some student audiences, but we have found that instructors at every kind of institution have had great success with the book because of the writing style and instructional tools used throughout. We have made some strategic decisions based on these

principles of learning and teaching. We have focused much of the book on higher-order thinking skills rather than memorization and regurgitation. We want students to learn to think sociologically: to apply, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and comprehend the interconnections of the world through a globally informed sociological imagination. However, we think it is also essential to do this with an understanding of how students learn.

Many introductory-level books offer several theories and then provide critiques of the theories. The idea is to teach critical thinking. We have purposefully refrained from extensive critique of theory (although some does occur) for several reasons. First, providing critique to beginning-level students does not really teach critical thinking. It trains them to memorize someone else's critique. Furthermore, it simply confuses many of them, leaving students with the feeling that sociology is just contradictory ideas, and the discipline really does not have anything firm to offer. Teaching critical thinking needs to be done in stages, and it needs to take into account the building steps that occur before effective critique is possible. That is why we focus on the concept of deep learning. We are working toward building the foundations necessary for sophisticated critical thought at upper levels in the curriculum.

Therefore, in this beginning-level text, we have attempted to focus on a central higher order or deep learning skill—synthesis. Undergraduate students need to grasp this before they can fully engage in evaluation. Deep learning involves understanding of complexity, and some aspects of complexity need to be taught at advanced levels. Although students at the introductory level are often capable of synthesis, complex evaluation requires some foundational skills. Thus, we offer contrasting theories in this text, and, rather than telling what is wrong with each one, we encourage students through Thinking Sociologically features to analyze the use of each and to focus on honing synthesis and comparison skills.

Finally, research tells us that learning becomes embedded in memory and becomes long-lasting only if it is related to something that learners already know. If they memorize terms but have no unifying framework to which they can attach those ideas, the memory will not last until the end of the course, let alone until the next higher-level course. In this text, each chapter is tied to the social world model that is core to sociological thinking. At the end of a course using this book, we believe that students will be able to explain coherently what sociology is and construct an effective essay about what they have learned from the course as a whole. Learning to develop and defend a thesis, with supporting logic and evidence, is another component of deep learning. In short, this text provides instructors with the tools to teach sociology in a way that will have a long-term impact on students.

Organization and Coverage

Reminiscent of some packaged international tours, in which the travelers figure that "it is Day 7, so this must be Paris," many introductory courses seem to operate on the principle that it is Week 5, so this must be deviance week. Students do not sense any integration, and at the end of the course, they have trouble remembering specific topics. This book is different. A major goal of the book is to show the integration between topics in sociology and between parts of the social world. The idea is for students to grasp the concept of the interrelated world. A change in one part of the social world affects all others, sometimes in ways that are mutually supportive and sometimes in ways that create intense conflict.

Although the topics are familiar, the textbook is organized around levels of analysis, explained through the social world model. This perspective leads naturally to an integrated discussion in which all topics fit clearly into an overall view, a comparative approach, and discussions of diversity and inequality. It hangs together!

As seen in the table of contents, the book includes 16 chapters plus additional online materials, written to fit into a semester or quarter system. It allows instructors to use the chapters in order, or to alter the order, because each chapter is tied into others through the social world model. We strongly recommend that Chapter 1 be used early in the course because it introduces the integrating model and explains the theme. Also, if any chapters on institutions are used, the section opener Institutions may be useful to include as well. Otherwise, the book has been designed for flexible use.

Instructors may also want to supplement the core book with other materials, such as those suggested on the Instructor Teaching Site. While covering all the key topics in introductory sociology, the cost and size of a mid-sized book allows for this flexibility. Indeed, for a colorful introductory-level text, the cost of this book is remarkably low—roughly half the cost of most other popular introductory texts.

A Unique Program Supporting Teaching of Sociology

There is one more way in which *Our Social World* has been unique among introductory sociology textbooks.

In 2007, the original authors (Ballantine and Roberts) teamed with SAGE to start a new program to benefit the entire discipline. Using royalties from *Our Social World*, we helped establish the SAGE Teaching Innovations & Professional Development Award (now the SAGE Publishing Keith Roberts Teaching Innovations Award), designed to prepare a new generation of scholars within the teaching movement in sociology. People in their early career stages (graduate students, assistant professors, newer PhDs) can be reimbursed $600 each for expenses entailed while attending the day-long American Sociological Association (ASA) Section on Teaching and Learning's preconference workshop. The workshop is on the day before ASA meetings. In 2007, 13 young scholars—graduate students or untenured faculty members—received this award and benefited from an extraordinary workshop on learning and teaching. Since then, more than two dozen other SAGE authors have supported this program from textbook royalties, and hundreds of young scholars have been beneficiaries. We are pleased to have had a hand in initiating and continuing to support this program.

We hope you find this book engaging. If you have questions or comments, please contact us.

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PART I

UNDERSTANDING OUR SOCIAL WORLD

The Scientific Study of Society

Can an individual make a difference in the world or in a community? How does your family influence your chances of gaining a college degree and a high-paying job? If you were born into a poor family, what are your chances of becoming wealthy? How does your level of education impact your likelihood of marrying—and staying married? Why are Generation Zers less likely to have sex than Generation Xers? How can sociology help you understand and be an effective member of society?

Those are some of the questions you will be able to answer as you develop a deeper understanding of our social world. Sociology is valuable because it gives us new perspectives on our personal and professional lives and because sociological insights and skills can help all of us make the world a better place. Sociology can change your life—and help you change the world.

By the time you finish reading the first two chapters, you should have an initial understanding of what sociology is, what you can gain from studying sociology, the roots of the sociological perspective, and how sociologists carry out research. We invite you to view our social world through a sociological lens and learn how you can use sociology to make a difference in your life, your community, and the world.

CHAPTER 1

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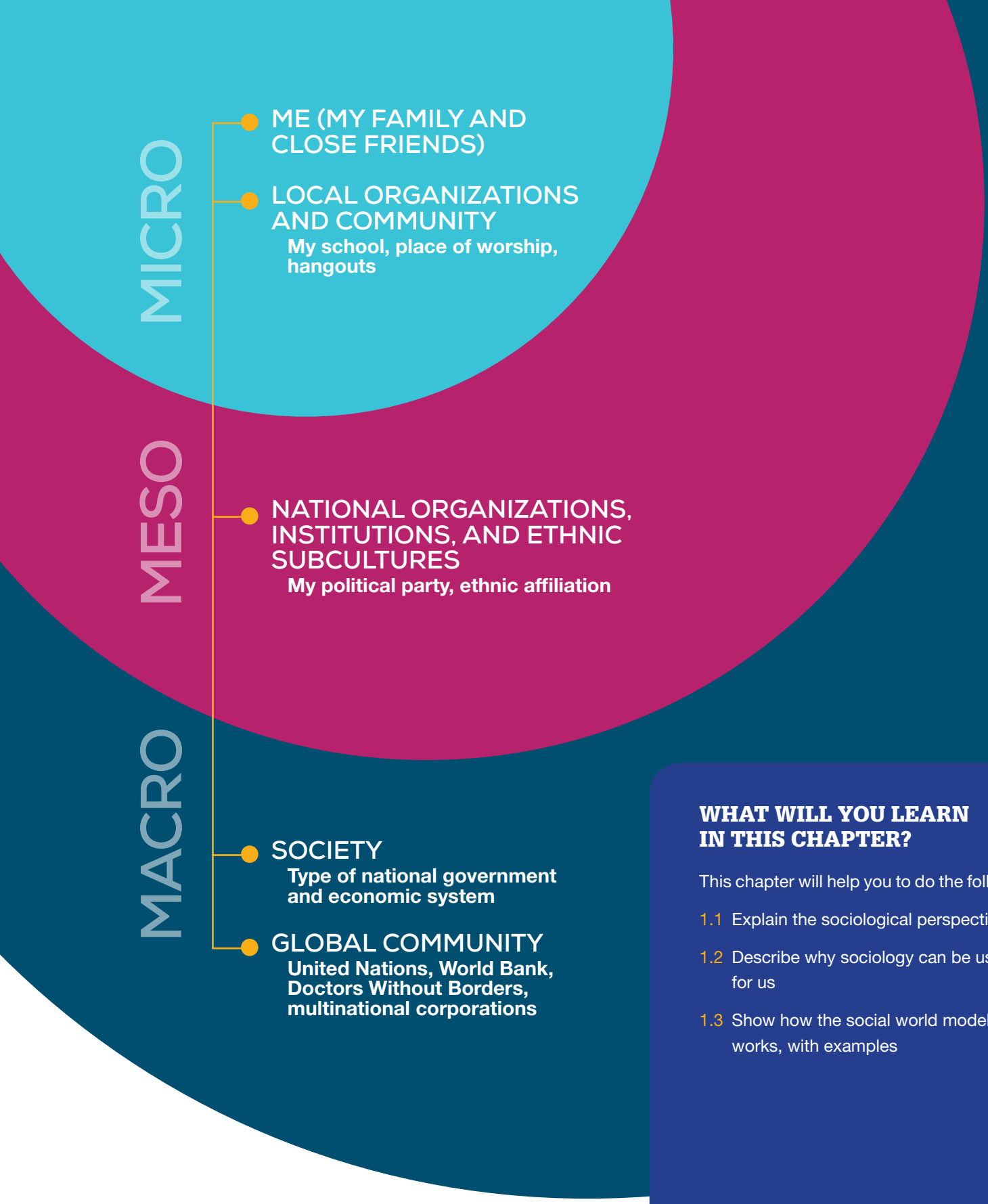
SOCIOLOGY

A Unique Way to View the World

▲ Sociology involves a transformation in the way one sees the world—learning to recognize the complex connections among our intimate personal lives, large organizations, and national and global systems.



This model illustrates a core idea carried throughout the book—how your own life is shaped by your family, community, society, and world, and how you influence them in return. Understanding this model can help you to better understand your social world and to make a positive impact on it.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER?

This chapter will help you to do the following:

1.1 Explain the sociological perspective

1.2 Describe why sociology can be useful for us

1.3 Show how the social world model works, with examples

THINK ABOUT IT

Micro: Small groups and local communities	How can sociology help me understand my own life and my social world?
Meso: National institutions, complex organizations, and ethnic groups	How do sociologists help us understand and even improve our lives in work organizations and health care organizations?
Macro: National and global systems	How might national and global events affect my life?

The womb is apparently the setting for some great body work. It may win the prize for the strangest place to get a back massage, but, according to a scientific article, by the 4th month of gestation, twin fetuses begin reaching for their "womb-mates," and by 18 weeks, they spend more time touching their siblings than themselves or the walls of the uterus (Weaver 2010). Fetuses that have single-womb occupancy tend to touch the walls of the uterus a good deal to make contact with the mother. Nearly 30% of the movement of twins is directed toward their companions. Movements such as stroking the back or the head are more sustained and more precise than movements toward themselves—touching their own mouths or other facial features. As one team of scholars put it, we are "wired to be social" (Castiello et al. 2010). In short, humans are innately social creatures.

The social world is not merely something that exists outside us. As the story of the twins illustrates, the social world is also something we carry inside. We are part of it, we reflect on it, and we are influenced by it, even when we are alone. The patterns of the social world engulf us in ways both subtle and obvious, with profound implications for how we create order and meaning in our lives. We need others—and that is where sociology enters.

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▲ Within hours of their birth in October 2010, Jackson and Audrey became highly fussy if the nurses tried to put them in separate bassinets. Shortly after birth they were both put in a warmer, and Jackson cried until he found Audrey, proceeding to intertwine his arms and legs with hers. Twins, like all humans, are hard-wired to be social and in relationships with others.

Sometimes it takes a dramatic and shocking event for us to realize just how deeply embedded we are in our social relationships in the social world that we take for granted. "It couldn't happen in the United States," read typical world newspaper accounts. "This is something you see in the Middle East, Central Africa, and other war-torn areas. . . . It's hard to imagine this happening in the economic center of the United States." Yet on September 11, 2001, shortly after 9 a.m., a commercial airliner crashed into New York City's World Trade Center, followed a short while later by another pummeling into the paired tower. This mighty symbol of financial wealth collapsed. After the dust settled and the rescue crews finished their gruesome work, nearly 3,000 people were dead and many others injured. The world as we knew it changed forever that day. This event taught U.S. citizens how integrally connected they are with the international community.

Such terrorist acts horrify people because they are unpredictable and unexpected in a normally predictable world. They violate the rules that support our connections to one another. They also bring attention to the discontent and disconnectedness that lie under the surface in many societies—discontent that can come to the surface and express itself in hateful violence. Such discontent and hostility are likely to continue until the root causes are addressed.

Terrorist acts represent a rejection of the modern civil society we know. The terrorists themselves see their acts as justifiable, as a way they can strike out against injustices and threats to their way of life. Few outside the terrorists' inner circle understand their thinking and behavior. The events of 9/11 forced U.S. citizens to realize that, although they may see a great diversity among themselves, people in other parts of the world view

U.S. citizens as all the same; they are despised by some for what they represent—consumerism, individualism, freedom of religion, and tolerance of other perspectives. The United States is a world power, yet its values challenge and threaten the views of many people around the world. For many U.S. citizens, a sense of loyalty to the nation was deeply stirred by the events of 9/11. Patriotism abounded. The nation's people became more connected to one another as a reaction to an act against the United States.

A similar sense of patriotism and connectedness arose in the United States immediately after the radical Islamic bombings and shootings at the Boston Marathon in 2013, Chattanooga in 2015, San Bernardino in 2015, and Orlando in 2016. First responders were held up as heroes and symbols of U.S. pride and perseverance in the face of terrorist attacks. However, most mass killings in the United States have not involved Islamic terrorists (Bump 2016). As Émile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, first pointed out, acts that break normal rules of behavior, as terrorism does, can unite the rule-following members of society (Durkheim [1895] 1982).

Most of the time, we live with social patterns that we take for granted as routine, ordinary, and expected. These social patterns help us to understand what is happening and to know what to expect. Unlike our innate drives, social expectations come from those around us and guide (or constrain) our behaviors and thoughts. Without shared expectations among humans about proper patterns of behavior, life would be chaotic. Our social interactions require some basic rules, and these rules create routine and normalcy in everyday interaction. It is strange if someone breaks the expected patterns. For the people in and around the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the Boston Marathon finish line on April 15, 2013, Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14, 2012, and Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, the social rules governing everyday life were brutally violated.

This chapter examines the social ties that make up our social world, as well as sociology's focus on those connections. You will learn what sociology is, what sociologists do, how sociology can be used to improve your life and society, and how the social world model helps us understand society and our social world work.

What Is Sociology?

Sociology is *the scientific study of social life, social change, and social causes and consequences of human behavior.* Sociologists examine how society both shapes and is shaped by individuals, small groups of people, organizations, national societies, and global social networks. For you this means learning how what you do affects other people—and how they affect your life.

©AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty

▲ The terrorist bombing of the 2013 Boston Marathon inspired residents in the Boston area and marathon runners to stand strong in the face of terrorism. The 2014 Boston Marathon attracted even more participants and spectators.

Unlike the discipline of psychology, which focuses on the attributes, motivations, and behaviors of individuals, sociology focuses on group patterns. Whereas a psychologist might try to explain behavior by examining the personality traits of individuals, a sociologist would examine the positions or tasks of different people within the group and how these positions influence what individuals think and do. Sociologists seek to analyze and explain why people interact with others and belong to groups, how groups like the family or you and your friends work together, why some groups have more power than other groups, how decisions in groups are made, and how groups deal with conflict and change. Sociologists also examine the causes of social problems, such as delinquency, child abuse, crime, poverty, and war, and ways they can be addressed.

Two-person interactions—*dyads*—are the smallest units studied by sociologists. Examples of dyads include roommates discussing their classes, a professor and student going over an assignment, a husband and wife negotiating their budget, and two children playing. Next in size are small groups consisting of three or more interacting people who know each other—a family, a neighborhood or peer group, a classroom, a work group, or a street gang. Then come increasingly larger groups—organizations such as sports or scouting clubs, neighborhood associations, and local religious congregations. Among the largest groups contained within nations are ethnic groups and national organizations or institutions, such as Google or

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▲ Here children experience ordered interaction in the competitive environment of a soccer game. What values, skills, attitudes, and assumptions about life and social interaction do you think these kids are learning?

Facebook, the Republican and Democratic national political parties, and national religious organizations like the Southern Baptists. Nations themselves are still larger and can sometimes involve hundreds of millions of people. In the past several decades, social scientists have increasingly focused on **globalization**, *the process by which the entire world is becoming a single interdependent entity*. Of particular interest to sociologists is how these various groups are organized, how they function, how they influence one another, and why they can come into conflict.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Identify several dyads, small groups, and large organizations to which you belong. Did you choose to belong, or were you born into membership in these groups? How does each group influence who you are and the decisions you make? How do you influence each of the groups?

Ideas Underlying Sociology

The idea that one action can cause or result in something else is a core idea in all science. Sociologists also share several ideas that they take for granted about the social world. These ideas about humans and social life are supported by considerable evidence, and they are no longer matters of debate or controversy. They are considered to be true. Understanding these core assumptions helps us see how sociologists approach the study of people in groups.

People are social by nature. This means that humans seek contact with other humans, interact with one another, and influence and are influenced by the behaviors of others. Furthermore, humans need groups to survive. Although a few individuals may become socially isolated as adults, they could not have reached adulthood without sustained interactions with others. The central point here is that we become who we are because other people and groups constantly influence us.

People live much of their lives belonging to social groups. It is in social groups that we interact with family, friends, and fellow workers; learn to share goals and to cooperate with others in our groups; develop identities that are influenced by our group affiliations; obtain power over others—or are relatively powerless; and have conflicts with others over resources we all want. Our individual beliefs and behaviors, our experiences, our observations, and the problems we face are derived from connections to our social groups.

Interaction between the individual and the group is a two-way process in which each influences the other. In our family or on a sports team, we can influence the shape and direction of our group, just as the group provides the rules and decides the expected behaviors for individuals.

Recurrent social patterns, ordered behavior, shared expectations, and common understandings among people characterize groups. Consider the earlier examples of the chaos created by 9/11 and other bombings and mass shootings. These events were so troubling because they were unexpected, even though such events are becoming more common. Normally, a degree of continuity and recurrent behavior is present in human interactions, whether in small groups, large organizations, or society.

The processes of conflict and change are natural and inevitable features of groups and societies. No group can remain unchanged and hope to perpetuate itself. To survive, groups must adapt to changes in the social and physical environment, yet rapid change often comes at a price. It can lead to conflict within a society—between traditional and new ideas and between groups that have vested interests in particular ways of doing things. Rapid change can give rise to protest activities; changing in a controversial direction or failing to change fast enough can spark conflict, including revolution. Governments in several Latin American countries have been challenged or overthrown, springing from citizens' discontent with corrupt or authoritarian rule. The

problem is finding acceptable replacement governments to take over what has been overthrown.

The previous ideas underlying sociology will be relevant in each of the topics we discuss. As you read this book, keep in mind these basic ideas that form the foundation of sociological analysis: People are social; they live and carry out activities largely in groups; interaction influences both individual and group behavior; people share common behavior patterns and expectations; and processes such as change and conflict are always present. Thus, in several important ways, sociological understandings provide new lenses for looking at our social world.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Try this throughout the book: Apply the core ideas underlying sociology, just discussed, to understand the groups to which you belong—a class, team, religious organization, work group, or other. You can better understand these groups by applying these ideas to examples you can relate to rather than memorizing abstract ideas.

Sociological Findings and Commonsense Beliefs

Through research, sociologists have shown that many commonly held beliefs are not actually true, and some "commonsense" ideas have been discredited by sociological research. Here are three examples.

Belief: Most of the differences in the behaviors of women and men are based on "human nature"; men and women are just different from each other. Research shows that biological factors certainly play a part in the behaviors of men and women, but the culture (beliefs, values, rules, and way of life) that people learn as they grow up determines who does what and how biological tendencies are played out. A unique example illustrates this: In the nomadic Wodaabe tribe in Africa, women do most of the heavy work, whereas men adorn themselves with makeup, sip tea, and gossip (Cultural Survival 2010; Drury 2015; Zaidi 2017). Each year, the group holds a festival where men adorn makeup and fancy hairstyles, and show their white teeth and the whites of their eyes to attract a marriage partner. Such dramatic variations in the behavior of men and women around the world are so great that it is impossible to attribute behavior to biology or human nature alone; learned behavior patterns enter in.

Belief: Racial groupings are based on biological differences among people. Actually, racial categorizations are socially constructed (created by members of society), and beliefs vary among societies and over time within societies. A person can be seen as one race in Brazil and another in the United States. Even within the United States, racial categories have changed many times. All one has to do is look at old U.S. Census records to see how racial categories change over time—even within the same nation (Chappell 2017)! We discuss construction of the concept of race in Chapter 8.

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▲ In the early 20th century, immigrants to the United States of Irish and Italian ancestry were not considered "White" in Virginia and several other states. In some cases where parochial schools were not an option, Irish and Italian children were forced to go to racially segregated public schools with Black students.

Belief: Most marriages in the United States do not last. There is not a simple answer to this belief! Marriage and divorce rates differ by age, education level, income, location, and other variables. Those who marry at age 18 or before, have less education, and have lower levels of income than the average person have the highest divorce rates (Kennedy and Ruggles 2014). Those who are middle class or higher tend to have more stable marriages, and most of their marriages do not end in divorce. Overall, noted researcher Paul Amato predicts that the lifetime risk of divorce is from 42% to 45%; "throw in permanent separations that don't end in divorce, then the overall likelihood of marital disruption is pushing 50 percent" (DePaulo 2017; Pew Research Center 2018a; Stanton 2018). Thus, research shows that divorce rates average below 45% depending on demographic variables.

As these examples illustrate, the discipline of sociology provides a method to assess the accuracy of our commonsense assumptions about the social world. To improve the lives of individuals in our communities and

in societies around the world, decision makers must have accurate information. Sociological research can be the basis for more rational and just social policies—policies that better meet the needs of all groups in the social world. The *sociological imagination*, discussed next, helps us gain an understanding of social problems.

The Sociological Imagination

Events in our social world affect our individual lives. If we are unemployed or lack funds for a college education, we may say this is a personal problem. Yet broader social issues are often at the root of our situation. The sociological imagination holds that we can best understand our personal experiences and problems by examining their broader social context—by looking at the big picture.

Many individual problems (*private troubles*) are rooted in social or *public issues* (what is happening in the social world outside one's personal control). Distinguished sociologist C. Wright Mills called the ability to understand this *complex interactive relationship between individual experiences and public issues* the **sociological imagination**. For Mills, many personal experiences can and should be interpreted in the context of large-scale forces in the wider society (Mills 1959).

Consider, for example, someone you know who has been laid off from a job. This personal trauma is a common situation during a recession. Unemployed persons often experience feelings of inadequacy or lack of self-worth because of the job loss. Their unemployment, though, may be due to larger forces such as a machine taking over their job, unsound banking practices, corporate downsizing, or a corporation taking operations to another country where labor costs are cheaper and there are fewer environmental regulations on companies. People may blame themselves or each other for personal troubles such as unemployment or marital problems, believing that they did not try hard enough. Often, they do not see the connection between their private lives and larger economic and social forces beyond their control. They fail to recognize the public issues that create private troubles.

If you are having trouble paying for college, that may feel like a very personal trouble. High tuition rates, though, relate to a dramatic decline in governmental support for public higher education and financial aid for students. The rising cost of a college education is a serious public issue that our society needs to address. Individuals, alone, cannot reduce the high price of college.

As you learn about sociology, you will begin to notice how social forces shape individual lives and group behavior. This knowledge helps us understand aspects of everyday life we take for granted. In this book you will learn to view the social world and your place in it from a sociological perspective as you develop your *sociological imagination*. Connecting events from the global and national levels to the personal and intimate level of our own lives is the core organizing theme of this book.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

How has divorce, poverty, or war caused personal troubles for someone you know? Give examples of why it is inadequate to explain these personal troubles by examining only the personal characteristics of those affected.

Questions Sociologists Ask—and Don't Ask

Think about this—everything a sociologist asks must be answerable through research. Perhaps you have had late-night discussions with your friends about the meaning of life, the existence of God, the ethical implications of genetically modified food, or the morality of abortion. These are philosophical issues that sociologists, like other scientists, cannot answer through scientific research. What sociologists *do* ask are questions about people in social groups and organizations—questions that can be studied scientifically. Sociologists may research how people feel about the previous issues (the percentage of people who want genetically modified food to be labeled, for example), but sociologists do not determine the right or wrong answers to such value-driven opinions. They are more interested in how people's beliefs influence their behavior. They focus on issues that can be studied objectively and scientifically—looking for causes or consequences.

Sociologists might ask, *Who gets an abortion, why do they do so, and how does the society, as a whole, view abortion?* These are matters of fact that a social scientist can explore. However, sociologists avoid making ethical judgments about whether abortion is always acceptable, sometimes acceptable, or always wrong. In their private lives, sociologists and other scientists may have opinions on controversial philosophical issues, but these should not enter into their scientific work.

Likewise, sociologists might ask, *What are the circumstances around individuals becoming drunk and acting drunk?* This question is often tied more to the particular social environment than to the availability of alcohol. Note that a person might become intoxicated at a fraternity party but not at a family member's wedding reception where alcohol

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▲ Binge drinking, losing consciousness, vomiting, or engaging in sexual acts while drunk may be sources of storytelling at a college party but can be offensive at a wedding reception.

is served. The expectations for behavior vary in each social setting. The researcher does not make judgments about whether use of alcohol is good or bad, or right or wrong, and avoids—as much as possible—opinions regarding responsibility or irresponsibility. The sociologist does, however, observe variations in the use of alcohol in different social situations and the resulting behaviors. The focus of sociology is on facts, what causes behaviors, and the results.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Consider the information you have just read. What are some questions sociologists might ask about drinking and drunkenness? What are some questions sociologists would not ask about these topics, at least while in their role as researchers?

The Social Sciences: A Comparison

Not so long ago, our views of people and social relationships were based on stereotypes, intuition, superstitions, supernatural explanations, and traditions passed on from one generation to the next. Natural scientists (e.g., chemists, astronomers, biologists, and oceanographers) first used the scientific method, a model later adopted by social scientists. Social scientists, including sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists, cultural geographers, historians, and political scientists, apply the scientific method to study social relationships, to correct misleading and harmful misconceptions about human behavior, and to guide policy decisions. Consider the following examples of specific studies various social scientists have conducted.

Consider an *anthropologist* who studies garbage. He examines what people discard to understand what kind of lives they lead (Bond 2010). *Anthropology* is the study of humanity in its broadest context. It is closely related to sociology, and the two areas have common historical roots and sometimes overlapping methodologies and subject matter. However, anthropologists have different specialties in four major subfields within anthropology: physical anthropology (which is related to biology), archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology (sometimes called *ethnology*). This last field has the most in common with sociology. Cultural anthropologists study the culture, or way of life, of a society.

A *psychologist* may wire research subjects to a machine that measures their physiological reaction to a violent film clip and then ask them questions about what they were feeling. *Psychology* is the study of individual behavior and mental processes (e.g., sensation, perception, memory, and thought processes). It differs from sociology in that it focuses on individuals rather than on groups, institutions, and societies. Although there are different branches of psychology, most psychologists are concerned with individual motivations, personality attributes, attitudes, perceptions, abnormal behavior, mental disorders, and the stages of normal human development.

A *political scientist* studies opinion poll results to predict who will win the next election, how various groups of people are likely to vote, or how elected officials will vote on proposed legislation. *Political science* is concerned with government systems and power—how they work, how they are organized, the forms of government, relations among governments, who holds power and how they obtain it, how power is used, and who is politically active (Domhoff 2018). Political science overlaps with

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▲ Anthropologists can learn about a society by studying what it throws away. Consider this picture of children rummaging through a garbage dump in India just to survive. What do you think they would learn about you from your garbage?

sociology, particularly in the study of political theory and the nature and uses of power.

Many economists study the banking system and market trends to try to predict trends and understand the global economy. *Economists* analyze economic conditions and explore how people organize, produce, and distribute material goods. They are interested in supply and demand, inflation and taxes, prices and manufacturing output, labor organization, employment levels, and comparisons between postindustrial, industrial, and nonindustrial nations.

What these social sciences—sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and economics—have in common is that they study aspects of human behavior and social life. Social sciences share many common topics, methods, concepts, research findings, and theories, but each has a different focus or perspective on the social world. Each of these social science studies relates to topics also studied by sociologists, but sociologists focus on human interaction, groups, and social structure, providing the broadest overview of the social world.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Consider the issue of unemployment in the United States. What is one question in each discipline that an anthropologist, psychologist, political scientist, economist, and sociologist might ask about the social issue of unemployment?

Why Does Sociology Matter?

Sociology helps us to understand our relationships with other people; it can inform social policy decisions; and we can use skills developed through sociology in a wide range of career fields.

Why Study Sociology?

The sociological perspective helps us to be more effective as we carry out our roles as life partners, workers, friends, family members, and citizens. For example, an employee who has studied sociology may better understand how to work with groups and how the structure of the workplace affects individual behavior, how to approach problem-solving, and how to collect and analyze data. Likewise, a schoolteacher trained in sociology may have a better understanding of classroom management, student motivation, the causes of poor student learning that have roots outside the school, and why students drop out. Consider the example in the following Sociology in Our Social World feature, which explores who drops out, why, the consequences of dropping out, and other variables that shape the professional life of teachers and academic success of students.

A sociological perspective allows us to look beneath the surface of society and notice social patterns that others tend to overlook. When you view our social world with a sociological perspective, you

1. become more self-aware by understanding your social surroundings, which can lead to opportunities to improve your life;
2. have a more complete understanding of social situations by looking beyond individual explanations to include group analyses of behavior;
3. understand and evaluate problems more clearly, viewing the world systematically and objectively rather than only in emotional or personal terms;
4. gain an understanding of the many diverse cultural perspectives and how cultural differences are related to behavioral patterns;
5. assess the impact of social policies;
6. understand the complexities of social life and how to study them scientifically;
7. gain useful skills in interpersonal relations, critical thinking, data collection and analysis, problem-solving, and decision-making; and
8. learn how to change your local environment and the larger society.

SOCIOLOGY IN OUR SOCIAL WORLD

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND CURES

"Cesar entered Hacienda Middle School in the Los Angeles School District in the sixth grade. He lived with his mother and three younger siblings in a garage that was divided into sleeping quarters and a makeshift kitchen with no running water. His mother, who spoke only Spanish, supported the family by working long hours at a minimum-wage job" (Rumberger 2011:1). Because Cesar missed lots of school and did not complete assignments, he failed the first quarter. However, a dropout prevention program helped him begin to pass courses. By eighth grade peer pressure and gangs became part of his life. He was involved in a fight in school and was "transferred"—but stopped going to school. Cesar became a dropout (Rumberger 2011).

Sociologists studying education look for causes and results of students dropping out versus staying in school. Dropouts are defined as "16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED certificate)" (National Center for Education Statistics 2017a). The percentage of high school dropouts has decreased from 12% in 1990 to approximately 6% in 2017. The decline for White students was from 9% to 5%, for Blacks from 13% to 7%, and for Hispanics from 32% to 12%. This narrowed the gap between White and Hispanic students by 23% (McFarland, Stark, and Cui 2018; U.S. Department of Education 2015). The U.S. dropout rate is currently at an all-time low due to improvements in graduation rates to 84.1% overall and lower dropout rates for students of color, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities (America's Promise Alliance 2018).

Yet sociologists, educators, parents, and policymakers, among others, are concerned about dropout rates because of economic factors—dropouts have difficulty finding jobs, pay fewer taxes, and often receive public assistance. If they do find a job, they earn about $8,000 a year less than high school graduates and $26,500 a year less than college graduates (Alliance for Excellent Education 2018). Unemployment rates for dropouts are 7.7% compared to 2.5% for college graduates (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017c). Dropouts have poorer health, use more health services, and die younger. They also are more likely to engage in criminal behavior and spend time in prison. They are less likely to vote or be engaged in civic activities. Dropouts cost the nation an estimated $1.8 billion every year in lost tax revenue alone ("High School Dropouts Cost $1.8 Billion Every Year" 2013).

Why do students drop out? A few reasons stand out:

- High rates of absenteeism
- Low levels of school engagement
- Low parental education
- Work or family responsibilities
- Problematic/deviant behavior
- Moving to a new school in ninth grade
- Attending school with lower achievement scores (Child Trends 2013b)

Sociologists and others propose many solutions for the dropout problem. Dropout counselors can identify students at risk and work with them, finding programs and curricula suited to their needs. Schools designed for at-risk students attempt to address issues in the students' lives such as living situations, poverty, poor health, lack of nutrition, gang membership, and other barriers to success (Diggs 2014). By understanding the causes of students dropping out we can address the problem (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network 2015).

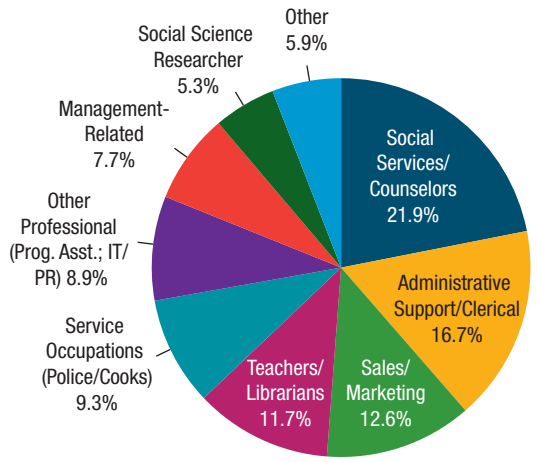
This book introduces you to most major topics in sociology, as outlined in *the sociological literacy framework*: the sociological eye (or the sociological imagination); social structure (from micro to macro levels); socialization (the relationship between ourselves and society); stratification (social inequality); and social change and social reproduction (major change processes and how social structures reproduce themselves) (ASA 2017).

What Do Sociologists Do?

Graduates with a bachelor's degree in sociology who seek employment immediately after college are most likely to find their first jobs in social services, administrative assistantships, sales and marketing, or management-related positions. The kinds of employment college graduates with a sociology major get are listed

▼ FIGURE 1.1

Occupational Categories for Sociology Graduates' First Jobs



Source: Based on "21st Century Careers With an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology," American Sociological Association, 2009.

in Figure 1.1. With graduate degrees—a master's or a doctoral degree—sociologists usually become college teachers, researchers, clinicians, or consultants (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018a). Some work for governments, whereas others work for businesses or public service nonprofit organizations.

Many sociologists work outside of academia, using their knowledge and research skills to address the needs of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government. For example, they may work in human resources departments and as consultants for businesses. In government jobs, they provide data such as population projections for education and health care planning. In social service agencies, they help provide services to those in need, and in health agencies, they may be concerned with outreach to immigrant communities. Both sociologists who work in universities and those who work for business or government can use sociological tools to improve society. You will find examples of some jobs sociologists are doing in the Sociologists in Action boxes throughout the book. In addition, at the end of some chapters you will find a discussion of policy related to that chapter topic.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

From what you have read so far, how might sociological tools (e.g., social interaction skills and knowledge of how groups work) be useful to you in your anticipated major and career or current job?

What Do Employers Want?

Ask employers what they want in a new hire, and the focus is likely to be on writing, speaking, and analytical skills—especially when the new employee will be faced with complex problems. Other desired skills include the ability to cope with change; work effectively in diverse teams; gather and interpret quantitative information; and other "soft skills" such as leadership, communication, and collaboration (Beaton 2017). Indeed, having a combination of social skills and math and computer skills is the best predictor of landing a job that is unlikely to be replaced by technological automation and tends to do better than most other areas in pay (Deming 2015). The left column in Table 1.1 indicates what employers want from college graduates; the right column indicates the skills and competencies that are part of most sociological training. Compare the two, noting the high levels of overlap.

We now have a general idea of what sociology is, what sociologists do, and what jobs students with sociology degrees tend to seek. It should be apparent that sociology is a broad field of interest; sociologists study all aspects of human social behavior. The next section of this chapter shows how the parts of the social world that sociologists study relate to each other, and it outlines the model you will follow as you continue to learn about sociology.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Imagine that you are a mayor, legislator, police chief, or government official. You must make many decisions each day. What method of decision-making will you use: your own intuition or assumptions, information gathered by social science research, or some other method? What are some advantages or disadvantages to each decision-making method?

The Social World Model

Think about the different groups you depend on and interact with daily. You wake up to greet members of your family or your roommate. You go to a larger group—a class—that exists within an even larger organization—the college or university. Understanding sociology and the approach of this book requires a grasp of **levels of analysis**—that is, *social groups from the smallest to the largest*. It may be relatively easy to picture small groups such as a family, a group of friends, a sports team, or a sorority or fraternity. It is more difficult to visualize large groups, such as corporations—Target, Nike,

▼ TABLE 1.1

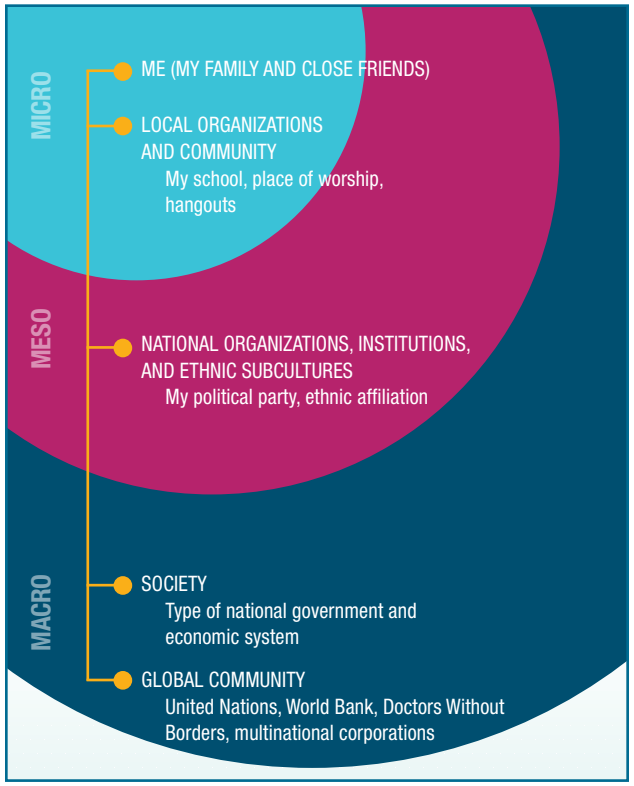
What Employers Want and What Sociology Majors Can Deliver

Employers Who Want Colleges to "Place More Emphasis" on Essential Learning Outcomes		Traits and Knowledge That Are Developed in Most Sociological Training
Knowledge of Human Culture	**(% Seeking)**	**Skills and Competencies**
1. Global issues	72	• Knowledge of global issues • Sensitivity to diversity and differences in cultural values and traditions
2. The role of the United States in the world	60	• Sociological perspective on the United States and the world
3. Cultural values and traditions—U.S. and global	53	• Understanding diversity • Working with others (ability to work toward a common goal)
Intellectual and Practical Skills	**(% Seeking)**	
4. Teamwork skills in diverse groups	76	• Effective leadership skills (ability to take charge and make decisions) • Interpersonal skills (working with diverse coworkers)
5. Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	73	• Analysis and research skills • Organizing thoughts and information • Planning effectively (ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and to be self-motivated)
6. Written and oral communication	73	• Communication skills (listening, verbal and written communication) • Working with peers • Effective interaction in group situations
7. Information literacy	70	• Knowledge of how to find information one needs—online or in a library
8. Creativity and innovation	70	• Flexibility, adaptability, and multitasking (ability to set priorities, manage multiple tasks, adapt to changing situations, and handle pressure) • Creative ways to deal with problems
9. Complex problem-solving	64	• Ability to conceptualize and solve problems • Ability to be creative (working toward meeting the organization's goals)
10. Quantitative reasoning	60	• Computer and technical literacy (basic understanding of computer hardware and software programs) • Statistical analysis
Personal and Social Responsibility	**(% Seeking)**	
11. Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)	76	• Personal values (honesty, flexibility, work ethic, dependability, loyalty, positive attitude, professionalism, self-confidence, willingness to learn) • Working with others; ability to work toward a common goal
12. Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	72	• Knowledge of global issues

Source: American Sociological Association 2009; Hansen and Hansen 2003; WorldWideLearn 2007. See also Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates 2013.

Apple, General Motors Company, Starbucks, Google, or Facebook—or organizations such as local or state governments. The largest groups include nations or international organizations, such as the sprawling networks of the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Groups of various sizes shape our lives. Sociological analysis involves an understanding of these groups that exist at various levels of analysis and the connections among them.

The **social world model** helps us picture *the levels of analysis in our social surroundings as an interconnected series of small groups, organizations, institutions, and societies*. Sometimes these groups are connected by mutual support and cooperation, but other times there are conflicts and power struggles over access to resources. What we are asking you to do here and throughout this book is to develop a sociological imagination—the basic lens used by sociologists. Picture the social world as connected levels of increasingly larger circles. To understand the units or parts of the social world model, look at the model shown here (and at the beginning of each chapter).



We use this social world model throughout the book to illustrate how each topic fits into the big picture: our social world. The social world includes both *social structures* and *social processes*.

Social Structures

Picture the human body, held together by bones and muscles. The organs or *units* that make up that body include the brain, heart, lungs, and kidneys. In a similar manner, **social units** are *interconnected parts of the social world ranging from small groups to societies*. These social units include dyads (two people); small groups like the members of a family; community organizations including schools and religious groups; large-scale organizations such as political parties or state and national governments; and global societies, such as the United Nations.

All of these social units connect to make up the **social structure**—*the stable patterns of interactions, statuses (positions), roles (responsibilities), and organizations that provide stability for the society and bring order to individuals' lives*. Think about these parallels between the structure that holds together the human body and the structure that holds together societies and their units.

Sometimes, however, the units within the social structure are in conflict. For example, a religion that teaches that some forms of birth control are wrong may conflict with the health care system regarding how to provide care to women. This issue has been in the U.S. news because many religious organizations and religious business owners have fought against the requirements of the 2010 Affordable Care Act in the United States that employers provide birth control to those who wish to receive it.

Social institutions are *organized, patterned, and enduring sets of social structures that provide guidelines for behavior and help each society meet its basic survival needs*. Think about the fact that all societies have some form of family, education, religion, politics, health care, and economics; in more complex societies there are also essential structures that provide science, media, advanced health care, and a military. These are the institutions that provide the rules, roles, and relationships to meet human needs and guide human behavior. They are the units through which organized social activities take place, and they provide the setting for activities essential to human and societal survival. For example, we cannot survive without an economic institution to provide guidelines and a structure for meeting our basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Likewise, society would not function without political institutions to govern and protect its members. Most social units fall under one of the main institutions just mentioned.

Like the human body, society and social groups have a structure. Our body's skeleton governs how our limbs are attached to the torso and how they move. Like the system of organs that make up our bodies—heart, lungs, kidneys,

© AFP/Stringer/Getty

All social institutions are interrelated, just as the parts of the body are interdependent: If the skeletal system of the body breaks down, the muscular system and nervous system are not far behind.

and bladder—all social institutions are interrelated. Just as an illness in one organ affects other organs, a dysfunction in one institution affects the other institutions. A heart attack affects the flow of blood to all other parts of the body. Likewise, if many people are unable to afford medical treatment, the society is less healthy, and there are consequences for families, schools, workplaces, and society as a whole.

The **national society**, one of the largest social units in our model, includes *a population of people, usually living within a specified geographic area, connected by common ideas and subject to a particular political authority*. It also features a social structure with groups and institutions. In addition to having relatively permanent geographic and political boundaries, a national society has one or more languages and a unique way of life. In most cases, national societies involve countries or large regions where the inhabitants share a common identity as members. In certain other instances, such as the contemporary United Kingdom, a single national society may include several groups of people who consider themselves distinct nationalities (e.g., Welsh, English, Scottish, and Irish) and those individuals from former colonies. Such multicultural societies may or may not have peaceful relations.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Can you think of any human activities that do not fall into one of the institutions just mentioned? How might change in one national institution, such as health care, affect change in other national institutions, such as the family and the economy?

Social Processes

If social structure is similar to the human body's skeletal structure, social processes are similar to what keeps the

© Getty Images/Peter Turnley/Contributor

This refugee mother and child from Mozambique represent the smallest social unit, a dyad. In this case, they are trying to survive with help from larger groups such as the United Nations.

body alive—a beating heart, the lungs processing oxygen, and the stomach processing nutrients. **Social processes** *take place through actions of people in institutions and other social units.* The process of *socialization* teaches individuals how to behave in their society. It takes place through actions in families, educational systems, religious organizations, and other social units. Socialization is essential for the continuation of any society because through this process members of society learn the thoughts and actions needed to survive in their society. Another process, *conflict*, occurs between individuals or groups over money, jobs, and other needed or desired resources. The process of *change* also occurs continuously in every social unit; change in one unit affects other units of the social world, often in a chain reaction. For instance, change in the quality of health care can affect the workforce; a workforce in poor health can affect the economy; instability in the economy can affect families, for breadwinners lose jobs; and family economic woes can affect religious communities because devastated families cannot afford to give money to churches, mosques, or temples.

Sociologists try to identify, understand, and explain the processes that take place within social units. Picture these processes as overlying and penetrating our whole social world, from small groups to large societies. Social units would be lifeless without the action brought about by social processes, just as body parts would be lifeless without the processes of electrical impulses shooting from the brain to each organ or the oxygen transmitted by blood coursing through our arteries to sustain each organ.

Our Social World and Its Environment

Surrounding each social unit, whether a small family group or a large corporation, is an **environment**—*the setting in which the social unit works, including everything that influences the social unit, such as its physical and organizational surroundings and technological innovations.* Just as each individual has a unique environment with family, friends, and other social groups, each social unit has an environment to which it must adjust. For example, your local church, mosque, synagogue, or temple may seem autonomous and independent, but it depends on its environment, including its national organization, for guidelines and support; the local police force to protect the building from vandalism; and the local economy to provide jobs to members so that the members, in turn, can support the organization. If the religious education program is going to train children to understand the scriptures, local schools are needed to teach the children to read. A religious group may also be affected by other religious bodies, competing with one another for potential members from the community. These religious groups may work cooperatively—organizing a summer program for children or jointly sponsoring a holy day celebration—or they may define one another as evil, each trying to malign or stigmatize the other. Moreover, one local religious group may be composed primarily of professional and businesspeople and another group mostly of laboring people. The religious groups may experience conflict in part because each serves a different socioeconomic constituency in the environment. The point is that to understand a social unit *or* the human body, we must consider the *structure* and *processes* within the unit as well as the interaction with the surrounding environment.

Perfect relationships or complete harmony among the social units is unusual. Social units, be they small groups or large organizations, are often motivated by self-interest and the need for self-preservation, with the result that they compete with other units for resources (e.g., time, money, skills, and the energy of members). Therefore, social units within a society are often in conflict. Whether groups are in conflict or they cooperate does not change their interrelatedness; units are interdependent and can be studied using the scientific method.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Think of an example of a social unit to which you belong. Describe the environment of the social unit. How does the environment influence that social unit?

Studying the Social World: Levels of Analysis

Picture for a moment your sociology class as a social unit in your social world. Students (individuals) make up the class, the class (small group) is offered by the sociology department, the sociology department (a large group, including faculty and students) is part of the college or university, and the university (an organization) is located in a community. The university follows the practices approved by the social institution (education) of which it is a part, and education is an institution located within a nation. Practices the university follows are determined by a larger accrediting agency that provides guidelines and oversight for educational institutions. The national society, represented by the national government, is shaped by global events such as technological and economic competition among nations, natural disasters,

global climate change, wars, and terrorist attacks. Such events influence national policies and goals, including policies for the educational system. Thus, global issues and conflicts may shape the content of the curriculum taught in the local classroom, from what is studied to the textbooks used.

As discussed, each of these social units is referred to as a *level of analysis* (two students in a discussion group, to a society or global system; see Table 1.2). These levels are illustrated in the social world model at the beginning of each chapter, and their relation to that chapter's content is shown through examples in the model.

Micro-Level Analysis. A focus on *individual or small-group interaction in specific situations* is called **micro-level analysis**. The micro level is important because one-to-one and small-group interaction form the basic foundation of all social groups and organizations to which we belong, from families to corporations to societies. We are members of many groups at the micro level.

To understand micro-level analysis, consider the problem of spousal abuse. Why does a person remain in an abusive relationship, knowing that each year thousands of people are killed by their partners and millions more are severely and repeatedly battered? To answer this question, several possible micro-level explanations can be considered. One view is that the abusive partner has convinced the abused person that she or he is powerless in the relationship or "deserves" the abuse. Therefore, the abused person gives up in despair of ever being able to alter the situation. The abuse is viewed as part of the interaction—of action and reaction—and some partners come to see abuse as what composes normal interaction.

Another explanation for remaining in the abusive relationship is that battering is a familiar part of the person's everyday life. However unpleasant and unnatural this may seem to outsiders, it may be seen by the abused as a "normal" and acceptable part of intimate relationships, especially if she or he grew up in an abusive family.

Another possibility is that an abused woman may fear that her children would be harmed or that she would be harshly judged by her family or religious group if she "abandoned" her mate. She may have few resources to make leaving the abusive situation possible. To study each of these possible explanations involves analysis at the micro level because each issue posed here focuses on interpersonal interaction factors rather than on large society-wide trends or forces. Moving to the next level, meso-level analysis leads to different explanations for abuse.

Meso-Level Analysis. **Meso-level analysis** involves looking at *intermediate-sized units smaller than the nation but larger than the local community or even the region*. This level includes national institutions (such as the economy of a country, the national educational system, or the political system within a country), nationwide organizations (such as a political party, a soccer league, or a national women's rights organization), and ethnic groups that have an identity as a group (such as Jews, Mexican Americans, or Native Americans in the United States). Organizations, institutions, and ethnic communities are smaller than the nation or global social units, but they are still beyond the everyday personal experience and control of individuals. They are intermediate in the sense of being too large to know everyone in the group, but they are not as

▼ TABLE 1.2

Levels of Analysis and Education

	Level	Parts of Education
Micro-level analysis	Interpersonal	Sociology class; professor and student interacting; study group cramming for an exam
	Local organizations	University; sociology department
Meso-level analysis	Organizations and institutions	State boards of education; National Education Association
	Ethnic groups within a nation	Islamic madrassas or Jewish yeshiva school systems
Macro-level analysis	Nations	Policy and laws governing education
	Global community	World literacy programs

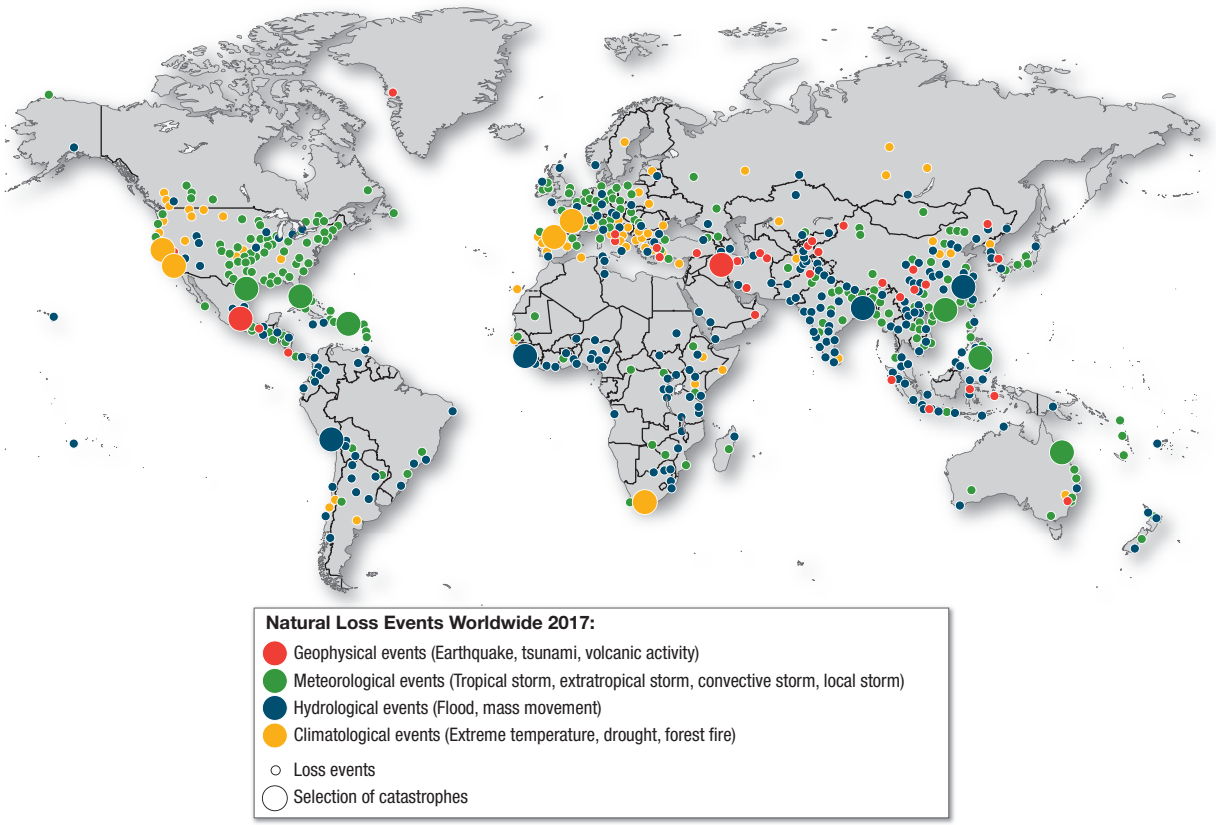
large as nation-states. For example, state governments in the United States, provinces in Canada, prefectures in Japan, or cantons in Switzerland are at the meso level and usually more accessible and easier to change than the national bureaucracies of these countries.

In discussing micro-level analysis, we used the example of domestic violence. Recognizing that personal troubles can often be related to public issues, many social scientists look for broader explanations of spousal abuse, such as social conditions at the meso level of society (Straus 2017; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006). When a pattern of behavior in society occurs with increasing frequency, it cannot be understood solely from the viewpoint of individual cases or micro-level causes. For instance, sociological findings show that fluctuations in spousal or child abuse at the micro level are related to levels of unemployment in meso-level organizations and macro-level government economic policies. Frustration resulting in abuse erupts within families when poor economic conditions make it nearly impossible for people to find a stable and reliable means of supporting themselves and their families. The message here is that meso-level economic issues in the society need to be addressed in order to decrease domestic violence.

Macro-Level Analysis. Studying the largest social units in the social world, called **macro-level analysis**, involves looking at *entire nations, global forces (such as international organizations), and international social trends.* Macro-level analysis is essential to our understanding of how larger societal forces and global events shape our everyday lives. A natural disaster, such as recent droughts and floods in North America and West Africa, and massive hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean, may change the foods we can serve at our family dinner table because much of what we consume comes from other parts of the world. (Figure 1.2 shows some of the deadliest natural disasters in 2017.) Likewise, a political conflict on the other side of the planet can lead to war, which means that a member of your family may be called up on active

▼ FIGURE 1.2

Loss Events Worldwide in 2017: Geographic Overview



Source: Münchener Ruckversicherungs-Gesellschaft, NatCatService 2018.