



The death of former South African president Nelson Mandela in December 2013 brought a staggering global response. More than 90 heads of state were among the tens of thousands who attended the memorial service in Soweto in the pouring rain. The service was a powerful commemoration of a courageous individual's life and also a testament to how much had changed during this one man's lifetime.

Millions of viewers worldwide watched Mandela's memorial service live on television. But when Mandela was born in 1918, television had not even been invented. When he died at age 95, Mandela's native country of South Africa had a democratically elected government and a black president. But Mandela had grown up in a society characterized by apartheid, or legalized racial segregation; blacks could not vote or hold skilled jobs, and they could live only in racially restricted neighborhoods. As a young man, Mandela joined the African National Congress, a movement that challenged the government and its apartheid policies, first through nonviolent protest and later through armed struggle. He was arrested in 1962, convicted of sabotage, and given a life sentence. Released from prison more than 27 years later, he was elected president of South Africa in 1994. Mandela, a vibrant symbol of perseverance and the possibility of social change, helped pave the way for a peaceful transition from a white-dominated apartheid regime to a multiracial government.

Mandela's contemporaries in the United States—your grandparents or great-grandparents—similarly experienced dramatic social change during a single lifetime. Women born before 1920 came into a world that did not permit them to vote. But for decades now, women not only have voted but have done so at a higher rate than men. Many African Americans of Mandela's generation grew up with their own version of apartheid in the South's legal racial segregation that mandated separate schools and separate seating on public transportation until the 1960s. The civil rights movement helped abolish legal segregation, and the idea of separate black and white seats on a bus is hard to imagine today. When Mandela was born, the American labor movement was working to outlaw child labor and establish basic rights such as a minimum wage. Today, the minimum wage and the abolition of child labor are well-established norms.

Mandela's story has a powerful message. It reminds us that in a single lifetime, people working together can help change the world in countless ways.

Social change has long been a topic of interest to sociologists. Sociology originated in the late 1800s, a time of breathtaking change, when Europe and the United States were shifting from a rural agricultural economy to an urban industrial economy. Early sociologists were trying to understand the impact of this and other social changes on how people lived, how they earned a living, and how families were organized.

Today's sociologists are doing much the same thing, except that now they are grappling with contemporary changes related to our global economy, the expansion of media and technology, a rapidly changing population, and enduring cultural conflicts, to name just a few focal points. *Experience Sociology* introduces you to a sociological perspective on these sorts of contemporary developments. Amid continuing shifts in the social landscape, the sociological perspective provides valuable tools for helping you navigate our changing world.

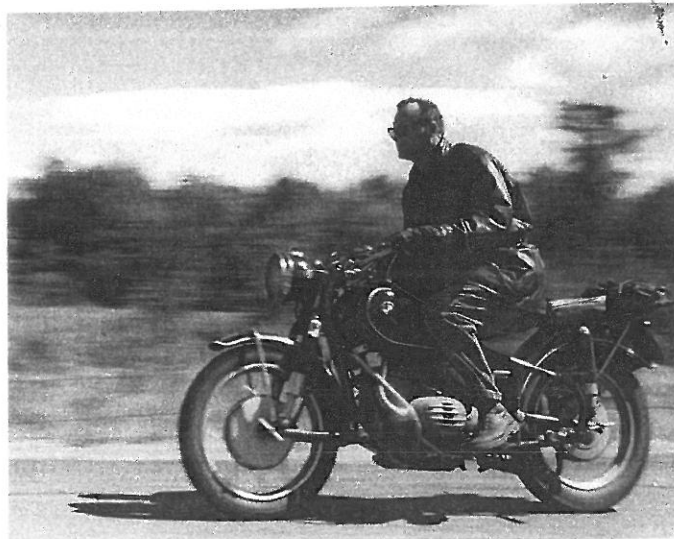
This chapter introduces sociology, its unique perspective, and its early development as a discipline. It examines some of sociology's diverse theories and the core concepts that unite the field, along with a number of key concerns of sociology—indeed, of all of us today. We will see how sociology offers insight into the forces that are shaping our lives and, at the same time, how it helps us recognize our own capacity to bring about change.

What Is Sociology?

Sociology is *the systematic study of the relationship between individuals and society*. The approach used in sociology can be thought of as a perspective, a way of looking at the world. To take a **sociological perspective** is to see and understand the connections between individuals and the broader social contexts in which they live. You can understand your own life—including the forces that have shaped your current daily routines and the options you have in your future—only by considering the broader social contexts within which you live. Your identity (including your race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality) as well as the social environment in which you live (including your family, neighborhood, country, culture, and historical period) influence who you are and who you can be. Understanding those connections is at the heart of a sociological perspective.

The Sociological Perspective

Writing in 1959, U.S. sociologist C. Wright Mills provided the best-known description of the sociological perspective (or, as he called it, the *sociological imagination*). According to Mills, “The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within a society” (p. 6). In other words, our individual condition (what Mills calls “biography”) depends, in part, upon larger forces in society (“history”).

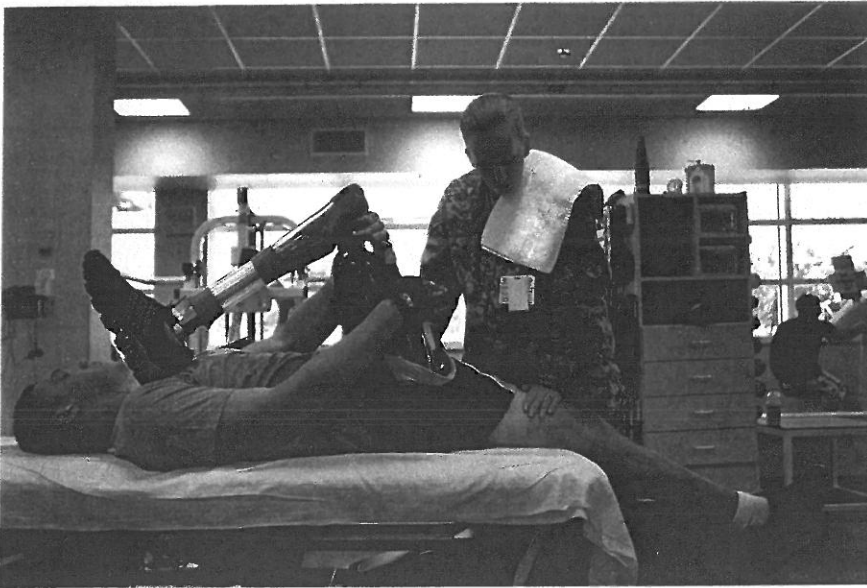


A motorcycle-riding Texan, C. Wright Mills wrote a classic description of the sociological perspective called *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) and a series of books focused on social class and power in the United States (1948, 1952, 1956). He taught at Columbia University from 1946 until 1962, when he died of a heart attack at age 45. Mills's critique of the concentration of power in the United States inspired a generation of activists in the 1960s to promote a more inclusive and democratic society, themes that continue to resonate today.

Do you live in a prosperous, peaceful society with democratic freedoms or in one where survival is a challenge, violence is a constant threat, and people's basic civil rights are suppressed? Is your mother or father a retail clerk, an auto worker, a school teacher, an engineer, in the military, a business executive, or unemployed? Are you African American, Latino, Asian, white? Are you male, female, or transgendered? Are you gay or straight? Are you from a rural community, the suburbs, or a major city? Were you raised as a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, or a nonbeliever? Although we often like to think of ourselves as rugged individuals responsible for our own lives, characteristics and circumstances like these influence who we are and the options we have. And as Mills (1959) points out (using the gendered language of his day), as social conditions change, so do the lives of individuals:

When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both. (p. 3)

We need only consider the economic recession of recent years, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rapid growth of



Personal choices—especially deciding to volunteer for the armed forces—contributed to this Iraq war veteran's current situation. But those decisions were made in the context of broader social conditions, including economic pressures to earn a living, a culture of popular patriotism, key decisions made by those with political power, and events that transformed international relations. The connections between individual lives and larger social processes are rarely so explicit or so poignant.

technology, and accompanying social developments to see that Mills's observations are as relevant today as they were more than half a century ago.

However, Mills and other sociologists do not argue that people are simply the passive victims of their social circumstances. Rather, as the sociological perspective reveals, interplay exists between the social conditions that shape our lives and the actions we take as individuals. We don't get to choose the conditions under which we live, the opportunities we enjoy, or the barriers we face, but we do have choices about how we respond to those circumstances, both individually and collectively. Deciding to join the military, have children, attend college, or move to another city are among the many individual decisions a person can make that have a major impact on his or her future. Mills himself was a strong advocate for collective action to strengthen democracy and help change the difficult and often unequal conditions that face people in society. That idea, too, is as relevant today as ever.

Sociology and Common Sense

You do not have to be a professional sociologist to look at the world from a sociological perspective. Indeed, many popular expressions reflect a kind of commonsense folk wisdom that assumes a sociological perspective. You have probably heard some version of the expression, "You've got

to play the cards you're dealt in life." The card game metaphor makes the point that from the beginning, our options in life have been shaped by social conditions that we did not get to pick ourselves. Such factors can heavily influence the opportunity people have for good health, education, material comfort, and overall well-being.

You don't get to choose the cards you are dealt, but you do get to decide how you will play them. For example, you no doubt decided to go to college with the hope that doing so could positively influence your future. Others may have had the option of attending college but chose not to exercise it. Many more people, of course, never had the option of attending college in the first place; they were dealt a very different hand in life.

The idea that people must play the cards they are dealt in life is consistent with a sociological perspective. But the problem with relying on commonsense folk wisdom to understand the world is that, however insightful it may sometimes be, it can produce a bewildering array of contradictory claims. The maxim about playing the cards you are dealt in life would seem to contradict another popular saying, "Life is what

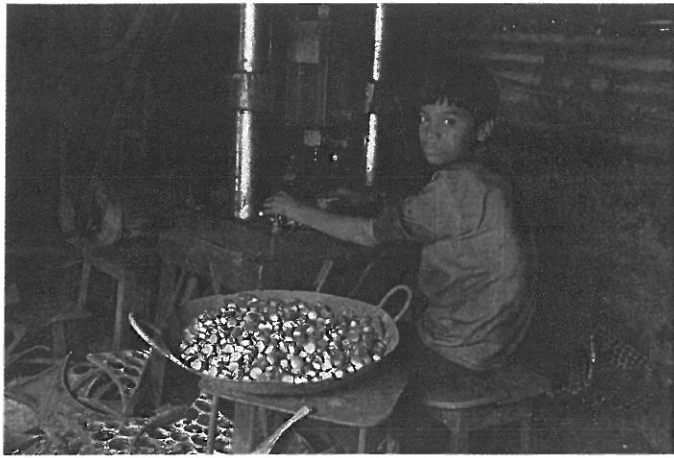
you make of it," which suggests that individuals have total control over their fate. Or perhaps you agree with the maxim, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," suggesting that our social origins largely predetermine our character. Without some way of gauging their accuracy, such wildly contradictory claims provide no insight at all.

In addition, an understanding of the world based only on our own individual experience may not be helpful in unfamiliar circumstances. This is especially true in a world in which communications, media, immigration, and international travel are bringing together people of vastly different backgrounds as never before. To operate in such a diverse society we need to understand not only how *we* make sense of the world, but how other people do so as well.

If we are to understand our connection to the social world beyond our own limited experience and be able to sort through competing claims about that world, we need a more systematic way to comprehend the patterns of behavior and the processes that make up social life. We need the discipline of sociology.

Sociology as a Discipline

Sociologists combine the sociological perspective with a variety of research methods (discussed in Chapter 2) to study in a systematic way how our actions shape, and are shaped by, broader social forces. Because the sociological perspective can apply to any aspect of people's lives and any social issue,



These children's life chances—their opportunities for good health, education, material comfort, and overall well-being—are significantly influenced by the social environment into which they were born. What differences are evident from these photographs? What elements of your social environment influenced your development?

the discipline of sociology addresses an especially broad array of topics, as we will see throughout this book.

Sociology is one of the *social sciences*, a group of research-based disciplines that gather and evaluate evidence in order to study human society. This focus on human society distinguishes the social sciences from the *natural sciences*, which focus on the physical aspects of nature. In addition to sociology, the social sciences include political science, economics, psychology, and anthropology. Each of these disciplines highlights different aspects of social life.

Take crime, for example. *Political scientists* might study how politicians use the issue of crime in their campaigns. *Economists* might examine the financial impact of crime on society. *Psychologists* might look at the individual features of criminals, perhaps suggesting personality traits associated with certain types of criminal behavior. *Anthropologists* might compare how different societies define crime and respond to it. *Sociologists* emphasize the interrelationship between individuals and larger social forces, as well as the interactions

between various social institutions such as government, economy, media, schools, and family. They explore why crime rates vary over time and are often linked to social trends such as changes in the age of the population (since younger people commit crimes at a higher rate than older ones). They examine the role of media in helping shape people's perception of crime and the criminal justice system through both news coverage and entertainment dramas. They examine the effectiveness of government efforts to reduce crime. Such topics illustrate the broad range of sociological research.

Sociologists have many interests, and the discipline as a whole has many areas of specialization, including medical sociology, sociology of the family, sociology of religion, political sociology, the sociology of race and ethnicity, the sociology of work, the sociology of gender, the sociology of media, and the sociology of social movements. As a result, sociology courses can provide a foundation for further study in any of these fields. As the Sociology Works box suggests,

SOCIOLOGY WORKS

The Sociology Major and the Job Market

People, culture, social problems, social change—these fascinating topics help explain why students often enjoy sociology. However, practical concern about the future might lead some to ask, “What can I do with a degree in sociology?”

The answer is, “Plenty.” By majoring in sociology you not only learn to better understand yourself and your world, but you also develop important skills that can prepare you for entry-level positions in a variety of employment settings, including business, education, social services, health care, government, media, and criminal justice. Sociology can also be an excellent choice for students who plan to go on to graduate school.

Here are four key advantages of majoring in sociology:

1. *A sociology degree is flexible.* Because sociology can be applied to virtually any aspect of social life, you can major in sociology with an eye toward your own particular interests. For example, if you are interested in health and medicine, you can take a course in medical sociology; if you are interested in social work, you can take courses related to the social problems you wish to address or the populations you wish to serve. Sociology can help you understand the issues related to your field of interest.
2. *Sociology focuses on the critical use of information.* As part of a liberal arts education, a sociology degree prepares you to find, understand, analyze, use, and communicate information. These fundamental critical-thinking skills apply to an array of work settings and will not become obsolete; they are highly valuable in today’s rapidly changing, information-based job market. Since most people change jobs—and even careers—during their lives, mastering such information-based skills is crucial for success. The ability to work with social science data found in government

Majoring in sociology allows you to study a subject area that interests you and helps you prepare for your future.

reports, marketing surveys, and other information sources is particularly important.

3. *Sociology provides insights into diversity.* Success in many fields of employment requires understanding people from different backgrounds. Sociology majors have an advantage in understanding diversity. As a result, they are more likely to work effectively in multicultural workplaces such as schools, hospitals, and businesses as well as in any field in which the players may be from diverse social backgrounds.
4. *Sociology explores the source of social problems.* Are you interested in a field that addresses social problems, such as social work, criminal justice, or health care? Do you plan to work with community organizations, international aid agencies, or social movements to bring about social change? If so, studying sociology can be particularly relevant. By focusing on the relationship between individuals and their social context, sociology helps you understand the roots of social problems.

The Sociology Works boxes throughout this book highlight how former sociology students are using the insights of sociology in a variety of fields. If you are considering majoring in sociology, talk with your instructor, who can tell you about the programs available at your school.

think about it

1. *Do you have any tentative ideas about the kind of work you’d like to do when you complete school? What kinds of classes do you think will help you prepare for the future? Why?*
2. *Take a look at your school’s course listings. Do you see any sociology courses that you think you may want to take? What interests you about the topics covered in these courses?*



Sociology majors in many occupations have made contributions to their professional fields. A few well-known majors have had an impact across society. Pictured here, from left to right, are former U.S. president Ronald Reagan, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., First Lady Michelle Obama, Hall of Fame quarterback and broadcaster Troy Aikman, and actor Kal Penn.

the study of sociology can also provide valuable skills for many careers, including some that may seem completely unrelated to sociology itself.

Sociology's Historical and Social Context

Imagine a society in which scientific discoveries reveal more and more about the world, political unrest sparks calls for social change, and economic crises and new technologies transform daily life. You might suspect this was a description of today's United States, but similar upheavals disturbed Europe in the 1800s, which is where and when the formal discipline of sociology first emerged. To better understand the origins of the discipline, we need to consider that historical and social context.

The Rise of Modernity

In the 1700s, European society entered a new historical era, **modernity**, characterized by the growth of democracy and personal freedom, increased reliance on reason and science to explain the natural and social worlds, and a shift toward an urban industrial economy. Earlier, during the Middle Ages (roughly 400–1400), religious explanations of the natural and social worlds dominated intellectual life, the land-owning aristocracy and clerical elite dominated political life, and the economy rested on a rural, agricultural base. (Our romanticized images of kings in castles and knights in battle come from this period.) During the transitional Renaissance and Early Modern periods (from roughly the 1400s to the 1600s), scholars laid the foundation of modern science with pioneering works in astronomy, anatomy, and other fields of knowledge; uprisings challenged traditional political authority; and technological advances improved agricultural production.

The rise of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was marked by revolutionary change (Table 1.1). Early sociologists sought to understand the dramatic shifts they were witnessing and to suggest what might be done to deal with the social problems that resulted from them.

Cultural Revolution: Science and the Enlightenment

During the Middle Ages the Church and its clergy dominated European intellectual life, controlling the era's limited number of books, libraries, and schools. Because religious doctrine formed the basis for acceptable social thought, heretics—those who held beliefs contrary to Church teaching—were often persecuted and even killed for questioning the accepted order. This intellectual climate was not hospitable to the open and free inquiry required for **science**, which uses logic and the systematic collection of evidence to support knowledge claims.

The dominance of the Church slowly eroded, however, as scientific research exposed the shortcomings of religious explanations of the natural world. For example, proof that the earth orbited the sun contradicted Church doctrine that the earth was at the center of the universe. Writers and philosophers seized on these advances in the natural sciences to promote the *Enlightenment*, an eighteenth-century intellectual movement that combined a belief in individual freedom and respect for individual rights with the calculated logic of the natural sciences. These Enlightenment thinkers, who were among the first intellectuals independent of the Church, argued that neither the physical nor the social world should be taken on faith. Instead, both should be open to questioning and examined through reason; claims to knowledge should be subject to testing through the collection of evidence, and explanations should be based in natural causes and events. German philosopher Immanuel Kant summed up this revolutionary way of thinking in the motto "Dare to know" ([1784] 1999). This new emphasis on reason and science created the cultural conditions needed for the emergence of sociology.

Political Revolution: The Rise of Democracy

Enlightenment thinkers believed that the open debate of ideas would promote tolerance, individual rights, equality, and democracy. They suggested that applying reason and science to questions of social significance would inevitably advance individual rights and freedom. Enlightenment

TABLE 1.1 SOCIOLOGY AND REVOLUTION

SOCIOLOGY AROSE IN THE CONTEXT OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Cultural Revolution	Political Revolution	Economic and Social Revolution
The declining influence of religion	Declining power of monarchies; American and French revolutions	Decline of agricultural life; industrialization and rise of consumer society
The rise of scientific thought	Uprisings of 1848	Capitalism
The Age of Enlightenment	Growth in democracy and individual rights	Urbanization



The rise of modernity introduced rapid social change. Work life shifted from fields to factories. Home and community life was transformed as people moved from small rural villages to rapidly expanding urban centers. What effect do you think the shift from rural village life based on farming to urban life based on wage labor had on family life?

ideas provided the intellectual basis for both the American (1775–1783) and French (1789–1799) revolutions, as well as for a series of uprisings that swept through Europe in 1848, challenging traditional rulers and promoting democratic ideals. These revolutions stimulated much interest in achieving a more equal society and improved living conditions, but they provoked condemnation from conservatives who saw them as a threat to stability, traditional values, and social order. Thus controversies about the nature and desirability of social order versus social change were among the first topics addressed by early sociologists.

Economic and Social Revolution: Industrial Capitalism and Urbanization

The term *Industrial Revolution* refers to a collection of major developments that transformed rural agricultural societies into urban industrial societies. This process began in Great Britain and spread through Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century.

The practical application of scientific developments, such as the creation of the steam engine, paved the way for **industrialization**, *the use of large-scale machinery for the mass manufacture of consumer goods*. Industrialization required a major investment in factories and mills with complex machinery—such as mechanized looms—at a cost that was often beyond the reach of a single owner. Thus industrialization became linked to the rise of *capitalists*, people who pursued profits by investing in and owning businesses. Mass manufacturing relied on a new type of relationship between workers and owners in which the workers sold their labor for a wage. They used their wages to buy food, clothing, and shelter, unlike rural peasants who produced many of their own

material goods and met their basic needs by farming. The result was the birth of both wage labor and *consumerism*, a way of life that depends on the purchase and use of commercial goods and services. These developments fueled the rapid expansion of *capitalism*, an economic system in which the machinery used for production is owned privately, workers are paid a wage, and markets facilitate the exchange of goods and services.

Economic changes fueled changes in social life. An agrarian economy requires farmers to work and live in rural areas. An industrial economy requires workers to congregate near centralized sites of production. Large-scale mass manufacturing operations were housed in factories and mills, often located along riverbanks to harness water power. As the Industrial Revolution took hold, many people left their rural homes and traveled to newly emerging cities for jobs they hoped would mean a better life. This migration contributed to **urbanization**, *the growth of cities*. Before 1800, more than 90 percent of Europeans lived in rural areas; by the 1890s, more than half lived in cities.

Urban life dramatically changed how people lived. In the agricultural economy of the Middle Ages, peasants worked the fields and lived in tiny rural villages among people mostly like themselves. Children could expect to grow up and live in the village they were born in and to do the same sort of work their parents and grandparents did. In contrast, the modern industrial economy required wage laborers to work the machinery in the factories of rapidly expanding cities. These bustling cities featured considerable diversity and rapid social change, some of which contributed to growing social problems.

Early industrial capitalism was highly productive, but it also created great inequalities, generating tremendous profits for a few wealthy owners from the labor of many overworked and underpaid workers. Disease (linked to poor sanitation), overcrowded and unsafe housing, inadequate

transportation, and crime plagued the rapidly growing cities. Staggering inequality and growing social problems caused great concern among political and social thinkers, inspiring calls for reform and igniting revolutionary movements.

The rise of modernity produced rapid and immediately visible changes that showed traditional ways of life were not inevitable; the fate of individuals was tied to broader social changes beyond their control; and human action could transform the world through new ideas, political reform, and technological innovation. Faced with the challenge of understanding these dramatic transformations, social thinkers began applying reason and scientific techniques to study social life systematically and to suggest ways that society might be improved. The resulting ideas became the foundation of sociology.

Foundations of Sociological Thought

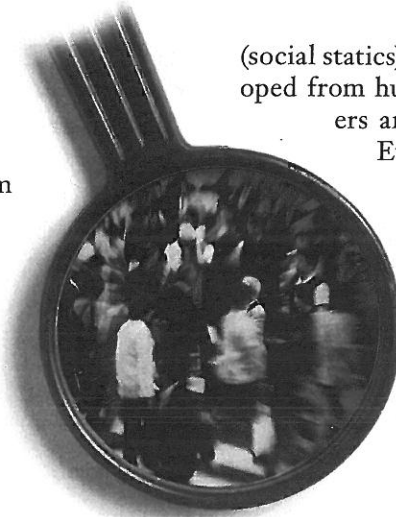
Sociology today has its roots in the ideas developed by early sociologists more than a century ago. Some of these thinkers asked profound questions of enduring relevance and are still widely read (Calhoun 2012; Ritzer and Stepnisky 2013). Their work on the rapidly changing world of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries continues to provide insight into our own social world today.

Defining the Terrain of Sociology: Comte and Spencer

Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) helped establish the idea that the social world could be the subject of systematic, scientific investigation.

AUGUSTE COMTE: STABILITY AND CHANGE Auguste Comte, a French intellectual with wide-ranging interests, coined the term *sociology* in the early nineteenth century. Comte sought to establish sociology as a rigorous science of society—modeled on the natural sciences—that would identify the laws that govern human behavior.

At the core of Comte's new field of study were two fundamental questions about social life: "How and why do societies change?" (social dynamics) and "What is the basis of social stability at a specific historical moment?"



(social statics). He was interested in how society had developed from humanity's earliest small-scale bands of hunters and gatherers to his own nineteenth-century European society. He theorized that throughout history societies progressed in a straight line through several stages: the theological (ruled by religion), the metaphysical (ruled by philosophy), and the positivist (ruled by science). For Comte, **positivism**, a belief that accurate knowledge must be based on the scientific method, enabled a deeper understanding of human life and was the key to solving persistent social problems.

Comte's efforts to build a science of society were crude by today's standards. Few of his ideas have withstood the test of time, but the focus of his interest—the nature of social stability and social change—continues to be a major concern in sociology.

HERBERT SPENCER: SOCIETY AS A SOCIAL ORGANISM The British intellectual Herbert Spencer was another early adopter of the term *sociology*. Taking a cue from the biological sciences, Spencer argued that society is a "social organism," much like a human organism. He theorized that, like its biological equivalent, society is made up of separate parts, each with a unique function, that work together to sustain the entire organism. Thus Spencer's theory emphasized the overall structure of society, the functions served by the various elements of society, and the interactions among these elements. Spencer also theorized that when societies evolve, their component parts—and the functions they serve—change as well.

Spencer believed that society progresses as it evolves. Therefore, evolution should be allowed to take place without interference from government. Rather than intervene with reforms in the face of the growing inequality created by unregulated industrial capitalism, Spencer believed in the "survival of the fittest," a phrase he devised before Charles Darwin's work on natural selection and the theory of evolution was published. Spencer's application of the survival of the fittest to human society is today known as *social Darwinism*. Spencer later recanted some of his more extreme views, but in recent years, those who wish to minimize the role of government in social and economic affairs have revived some of Spencer's ideas.

The Key Founders: Marx, Durkheim, and Weber

Spencer and Comte helped define the terrain of sociology in its earliest years. But the thinkers who are widely seen as the founders of sociology and who set the agenda for the next century of sociological theory were Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber.

EARLY SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS



Karl Marx



Emile Durkheim



Max Weber

	Karl Marx	Emile Durkheim	Max Weber
Biography	1818–1883 German Writer and activist	1858–1917 French Academic	1864–1920 German Academic
Key issues and key work	The nature of capitalism Conflict and inequality <i>Capital</i>	The nature of social solidarity Shared values and morals <i>Suicide</i>	Decline of tradition Rationalization of society <i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>

KARL MARX: THE EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM

The German-born Karl Marx (1818–1883) is best known as a revolutionary thinker who advocated radical change to advance the interests of workers. Marx combined writing with political activism, and much of his life was spent escaping political repression. Because of his writings, Marx was expelled from France (twice!) and Belgium. In Germany he was arrested, tried, acquitted, and also expelled. Finally, in 1849 he went to London, where he spent the rest of his life in exile. He lived in poverty while he wrote his greatest works, including *Capital*, his comprehensive analysis of the history and dynamics of capitalism.

Marx recognized that industrial capitalism was remarkably productive and thus capable of doing away with hunger and poverty for all. But instead, industrial capitalism was used to produce huge fortunes for a few owners, while leaving workers to labor in dangerous conditions and often live in poverty. In much of his work, Marx sought to explain how and why so much wealth and productivity could coexist with such widespread poverty and misery.

For Marx, the answer could be found in the relationship between capitalists, who owned the means of production, and workers (the proletariat), who sold their labor power to the capitalists. The dynamics of capitalism, said Marx, encouraged owners to pay the lowest wages possible because lower labor costs mean higher profits. This dynamic explained the simultaneous creation of enormous fortunes and devastating poverty.

Capitalists accumulated great wealth precisely because they were able to exploit the workers who toiled in their factories. This wealth gave owners great power, which they used to control governments and cultural institutions (Marx [1867] 1976).

To Marx, conflict between owners and workers was an inevitable feature of capitalism. As a result, he argued that capitalism—like earlier economic forms based on inequality—had within it the seeds of its own destruction. He theorized that the exploitation of workers would eventually become so extreme that wage laborers would rise up and overthrow the capitalist system. In its place, they would adopt *socialism*, a system in which ownership of the major means of production—such as factories, utilities, and railways—is in public, rather than private, hands, and government directs the use of the productive forces of industry for the public good. The goal of socialism would be a society without the extreme inequalities that characterized capitalism. (We explore the nature of capitalism and socialism more closely in Chapter 16.)

Marx's analysis of industrial capitalism was insightful in specifying the connection between wealth and poverty. He accurately predicted that the search for cheap labor would lead to the expansion of capitalism around the globe. He also correctly predicted the growth of labor movements demanding an end to unregulated capitalism. But he failed to appreciate the ability of capitalism to accommodate reform or the important role markets play in stimulating innovation and

efficiency. The revolutionary worker movements Marx supported in recently industrialized countries like Great Britain, France, and Germany ultimately reformed, rather than overthrew, capitalism. Meanwhile, the socialist revolutions that did occur, most notably in Russia and China, took place in primarily agricultural societies that did not have the capacity to produce an abundance of material goods. Even though the brutal totalitarian states that emerged after these revolutions invoked Marx's name in their official ideology, they bore almost no resemblance to the humanist egalitarian vision that Marx had promoted.

Beyond the specific analysis of capitalism, Marx's work highlighted a core concept in sociology: in this case, economic power and its role in enforcing inequality. Marx argued that economic power could be used to influence other aspects of social life, including government and cultural institutions, such as schools and the media. Marx's work also stressed the interplay between structure and action that is at the heart of the sociological perspective. "Men make their own history," he wrote, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx [1852] 1978, 595).

The issues Marx explored continue to be important today. Questions about the nature and direction of our economy are among the most significant ones addressed by sociologists. For example, how has globalization changed our economy? How are the most recent economic crises linked to the dynamics of capitalism? How has the nature of work been changing? How have the labor movement and social welfare programs—both examples of attempts to moderate the excesses of capitalism—affected the lives of workers?

EMILE DURKHEIM: SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), who lived a generation after Marx, was also concerned with understanding social change in the modern world, but Durkheim's life could hardly have been more different from Marx's. The descendant of a long line of rabbinical scholars in France, Durkheim studied to be a rabbi but rejected religion in his teens and became agnostic, believing there was no way to know whether or not God existed. However, he retained a lifelong interest both in the role of religion in social life and in the scientific study of morality.

Durkheim is perhaps the single individual most responsible for establishing sociology as an academic discipline. He

held the first academic position in sociology; wrote a book laying out the methods of the discipline, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Durkheim [1895] 1982); and established a well-respected academic journal devoted to the new field.

Like many social thinkers who witness dramatic change, Durkheim was concerned with how to maintain social order. He was particularly interested in the question of **social solidarity**, *the collective bonds that connect individuals*. At the core of his theory was the proposition that society is held together by shared cultural values. As we explore in more detail in Chapter 3, cultural *norms*, or shared expectations about behavior associated with a society's values and morals, are promoted informally through custom and tradition and are spelled out more systematically in laws. When internalized by individuals, shared values and morals become the foundation for social solidarity.



Durkheim observed that traditional agricultural societies were often tight-knit communities. They shared social bonds across generations because people did the same sort of work, shared a common religion, and followed similar customs. These similar experiences resulted in *mechanical solidarity*—social cohesion based on shared experience and a common identity with limited individuality. As European societies grew and became urbanized and industrialized, however, people increasingly differed from one another. A more complex economy required an increasing **division of labor**, in which *people specialize in different tasks, each requiring specific skills*. As cities developed, a diverse array of people coexisted, often with different religions and cultural traditions. Given this increasing social complexity and diversity, how could social solidarity be maintained?

Durkheim's answer was *organic solidarity*, a new form of social cohesion, characteristic of modern industrial societies, that is based on interdependence. In the tradition of Spencer's "social organism," Durkheim argued that the social glue that holds together modern societies mirrors the way living organisms depend on multiple, specialized components operating in unison. Social cohesion is possible because we are dependent on one another. With its increased division of labor, modern urban industrialized society requires doctors, construction workers, sales clerks, police officers, factory workers, janitors, and thousands of other specialists to keep operating. Durkheim's theory helped explain why rapid growth and social differentiation in European societies did not lead to the breakdown of social solidarity, but instead produced a new and, Durkheim thought, even stronger form of solidarity that would

THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

Explaining the Social Basis of Suicide

Why do people intentionally kill themselves? At first glance, suicide seems to be the ultimate example of a private individual act, best explained by psychologists, not sociologists. But sociologist Emile Durkheim broke new ground: he made suicide the subject of the first sociological study to use large-scale data analysis. After examining official government records of suicide cases, Durkheim theorized that certain groups are more or less likely to commit suicide because of their relationship to society. This was a fundamental sociological insight.

Durkheim's study, *Suicide*, showed that a sociological perspective could help explain how individuals are affected by the quality of their relationship with larger social groups, even to the extent of taking their own lives. His research revealed, for example, that unmarried adults had higher rates of suicide than married adults, and Protestants had higher rates than Catholics or Jews. Durkheim explained these differences through an analysis of social *integration*, the strength of social ties that allow people to feel they belong to a group, and social *regulation*, the strength of social norms that control people's behavior. Too much or too little of either would increase the likelihood of suicide. Thus Durkheim identified four types of suicide—egoistic, anomic, altruistic, and fatalistic.

Egoistic suicides result from too little social integration and are committed by people who feel isolated and detached from society. For example, married couples are likely to have a strong bond with one another, whereas divorced, widowed, and unmarried people are more likely to lack a strong social connection; thus suicide rates among these latter groups are higher. Protestants lack the intense communal rituals associated with Catholicism and Judaism, which helps explain their

higher rates of suicide. At the other extreme, *altruistic* suicides result from too much social integration, leading individuals to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the collective. Consider, for example, the Japanese kamikaze pilots who volunteered to fly suicide missions for their country during World War II.

The absence of regulation in the form of social norms and boundaries is also associated with higher suicide rates. *Anomic* suicide often results from a sudden and dramatic change in the level of social regulation, which leaves the individual without clear rules about how to adapt. These changes can be negative, such as with the death of a spouse or the loss of a job. Ironically, the changes can also be positive, as when entertainers become "overnight successes" and suddenly have access to endless amounts of money and attention. The self-destructive behavior and suicides of many celebrities, such as musician Kurt Cobain and actor and reality television star Gia Marie Allemand, fit into this category. Conversely, too much regulation can result in *fatalistic* suicide, as in the case of slaves, prisoners, or invalids who see no hope or way to escape their desperate conditions.

Today, the issue of suicide remains a poignant one, and Durkheim's work remains a touchstone. News outlets have been filled with stories about the alarmingly high suicide rate among returning U.S. veterans. In 2013, medical researchers launched a suicide prevention study that monitors Facebook profile content and Twitter posts of veterans who have volunteered to share their social media activity, with the aim of providing clinicians with real-time assessments of risk factors for suicide and other dangerous behaviors. The study's name? The Durkheim Project.

Suicide and Social Integration

	Too Little	Too Much
Integration	Egoistic	Altruistic
Regulation	Anomic	Fatalistic

think about it

1. Using Durkheim's insights about suicide, consider which of the four types of suicide seems to best apply to suicide bombers who act to advance a cause. Explain your reasoning.
2. Based on Durkheim's analysis, what positive steps could be taken to help reduce the risk of suicide for any particular individual?

permit a balance between individuality and a commitment to the group.

Durkheim's work highlights the interplay between social structure and cultural values, especially as they relate to social solidarity. Much of Durkheim's sociological work builds upon this central concern with social solidarity. Indeed in *Suicide*, one of his most influential works and one

of the first to show the potential of the sociological perspective combined with systematic research, Durkheim argued that suicide rates could be explained by the strength of the social ties people have with larger social groups (Durkheim [1897] 1951). (See the Through a Sociological Lens box.)

Durkheim also argued that crime and punishment are fundamentally about solidarity (see Chapter 8). Crimes,

for Durkheim, are acts that offend the **collective conscience**, or *shared values of a society*. Punishment serves as a means to reinforce social solidarity in the face of such antisocial actions. Without the moral constraints provided by the collective conscience, Durkheim argued, people—and society as a whole—would descend into a chaotic state of **anomie**, or *normlessness, without moral guidance*.

Today, close to a century later, people are still debating the proper role of values and religion in public and private life. How might Durkheim's ideas help explain the resurgence of traditional religious belief? Can the increasing diversity of our society serve as a source of strength, rather than division? How can people maintain healthy social ties in a world where they regularly move from one community to another? How can we affirm people's individuality while maintaining a sense of common identity? As sociologists investigate such twenty-first-century questions, Durkheim's theories continue to be relevant.

MAX WEBER: THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE RATIONALIZATION OF MODERN LIFE

Like Durkheim, German theorist Max Weber (pronounced "VAY-ber") (1864–1920) was also trying to make sense of the shift from traditional to modern society. The son of a high-ranking government bureaucrat, Weber took a series of university positions as a young man, carried out major research projects, and served as a consultant for government agencies. By his mid-thirties, Weber was in a state of exhaustion and suffered a nervous breakdown that left him incapacitated for nearly seven years. When he was able to return to his writing full time, Weber produced his best-known work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber [1905] 1958).

In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber argued that culture—in the form of Protestantism—had helped promote the early development of capitalism in northern Europe. Traditionally, the Catholic Church had encouraged the rejection of worldly affairs and wealth, promising everlasting life to those who were faithful and participated in the Church's defining rituals such as baptism and communion. However, after the Protestant Reformation, some sects—particularly Calvinists—rejected this approach to salvation and instead maintained that people's fate in the afterlife was predetermined before birth and could not be changed by actions they took on earth. But how could a person know whether he or she was going to heaven or hell? Some believers thought that wealth, accumulated through diligent work, was a sign of God's favor, indicating likely salvation. This cultural belief encouraged hard work, investment, and the accumulation of wealth—the essential requirements for success in a capitalist economy. Marx had focused on the economy's role in influencing other aspects of social life—including culture. With *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that cultural beliefs could influence economic development.

As *The Protestant Ethic* illustrates, Weber sometimes tried to understand social action by viewing it from the perspective of the actor, an approach known by the German word *verstehen*, which means "understanding." Understanding why someone behaves the way he or she does also provides insight into the broader culture in which the action is taking place. As we will see, this approach was an important precursor to later sociological theory that focused precisely on how people make meaning of the social world.

Weber also contributed to sociological theory through his effort to explain the shift from traditional to rational action. One of his central theoretical propositions was that, in earlier societies, *tradition*—beliefs and customs often charged with emotional significance that are passed on from generation to generation—primarily influenced the actions of people. However, in newly industrialized capitalist societies, *rationality*—the use of reason and logical calculation to achieve a goal as efficiently as possible—was much more likely to influence people's actions.

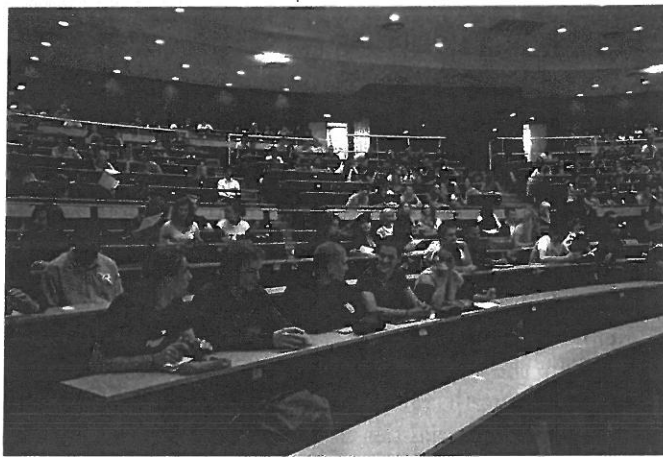
Weber argued that the **rationalization of society**—the long-term historical process by which rationality replaced tradition as the basis for organizing social and economic life—propelled the social change of his day. The influence of rationalization went beyond individual human action to include broader social institutions. For example, Weber argued that whereas rulers had previously claimed authority based solely on their claim to descent from previous rulers, the authority of government officials now rests increasingly on such rational-legal foundations as elections or specific training and certification. In addition, Weber argued that the principle of rationality was responsible for the formation of bureaucracies within large organizations—government agencies, political parties, industrial companies—that manage economic and political life.

Weber could see that rationalization might be productive for society, since it focused on specifying procedures, training officials, and pursuing efficiency. But he also saw that as rationalization permeated all aspects of social life it would create cold and impersonal societies. Weber believed that bureaucracy was self-perpetuating and becoming the dominant type of social organization. He worried it would constrain human action and imprison us in an "iron cage of bureaucracy."

Ultimately, Weber feared that in modern society humans could engage in meaningful action only in large organizations, in which they were allotted narrowly defined tasks and sacrificed their personal goals to the impersonal goals of the whole. And although he agreed with much of Marx's critique of industrial capitalism, Weber's theory of rationalization led him to predict that postcapitalist societies would not produce the kind of egalitarian future that Marx predicted, but would instead be even more highly rationalized, with more layers of bureaucracy. In this way, Weber was perhaps the most prophetic of the three major founders of sociology. He did not share in the pure optimism for science and rational thought that emerged from the Enlightenment. Instead, he saw the early signs of a dark side to

rationality that has now become a cautionary element of contemporary sociological thought.

Weber's sociological theory applies to a wide range of contemporary concerns. Rationalization continues to pervade our lives at home, school, and work in a variety of ways. Do the large lecture halls of the large university and the even larger online courses represent the rationalization of higher education? How do the bureaucracies of governments and corporations assist in—and interfere with—the work of those organizations? Are such bureaucracies a threat to our privacy and freedom? Weber gives us valuable tools for analyzing the role of rational thought and practice in many areas of our lives.



forceful critique of the failure of the United States to live up to its democratic promise in its treatment of both slaves and women. At this time, she also wrote about the methods of social research in *How to Observe Morals and Manners* ([1838] 2009). Finally, Martineau made an important contribution to sociology by translating the work of Auguste Comte for English-speaking audiences.

Recovered Voices: Harriet Martineau, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams

Because of the prevailing discriminatory attitudes toward women and racial minorities during the early years of sociology, a variety of social thinkers were excluded from or marginalized in the academic world. Instead of writing for a strictly academic audience, they wrote for popular publications, authored novels, and spoke out as activists advocating social change. In many ways, they were ahead of their time. Although often at the margins of academic sociology while they were alive, these thinkers are now appreciated more widely for the contributions they made to our understanding of social life. Among these voices are Harriet Martineau, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Addams.

HARRIET MARTINEAU: GENDER DISCRIMINATION Many consider Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), born into an affluent English family, to be the first female sociologist. Her work delved into issues of gender discrimination and slavery that many of the white male sociologists of her time had largely ignored. She also agitated for women's suffrage and the expansion of women's rights in England.

Self-taught and—like other women at the time—excluded from an academic appointment, Martineau began by writing magazine articles and then a series of books on economics and politics that were geared toward the general public rather than an academic audience. Her books were highly successful, making her independently wealthy as well as a literary celebrity. After traveling in the United States for two years, she wrote two books based on her observations, most notably *Society in America* (Martineau [1837] 2009), a

W.E.B. DU BOIS: RACIAL INEQUALITY

W.E.B. Du Bois (pronounced “doo-BOYS”) (1868–1963) made important contributions to sociology with his groundbreaking research on race in America as well as with his efforts to promote racial justice. Du Bois, a descendant of African, French, and Dutch ancestors, came from a comfortable middle-class Massachusetts family that provided him with a solid early education and insulated him from the worst effects of racism. When he traveled south to Nashville to study at Fisk University in the 1880s, however, he encountered a rigidly segregated world in which African Americans were frequently the targets of beatings and lynchings. This injustice strengthened his interest in race as a subject of sociological study. In 1895, Du Bois became the first African American to obtain a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He went on to teach sociology and to write a series of studies that elevated race to a place of prominence in sociology. Du Bois published the first sociological study of a black community, *The Philadelphia Negro* ([1899] 1996), followed by the widely read *The Souls of Black Folk* ([1903] 2005). Both works explored the complexity of race relations in turn-of-the-century American society.

Throughout his life, Du Bois combined scholarship with activism. He played an important role in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), arguably the leading civil rights organization of the twentieth century. He founded—and for a quarter century edited—the NAACP's influential magazine, *The Crisis*, which is still published today (thecrisismagazine.com). He also nurtured efforts to promote unity among people of African descent worldwide. As an agent of change, he faced opposition from powerful forces. During the Cold War anticommunist hysteria of the 1950s, the U.S. Justice Department accused Du Bois of being an agent of the Soviet Union because of his peace activism and promotion of nuclear disarmament. Although he was acquitted, the FBI continued to harass him and the government revoked his passport. Eventually, he was allowed to travel abroad and he moved to Ghana, where he became a citizen. He died there at the age of 95 on August 27, 1963, the day before the civil rights march on Washington,



Harriet Martineau



W.E.B. Du Bois, as portrayed on a U.S. postage stamp honoring his social activism



Jane Addams with some of the youngsters who frequented Hull House

Biography	1802–1876 English Writer and activist	1868–1963 American Scholar and activist	1860–1935 American Scholar and activist
Key issues and work	Gender, slavery, and discrimination <i>Society in America</i>	Race and discrimination NAACP cofounder <i>The Philadelphia Negro;</i> <i>The Souls of Black Folk;</i> <i>The Crisis</i> magazine	Urban social problems Hull House founder <i>Hull House Maps and Papers</i>

D.C., where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

JANE ADDAMS: URBAN SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Jane Addams (1860–1935) is best known as a social reformer and the founder of Hull House, which provided a wide range of social services in the poor immigrant communities of Chicago and served as a model for later similar establishments, known as settlement houses, in other cities. Addams was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded to her in 1931 for her long-standing work in building an international women’s coalition to promote peace and prevent war. But Addams also made an important contribution to the development of sociology. Her social reform work and her research on social life on the south side of Chicago had a significant influence on the development of urban sociology at the University of Chicago, the home of the first sociology department in the United States.

However, unlike some University of Chicago sociologists, who limited their work to understanding urban life, Addams believed that social theory and research should be linked to action promoting social change. Working to address social problems enabled her to contribute to social reform while developing and testing theories about how society worked. In

doing so, she often challenged those in power, advocating for the poor and others at the margins of society.

In *Hull House Maps and Papers* ([1895] 2007), Addams chronicled life in the immigrant communities around Hull House, producing data that were used to promote reform. In *Democracy and Social Ethics* ([1902] 2002), she linked democracy with diversity, explaining that a well-functioning democratic society requires an understanding of a wide range of experiences and perspectives, something that early sociology was well equipped to provide. In addition, Addams foreshadowed the development of feminist social theory by critiquing the way male sociologists often based their generalizations about society on men’s experiences only. She argued that for researchers to fully understand social problems, they needed to have a sympathetic connection with the people affected by those problems. Her collaboration with poor immigrants informed her sociological understanding that people actively seek to improve their conditions, even when facing great odds in extremely difficult situations.

Although the works of Martineau, Du Bois, Addams, and others may have been underappreciated when they wrote them, those works have since had a significant impact on sociology, encouraging sociologists to pay careful attention to the social complexities of gender, race, class, and power.

Sociology's Diverse Theories

The work of early sociologists served as the source for the development of later sociological theory. In the chapters to come, we consider different theories regarding specific social phenomena. In this section, we examine some of the general approaches to theory that have developed over the years. First, though, we consider what theory is and examine some basic ways that sociological theories vary.

Understanding Theory

The film *Avatar* sold nearly \$3 billion in movie tickets, making it the biggest box office hit in history. Why do you think the film has taken in so much money? Perhaps the story is compelling, the actors superb, or the special effects well worth the price of admission. Or maybe the studio advertised and promoted the film especially well. Or perhaps the film's success is due to the growing number of movie theaters worldwide, which translates into more ticket sales.

Each possible explanation for the financial success of *Avatar* is, in effect, a theory because it tries to explain an observation. Accurate evidence and data—such as *Avatar*'s \$3 billion in ticket sales—*describes* the world and helps us see “what” has occurred. Theories answer “why?” questions and help *explain* the data or evidence: “Why did this happen?” “Why is this so?” More formally, a **social theory** is a set of principles and propositions that explains the relationships among social phenomena. Through their explanations, theories also alert us to the sorts of questions we should be asking in future research.

Of course, sociologists don't ask about just box office hits—although media sociologists would be able to offer some likely explanations for *Avatar*'s success. Instead, sociological theorists address broad questions, such as, “Why don't complex societies fall apart?” and “Why do wealth and poverty coexist?” as well as more narrowly defined questions, such as, “Why do some schools succeed while others fail?” or even “Why do students who sit in the back of the class tend to have lower grades than those who sit up front?” When we speak of approaches to sociological theory, therefore, we are referring to broad explanations sociologists have for why society operates the way it does. Although thinking about theory can seem intimidating at first, it actually is fairly straightforward and involves answering the most interesting question of all: Why?

A few other characteristics of theories are important to remember:

- **A theory is not just a bunch or personal opinion.** It may start off that way—just as our explanations for *Avatar*'s success did—but to be useful, theories have to be put to the test to see if they are consistent with the evidence; that's the nature of science. Sociological theory is linked to research and evidence in ways that we explore in Chapter 2.

- **Theories evolve and are sometimes rejected, leaving the most useful to survive.** When evidence repeatedly contradicts a theory, the theory is either revised or discarded. The most useful theories are those that endure, some of which we discuss later in this chapter.
- **Multiple theories often give us a more complete picture than any single one.** Just as many factors likely contributed to *Avatar*'s success, many factors similarly contribute to most aspects of social life. Considering different theories can alert us to a variety of possible explanations for a social phenomenon and to a range of factors that can contribute to it.

Finally, theories tend to vary along a few key dimensions, which we now consider.

Key Dimensions of Theory

How do professional football teams vary? Some focus on offense, others on defense. Some rely on skilled veteran players, whereas others groom the abilities of younger team members. Some teams get most of their points by running the ball, whereas others generate most of their offense by passing. These are among the key dimensions on which teams vary.

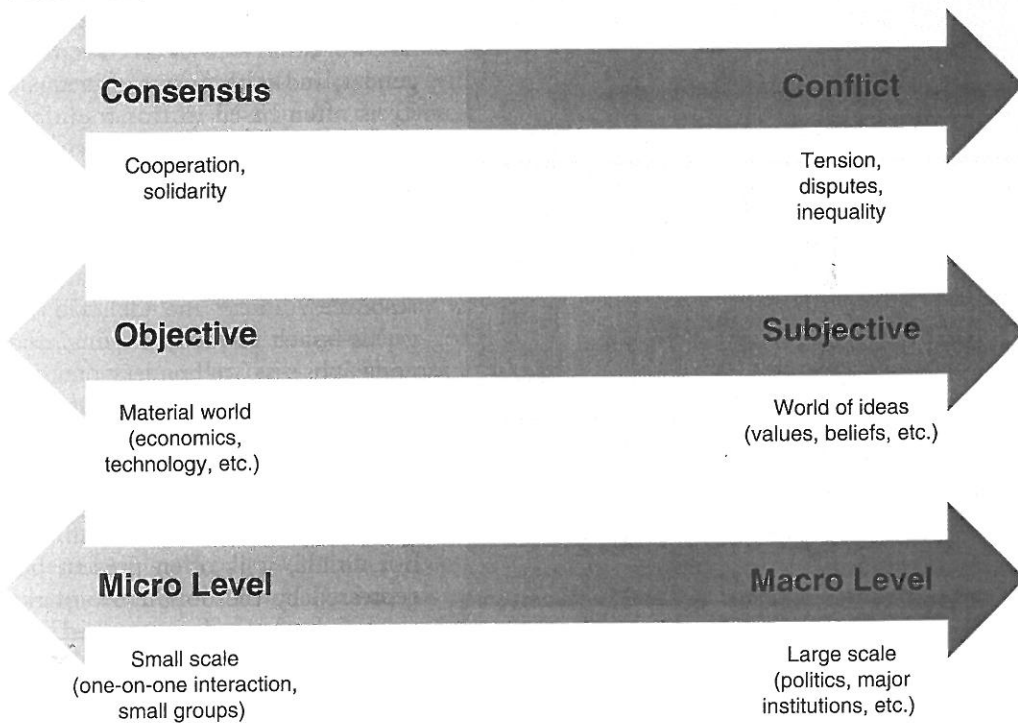
Sociological theories, too, vary along key dimensions, including consensus and conflict, subjective and objective reality, and micro-level and macro-level analyses (see Figure 1.1). Think of each dimension as a continuum rather than an either-or division. Knowing where a theory lies on each continuum can help you understand how it fits into the larger picture of sociological thought.

CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT *Conflict* refers to tensions and disputes in society, often resulting from the unequal distribution of scarce resources, which can contribute to social change. *Consensus* refers to solidarity and cooperative interaction, often due to shared values and interests, which can contribute to social stability. Although different theories focus more on one or the other, both consensus and conflict coexist in every society, institution, and organization—indeed, in all social life.

In some instances, conflict can produce certain kinds of consensus (Coser 1956). When countries go to war, a dramatic example of conflict, citizens in each nation often feel a renewed sense of solidarity, which they express through increased patriotism and nationalism. On the other hand, sometimes apparent consensus masks simmering tensions that become evident only when they erupt into full-blown conflict. For example, the ordinary daily routines of some cities have sometimes concealed underlying racial tensions that exploded into broad urban riots sparked by a specific incident.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE REALITY *Objective conditions* are the material aspects of social life, including the physical environment, social networks, and social institutions. All of these exist outside of us, and collectively they make up the objective dimension of social life. In contrast, the *subjective dimension* of social life involves the world of ideas, including our sense of self, social norms,

FIGURE 1.1 | DIMENSIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY



Different sociological theories focus on various dimensions of social life.

values, and belief systems. These all exist “in our head,” so to speak, and are part of the cultural aspect of social life.

Both the objective physical world we live in and our subjective interpretations of that world have a significant impact on our lives and our society. For example, we have seen that Marx emphasized the impact of economic life (an objective factor) whereas Weber’s theory regarding the Protestant Ethic highlighted the role of cultural beliefs (a subjective factor).

MICRO-LEVEL AND MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSES

The third dimension of sociological theory relates to different levels of analysis—as well as to different levels of society itself. Theories that focus on small-scale, usually face-to-face, social interaction are operating at the **micro level of analysis**. (“Micro” means small.) Theories that focus on large-scale social systems and processes such as the economy, politics, and population trends operate at the **macro level of analysis**. (“Macro” means large.) Theories that focus somewhere between very large and very small social phenomena—on organizations or institutions, for example—are using a **meso level of analysis**. (“Meso” means middle.) Often, sociological work focuses on the interaction between these various levels of social life.

Now that you are equipped with a better understanding of what theory is and how theories vary, let’s take a closer look at some major theoretical traditions. Since the mid-twentieth century, sociologists have sometimes grouped varied sociological theories into three broad categories: *structural-functional theories*, *conflict theories*, and *symbolic interactionist theories*.

Structural-Functionalist Theories

Structural-functional theories focus on consensus and cooperative interaction in social life, emphasizing how different elements that make up a society’s structure contribute to its overall operation. The roots of this tradition can be found in the work of Spencer and Durkheim. Structural-functional theories—often referred to simply as **functionalist theories**—were dominant in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century, when its leading proponent was Talcott Parsons (1902–1979). Parsons saw societies as complex systems made up of interdependent parts—for example, families, courts, schools, the economy—that work together to produce social stability. Because the systems are balanced, they tend to move toward normal states of equilibrium; a change in one part of the system results in a change in another part to compensate. Individuals are integrated into the social structure through culture, especially in the form of shared values. A consensus on basic values results in a moral commitment to society, which helps enable its smooth functioning.

To endure, a social institution must meet a need of the system as a whole; institutions that do not contribute adapt or disappear. Parsons argued that any social organization—whether a small group or a large and diverse society—must perform several key functions to survive, including teaching group members core community values, integrating members into productive participation in social life, defining and attaining community goals, and adapting to a changing environment.



Individuals are embedded within larger social structures that correspond to different levels of sociological analysis. These drummers at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for example, brought their individual talents to the performance (micro level), but their efforts were coordinated by the organization behind the Beijing Olympics (meso level), which was, in turn, one project of the global International Olympic Committee (macro level).

In an important contribution to functionalist theory, Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) distinguished between **manifest functions**, *the recognized and intended consequences of social phenomena*, and **latent functions**, *their largely unrecognized and unintended consequences*. A manifest function of schools, for example, is to help prepare people for future employment, whereas a latent function is to serve as a dating pool or marriage market. Merton also reminds us that even though some phenomena are persistent, they can be **dysfunctional**, *inhibiting or disrupting the working of a system as a whole*. The persistent overcrowding in many schools, for example, is dysfunctional.

Consider how one might study the family as a social institution using functionalist theories. Families serve a number of functions, including the raising of children (though some societies raise children communally outside of the family and many families do not include children). In recent decades, a changing economy (another part of the social system) and changes in cultural values have contributed to changes in the family, including the rise of two-wage-earner families, single-parent families, blended families, and families with same-sex parents. Despite such changes, shared values continue to tell us how to raise children and maintain family life. Families can be dysfunctional, too—for example, by harboring child abuse or domestic violence.

Conflict Theories

Conflict theories focus on issues of contention, power, and inequality, highlighting the competition for scarce resources. The

roots of this approach can be found in the work of Marx and Weber. Today, work that focuses on class, race, gender, and other forms of inequality is often based in this tradition, drawing on the work of Martineau, Du Bois, Addams, and others. The conflict approach emphasizes that, to meet common needs, people attempt to acquire scarce and valuable resources. These include material goods—such as food, housing, and good jobs—as well as less tangible resources, such as social respect and freedom. Because these resources are often limited, people compete for them, bringing different groups into conflict. Even when conflict is not visible, it is often present but repressed by the dominance of the powerful over the less powerful.

Conflict theories, then, see power at the core of social life. Power enables some people to gain an advantage over others and acquire more resources; more resources, in turn, give them more power. In this ongoing struggle, different groups use

culture's values and ideas as weapons to advance their own positions. The dominant culture supports and justifies existing inequalities. Various countercultures articulate different values in their challenge to the existing condition.

How would one study the family with conflict theory? Conflict theories explain that tension and disagreement within families are routine and ordinary. Some of this discord emerges because of differences in power between women and men. Historically, the extensive legal, economic, and social inequalities between women and men reflected the different amounts of power each possessed. This inequality had been justified by a dominant culture that viewed men as naturally superior to women. Such cultural beliefs traditionally kept women in restricted family roles and prevented them from pursuing ambitions they might have had for themselves, topics we explore in Chapter 12. Inequalities continue to exist around family life today, both within families, where power may not be shared evenly, and within broader society, where some forms of family, such as same-sex unions, do not yet have universal legal recognition.

Symbolic Interactionist Theories

Symbolic interactionist theories focus on how people use shared symbols and construct society as a result of their everyday interactions. Weber's approach of *verstehen*, in which the researcher

tries to understand action from the perspective of the actor, laid some groundwork for these theories, as did early work by Georg Simmel (1858–1918), who wrote insightful essays on the dynamics of daily life. However, symbolic interactionist theories were fully developed in the United States, building on work by social psychologists in the early and mid-twentieth century. George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), for example, wrote about how we develop a sense of self through our interaction with others and by self-reflection (see Chapter 6). In his dramaturgical theory, Erving Goffman (1922–1982) showed how social life was very much like a play, with people adopting roles, complete with props and scripts (see Chapter 7).

Symbolic interactionist theories are strongly associated with the subjective and micro-level dimensions of social life. They explain social life by highlighting that the social world is based on interaction between people using cultural symbols, such as words and nonverbal body language. Through interaction, individuals develop a sense of self and create a shared understanding of reality with others. People with more power are typically better able to influence this interpretation of reality. This common interpretation of reality leads to patterns of social interaction within groups that form the basis of social structure. But everyday interaction is also constantly recreating or changing these patterns, so society itself is inherently unstable and constantly in flux. Always under construction, the social world is therefore always capable of change. In this way, the symbolic interactionist theories explain social life by highlighting the active role people take in constructing shared understandings of social reality and creating society.

Applied to the family, the symbolic interactionist approach directs our attention to micro-level interactions between family members. As they interact, they develop an understanding of who they are and what their role is within the family. What does it mean to be a “good parent” today? Who will work to earn money? Who will care for children? What responsibility does a child have for an aging parent? Family members must come to some mutual understanding about what is expected from each of them. This shared interpretation of reality produces patterns of behavior that provide a routine structure to family life. But these interpretations and arrangements are not static; they are continuously reexamined and thus subject to change. The changes in family structure over the past half century illustrate the cumulative effect of individual-level decisions. People in different types of family—including two-parent families, one-parent families, childless couples, families with same-sex parents, and step-families—actively interpret the meaning of “family” and act accordingly.

Feminist Theories and Theoretical Diversity

As we see throughout this book, sociological theory has developed considerably since the mid-twentieth century, when some sociologists grouped the field’s varied theories into the categories of functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives. Newer perspectives often do

not fit neatly into these older categories. Among the most important contemporary perspectives is feminist theory. Feminist theories focus on inequality between women and men and could be considered in the tradition of conflict theories. But feminist theories also provide insight into how those inequalities are created and reinforced in daily interactions, placing these insights squarely in the tradition of symbolic interactionism (see Chapter 11).

As with other theoretical traditions, there is no single feminist theory. Instead, a variety of feminist theories emphasize the importance of women’s experience, analyze gender inequality, and advocate gender equality (Anderson and Witham 2010; Taylor, Rupp, and Whittier 2008). As we saw earlier in the chapter, feminist ideas from Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams, and others were present during the early years of sociology but were often marginalized in the male-dominated world of academia. The women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, however, helped create a space for the emergence of feminist scholars who transformed many academic fields, including sociology. Often working across disciplinary boundaries and in newly established women’s studies departments, feminist theorists challenged male assumptions about the world and about how social research should be done (Harding 1991; Reinharz 1992).

Historically, men had dominated the analyses of social life and often assumed that their understanding and perspective applied to everyone. Feminist “standpoint theory” rejected this notion, instead emphasizing that all knowledge is constructed from a particular perspective and that women’s different experiences need to be included to produce an accurate understanding of social life (Harding 2004; Smith 1974, 1989). In the years that followed, this basic insight was extended to include the recognition that women’s experiences vary depending on their class, race, and sexual orientation (Collins 2009; hooks 2000). This understanding has contributed to a wider recognition that the effects of gender, class, race, and sexual orientation intersect in shaping social life (Anderson and Collins 2013; Rothenberg 2014) and that women’s lives vary across different societies (Mohanty 2003). Feminist theory has also contributed to a focus on women’s bodies as a site of social struggles involving sexuality, beauty norms, violence, reproductive rights, and health (Lorber and Moore 2010). Finally, feminist theory has informed work on men, gender, and sexuality, revealing how our ideas about masculinity are socially constructed (Kimmel and Messner 2013; Pascoe 2011).

In addition, various recent theories—under the umbrella term *postmodernism*—have highlighted how shared meanings and assumptions about the world have fragmented, as different groups in society come to understand social reality differently. Meanwhile, rational choice theories have introduced a sort of economic analysis, suggesting that social interaction be understood as exchanges between rational individuals. And queer theory challenges the stability of basic identity categories—such as straight or gay, male or female—highlighting the fluidity and complexity of identity in contemporary society.

One of the great strengths of sociology is that it contains a variety of theories about the workings of social life that reach well beyond the three traditional approaches. But what unites sociology? What is the common ground that enables people using such disparate theories to identify as sociologists? That common ground is the sociological perspective and the core concepts that are at its heart.

Sociology's Common Ground: Culture, Structure, and Power

Diverse sociological theories are united by the core concepts that are central to a sociological perspective, including culture, structure, and power. As we have already seen, these concepts were used extensively by sociology's early thinkers and they have been at the heart of sociology ever since.

To varying degrees, all theoretical approaches rely on sociology's core concepts. For example, functionalism highlights culture's role in providing society with common values, such as

love of family. Conflict theory emphasizes how competing groups can manipulate cultural ideas and symbols to their advantage, as when politicians attach the idea of "family values" to their legislative initiatives and suggest opponents are anti-family. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the process by which individuals create culture, as when people redefine "family" to incorporate a broader range of relationships. Although these approaches differ in their interpretations and emphases, they all agree that culture is a significant feature of social life worthy of close attention. Similarly, structure and power are important to all sociological theories. Table 1.2 summarizes how these core concepts provide the common ground that links the major approaches to sociological theory.

This section presents a brief overview of sociology's three core concepts. Each concept is later covered in depth in a separate chapter. By learning to use these three concepts to analyze and understand social life, you will succeed in developing a sociological perspective.

Culture

Culture is the collection of values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, language, behaviors, and material objects shared by a people and socially transmitted from generation to generation. Culture operates at all levels of society: through everyday interactions

TABLE 1.2 CORE CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

	Functionalist Theories	Conflict Theories	Symbolic Interactionist Theories
Key questions	How is society held together? What function do the parts of society serve?	How is inequality structured in society? How are power relations maintained; how can they be changed?	How do people interpret and understand the social world in their interactions? How do they help shape the reality they experience?
Culture	Culture represents the consensus values and norms of a society into which individuals are socialized.	Conflicting parties use culture to advance their interests. Those in power perpetuate their privilege by socializing people into dominant values and norms. Those who are oppressed develop countercultures that challenge the dominant world view.	Through the use of symbols, people create culture based on their interpretation of social reality. They pass on these ideas and values in the socialization process.
Structure	Society is a stable system made up of interconnected structures. People act within structural constraints so that change is typically gradual and temporary, returning societies to a stable equilibrium.	Structure is the social order maintained by dominant groups primarily through coercion and the threat of force. Collective action challenging the existing order is often the source of structural change.	Social structure is produced through recurring individual actions that create a pattern. Structure is inherently unstable and changeable since it must be reproduced continually through individual action.
Power	Power is the ability of a social system to achieve its collective goals. Inequalities between groups serve a positive function in society by motivating the most qualified to fill the most important positions.	Power is often concentrated in the hands of a dominant group that uses it to exploit or oppress others. Inequality is the result of struggle between groups for scarce resources.	Power is rooted in the social relationships between people. Inequality results from the actions of individuals and therefore can be changed.

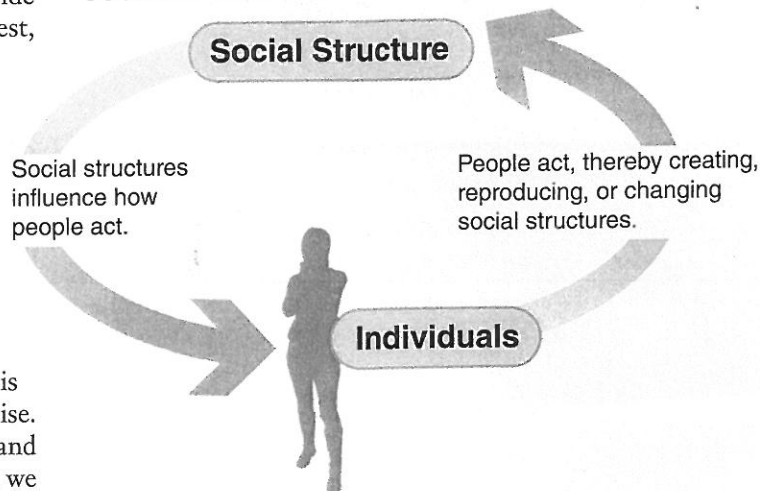
between individuals; through organizational norms in schools, businesses, and other groups; and through society-wide mechanisms such as the media and religion. At its broadest, culture is a way of life.

We tend to take our own culture for granted since we have internalized its basic customs and assumptions. For example, most of us, most of the time, have a fairly good understanding of what to expect from routine social interactions and what is considered appropriate behavior in those settings. We know when we are expected to be more formal and polite (perhaps with authority figures) and when we can relax and be casual (perhaps with close friends and family). We know that raising a hand to speak when hanging out with friends is unnecessary and that cracking open a beer in class is unwise. These unwritten “rules”—and the ideas about courtesy and respect that inform them—are part of our culture that we have learned.

Consider, for example, the simple matter of where to look when speaking with someone. Most Americans look people in the eye since in American culture direct eye contact signals honesty and forthrightness, whereas avoiding eye contact suggests that one has something to hide. But in some Asian societies, extended direct eye contact is often considered rude and impertinent, whereas averting one’s gaze is a sign of deference and respect. Imagine the potential miscommunication if, say, an Asian and an American business executive, unaware of these cultural differences, were assessing each other as potential business partners. The American might think her Asian colleague had something to hide, whereas the Asian executive might think his American colleague was being rude and disrespectful. Understanding the concept of culture helps us interact in a world of diversity and allows us to critically examine beliefs and behaviors we might otherwise view as “natural.”

Culture is not “natural” or biologically based because it must be taught and learned through the process of socialization (see Chapter 6). Since people must reproduce culture for it to survive, people can also change culture by adopting new values, beliefs, and behaviors and abandoning older ones. This process of cultural evolution can create conflict as some people seek to hold on to more traditional values and ways of life, while others embrace new ideas and behaviors. As a result, cultural conflicts are common. Clashes in values, beliefs, and ways of life help fuel conflict, sometimes even contributing to warfare. On the other hand, culture is often something to celebrate, and our identity comes, in part, from the elements of culture that we choose to embrace. Our tastes in music, our dress and appearance, our religious beliefs or nonbeliefs, our language, our family’s ancestry, among other things, are all cultural features that help make us who we are.

FIGURE 1.2 | THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PEOPLE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE



Culture, therefore, is woven into the fabric of social life and is an essential element of a sociological analysis of society.

Structure

Structure refers to *the recurring patterns of behavior in social life*. These patterns occur at all levels of society, from our daily interactions with others to the global economy. Structures range from highly informal patterns, such as where and when we routinely meet up with friends, to much more formal organizations and institutions, such as schools and government.

People create structures to help them accomplish their goals, but, in turn, structures come to constrain what they can do (see Figure 1.2). For example, imagine that you and your friends decide to form a new group to advocate for better student life, including more parking spaces on campus. In establishing your group, you have to decide things like: Will there be formal leadership positions, such as president and secretary? How will those be chosen? How do you become a member? How will decisions be made? How you answer such questions will determine the structure for your organization. You would hope that the structure you create will help the group function smoothly and promote its goal effectively. But the rules that define the structure will also constrain the behavior of group members because they regulate how members are supposed to behave. As new members join your group, they will experience the rules as an already-existing reality that constrains their actions. They may choose to comply with the rules, thereby reproducing the structure of your group, or work to change them in some way, thereby modifying the structure.

thinking about the core concepts

Review the description of sociology’s early thinkers. What roles did culture, structure, and power play in their work?



FAST-FORWARD

Social Change and Urbanization

Social change influences the lives of individuals and communities alike. These photos show the rapid development that has occurred in a portion of Shanghai, China, between 1987 (*top*) and 2013 (*bottom*). Just as the fast growth of industrial cities more than a century ago prompted early sociologists to study urbanization, such quick expansion in contemporary cities has led sociologists to examine how culture, structure, and power are changing today.

Daily life tends to be ordered by various informal patterns of behavior, or *social structures*. We can talk about “family structure,” for example, even though there are no formal organizational by-laws that regulate the behavior of such groups. There are, however, legal standards, social norms, and common practices that establish the “rules” of family life, something we explore later in the book.

Similar to how culture must be reproduced—and can be changed—structures must be reproduced through continuing patterns of behavior or they can be changed through changes in that behavior. History provides examples of how people can act collectively to change social structure. In the nineteenth century, six-day workweeks were the norm in industrial societies, and workers usually labored for 10 or 12 hours a day. By the early twentieth century, however, a growing number of people joined the labor movement, which promoted the then-radical ideas of an eight-hour workday and a five-day workweek. With great difficulty, labor unions struggled successfully to establish this new standard, thus creating the much-beloved weekend with its two-day reprieve from work. This resulted in a fundamental change in the social structuring of time in our society. (See the Sociology in Action box for an example of the role sociology can play in helping change social structures today.)

Power

Power is the ability to bring about an intended outcome, even when opposed by others. Power, too, operates at all levels of society, including in families (parents have power over their children), in organizations (managers have power over the people who report to them), and in national and international relations (leaders exercise military and economic power to achieve national goals). Sometimes people *empower* themselves to achieve a goal (as when a student completes a degree to qualify for a particular career). Other times power is used to influence the thinking and behavior of others and even to dominate others. For example, an employer can dictate the rules that employees must follow during work hours.

Power is commonly used to allocate resources (economic power), make rules and decisions (political power), and help define reality (cultural power). It is thus closely tied to *inequality*, the systematic and unequal distribution of resources among various groups of people. All societies have some form of inequality; it just varies by type and degree. Those who have more economic, political, and cultural resources have a better chance to achieve their goals and overcome hurdles and opposition. In other words, they have more power.

Paying attention to power allows us to see connections and similarities between different forms of inequality, which coexist and interact. Considering the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality has proven to be especially important in understanding power and inequality.

SOCIOLOGY in ACTION

The Arab Struggle for Democracy

In January 2011, a wave of protests erupted in the Arab world against the region's dictatorial regimes. In Egypt, the most populous Arab country, young people, many of them college students or recent graduates, used Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to coordinate protests against the U.S.-backed regime of Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled with an iron hand since 1981. Labor unions and other groups brought workers out into the streets by the hundreds of thousands. When the military sided with the protesters, the regime was doomed. The revolution was followed by an election, widespread protests, and a military coup, events making clear that Egypt's future remains uncertain. Though the revolution and subsequent developments took many people by surprise, the struggle for democracy in Egypt began decades ago, and in one little-known way, social scientists played a role in it.

Sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim is the founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, which is named for Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who pioneered the formal study of society centuries before the discipline of sociology emerged in the nineteenth century. The center's researchers study and advocate for economic development, democratization, and the strengthening of the agents of civil society—voluntary organizations such as unions, charities, professional associations, and advocacy groups that are neither government nor for-profit businesses. Ibrahim's work led him to conclude that the Arab world would not enjoy peace or widespread prosperity until democracy flourished in the region. He and his colleagues have worked relentlessly for democratic freedom and championed the inclusion of women and minorities in the political process.

A vocal critic of repressive Arab regimes and the U.S. policy of supporting them to promote stability and steady access to Mideast oil, Ibrahim made himself unpopular with the Mubarak government. In 2000, when Mubarak announced elections, Ibrahim and his colleagues said they would conduct independent surveys of voters and publish the results, which threatened to embarrass an unpopular dictator planning a sham election. Ibrahim also explained in a foreign magazine article that he believed Mubarak had no intention of submitting to fair elections and instead was grooming his son to take over the regime as the new president-for-life.

The reaction was swift. The same day the article was published, the Ibn Khaldun Center was looted by State Security

guards and Ibrahim and twenty-six of his colleagues were arrested. Ibrahim was convicted and sentenced to seven years' hard labor for "tarnishing" Egypt's image abroad. The imprisonment drew outcries from human rights organizations, the United Nations, social scientists (including the American Sociological Association), and, eventually, the U.S. government. After three years in isolation, Ibrahim was acquitted of all charges on appeal. He suffered permanent nerve damage in one leg from torture he endured while in prison. A former marathon runner, he needed multiple surgeries before he could walk again, and then only with a cane.

Upon Ibrahim's release, the Ibn Khaldun Center reopened and he and his colleagues resumed their work. In 2007, however, facing a new round of charges, Ibrahim chose to go into exile in the United States rather than risk another prison term. He continued his work on Arab democracy from abroad while his colleagues at the center helped train observers to monitor the polling stations in Egypt's 2010 elections. The fraud they witnessed fed growing public disillusionment that contributed to the 2011 revolution.

When the revolution's success appeared imminent, Ibrahim risked returning to his homeland. The country's first election brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power, but economic turmoil and political discord continued. Once again, Ibrahim became a vocal critic of the new government's unwillingness to work with political minorities and has continued to engage that country's evolving situation.

Like the founders of sociology who were public intellectuals engaged in the political debates of their day, who advised governments on public policy, and who worked with social movements to promote change, Ibrahim and his fellow scholars at Egypt's Ibn Khaldun Center embody one version of sociology in action.

Sources: Goodman (2007); Alan Johnson (2007); Stockman (2011); Ward (2010); Weiss (2011); and the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies (icids.org).

think about it

1. *Why can social science research, such as surveying citizens, pose a threat to an autocratic government?*
2. *With the political freedoms they enjoy, do you think young people in the United States feel empowered to help shape the future of their country, as the young people in Egypt did? Why or why not?*

Culture, structure, and power are not unchanging features of social life; they are part of ongoing social processes. Culture is reproduced and changed through socialization. Structures are created and altered through action. Power

can be used to produce or reduce inequalities, which in turn can alter the distribution of power. These dynamics are at the heart of a sociological analysis that recognizes the ever-changing nature of social life.

A Changing World

FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN SOCIETY

Sociology arose over a century and a half ago during a period of transition that marked the emergence of modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Early sociologists, drawing on the core concepts of culture, structure, and power, sought to explain that transition and the social turmoil that often accompanied it. Today, we are living through another period of transition, this time from modernity to an as-yet-uncertain postmodernity, and sociologists are studying the nature and consequences of these changes.

Modernity was a period associated with the rise of industrialization, democracy, and science. In contrast, **postmodernity** is a historical period beginning in the mid-twentieth century characterized by the rise of information-based economies and the fragmentation of political beliefs and ways of knowing. Because we are in the midst of this transition, it is difficult to summarize neatly what postmodernity will look like or what long-term impact it will have. Nonetheless, we can point to certain features of this transition to the postmodern world (see Table 1.3).

Classical theorists were concerned with the rise of an industrial economy; today's sociologists are interested in the relationship between so-called postindustrial economies, in which information-based and service-sector jobs predominate, and the developing industrial economies that now produce the bulk of the world's manufactured goods. Classical sociologists studied the rise of urban life that accompanied industrialization; contemporary sociologists have examined the emergence of suburban life as a new social reality in advanced economies while documenting continued urbanization in the developing world and the growth of "mega-cities." The modern era was marked by a great faith in democratic governments as a means to human progress; in postmodern times, distrust of government and a loss of faith in political ideologies have often led to stalemated conflicts, political disengagement, and widespread cynicism. Finally, classical theorists highlighted the declining influence of religion, the rise of science, and the rationalization of modern life. Contemporary sociologists have studied our highly fragmented culture, which includes everything from the rise of multiculturalism and rejection of universal truths to a resurgence of fundamentalist religions and reaffirmation of universal truths.

Ten Features of Postmodern Society

Beyond such broad changes, a number of significant developments are transforming our way of life. These changes tend to affect the wealthier societies of the world most.

TABLE 1.3

KEY FEATURES OF PREMODERN, MODERN, AND POSTMODERN SOCIETIES

	Premodern	Modern	Postmodern
Economy	Agricultural	Industrial	Information based Service oriented
Social life	Rural	Urban	Suburban Mega-cities
Politics	Religiously sanctioned leaders	Democracy	Disengagement Cynicism
Dominant culture	Religion	Rationality and science	Fragmented Multicultural

Throughout this book, we use a sociological perspective to better understand these aspects of postmodern society. As you read the list of changes below, consider how they have affected—or will affect—your life:

- 1. The expansion of media and commercial culture.** In postmodern society, media technologies have dramatically expanded into all aspects of social life, creating new opportunities for communication and new dilemmas. The boundaries between the Internet, television, smartphones, video games, and other media continue to blur, resulting in the all-encompassing and commercialized media environment in which we live. Closely connected to this expansion has been unprecedented growth in advertising and the promotion of consumption. How is the saturation of society by the media influencing social life? How often do you check or send texts or check your Facebook page? How many advertisements have you seen today? (See especially Chapter 14.)
- 2. The threat to the natural environment.** The ever-increasing production and consumption of consumer goods have taken a serious toll on the environment in the form of resource depletion, pollution, climate change, and an ever-growing accumulation of waste. How can we balance the desire for material comfort with the need to protect diminishing resources? How are environmental changes potentially affecting our health and our way of life? (See Chapter 15.)
- 3. The decline of U.S. cities and the rise of suburbs.** In the postmodern era, corporations have moved many industrialized manufacturing jobs to developing nations with lower-wage workers. As industrial jobs in U.S. cities disappeared, the economic base of major urban areas crumbled, leaving behind unemployment, poverty, and crime in many inner cities. Meanwhile, rapid suburban growth has permitted more people to own

- homes in relatively safe and tranquil surroundings. But suburban life can leave people feeling socially isolated and require lengthy commutes to work in heavy traffic. How can U.S. cities remain vital in postmodernity? How have the suburbs changed the rhythms of daily life, and what is their effect on people's sense of community? How will the expansion of urban life in developing nations affect those societies? (See Chapter 15.)
4. **The global economy.** You need only consider the route traveled by the ingredients of your morning cup of coffee—from the plantations of Brazil, Colombia, or Vietnam to your local coffee shop or grocery store—to realize that we are inextricably part of a global system of production and consumption. The global economy is transforming societies around the world, and the debate over the nature of this change has been an important topic in sociology recently. How does a global economy affect the inequality between rich and poor nations? How has the growth of a global economy impacted employment patterns, educational requirements, and family life? (See Chapters 9 and 16.)
 5. **The aging population.** We are living longer and healthier lives thanks to advances in health information and medical technology. Now society must adjust to the new reality of an aging population. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of Americans aged 90 and over increased from 720,000 in 1980 to 1.9 million in 2010, and projects the 90+ population to grow to more than 10 million by 2050 (He and Muenchrath 2011). How will the need to care for aging parents and grandparents affect future American families? How will social services and the health care system cope with an aging population? (See Chapter 17.)
 6. **The changing family.** Effective contraception, divorce, blended families, two-wage-earner families, single-parent families, same-sex marriage, and surrogate parenting, among other developments, have changed the definition of the family and its role in society. How does today's family differ from yesterday's? How have recent social changes affected the nature and function of the family? What is in store for the family in the future? (See Chapter 12.)
 7. **Troubled political institutions.** In many parts of the world today, the prospect of democracy holds great promise as a substitute for repressive political regimes. But long-established democracies often seem to have their own troubles. Why do some well-established democracies stagnate? What threats challenge the vitality of our democratic institutions? (See Chapter 16.)
 8. **Increased diversity and multiculturalism.** A recent influx of immigrants has been a catalyst for change as well as conflict in the United States, just as was an earlier wave of immigrants who arrived in the early twentieth century. In addition, the global economy and the relative ease of modern travel have begun to erode the significance of national boundaries. Do the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural experiences—in music, food, film, and more—point to a new cultural mash-up? Does the presence of such cultural diversity threaten societies with fragmentation? How can the distinct contributions of different cultures be preserved in a world in which cultural traits are increasingly blended? (See Chapters 10 and 14.)
 9. **The changing nature of violence and warfare.** Powerful and wealthy countries, including the United States, possess advanced weapons that can destroy humanity many times over. Some smaller nations and various nonstate actors have developed low-tech but deadly weapons and tactics. The result is a world bristling with arms, threatened by violence, and locked in political and military stalemates. How can societies reduce violence? What factors contribute to the recent rise in terrorist activity? What is the future of warfare? (See Chapter 16.)
 10. **The changing role of religion.** To varying degrees, the world's wealthy industrialized nations have become increasingly secular—that is, religion plays a much less significant role in public and daily life in those nations than it once did. But in other parts of the world, religious beliefs continue to inform and drive many aspects of social life. Because of the increased contact among cultures, differences in religious beliefs now fuel some of the world's major conflicts, as well as divisive political issues at home. Will secularization continue to expand, or will religious revivals spread? Can different cultures coexist even with fundamental religious differences? (See Chapter 12.)

The Challenge and Hope of Sociology

Sociology holds great promise. As C. Wright Mills pointed out, it can help us understand the connections between ourselves and the larger social world. In studying society, we learn more about who we are as individuals, why we face the conditions that we do, and how we are connected to others. At its best, sociology promotes an understanding of the social world and our place in it and suggests ways that we might act to improve our lives, our community, and our world.

But sociology comes with some challenges, too. Because it addresses serious problems that face society, it can lead us to some disturbing discoveries about society and ourselves. Issues such as how to care for an aging population, how to balance human needs with environmental concerns, how to address persistent poverty, how to combat racism and sexism, how to respond to extremist violence, and how to accommodate diversity in society are not easy to think about, but they are important and must be faced. Also, looking at our experiences in a broader social context sometimes reveals disconcerting insights about our relative privilege, or lack of it, due to the effects of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. Achieving a better understanding of our place in the world's hierarchy of privilege can be enlightening, but also unsettling.

As you will see throughout this book, sociology can force us to move outside our comfort zone and challenge us to

think in new ways about things that we take for granted. If we live in relative comfort and freedom, we might find it easy to ignore difficult issues that face society, and hope they won't affect us personally. If we are struggling to get by, we might prefer to focus solely on taking care of our private lives, hoping that eventually we can insulate ourselves from economic upheaval, crime, and other social problems. But sociology reminds us that in taking either position we are, by default, helping reproduce the society in which we live, with all its problems. Whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not, we are part of the broader social world.

In the face of our changing world, sociology offers hope. It is not a fearful hope that we can somehow manage individually to escape the world's problems. Instead, it is the hopeful realization that societies—and the issues that confront them—are largely created by human beings. That means people working together also have the capacity to change and improve those societies, as well as their own lives. We invite you to take up the challenge to use sociology to better understand the world and your place in it. And we hope that from this understanding, you'll be inspired and better equipped to act—in whatever way you see fit—to make a positive difference in your life and in our rapidly changing world.



REVIEW, REFLECT, AND APPLY

Looking Back

1. The sociological perspective is a way of looking at the world that focuses on the relationships between individuals and larger forces in society. Sociology as a discipline couples this perspective with systematic study and research using the methods of social science.
2. The discipline of sociology emerged in the late 1800s, in part as a response to the dramatic economic, political, cultural, and social changes taking place in the modern world.
3. Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber were the three most influential classical sociological thinkers. Marx is best known for his work on capitalism and on the role of conflict in society. Durkheim's work focused on social solidarity. Weber is best known for his work on the rationalization of society, including the rise of bureaucracy.
4. Because of the sexism and racism of the day, the contributions of other social thinkers such as Harriet Martineau, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Addams were not fully recognized or accepted within the discipline of sociology in their time. However, they made a major contribution, especially in spotlighting issues of gender- and race-based inequality.
5. Sociological theories seek to explain the workings of society by explaining why things happen as they do. These theories vary along three key dimensions: consensus and conflict, subjective and objective reality, and micro-level and macro-level analyses. Diverse theories are sometimes grouped into the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches.
6. The foundational work in sociology highlighted a number of core concepts that still serve as sociology's common ground. Among these enduring concepts are culture, structure, and power. These concepts are used throughout the book to help analyze social issues and phenomena.
7. Today, sociologists continue to study the social changes taking place as modernity gives way to the postmodern era. In many respects, the postmodern world is distinctly different from the one studied by the classical sociologists. But the enduring core concepts and theoretical insights of those early sociological thinkers—combined with new ideas and theories—can help us better understand our contemporary society. That is the focus of this book.

Critical Thinking: Questions and Activities

1. What is sociology and what is the sociological perspective? How does the sociological perspective apply to your own life?
2. The use of indiscriminate deadly violence against civilians, often referred to as terrorism, is a topic of intense interest to social scientists. What sorts of issues and questions would someone using a sociological perspective focus on in addressing this topic? What sorts of questions might researchers in other social science disciplines—such as economics, psychology, anthropology, and political science—focus on when considering this phenomenon?
3. What do you see as some of the advantages and disadvantages of the rise of modernity?

4. Of the 10 changes in contemporary society listed on pages 26–27, which one do you think is the most significant? Why? What important changes, if any, would you add to the list? Why do you feel they should be included?
5. What cards have you been dealt? Consider, for example, these questions about your childhood: Did you regularly have access to adequate food and clean drinking water? Did you live in a neighborhood that was relatively safe

and free of crime? Did you have access to a good education? If you answered no to one or more of these questions, you no doubt had to overcome some hurdles while growing up. If you answered yes to these questions, you have enjoyed privileges that are unavailable to others. Using your sociological imagination, list 10 more questions that could help determine whether people have enjoyed access to privileges in their lives.

Key Terms

anomie (p. 15) social normlessness, without moral guidance or standards.

collective conscience (p. 15) the shared values of society.

conflict theories (p. 20) social theories that focus on issues of contention, power, and inequality, highlighting the competition for scarce resources.

culture (p. 22) the collection of values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, language, behaviors, and material objects shared by a people and socially transmitted from generation to generation.

division of labor (p. 13) the way people specialize in different tasks, each requiring specific skills.

dysfunctional (p. 20) inhibiting or disrupting the working of a system as a whole.

functionalist theories (p. 19) see “structural-functionalist theories.”

industrialization (p. 10) the use of large-scale machinery for the mass manufacture of consumer goods.

latent functions (p. 20) the largely unrecognized and unintended consequences of social phenomena.

macro level of analysis (p. 19) a focus on large-scale social systems and processes such as the economy, politics, and population trends.

manifest functions (p. 20) the recognized and intended consequences of social phenomena.

meso level of analysis (p. 19) a focus somewhere between very large and very small social phenomena—on organizations or institutions, for example.

micro level of analysis (p. 19) a focus on small-scale, usually face-to-face social interaction.

modernity (p. 9) a historical era beginning in the 1700s characterized by the growth of democracy and personal freedom, increased reliance on reason and science to explain the natural and social worlds, and a shift toward an urban industrial economy.

positivism (p. 11) a belief that accurate knowledge must be based on the scientific method.

postmodernity (p. 26) a historical period beginning in the mid-twentieth century characterized by the rise of information-based economies and the fragmentation of political beliefs and ways of knowing.

power (p. 24) the ability to bring about an intended outcome, even when opposed by others.

rationalization of society (p. 15) the long-term historical process by which rationality replaced tradition as the basis for organizing social and economic life.

science (p. 9) a method of inquiry that uses logic and the systematic collection of evidence to support knowledge claims.

social solidarity (p. 13) the collective bonds that connect individuals.

social theory (p. 18) a set of principles and propositions that explains the relationships among social phenomena.

sociological perspective (p. 5) a view of the social world that focuses on discovering and understanding the connections between individuals and the broader social contexts in which they live; what C. Wright Mills called the *sociological imagination*.

sociology (p. 5) the systematic study of the relationship between individuals and society.

structural-functionalist theories (p. 19) theories that focus on consensus and cooperative interaction in social life, emphasizing how different elements that make up a society’s structure contribute to its overall operation. Often referred to simply as “functionalist theories,” or “functionalism.”

structure (p. 23) the recurring patterns of behavior in social life.

symbolic interactionist theories (p. 20) social theories that focus on how people use shared symbols and construct society as a result of their everyday interactions.

urbanization (p. 10) the growth of cities.