The Sociological Perspective

Why were these men so silent? Why did they receive such despicable treatment? What was I doing in that homeless shelter? After all, I hold a respectable, professional position, and I have a home and family.

Sociology offers a perspective, a view of the world. The *sociological perspective* (or imagination) opens a window onto unfamiliar worlds—and offers a fresh look at familiar worlds. In this text you will find yourself in the midst of Nazis in Germany, warriors in South America, and even, as I recently discovered, people who live in a city dump in Cambodia. But you will also find yourself looking at your own world in a different light. As you view other worlds—or your own—the sociological perspective enables you to gain a new vision of social life. In fact, this is what many find appealing about sociology.

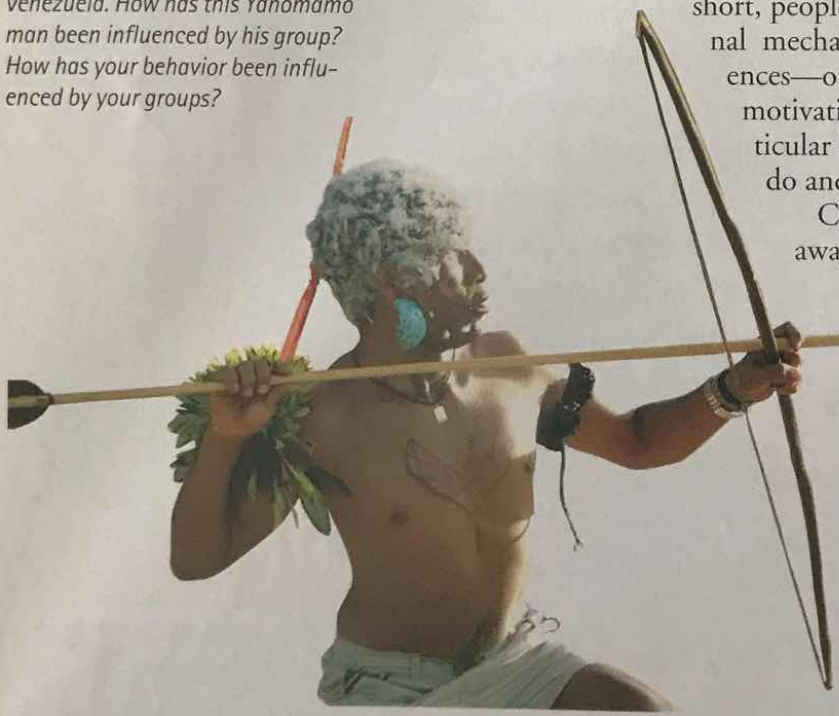
The sociological perspective has been a motivating force in my own life. Ever since I took my first introductory course in sociology, I have been enchanted by the perspective that sociology offers. I have thoroughly enjoyed both observing other groups and questioning my own assumptions about life. I sincerely hope the same happens to you.

Seeing the Broader Social Context

The **sociological perspective** stresses the social contexts in which people live. It examines how these contexts influence people's lives. At the center of the sociological perspective is the question of how groups influence people, especially how people are influenced by their **society**—a group of people who share a culture and a territory.

To find out why people do what they do, sociologists look at **social location**, the corners in life that people occupy because of where they are located in a society. Sociologists look at jobs, income, education, gender, age, and race as significant. Consider, for example, how being identified with a group called *females* or with a group called *males* when we are growing up affects our ideas of who we are and what we should attain in life. Growing up as a male or a female influences not only our aspirations, but also how we feel about ourselves and the way we relate to others in dating and marriage and at work.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) put it this way: "The sociological perspective enables us to grasp the connection between history and biography." By *history,* Mills meant that each society is located in a broad stream of events. Because of this, each society has specific characteristics—such as its ideas about the proper roles of men and women. By *biography,* Mills referred to the individual's specific experiences. In short, people don't do what they do because of inherited internal mechanisms, such as instincts. Rather, *external* influences—our experiences—become part of our thinking and motivations. The society in which we grow up, and our particular location in that society, lie at the center of what we do and how we think.



Examining the broad social context in which people live is essential to the sociological perspective, *for this context shapes our beliefs and attitudes and sets guidelines for what we do. From this photo, you can see how distinctive those guidelines are for the Yanomamö Indians who live on the border of Brazil and Venezuela. How has this Yanomamö man been influenced by his group? How has your behavior been influenced by your groups?*

Consider a newborn baby. If we were to take the baby away from its U.S. parents and place it with a Yanomamö Indian tribe in the jungles of South America, you know that when the child begins to speak, his or her words will not be in English. You also know that the child will not think like an American. He or she will not grow up wanting credit cards, for example, or designer jeans, a new car, and the latest video game. Equally, the child will unquestioningly take his or her place in Yanomamö society—perhaps as a food gatherer, a hunter, or a warrior—and he or she will not even know about the world left behind at birth. And, whether male or female, the child will grow up

assuming that it is natural to want many children, not debating whether to have one, two, or three children.

People around the globe take their particular world for granted. Something inside us Americans tells us that hamburgers are delicious, small families are desirable, and designer clothing is attractive. Yet something inside some of the Sinai Desert Arab tribes tells them that warm, fresh camel's blood makes a fine drink and that everyone should have a large family and wear flowing robes (Murray 1935; McCabe and Ellis 1990). And that something certainly isn't an instinct. As sociologist Peter Berger (1963) phrased it, that "something" is "society within us."

Although obvious, this point frequently eludes us. We often think and talk about people's behavior as though it were caused by their sex, their race, or some other factor transmitted by their genes. The sociological perspective helps us escape from this cramped personal view by exposing the broader social context that underlies human behavior. It helps us see the links between what people do and the social settings that shape their behavior.

This brings us to *you*—to how *your* social groups have shaped *your* ideas and desires. Over and over in this text, you will see that the way you look at the world is the result of your exposure to human groups. I think you will enjoy the process of self-discovery that sociology offers.

The Growing Global Context

As is evident to all of us—from the labels on our clothing to the components in our cars—our world is becoming a global village. Our predecessors lived isolated on farms and in small towns; beyond the borders of their communities lay a world they only dimly perceived. Communications were so slow that in the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans was fought two weeks *after* the adversaries, the United States and Great Britain, had signed a peace treaty. The armed forces there had not yet heard that the war was over (Volti 1995).

Today, in contrast, communications connect us instantly with remote areas of the globe, and a vast economic system connects us not only with Canada and Mexico but also with Ireland, Taiwan, and India. At the same time that we are immersed in such global interconnections, however, we continue to occupy little corners of life, marked by differences in family background, religion, job, gender, race, and social class. In these corners, we learn distinctive ways of viewing the world.

One of the beautiful—and fascinating—aspects of sociology is that it is able to analyze both parts of our current reality: the changes that incorporate us into a global network and our unique experiences in our smaller corners of life. In this text, we shall examine both of these vital aspects of our lives.

sociological perspective understanding human behavior by placing it within its broader social context

society people who share a culture and a territory

social location the group memberships that people have because of their location in history and society

science the application of systematic methods to obtain knowledge and the knowledge obtained by those methods

sociology the scientific study of society and human behavior

natural sciences the intellectual and academic disciplines designed to comprehend, explain, and predict events in our natural environment

Sociology and the Other Sciences

Just as humans today have an intense desire to unravel the mysteries around them, people in ancient times also attempted to understand their world. Their explanations, however, were not based only on observations, but were also mixed with magic and superstition.

To satisfy their basic curiosities about the world around them, humans gradually developed **science**, systematic methods used to study the social and natural worlds, as well as the knowledge obtained by those methods. **Sociology**, the scientific study of society and human behavior, is one of the sciences that modern civilization has developed.

A useful way of comparing these sciences—and of gaining a better understanding of sociology's place—is to divide them into the natural and the social sciences.

The Natural Sciences

The **natural sciences** are the intellectual and academic disciplines designed to explain and predict the events in our natural environment. The natural sciences are divided into specialized fields of research according to subject matter, such as biology, geology, chemistry,

and physics. These are further subdivided into even more highly specialized areas. Biology is divided into botany and zoology, geology into mineralogy and geomorphology, chemistry into its organic and inorganic branches, and physics into biophysics and quantum mechanics. Each area of investigation examines a particular "slice" of nature (Henslin 2003a).

The Social Sciences

People have not limited themselves to investigating nature. In the pursuit of a more adequate understanding of life, they have also developed fields of science that focus on the social world. The **social sciences** examine human relationships. Just as the natural sciences attempt to objectively understand the world of nature, the social sciences attempt to objectively understand the social world. Just as the world of nature contains ordered (or lawful) relationships that are not obvious but must be discovered through controlled observation, so the ordered relationships of the human or social world are not obvious, and must be revealed by means of repeated observations.

Like the natural sciences, the social sciences are divided into specialized fields based on their subject matter. These divisions are anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. The social sciences are subdivided further into specialized fields. Thus, anthropology is divided into cultural and physical anthropology; economics has macro (large-scale) and micro (small-scale) specialties; political science has theoretical and applied branches; psychology may be clinical or experimental; and sociology has its quantitative and qualitative branches. Since our focus is sociology, let's contrast sociology with each of the other social sciences.

Anthropology *Anthropology* is the sister discipline of sociology. The chief concern of anthropologists is to understand *culture,* a people's total way of life. Culture includes a group's (1) *artifacts,* such as its tools, art, and weapons; (2) *structure,* that is, the patterns (such as positions that require respect) that determine how its members interact with one another; (3) *ideas and values,* especially how its belief system affects people's lives; and (4) *forms of communication,* especially language. The traditional focus of anthropology has been on tribal peoples. Anthropologists who are studying for their doctorate usually live with a group. In their reports, they emphasize the group's family (kin) relationships. As there are no "undiscovered" groups left in the world, this focus on tribal groups is giving way to the study of groups in industrialized settings. When anthropologists study the same groups that sociologists do, they place greater emphasis on artifacts, authority (hierarchy), and language, especially kinship terms.

Economics *Economics* concentrates on a single social institution. Economists study the production and distribution of the material goods and services of a society. They want to know what goods are being produced at what rate and at what cost, and how those goods are distributed. Economists also are interested in the choices that determine production and consumption; for example, they study what motivates people to buy a certain item instead of another.

Political Science *Political science* focuses on politics and government. Political scientists examine forms of government and how these forms are related to other institutions of society. Political scientists are especially interested in how people attain ruling positions in their society, how they maintain those positions, and the consequences of their actions for those they govern. In studying a constitutional government, such as that of the United States, political scientists also analyze voting behavior.

Psychology The focus of *psychology* is on processes that occur *within* the individual, inside what they call the "skin-bound organism." Psychologists focus primarily on mental processes (what occurs in the brain, or the mind). They examine intelligence, emotions, perception, memory, even dreams. Some study how personality is formed. Others focus on mental aberration (psychopathology or mental illness). Many psychologists work in private practice and as counselors in school and work settings, where they give personality tests, IQ tests, and vocational aptitude tests. As therapists, they focus on re-

social sciences the intellectual and academic disciplines designed to understand the social world objectively by means of controlled and repeated observations

generalization a statement that goes beyond the individual case and is applied to a broader group or situation

patterns recurring characteristics or events

solving personal problems, whether they involve the need to recover from trauma, such as abuse, or to be freed from addiction to drugs, alcohol, or gambling.

Sociology *Sociology* has many similarities to the other social sciences. Like anthropologists, sociologists also study culture; they, too, have an interest in group structure and belief systems, as well as in how people communicate with one another. Like economists, sociologists are also concerned with what happens to the goods and services of a society, but sociologists place their focus on the social consequences of inequality. Like political scientists, sociologists also study how people govern one another, especially how government affects people's lives. Like psychologists, sociologists are also concerned with how people adjust to the difficulties of life.

Given these overall similarities, then, what distinguishes sociology from the other social sciences? Unlike anthropologists, sociologists focus primarily on industrialized societies. Unlike political scientists and economists, sociologists do not concentrate on a single social institution. And unlike psychologists, sociologists stress factors *external* to the individual to determine what influences people. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box below revisits an old tale about how members of different disciplines perceive the same subject matter.

The Goals of Science

The first goal of each scientific discipline is to *explain* why something happens. The second goal is to make **generalizations,** that is, to go beyond the individual case and make statements that apply to a broader group or situation. For example, a sociologist wants to explain not only why Mary went to college or became an armed robber but also why people with her characteristics are more likely than others to go to college or to become armed robbers. To achieve generalizations, sociologists look for **patterns,** recurring characteristics or events. The third scientific goal is to *predict,* to specify what will happen in the future in the light of current knowledge.

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

An Updated Version of the Old Elephant Story

IT IS SAID THAT IN THE RECENT PAST FIVE wise men and women, all blindfolded, were led to an elephant and asked to explain what they "saw." The first, a psychologist, stroking the top of the elephant's head, said, "This is the only thing that counts. All feeling and thinking take place inside here. To understand this beast, study only this."

The second, an anthropologist, tenderly touched the trunk and the tusks, then smiled and said, "This is really primitive. I feel very comfortable here. Concentrate on these."

The third, a political scientist, feeling the gigantic ears, announced, "This is the power center. What goes in here controls the entire beast. Concentrate your studies here."

The fourth, an economist, feeling the mouth, said, "This is what counts. What goes in here is distributed throughout the body. Concentrate your studies on how it is distributed."

Then came the sociologist (of course!), who, after feeling the entire body, said, "You can't understand the beast by concentrating on only one part. Each is but part of the whole. The head, the trunk and tusks, the ears, the mouth—all are important. But so are the parts of the beast that you haven't mentioned. We must remove our blindfolds so we can see the larger picture. We have to see how everything works together to form the entire animal."

Pausing for emphasis, the sociologist added, "And we also need to understand how this creature interacts with similar creatures. How does its life in groups influence its behavior?"

I wish I could conclude this tale by saying that the psychologist, the anthropologist, the political scientist, and the economist were dazzled on hearing the wisdom of the sociologist, and, amid gasps of wonderment, they tore off their blindfolds, joined together, and began to examine the entire animal. But, alas and alack! On hearing this sage advice, the specialists stubbornly bound their blindfolds even tighter so they could concentrate all the more on their particular part. And if you listened very, very carefully, you could even hear them mutter, "The top of the head is mine—stay away from it." "Don't touch the tusks." "Take your hand off the ears." "Stay away from the mouth—that's my area."

To attain these goals, scientists do not rely on magic, superstition, or common beliefs, but, instead, they do systematic research. They explain exactly how they did their research so it can be checked by others. Secrecy, prejudice, and other biases go against the grain of science.

Sociologists and other scientists also move beyond **common sense**—the prevailing ideas in a society, the things that "everyone knows" are true. "Everyone" can be mistaken today just as easily as when common sense dictated that the world was flat or that no human could ever walk on the moon. As sociologists examine people's assumptions about the world, their findings may contradict commonsense notions about social life. To test your own "common sense," read the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Sometimes the explorations of sociologists take them into nooks and crannies that people would prefer remain unexplored. For example, a sociologist might study how people make decisions to commit a crime or to cheat on their spouses. Since sociologists want above all to understand social life, they cannot cease their studies because people feel uncomfortable. Sociologists consider all realms of human life legitimate avenues to explore, and their findings sometimes challenge cherished ideas.

As they examine how groups operate, sociologists often confront attempts to keep things secret. It seems that every organization, every group, nourishes a pet image that it presents to others. Sociologists are interested in knowing what is really going on behind the scenes, however, so they peer beneath the surface to get past that sugar-coated image (Berger 1963). This approach sometimes brings sociologists into conflict with people who feel threatened by that information—which is all part of the adventure, and risk, of being a sociologist.

Origins of Sociology

Tradition Versus Science

Just how did sociology begin? In some ways it is difficult to answer this question. Even ancient peoples tried to figure out social life. They asked questions about why war exists, why some people become more powerful than others, and why some become rich. However, they often based their answers on superstition, myth, or even the positions of the stars, and did not *test* their assumptions.

Science, in contrast, requires the development of theories that can be tested by systematic research. Measured by this standard, sociology only recently appeared on the human scene. It emerged about the middle of the 1800s, when social observers began to use scientific methods to test their ideas.

Sociology grew out of social upheaval. The Industrial Revolution had just begun. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the economy of Europe was changing from agriculture to factory production. Masses of people were moving to cities in search of work. Their ties to the land—and to a culture that provided them with ready answers—were broken. The city greeted them with horrible working conditions: low pay; long, exhausting hours; dangerous work. To survive, even children had to work in these conditions; some were even chained to factory machines to make certain they could not run away. Life no longer looked the same, and tradition, which had provided the answers to questions about social life, no longer could be counted on.

Tradition was to suffer further blows. The success of the American and French revolutions encouraged people to rethink social life. New ideas arose, including the conviction that individuals possess inalienable rights. As this new idea caught fire, many traditional Western monarchies gave way to more democratic forms of government. People found the ready answers of tradition, including religion, inadequate.

When tradition reigns, it provides ready answers: "We do this because it has always been done this way." Tradition discourages original thinking. Since the answers are already provided, why search for explanations? Sweeping change, however, does the opposite: By upsetting the existing order, it encourages questioning and demands new answers.

common sense those things that "everyone knows" are true

scientific method (the) using objective, systematic observations to test theories

positivism the application of the scientific approach to the social world

sociology the scientific study of society and human behavior

Enjoying A Sociology Quiz—Sociological Findings Versus Common Sense

SOME FINDINGS OF SOCIOLOGY SUPPORT commonsense understandings of social life, while others contradict them. Can you tell the difference? To enjoy this quiz, complete *all* the questions before turning the page to check your answers.

1. True/False More U.S. students are killed in school shootings now than ten or fifteen years ago.
2. True/False The earnings of U.S. women have just about caught up with those of U.S. men.
3. True/False When faced with natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, people panic and social organization disintegrates.
4. True/False Most rapists are mentally ill.
5. True/False Most people on welfare are lazy and looking for a handout. They could work if they wanted to.
6. True/False Compared with women, men maintain more eye contact in face-to-face conversations.
7. True/False Couples who live together before marriage are usually more satisfied with their marriages than couples who do not live together before marriage.
8. True/False Most husbands of working wives who get laid off from work take up the slack and increase the amount of housework they do.
9. True/False Because bicyclists are much more likely to wear helmets now than just a few years ago, their rate of head injuries has dropped.
10. True/False Students in Japan are under such intense pressure to do well in school that their suicide rate is about double that of U.S. students.

Then there was the imperialism of the time. The Europeans had conquered many parts of the world, and their new colonial empires stretched from Asia and Africa to North and South America. This exposed them to radically different ways of life, and they began to ask why cultures differ.

Another impetus for the development of sociology was the success of the natural sciences. Just as tradition was breaking down and people were questioning fundamental aspects of life, **the scientific method**—using objective, systematic observations to test theories—was being tried out in chemistry and physics. Many secrets that had been concealed in nature were uncovered. With tradition no longer providing the answers to questions about social life, the logical step was to apply the scientific method to these questions. The result was the birth of sociology.

Auguste Comte and Positivism

This idea of applying the scientific method to the social world, known as **positivism**, apparently was first proposed by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). With the philosophical upheaval of the French Revolution still fresh in his mind, Comte left the small, conservative town in which he had grown up and moved to Paris. The changes he experienced in this move, combined with those France underwent in the revolution, led Comte to become interested in what holds society together. What creates social order, he wondered, instead of anarchy or chaos? And then, once society does become set on a particular course, what causes it to change?

As Comte considered these questions, he concluded that the right way to answer them was to apply the scientific method to social life. Just as this method had revealed the law of gravity, so, too, it would uncover the laws that underlie society. Comte called this new science **sociology**—"the study of society" (from the Greek *logos,* "study of," and the Latin *socius,* "companion," or "being with others"). Comte stressed that this new science not only would discover social principles but also would apply them to social reform. Sociologists would reform the entire society, making it a better place to live.

To Comte, however, applying the scientific method to social life meant practicing what we might call "armchair philosophy"—drawing conclusions from informal observations

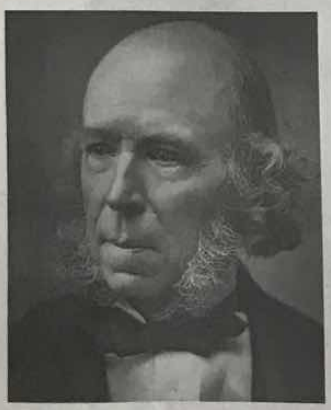
***Auguste Comte** (1798–1857), who is credited as the founder of sociology, began to analyze the bases of the social order. Although he stressed that the scientific method should be applied to the study of society, he did not apply it himself.*

Sociological Findings Versus Common Sense—Answers to the Sociology Quiz

1. False. More students were shot to death at U.S. schools in the early 1990s than now. See page 505.
2. False. Over the years, the wage gap has narrowed, but only slightly. On average, full-time working women earn only 70 percent of what full-time working men earn. This low figure is actually an improvement over earlier years. See Figures 11.7 and 11.8 on pages 311 and 312.
3. False. Following natural disasters, people develop *greater* cooperation and social organization to deal with the catastrophe. For an example, see the photo essay on pages 118–119.
4. False. Sociologists compared the psychological profiles of prisoners convicted of rape and prisoners convicted of other crimes. Their profiles were similar. Like robbery, rape is a learned behavior. See pages 142–143.
5. False. Most people on welfare are children, the old, the sick, the mentally and physically handicapped, or young mothers with few skills. Less than 2 percent meet the common stereotype of an able-bodied man. See page 279.
6. False. Women maintain considerably more eye contact (Henley et al. 1985).
7. False. The opposite is true. The reason, researchers suggest, is that many couples who cohabit before marriage are less committed to marriage in the first place—and a key to marital success is a strong commitment to one another (Larson 1988).
8. False. Most husbands of working wives who get laid off from work *reduce* the amount of housework they do. See page 454 for an explanation.
9. False. The opposite is true. Bicyclists today are more likely to wear helmets, but their rate of head injuries is higher. Apparently, wearing helmets makes them feel safer, and they take more risks (Barnes 2001). (Unanticipated consequences of human action are studied by functionalists. See page 26.)
10. False. The suicide rate of U.S. students is about double that of Japanese students (Haynes and Chalker 1997).

of social life. He did not do what today's sociologists would call research, and his conclusions have been abandoned. Nevertheless, Comte's insistence that we must observe and classify human activities in order to uncover society's fundamental laws is well taken. Because he developed this idea and coined the term *sociology,* Comte often is credited with being the founder of sociology.

Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism



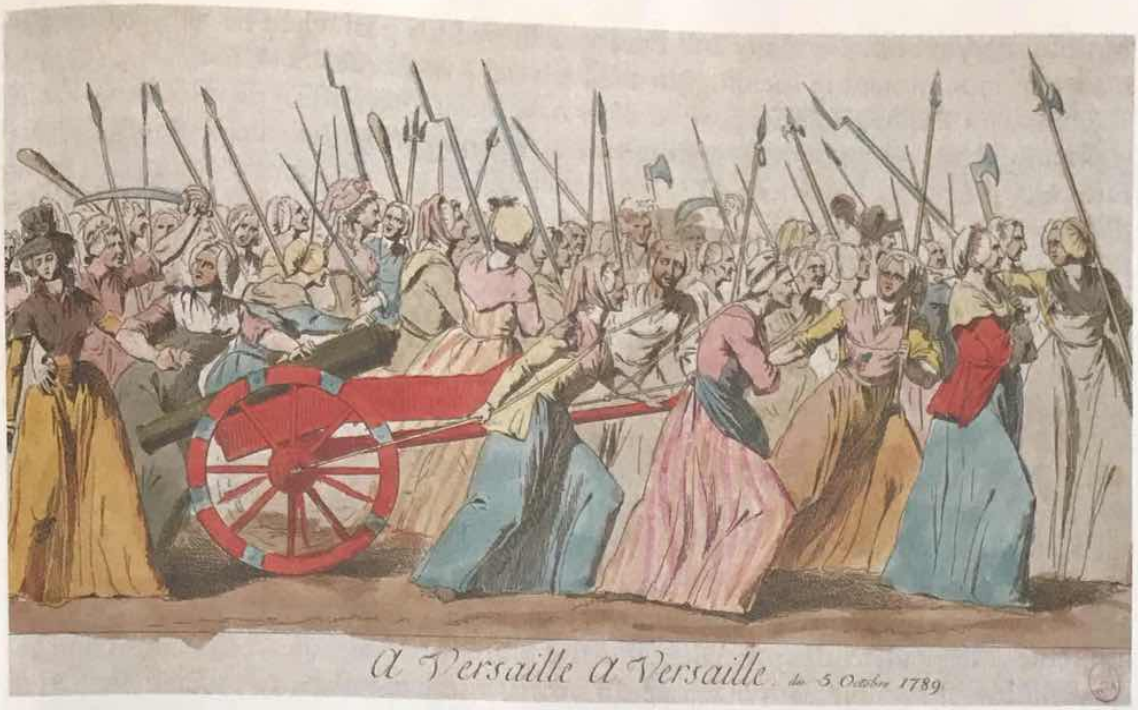
***Herbert Spencer** (1820–1903), sometimes called the second founder of sociology, coined the term "survival of the fittest." Spencer thought that helping the poor was wrong, that this merely helped the "less fit" survive.*

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who grew up in England, is sometimes called the second founder of sociology. Spencer disagreed profoundly with Comte that sociology should guide social reform. Spencer thought that societies evolve from lower ("barbarian") to higher ("civilized") forms. As generations pass, the most capable and intelligent ("the fittest") members of a society survive, while the less capable die out. Thus, over time, societies improve. If you help the lower classes, you interfere with this natural process. The fittest members will produce a more advanced society—unless misguided do-gooders get in the way and help the less fit survive.

Spencer called this principle "the survival of the fittest." Although Spencer coined this phrase, it usually is attributed to his contemporary, Charles Darwin, who proposed that organisms evolve over time as they adapt to their environment. Because they are so similar to Darwin's ideas, Spencer's views of the evolution of societies became known as *social Darwinism.*

Spencer's ideas that charity and helping the poor were wrong appalled many. The wealthy industrialists of the time, however, who saw themselves as "the fittest"—and therefore superior—found Spencer's ideas attractive. Not coincidentally, Spencer's views helped them avoid feelings of guilt for living like royalty while people around them went hungry.

Like Comte, Spencer was more of a social philosopher than a sociologist. Also like Comte, Spencer did not conduct scientific studies. He simply developed ideas about so-



This eighteenth-century painting (artist unknown) depicts women from Paris joining the French Army on its way to Versailles on October 5, 1789. The French Revolution of 1789 not only overthrew the aristocracy but also upset the entire social order. This extensive change removed the past as a sure guide to the present. The events of this period stimulated Auguste Comte to analyze how societies change. His writings are often taken as the origin of sociology.

ciety. Spencer gained a wide following in England and the United States, where he was sought after as a speaker, but eventually social Darwinism was discredited.

Karl Marx and Class Conflict

Karl Marx (1818–1883) not only influenced sociology but also left his mark on world history. Marx's influence has been so great that even the *Wall Street Journal,* that staunch advocate of capitalism, has called him one of the three greatest modern thinkers (the other two being Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein).

Like Comte, Marx thought that people should try to change society. Marx, who came to England after being exiled from his native Germany for proposing revolution, believed that the engine of human history is **class conflict.** He said that the **bourgeoisie** (boo-shwazee) (the *capitalists,* those who own the means to produce wealth—capital, land, factories, and machines) are locked in conflict with the **proletariat** (the exploited workers who do not own the means of production). This bitter struggle can end only when the workers unite in revolution and throw off their chains of bondage. The result will be a classless society, one free of exploitation, in which people will work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs (Marx and Engels 1848/1967).

Marxism is not the same as communism. Although Marx supported revolution as the only way that the workers could gain control of society, he did not develop the political system called *communism.* This is a later application of his ideas. Indeed, Marx himself felt disgusted when he heard debates about his insights into social life. After listening to some of the positions attributed to him, he shook his head and said, "I am not a Marxist" (Dobriner 1969b:222; Gitlin 1997:89).

Unlike Comte and Spencer, Marx did not think of himself as a sociologist. He spent years studying in the library of the British Museum in London, where he wrote widely on history, philosophy, and, of course, economics and political science. Because of his insights into the relationship between the social classes, especially the class struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots," many sociologists claim Marx as a significant early sociologist. He also introduced one of the major perspectives in sociology, conflict theory, which is discussed on pages 28–29.

***Karl Marx** (1818–1883) believed that the roots of human misery lay in* class conflict, *the exploitation of the working classes by those who own the means of production. Social change, in the form of the overthrow of the capitalists by the proletariat, was inevitable from Marx's perspective. Although Marx did not consider himself a sociologist, his ideas have profoundly influenced many in the discipline, particularly conflict theorists.*

class conflict Marx's term for the struggle between capitalists and workers

bourgeoisie Karl Marx's term for capitalists, those who own the means of production

proletariat Marx's term for the exploited class, the mass of workers who do not own the means of production

Emile Durkheim and Social Integration

The primary professional goal of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline (Coser 1977). Up to this time, sociology was viewed as part of history and economics. Durkheim, who grew up in eastern France and

The French sociologist ***Emile Durkheim*** *(1858–1917) contributed many important concepts to sociology. His systematic study comparing suicide rates among several counties revealed an underlying social factor: People are more likely to commit suicide if their ties to others in their communities are weak. Durkheim's identification of the key role of* social integration *in social life remains central to sociology today.*

was educated in both Germany and France, achieved his goal when he received the first academic appointment in sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1887.

Durkheim also had another goal: to show how social forces affect people's behavior. To accomplish this, he conducted rigorous research. Comparing the suicide rates of several European countries, Durkheim (1897/1966) found that each country's suicide rate was different and that each remained remarkably stable year after year. He also found that different groups within a country had different suicide rates, and that these, too, remained stable from year to year. For example, Protestants, males, and the unmarried killed themselves at a higher rate than did Catholics, Jews, females, and the married. From this, Durkheim drew the insightful conclusion that suicide is not simply a matter of individuals here and there deciding to take their lives for personal reasons. Instead, *social factors underlie suicide,* and this is what keeps a group's rates fairly constant year after year.

Durkheim identified **social integration,** the degree to which people are tied to their social group, as a key social factor in suicide. He concluded that people who have weaker social ties are more likely to commit suicide. This factor, he said, explained why Protestants, males, and the unmarried have higher suicide rates. This is how it works, Durkheim said: Protestantism encourages greater freedom of thought and action; males are more independent than females; and the unmarried lack the connections and responsibilities that come with marriage. In other words, because their social integration is weaker, members of these groups have fewer of the social ties that keep people from committing suicide.

Although strong social bonds help protect people from suicide, Durkheim noted that in some instances strong bonds encourage suicide. An example is people who, torn apart by grief, kill themselves after their spouse dies. Their own feelings are so integrated with those of their spouse that they prefer death rather than life without the one who gave meaning to life.

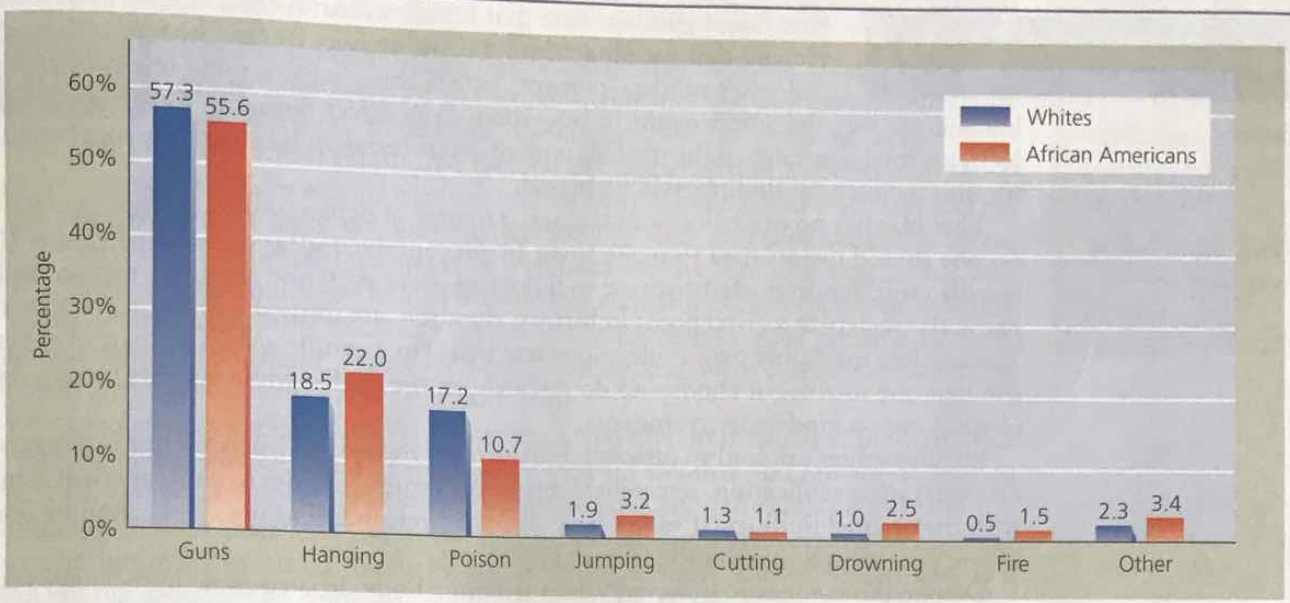
Over a hundred years later, Durkheim's study is still quoted. His research was so thorough that the principle he uncovered still applies: People who are less socially integrated have higher rates of suicide. Even today, those same categories that Durkheim identified—Protestants, males, and the unmarried—are more likely to kill themselves.

From Durkheim's study of suicide, we see the principle that was central in his research: *Human behavior cannot be understood simply in individualistic terms; we must always examine the social forces that affect people's lives.* Suicide, for example, appears at first to be such an intensely individual act that psychologists should study it, not sociologists. Yet,

social integration the degree to which people feel a part of social groups

Durkheim believed that modern societies produce feelings of isolation, much of which comes from the division of labor. In contrast, members of traditional societies, who work alongside family and neighbors and participate in similar activities, experience a high degree of social integration. The photo on the right shows workers in Zinacantan, Mexico, cooking corn.

Figure 1.1 How Americans Commit Suicide



Note: The source lists no separate totals for Latinos.
Source: By the author. Based on Centers for Disease Disease Control, 2002.

as Durkheim illustrated, if we look at human behavior (such as suicide) only in individualistic terms, we miss its *social* basis. For a glimpse of what Durkheim meant, look at Figure 1.1. That African Americans and whites commit suicide in such similar ways indicates something that goes far beyond the individual. Since these patterns are similar year after year, they reflect conditions in society, such as the popularity and accessibility of guns.

Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic

Max Weber (Mahx VAY-ber) (1864–1920), a German sociologist and a contemporary of Durkheim, also held professorships in the new academic discipline of sociology. Like Durkheim and Marx, Weber is one of the most influential of all sociologists, and you will come across his writings and theories in the coming chapters. Let's look at two issues Weber raised that remain controversial today.

Religion and the Origin of Capitalism Weber disagreed with Marx's claim that economics is the central force in social change. That role, he said, belongs to religion. Weber (1904/1958) theorized that the Roman Catholic belief system encouraged followers to hold onto traditional ways of life, while the Protestant belief system encouraged its members to embrace change. Protestantism, he said, undermined people's spiritual security. Roman Catholics believed that because they were church members, they were on the road to heaven. But Protestants, who did not share this belief, looked for "signs" that they were in God's will. Financial success became the major sign that God was on their side. Consequently, Protestants began to live frugal lives, saving their money and investing the surplus in order to make even more. This, said Weber, brought about the birth of capitalism.

Weber called this self-denying approach to life the *Protestant ethic.* He termed the readiness to invest capital in order to make more money the *spirit of capitalism.* To test his theory, Weber compared the extent of capitalism in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries. In line with his theory, he found that capitalism was more likely to flourish in Protestant countries. Weber's conclusion that religion was the key factor in the rise of capitalism was controversial when he made it, and it continues to be debated today (Kaelber 2001). We'll explore these ideas in more detail in Chapter 7.

***Max Weber** (1864–1920) was another early sociologist who left a profound impression on sociology. He used cross-cultural and historical materials to trace the causes of social change and to determine how extensively social groups affect people's orientations to life.*

Values in Sociological Research

Weber raised another issue that remains controversial among sociologists. He said that sociology should be **value free.** By this, he meant that a sociologist's **values**—personal beliefs about what is good or worthwhile in life and the way the world ought to be—should not affect research. Weber wanted **objectivity,** total neutrality, to be the hallmark of social research. If values influence research, he said, sociological findings will be biased.

That bias has no place in research is not a matter of debate. All sociologists agree that no one should distort data to make them fit preconceived ideas or personal values. It is equally clear, however, that because sociologists—like everyone else—are members of a particular society at a given point in history, they, too, are infused with values of all sorts. These values inevitably play a role in our research. For example, values are part of the reason that one sociologist chooses to do research on the Mafia, while another turns a sociological eye on kindergarten students.

Because values can lead to unwitting distortions in how we interpret our findings, sociologists stress **replication,** researchers repeating a study in order to compare their results with the original findings. If values have distorted research findings, replication by other sociologists should uncover the bias and correct it.

Despite this consensus, however, values remain a hotly debated topic in sociology (Burawoy 2003; Gans 2003). The disagreement centers on the proper purposes and uses of sociology. Regarding its *purpose,* some sociologists take the position that their goal should be simply to advance understanding of social life. They should gather data on any topic in which they are interested and then use the best theory available to interpret their findings. Others are convinced that sociologists have the responsibility to investigate the social arrangements that harm people—the causes of poverty, crime, war, and other forms of human exploitation.

Then, as Figure 1.2 illustrates, there is also the disagreement over the *uses* of sociology. Those who say that understanding is sociology's proper goal take the position that the knowledge gained by social research belongs to the scientific community and to the world. Accordingly, it can be used by anyone for any purpose. In contrast, those who say that sociologists should focus on harmful social conditions take the position that sociologists should spearhead social reform. They say that sociologists should use their studies to alleviate human suffering and make society a better place to live.

Although this debate is more complicated than the argument summarized here—few sociologists take such one-sided views—this sketch does identify its major issues. Perhaps sociologist John Galliher (1991) best expresses today's majority position:

> Some argue that social scientists, unlike politicians and religious leaders, should merely attempt to describe and explain the events of the world but should never make value judgments based on those observations. Yet a value-free and nonjudgmental social science has no place in a world that has experienced the Holocaust, in a world having had slavery, in a world with the ever-present threat of rape and other sexual assault, in a world with frequent, unpunished crimes in high places, including the production of products known by their manufacturers to cause death and injury as has been true of asbestos products and continues to be true of the cigarette industry, and in a world dying from environmental pollution by these same large multinational corporations.

value free the view that a sociologist's personal values or biases should not influence social research

values the standards by which people define what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad, beautiful or ugly

objectivity total neutrality

replication repeating a study in order to test its findings

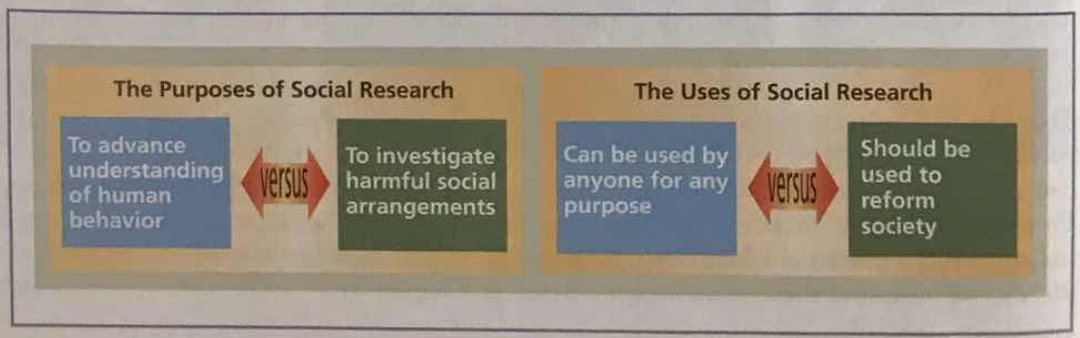


Figure 1.2
The Debate Over Values in Sociological Research

Verstehen and Social Facts

Verstehen a German word used by Weber that is perhaps best understood as "to have insight into someone's situation"

subjective meanings the meanings that people give their own behavior

social facts Durkheim's term for a group's patterns of behavior

Weber and *Verstehen*

Weber also stressed that to understand human behavior, we should use ***Verstehen*** (vare-shtay-in) (a German word meaning "to understand"). Perhaps the best translation of this term is "to grasp by insight." By emphasizing *Verstehen,* Weber meant that the best interpreter of human behavior is someone who "has been there," someone who can understand the feelings and motivations of the people being studied. In short, we must pay attention to what are called **subjective meanings,** the ways in which people interpret their own behavior. We can't understand what people do, Weber insisted, unless we look at how people view and explain their own behavior.

To better understand this term, let's return to the homeless in our opening vignette. Why were the men so silent? Why were they so unlike the noisy, sometimes boisterous college students who swarm dorms and cafeterias?

Verstehen can help explain this. When I interviewed men in the shelters (and, in other settings, homeless women), they revealed their despair. Because you know—at least on some level—what the human emotion of despair is, you can immediately apply your understanding to their situation. You know that people in despair feel a sense of hopelessness. The future looks bleak, hardly worth plodding toward. Consequently, why is it worth talking about? Who wants to hear another hard-luck story?

By applying *Verstehen*—your understanding of what it means to be human and to face some situation in life—you gain insight into people's behavior. In this case, you can understand their silence, their lack of communication in the shelter.

Durkheim and Social Facts

In contrast to Weber's emphasis on *Verstehen* and subjective meanings, Durkheim stressed what he called **social facts.** By this term, he meant the patterns of behavior that characterize a social group. Examples of social facts in the United States include June being the most popular month for weddings, suicide rates being higher among the elderly, and more births occurring on Tuesdays than on any other day of the week.

Durkheim said that we must use social facts to interpret social facts. In other words, each pattern reflects some condition of society. People all over the country don't just coincidentally decide to do similar things, whether that be to get married or to commit suicide. If this were the case, in some years, middle-aged people would be the most likely to kill themselves, in other years, young people, and so on. *Patterns that hold true year after year indicate that as thousands and even millions of people make their individual decisions, they are responding to conditions in their society.* It is the job of the sociologist, then, to uncover social facts and to explain them through other social facts. In the following section, let's look at how the social facts I mentioned—of weddings, suicide, and births—are explained by other social facts.

Granted their deprivation, it is not surprising that the homeless are not brimming with optimism. This scene at the Bowery Mission in New York City is typical, reminiscent of the many meals I ate in soup kitchens with men who looked exactly like this.

How Social Facts and *Verstehen* Fit Together

Social facts and *Verstehen* go hand in hand. As a member of U.S. society, you know how June weddings are related to the end of the school year and how this month, locked in tradition, common sentiment, and advertising, carries its own momentum. As for suicide among the elderly (see Chapter 13), you probably already have a sense of the greater despair that many Americans of this age feel. This is your *verstehen* of the social facts.

But do you know why more Americans are born on Tuesday than on any other day of the week? One would expect Tuesday to be no more common than any other

Cesarean deliveries used to be unusual, a last resort to prevent harm to the mother or to save the baby. Today, these deliveries have become routine in the United States. To understand this change, both social facts and Verstehen *are useful.*

day, and that is how it used to be. But no longer. To understand this change, we need a combination of social facts and *Verstehen.* Four social facts are relevant: First, due to technology, the hospital has become a dominating force in the U.S. medical system. Second, current technology has made delivery by cesarean section safer. Third, as discussed in Chapter 19 (page 549), doctors took over the delivery of babies. Fourth, profit is a top goal of practicing medicine in the United States. As a result of these social facts, an operation that used to be a last resort for emergencies has become so routine that almost one-fourth (23 percent) of all U.S. babies are now delivered in this manner (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 79). This is the highest rate of such births in the world (Wolff et al. 1992).

If we add *Verstehen* to these social facts, we gain insight that goes far beyond the cold statistics. We can understand that most mothers-to-be prefer to give birth in a hospital and that, under the influence of physicians at a highly emotionally charged moment, alternatives appear quite dim. We can also understand that the services of physicians are in high demand and that they schedule deliveries for the time that is most convenient for themselves. Tuesday is the day that suits them best.

Sexism in Early Sociology

Attitudes of the Time

As you may have noticed, all the sociologists we have discussed are men. In the 1800s, sex roles were rigidly defined, with women assigned the roles of wife and mother. In the classic German phrase, women were expected to devote themselves to the four K's: *Kirche, Küchen, Kinder, und Kleider* (church, cooking, children, and clothes). Trying to break out of this mold meant risking severe disapproval.

Few people, male or female, received any education beyond basic reading and writing. Higher education, for the rare few who received it, was reserved for men. A handful of women from wealthy families, however, did pursue higher education. A few even man-

aged to study sociology, although the sexism so deeply entrenched in the universities stopped them from obtaining advanced degrees or becoming professors. In line with the times, the writings of women were almost entirely ignored. Jane Frohock, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, were little known beyond a small circle. Frances Perkins, a sociologist and the first woman to hold a cabinet position (as Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt), is no longer remembered.

Harriet Martineau and Early Social Research

A classic example is Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), who was born into a wealthy family in England. When Martineau first began to analyze social life, she would hide her writing beneath her sewing when visitors arrived, for writing was "masculine" and sewing "feminine" (Gilman 1911:88). Martineau persisted in her interests, however, and eventually she studied social life in both Great Britain and the United States. In 1837, two or three decades before Durkheim and Weber were born, Martineau published *Society in America,* in which she reported on this new nation's customs—family, race, gender, politics, and religion. Despite her insightful examination of U.S. life, which is still worth reading today, Martineau's research met the same fate as the work of other early women sociologists and, until recently, has been ignored. Instead, she is known primarily for translating Comte's ideas into English. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page features selections from *Society in America.*

Sociology in North America

Early History: The Tension Between Social Reform and Sociological Analysis

Transplanted to U.S. soil in the late nineteenth century, sociology first took root at the University of Kansas in 1890, at the University of Chicago in 1892, and at Atlanta University, then an all-black school, in 1897. From there, academic specialties in sociology spread throughout North America. The growth was gradual, however. It was not until 1922 that McGill University gave Canada its first department of sociology. Harvard University did not open its department of sociology until 1930, and the University of California at Berkeley did not follow until the 1950s.

Initially, the department at the University of Chicago, which was founded by Albion Small (1854–1926), dominated sociology. (Small also founded the *American Journal of Sociology* and was its editor from 1895 to 1925.) Members of this early sociology department whose ideas continue to influence today's sociologists include Robert E. Park (1864–1944), Ernest Burgess (1886–1966), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Mead developed the symbolic interactionist perspective, which we will examine later.

The situation of women in North America was similar to that of European women, and their contributions to sociology met a similar fate. Among the early women sociologists were Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Isabel Eaton, Sophie Germain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Alice Hamilton, Florence Kelley, Elsie Clews Parsons, and Alice Paul. Denied faculty appointments in sociology, many turned to social activism (Young 1995).

Because some of these women worked with the poor rather than as professors of sociology, many sociologists classify them as social workers. Today's distinction between sociology and social work is fairly clear cut. There is a profession called social work; people train for it, they are hired to do it, and they call themselves social workers. They focus on aiding people in poverty and socially maladjusted members of society. They have jobs in hospitals and schools, and many work in the area of public aid. Others set up private practice and counsel patients. Earlier in the development of sociology, however, there often was little distinction between sociology and social work. This fuzziness lasted for generations, and many departments combined sociology and social work. Some still do.

Listening to an Early Feminist

Interested in social reform, ***Harriet Martineau*** *(1802–1876) turned to sociology, where she discovered the writings of Comte. An active advocate for the abolition of slavery, she traveled widely and wrote extensively.*

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1834, Harriet Martineau, an early feminist sociologist from England, began a fascinating two-year journey around the United States. Traveling by stagecoach, she interviewed people living in poverty, as well as James Madison, the former President of the United States. She spoke with both slaveholders and abolitionists. She also visited prisons and attended sessions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Her observations on the status of U.S. women are taken from this research, published in her 1837 book, *Society in America.*

Concerning women not being allowed to vote:
One of the fundamental principles announced in the Declaration of Independence is that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. How can the political condition of women be reconciled with this?

Governments in the United States have power to tax women who hold property . . . to fine, imprison, and execute them for certain offences. Whence do these governments derive their powers? They are not "just," as they are not derived from the consent of the women thus governed. . . .

The democratic principle condemns all this as wrong; and requires the equal political representation of all rational beings. Children, idiots, and criminals . . . are the only fair exceptions . . .

Concerning sex, slavery, and relations between white women and men in the South:
[White American women] are all married young . . . and there is ever present an unfortunate servile class of their own sex [female slaves] to serve the purposes of licentiousness [as sexual objects for white slaveholders]. . . . [When most] men carry secrets which their wives must be the last to know . . . there is an end to all wholesome confidence and sympathy, and woman sinks to be the ornament of her husband's house, the domestic manager of his establishment, instead of being his all-sufficient friend. . . . I have seen, with heart-sorrow, the kind politeness, the gallantry, so insufficient to the loving heart, with which the wives of the south are treated by their husbands. . . . I know the tone of conversation which is adopted towards women; different in its topics and its style from that which any man would dream of offering to any other man. I have heard the boast of chivalrous consideration in which women are held throughout their woman's paradise; and seen something of the anguish of crushed pride, of the conflict of bitter feelings with which such boasts have been listened to by those whose aspirations teach them the hollowness of the system . . .

Concerning women's education:
The intellect of woman is confined by an unjustifiable restriction . . . As women have none of the objects in life for which an enlarged education is considered requisite, the education is not given . . . [S]ome things [are] taught which . . . serve to fill up time . . . to improve conversation, and to make women something like companions to their husbands, and able to teach their children somewhat. . . . There is rarely or never a . . . promotion of clear intellectual activity. . . . [A]s long as women are excluded from the objects for which men are trained . . . intellectual activity is dangerous: or, as the phrase is, unfit. Accordingly marriage is the only object left open to woman.

Jane Addams and Social Reform

Although many North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer, none was as successful as Jane Addams (1860–1935). Like Harriet Martineau, Addams came from a background of wealth and privilege. She attended The Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, but dropped out because of illness (Addams 1910/1981). On one of her many trips to Europe, Addams was impressed with work being done to help London's poor. From then on, she tirelessly worked for social justice.

In 1889, Addams co-founded Hull-House, located in Chicago's notorious slums. Hull-House was open to people who needed refuge—to immigrants, the sick, the aged, the poor. Sociologists from nearby University of Chicago were frequent visitors at Hull-House. With her piercing insights into the social classes, especially the ways workers were exploited and how peasant immigrants adjusted to city life, Addams strived to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. She worked with others to win

the eight-hour day and to pass laws against child labor. Her efforts at social reform were so outstanding that in 1931, she was a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, the only sociologist to win this coveted award.

Jane Addams, 1860–1935, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, worked on behalf of poor immigrants. With Ellen G. Starr, she founded Hull-House, a center to help immigrants in Chicago. She was also a leader in women's rights (women suffrage), as well as the peace movement of World War I.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Race Relations

Confronted by the racism of this period, African American professionals also found life difficult. The most notable example is provided by W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), who, after earning a bachelor's degree from Fisk University, became the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard. After completing his education at the University of Berlin, where he attended lectures by Max Weber, Du Bois taught Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University. He was hired by Atlanta University in 1897, where he remained for most of his career (Du Bois 1935/1966).

It is difficult to imagine the racism that Du Bois encountered. For example, he once saw the fingers of a lynching victim displayed in a Georgia butcher shop (Aptheker 1990). Although Du Bois was invited to present a paper at the 1909 meetings of the American Sociological Society, he was too poor to attend, despite his education, faculty position, and accomplishments. When he could afford to attend subsequent meetings, discrimination was so prevalent that restaurants and hotels would not allow him to eat or room with the white sociologists. Later in life, when Du Bois had the money to travel, the U.S. State Department feared that he would criticize the United States and refused to give him a passport (Du Bois 1968).

Each year between 1896 and 1914, Du Bois published a book on relations between African Americans and whites. Of his almost 2,000 writings, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1967) stands out. In this analysis of how African Americans in Philadelphia coped with racism, Du Bois pointed out that some of the more successful African Americans were breaking their ties with other African Americans in order to win acceptance by

***W(illiam) E(dward) B(urghardt) Du Bois** (1868–1963) spent his lifetime studying relations between African Americans and whites. Like many early North American sociologists, Du Bois combined the role of academic sociologist with that of social reformer. He was also the editor of Crisis, an influential journal of the time.*

In the 1940s, when this photo was taken, racial segregation was a taken-for-granted fact of life. Although many changes have occurred since then—and since W.E.B. Du Bois analyzed race relations—race remains a significant factor in the lives of Americans.

whites. This, he said, weakened the African American community by depriving it of their influence. One of Du Bois' most elegantly written books, which preserves a picture of race relations immediately after the Civil War, is *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The Down-to-Earth Sociology box below is taken from this book.

At first, Du Bois was content to collect and interpret objective data. Later, frustrated at the continued racism of his time, Du Bois turned to social action. Along with Jane Addams and others from Hull-House, he founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Deegan 1988). Continuing to battle racism both as a sociologist and as a journalist, Du Bois eventually embraced revolutionary Marxism. At age 93, dismayed that so little improvement had been made in race relations, he moved to Ghana, where he is buried (Stark 1989).

Until recently, W.E.B. Du Bois was neglected in sociology, his many contributions unrecognized. As a personal example, during my entire graduate program at Washington University, I was never introduced to Du Bois' books and thought. Today, however, sociologists are rediscovering Du Bois, and he is beginning to receive some long-deserved respect.

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

Early North American Sociology: Du Bois and Race Relations

THE WRITINGS OF W.E.B. DU BOIS, WHO expressed sociological thought more like an accomplished novelist than a sociologist, have been neglected in sociology. To help remedy this omission, I reprint the following excerpts from pages 66–68 of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In this book, Du Bois analyzes changes that occurred in the social and economic conditions of African Americans during the thirty years following the Civil War.

For two summers, while he was a student at Fisk, Du Bois taught in a log-hut, segregated school "way back in the hills" of rural Tennessee. The following excerpts help us understand conditions at that time.

> It was a hot morning late in July when the school opened. I trembled when I heard the patter of little feet down the dusty road, and saw the growing row of dark solemn faces and bright eager eyes facing me. . . . There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces shading from a pale cream to deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, the eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster's blue-black spelling-book. I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvelous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hill. . . .
>
> On Friday nights I often went home with some of the children,—sometimes to Doc Burke's farm. He was a great, loud, thin Black, ever working, and trying to buy these seventy-five acres of hill and dale where he lived; but people said that he would surely fail and the "white folks would get it all." His wife was a magnificent Amazon, with saffron face and shiny hair, uncorseted and barefooted, and the children were strong and barefooted. They lived in a one-and-a-half-room cabin in the hollow of the farm near the spring. . . .
>
> Often, to keep the peace, I must go where life was less lovely; for instance, 'Tildy's mother was incorrigibly dirty, Reuben's larder was limited seriously, and herds of untamed insects wandered over the Eddingses' beds. Best of all I loved to go to Josie's, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was "mighty little" wages; how Josie longed to go away to school, but that it "looked liked" they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how mean some of the white folks were.
>
> For two summers I lived in this little world. . . . I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages, and, above all, from the sight of the Veil* that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years had seen "the glory of the coming of the Lord," saw in every present hindrance or help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado.

*"The Veil" is shorthand for the Veil of Race, referring to how race colors all human relations. Du Bois' hope was that "sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins" (p. 261).

Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: Theory Versus Reform

Like Du Bois, many early North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer. They saw society, or parts of it, as corrupt and in need of reform. During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Park and Burgess not only studied crime, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, and prostitution, but also offered suggestions for how to alleviate these social problems.

During the 1940s, the emphasis shifted from social reform to social theory. Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), for example, developed abstract models of society that influenced a generation of sociologists. Parsons' detailed models of how the parts of society harmoniously work together did nothing to stimulate social activism.

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) deplored the theoretical abstractions of this period, and he urged sociologists to get back to social reform. He saw the coalescing of interests on the part of a group he called the *power elite*—the top leaders of business, politics, and the military—as an imminent threat to freedom. Shortly after Mills' death, the United States entered the turbulent era of the 1960s and 1970s. This sparked interest in social activism, and Mills' ideas became popular among a new generation of sociologists.

C. Wright Mills was a controversial figure in sociology because of his analysis of the role of the power elite *in U.S. society. Today, his analysis is taken for granted by many sociologists and members of the public.*

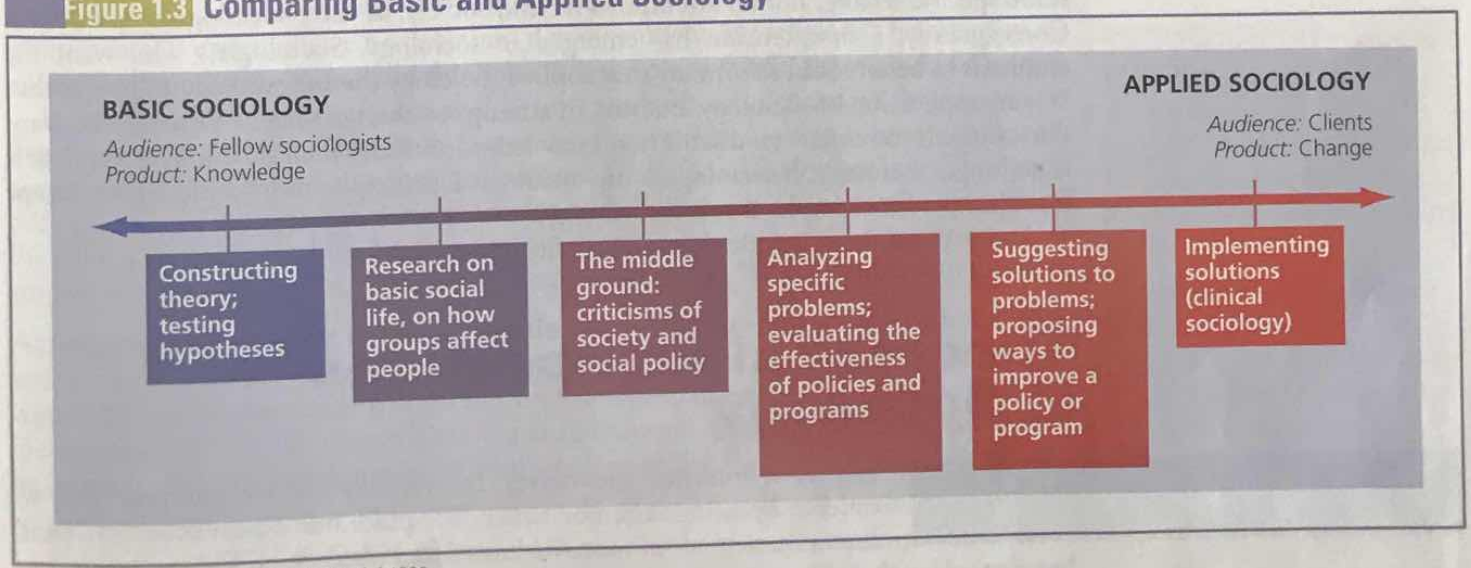
The Continuing Tension and the Rise of Applied Sociology

The apparent contradiction of these two aims—analyzing society versus working toward its reform—created a tension in sociology that is still evident today. Some sociologists believe that their proper role is to analyze some aspect of society and to publish their findings in sociology journals. Others say this is not enough: Sociologists have an obligation to use their expertise to try to make society a better place in which to live and to help bring justice to the poor.

Somewhere between these extremes lies **applied sociology,** which uses sociology to solve problems. (See Figure 1.3, which contrasts basic and applied sociology.) One of the first attempts at applied sociology—and one of the most successful—was the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Today's applied sociologists work in a variety of settings (Dentler 2002; Stephens 2004). Some work for business firms to solve problems in the workplace. Others do research for the government, where they investigate social problems such as pornography, rape, environmental pollution, or the spread of AIDS. Still others work in high technology. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page gives an idea of the variety of settings in which applied sociologists work.

applied sociology the use of sociology to solve problems—from the micro level of family relationships to the macro level of crime and pollution

Figure 1.3 Comparing Basic and Applied Sociology



Source: By the author. Based on DeMartini 1982.

Careers in Sociology: What Applied Sociologists Do

MOST SOCIOLOGISTS TEACH IN COLLEGES and universities, sharing sociological knowledge with college students, as your instructor is doing with you in this course. Applied sociologists, in contrast, work in a wide variety of areas—from counseling children to studying how diseases are transmitted. Some even make software more "user friendly." (They study how people use new computer products and give feedback to the software engineers who design those products [Guice 1999].) To give you an idea of this variety, let's look over the shoulders of four applied sociologists.

Leslie Green, who does marketing research at Vanderveer Group in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, earned her bachelor's degree in sociology at Shippensburg University. She helps develop strategies to get doctors to prescribe particular drugs. She sets up the meetings, locates moderators for the discussion groups, and arranges payments to the physicians who participate in the research. "My training in sociology," she says, "helps me in 'people skills.' It helps me to understand the needs of different groups, and to interact with them."

Stanley Capela, whose master's degree is from Fordham University, works as an applied sociologist at HeartShare Human Services in New York. He evaluates how children's programs—such as ones that focus on housing, AIDS, group homes, and preschool education—actually work, compared with how they are supposed to work. He spots problems and suggests solutions. One of his assignments was to find out why children had to wait so long to be adopted, even though there was a long list of eager adoptive parents. Capela pinpointed how the paperwork got bogged down as it was routed through the system and suggested ways to improve the flow of paperwork.

Laurie Banks, who received her master's degree in sociology from Fordham University, analyzes statistics for the New York City Health Department. As she examined death certificates, she noticed that a Polish neighborhood had very high rates of stomach cancer. She alerted the Centers for Disease Control, which conducted interviews in the neighborhood. They traced the cause to eating large amounts of sausage. In another case, Banks compared birth certificates with school records. She found that problems at birth—low birth weight, lack of prenatal care, and birth complications—were linked to low reading skills and behavior problems in school.

Joyce Miller Iutcovich, whose doctorate is from Kent State University, is president of Keystone University Research Corporation in Erie, Pennsylvania. She is also a past president of the Society for Applied Sociology. Iutcovich does research and consulting, primarily for government agencies. In one of her projects, she designed a training program for child care providers. She also did research on how well the caregivers did. Her research and program improved the quality of care given to children by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Her organization also administers the Pennsylvania Substance Abuse and Health Information Clearinghouse, which mails over 300,000 pieces of literature a month.

From just these few examples, you can catch a glimpse of the variety of work that applied sociologists do. Some work for corporations, some are employed by government and private agencies, and others run their own businesses. You can also see that having a doctorate is not necessary in order to work as an applied sociologist.

Applied sociology is not the same as social reform. It is an application of sociology in some specific setting, not an attempt to rebuild society, as early sociologists envisioned. Consequently, a new tension has emerged in sociology. Sociologists who want the emphasis to be on social reform say that applied sociology doesn't even come close to this. It is an application of sociology, but not an attempt to change society. Others, who want the emphasis to remain on discovering knowledge, say that when sociology is applied, it is no longer sociology. If sociologists use sociological principles to help prostitutes escape from pimps, for example, is it still sociology?

At this point, let's consider how theory fits into sociology.

Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

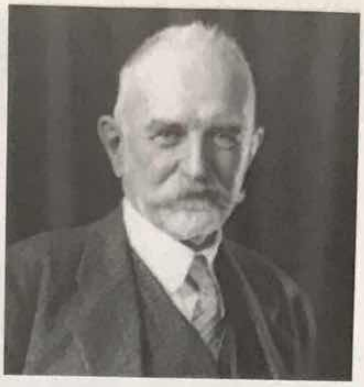
Facts never interpret themselves. In everyday life, we interpret what we observe by using common sense. We place our observations or "facts" into a framework of more-or-less related ideas. Sociologists do this, too, but they place their observations into a conceptual framework called a theory. A **theory**

is a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work. It is an explanation of how two or more "facts" are related to one another.

Sociologists use three major theories: symbolic interactionism, functional analysis, and conflict theory. Let's first examine the main elements of these theories. Then let's see how each theory helps us to understand why the divorce rate in the United States is so high. As we do so, you will see how each theory, or perspective, provides a distinct interpretation of social life.

Symbolic Interactionism

We can trace the origins of **symbolic interactionism** to the Scottish moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, who noted that individuals evaluate their own conduct by comparing themselves with others (Stryker 1990). In the United States, a long line of thinkers added to this analysis, including the pioneering psychologist William James (1842–1910) and the educator John Dewey (1859–1952), who analyzed how people use symbols to make sense out of their experiences. This theoretical perspective was brought to sociology by Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), William I. Thomas (1863–1947), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Cooley's and Mead's analyses of how symbols lie at the basis of the self-concept are discussed on pages 68–70.



George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, a major theoretical perspective in sociology. He taught at the University of Chicago, where his lectures were popular. Although he wrote little, after his death students compiled his lectures into an influential book, Mind, Self, and Society.

Symbols in Everyday Life Symbolic interactionists study how people use *symbols*—the things to which we attach meaning—to develop their views of the world and communicate with one another. Without symbols, our social life would be no more sophisticated than that of animals. For example, without symbols we would have no aunts or uncles, employers or teachers—or even brothers and sisters. I know that this sounds strange, but it is symbols that define for us what relationships are. There would still be reproduction, of course, but no symbols to tell us how we are related to whom. We would not know to whom we owe respect and obligations, or from whom we can expect privileges—the stuff that our relationships are made of.

Look at it like this: If you think of someone as your aunt or uncle, you behave in certain ways, but if you think of that person as a boyfriend or girlfriend, you behave quite differently. It is the symbol that tells you how you are related to others—and how you should act toward them.

To make this clearer, suppose that you are head-over-heels in love with someone and are going to marry this person tomorrow. The night before you are going to marry, your mother confides that she had a child before she married, a child she gave up for adoption. You then discover that the person you are going to marry is this child. You can see how the symbol will change overnight! And your behavior, too!

Symbols not only allow relationships to exist, but also society. Without symbols, we could not coordinate our actions with those of other people. We could not make plans for a future date, time, and place. Unable to specify times, materials, sizes, or goals, we could not build bridges and highways. Without symbols, there would be no movies or musical instruments. We would have no hospitals, no government, no religion. The class you are taking could not exist—nor could this book. On the positive side, there would be no war.

In short, symbolic interactionists analyze how our behaviors depend on the ways we define ourselves and others. They study face-to-face interaction, looking at how people work out their relationships and how they make sense out of life and their place in it. They point out that even the *self* is a symbol, for it consists of the ideas we have about who we are. And the self is a changing symbol: As we interact with others, we constantly adjust our views of who we are based on how we interpret the reactions of others. We'll get more into this later.

Applying Symbolic Interactionism To better understand symbolic interactionism, let's see how changing symbols (meanings) help to explain the high U.S. divorce rate. For background, you should understand that marriage used to be seen as a lifelong commitment. Divorce was viewed as an immoral act, a flagrant disregard for public opinion, and the abandonment of adult responsibilities.

1. *Emotional satisfaction.* Slowly, the meaning of marriage began to change. In 1933, sociologist William Ogburn observed that personality was becoming more important in mate selection. In 1945, sociologists Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke noted

theory a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work; an explanation of how two or more facts are related to one another

symbolic interactionism a theoretical perspective in which society is viewed as composed of symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communicate with one another

the growing importance of mutual affection, understanding, and compatibility in marriage. What these sociologists had observed was a fundamental shift in U.S. marriage: Husbands and wives were coming to expect—and demand—greater emotional satisfaction from one another.

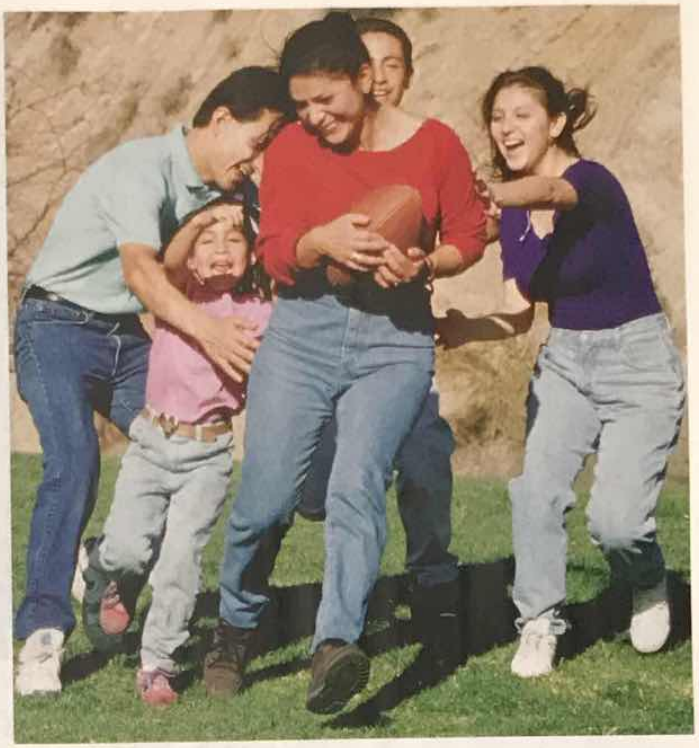
As this trend intensified, intimacy became the core of marriage and Americans placed more importance on physical attractiveness in a spouse (Bus et al. 2001). At the same time, as society grew more complex and impersonal, Americans came to view marriage as a solution to the tensions that society produced (Lasch 1977). This new form, "companionate marriage," contributed to divorce, for it encouraged people to expect that their spouse would satisfy "each and every need." Consequently, sociologists say, marriage became an "overloaded institution."

2. *The love symbol.* Our symbol of love also helps to "overload" marriage. An expectation that "true love" will be a constant source of emotional satisfaction sets people up for crushed hopes, for when dissatisfactions enter marriage, as they inevitably do, spouses tend to blame one another for what they see as the other's failure. Their engulfment in the symbol of love at the time of marriage blinds them to the basic unreality of their expectations.
3. *The meaning of children.* Ideas about childhood have undergone a deep historical shift with far-reaching consequences for the U.S. family. In medieval Europe, children were seen as miniature adults, and there was no sharp separation between the worlds of adults and children (Ariés 1965). Boys were apprenticed at about age 7, while girls of the same age learned the homemaking duties associated with being a wife. In the United States, just three generations ago, children "became adults" when they graduated from eighth grade and went to work. Today's contrast is amazing: From miniature adults, children have been culturally fashioned into impressionable, vulnerable, and innocent beings.
4. *The meaning of parenthood.* These changed notions of childhood have had a deep impact on our ideas of good parenting. Today's parents are expected not only to provide unending amounts of love and tender care but also to ensure that their children "reach their potential." Today's child rearing lasts longer and is more demanding. These greater responsibilities place heavier burdens on today's couples, and with them, more strain on marriage.
5. *Marital roles.* In earlier generations, the responsibilities and privileges of husbands and wives were clearly defined. Newlyweds knew what they could legitimately expect from each other. In contrast, with today's much vaguer guidelines couples must work out more aspects of their respective roles on their own. Many struggle to figure out how to divide up responsibilities for work, home, and children.
6. *Perception of alternatives.* While these changes were taking place, society was making another major shift: More and more women began taking jobs outside the home. As they earned paychecks of their own, many wives began to see alternatives to remaining in unhappy marriages. Symbolic interactionists consider the perception of an alternative an essential first step to making divorce possible.
7. *The meaning of divorce.* As these factors came together—expecting more emotional satisfaction in marriage, changed marital and parental roles, and a new perception of alternatives to an unhappy marriage—divorce steadily increased. As Figure 1.4 shows, divorce went from practically zero in 1890 to our current 1.1 million divorces a year. (The plateau for both marriage and divorce since 1980 is probably due to increased cohabitation.)

   As divorce became common, its meaning changed. Once a symbol of failure—and of immorality and irresponsibility—divorce came to indicate freedom and new meanings. Removing the stigma from divorce shattered a strong barrier that had kept husbands and wives from breaking up, setting the stage for divorce on an even larger scale.
8. *Changes in the law.* As the law—itself a powerful symbol—began to reflect these changed ideas about divorce, it became an additional factor that encouraged di-

functional analysis a theoretical framework in which society is viewed as composed of various parts, each with a function that, when fulfilled, contributes to society's equilibrium; also known as functionalism and structural functionalism

vorce. Divorce previously had been granted only for severe reasons, such as adultery, but then legislators made "incompatibility" grounds for divorce. States then pioneered "no-fault" divorce, in which a couple could dissolve their marriage without accusing each other of wrongdoing. Some states even began to provide do-it-yourself divorce kits.



Symbolic interactionists analyze how family relationships have changed over time, and how these changes are related to divorce. From its particular experiences, each family also develops unique perspectives. How do you think this family views its relationships?

IN SUM

Symbolic interactionists explain an increasing divorce rate in terms of the changing symbols (or meanings) associated with both marriage and divorce. Changes in people's ideas—about divorce, marital satisfaction, love, the nature of children and parenting, and the roles of husband and wife—have made marriage more fragile. No single change is *the* cause, but taken together, these changes provide a strong "push" toward divorce.

Are these changes good or bad? Central to symbolic interactionism is the position that to make a value judgment about change (or anything else) requires a value framework from which to view the change. Symbolic interactionism provides no such value framework. In short, symbolic interactionists, like other sociologists, can analyze social change, but they cannot pass judgment on that change.

Functional Analysis

The central idea of **functional analysis** is that society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together. Functional analysis, also known as *functionalism* and *structural functionalism,* is rooted in the origins of sociology (Turner 1978). Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer viewed society as a kind of living organism. Just as a person

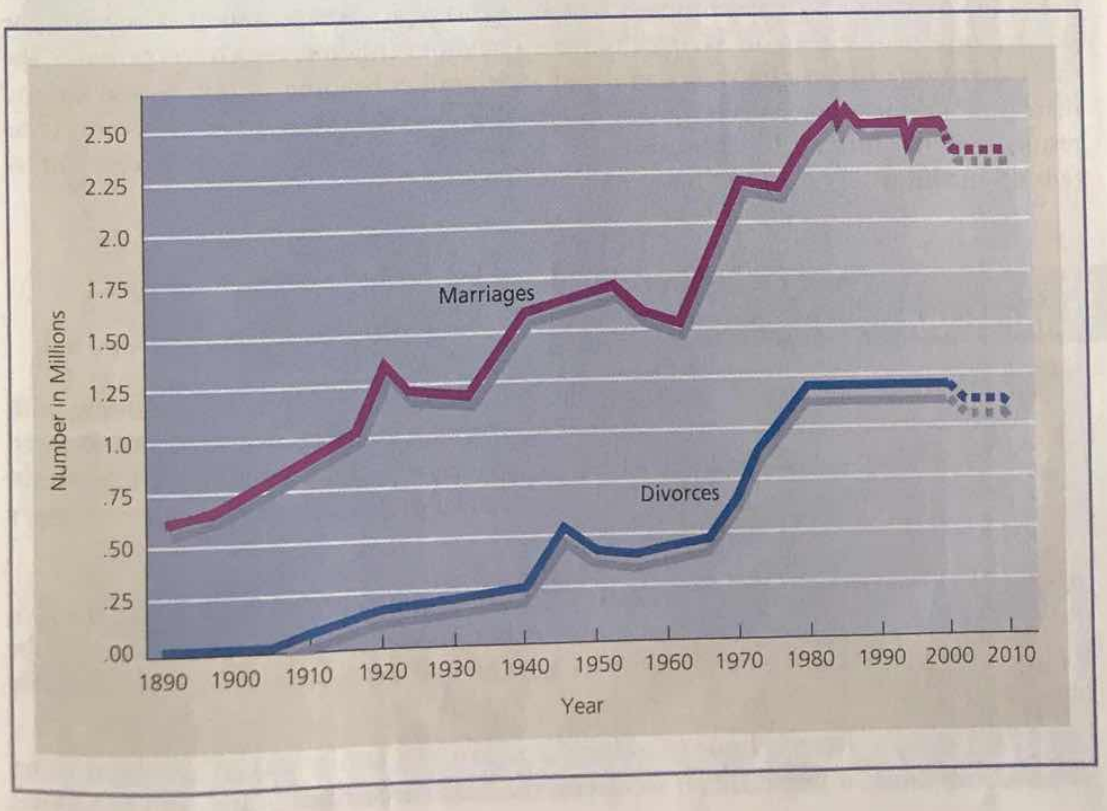


Figure 1.4

U.S. Marriage, U.S. Divorce

Sources: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 1998:Table 92; earlier editions for earlier years; "Population Update" 2000. The broken lines indicate the author's estimates.

Sociologists who use the functionalist perspective *stress how industrialization and urbanization undermined the traditional* functions *of the family. Before industrialization, members of the family worked together as an economic unit. As production moved away from the home, it took with it first the father and, more recently, the mother. One consequence is a major* dysfunction, *the weakening of family ties. This 19th century engraving depicts a carpenter at work while his mother tells stories to the children (and to the adults) and his wife cooks the evening meal.*

or animal has organs that function together, they wrote, so does society. Like an organism, if society is to function smoothly, its various parts must work together in harmony.

Emile Durkheim also saw society as being composed of many parts, each with its own function. When all the parts of society fulfill their functions, society is in a "normal" state. If they do not fulfill their functions, society is in an "abnormal" or "pathological" state. To understand society, then, functionalists say that we need to look at both *structure* (how the parts of a society fit together to make the whole) and *function* (what each part does, how it contributes to society).

Robert Merton and Functionalism

Robert Merton (1910–2003) dismissed the organic analogy, but he did maintain the essence of functionalism—the image of society as a whole composed of parts that work together. Merton used the term *functions* to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions: Functions help keep a group (society, social system) in equilibrium. In contrast, *dysfunctions* are consequences that harm a society: They undermine a system's equilibrium.

Functions can be either manifest or latent. If an action is *intended* to help some part of a system, it is a **manifest function.** For example, suppose that government officials become concerned about our slowing rate of childbirth. Congress offers a $10,000 bonus for every child born to a married couple. The intention, or manifest function, of the bonus is to increase childbearing. Merton pointed out that people's actions can also have **latent functions;** they can have *unintended* consequences that help a system adjust. Let's suppose that the bonus works and the birth rate jumps. As a result, the sale of diapers and baby furniture booms. Because the benefits to these businesses were not the intended consequences, they are *latent* functions of the bonus.

Of course, human actions can also hurt a system. Because such consequences usually are unintended, Merton called them *latent dysfunctions.* Let's assume that the government has failed to specify a "stopping point" with regard to its bonus system. To collect the bonus, some people keep on having children. The more children they have, however, the more they need the next bonus to survive. Large families become common, and poverty increases. Welfare is reinstated, taxes jump, and the nation erupts in protest. Because these results were not intended and because they harmed the social system, they represent latent dysfunctions of the bonus program.

IN SUM

From the perspective of functional analysis, then, the group is a functioning unit, with each part related to the whole. Whenever we examine a smaller part, we need to look for its functions and dysfunctions to see how it is related to the larger unit. This basic approach can be applied to any social group, whether an entire society, a college, or even a group as small as a family.

manifest functions the intended beneficial consequences of people's actions

latent functions unintended beneficial consequences of people's actions

Applying Functional Analysis

Now let's apply functional analysis to the U.S. divorce rate. Functionalists stress that industrialization and urbanization undermined the traditional functions of the family. Let's see how each of the basic functions of the family has changed.

1. *Economic production.* Prior to industrialization, the family was an economic team. At that time, it was difficult to obtain the basic necessities of life, and to survive,

family members had to cooperate in producing what they needed. When industrialization moved production from home to factory, it disrupted this family team. This weakened the bonds that tied family members together. Especially significant was the transfer of the husband-father to the factory, for this isolated him from the family's daily routine. In addition, the wife-mother and children now contributed less to the family's economic survival.

2. *Socialization of children.* As these sweeping changes took place, the government was growing larger and more powerful. It then took over many family functions. To give just one example, schools took away from the family the education of children. In so doing, they assumed much of the responsibility for socializing children. To make certain that families went along with this change, states passed laws requiring school attendance and threatened parents with jail if they did not send their children to school.
3. *Care of the sick and elderly.* As medical training and technology improved, institutionalized medicine grew more powerful. Care of the sick gradually shifted from the family to outside medical specialists. As the central government expanded, its agencies multiplied, and care of the aged changed from a family concern to a government obligation.
4. *Recreation.* As more disposable income became available to Americans, businesses sprang up to compete for that income. This cost the family a good part of its recreational function, for much entertainment and "fun" moved from home-based, family-centered activities to attendance at paid events.
5. *Sexual control.* The vast changes that swept the country also affected the family's role in controlling human sexuality. Traditionally, only sexual relations within marriage were considered legitimate. Although this value was more ideal than real—even the Puritans had a lot of sex outside marriage (Smith and Hindus 1975)—the "sexual revolution" opened many alternatives to marital sex.
6. *Reproduction.* The only family function that seems to have been left untouched is reproduction. Yet even this seemingly inviolable function has not gone unchallenged.

In the 1800s, poverty was widespread in the United States. Most people were so poor that they expended their life energies on just getting enough food, fuel, and clothing to survive. Formal education beyond the first several grades was a luxury. This photo depicts the conditions of the people Du Bois worked with. *(See the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on page 20.)*

A prime example is the greater number of single women who bear children. One third of all U.S. babies are born to an unmarried mother (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 74). Even schools and doctors have taken over some of the family's control over reproduction. A married woman, for example, can get an abortion without informing her husband, and some U.S. high schools distribute condoms.

A Glimpse of the Past To see how sharply family functions have changed, it may be useful to take a glimpse of family life in the 1800s.

> When Phil became sick, he was nursed by Ann, his wife. She cooked for him, fed him, changed the bed linen, bathed him, read to him from the Bible, and gave him his medicine. (She did this in addition to doing the housework and taking care of their six children.) Phil was also surrounded by the children, who shouldered some of his chores while he was sick.
>
> When Phil died, the male neighbors and relatives made the casket while Ann, her mother, and female friends washed and dressed the body. Phil was then "laid out" in the front parlor (the formal living room), where friends, neighbors, and relatives viewed him, paying their last respects. From there, friends moved his body to the church for the final message, and then to the grave they themselves had dug.

As you can see, the family used to have more functions. The family handled many aspects of life and death that we now assign to outside agencies. Not only did the care of the sick take place almost exclusively within the family, but also death was a family affair—from preparing the body to burying it. Today we assume that such functions *properly* belong to specialized agencies, and few of us can imagine ourselves preparing the body of a close relative for burial. Such an act may even seem grotesque, almost barbarous, for our current customs also guide our feelings, another fascinating aspect of social life. (On pages 73–75, we return to the topic of emotions.)

IN SUM

The family has lost many of its traditional functions, while others are presently under assault. Especially significant are changes in economic production. No longer is this a cooperative, home-based effort, with husbands and wives depending on one another for their interlocking contributions to a mutual endeavor. Husbands and wives today earn individual paychecks, and increasingly function as separate components of an impersonal, multinational, and even global system. When outside agencies take over family functions, this makes the family more fragile, and an increase in divorce becomes inevitable. The fewer functions that family members have in common, the fewer are their "ties that bind," and these ties are what help husbands and wives get through the inevitable problems they experience.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory provides a third perspective on social life. Unlike the functionalists who view society as a harmonious whole, with its parts working together, conflict theorists stress that society is composed of groups that engage in fierce competition for scarce resources. Although alliances or cooperation may prevail on the surface, beneath that surface lies a struggle for power.

Karl Marx and Conflict Theory Karl Marx, the founder of conflict theory, witnessed the Industrial Revolution that transformed Europe. He saw that peasants who had left the land to seek work in cities had to work at wages that barely provided enough to eat. Things were so bad that the average worker died at age 30, the average wealthy person at age 50 (Edgerton 1992:87). Shocked by this suffering and exploitation, Marx began to analyze society and history. As he did so, he developed **conflict theory**. He concluded that the key to human history is class struggle. In each society, some small group

conflict theory a theoretical framework in which society is viewed as composed of groups competing for scarce resources

controls the means of production and exploits those who are not in control. In industrialized societies, the struggle is between the *bourgeoisie,* the small group of capitalists who own the means to produce wealth, and the *proletariat,* the mass of workers who are exploited by the bourgeoisie. The capitalists also control politics, so that if workers rebel, the capitalists are able to call on the power of the state to subdue them (Angell 1965).

When Marx made his observations, capitalism was in its infancy and workers were at the mercy of their employers. Workers had none of what we take for granted today—the right to strike, minimum wages, eight-hour days, coffee breaks, five-day work weeks, paid vacations and holidays, medical benefits, sick leave, unemployment compensation, or Social Security. Marx's analysis reminds us that these benefits came not from generous hearts, but from workers forcing concessions from their employers.

Conflict Theory Today Some conflict sociologists use conflict theory in a much broader sense. They see conflict as inherent in all relations that involve authority. They point out that **authority,** or power that people consider legitimate, permeates every layer of society—whether that be a small group, an organization, a community, or the entire society. People in positions of authority try to enforce conformity, which, in turn, creates resentment and resistance. The result is a constant struggle throughout society to determine who has authority over what (Turner 1978; Bartos and Wehr 2002).

Sociologist Lewis Coser (b. 1913–2003) pointed out that conflict is most likely to develop among people who are in close relationships. They have worked out ways to distribute responsibilities and privileges, power and rewards. Any change in this arrangement can lead to hurt feelings, or bitterness and conflict. Even in intimate relationships, then, people are in a constant balancing act, with conflict lying uneasily just beneath the surface.

Feminists and Conflict Theory *Feminists* stress that men and women should have equal rights. As they view the relations between men and women, they see a conflict that goes back to the origins of history. Just as Marx stressed conflict between capitalists and workers, so many feminists stress a similar conflict between men and women. Feminists are not united by the conflict perspective, however. Although some feminists focus on the oppression of women by men and women's struggle against that oppression, feminists do research on all the topics of sociology and use whatever theories apply. (Feminism is discussed in Chapter 11.)

Applying Conflict Theory To explain why the U.S. divorce rate is high, conflict theorists focus on how men's and women's relationships have changed. For millennia, men dominated women. Women had few alternatives other than accepting their exploitation. Today, however, with industrialization, women can meet their basic survival needs outside of marriage. Industrialization has also fostered a culture in which females participate in social worlds beyond the home. Consequently, refusing to bear burdens that earlier generations accepted as inevitable, today's women are much more likely to dissolve a marriage that becomes intolerable—or even unsatisfactory.

IN SUM

Conflict theorists see marriage as reflecting society's basic inequalities between males and females. The traditional imbalance of power between men and women, which had been taken for granted, changed as women gained power, especially through the paycheck. One consequence is a higher divorce rate as wives strive for more equality and husbands resist their efforts. From the conflict perspective, then, the increase in divorce is not a sign that marriage has weakened, but, rather, a sign that women are making headway in their historical struggle with men.

Levels of Analysis: Macro and Micro

A major difference between these three theoretical perspectives is their level of analysis. Functionalists and conflict theorists focus on the **macro level;** that is, they examine large-scale patterns of society. In contrast, symbolic interactionists usually focus on the

authority power that people consider legitimate, as rightly exercised over them; also called *legitimate power*

macro-level analysis an examination of large-scale patterns of society

micro level, on **social interaction**—what people do when they are in one another's presence. See Table 1.1 below.

To make this distinction between micro and macro levels clearer, let's return to the example of the homeless, with which we opened this chapter. To study homeless people, symbolic interactionists would focus on the micro level. They would analyze what homeless people do when they are in shelters and on the streets. They would also analyze their communications, both their talk and their **nonverbal interaction** (gestures, silence, use of space, and so on). The observations I made at the beginning of this chapter about the silence in the homeless shelter, for example, would be of interest to symbolic interactionists.

This micro level, however, would not interest functionalists and conflict theorists. They would focus instead on the macro level. Functionalists would examine how changes in the parts of society have increased homelessness. They might look at how changes in the family (fewer children, more divorce) and economic conditions (higher rents, fewer unskilled jobs, loss of jobs overseas) cause homelessness among people who are unable to find jobs and have no family to fall back on. For their part, conflict theorists would stress the struggle between social classes, especially how the policies of the wealthy force certain groups into unemployment and homelessness. That, they point out, accounts for the disproportionate number of African Americans who are homeless. Chapter 4 focuses on the distinctions between macro and micro levels of analysis.

micro-level analysis an examination of small-scale patterns of society

social interaction what people do when they are in one another's presence

nonverbal interaction communication without words through gestures, use of space, silence, and so on

Putting the Theoretical Perspectives Together

Which theoretical perspective should we use to study human behavior? Which level of analysis is the correct one? As you have seen, these theoretical perspectives provide contrasting pictures of human life. In the case of divorce, these interpretations are quite different from the commonsense understanding that two people are simply "incompatible." *Because each theory focuses on different features of social life, each provides a distinctive interpretation. Consequently, it is necessary to use all three theoretical lenses to analyze human behavior. By combining their contributions, we gain a more comprehensive picture of social life.*

Table 1.1 Major Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Perspectives	Usual Level of Analysis	Focus of Analysis	Key Terms	Applying the Perspectives to the U.S. Divorce Rate
Symbolic Interactionism	Microsociological–examines small-scale patterns of social interaction	Face-to face interaction, how people use symbols to create social life	Symbols Interaction Meanings Definitions	Industrialization and urbanization changed marital roles and led to a redefinition of love, marriage, children, and divorce.
Functional Analysis (also called functionalism and structural functionalism)	Macrosociological–examines large-scale patterns of society	Relationships among the parts of society; how these parts are *functional* (have beneficial consequences) or *dysfunctional* (have negative consequences)	Structure Functions (manifest and latent) Dysfunctions Equilibrium	As social change erodes the traditional functions of the family, family ties weaken, and the divorce rate increases.
Conflict Theory	Macrosociological–examines large-scale patterns of society	The struggle for scarce resources by groups in a society; how the elites use their power to control the weaker groups	Inequality Power Conflict Competition Exploitation	When men control economic life, the divorce rate is low because women find few alternatives to a bad marriage; the high divorce rate reflects a shift in the balance of power between men and women.

Trends Shaping the Future of Sociology

Two major trends indicate changing directions in sociology. Let's look again at the relationship of sociology to the reforming of society, and then at globalization.

Sociology Full Circle: Reform Versus Research A tension between social reform and social analysis has always run through sociology. To better understand this tension, some sociologists find it useful to divide sociology into three major periods (Lazarsfeld and Reitz 1989). During the first phase, sociologists stressed the need to do research in order to improve society. One of the first presidents of the American Sociological Society, Albion Small, made this goal explicit. In 1912, Small said that the primary reason for sociology was its "practical application to the improvement of social life." He said that sociologists should use science to gain knowledge, and then use that knowledge to "realize visions" (Fritz 1989). This first phase of sociology lasted until the 1920s.

During the second phase, from the 1920s until World War II, the emphasis switched from making the world a better place to making sociology a respected field of knowledge. Sociologists emphasized **basic** or **pure sociology**, that is, research and theory aimed at making discoveries about life in human groups, but not at making changes within those groups. They achieved this goal within a generation, and almost every college and university in the United States added sociology to its course offerings. It is because of these efforts that you are taking this introductory course in sociology.

We are now in a third phase, which began around the end of World War II. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court based a major ruling partially on sociological research. The Court was deciding whether racially segregated public schools were constitutional. Up to this time, states followed a so-called "separate but equal" doctrine and had separate public schools for whites and blacks. (The schools, as many observers noted, were separate, but certainly not equal.) In this landmark ruling (*Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*), which banned segregated public schools, sociologists testified on the harmful effects of segregation.

This fundamental change in law had a direct impact on education across the country. It also made sociologists more aware of their potential to bring about social change. Just as sociologists switched from their initial concern with improving society to developing abstract knowledge, today they are seeking ways to apply their research findings. With the development of applied sociology, these efforts have gained momentum. Many sociology departments offer courses in applied sociology; some offer internships in applied sociology at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

I want to stress that sociology is filled with diverse opinions. We do not move in lockstep toward a single goal. To divide sociology into three separate phases overlooks as much as it reveals. Even during the first phase, Durkheim and Weber did research for the purpose of gaining academic respectability for sociology. Similarly, during the second phase, many sociologists who wanted to reform society chafed at the emphasis on understanding. And today, many sociologists want the emphasis to remain on basic sociology. Some do not even acknowledge that applied sociology is "real" sociology. They say that it is actually social work or psychology masquerading as sociology.

Each particular period, however, does have basic emphases, and this division of sociology into three phases does pinpoint major trends. The tension that has run through sociology—between gaining knowledge and applying knowledge—will continue. During this current phase, the pendulum seems to be swinging toward applying sociological knowledge.

Globalization A second major trend, globalization, also seems destined to leave its mark on sociology. **Globalization** is the breaking down of national boundaries because of advances in communication, trade, and travel. Currently, the United States dominates sociology. As sociologists William Martin and Mark Beittel (1998) put it, U.S. sociology is the "unrivaled center of the discipline on a world scale." One consequence of this dominance is an emphasis on groups in the United States. We U.S. sociologists tend to look inward, concentrating on events and relationships that occur in our own country. We

pure or **basic sociology** sociological research whose purpose is to make discoveries about life in human groups, not to make changes in those groups

globalization the extensive interconnections among nations due to the expansion of capitalism

globalization of capitalism capitalism (investing to make profits within a rational system) becoming the globe's dominant economic system

even base most of our findings on U.S. samples. Globalization is likely to broaden our horizons, directing us to a greater consideration of global issues. This, in turn, is likely to motivate us to try more vigorously to identify universal principles.

Application of Globalization to This Text With each passing year, the world becomes smaller as we become more connected to the global village. What occurs elsewhere has a direct impact on our lives, and, increasingly, our welfare is tied to that of people in other nations. To help broaden our horizons, in this book we will visit many cultures around the world, examining what life is like for the people in those cultures. Seeing how *their* society affects their behavior and orientations to life will help us understand how *our* society influences what we do and how we feel about life.

Globalization is one of the most significant events in world history, and you and I are living through it. Throughout this text, I will stress the impact of globalization on your life, especially how it is likely to shape your future. We will also examine the **globalization of capitalism,** focusing on implications of the triumph of this economic system. From time to time, as you read the following pages, you will also confront the developing new world order, which appears destined to play a most significant role in your future.