

Founders and Foundations of Sociology

Theory

Sociology was founded by social scientists eager to (a) understand the major social changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and (b) make society better. In this chapter, you will learn how six of the founders of sociology—Karl Marx, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, George Herbert Mead, Jane Addams, and W. E. B. Du Bois—carried out the two core commitments of sociology. Each of these theorists, in his or her own way, looked beneath the surface of society to understand how it operates and used this knowledge to improve society.

Although all of these founders responded to aspects of the social forces related to industrialization, their works are myriad and focus on a variety of subjects. Marx and Weber are considered conflict theorists,¹ Durkheim was a functionalist, Mead and Addams were symbolic interactionists, and Du Bois inspired critical race theory. However, to one degree or another, all of them looked at the roots of inequality in society and the possible solutions to this social problem. They used theories to explain how society works and how it might be improved. Like all explanations, some theories are more convincing than others. As you read through the chapter, think about which theories are most helpful to you as you try to understand how society operates and how you might work to make it better.

Karl Marx

According to Marx (1818–1883), class conflict over the control of the production of goods leads to inequality in society. He maintained that in every economic age, there is a dominant class (the owners) that owns and controls the means of production and exploits the other class (the workers).

For example, in the feudal era, there were landowners and serfs, and in the industrial era, there were factory owners and factory workers. Marx believed that the workers would eventually overthrow the owners when

1. the economic means of production was sufficiently technologically advanced that it could easily support everyone in society and
2. the workers united, realizing that they, as a class, were being exploited by the owners.

Marx believed that the workers (*proletariat*) were under a “false consciousness” regarding their social class arrangements. That is, although they were conscious that there were class differences, they didn’t understand why these differences existed, how those in power had manipulated the system to create these differences, or even the extent of these differences. Thus, their *consciousness* of the class differences was *false*.

Marx believed that the owners (*bourgeoisie*) owned not only the means of production for market goods but also the means for the production of *ideas* in society. In Marx’s words,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 64)

The owner’s ability to control the dominant ideas of society helped them stay in power. The workers were exposed primarily to ideas that promoted the status quo and maintained their false consciousness. This worked to prevent the members of the proletariat from realizing that the capitalist system was designed to exploit rather than benefit them.

To counteract this false consciousness, Marx spent much of his life trying to unite the proletariat, encouraging them to establish a “class consciousness,” overthrow the ownership society, and transform the economic system from capitalism to communism. Consciousness was key to Marx’s approach. As long as millions of individual workers saw themselves as struggling alone or in competition with other workers, nothing would change. Marx wanted to impart a larger, societal view of the system to the working class, in which they would understand the role of the class system in their personal lives and act collectively against the system itself. His most famous attempt was *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002), which concludes, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!” (p. 258).

Conflict theory is a modern extension of Marx’s insights, although many conflict theorists support democracy, not communism. In its general form, *conflict theory* begins with the assumption that at any point in time, in any society, there will be different interest groups, different strata of society that have conflicting needs, and that much of what happens politically, socially, or economically is a manifestation of this conflict. Conflict theorists maintain that at the core of society lies the struggle for power among these competing groups.

Max Weber

Whereas Marx focused on class conflict and economic systems, Max Weber (1864–1920) looked more at the combination of economic and political power. Weber expanded Marx's idea of class into three dimensions of stratification: (1) *class* (based on possession of economic resources—most important in industrial capitalist societies), (2) *status* (prestige—most important in traditional societies), and (3) *party* (organizations formed to achieve a goal in a planned manner, such as political parties, unions, and professional associations—most important in advanced industrial, highly rational societies). In most eras, there would be a great deal of overlap among the three dimensions. For example, someone high in class would also tend to be high in status and political power.

Unlike Marx, Weber was very pessimistic about attempts to eliminate inequality from society. He believed that even if one aspect of conflict and inequality could be eliminated, others would remain and perhaps become an even more important basis for inequality (e.g., the rise of the importance of difference in party position in China after status inequality had largely been eliminated). Weber's (1946) definition of *power*—"the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber, as quoted in Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. 180)—remains the starting point for most modern sociological explorations of power relations.

Weber's work on bureaucratic institutions helps us understand how power is won and held within advanced industrial societies of all types (whether capitalist, communist, or anything in between). Thanks to Weber, we now comprehend how powerful bureaucratic structures can be and how much of the structure remains intact even when the individuals in charge are replaced. For example, whoever controls the governmental bureaucracy in a highly developed nation can exert tremendous power over all aspects of that society. Controlling the government bureaucracy enables one to control key institutions in society (including the military) and to define the standards by which other bureaucracies will be created, evaluated, and carried forth.

The crucial element of a power structure is its perceived *legitimacy*. Persons or institutions have legitimacy when people accept their authority and follow their orders. Because the power of lower-level functionaries depends on the same system that empowers those in higher positions, it becomes difficult and dangerous and therefore unlikely for someone in a lower stratum to really challenge the upper strata. The bureaucracy protects itself.

When properly managed, bureaucratic structures are extremely efficient, whether they are being used well or poorly. One infamous example of this is that the same highly efficient train system that existed in

Germany before Hitler came to power (to transport workers and travelers) was used to transport men, women, and children to the death camps of the Third Reich. In fact, Hitler and the Nazis used many of the mechanisms of Germany's bureaucracy to carry out one of the most efficient (albeit horrible and nearly incomprehensible) acts in human history.

Although Weber cautioned against the establishment of sociology as a science that should direct society, he did not shy away from using his knowledge to try to guide his country (Germany) in turbulent times. He may have been pessimistic about anyone's potential to eradicate inequality, but he nonetheless felt obliged to do what he could to promote democracy in his society. Weber was deeply involved in the political realm throughout his life. His greatest impact on German society, as an engaged citizen, came toward the end of his life, during and right after World War I. He wrote many newspaper articles, memos to public officials, and papers against the annexationist policies of the German government during the war, and he advocated for a strong, democratically elected parliament and against the extreme ideologies of both the right and the left (Coser, 1977, p. 242).

Émile Durkheim

Whereas Karl Marx and Max Weber were conflict theorists, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) adopted a functionalist perspective. According to this perspective, society is like a biological organism, with each organ dependent on the others for survival. Functionalists believe that society is made up of interdependent parts, each working for the good of the whole rather than being composed of competing interests (as conflict theorists maintain). Durkheim believed that humans are selfish by nature and must be channeled and controlled through proper socialization by institutions in society. According to Durkheim, properly functioning institutions, such as the education system, the family, occupational associations, and religion, will ensure that people work for the good of society rather than just for themselves as individuals.

Durkheim (1903/1933) maintained that society is held together by a sense of connectedness or *solidarity* that its members feel. This type of bond changes as society moves from simple (e.g., agrarian) to more complex (e.g., industrial and postindustrial). The simpler societies, in which almost everyone shares a common way of life, are based on what Durkheim called *mechanical solidarity*. In this type of society, there is little room for individualism. People are bound to one another through tradition and a common way of life.

The more complex societies, in which people perform different and often highly selective tasks, are founded on *organic solidarity*. In this type of

society, people come together to exchange services with one another. It is the many exchanges and the interactions during those exchanges that bind the members of the group to one another. They rely on one another for needed goods and services and understand (to some degree) each other's different perspectives through communicating during their exchanges. In these societies, there is more room for individualism. However, while the members depend on one another to survive and prosper, the ties holding the community together are weaker.

Seeing the political and social upheaval that plagued his home country of France during his lifetime, Durkheim studied how society operates and sought ways to make improvements. According to Durkheim, at the core of a smooth-functioning society lies solidarity. Societies with increased divisions of labor can achieve stability only if their members are socialized through their institutions to believe that they are obligated to one another as members of a common community.

Durkheim argued that the existence of *external inequality* in an industrial society indicates that its institutions are not functioning properly. He divided inequalities into *internal* (based on people's natural abilities) and *external* (those forced on people). Because an organic society needs all its members to do what they do best in order for it to function most effectively, external inequality that prevents some people from fulfilling their innate talents damages all of society and should be eradicated. For example, if someone with the potential to find a cure for cancer—or just to be a good physician—never gets to fulfill this potential because she was raised in a poor neighborhood and attended a terrible school with teachers who never encouraged her to go to college, the whole society suffers.

Among Durkheim's concerns were the problems of how to reduce external inequalities and increase social consensus (solidarity). He maintained that it was up to the various institutions in society to create opportunities and incentives for all its members to become engaged citizens and share their gifts. Durkheim used his various positions in the educational system to mold France's public schools around these ideas.

George Herbert Mead

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), the founder of symbolic interactionism, was the first sociologist to focus on how the mind and the self are created through social processes. Instead of looking at the individual as either distinct from or controlled by society, Mead saw that people are both shaped by and shapers of society. He was particularly interested in how the human self develops through communicating with others via language and other symbolic behavior (symbolic interaction).

According to Mead, humans are not truly human unless they interact with one another. In turn, the nature of our interactions with others determines how we see ourselves and our role in society. *Symbolic interactionists* maintain that society is a social construction, continually created and re-created by humans. We may not realize it, but society is maintained by our implicit agreement to interact with one another in certain ways. As we “practice” certain patterns of interaction, we reinforce the belief system that society “just works that way.” Therefore, by changing how we interact with one another, we can change society.

Mead used his sociological expertise about the influence of the social environment to contribute to several social programs and movements in Chicago. For example, he served as treasurer of Hull House (the social service “settlement house” cofounded by Jane Addams and Helen Gates Starr; see below), was a member of the progressive City Club, participated in a variety of local movements and social programs in the city, and edited the journal *Elementary School Teacher*. Mead also spent much time advocating for a reform of the public school system that would provide tenure for teachers and give them greater influence over how they could teach students (Cook, 1993).

Mead spoke publicly and often on behalf of the immigrant population of Chicago, encouraging school reform to aid immigrants in the assimilation process.² He helped establish and, with Addams, served as vice president of the Immigrants’ Protective League. The league supported studies on immigrants and pushed for legislation to protect them from exploitation. For many years, Mead was a fund-raiser and policymaker for the University of Chicago’s settlement house and eventually served as president of the Settlement House Board of Directors. As a member of the board of directors, he led the effort to conduct research on social and economic conditions in the neighborhoods surrounding the stockyards in Chicago in order to advocate for social change. Mead’s work to promote social scientific studies in Chicago eventually led to the creation of the Department of Public Welfare (Cook, 1993).

Jane Addams

Jane Addams (1860–1935) grew up in a time when the norm was for women to marry young and raise a family. Her father, however, a wealthy mill owner and state senator, permitted her to attend college, with the understanding that she would then marry and raise a family (Haberman, 1972). Instead, she ignored the gender norms of the time and courageously chose to become a public citizen and scholar. Addams is considered the founder of modern social work as well as one of the founders of sociology.

Addams, with her friend Ellen Gates Starr, established one of the first settlement houses in the United States. After visiting a similar neighborhood center in England during a trip after college, they returned to Chicago and created Hull House in 1888. Hull House became the model for “settlement houses” in newly developing urban areas throughout the United States. The model was based on the vision that middle- and upper-class people could move to the city and serve the poor while living among them. People in need, such as poor immigrants and women, would be exposed to the culture, values, and knowledge of the educated settlement house workers while they all resided in the same large households. Meanwhile, those who worked at the settlement houses provided social services and advocated for social policies that would empower and protect the members of these lower-class and working-class groups.

Hull House also served as “an underground university for women activists focusing on questions of housing, sanitation, and public health” (R. M. Berger, 1997, para. 5). Addams believed that all members of society, not only the privileged and wealthy, deserve protection. In turn, helping those in need benefits everyone in society, for “the good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life” (Linn, 2000, p. 107).

One of the more colorful Hull House studies involved researching garbage collection in Chicago. Lack of proper collection was allowing disease to spread, particularly in poor, immigrant communities. In response, the Hull House Women’s Club stepped out of the roles expected of them as ladies in late-19th-century Chicago and began to personally collect the garbage that was polluting the poor neighborhoods! Before doing that, however, they used their sociological eyes and research skills to carry out

a major investigation into the city’s garbage collection system.

Then Addams submitted to the city government her own bid to collect garbage. The resulting public uproar forced the mayor to appoint Addams as garbage inspector for her ward. The Hull House women formed a garbage patrol, getting up at 6 a.m. to follow the garbage trucks, mapping routes and dump sites, and making citizens arrests of landlords whose properties were a health hazard. Their vigilance moved garbage reform to the top of Chicago’s civic agenda, forcing industry to take responsibility for its trash. (R. M. Berger, 1997, para. 5)

This episode in the life of Hull House beautifully illustrates how Addams carried out the two core commitments of sociology. She and her colleagues used their sociological eyes to notice a pattern of inequality and then used social activism to address that inequity.

While Addams and her partners at Hull House helped initiate a grass-roots social reform effort, they soon recognized that structural changes were necessary to fix the causes and not just the symptoms of inequality. She and other Hull House residents worked to improve policy regarding the juvenile justice system, secure women the right to vote, strengthen workers' rights, and establish child labor laws. Addams and her colleagues knew that people without safe places to live and employment that paid a livable wage would never escape the cycle of poverty. While social services provided by the government assisted people in need, ending inequality would require structural changes such as greater access to education, skills training, and capital. Addams devoted her life to this effort. As a scholar and engaged citizen, she remained true to the belief that "nothing could be worse than the fear that one had given up too soon, and left one unexpended effort that might have saved the world" (as quoted in Lewis, 2009, para. 2). Addams was formally recognized as a leader in reforming social policy when, in 1931, she became the second woman, and the first from the United States, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

W. E. B. Du Bois

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) grew up as one of the few black residents in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. While Du Bois was an excellent student, whom his teachers encouraged, his classmates did not treat him as an equal. During these early years in school, Du Bois began to recognize the racial division in society. He believed, though, that empowering himself with education would allow him to better understand and help improve the situation of black citizens. When Du Bois was in college at Fisk University, a historically black university in Nashville, Tennessee, he traveled with the glee club to a summer resort in Minnesota. There, he was exposed to privileged white vacationers and was struck by how their lives contrasted with those of the rural, poor black children whom he taught during the summers he was at Fisk.

Du Bois's early experiences furthered his drive to learn more and to improve the lives of black Americans in the United States. After leaving Fisk and earning a bachelor's degree at Harvard, he won a fellowship that allowed him to travel throughout Europe while he studied with the top social scientists of the time. In 1895, Du Bois became the first black person to earn a PhD from Harvard University. He went on to teach at a number of colleges and established the Department of Social Work at what is now Clark Atlanta University in Georgia.

Despite attending and achieving great success at Harvard, Du Bois (1953) described his experience as being "in Harvard but not of it." Being

surrounded by but never connected to the mainstream academic and public worlds was a constant theme in the lives of both Addams and Du Bois. Even though he was armed with numerous scholarly achievements and a graduate degree from Harvard, Du Bois never gained a position as a full teaching professor at a predominantly white university. There is little doubt that Du Bois's and Addams's experience with discrimination shaped their desire to help those who suffered in their societies. They collaborated on numerous projects for social justice over the course of their careers (Deegan, 1988).

Throughout his life, Du Bois documented and railed against the status of black Americans, noting that although African Americans were an integral part of U.S. society, they were not fully accepted into it. Du Bois's major achievements as a sociologist, founder of critical race theory, and activist began with his famous study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). This groundbreaking work was the first social scientific research to dismiss the notion of racial inferiority. It documented the negative impact of racial discrimination and segregation on the condition of African Americans in the urban North.

Like Addams, Du Bois advocated for social policy changes and pushed for efforts to improve the situation of blacks throughout the country. He used the Hull House studies of poor immigrant neighborhoods in Chicago as his research model for *The Philadelphia Negro*. Also, just as Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull House lived among the people they studied (a technique known as ethnography), Du Bois resided with the poor blacks in Philadelphia while he carried out his research for *The Philadelphia Negro*. While he did not enjoy living in that environment (Deegan, 1988), experiencing the conditions firsthand allowed him to establish rapport with and gain the trust of the thousands of black residents of Philadelphia he surveyed and interviewed.

Throughout his long career, Du Bois advocated for the rights of black Americans, women, and workers. He lived his belief that "there is in this world no such force as the force of a person determined to rise" (Aberjhani, 2003, p. 33). In addition to cofounding (with a number of people, including Addams) and leading the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for many years, he promoted social action by editing the organization's journal, *The Crisis*; writing several books, including *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/2005); organizing conferences of scholars; teaching; and speaking out on behalf of those without power in society. Eventually, he became frustrated with what he viewed as a lack of social progress in the United States. He joined the (then banned) Communist Party, surrendered his U.S. citizenship, and became a renowned citizen of Ghana before his death.

The founders of sociology were deeply interested in using their knowledge for the good of society. One wonders how they might make sense of

society today and what changes they would recommend to curb current systems of inequality. As we can see, their respective views of the world influenced how they perceived the social issues of the day and their proposed solutions for them.

Theory and Society

Sociologists use theory to elucidate and make sense of social patterns. Without theories, we would have little or no understanding of why society operates the way it does and how we might improve it. Looking at the world through a theoretical perspective can also help us detect social patterns that we might otherwise overlook and help us figure out where we should concentrate our focus. For instance, conflict theorists are more likely to notice discrimination, class inequality, and struggles for power in society than are those who do not view society through a similar lens. Similarly, symbolic interactionists tend to be more aware of the impact of small-group interactions and symbols. For example, such theorists are quick to observe that seemingly minor behaviors (e.g., sitting with legs crossed or uncrossed) can have serious diplomatic repercussions.³

A subfield of symbolic interactionism is the sociology of knowledge, a theory that much of what we think of as “reality” in large part is seen that way because it has been “constructed” as what we *think we know* to be reality. For instance, one of the authors grew up Jewish and one grew up Catholic. In addition to this leading to us coming from families with differing ideas of God, each of our families also believed in differing “knowledges” on a variety of issues, from afterlife to gender equality to sexuality to how the earth and humans were created and so forth. Many of these are not only perceived knowledge of what is but also perceived knowledge of what is *right*, and thus what is wrong. Therefore, much of what we might learn from religion is not based on fact but on moral or cultural views, and yet these then contribute to what we often come to believe to be fact. Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann describe that “Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world.” Further, that “as sociologists we take this reality as the object of our analyses” (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1967). What is perceived as reality, thus happens inside the social world and is shaped and created inside this context. As sociologists, we are interested in studying the social forces that create our perceived knowledges and the outcomes these socially constructed knowledges then produce.

The level of analysis also varies among the theoretical perspectives. Some portray the world through a wide-angle lens, looking at larger (macro- and meso-) social patterns (e.g., functionalism and conflict theory), whereas others (e.g., symbolic interactionists) view society closeup, from a more detailed (micro-) angle. Sometimes, as the Sociologist in Action section below illustrates, theories help us achieve important practical goals. While theory is powerful in helping us analyze the social world, it is also important to remember that whenever people use a particular theoretical lens (or any point of view), they will be more attuned to some social patterns than others.

Sociologist in Action

Brian J. Reed

Social network theory helped the U.S. Army capture Saddam Hussein. Major Brian J. Reed, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, used his sociological training in social network analysis when he was stationed in Iraq and assigned the task of devising a strategy to capture the former Iraqi dictator. He described his use of social network theory in locating Hussein in the following way:

The intelligence background and link diagrams that we built [to capture Hussein] were rooted in the concepts of network analysis. We constructed an elaborate product that traced the tribal and family linkages of Saddam Hussein, thereby allowing us to focus on certain individuals who may have had (or presently had) close ties to [him]. (Hougham, 2005, p. 3)

Reed's expertise in network analysis allowed him and the soldiers under his command to re-create and study a detailed picture of Hussein's social network, thereby, determining where he would be most likely to hide.

Reed also maintains that his sociological training helped him comprehend the Iraqi culture and, because of this understanding, more effectively carry out military operations in that country. Recognizing the practical applications of sociological research and theory, the Army Research Institute gave \$1.1 million in 2005 to the University of Maryland's Center for Research on Military Organization, of which Reed is a member, to conduct research on social structure, social systems, and social networks.

Exercise 2.1

What Would the Founders of Sociology Say About . . . ?

1. Consider one of these issues of inequality today (the movement to privatize the world's water, the reduction of federal and state aid for state colleges and universities, the vast gap between races in wealth and income in the United States, the high cost of running for public office, the gap in wages between women and men in the United States or in the world, environmental racism, the increasing gap between the wealthy 1 percent and the remaining 99 percent, the increase in hunger in the United States, the differences in access to health care for those who are poor from those who are middle class, upper class, and wealthy, or the decrease in funding for housing for poor people).
2. Describe how three of the six founders of sociology discussed above might respond when told about this issue. Be sure that your answer also briefly summarizes what the issue is about.
3. Which of the responses makes the most sense to you? Why?
4. Is there anything you feel is missing from the founders' perspectives that you might want to add? If so, explain what you would like to add and why. If not, explain why you think their perspectives do not need to be expanded or revised.

Exercise 2.2

Going Deeper

1. Read the articles "Major US Immigration Laws, 1790-Present" at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/timeline-1790> (you'll need to download the fact sheet) and "Key Facts About US Immigration Policy and Proposed Changes" (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/26/key-facts-about-u-s-immigration-policies-and-proposed-changes/>).

2. Pick two of the theorists or schools of theory in this chapter. Write a two- to three-page paper outlining how each of these theorists or theoretical schools of thought would analyze both the history of and current debate surrounding immigration policy.
3. Which theorist or theory most helps to inform your own understanding and analysis of the immigration debate and why?

Exercise 2.3

Are You a Worker or an Owner?

1. According to Marx's perspective, do you think you were raised by workers (proletariat) or owners (bourgeoisie)? What makes you think so? Be specific.
2. Do you think most workers in the United States have developed a class consciousness? Why or why not? Be sure to provide evidence for your answer.
3. Can you see yourself encouraging workers to overcome their false consciousness and develop a class consciousness? Why or why not? How might you (or someone else) go about helping them do so?

Exercise 2.4

Just and Unjust Laws

1. Read Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" (http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf).
2. Write a two-page paper discussing and analyzing this seminal piece, widely considered one of history's most important writings on social justice.

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3. In your paper, also consider the social construction of knowledge. How do unjust laws come to be the law of the land? How are social norms and mores that at one point in history are seen as just come at another point in history to be seen as unjust? What does this tell you about the social construction of knowledge? The social construction of your own knowledge and morals?

Exercise 2.5

Different Perspectives Lead to Different News

This assignment will require you to watch the news for at least 1.5 hours a day for one week. It will also require you to have access to a wide range of stations. Watch CNN, BBC World News (now available in the United States on most cable networks and accessible online), and Fox News, each for half an hour a day for one week.

As you are doing so, make notes on (a) what stories they show on the news, (b) how they portray the news events (e.g., positively or negatively), and (c) how they compare with one another. Pay attention to which stories are addressed by all three and which stories are covered only on one of the news outlets. As you do so, complete the questions below. Pick one news story that all of the networks carry, and answer the following questions:

1. How much time does CNN, BBC World News, and Fox News each give the story?
2. Are the events at the center of the story portrayed positively or negatively (or both) by each of the three networks? How do the positive and negative portrayals differ from one another?
3. How would your knowledge of the news story be different if you watched just one of the news networks?
4. How would your perception of the news story (whether the story was important, negative or positive, etc.) be different if you watched just one of the news networks?

5. After the week is over, compare the different news stations' perspectives on the world. Were you able to clearly perceive three different perspectives? If so, how did they differ? Research and analyze in detail why it is that those differences exist. What does this tell you about the objectivity of news and news stories?

Extra credit: Go to the website for the organization Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (<http://www.fair.org/index.php>). Look through the articles, and identify stories you think are important but were not covered by the news stations you analyzed in Questions 1 through 5. What is your explanation for why these stories were not included, and what does this tell you about mainstream news coverage?

Exercise 2.6

Different Perspectives in the Online Media

Find one conservative media source (e.g., WorldNetDaily at <https://www.wnd.com/>, Intellectual Conservative at www.intellectualconservative.com, or Free Republic (<http://www.freerepublic.com/>) and one left-leaning source (e.g., Salon at www.salon.com, *The Nation* online at www.thenation.com, ZNet at <https://zcomm.org/znet/>, or *Mother Jones* at <http://www.motherjones.com>).

Read the headline stories for each at the same time of day for five consecutive days. Then, answer the following questions in a two- to three-page paper:

1. How similar are they in their editorial approaches? That is, to what extent do the different papers make similar decisions about which stories are most important? If they are similar, why do you think this is so? If they differ, why do you think they are different?
2. How would your perspective on society differ based on which of the media sources you read on a regular basis?
3. Discuss the possible impacts of these types of media on U.S. society.

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4. What are two or three major things your answers to Questions 1 through 3 tell you about print media today?

Extra credit: Choose any two of the theorists from this chapter (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead, Du Bois, & Addams). How might each of them answer Question 3?

Exercise 2.7

The Media and Climate Change

Watch the following video and read the following overview piece about climate change: “Global Warming” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScX29WBJ13w#at%3D81> and “Global Climate Change” at <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/> (read each section: Evidence, Causes, Effects, Scientific Consensus, Vital Signs, Questions, FAQ). Then, read “Competing Media Stories and US Public Opinion on Climate Change” (<https://scholars.org/brief/competing-media-stories-and-us-public-opinion-climate-change>). Then, read “What Are Donald Trump’s Policies on Climate Change and Other Environmental Issues?” (<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/what-are-donald-trumps-policies-climate-change-and-other-environmental-issues>).

Write a two-page paper that answers the following questions:

1. What are the key points you learned from the overviews and the article about climate change news coverage?
2. How has your own perception of climate change been influenced by the media?
3. Do you think reading this information and answering these questions have altered your perception of climate change? Why or why not?
4. Based on the article from Friends of the Earth, what is your analysis of the Trump administration’s environmental policy in context of the other articles outlining climate change?

5. How might you use the information you have learned to teach students at your school about climate change? How, if you wanted to, might you use this to create action to create social change on this issue? Be specific.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sociology has always been viewed a bit warily by leaders in most societies. Why do you think this might be? What is it about a sociological perspective that might feel threatening to those in power and those benefiting from the current system?
2. Imagine you are a sociological theorist. What social issue would you choose to study first? Why? Which of the three primary sociological perspectives (functionalism, conflict theory, or symbolic interactionism) do you think you would use to explain your findings? Why?
3. If, as symbolic interactionists maintain, society is merely a social construction (that is created and re-created anew through our interactions with one another), why is it so hard to address social issues effectively? How might a symbolic interactionist respond to this question?
4. Of the sociological perspectives covered in this chapter (conflict theory, functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and critical race theory), which do you think best explains inequality in the United States today? Why do you think so?
5. While Du Bois was able to attain a higher education only through scholarships, the other founders came from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds. Why do you think this might be? Do you think that most successful scholars today come from middle-class to wealthy backgrounds? Why or why not? If so, what are the potential repercussions?
6. Describe the difference between internal and external inequality. Provide an example of how external inequality can harm a society. What can (a) society and (b) you do to curb external inequality in your society?
7. Which of the theorists described in this chapter do you think best fulfilled the two core commitments of sociology? Why?

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC ACTIONS

1. Many sociologists note that although sociological studies have pointed out good solutions to social issues they have been largely ignored by governmental leaders and the media. Go to the American Sociological Association website at www.asanet.org or the Society for the Study of Social Problems website at www.sssp1.org. Look around each site and find a study that provides a good basis for the use of sociological research in public policy.
2. Write a letter to your school newspaper or another local paper describing the study and what you think would be a good public policy based on it. Go to <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/letters-to-editor/main> to get tips on how to write a letter to the editor.
3. Please go to the website for this book at <http://study.sagepub.com/white6e> to find further civic engagement opportunities, resources, peer-reviewed articles, and updated web links related to this chapter.

NOTES

1. Some consider Weber a functionalist.
2. See the University of Chicago Centennial Catalogue's faculty webpage on Mead at http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/centcat/fac/facch12_01.html.
3. In Arab nations, it is regarded as impolite to cross one's legs. In India, it is impolite to show the bottom of your shoe, as you would by crossing one foot over your knee instead of crossing your ankles.

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