DISCOVER
SOCIOLOGY
1. Can societies be studied scientifically? What does the scientific study of societies entail?

2. What is a theory? What role do theories play in sociology?

3. In your opinion, what social issues or problems are most interesting or important today? What questions about those issues or problems would you like to study?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1.1 Describe the significance of the sociological imagination and critical thinking in the study of sociology

1.2 Trace the historical development of sociological thought

1.3 Identify key theoretical paradigms in the discipline of sociology
A goal of this book is to take you on a sociological journey. But let’s begin with a basic question: What is sociology? First of all, sociology is a discipline of and for curious minds. Sociologists are deeply committed to answering the question, “Why?” Why are some people desperately poor and others fabulously wealthy? Why does racial segregation in housing and public education exist, and why does it persist half a century after civil rights laws were enacted in the United States? What accounts for the decline of marriage among the poor and the working class—as well as the millennial generation? Why are the poor more likely to be overweight or obese than their middle-class counterparts? Why is the proportion of women entering and completing college rising while men’s enrollment has fallen? Why, in spite of this, do men as a group still earn higher incomes than do women as a group? And how is it that social media is simultaneously praised as a vehicle of transformational activism and criticized as a cause of social alienation and civic disengagement? Take a moment to think about some why questions you have about society and social life: As you look around you, hear the news, and interact with other people, what strikes you as fascinating—but perhaps difficult to understand? What are you curious about?

Sociology is an academic discipline that takes a scientific approach to answering the kinds of questions our curious minds imagine. When we say that sociology is scientific, we mean that it is a way of learning about the world that combines logically constructed theory and systematic observation. The goal of sociological study and research is to base answers to questions like those above on careful examination of the roots of social phenomena such as poverty, segregation, and the wage gap. Sociologists do this with research methods—surveys, interviews, observations, and archival research, among others—which yield data that can be tested, challenged, and revised. In this text, you will see how sociology is done—and you will learn how to do sociology yourself.
Concisely stated, sociology is the scientific study of human social relationships, groups, and societies. Unlike natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology, sociology is one of several social sciences engaged in the scientific study of human beings and the social worlds they consciously create and inhabit. The purpose of sociology is to understand and generate new knowledge about human behavior, social relations, and social institutions on a larger scale. The sociologist adheres to the principle of social embeddedness: the idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relations. Thus, sociologists pursue studies on a wide range of issues occurring within, between, and among families, communities, states, nations, and the world. Other social sciences, some of which you may be studying, include anthropology, economics, political science, and psychology.

Sociology is a field in which students have the opportunity to build strong core knowledge about the social world with a broad spectrum of important skills, ranging from gathering and analyzing information to identifying and addressing social problems to effective written and oral communication. Throughout this book, we draw your attention to important skills you can gain through the study of sociology and the kinds of jobs and fields in which these skills can be put to work.

Doing sociology requires that you build a foundation for your knowledge and understanding of the social world. Some of the key foundations of sociology are the sociological imagination and critical thinking. We turn to these below.

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**Scientific:** A way of learning about the world that combines logically constructed theory and systematic observation.

**Sociology:** The scientific study of human social relations, groups, and societies.

**Social embeddedness:** The idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relations.

**Sociological imagination:** The ability to grasp the relationship between individual lives and the larger social forces that help to shape them.

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Sociology seeks to rigorously research and understand societies, social groups, and social relationships. A new area of interest is the way social media is changing social interactions.

**THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION**

As we go about our daily lives, it is easy to overlook the fact that large-scale economic, political, and cultural forces shape even the most personal aspects of our lives. When parents divorce, for example, we tend to focus on individual explanations: A father was devoted more to his work than to his family; a mother may have felt trapped in an unhappy marriage but stuck with it for the sake of young children. Yet while personal issues are inevitable parts of a breakup, they can’t tell the whole story. When many U.S. marriages end in divorce, forces larger than incompatible personalities or marital discord are at play. But what are those greater social forces, exactly?

As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) suggested half a century ago, uncovering the relationship between what he called personal troubles and public issues calls for a sociological imagination (1959/2000b). The sociological imagination is the ability to grasp the relationship between individual lives and the larger social forces that shape them—that is, to see where biography and history intersect.

In a country like the United States, where individualism is part of the national heritage, people tend to believe that each person creates his or her life’s path and to largely disregard the social context in which this happens. When we cannot get a job, fail to earn enough to support a family, or experience marital separation, for example, we tend to see it as a personal trouble. We do not necessarily see it as a public issue. The sociological imagination, however, invites us to make the connection and to step away from the vantage point of a single life experience to see how powerful social forces—for instance, changes in social norms, ethnic or sex discrimination, large shifts in the
economy, or the beginning or end of a military conflict—shape the obstacles and opportunities that contribute to the unfolding of our own life’s story. Among Mills’s (1959/2000b) most often cited examples is the following:

When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals. (p. 9)

To apply the idea to contemporary economic conditions, we might look at recent college graduates. If many of the young adults graduating from college today are finding employment in fields of interest to them, they may account for their success by citing personal effort and solid academic qualifications. These are, of course, very important! The sociological imagination, however, suggests that there are also larger social forces at work: The recent economic recovery in the United States has manifested in the form of growing job creation and more hiring: The official unemployment rate for college graduates with a bachelor’s degree in 2015 was 2.8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016c). A review of 2015 figures shows that the rate of unemployment of young college graduates (ages 21–24) was higher, at 7.2%, though this also represented a significant drop after the postrecession high of nearly 10% (Figure 1.1). If your friends or relatives who graduated into the labor market during the economic crisis or even the first years following that period encountered difficulties securing a job after graduation, this suggests that personal effort and qualifications are only part of the explanation for the success of one class of college completers and the frustration of another.

Understanding this relationship is particularly critical for people in the United States, who often regard individuals as fully responsible for their social, educational, and economic successes and failures. For instance, it is easy to fault the poor for their poverty, assuming they only need to work harder and “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” We may neglect the powerful role of social forces like racial or ethnic discrimination, the outsourcing or automation of manufacturing jobs that used to employ those with less education, or the dire state of public education in many economically distressed rural and urban areas. The sociological imagination implores us to seek the intersection between private troubles, such as a family’s poverty, and public issues, such as lack of access to good schooling and jobs paying a living wage, to develop a more informed and comprehensive understanding of the social world and social issues.

It is useful, when we talk about the sociological imagination, to bring in the concepts of agency and structure. Sociologists often talk about social actions—individual and group behavior—in these terms. **Agency** can be understood as the ability of individuals and groups to exercise free will and to make social changes on a small or large scale.

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**FIGURE 1.1 Unemployment Rate of Young College Graduates, by Gender, 1989–2015**

![Unemployment Rate of Young College Graduates, by Gender, 1989–2015](image)

Structure is a complex term but may be defined as patterned social arrangements that have effects on agency—structure may enable or constrain social action. For example, sociologists talk about the class structure, which is composed of social groups who hold varying amounts of resources such as money, political voice, and social status. They also identify normative structures—for instance, they might analyze patterns of social norms regarding “appropriate” gender behaviors in different cultural contexts.

Sociologists take a strong interest in the relationship between structure and agency. Consider that, on one hand, we all have the ability to make choices—we have free will and we can opt for one path over another. On the other hand, the structures that surround us impose obstacles on us or afford us opportunities to exercise agency. We can make choices, but they may be enabled or constrained by structure. For example, in the early 1900s, we would surely have found bright young women in the U.S. middle class who wanted to study to be doctors or lawyers. The social norms of the time, however, held that young women of this status were better off marrying and caring for the husband, home, and children. There were also legal constraints to women’s entry into higher education and the paid labor force. So while the women in our example might have individually argued and pushed to get an education and have professional careers, the dreams of this group were constrained by powerful normative and legal structures that identified women’s place as being in the home.

Structure: Patterned social arrangements that have effects on agency.

Consider as well the relationship between the class structure and individual agency as a way of thinking about social mobility in U.S. society. If, for instance, a young man today whose parents are well educated and whose family is economically prosperous wishes to go to college and study to be an architect, engineer, or college professor, his position in the class structure (or the position of his family) is enabling—that is, it raises the probability that he will be able to make this choice and realize it. If, however, a young man from a poor family with no college background embraces these same dreams, his position in the class structure is likely to be constraining: Not only does his family have insufficient economic means to pay for college, but he may also be studying in an underfunded or underperforming high school that cannot provide the advanced courses and other resources he needs to prepare for college. A lack of college role models may also be a factor. This does not mean that inevitably the first young man will go to college and realize his hopes and the second will not; it does, however, suggest that structural conditions favor the first college aspirant over the second.

In order to understand why some students go to college and others do not, sociologists would say that we cannot rely on individual choice or will (agency) alone—structures, whether subtly or quite obviously, exercise an influence on social behavior and outcomes. At the same time, we should not see structures as telling the whole story of social behavior, because history shows the power of human agency in making change even in the face of obstacles. Agency itself can transform structures (for example, think about the ways women’s historical activism has helped to transform limiting gender norms for women today). Sociologists weight both agency and structure and continue to study how the two intersect and interact. For the most part, sociologists understand the relationship as reciprocal—that is, it goes in both directions, as structure affects agency and agency, in turn, can change the dimensions of a structure (Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 Structure and Agency

Structure: Patterned social arrangements that have effects on agency.
CRITICAL THINKING

Applying the sociological perspective requires more than an ability to use the sociological imagination. It also entails **critical thinking**, the ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence. In everyday life, we frequently accept things as “true” because they are familiar, feel right, or are consistent with our beliefs. Critical thinking takes a different approach—recognizing poor arguments, rejecting statements not supported by evidence, and questioning our assumptions. One of the founders of modern sociology, Max Weber, captured the spirit of critical thinking in two words when he said that a key task of sociological inquiry is to acknowledge “inconvenient facts.”

Critical thinking requires us to be open-minded, but it does not mean that we must accept all arguments as equally valid. Those supported by logic and backed by evidence are clearly preferable to those that are not. For instance, we may passionately agree with Thomas Jefferson’s famous statement, “That government is best that governs least.” However, as sociologists we must also ask, “What evidence backs up the claim that less government is better under all circumstances?”

To think critically, it is useful to follow six simple rules (adapted from Wade & Tavris, 1997):

1. **Be willing to ask any question, no matter how difficult.** The belief in small government is a cherished U.S. ideal. But sociologists who study the role of government in modern society must be willing to ask whether there are circumstances under which more—not less—government is better. Government’s role in areas such as homeland security, education, and health care has grown in the past several years—what are the positive and negative aspects of this growth?

2. **Think logically and be clear.** Logic and clarity require us to define concepts in a way that allows us to study them. “Big government” is a vague concept that must be made more precise and measurable before it provides for useful research. Are we speaking of federal, state, or local government, or all of these? Is “big” measured by the cost of government services, the number of agencies or offices within the government, the number of people working for it, or something else? What did Jefferson mean by “best,” and what would that “best” government look like? Who would have the power to define this notion in any case?

3. **Back up your arguments with evidence.** Founding Father Thomas Jefferson is a formidable person to quote, but quoting him does not prove that smaller government is better in the 21st century. To find evidence, we need to seek out studies of contemporary societies to see whether there is a relationship between a population’s well-being and the size of government or the breadth of services it provides. Because studies may offer contradictory evidence, we also need to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments on different sides of the issue.

4. **Think about the assumptions and biases—including your own—that underlie all studies.** You may insist that government has a key role to play in modern society. On the other hand, you may believe with equal passion that big government is one root of the problems in the United States. Critical thinking requires that we recognize our beliefs and biases. Otherwise we might unconsciously seek out only evidence that supports our argument, ignoring evidence to the contrary. Passion has a role to play in research: It can motivate us to devote long hours to studying an issue. But passion should not play a role when we are weighing evidence and drawing conclusions.

5. **Avoid anecdotal evidence.** It is tempting to draw a general conclusion from a single experience or anecdote, but that experience may illustrate the exception rather than the rule. For example, you may know someone who just yesterday received a letter mailed 2 years ago, but that is not evidence that the U.S. Postal Service is inefficient or does not fulfill its mandates. To determine whether this government agency is working well, you would have to study its entire mail delivery system and its record of work over time.

6. **Be willing to admit when you are wrong or uncertain about your results.** Sometimes we expect to find support for an argument only to find that things are not so clear. For example,

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**Critical thinking:** The ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence.
Why Do Couples Get Divorced?

FIGURE 1.3 144 Years of Marriage and Divorce in the United States

Until about the middle of the 20th century, most marriages were “‘til death do us part.” In 1940, the rate of divorce in the United States was 2.0 per 1,000 population. In 1960, it was still 2.2 per 1,000, but it rose consistently through the 1970s, peaking in 1981 at 5.3 per 1,000 before dropping back to 3.4 per 1,000 in 2012 (Figure 1.3). What accounts for the shifting landscape of marital breakup in the United States?

The sociological imagination suggests to us that marriage and divorce, seemingly the most private of matters, are public issues as well as personal ones. Certainly, the end of a marriage is a profoundly personal experience and rooted in disagreements, conflicts, or crisis faced by a couple. At the same time, researchers recognize that there are structural and normative shifts that are important for understanding the context in which marriages are made, experienced, and ended.

Consider the fact that when wages for the working class began to stagnate in the mid-1970s, growing numbers of women went to work to help their families make ends meet. More women also went to college and pursued careers as a path to financial stability and personal fulfillment, a path enabled in part by the 1972 passage of Title IX, a federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program receiving federal financial support. In fact, today more women than men finish undergraduate degrees (a topic we cover in depth in Chapter 10), and women have a higher measure of economic independence than ever before. The combination of educational attainment and satisfying careers reinforces women’s autonomy, making it easier for those who are in unhappy marriages to leave them. Greater social acceptance of divorce has also removed much of the stigma once associated with a failed marriage.

After rising to its peak in 1981, the divorce rate in the United States
began to decline again, falling to and staying below 4.0 per 1,000 in 2000. Can we find the roots of this shift in sociological phenomena as well? Arguably, several more recent societal changes could be implicated in a dropping divorce rate. For example, as we will see in Chapter 11, fewer people today are marrying at all. The decline has been particularly notable among millennials, as well as the poor and the working class, shrinking the pool from which divorced couples could emerge. More couples today are also cohabiting: Some break up before marriage, while others may discover compatibility that translates into a durable marriage. As well, a trend toward later marriage, when careers have already been established, may mean that couples are likely to marry for love rather than economic stability and are more likely to stay together. Economic stability, in fact, continues to be an important variable in the sociological picture: One demographic category where divorce remains high is among less-educated, low-income couples.

Societal changes can be implicated in the rise—and decline—of divorce in the United States. The sociological imagination helps us to see that this private trouble is in many respects influenced by public issues, including women’s growing economic independence, the dynamism of cultural norms related to marriage and divorce, and financial stresses experienced by less-educated and lower-income couples. Social research methods, which we will discuss in the next chapter, can help us learn to ask and study the kinds of sociological questions that will help us understand these trends more fully.

**THINK IT THROUGH**

What other “private troubles” might sociologists identify as “public issues”? Can you use the sociological imagination to discuss any of the social issues and problems of interest to you?

consider the position of a sociologist who advocates small government and learns that Japan and Singapore initially became economic powerhouses because their governments played leading roles in promoting growth, or a sociologist who champions an expanded role for government but learns from the downturn of the 1990s in the Asian economies that some societal needs can be better met by private enterprise. Empirical evidence may contradict our beliefs: We learn from recognizing erroneous assumptions and having a mind open to new information.

Critical thinking also means becoming “critical consumers” of the information—news, social media, surveys, texts, magazines, and scientific studies—that surrounds us. To be a good sociologist, it is important to look beyond the commonsense understanding of social life and develop a critical perspective.

Being critical consumers of information entails paying attention to the sources of information we encounter and asking questions about how data were gathered. In this text, *Behind the Numbers* boxes will look critically at data on issues like unemployment, poverty, and high school dropouts, helping us to understand what is illuminated and what is obscured by these commonly cited social indicators.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING**

Humans have been asking questions about the nature of social life as long as people have lived in societies. Aristotle and Plato wrote extensively about social relationships more than 2,000 years
ago. Ibn Khaldun, an Arab scholar writing in the 14th century, advanced a number of sociological concepts we recognize today, including ideas about social conflict and cohesion. Yet modern sociological concepts and research methods did not emerge until the 19th century, after the Industrial Revolution, and then largely in those European nations undergoing dramatic societal changes like industrialization and urbanization.

THE BIRTH OF SOCIOLOGY: SCIENCE, PROGRESS, INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND URBANIZATION

We can trace sociology’s roots to four interrelated historical developments that gave birth to the modern world: the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, industrialization, and urbanization. Since these developments initially occurred in Europe, it is not surprising that sociological perspectives and ideas evolved there during the 19th century. By the end of the 19th century, sociology had taken root in North America as well; somewhat later, it gained a foothold in Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Sociology throughout the world initially bore the stamp of its European and North American origins, though recent decades have brought a greater diversity of perspectives to the discipline.

The Scientific Revolution

The rise of modern natural and physical sciences, beginning in Europe in the 16th century, offered scholars a more advanced understanding of the physical world. The success of natural science contributed to the belief that science could be fruitfully applied to human affairs, thereby enabling people to improve society or even perfect it. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) coined the term sociology to characterize what he believed would be a new “social physics”—that is, the scientific study of society.

The Enlightenment

Inspired in part by the success of the physical sciences, French philosophers in the 18th century such as Voltaire (1694–1778), Montesquieu (1689–1755), Diderot (1719–1784), and Rousseau (1712–1778) promised that humankind could attain lofty heights by applying scientific understanding to human affairs. Enlightenment ideals such as equality, liberty, and fundamental human rights found a home in the emerging social sciences, particularly sociology. Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), considered by many to be the first modern sociologist, argued that sociological understanding would create a more egalitarian, peaceful society, in which individuals would be free to realize their full potential. Many of sociology’s founders shared the hope that a fairer and more just society would be achieved through the scientific understanding of society.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the mid-18th century and soon spread to other countries, dramatically changed European societies. Traditional agricultural economies and the small-scale production of handicrafts in the home gave way to more efficient, profit-driven manufacturing based in factories. For instance, in 1801 in the English city of Leeds, there were about 20 factories manufacturing a variety of goods. By 1838, Leeds was home to 106 woolen mills alone, employing 10,000 people.

Small towns, including Leeds, were transformed into bustling cities, showcasing extremes of wealth and poverty as well as opportunity and struggle. In the face of rapid social change and growing inequality, sociologists sought to gain a social scientific perspective on what was happening and how it had come about. German theorist and revolutionary Karl Marx (1818–1883), who had an important impact on later sociological theorizing about modern societies and economies, predicted that industrialization would make life increasingly intolerable for the masses. He believed that private property ownership by the wealthy allowed for the exploitation of working people and that its elimination, and revolution, would bring about a utopia of equality and genuine freedom for all.

URBANIZATION: THE POPULATION SHIFT TOWARD CITIES Industrialization fostered the growth of cities, as people streamed from rural fields to urban factories in search of work. By the end of the 19th century, more than 20 million people lived in English cities. The population of London alone exceeded 7 million by 1910.

Early industrial cities were often fetid places, characterized by pollution and dirt, crime, and crowded housing tenements. In Europe, sociologists lamented the passing of communal village life and its replacement by a savage and alienating urban existence. Durkheim, for example, worried about the potential breakdown of stabilizing beliefs and values in modern urban
society. He argued that whereas traditional communities were held together by shared culture and norms, or accepted social behaviors and beliefs, modern industrial communities were threatened by anomie, or a state of normlessness that occurs when people lose sight of the shared rules and values that give order and meaning to their lives. In a state of anomie, individuals often feel confused and anxious because they do not know how to interact with each other and their environment. Durkheim raised the question of what would hold societies and communities together as they shifted from homogeneity and shared cultures and values to heterogeneous masses of diverse cultures, norms, and occupations.

19TH-CENTURY FOUNDERS

Despite its largely European origins, early sociology sought to develop universal understandings that would apply to other peoples, times, and places. The discipline’s principal acknowledged founders—Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber—left their marks on sociology in different ways.

Auguste Comte

Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a French social theorist, is credited with founding modern sociology, naming it, and establishing it as the scientific study of social relationships. The twin pillars of Comte’s sociology were the study of social statics, the way society is held together, and the analysis of social dynamics, the laws that govern social change. Comte believed social science could be used effectively to manage the social change resulting from modern industrial society, but always with a strong respect for traditions and history.

Comte proclaimed that his new science of society was positivist. This meant that it was to be based on facts alone, which should be determined scientifically and allowed to speak for themselves. Comte argued that this purely factual approach was the proper method for sociology. He argued that all sciences—and all societies—go through three stages. The first stage is a theological one, in which key ways of understanding the world are framed in terms of superstition, imagination, and religion. The second stage is a metaphysical one, characterized by abstract speculation but framed by the basic belief that society

**Norms:** Accepted social behaviors and beliefs.

**Anomie:** A social condition of normlessness; a state of normative uncertainty that occurs when people lose touch with the shared rules and values that give order and meaning to their lives.

**Social statics:** The way society is held together.

**Social dynamics:** The laws that govern social change.

**Positivist:** Science that is based on facts alone.
is the product of natural rather than supernatural forces. The third and last stage is one in which knowledge is based on scientific reasoning “from the facts.” Comte saw himself as leading sociology toward its final positivist stage.

Comte left a lasting mark on modern sociology. The scientific study of social life continues to be the goal of sociological research. His belief that social institutions have a strong impact on individual behavior—that is, that our actions are the products of personal choices and the surrounding social context—remains at the heart of sociology.

Harriet Martineau

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) was an English sociologist who, despite deafness and other physical challenges, became a prominent social and historical writer. Her greatest handicap was being a woman in male-dominated intellectual circles that failed to value female voices. Today she is frequently recognized as the first major woman sociologist.

Deeply influenced by Comte’s work, Martineau translated his six-volume treatise on politics into English. Her editing helped make Comte’s esoteric prose accessible to the English-speaking world, ensuring his standing as a leading figure in sociology. Martineau was also a distinguished scholar in her own right. She wrote dozens of books, more than a thousand newspaper columns, and 25 novels, including a three-volume study, Society in America (1837), based on observations of the United States that she made during a tour of the country.

Martineau, like Comte, sought to identify basic laws that govern society. She derived three of her four “laws” from other theorists. The fourth law, however, was her own and reflected her progressive (today we might say feminist) principles: For a society to evolve, it must ensure social justice for women and other oppressed groups. In her study of U.S. society, Martineau treated slavery and women’s experience of dependence in marriage as indicators of the limits of the moral development of the United States. In her view, the United States was unable to achieve its full social potential while it was morally stunted by persistent injustices like slavery and women’s inequality. The question of whether the provision of social justice is critical to societal development remains a relevant and compelling one today.

Émile Durkheim

Auguste Comte founded and named the discipline of sociology, but French scholar Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) set the field on its present course. Durkheim established the early subject matter of sociology, laid out rules for conducting research, and developed an important theory of social change.

For Durkheim, sociology’s subject matter was social facts, qualities of groups that are external to individual members yet constrain their thinking and behavior. Durkheim argued that such social facts as religious beliefs and social duties are external—that is, they are part of the social context and are larger than our individual lives. They also have the power to shape our behavior. You may feel compelled to act in certain ways in different contexts—in the classroom, on a date, at a religious ceremony—even if you are not always aware of such social pressures.

Durkheim also argued that only social facts can explain other social facts. For example, there is no scientific evidence that men have an innate knack for business compared with women—but in 2012, women headed just 18 of the Fortune 500 companies. A Durkheimian approach would highlight women’s experience in society—where historically they have been
socialized into more domestic values or restricted to certain noncommercial professions—and the fact that the social networks that foster mobility in the corporate world today are still primarily male to help explain why men dominate the upper ranks of the business world.

Durkheim’s principal concern was explaining the impact of modern society on social solidarity, the bonds that unite the members of a social group. In his view, in traditional society these bonds are based on similarity—people speak the same language, share the same customs and beliefs, and do similar work tasks. He called this mechanical solidarity. In modern industrial society, however, bonds based on similarity break down. Everyone has a different job to perform in the industrial division of labor, and modern societies are more likely to be socially diverse. However, workers in different occupational positions are dependent on one another for things like safety, education, and the provision of food and other goods essential to survival. The people filling these positions may not be alike in culture, beliefs, or language, but their dependence on one another contributes to social cohesion. Borrowing from biology, Durkheim called this organic solidarity, suggesting that modern society functions as an interdependent organic whole, like a human body.

Yet organic solidarity, Durkheim argued, is not as strong as mechanical solidarity. People no longer necessarily share the same norms and values. The consequence, according to Durkheim, is anomie. In this weakened condition, the social order disintegrates and pathological behavior increases (Durkheim, 1922/1973a).

Consider whether the United States, a modern and diverse society, is held together primarily by organic solidarity, or whether the hallmark of mechanical solidarity, a collective conscience—the common beliefs and values that bind a society together—is in evidence. Do public demonstrations of patriotism on nationally significant anniversaries such as September 11 and July 4 indicate mechanical solidarity built on a collective sense of shared values, norms, and practices? Or do the deeply divisive politics of recent years suggest social bonds based more fully on practical interdependence?

**Karl Marx**

The extensive writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883) influenced the development of economics and political science as well as sociology. They also shaped world politics and inspired communist revolutions in Russia (later the Soviet Union), China, and Cuba, among others.

Marx’s central idea was deceptively simple: Virtually all societies throughout history have been divided into economic classes, with one class prospering at the expense of others. All human history, Marx believed, should be understood as the product of class conflict, competition between social classes over the distribution of wealth, power, and other valued resources in society (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998).

In the period of early industrialization in which he lived, Marx condemned capitalism’s exploitation of working people, the proletariat, by the ownership class, the bourgeoisie. As we will see in later chapters, Marx’s views on conflict and inequality are still influential in contemporary sociological thinking, even among sociologists who do not share his views on society.

Marx focused his attention on the emerging capitalist industrial society (Marx, 1867/1992a, 1885/1992b, 1894/1992c). Unlike his contemporaries in sociology, however, Marx saw capitalism as a transitional stage to a final period in human history in which economic classes and the unequal distribution of rewards and opportunities linked to class inequality would disappear and be replaced by a utopia of equality.

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**Social solidarity**: The bonds that unite the members of a social group.

**Collective conscience**: The common beliefs and values that bind a society together.

**Class conflict**: Competition between social classes over the distribution of wealth, power, and other valued resources in society.

**Proletariat**: The working class; wage workers.

**Bourgeoisie**: The capitalist (or property-owning) class.
Although many of Marx’s predictions have not proven to be correct, his critical analysis of the dynamics of capitalism proved insightful. Among other things, Marx argued that capitalism would lead to accelerating technological change, the replacement of workers by machines, and the growth of monopoly capitalism.

Marx also presciently predicted that ownership of the *means of production*, the sites and technology that produce the goods (and sometimes services) we need and use, would come to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. As a result, he believed, a growing wave of people would be thrust down into the proletariat, which owns only its own labor power. In modern society, large corporations have progressively swallowed up or pushed out smaller businesses; where small lumberyards and pharmacies used to serve many communities, corporate giants such as Home Depot, CVS, and Best Buy have moved in, putting locally owned establishments out of business.

In many U.S. towns, small business owners have joined forces to protest the construction of “big box” stores like Walmart (now the largest private employer in the United States), arguing that these enormous establishments, while they offer cheap goods, wreak havoc on local retailers and bring only the meager economic benefit of masses of entry-level, low-wage jobs. From a Marxist perspective, we might say that the local retailers, in resisting the incursion of the big box stores into their communities, are fighting their own “proletarianization.” Even physicians, many of whom used to own their own means of production in the form of private medical practices, have increasingly been driven by economic necessity into working for large health maintenance organizations (HMOs), where they are salaried employees.

Unlike Comte and Durkheim, Marx thought social change would be revolutionary, not evolutionary, and would be the product of oppressed workers rising up against a capitalist system that exploits the many to benefit the few.

**Max Weber**

Max Weber (1864–1920), a German sociologist who wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, left a substantial academic legacy. Among his contributions are an analysis of how Protestantism fostered the rise of capitalism in Europe (Weber, 1904–1905/2002) and insights into the emergence of modern bureaucracy (Weber, 1919/1946). Weber, like other founders of sociology, took up various political causes, condemning injustice wherever he found it. Although pessimistic about capitalism, he did not believe, as did Marx, that some alternative utopian form of society would arise. Nor did he see sociologists enjoying privileged insights into the social world that would qualifi them to wisely counsel rulers and industrialists, as Comte (and, to some extent, Durkheim) had envisioned.

Weber believed that an adequate explanation of the social world begins with the individual and takes into account the meaning of what people say and do. While he argued that research should be scientific and value-free, Weber also believed that to explain what people do, we must use a method he termed *Verstehen*, the German word for interpretive understanding. This methodology, rarely used by sociologists today, sought to explain social relationships by having the sociologist/observer imagine how the subjects being studied might have perceived and interpreted the situation. Studying social life, Weber felt, is not like studying plants or chemical reactions, because human beings act on the basis of meanings and motives.

Weber’s theories of social and economic organization have also been highly influential (Weber, 1921/2012). Weber argued that the modern Western world showed an ever-increasing reliance on logic, efficiency, rules, and reason. According to him, modern societies are characterized by the development and growing influence of *formal rationality*, a context in which people’s pursuit of goals is increasingly shaped by rules, regulations, and larger social structures. One of Weber’s most widely known illustrations of formal rationality comes from his study of *bureaucracies*, formal organizations characterized by written rules, hierarchical authority, and paid staff, intended to promote organizational efficiency. Bureaucracies, for Weber, epitomized formally rational systems: On one hand, they offer clear, knowable rules and regulations for the efficient pursuit of particular ends, like obtaining a passport or getting financial aid for higher education. On the other hand, he feared, the bureaucratization of modern society would also progressively strip people of their humanity and creativity and result in an iron cage of rationalized structures with irrational consequences.

Weber’s ideas about bureaucracy were remarkably prescient in their characterization of our bureaucratic (and formally rationalized) modern world. Today we are also confronted regularly with both the incredible efficiency and the baffling irrationality of modern bureaucratic structures. Within moments of entering into an efficiently concluded contract with a wireless phone service provider, we can become consumers of a cornucopia of technological opportunities, with the ability to chat on the phone or receive text messages from virtually anywhere, post photographs or watch videos online, and pass the time on social media platforms. Should we later be confused by a bill and need to speak to a company representative, however, we may be shuttled through endless repetitions of an automated response system that never seems to offer us the option of speaking with...
another human being. Today, Weber’s presciently predicted irrationality of rationality is alive and well.

SIGNIFICANT FOUNDING IDEAS IN U.S. SOCIOLOGY

Sociology was born in Europe, but it took firm root in U.S. soil, where it was influenced by turn-of-the-century industrialization and urbanization, as well as by racial strife and discrimination. Strikes by organized labor, corruption in government, an explosion of European immigration, racial segregation, and the growth of city slums all helped mold early sociological thought in the United States. By the late 1800s, a number of universities in the United States were offering sociology courses. The first faculties of sociology were established at the University of Kansas (1889), the University of Chicago (1892), and Atlanta University (1897). Below, we look at a handful of sociologists who have had an important influence on modern sociological thinking in the United States. Throughout the book, we will learn about more U.S. sociologists who have shaped our perspectives today.

Robert Ezra Park

The sociology department at the University of Chicago, which gave us what is often known as the “Chicago School” of sociology, dominated the new discipline in the United States at the start of the 20th century. Chicago sociologist Robert Ezra Park (1864–1944) pioneered the study of urban sociology and race relations. Once a muckraking journalist, Park was an equally colorful academic, reportedly coming to class in disheveled clothes and with shaving soap still in his ears. But his students were devoted to him, and his work was widely recognized. His 1921 textbook An Introduction to the Science of Sociology, coauthored with his Chicago colleague Ernest Burgess, helped shape the discipline. The Chicago School studied a broad spectrum of social phenomena, from hoboes and flophouses (inexpensive dormitory-style housing) to movie houses, dance halls, and slums, and from youth gangs and mobs to residents of Chicago’s ritzy Gold Coast.

Park was a champion of racial integration, having once served as personal secretary to the African American educator Booker T. Washington. Yet racial discrimination was evident in the treatment
of Black sociologists, including W. E. B. Du Bois, a contemporary of many of the sociologists working in the Chicago School.

**W. E. B. Du Bois**

A prominent Black sociologist and civil rights leader at the African American Atlanta University, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) developed ideas that were considered too radical to find broad acceptance in the sociological community. At a time when the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that segregated “separate but equal” facilities for Blacks and Whites were constitutional and when lynching of Black Americans had reached an all-time high, Du Bois condemned the deep-seated racism of White society. Today, his writings on race relations and the lives of U.S. Blacks are classics in the field.

Du Bois sought to show that racism was widespread in U.S. society. He was also critical of Blacks who had “made it” and then turned their backs on those who had not. One of his most enduring ideas is that in U.S. society, African Americans are never able to escape a fundamental awareness of race. They experience a double consciousness, as he called it—*an awareness of themselves both as Americans and as Blacks, never free of racial stigma*. He wrote, “The Negro is sort of a seventh son ... gifted with second-sight...this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 1903/2008, p. 12). Today as in Du Bois’s time, physical traits such as skin color may shape people’s perceptions and interactions in significant and complex ways.

**Charlotte Perkins Gilman**

Gilman (1860–1935) was a well-known novelist, feminist, and sociologist of her time. Because of her family’s early personal and economic struggles, she had only a few years of formal schooling in childhood, though she would later enroll at the Rhode Island School of Design. She read widely, however, and she was influenced by her paternal aunts, who included suffragist Isabella Beecher Stowe and writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), an anti-slavery novel.

Gilman’s most prominent publication was her semi-autobiographical short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1890), which follows the decline of a married woman shut away in a room (with repellent yellow wallpaper) by her husband, ostensibly for the sake of her health. Gilman used the story to highlight the consequences of women’s lack of autonomy in marriage. She continued to build this early feminist thesis in the book *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898/2006), which includes this memorable quote:

> The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; and

**Double consciousness:** Among African Americans, an awareness of being both American and Black, never free of racial stigma.

in this way women are economic factors in society. But so are horses. The labor of horses enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could. The horse is an economic factor in society. But the horse is not economically independent, nor is the woman. (p. 7)

Gilman’s work represents an early and notable effort to look at sex roles in the family not as natural and inevitable, as many saw them at the time, but rather as social constructions that had the potential to change and to bring greater autonomy to women in the home and society.

**Robert K. Merton**

After World War II, sociology began to apply sophisticated quantitative models to the study of social processes. There was also a growing interest in the grand theories of the European founders. At Columbia University, Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) undertook wide-ranging studies that helped further establish sociology as a scientific discipline. Merton is best known for his theory of deviance (Merton, 1938), his work on the sociology of science (Merton, 1996), and his iteration of the distinction between manifest and latent functions as a means for more fully understanding the relationships between and roles of sociological phenomena and institutions in communities and society. (Merton, 1968). He emphasized the development of theories in what he called the “middle range”— midway between the grand theories of Weber, Marx, and Durkheim and quantitative studies of specific social problems.

**C. Wright Mills**

Columbia University sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) is best known in the discipline for describing the “sociological imagination,” the imperative in sociology to seek the nexus between private troubles and public issues. In his short career, Mills was prolific. He renewed interest in Max Weber by translating many of his works into English and applying his ideas to the contemporary United States. But Mills, who also drew on Marx, identified himself as a “plain Marxist.” His concept of the sociological imagination can be traced in part to Marx’s famous statement that “man makes history, but not under circumstances of his own choosing,” meaning that while we are agents of free will, the social context has a profound impact on the obstacles or opportunities in our lives.

Mills synthesized Weberian and Marxian traditions, applying sociological thinking to the most pressing problems of the day, particularly inequality. He advocated an activist sociology with a sense of social responsibility. Like many sociologists, he was willing to turn a critical eye on “common knowledge,” including the belief that the United States is a democracy that represents the interests of all the people. In a provocative study, he examined the workings of the “power elite,” a small group of wealthy businessmen, military leaders, and politicians who Mills believed ran the country largely in their own interests (Mills, 1956/2000a).
WOMEN IN EARLY SOCIOLOGY

Why did so few women social scientists find a place among sociology’s founders? After all, the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions elevated such lofty ideals as freedom, liberty, and equality. Yet long after these historical events, women and minorities were still excluded from public life in Europe and North America. Democracy—which gives people the right to participate in their governance—was firmly established as a principle for nearly a century and a half in the United States before women achieved the right to vote in 1920. In France, it took even longer—until 1945.

Sociology as a discipline emerged during the first modern flourishing of feminism in the 19th century. Yet women and people of non-European heritage were systematically excluded from influential positions in the European universities where sociology and other modern social sciences originated. When women did pursue lives as scholars, the men who dominated the social sciences largely ignored their writings. Feminist scholar Julie Daubié won a prize from the Lyon Academy for her essay “Poor Women in the Nineteenth Century,” yet France’s public education minister denied her a diploma on the grounds that he would be “forever holding up his ministry to ridicule” (Kandal, 1988, pp. 57–58). Between 1840 and 1960, almost no women held senior academic positions in the sociology departments of any European or U.S. universities, with the exception of exclusively women’s colleges.

A number of woman scholars managed to overcome the obstacles to make significant contributions to sociological inquiry. For example, in 1792 the British scholar Mary Wollstonecraft published A Vindication of the Rights of Women, arguing that scientific progress could not occur unless women were allowed to become men’s equals by means of universal education. In France in 1843, Flora Tristan called for equal rights for women workers, “the last remaining slaves in France.” Also in France, Aline Valette published Socialism and Sexualism in 1893, nearly three-quarters of a century before the term sexism found its way into spoken English (Kandal, 1988).

An important figure in early U.S. sociology is Jane Addams (1860–1935). Addams is best known as the founder of Hull House, a settlement house for the poor, sick, and aged that became a center for political activists and social reformers. Less well known is the fact that under Addams’s guidance, the residents of Hull House engaged in important research on social problems in Chicago. Hull House Maps and Papers, published in 1895, pioneered the study of Chicago neighborhoods, helping to shape the research direction of the Chicago School of sociology. Following Addams’s lead, Chicago sociologists mapped the city’s neighborhoods, studied their residents, and helped create the field of community studies. In spite of her prolific work—she authored 11 books and hundreds of articles and received the Nobel Peace Prize for her dedication to social reform in 1931—she never secured a full-time position at the University of Chicago, and the school refused to award her an honorary degree.

As Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams, Julie Daubié, and others experienced, early female sociologists were not accorded the same status as their male counterparts. Only recently have many of their writings been “rediscovered” and their contributions acknowledged in sociology.
assumptions and ask particular questions about the social world. The word theory is rooted in the Greek word theoria, which means “a viewing.” An apt metaphor for a theory is a pair of glasses. You can view a social phenomenon such as socioec-
onomic inequality or poverty, deviance, or consumer culture, or an institution like capitalism or the family, using different theories as lenses.

As you will see in the next section, in the discipline of sociology there are several major categories of theories that seek to examine and explain social phenomena and institutions. Imagine the various sociological theories as different pairs of glasses, each with colored lenses that change the way you see an image: You may look at the same institution or phenomenon as you put on each pair, but it will appear different depending on the glasses you are wearing. Keep in mind that sociological theories are not “truths” about the social world. They are logical, rigorous analytical tools that we can use to inquire about, interpret, and make educated predictions about the world around us. From the vantage point of any sociological theory, some aspects of a phenomenon or an institution are illuminated while others are obscured. In the end, theories are more or less useful depending on how well empirical data—that is, knowledge gathered by researchers through scientific methods—support their analytical conclusions. Below, we outline the basic theoretical perspectives that we will be using in this text.

The three dominant theoretical perspectives in sociology are structural functionalism, social conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. We outline their basic characteristics below and will revisit them again throughout the book. Symbolic interactionism shares with the functionalist and social conflict paradigms an interest in interpreting and understanding social life. However, the first two are macro-level paradigms, concerned with large-scale patterns and institutions. Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level paradigm—that is, it is concerned with small-group social relations and interactions.

Structural functionalism, social conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism form the basic foundation of contemporary sociological theorizing (Table 1.1). Throughout this book we will introduce variations on these theories, as well as new and evolving theoretical ideas in sociology.

THE FUNCTIONALIST PARADIGM

Structural functionalism (or functionalism—the term we use in this book) seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the roles performed by different social structures, phenomena, and institutions. Functionalism characterizes society as made up of many interdependent parts—an analogy often cited is the human body. Each part serves a different function, but all parts work together to ensure the equilibrium and health of the entity as a whole. Society too is composed of a spectrum of different parts with a variety of different functions, such as the government, the family, religious and educational institutions, and the media. According to the theory, together these parts contribute to the smooth functioning and equilibrium of society.

The key question posed by the functionalist perspective is, “What function does a particular institution, phenomenon, or social group serve for the maintenance of society?” That is, what contribution does a given institution, phenomenon, or social group make to the equilibrium, stability, and functioning of the whole? Note the underlying assumption of functionalism: Any existing institution or phenomenon does serve a function; if it served no function, it would evolve out of existence. Consequently, the central task of the functionalist sociologist is to discover what function an institution or a phenomenon—for

Underappreciated during her time, Jane Addams was a prominent scholar and early contributor to sociology. She is also known for her political activism and commitment to social reform.
instance, the traditional family, capitalism, social stratification, or deviance—serves in the maintenance of the social order.

Émile Durkheim is credited with developing the early foundations of functionalism. Among other ideas, Durkheim observed that all known societies have some degree of deviant behavior, such as crime. The notion that deviance is functional for societies may seem counterintuitive: Ordinarily, we do not think of deviance as beneficial or necessary to society. Durkheim, however, reasoned that since deviance is universal, it must serve a social function—if it did not serve a function, it would cease to exist. Durkheim concluded that one function of deviance—specifically, of society’s labeling of some acts as deviant—is to remind members of society what is “normal” or “moral”; when a society punishes deviant behavior, it reaffirms people’s beliefs in what is right and good.

Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) expanded functionalist analysis by looking at whole social systems such as government, the economy, and the family and how they contribute to the functioning of the whole social system (Parsons, 1964/2007, 1967). For example, he wrote that traditional sex roles for men and women contribute to stability on both the micro familial level and the macro societal level. Parsons argued that traditional socialization produces instrumental or rational and work-oriented males, and expressive or sensitive, nurturing, and emotional females. Instrumental males, he reasoned, are well suited for the competitive world of work, while their expressive female counterparts are appropriately prepared to care for the family. According to Parsons, these roles are complementary and positively functional, leading men and women to inhabit different spheres of the social world. Complementary rather than competing roles contribute to solidarity in a marriage by reducing competition between husband and wife. Critics have rejected this idea as a justification of inequality.

As this example suggests, functionalism is conservative in that it tends to accept rather than question the status quo; it holds that any given institution or phenomenon exists because it is functional for society, rather than asking whether it might benefit one group to the detriment of others, as critics say Parsons’s position on gender roles does. One of functionalism’s long-standing weaknesses is a failure to recognize inequalities in the distribution of power and resources and how those affect social relationships.

Robert Merton attempted to refine the functionalist paradigm by demonstrating that not all social structures work to maintain or strengthen the social organism, as Durkheim and other early functionalists seemed to suggest. According to Merton, a social institution or phenomenon can have both positive functions and problematic dysfunctions. Merton broadened the functionalist idea by suggesting that manifest functions are the obvious and intended functions of a phenomenon or institution. Latent functions, by contrast, are functions that are not recognized or expected. He used the famous example of the Hopi rain dance, positing that while the manifest function of the dance was to bring rain, a no less important latent function was to reaffirm social bonds in the community through a shared ritual. Consider another example: A manifest function of war is usually to vanquish an enemy, perhaps to defend a territory or to claim it. Latent functions of war—those that are not the overt purpose but may still have powerful effects—may include increased patriotism in countries engaged in the war, a rise in

| TABLE 1.1 The Three Principal Sociological Paradigms |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Theoretical Perspective and Founding Theorist(s) | Structural Functionalism Emile Durkheim | Social Conflict Karl Marx | Symbolic Interactionism Max Weber, George Herbert Mead |
| Assumptions about self and society | Society is a system of interdependent, interrelated parts, like an organism, with groups and institutions contributing to the stability and equilibrium of the whole social system. | Society consists of conflicting interests, but only some groups have the power and resources to realize their interests. Some groups benefit from the social order at the expense of other groups. | The self is a social creation; social interaction occurs by means of symbols such as words, gestures, and adornments; shared meanings are important to successful social interactions. |
| Key focus and questions | Macrosociology: What keeps society operating smoothly? What functions do different societal institutions and phenomena serve for society as a whole? | Macrosociology: What are the sources of conflict in society? Who benefits and who loses from the existing social order? How can inequalities be overcome? | Microsociology: How do individuals experience themselves, one another, and society as a whole? How do they interpret the meanings of particular social interactions? |

**Manifest functions:** Functions of an object, an institution, or a phenomenon that are obvious and intended.

**Latent functions:** Functions of an object, an institution, or a phenomenon that are not recognized or expected.
Sociology: One Way of Looking at the World—or Many?

the profits of companies manufacturing military equipment or contracting workers to the military, and changes in national budgetary priorities.

THE SOCIAL CONFLICT PARADIGM

In contrast to functionalism, the social conflict paradigm (which we refer to in this book as conflict theory) seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the conflict built into social relationships. Conflict theory is rooted in ideas about class and power put forth by Karl Marx. While Durkheim's structural functionalist lens asked how different parts of society contribute to stability, Marx asked about the roots of conflict. Conflict theorists pose the questions, “Who benefits from the way social institutions and relationships are structured?” and “Who loses?” The social conflict paradigm focuses on what divides people rather than on what unites them. It presumes that group interests drive relationships, and that various groups in society (for instance, social classes, ethnic and racial groups, women and men) will act in their own interests. Conflict theory thus assumes not that interests are shared but rather that they may be different and irreconcilable and, importantly, that only some groups have the power and resources to realize their interests. Because of this, conflict is—sooner or later—inevitable.

From Marx's perspective, the bourgeoisie benefits directly from the capitalist social order. If, as Marx suggests, the capitalist class has an interest in maximizing productivity and profit and minimizing costs (like the cost of labor in the form of workers' wages), and the working class has an interest in earning more and working less, then the interests of the two classes are difficult to reconcile. The more powerful group in society generally has the upper hand in furthering its interests.

After Marx, the body of conflict theory expanded tremendously. In the 20th century and today, theorists have extended the reach of the perspective to consider, for instance, how control of culture and the rise of technology (rather than just control of the means of production) underpins class domination (Adorno, 1975; Horkheimer, 1947), as well as how the expanded middle class can be accommodated in a Marxist perspective (Wright, 1998). Many key ideas in feminist theory take a conflict-oriented perspective, though the focus shifts from social class to gender power and

Social conflict paradigm: A theory that seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the conflict that is built into social relations; also known as conflict theory.
conflict (Connell, 2005), as well as ways in which race is implicated in relations of power (Collins, 1990).

Recall Durkheim’s functionalist analysis of crime and deviance. According to this perspective, society defines crime to reaffirm people’s beliefs about what is right and dissuade them from deviating. A conflict theorist might argue that dominant groups in society define the behaviors labeled criminal or deviant because they have the power to do so. For example, street crimes such as robbery and carjacking are defined and punished as criminal behavior. They are also represented in reality television programs, movies, and other cultural products as images of criminal deviance. On the other hand, corporate or white-collar crime, which may cause the loss of money or even lives, is less likely to be clearly defined, represented, and punished as criminal. From a conflict perspective, white-collar crime is more likely to be committed by members of the upper class (for instance, business or political leaders or financiers) and is less likely to be punished harshly than street crime, which is associated with the lower-income classes, though white-collar crime may have even greater economic and health consequences. A social conflict theorist would draw our attention to the fact that the decision makers who pass our laws are mostly members of the upper class and govern in the interests of capitalism and their own socioeconomic peers.

A key weakness of the social conflict paradigm is that it overlooks the forces of stability, equilibrium, and consensus in society. The assumption that groups have conflicting, even irreconcilable, interests and that those interests are realized by those with power at the expense of those with less power fails to account for forces of cohesion and stability in societies.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Symbolic interactionism argues that both the individual self and society as a whole are the products of social interactions based on language and other symbols. The term symbolic interactionism was coined by U.S. sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) in 1937, but the approach originated in the lectures of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), a University of Chicago philosopher allied with the Chicago School of sociology. The symbolic interactionist paradigm argues that people acquire their sense of who they are only through interaction. They do this by means of symbols, representations of things that are not immediately present to our senses. Symbols include such things as words, gestures, emoticons, and tattoos, among others.

Recall our earlier discussions of the theoretical interpretations of deviance and crime. A symbolic interactionist might focus on the ways in which people label one another as deviant (a symbolic act that uses language), the factors that make such a label stick, and the meanings underlying such a label. If you are accused of committing a crime you did not commit, how will it affect the way you see yourself, and will you begin to act differently as a result? Can being labeled “deviant” be a self-fulfilling prophecy? For the symbolic interactionist, sociological inquiry is the study of how people interact and how they create and interpret symbols in the social world.

While symbolic interactionist perspectives draw our attention to important micro-level processes in society, they may miss the larger structural context of those processes, such as discovering who has the power to make laws defining what or who is deviant. For this reason, many sociologists seek to utilize both macro- and micro-level perspectives when analyzing social phenomena such as deviance.

The three paradigms described above lead to diverse images of society, research questions, and conclusions about the patterns and nature of social life. Each “pair of glasses” can provide a different perspective on the social world. Throughout this text, the three major theoretical paradigms—and some new ones we will encounter in later chapters—will help us understand key issues and themes of sociology.

**PRINCIPAL THEMES IN THIS BOOK**

We began this chapter with a list of why questions with which sociologists are concerned—and about which any one of us might be curious. Behind these questions, we find several major themes, which are also some of the main themes in this book. Three important focal points for sociology—and for us—are (1) power and inequality and the ways in which the unequal distribution of social, economic, and political resources shape opportunities, obstacles, and relationships; (2) the societal changes occurring as a result of globalization and the growing social diversity of modern communities and societies; and (3) the powerful impact of technological change on modern lives, institutions, and states.

**POWER AND INEQUALITY**

As we consider broad social topics such as gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation and their effects on social relationships and resources, we will be asking who has power—the ability to mobilize resources and achieve goals despite the resistance of others—and who does not. We will also ask about

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**Symbolic interactionism**: A microsociological perspective that posits that both the individual self and society as a whole are the products of social interactions based on language and other symbols.

**Symbols**: Representations of things that are not immediately present to our senses.

**Power**: The ability to mobilize resources and achieve goals despite the resistance of others.
Why Are Some People Poor and Others Rich?

The concentration of wealth at the top of the economic ladder and the widespread struggle of millions of others to make do with scant resources are critical issues on both the domestic and global levels. One common explanation of the stark economic disparities in the United States is that they are the outcome of individual differences in talent, ambition, and work ethic. While personal effort is very important, the fact that more than 14.8% of the population lives below the official poverty line, including disproportionate numbers of Blacks (26.2%), Hispanics (23.6%), and women (16.1% compared to 13.4% of men; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015), should lead our sociological imaginations to recognize social and economic forces that underlie what we see in the data—and around us.

What are some of the sociological factors we might study to understand the existence and persistence of poverty in a wealthy country (Figure 1.4)? Consider the argument that educational opportunity is not equally distributed: In most U.S. states, schools are still funded primarily by local property taxes. Consequently, school districts sited in areas with high property values have more assets to tax than low-value areas. This means more money to spend on teachers, textbooks, and technology, as well as the maintenance of schools, playgrounds, and athletic facilities. Even within districts, individual schools in wealthier neighborhoods benefit from greater parental resources like donated funds and volunteer hours. Without a strong educational foundation that prepares
variables that influence the uneven distribution of power, and how some groups use power to create advantages for themselves (and disadvantages for others) and how disadvantaged groups mobilize to challenge the powerful.

Power is often distributed unequally and can be used by those who possess it to marginalize other social groups. *Inequality* refers to differences in wealth, power, political voice, educational opportunities, and other valued resources. The existence of inequality not only raises moral and ethical questions about fairness; it can tear at the very fabric of societies, fostering social alienation and instability. It may also have negative effects on local and national economies. Notably, economic inequality is increasing both within and between many countries around the globe, a fact that makes understanding the roots and consequences of this phenomenon—that is, asking the why questions—ever more important.

Inequality: Differences in wealth, power, political voice, educational opportunities, and other valued resources.
Global Issues

Local Consumption, Global Production

Try this at home: Walk through your dorm room, apartment, or house and make a list of the places of manufacture of some of the products you find. Be sure to check electronic equipment such as your laptop and smartphone. Go through your closets and drawers and look at some labels on your clothing and footwear. Can you locate where other household items like your microwave oven or coffeemaker were manufactured?

Take a look at your list: What countries do you find there? It is likely that you will find that people who live outside the United States produced many of the necessities and luxuries of your everyday life. Even a U.S.-manufactured car is likely to have parts that have passed through the hands of workers abroad.

When you checked your closet, did you find any clothing made in the United States? If not, you are not alone. In 1950, about 95% of clothing purchased in this country was made domestically. By 1980, the share fell to 70%. Today, an estimated 2% of our clothing is manufactured in the United States (Vatz, 2013). The rest is manufactured in factories around the globe: Just after the turn of the millennium, the clothing chain The Gap was ordering its goods from about 1,200 factories across 42 countries (Cline, 2013). What are some of the sociological effects of this shift?

As we will see in Chapter 16, U.S. consumption of goods grew in the latter half of the 20th century. This came about as appetites were whetted by new advertising campaigns and credit options increased (though wages were stagnating by the mid-1970s). Notably as well, as more goods were manufactured abroad, they also became less expensive:

In 1960, an average American household spent over 10 percent of its income on clothing and shoes—equivalent to roughly $4,000 today. The average person bought fewer than 25 garments each year . . .

Today, the average American household spends less than 3.5 percent of its budget on clothing and shoes—under $1,800. Yet, we buy more clothing than ever before: nearly 20 billion garments a year, close to 70 pieces of clothing per person, or more than one clothing purchase per week (Vatz, 2013, para. 1).

The falling costs of goods for consumers, however, have come at a price. As clothing and other manufacturers have shifted production abroad (an issue also discussed in Chapter 16), there have been dramatic disruptions in the labor market. As we will see in Chapter 7, outsourcing abroad, as well as increased automation of production, have contributed to declining wages and lost jobs for manufacturing workers in the United States. As well, millions of workers around the world are today employed in factories that are poorly regulated and operate largely outside the view of the consumers who buy their products. These poor conditions were highlighted in 2013, when 1,135 garment workers producing high-end clothing in a factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, were killed when their building collapsed; in spite of a building evacuation conducted after cracks were detected in the building on the previous day, workers were ordered to come to work (“Rana Plaza Collapse,” 2016).

On the one hand, despite the risks, many workers in developing countries leave their rural homes to seek out opportunities to earn and learn in new urban factories, just as they did in the early decades of the industrial revolution in Western Europe. On the other hand, the world’s low-wage workers, many of whom are women, are vulnerable to exploitation, and their hours are long and their work sites can be unpleasant or, as the incident in Dhaka demonstrated, even deadly. The conditions under which some workers toil today recall the 19th-century English factories that inspired Karl Marx to write his powerful critique of capitalism’s darker sides.
Chapter 1: Discover Sociology

GLOBALIZATION AND DIVERSITY

Globalization is the process by which people all over the planet become increasingly interconnected economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally. Globalization is not new. It began nearly 200,000 years ago when humans first spread from their African cradle into Europe and Asia. For thousands of years, humans have traveled, traded goods, and exchanged ideas over much of the globe, using seaways or land routes such as the famed Silk Road, a stretch of land that links China and Europe. But the rate of globalization took a giant leap forward with the Industrial Revolution, which accelerated the growth of global trade. It made another dramatic jump with the advent of the information age, drawing together individuals, cultures, and countries into a common global web of information exchange. In this book, we consider a spectrum of manifestations, functions, and consequences of globalization in areas like the economy, culture, and the environment.

Growing contacts between people and cultures have made us increasingly aware of social diversity as a feature of modern societies. Social diversity is the social and cultural mixture of different groups in society and the societal recognition of difference as significant. The spread of culture through the globalization of media and the rise of migration has created a world in which virtually no place is isolated. As a result, many nations today, including the United States, are characterized by a high degree of social diversity.

Social diversity brings a unique set of sociological challenges. People everywhere have a tendency toward ethnocentrism, a worldview whereby they judge other cultures by the standards of their own culture and regard their own way of life as “normal”—and often superior to others. From a sociological perspective, no group can be said to be more human than any other. Yet history abounds with examples of people lashing out at others whose religion, language, customs, race, or sexual orientation differed from their own.

WHY STUDY SOCIOLOGY?

A sociological perspective highlights the many ways that we both influence and are powerfully influenced by the social world around us: Society shapes us, and we, in turn, shape society. A sociological perspective enables us to see the social world through a variety of different lenses (recall the glasses metaphor we used when talking about theory): Sociologists might explain class differences and why they persist, for instance, in many different ways. Different theories illuminate different aspects of a sociological phenomenon or institution, enabling us to assemble a fuller, more rigorous perspective on social life.

GLOBALIZATION: The process by which people all over the planet become increasingly interconnected economically, politically, culturally, and environmentally.

SOCIAL DIVERSITY: The social and cultural mixture of different groups in society and the societal recognition of difference as significant.

ETHNOCENTRISM: A worldview whereby one judges other cultures by the standards of one’s own culture and regards one’s own way of life as “normal” and better than others.
Capturing the World in 140 Characters

What is Twitter? Just over a decade ago, no such question could have been asked. To twitter meant only to chatter (or to impart a “short burst of inconsequential information; Johnson, 2013), and tweeting was for the birds. Today, the social media platform Twitter is a significant and ubiquitous form of communication utilized by social activists, politicians, celebrities and fans, the news media, sports teams, advertisers, and friend groups. Social media reaches across the globe: According to a recent analysis, of the world’s 7.3 million inhabitants, about 3.4 billion are Internet users and 2.3 billion are “active social media users.” Both figures rose by 10% in the last year alone and are expected to grow (Chaffey, 2016). The rise of users in the United States has been dramatic. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2005, about 7% of the U. S. population used social media. Just a decade later, it is 65% (Perrin, 2015). Globally, Twitter is the third most popular social media platform on the planet (Figure 1.5), finding its most avid users in Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, and the Philippines (Chaffey, 2015).

The Twitter social media site (https://about.twitter.com/company) was created by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone. On March 21, 2006, Jack Dorsey (@Jack) sent out the first tweet. It said, “just setting up my twttr.” Today, Twitter has over 310 million “monthly active users,” tweeting in over 40 languages. A company that had eight employees in 2008 has grown to 3,800 worldwide. At this point, then, we can return to our opening question: What is Twitter? Novelist David Foster Wallace has been quoted as saying that Twitter is “the bathroom wall of the American psyche.” The magazine The New Yorker responded to Wallace’s characterization by asking its readers to use their own tweets to define Twitter. Among their entries:

- “Alone Together” (@dnahinga)
- “Communicative disease” (@Wodespain)
- “the carrier pigeon of the 21st century” (@Rajiv_Narayan)
- “Twitter is the dimestore in the marketplace of ideas” (@anglescott)
- “an infinite orchestra hall, where everyone has a kazoo solo anytime they want for 140 seconds” (@Shan19the6man6).

(“Questioningly Winner,” 2012)

Are you a Twitter user or follower? How would you define it in 140 characters or less?

From a sociological perspective, the key question that follows is this: What is the sociological significance of Twitter? The social media platform has been credited with contributing to scientific and medical knowledge, as well as investment wisdom. Social Media Today points out that the U.S. Geological Survey has used tweets to track earthquakes: “. . . the USGS had found that by tracking mentions of the term ‘earthquake’, within specific parameters which they’d defined, they could better track seismic activity across the globe than they’d been able to via their previous measurement...
Why are the issues and questions posed by sociology incredibly compelling for all of us to understand? One reason is that, as we will see throughout this book, many of the social issues sociologists study—marriage, fertility, poverty, unemployment, consumption, discrimination, and many others—are related to one another in ways we may not immediately see. A sociological perspective helps us to make connections between diverse social phenomena. When we understand these connections, we are better able to understand social issues, to address social problems, and to make (or vote for) policy choices that benefit society.

For example, a phenomenon like the decline of marriage among the working class, which we mentioned at the start of the chapter, is related to growing globalization, declining employment in the manufacturing sector, and the persistently high rate of poverty among single mothers. Consider these social phenomena as pieces of a puzzle. One of the defining characteristics of economic globalization is the movement of manufacturing industries away from the United States to lower-wage countries. As a result, jobs in U.S. manufacturing, an economic sector dominated by men, have been declining since the 1970s. The decreasing number of less educated men able to earn a wage high enough to support a family in turn is related to a decline in marriage among the working class. Even as marriage rates fall, however, many women still desire to have families, so the proportion of nonmarital births rises. Single mothers with children are among the demographic groups in the United States most likely to be poor, and their poverty rate has remained relatively high even in periods of economic prosperity.

While the relationships between sociological factors are complex and sometimes indirect, when sociology helps us fit them together, we gain a better picture of the issues confronting all of us—as well as U.S. society and the larger world. Let’s begin our journey.
WHAT CAN I DO WITH A SOCIOLOGY DEGREE?

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH SKILLS

Sociologists use quantitative research skills to conduct systematic empirical investigations of social phenomena using statistical methods. Quantitative research comprises those studies in which data are expressed in terms of numbers. The objective of quantitative research in sociology is to gather rigorous data and to use those numerical data to characterize the dimensions of an issue or the extent of a problem (this could include, for instance, the collection of statistical data on rates of obesity and poverty in neighborhoods or states and the calculation of the correlation of the two phenomena) and, often, to use those data to develop or test hypotheses about the roots of the problem at hand. Knowledge of quantitative methods is a valuable skill in today’s job market. Learning quantitative methods of research, which is an important part of a sociological education, prepares you to do a wide variety of job tasks, including survey development, questionnaire design, market research, brand health tracking, and financial quantitative modeling and analysis.

AMBER HENDERSON, SURVEY STATISTICIAN, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

The George Washington University, MA in Sociology

I work in the Center for Survey Measurement as a statistician at the U.S. Census Bureau. The goal of the Census Bureau is to provide timely, accurate, and quality data while minimizing the various sources of survey error. When fielding a survey, it must go through all of the phases of what we call the survey life cycle. This includes tasks such as project planning, data collection, data analyses, and reporting. During my first year at Census, I used statistical software packages to manipulate, edit, and analyze data for surveys on education. Statistical software is a valuable tool for those who work with data. I used it frequently to run basic descriptive statistics and to check the data for error. For example, if a respondent gave a date of birth that indicated they were 12 years of age and listed his or her marital status as “married,” I would flag these data points for potential inconsistencies.

In my current role at Census, I do a lot more survey research where I specialize in structured cognitive interviewing and develop survey questions. The core sociology courses I took both during undergraduate and graduate school prepared me for my career at Census. I use a lot of what I learned in my courses on sociological research methods and data analysis to choose the best research method and work effectively and accurately with the Census Bureau’s survey data. People often look puzzled when they learn you want to study sociology, but what they do not realize is that it’s a multidimensional field. Sociology and my professors taught me both the qualitative and quantitative skills I needed to land my dream job. I wouldn’t change a thing!

Career Data: Statistician

- 2015 Median Pay: $80,110
- Typical Entry-Level Education: Master’s degree
- Projected Job Growth by 2024: 34% (Much faster than average)

SUMMARY

- **Sociology** is the scientific study of human social relationships, groups, and societies. Its central task is to ask what the dimensions of the social world are, how they influence our behavior, and how we in turn shape and change them.

- Sociology adheres to the principle of **social embeddedness**, the idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relationships. Sociologists seek to study through scientific means the social worlds that human beings consciously create.

- The **sociological imagination** is the ability to grasp the relationship between our individual lives and the larger social forces that help to shape them. It helps us see the connections between our private lives and public issues.

- **Critical thinking** is the ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence. Often we accept things as true because they are familiar, seem to mesh with our own experiences, and sound right. Critical thinking instead asks us to recognize poor arguments, reject statements not supported by evidence, and even question our own assumptions.

- Sociology’s roots can be traced to the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, industrialization and the birth of modern capitalism, and the urbanization of populations. Sociology emerged in part as a tool to enable people to understand dramatic changes taking place in modern societies.

- Sociology generally traces its classical roots to Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. Early work in sociology reflected the concerns of the men who founded the discipline.

- In the United States, scholars at the University of Chicago focused on reforming social problems stemming from industrialization and urbanization. Women and people of color worked on the margins of the discipline because of persistent discrimination.

- Sociologists base their study of the social world on different theoretical perspectives that shape theory and guide research, often resulting in different conclusions. The major sociological paradigms are **structural functionalism**, the **social conflict paradigm**, and **symbolic interactionism**.

- Major themes in sociology include the distribution of **power** and growing inequality, **globalization** and its accompanying social changes, the growth of **social diversity**, and the way advances in if have changed communication, commerce, and communities.

- The early founders of sociology believed that scientific knowledge could lead to shared social progress. Some modern sociologists question whether such shared scientific understanding is indeed possible.

**KEY TERMS**

- **scientific**, 13
- **sociology**, 3
- **social embeddedness**, 3
- **sociological imagination**, 3
- **agency**, 4
- **structure**, 5
- **critical thinking**, 6
- **norms**, 10
- **anomie**, 10
- **social statics**, 10
- **social dynamics**, 10
- **positivist**, 10
- **social facts**, 11
- **social solidarity**, 12
- **collective conscience**, 12
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- **means of production**, 13
- **Verstehen**, 13
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- **manifest functions**, 18
- **latent functions**, 18
- **power**, 20
- **inequality**, 22
- **globalization**, 24
- **social diversity**, 24
- **ethnocentrism**, 24
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about Mills’s concept of the sociological imagination and its ambition to draw together what Mills called private troubles and public issues. Think of a private trouble that sociologists might classify as also being a public issue. Share your example with your classmates.

2. What is critical thinking? What does it mean to be a critical thinker in our approach to understanding society and social issues or problems?

3. In the chapter, we asked why women’s voices were marginal in early sociological thought. What factors explain the dearth of women’s voices? What about the lack of minority voices? What effects do you think these factors may have had on the development of the discipline?

4. What is theory? What is its function in the discipline of sociology?

5. Recall the three key theoretical paradigms discussed in this chapter—structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Discuss the ways these diverse “glasses” analyze deviance, its labeling, and its punishment in society. Try applying a similar analysis to another social phenomenon, such as class inequality or traditional gender roles.

SAGE News Clips, available in the interactive eBook, showcase real life examples to reinforce sociological concepts.

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