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# Fuller's Introduction to Sociology

**Collection Editor:**

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# Fuller's Introduction to Sociology

**Collection Editor:**

Abigail Fuller

**Author:**

OpenStax College

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**C O N N E X I O N S**

**Rice University, Houston, Texas**



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# Preface<sup>1</sup>

## About OpenStax College

OpenStax College is a non-profit organization committed to improving student access to quality learning materials. Our free textbooks are developed and peer-reviewed by educators to ensure they are readable, accurate, and meet the scope and sequence requirements of modern college courses. Unlike traditional textbooks, OpenStax College resources live online and are owned by the community of educators using them. Through our partnerships with companies and foundations committed to reducing costs for students, OpenStax College is working to improve access to higher education for all. OpenStax College is an initiative of Rice University and is made possible through the generous support of several philanthropic foundations.

## About This Book

Welcome to *Introduction to Sociology*, an OpenStax College resource created with several goals in mind: accessibility, affordability, customization, and student engagement—all while encouraging learners toward high levels of learning. Instructors and students alike will find that this textbook offers a strong foundation in sociology. It is available for free online and in low-cost print and e-book editions.

To broaden access and encourage community curation, *Introduction to Sociology* is “open source” licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Everyone is invited to submit examples, emerging research, and other feedback to enhance and strengthen the material and keep it current and relevant for today’s students. You can make suggestions by contacting us at [info@openstaxcollege.org](mailto:info@openstaxcollege.org). You can find the status of the project, as well as alternate versions, corrections, etc., on the StaxDash at <http://openstaxcollege.org><sup>2</sup>.

## To the Student

This book is written for you and is based on the teaching and research experience of numerous sociologists. In today’s global socially networked world, the topic of Sociology is more relevant than ever before. We hope that through this book, you will learn how simple, everyday human actions and interactions can change the world. In this book, you will find applications of Sociology concepts that are relevant, current, and balanced.

## To the Instructor

This text is intended for a one-semester introductory course. Since current events influence our social perspectives and the field of Sociology in general, OpenStax College encourages instructors to keep this book fresh by sending in your up-to-date examples to [info@openstaxcollege.org](mailto:info@openstaxcollege.org) so that students and instructors around the country can relate and engage in fruitful discussions.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43493/1.5/>>.

<sup>2</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org>

## General Approach

*Introduction to Sociology* adheres to the scope and sequence of a typical introductory sociology course. In addition to comprehensive coverage of core concepts, foundational scholars, and emerging theories, we have incorporated section reviews with engaging questions, discussions that help students apply the sociological imagination, and features that draw learners into the discipline in meaningful ways. Although this text can be modified and reorganized to suit your needs, the standard version is organized so that topics are introduced conceptually, with relevant, everyday experiences.

## Features of OpenStax *Introduction to Sociology*

The following briefly describes the special features of this text.

### Modularity

This textbook is organized on Connexions (<http://cnx.org><sup>3</sup>) as a collection of modules that can be rearranged and modified to suit the needs of a particular professor or class. That being said, modules often contain references to content in other modules, as most topics in sociology cannot be discussed in isolation.

### Learning Objectives

Every module begins with a set of clear and concise learning objectives. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign, and to guide the student with respect to what he or she can expect to learn. After completing the module and end-of-module exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

### Key Features

The following features show students the dynamic nature of Sociology:

- **Sociological Research:** Highlights specific current and relevant research studies. Examples include “Is Music a Cultural Universal?” and “Deceptive Divorce Rates.”
- **Sociology in the Real World:** Ties chapter content to student life and discusses sociology in terms of the everyday. Topics include “Secrets of the McJob” and “Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?”
- **Big Picture:** Features present sociological concepts at a national or international level, including “Education in Afghanistan” and “American Indian Tribes and Environmental Racism.”
- **Case Study:** Describes real-life people whose experiences relate to chapter content, such as “Catherine Middleton: The Commoner Who Would Be Queen.”
- **Social Policy and Debate:** Discusses political issues that relate to chapter content, such as “The Legalese of Sex and Gender” and “Is the U.S. Bilingual?”

### Section Summaries

Section summaries distill the information in each section for both students and instructors down to key, concise points addressed in the section.

### Key Terms

Key terms are bold and are followed by a definition in context. Definitions of key terms are also listed in the Glossary, which appears at the end of the module online and at the end of the chapter in print.

---

<sup>3</sup><http://cnx.org>

## Section Quizzes

Section quizzes provide opportunities to apply and test the information students learn throughout each section. Both multiple-choice and short-response questions feature a variety of question types and range of difficulty.

## Further Research

This feature helps students further explore the section topic and offers related research topics that could be explored.

## Acknowledgements

*Introduction to Sociology* is based on the work of numerous professors, writers, editors, and reviewers who are able to bring topics to students in the most engaging way.

We would like to thank all those listed below as well as many others who have contributed their time and energy to review and provide feedback on the manuscript. Their input has been critical in maintaining the pedagogical integrity and accuracy of the text.

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## Supplements

Accompanying the main text is an Instructor's PowerPoint<sup>4</sup> file, which includes all of the images and captions found throughout the text and an Instructor's test bank.

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<sup>4</sup><https://openstaxcollege.org/textbooks/introduction-to-sociology>

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Sociology

### 1.1 Introduction to Sociology<sup>1</sup>

---



**Figure 1.1:** Sociologists study how society affects people and how people affect society. (Photo courtesy of Chrissy Polcino/flickr)

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Concerts, sports games, and political rallies can have very large crowds. When you attend one of these events, you may know only the people you came with. Yet you may experience a feeling of connection to the group. You are one of the crowd. You cheer and applaud when everyone else does. You boo and yell

---

<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42980/1.2/>>.



alongside them. You move out of the way when someone needs to get by, and you say "excuse me" when you need to leave. You know how to behave in this kind of crowd.

It can be a very different experience if you are traveling in a foreign country and find yourself in a crowd moving down the street. You may have trouble figuring out what is happening. Is the crowd just the usual morning rush, or is it a political protest of some kind? Perhaps there was some sort of accident or disaster. Is it safe in this crowd, or should you try to extract yourself? How can you find out what is going on? Although you are *in* it, you may not feel like you are *part* of this crowd. You may not know what to do or how to behave.

Even within one type of crowd, different groups exist and different behaviors are on display. At a rock concert, for example, some may enjoy singing along, others prefer to sit and observe, while still others may join in a mosh pit or try crowd surfing. Why do we feel and act differently in different types of social situations? Why might people of a single group exhibit different behaviors in the same situation? Why might people acting similarly not feel connected to others exhibiting the same behavior? These are some of the many questions sociologists ask as they study people and societies.

## 1.2 What Is Sociology?<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1.2:** Sociologists learn about society as a whole while studying one-to-one and group interactions. (Photo courtesy of Robert S. Donovan/flickr)

A dictionary defines **sociology** as the systematic study of society and social interaction. The word “sociology” is derived from the Latin word *socius* (companion) and the Greek word *logos* (study of), meaning “the study of companionship.” While this is a starting point for the discipline, sociology is actually much more complex.

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42789/1.3/>>.

It uses many different methods to study a wide range of subject matter and to apply these studies to the real world.

### 1.2.1 What Are Society and Culture?

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. A society is a group of people whose members interact, reside in a definable area, and share a culture. A culture includes the group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. One sociologist might analyze video of people from different societies as they carry on everyday conversations to study the rules of polite conversation from different world cultures. Another sociologist might interview a representative sample of people to see how texting has changed the way they communicate. Yet another sociologist might study how migration determined the way in which language spread and changed over time. A fourth sociologist might be part of a team developing signs to warn people living thousands of years in the future, and speaking many different languages, to stay away from still-dangerous nuclear waste.

### 1.2.2 The Sociological Imagination

Although these studies and the methods of carrying them out are different, the sociologists involved in them all have something in common. Each of them looks at society using what pioneer sociologist C. Wright Mills called the sociological imagination, sometimes also referred to as the sociological lens or sociological perspective. Mills defined **sociological imagination** as how individuals understand their own and others' pasts in relation to history and social structure (1959).

By looking at individuals and societies and how they interact through this lens, sociologists are able to examine what influences behavior, attitudes, and culture. By applying systematic and scientific methods to this process, they try to do so without letting their own biases and pre-conceived ideas influence their conclusions.

#### 1.2.2.1 Studying Patterns: How Sociologists View Society

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

The recent turmoil in the U.S. housing market and the high rate of foreclosures offer an example of how a sociologist might explore social patterns. Owning a home has long been considered an essential part of the American Dream. People often work for years to save for a down payment on what will be the largest investment they ever make. The monthly mortgage is often a person's largest budget item. Missing one or more mortgage payments can result in serious consequences. The lender may foreclose on the mortgage and repossess the property. People may lose their homes and may not be able to borrow money in the future. Walking away from the responsibility to pay debts is not a choice most people make easily.

About three million homes were repossessed in the United States between 2006 and 2011. Experts predict the number could double by 2013 (Levy and Gop 2011). This is a much higher rate than the historical average. What social factors are contributing to this situation, and where might sociologists find patterns? Do Americans view debt, including mortgages, differently than in the past? What role do unemployment rates play? Might a shift in class structure be an influential factor? What about the way major economic players operate?

To answer these questions, sociologists will look beyond individual foreclosures at national trends. They will see that in recent years unemployment has been at record highs. They will observe that many lenders approved subprime mortgages with adjustable rates that started low and ballooned. They may look into whether unemployment and lending practices were different for members of different social classes, races, or genders. By analyzing the impact of these external conditions on individuals' choices, sociologists can better explain why people make the decisions they do.



**Figure 1.3:** Risky bank loans, falling housing prices, and high unemployment can result in higher foreclosure rates. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Turner/flickr)

Another example of how society influences individual decisions can be seen in people's opinions about and use of food stamps (also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP benefits). Some people believe that those who receive food stamps are lazy and unmotivated. Statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture show a complex picture.

#### Food Stamp Use by State

Percent Eligible by Reason for Eligibility					
	Living in Waiver Area	Have Not Exceeded Time Limits <sup>a</sup>	In E & T Program	Received Exemption	Total Percent Eligible for the FSP <sup>a</sup>
<i>continued on next page</i>					

Alabama	29	62 / 72	0	1	73 / 80
Alaska	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
California	6	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74
District of Columbia	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
Florida	48	62 / 72	0	0	80 / 85
Mississippi	39	62 / 72	0	3	100
Wyoming	7	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74

**Table 1.1:** Sociologists examine social conditions in different states to explain differences in the number of people receiving food stamps. (Table courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture)

The percentage of the population receiving food stamps is much higher in certain states than in others. Does this mean, if the stereotype above were applied, that people in some states are lazier and less motivated than those in other states? Sociologists study the economies in each state—comparing unemployment rates, food, energy costs, and other factors—to explain differences in social issues like this.

To identify social trends, sociologists also study how people use food stamps and how people react to their use. Research has found that for many people from all classes, there is a strong stigma attached to the use of food stamps. This stigma can prevent people who qualify for this type of assistance from using food stamps. According to Hanson and Gundersen (2002), how strongly this stigma is felt is linked to the general economic climate. This illustrates how sociologists observe a pattern in society.

Sociologists identify and study patterns related to all kinds of contemporary social issues. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the emergence of the Tea Party as a political faction, how Twitter has influenced everyday communication—these are all examples of topics that sociologists might explore.

### 1.2.2.2 Studying Part and Whole: How Sociologists View Social Structures

A key basis of the sociological perspective is the concept that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior **figuration**. He described it through a metaphor of dancing. There can be no dance without the dancers, but there can be no dancers without the dance. Without the dancers, a dance is just an idea about motions in a choreographer’s head. Without a dance, there is just a group of people moving around a floor. Similarly, there is no society without the individuals that make it up, and there are also no individuals who are not affected by the society in which they live (Elias 1978).

An application that makes this concept understandable is the practice of religion. While people experience their religion in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context. For instance, an individual’s religious practice may be influenced by what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience.

: When sociologist Nathan Kierns spoke to his friend Ashley (a pseudonym) about the move she and her partner had made from an urban center to a small Midwestern town, he was curious how the social pressures placed on a lesbian couple differed from one community to the other. Ashley said that in the city they had been accustomed to getting looks and hearing comments when she and her partner walked hand in hand. Otherwise, she felt that they were at least being tolerated. There had been little to no outright discrimination.

Things changed when they moved to the small town for her partner’s job. For the first time, Ashley found herself experiencing direct discrimination because of her sexual orientation. Some of it was

particularly hurtful. Landlords would not rent to them. Ashley, who is a highly trained professional, had a great deal of difficulty finding a new job.

When Nathan asked Ashley if she and her partner became discouraged or bitter about this new situation, Ashley said that rather than letting it get to them, they decided to do something about it. Ashley approached groups at a local college and several churches in the area. Together they decided to form the town's first gay-straight alliance.

The alliance has worked successfully to educate their community about same-sex couples. It also worked to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination Ashley and her partner experienced in the town and how those could be eliminated. The alliance has become a strong advocacy group, working to attain equal rights for LGBT individuals.

Kierns observed that this is an excellent example of how negative social forces can result in a positive response from individuals to bring about social change (Kierns 2011).

### 1.2.3 Summary

Sociology is the systematic study of society and social interaction. In order to carry out their studies, sociologists identify cultural patterns and social forces and determine how they affect individuals and groups. They also develop ways to apply their findings to the real world.

### 1.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 1.2.1

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

Which of the following best describes sociology as a subject?

- a. The study of individual behavior
- b. The study of cultures
- c. The study of society and social interaction
- d. The study of economics

#### Exercise 1.2.2

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

C. Wright Mills once said that sociologists need to develop a sociological \_\_\_\_\_ to study how society affects individuals.

- a. culture
- b. imagination
- c. method
- d. tool

#### Exercise 1.2.3

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

A sociologist defines society as a group of people who reside in a defined area, share a culture, and who:

- a. interact
- b. work in the same industry
- c. speak different languages
- d. practice a recognized religion

#### Exercise 1.2.4

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

Seeing patterns means that a sociologist needs to be able to:

- a. compare the behavior of individuals from different societies

- b. compare one society to another
- c. identify similarities in how social groups respond to social pressure
- d. compare individuals to groups

### 1.2.5 Short Answer

#### Exercise 1.2.5

What do you think C. Wright Mills meant when he said that to be a sociologist, one had to develop a sociological imagination?

#### Exercise 1.2.6

Describe a situation in which a choice you made was influenced by societal pressures.

### 1.2.6 Further Research

Sociology is a broad discipline. Different kinds of sociologists employ various methods for exploring the relationship between individuals and society. Check out more about sociology at <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/what-is-sociology><sup>3</sup>.

### 1.2.7 References

Elias, Norbert. 1978. *What Is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

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<sup>3</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/what-is-sociology>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr26/fanrr26-7/fanrr26-7.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-13/u-s-foreclosure-filings-may-jump-20-this-year-as-crisis-peaks.html>

### 1.3 Theoretical Perspectives<sup>6</sup>

---



**Figure 1.4:** Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest rallies. (Photo courtesy of voanews.com/Wikimedia Commons)

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Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns. They then develop theories to explain why these occur and what can result from them. In sociology, a **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create testable propositions about society (Allan 2006).

For example, early in the development of sociology, Émile Durkheim was interested in explaining the social phenomenon of suicide. He gathered data on large groups of people in Europe who had ended their lives. When he analyzed the data, he found that suicide rates differed among groups with different religious affiliations. For example, the data showed that Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics.

To explain this, Durkheim developed the concept of social solidarity. **Social solidarity** described the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, or religion. Durkheim combined these concepts with the data he analyzed to propose a theory that explained the religion-based differences in suicide rates. He suggested that differences in social solidarity between the two groups corresponded to the differences in suicide rates.

Although some have disagreed with his methods and his conclusions, Durkheim's work shows the importance of theory in sociology. Proposing theories supported by data gives sociologists a way to explain social patterns and to posit cause-and-effect relationships in social situations.

Theories vary in scope depending on the scale of the issues they are meant to explain. **Grand theories**, also described as **macro-level**, are attempts to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change. These theories tend to be abstract and can be difficult if not impossible to test empirically. **Micro-level theories** are at the other end of the scale and

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<sup>6</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42792/1.7/>>.

cover very specific relationships between individuals or small groups. They are dependent on their context and are more concrete. This means they are more scientifically testable.

An example of a micro-theory would be a theory to explain why middle-class teenage girls text to communicate instead of making telephone calls. A sociologist might develop a hypothesis that the reason they do this is because they think texting is silent and therefore more private. A sociologist might then conduct interviews or design a survey to test this hypothesis. If there is enough supportive data, a hypothesis can become a theory.

Sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Classic sociological theories are still considered important and current, but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them (Calhoun 2002).

In sociology, a few theories provide broad perspectives that help to explain many different aspects of social life. These theories are so prominent that many consider them paradigms. **Paradigms** are philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them. Three of these paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking because they provide useful explanations: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

**Sociological Theories or Perspectives**

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Structural Functionalism	Macro or mid	How each part of society functions together to contribute to the whole
Conflict Theory	Macro	How inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	One-to-one interactions and communications

**Table 1.2:** Different sociological perspectives enable sociologists to view social issues through a variety of useful lenses.

### 1.3.1 Functionalism

**Functionalism**, also called structural functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals who make up that society. It is the oldest of the main theories of sociology. In fact, its origins began before sociology emerged as a formal discipline. It grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) who likened society to a human body. He argued that just as the various organs in the body work together to keep the entire system functioning and regulated, the various parts of society work together to keep the entire society functioning and regulated (Spencer 1898). By parts of society, Spencer was referring to such social institutions as the economy, political systems, healthcare, education, media, and religion. Spencer continued the analogy by pointing out that societies evolve just as the bodies of humans and other animals do (Maryanski and Turner 1992).

One of the founders of sociology, Emile Durkheim, applied Spencer's analogy to explain the structure of societies and how they change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that earlier, more primitive societies were held together because most people performed similar tasks and shared values, language, and symbols. They exchanged goods and services in similar ways. Modern societies, according to Durkheim, were more complex. People served many different functions in society and their ability to carry out their function depended upon others being able to carry out theirs. Durkheim's theory sees society as a complex system of interrelated parts, working together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893). According to this



sociological viewpoint, the parts of society are interdependent. This means each part influences the others. In a healthy society, all of these parts work together to produce a stable state called **dynamic equilibrium** (Parsons 1961).

Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. **Social facts** are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

The English sociologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) shared Comte's and Durkheim's views. He believed that how these functions worked together to maintain a stable society was controlled by laws that could be discovered through systematic comparison (Broce 1973). Like Durkheim, he argued that explanations of social interactions had to be made at the social level and not involve the wants and needs of individuals (Goldschmidt 1996). He defined the **function** of any recurrent activity as the part it plays in the social life as a whole, and thereby, the contribution it makes to structural continuity (Radcliffe-Brown 1952).

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. **Manifest functions** are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while **latent functions** are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called **dysfunctions**. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

### 1.3.1.1 Criticism

Structural-functionalism was the sociological paradigm that prevailed between World War II and the Vietnam War. Its influence declined in the 1960s and 1970s because many sociologists believed that it could not adequately explain the many rapid social changes taking place at the time. Many sociologists now believe that structural functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve as useful purpose in many mid-range analyses.

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**Figure 1.5:** Some sociologists see the online world contributing to the creation of an emerging global culture. Are you a part of any global communities? (Photo courtesy of quasireversible/flickr)

Sociologists around the world are looking closely for signs of what would be an unprecedented event: the emergence of a global culture. In the past, empires such as those that existed in China, Europe, Africa, and Central and South America linked people from many different countries, but those people rarely became part of a common culture. They lived too far from each other, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and traded few goods. Today, increases in communication, travel, and trade have made the world a much smaller place. More and more people are able to communicate with each other instantly—wherever they are located—by telephone, video, and text. They share movies, television shows, music, games, and information over the internet. Students can study with teachers and pupils from the other side of the globe. Governments find it harder to hide conditions inside their countries from the rest of the world.

Sociologists are researching many different aspects of this potential global culture. Some are exploring the dynamics involved in the social interactions of global online communities, such as when members feel a closer kinship to other group members than to people residing in their own country. Other sociologists are studying the impact this growing international culture has on smaller, less-powerful local cultures. Yet other researchers are exploring how international markets and the outsourcing of labor impact social inequalities. Sociology can play a key role in people's ability to understand the nature of this emerging global culture and how to respond to it.

### 1.3.2 Conflict Theory

Another theory with a macro-level view, called **conflict theory**, looks at society as a competition for limited resources. Conflict theory sees society as being made up of individuals who must compete for social, political,

and material resources such as political power, leisure time, money, housing, and entertainment. Social structures and organizations such as religious groups, governments, and corporations reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others. These "winners" use their power and influence to maintain their positions of power in society and to suppress the advancement of other individuals and groups. Of the early founders of sociology, Karl Marx is most closely identified with this theory. He focused on the economic conflict between different social classes. As he and Fredrick Engels famously described in their *Communist Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed" (1848).

Developing on this foundation, Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) expanded on Marx's ideas to develop his own version of conflict theory, adding his knowledge about how civilizations evolve. In *Outlines of Sociology* (1884), he argues that war and conquest are the basis on which civilizations have been shaped. He believed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving 2007).

The German sociologist Max Weber agreed with Marx that the economic inequalities of the capitalist system were a source of widespread conflict. However, he disagreed that the conflict must lead to revolution and the collapse of capitalism. Weber theorized that there was more than one cause for conflict: besides economics, inequalities could exist over political power and social status. The level of inequalities could also be different for different groups based on education, race, or gender. As long as these conflicts remained separate, the system as a whole was not threatened.

Weber also identified several factors that moderated people's reaction to inequality. If the authority of the people in power was considered legitimate by those over whom they had power, then conflicts were less intense. Other moderating factors were high rates of social mobility and low rates of class difference.

Another German sociologist, Georg Simmel (1858–1918), wrote that conflict can in fact help integrate and stabilize a society. Like Weber, Simmel said that the nature of social conflict was highly variable. The intensity and violence of the conflict depended upon the emotional involvement of the different sides, the degree of solidarity among the opposing groups, and if there were clear and limited goals to be achieved. Simmel also said that frequent smaller conflicts would be less violent than a few large conflicts.

Simmel also studied how conflict changes the parties involved. He showed that groups work to increase their internal solidarity, centralize power, reduce dissent, and become less tolerant of those not in the group during conflict. Resolving conflicts can release tension and hostility and pave the way for future agreements.

More recently, conflict theory has been used to explain inequalities between groups based on gender or race. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) was a leader in the field of feminist conflict theory. Her books *Masculine/Feminine or Human* (1974), *Feminist Sociology* (1988), and *Gender Equity* (1990) and other studies Dr. Chafetz uses conflict theory to present a set of models to explain the forces maintaining a system of gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed. She argues that two types of forces sustain a system of gender inequality. One type of force is coercive and is based on the advantages men have in finding, keeping, and advancing in positions within the workforce. The other depends on the voluntary choices individuals make based on the gender roles that have been passed down through their families. Chafetz argues that the system can be changed through changes in the number and types of jobs available to increasingly large numbers of well-educated women entering the workforce (Turner 2003).

### 1.3.2.1 Criticism

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

: The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence, yet it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation's food system is

at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study.

A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might be interested in the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another examination might study the different functions that occur in food production: from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might be interested in the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary *Food Inc.* depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in micro-level topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also study the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

### 1.3.3 Symbolic Interactionist Theory

**Symbolic Interactionism** provides a theoretical perspective that helps scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society. This perspective is centered on the notion that communication—or the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is how people make sense of their social worlds. As pointed out by Herman and Reynolds (1994), this viewpoint sees people as active in shaping their world, rather than as entities who are acted upon by society (Herman and Reynolds 1994). This approach looks at society and people from a micro-level perspective.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, though he never published his work on it (LaRossa & Reitzes 1993). It was up to his student Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) to interpret Mead's work and popularize the theory. Blumer coined the term “symbolic interactionism” and identified its three basic premises:

1. Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (Blumer 1969).

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982) to develop a technique called **dramaturgical analysis**. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural “scripts.” Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

### 1.3.3.1 Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

### 1.3.4 Summary

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those patterns. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

### 1.3.5 Section Quiz

**Exercise 1.3.1***(Solution on p. 24.)*

Which of these theories is most likely to look at the social world on a micro level?

- a. Structural functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Positivism
- d. Symbolic interactionism

**Exercise 1.3.2***(Solution on p. 24.)*

Who believed that the history of society was one of class struggle?

- a. Emile Durkheim
- b. Karl Marx
- c. Erving Goffmann
- d. George Herbert Mead

**Exercise 1.3.3***(Solution on p. 24.)*

Who coined the phrase symbolic interactionism?

- a. Herbert Blumer
- b. Max Weber
- c. Lester F. Ward
- d. W.I. Thomas

**Exercise 1.3.4***(Solution on p. 24.)*

A symbolic interactionist may compare social interactions to:

- a. behaviors
- b. conflicts
- c. human organs
- d. theatrical roles

**Exercise 1.3.5***(Solution on p. 24.)*

Which research technique would most likely be used by a symbolic interactionist?

- a. Surveys
- b. Participant observation
- c. Quantitative data analysis
- d. None of the above

### 1.3.6 Short Answer

#### Exercise 1.3.6

Which theory do you think better explains how societies operate—structural functionalism or conflict theory? Why?

#### Exercise 1.3.7

Do you think the way people behave in social interactions is more like the behavior of animals or more like actors playing a role in a theatrical production? Why?

### 1.3.7 Further Research

People often think of all conflict as violent, but many conflicts can be resolved nonviolently. To learn more about nonviolent methods of conflict resolution check out the Albert Einstein Institution <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/ae-institution><sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/ae-institution>

## 1.4 Why Study Sociology?<sup>8</sup>

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**Figure 1.6:** The research of sociologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark helped the Supreme Court decide to end “separate but equal” racial segregation in schools in the United States. (Photo courtesy of public domain)

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When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned 21 state laws that allowed blacks and whites to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.” One of the major factors influencing that decision was research conducted by the husband-and-wife team of sociologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their research showed that segregation was harmful to young black schoolchildren, and the Court found that harm to be unconstitutional.

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society, but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental handicaps or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical handicaps, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The prominent sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929–), in his 1963 book *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as “someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way.” He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

*[T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don’t people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly*

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<sup>8</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42958/1.4/>>.

*brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger 1963)*

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

### 1.4.1 Sociology in the Workplace

Employers continue to seek people with what are called “transferable skills.” This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks. Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including:

- *an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies,*
- *the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working,*
- *the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys,*
- *the ability to recognize important differences in people's social, cultural, and economic backgrounds,*
- *skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas,*
- *the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama)*

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

: The phenomenon known as Facebook was designed specifically for students. Whereas earlier generations wrote notes in each other's printed yearbooks at the end of the academic year, modern technology and the internet ushered in dynamic new ways for people to interact socially. Instead of having to meet up on campus, students can call, text, and Skype from their dorm rooms. Instead of a study group gathering weekly in the library, online forums and chat rooms help learners connect. The availability and immediacy of computer technology has forever changed the ways students engage with each other.

Now, after several social networks have vied for primacy, a few have established their place in the market and some have attracted niche audience. While Facebook launched the social networking trend geared toward teens and young adults, now people of all ages are actively “friending” each other. LinkedIn distinguished itself by focusing on professional connections, serving as a virtual world for workplace networking. Newer offshoots like Foursquare help people connect based on the real-world places they frequent, while Twitter has cornered the market on brevity.



These newer modes of social interaction have also spawned harmful consequences, such as cyberbullying and what some call FAD, or Facebook Addiction Disorder. Researchers have also examined other potential negative impacts, such as whether Facebooking lowers a student's GPA, or whether there might be long-term effects of replacing face-to-face interaction with social media.

All of these social networks demonstrate emerging ways that people interact, whether positive or negative. They illustrate how sociological topics are alive and changing today. Social media will most certainly be a developing topic in the study of sociology for decades to come.

### 1.4.2 Summary

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students' lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

### 1.4.3 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 1.4.1

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

Kenneth and Mamie Clark used sociological research to show that segregation was:

- a. beneficial
- b. harmful
- c. illegal
- d. of no importance

#### Exercise 1.4.2

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

Studying Sociology helps people analyze data because they learn:

- a. interview techniques
- b. to apply statistics
- c. to generate theories
- d. all of the above

#### Exercise 1.4.3

*(Solution on p. 24.)*

Berger describes sociologists as concerned with:

- a. monumental moments in people's lives
- b. common everyday life events
- c. both a and b
- d. none of the above

### 1.4.4 Short Answer

#### Exercise 1.4.4

How do you think taking a sociology course might affect your social interactions?

#### Exercise 1.4.5

What sort of career are you interested in? How could studying sociology help you in this career?

### 1.4.5 Further Research

Social communication is rapidly evolving due to ever improving technologies. To learn more about how sociologists study the impact of these changes check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/media><sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/media>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.uah.edu/la/departments/sociology/about-sociology/why-sociology>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 1

to Exercise 1.2.1 (p. 10): Answers

C

to Exercise 1.2.2 (p. 10): Answers

B

to Exercise 1.2.3 (p. 10): Answers

A

to Exercise 1.2.4 (p. 10): Answers

C

to Exercise 1.3.1 (p. 18)

D

Solution to Exercise 1.3.2 (p. 18)

B

to Exercise 1.3.3 (p. 18)

A

to Exercise 1.3.4 (p. 18)

D

to Exercise 1.3.5 (p. 18)

B

to Exercise 1.4.1 (p. 22)

B

to Exercise 1.4.2 (p. 22)

D

to Exercise 1.4.3 (p. 22)

C

## Chapter 2

# Sociological Research

### 2.1 Introduction to Sociological Research<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 2.1:** Concertgoers enjoy a show. What makes listening to live music among a crowd of people appealing? How are the motivations and behaviors of groups of people at concerts different from those of groups in other settings, such as theme parks? These are questions that sociological research can aim to answer. (Photo courtesy of Benjamin Cook/flickr)

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42982/1.4/>>.

In the campus cafeteria, you set your lunch tray down at a table, grab a chair, join a group of your college classmates, and hear the start of two discussions. One person says, “It’s weird how Jimmy Buffett has so many devoted fans.” Another says, “Disney World is packed year-round.” Those two seemingly benign statements are claims, or opinions, based on everyday observation of human behavior. Perhaps the speakers had firsthand experience, talked to experts, conducted online research, or saw news segments on TV.

In response, two conversations erupt.

“I don’t see why anyone would want to go to Disney World and stand in those long lines.”

“Are you kidding?! Going to Disney World is one of my favorite childhood memories.”

“It’s the opposite for me with Jimmy Buffett. After seeing one of his shows, I don’t need to go again.”

“Yet some people make it a lifestyle.”

“A theme park is way different than a concert.”

“But both are places people go for the same thing: a good time.”

“If you call getting lost in a crowd of thousands of strangers fun.”

As your classmates at the lunch table discuss what they know or believe, the two topics converge. The conversation becomes a debate. Someone compares Parrotheads to Packers fans. Someone else compares Disney World to a cruise. Students take sides, agreeing or disagreeing, as the conversation veers to topics such as crowd control, mob mentality, political protests, and group dynamics.

If you contributed your expanding knowledge of sociological research to this conversation, you might make statements like these:

“Jimmy Buffett’s fans long for escapism. Parrotheads join together claiming they want freedom, except they only want a temporary escape.”

And this: “Mickey Mouse is a symbol of America just like the Statue of Liberty. Disney World is a place where families go to celebrate what they see as America.”

You finish lunch, clear away your tray, and hurry to your next class. But you are thinking of Jimmy Buffett and Disney World. You have a new perspective on human behavior and a list of questions that you want answered. That is the purpose of sociological research—to investigate and provide insights into how human societies function. Although claims and opinions are part of sociology, sociologists use **empirical evidence** (that is, evidence corroborated by direct experience and/or observation) combined with the scientific method or an interpretive framework to deliver sound sociological research. They also rely on a theoretical foundation that provides an interpretive perspective through which they can make sense of scientific results.

A truly scientific sociological study of the social situations up for discussion in the cafeteria would involve these prescribed steps: defining a specific question, gathering information and resources through observation, forming a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis in a reproducible manner, analyzing and drawing conclusions from the data, publishing the results, and anticipating further development when future researchers respond to and retest findings. An appropriate starting point in this case might be the question “What do fans of Jimmy Buffett seek that drives them to attend his concerts faithfully?”

As you begin to think like a sociologist, you may notice that you have tapped into your observation skills. You might assume that your observations and insights are valuable and accurate. But the results of casual observation are limited by the fact that there is no standardization—who is to say one person’s observation of an event is any more accurate than another’s? To mediate these concerns, sociologists rely on systematic research processes.

## 2.2 Approaches to Sociological Research<sup>2</sup>

When sociologists apply the sociological perspective and begin to ask questions, no topic is off limits. Every aspect of human behavior is a source of possible investigation. Sociologists question the world that humans have created and live in. They notice patterns of behavior as people move through that world. Using sociological methods and systematic research within the framework of the scientific method and a scholarly interpretive perspective, sociologists have discovered workplace patterns that have transformed industries,

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42796/1.4/>>.

family patterns that have enlightened parents, and education patterns that have aided structural changes in classrooms.

The students at that college cafeteria discussion put forth a few loosely stated opinions. If the human behaviors around those claims were tested systematically, a student could write a report and offer the findings to fellow sociologists and the world in general. The new perspective could help people understand themselves and their neighbors and help people make better decisions about their lives. It might seem strange to use scientific practices to study social trends, but, as we shall see, it's extremely helpful to rely on systematic approaches that research methods provide.

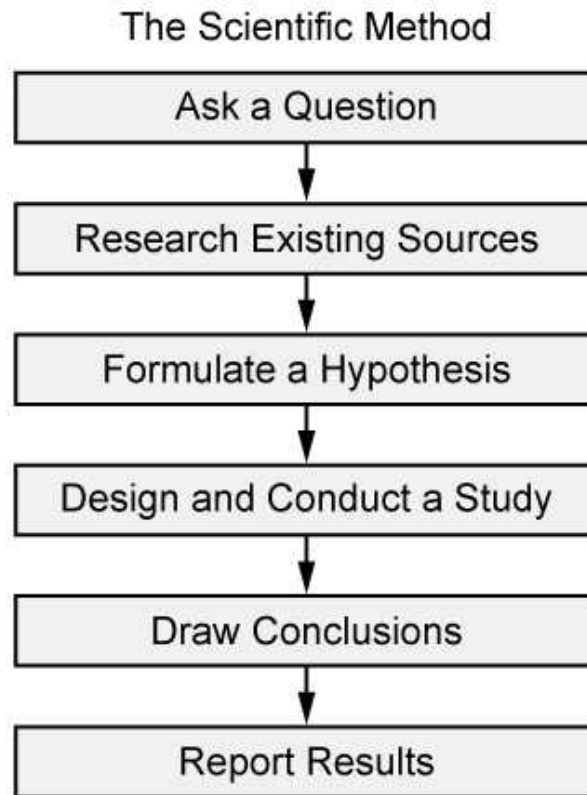
Sociologists often begin the research process by asking a question about how or why things happen in this world. It might be a unique question about a new trend or an old question about a common aspect of life. Once a question is formed, a sociologist proceeds through an in-depth process to answer it. In deciding how to design that process, the researcher may adopt a scientific approach or an interpretive framework. The following sections describe these approaches to knowledge.

### 2.2.1 The Scientific Method

Sociologists make use of tried and true methods of research, such as experiments, surveys, and field research. But humans and their social interactions are so diverse that they can seem impossible to chart or explain. It might seem that science is about discoveries and chemical reactions or about proving ideas right or wrong rather than about exploring the nuances of human behavior.

However, this is exactly why scientific models work for studying human behavior. A scientific process of research establishes parameters that help make sure results are objective and accurate. Scientific methods provide limitations and boundaries that focus a study and organize its results.

The scientific method involves developing and testing theories about the world based on empirical evidence. It is defined by its commitment to systematic observation of the empirical world and strives to be objective, critical, skeptical, and logical. It involves a series of prescribed steps that have been established over centuries of scholarship.



**Figure 2.2:** The scientific method is an essential tool in research.

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But just because sociological studies use scientific methods does not make the results less human. Sociological topics are not reduced to right or wrong facts. In this field, results of studies tend to provide people with access to knowledge they did not have before—knowledge of other cultures, knowledge of rituals and beliefs, knowledge of trends and attitudes. No matter what research approach is used, researchers want to maximize the study’s **reliability** (how likely research results are to be replicated if the study is reproduced). Reliability increases the likelihood that what happens to one person will happen to all people in a group. Researchers also strive for **validity**, which refers to how well the study measures what it was designed to measure. Returning to the Disney World topic, reliability of a study would reflect how well the resulting experience represents the average experience of theme park-goers. Validity would ensure that the study’s design accurately examined what it was designed to study, so an exploration of adults’ interactions with costumed mascots should address that issue and not veer into other age groups’ interactions with them or into adult interactions with staff or other guests.

In general, sociologists tackle questions about the role of social characteristics in outcomes. For example, how do different communities fare in terms of psychological well-being, community cohesiveness, range of vocation, wealth, crime rates, and so on? Are communities functioning smoothly? Sociologists look between the cracks to discover obstacles to meeting basic human needs. They might study environmental influences and patterns of behavior that lead to crime, substance abuse, divorce, poverty, unplanned pregnancies, or illness. And, because sociological studies are not all focused on negative behaviors or challenging situations, researchers might study vacation trends, healthy eating habits, neighborhood organizations, higher education

patterns, games, parks, and exercise habits.

Sociologists can use the scientific method not only to collect but to interpret and analyze the data. They deliberately apply scientific logic and objectivity. They are interested in but not attached to the results. They work outside of their own political or social agenda. This doesn't mean researchers do not have their own personalities, complete with preferences and opinions. But sociologists deliberately use the scientific method to maintain as much objectivity, focus, and consistency as possible in a particular study.

With its systematic approach, the scientific method has proven useful in shaping sociological studies. The scientific method provides a systematic, organized series of steps that help ensure objectivity and consistency in exploring a social problem. They provide the means for accuracy, reliability, and validity. In the end, the scientific method provides a shared basis for discussion and analysis (Merton 1963).

Typically, the scientific method starts with these steps—1) ask a question, 2) research existing sources, 3) formulate a hypothesis—described below.

### 2.2.1.1 Ask a Question

The first step of the scientific method is to ask a question, describe a problem, and identify the specific area of interest. The topic should be narrow enough to study within a geography and timeframe. “Are societies capable of sustained happiness?” would be too vague. The question should also be broad enough to have universal merit. “What do personal hygiene habits reveal about the values of students at XYZ High School?” would be too narrow. That said, happiness and hygiene are worthy topics to study. Sociologists do not rule out any topic, but would strive to frame these questions in better research terms.

That is why sociologists are careful to define their terms. In a hygiene study, for instance, hygiene could be defined as “personal habits to maintain physical appearance (as opposed to health),” and a researcher might ask, “How do differing personal hygiene habits reflect the cultural value placed on appearance?” When forming these basic research questions, sociologists develop an **operational definition**, that is, they define the concept in terms of the physical or concrete steps it takes to objectively measure it. The operational definition identifies an observable condition of the concept. By operationalizing a variable of the concept, all researchers can collect data in a systematic or replicable manner.

The operational definition must be valid, appropriate, and meaningful. And it must be reliable, meaning that results will be close to uniform when tested on more than one person. For example, “good drivers” might be defined in many ways: those who use their turn signals, those who don't speed, or those who courteously allow others to merge. But these driving behaviors could be interpreted differently by different researchers and could be difficult to measure. Alternatively, “a driver who has never received a traffic violation” is a specific description that will lead researchers to obtain the same information, so it is an effective operational definition.

### 2.2.1.2 Research Existing Sources

The next step researchers undertake is to conduct background research through a **literature review**, which is a review of any existing similar or related studies. A visit to the library and a thorough online search will uncover existing research about the topic of study. This step helps researchers gain a broad understanding of work previously conducted on the topic at hand and enables them to position their own research to build on prior knowledge. Researchers—including student researchers—are responsible for correctly citing existing sources they use in a study or that inform their work. While it is fine to borrow previously published material (as long as it enhances a unique viewpoint), it must be referenced properly and never plagiarized.

To study hygiene and its value in a particular society, a researcher might sort through existing research and unearth studies about child-rearing, vanity, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and cultural attitudes toward beauty. It's important to sift through this information and determine what is relevant. Using existing sources educates a researcher and helps refine and improve a study's design.



### 2.2.1.3 Formulate a Hypothesis

A **hypothesis** is an assumption about how two or more variables are related; it makes a conjectural statement about the relationship between those variables. In sociology, the hypothesis will often predict how one form of human behavior influences another. In research, **independent variables** are the *cause* of the change. The **dependent variable** is the *effect*, or thing that is changed.

For example, in a basic study, the researcher would establish one form of human behavior as the independent variable and observe the influence it has on a dependent variable. How does gender (the independent variable) affect rate of income (the dependent variable)? How does one's religion (the independent variable) affect family size (the dependent variable)? How is social class (the dependent variable) affected by level of education (the independent variable)?

**Examples of Dependent and Independent Variables**

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
The greater the availability of affordable housing, the lower the homeless rate.	Affordable Housing	Homeless Rate
The greater the availability of math tutoring, the higher the math grades.	Math Tutoring	Math Grades
The greater the police patrol presence, the safer the neighborhood.	Police Patrol Presence	Safer Neighborhood
The greater the factory lighting, the higher the productivity.	Factory Lighting	Productivity
The greater the amount of observation, the higher the public awareness.	Observation	Public Awareness

**Table 2.1:** Typically, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change in some way.

At this point, a researcher's operational definitions help measure the variables. In a study asking how tutoring improves grades, for instance, one researcher might define "good" grades as a C or better, while another uses a B+ as a starting point for "good." Another operational definition might describe "tutoring" as "one-on-one assistance by an expert in the field, hired by an educational institution." Those definitions set limits and establish cut-off points, ensuring consistency and replicability in a study.

As the chart shows, an independent variable is the one that causes a dependent variable to change. For example, a researcher might hypothesize that teaching children proper hygiene (the independent variable) will boost their sense of self-esteem (the dependent variable). Or rephrased, a child's sense of self-esteem depends, in part, on the quality and availability of hygienic resources.

Of course, this hypothesis can also work the other way around. Perhaps a sociologist believes that increasing a child's sense of self-esteem (the independent variable) will automatically increase or improve habits of hygiene (now the dependent variable). Identifying the independent and dependent variables is very important. As the hygiene example shows, simply identifying two topics, or variables, is not enough: Their prospective relationship must be part of the hypothesis.

Just because a sociologist forms an educated prediction of a study's outcome doesn't mean data contradicting the hypothesis aren't welcome. Sociologists analyze general patterns in response to a study, but they are equally interested in exceptions to patterns. In a study of education, a researcher might predict that high school dropouts have a hard time finding a rewarding career. While it has become at least a cultural assumption that the higher the education, the higher the salary and degree of career happiness, there are

certainly exceptions. People with little education have had stunning careers, and people with advanced degrees have had trouble finding work. A sociologist prepares a hypothesis knowing that results will vary.

Once the preliminary work is done, it's time for the next research steps: designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. These research methods are discussed below.

### 2.2.2 Interpretive Framework

While many sociologists rely on the scientific method as a research approach, others operate from an **interpretive framework**. While systematic, this approach doesn't follow the hypothesis-testing model that seeks to find generalizable results. Instead, an *interpretive framework*, sometimes referred to as an interpretive perspective, seeks to understand social worlds from the point of view of participants, leading to in-depth knowledge.

Interpretive research is generally more descriptive or narrative in its findings. Rather than formulating a hypothesis and method for testing it, an interpretive researcher will develop approaches to explore the topic at hand that may involve lots of direct observation or interaction with subjects. This type of researcher also learns as he or she proceeds, sometimes adjusting the research methods or processes midway to optimize findings as they evolve.

### 2.2.3 Summary

Using the scientific method, a researcher conducts a study in five phases: asking a question, researching existing sources, formulating a hypothesis, conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. The scientific method is useful in that it provides a clear method of organizing a study. Some sociologists conduct research through an interpretive framework rather than employing the scientific method.

Scientific sociological studies often observe relationships between variables. Researchers study how one variable changes another. Prior to conducting a study, researchers are careful to apply operational definitions to their terms and to establish dependent and independent variables.

### 2.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 2.2.1

(Solution on p. 51.)

A measurement is considered \_\_\_\_\_ if it actually measures what it is intended to measure, according to the topic of the study.

- a. reliable
- b. sociological
- c. valid
- d. quantitative

#### Exercise 2.2.2

(Solution on p. 51.)

Sociological studies test relationships in which change in one \_\_\_\_\_ causes change in another.

- a. test subject
- b. behavior
- c. variable
- d. operational definition

#### Exercise 2.2.3

(Solution on p. 51.)

In a study, a group of 10-year-old boys are fed doughnuts every morning for a week and then weighed to see how much weight they gained. Which factor is the dependent variable?

- a. The doughnuts

- b. The boys
- c. The duration of a week
- d. The weight gained

**Exercise 2.2.4***(Solution on p. 51.)*

Which statement provides the best operational definition of “childhood obesity”?

- a. Children who eat unhealthy foods and spend too much time watching television and playing video games
- b. A distressing trend that can lead to health issues including type 2 diabetes and heart disease
- c. Body weight at least 20% higher than a healthy weight for a child of that height
- d. The tendency of children today to weigh more than children of earlier generations

**2.2.5 Short Answer****Exercise 2.2.5**

Write down the first three steps of the scientific method. Think of a broad topic that you are interested in and which would make a good sociological study—for example, ethnic diversity in a college, homecoming rituals, athletic scholarships, or teen driving. Now, take that topic through the first steps of the process. For each step, write a few sentences or a paragraph: 1) Ask a question about the topic. 2) Do some research and write down the titles of some articles or books you’d want to read about the topic. 3) Formulate a hypothesis.

**2.2.6 Further Research**

For a historical perspective on the scientific method in sociology, read “The Elements of Scientific Method in Sociology” by F. Stuart Chapin (1914) in the *American Journal of Sociology*: <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Method-in-Sociology><sup>3</sup>

**2.2.7 References**

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**2.3 Research Methods<sup>4</sup>**

Sociologists examine the world, see a problem or interesting pattern, and set out to study it. They use research methods to design a study—perhaps a detailed, systematic, scientific method for conducting research and obtaining data, or perhaps an ethnographic study utilizing an interpretive framework. Planning the research design is a key step in any sociological study.

When entering a particular social environment, a researcher must be careful. There are times to remain anonymous and times to be overt. There are times to conduct interviews and times to simply observe. Some participants need to be thoroughly informed; others should not know they are being observed. A researcher wouldn’t stroll into a crime-ridden neighborhood at midnight, calling out, “Any gang members around?”

<sup>3</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Method-in-Sociology>

<sup>4</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42960/1.4/>>.

And if a researcher walked into a coffee shop and told the employees they would be observed as part of a study on work efficiency, the self-conscious, intimidated baristas might not behave naturally.

In the 1920s, leaders of a Chicago factory called Hawthorne Works commissioned a study to determine whether or not lighting could increase or decrease worker productivity. Sociologists were brought in. Changes were made. Productivity increased. Results were published.

But when the study was over, productivity dropped again. Why did this happen? In 1953, Henry A. Landsberger analyzed the study results to answer this question. He realized that employee productivity increased because sociologists were paying attention to them. The sociologists' presence influenced the study results. Worker behaviors were altered not by the lighting but by the study itself. From this, sociologists learned the importance of carefully planning their roles as part of their research design (Franke and Kaul 1978).

Landsberger called the workers' response the **Hawthorne effect**—people changing their behavior because they know they are being watched as part of a study. The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some research. In many cases, sociologists have to make the purpose of the study known. Subjects must be aware that they are being observed, and a certain amount of artificiality may result (Sonnenfeld 1985).

Making sociologists' presence invisible is not always realistic for other reasons. That option is not available to a researcher studying prison behaviors, early education, or the Ku Klux Klan. Researchers can't just stroll into prisons, kindergarten classrooms, or Klan meetings and unobtrusively observe behaviors. In situations like these, other methods are needed. All studies shape the research design, while research design simultaneously shapes the study. Researchers choose methods that best suit their study topic and that fit with their overall approach to research.

In planning a study's design, sociologists generally choose from four widely used methods of social investigation: survey, field research, experiment, and secondary data analysis (or use of existing sources). Every research method comes with plusses and minuses, and the topic of study strongly influences which method or methods are put to use.

### 2.3.1 Surveys

As a research method, a **survey** collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire. The survey is one of the most widely used scientific research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas.

First Name

6. What is Person 1's sex? Mark ☒ ONE box.

☐ Male ☐ Female

7. What is Person 1's age and what is Person  
Please report babies as age 0 when the child is  
Print numbers in boxes

Age on April 1, 2010 Month Day

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about  
Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispa

**Figure 2.3:** Questionnaires are a common research method; the U.S. Census is a well-known example.  
(Photo courtesy of Karen Horton/flickr)

At some point or another, everyone responds to some type of survey. The United States Census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey intended to gather sociological data. Customers fill out questionnaires at stores or promotional events, responding to questions such as “How did you hear about the event?” and “Were the staff helpful?” You’ve probably picked up the phone and heard a caller ask you to participate in a political poll or similar type of survey. “Do you eat hot dogs? If yes, how many per month?”

Not all surveys would be considered sociological research. Marketing polls help companies refine marketing goals and strategies; they are generally not conducted as part of a scientific study, meaning they are not designed to test a hypothesis or to contribute knowledge to the field of sociology. The results are not published in a refereed scholarly journal, where design, methodology, results, and analyses are vetted. Often, polls on TV do not reflect a general population, but are merely answers from a specific show’s audience. Polls conducted by programs such as *American Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance* represent the opinions of fans but are not particularly scientific. A good contrast to these are the Nielsen Ratings, which determine the popularity of television programming through scientific market research.



**Figure 2.4:** As part of a malaria pill study, U.S. Navy Hospital personnel complete a questionnaire on health issues they experienced in Somalia. Participants submitted a blood sample as part of this study, which supported Operation Restore Hope. (Photo courtesy of ExpertInfantry.com/flickr)

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Sociologists conduct surveys under controlled conditions for specific purposes. Surveys gather different types of information from people. While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a great method for discovering how people feel and think—or at least how they say they feel and think. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates or reported individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits), or factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

A survey targets a specific **population**, people who are the focus of a study, such as college athletes, international students, or teenagers living with type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes. Most researchers choose to survey a small sector of the population, or a **sample**: that is, a manageable number of subjects who *represent* a larger population. The success of a study depends on how well a population is represented by the sample. In a **random sample**, every person in a population has the same chance of being chosen for the study. According to the laws of probability, random samples represent the population as a whole. For instance, a Gallup Poll, if conducted as a nationwide random sampling, should be able to provide an accurate estimate of public opinion whether it contacts 2,000 or 10,000 people.

After selecting subjects, the researcher develops a specific plan to ask questions and record responses. It is important to inform subjects of the nature and purpose of the study up front. If they agree to participate, researchers thank subjects and offer them a chance to see the results of the study if they are interested. The researcher presents the subjects with an instrument, a means of gathering the information. A common instrument is a questionnaire, in which subjects answer a series of questions. For some topics, the researcher might ask yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, allowing subjects to choose possible responses to each question. This kind of **quantitative data**—research collected in numerical form that can be counted—are easy to tabulate. Just count up the number of “yes” and “no” responses or correct answers and chart them into percentages.

Questionnaires can also ask more complex questions with more complex answers—beyond “yes,” “no,” or

the option next to a checkbox. In those cases, the answers are subjective, varying from person to person. *How do plan to use your college education? Why do you follow Jimmy Buffett around the country and attend every concert?* Those types of questions require short essay responses, and participants willing to take the time to write those answers will convey personal information about religious beliefs, political views, and morals. Some topics that reflect internal thought are impossible to observe directly and are difficult to discuss honestly in a public forum. People are more likely to share honest answers if they can respond to questions anonymously. This type of information is **qualitative data**—results that are subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting. Qualitative information is harder to organize and tabulate. The researcher will end up with a wide range of responses, some of which may be surprising. The benefit of written opinions, though, is the wealth of material that they provide.

An **interview** is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject, and is a way of conducting surveys on a topic. Interviews are similar to the short answer questions on surveys in that the researcher asks subjects a series of questions. However, participants are free to respond as they wish, without being limited by predetermined choices. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification, spend more time on a subtopic, or ask additional questions. In an interview, a subject will ideally feel free to open up and answer questions that are often complex. There are no right or wrong answers. The subject might not even know how to answer the questions honestly.

Questions such as “How did society’s view of alcohol consumption influence your decision whether or not to take your first sip of alcohol?” or “Did you feel that the divorce of your parents would put a social stigma on your family?” involve so many factors that the answers are difficult to categorize. A researcher needs to avoid steering or prompting the subject to respond in a specific way; otherwise, the results will prove to be unreliable. And, obviously, a sociological interview is not an interrogation. The researcher will benefit from gaining a subject’s trust, from empathizing or commiserating with a subject, and from listening without judgment.

### 2.3.2 Field Research

The work of sociology rarely happens in limited, confined spaces. Sociologists seldom study subjects in their own offices or laboratories. Rather, sociologists go out into the world. They meet subjects where they live, work, and play. **Field research** refers to gathering **primary data** from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey. It is a research method suited to an interpretive framework rather than to the scientific method. To conduct field research, the sociologist must be willing to step into new environments and observe, participate, or experience those worlds. In field work, the sociologists, rather than the subjects, are the ones out of their element.

The researcher interacts with or observes a person or people, gathering data along the way. The key point in field research is that it takes place in the subject’s natural environment, whether it’s a coffee shop or tribal village, a homeless shelter or the DMV, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort.



Photo Courtesy of Olympic National Park

**Figure 2.5:** Sociological researchers travel across countries and cultures to interact with and observe subjects in their natural environments. (Photo courtesy of IMLS Digital Collections and Content/flickr and Olympic National Park)

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While field research often begins in a specific *setting*, the study's purpose is to observe specific *behaviors* in that setting. Field work is optimal for observing *how* people behave. It is less useful, however, for understanding *why* they behave that way. You can't really narrow down cause and effect when there are so many variables floating around in a natural environment.

Much of the data gathered in field research are based not on cause and effect but on **correlation**. And while field research looks for correlation, its small sample size does not allow for establishing a causal relationship between two variables.

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**Figure 2.6:** Business suits for the day job are replaced by leis and T-shirts for a Jimmy Buffett concert. (Photo courtesy of Sam Howzitt/flickr)

Some sociologists study small groups of people who share an identity in one aspect of their lives. Almost everyone belongs to a group of like-minded people who share an interest or hobby. Scientists, folk dancers, or members of Mensa (an organization for people with exceptionally high IQs) express a specific part of their identity through their affiliation with a group. Those groups are often of great interest to sociologists.

Jimmy Buffett, an American musician who built a career from his single top-10 song “Margaritaville,” has a following of devoted groupies called Parrotheads. Some of them have taken fandom to the extreme, making Parrothead culture a lifestyle. In 2005, Parrotheads and their subculture caught the attention of researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau. The two saw the way Jimmy Buffett fans collectively created an artificial reality. They wanted to know how fan groups shape culture. The result was a study and resulting article called “Parrotheads in Margaritaville: Fan Practice, Oppositional Culture, and Embedded Cultural Resistance in Buffett Fandom.”

What Mihelich and Papineau found was that Parrotheads, for the most part, do not seek to challenge or even change society, as many sub-groups do. In fact, most Parrotheads live successfully within society, holding upper-level jobs in the corporate world. What they seek is escape from the stress of daily life. They get it from Jimmy Buffett’s concerts and from the public image he projects. Buffett fans collectively keep their version of an alternate reality alive.

At Jimmy Buffett concerts, Parrotheads engage in a form of role play. They paint their faces and dress for the tropics in grass skirts, Hawaiian leis, and Parrot hats. These fans don’t generally play the part of Parrotheads outside of these concerts; you are not likely to see a lone Parrothead in a bank or library. In that sense, Parrothead culture is less about individualism and more about conformity. Being a Parrothead means sharing a specific identity. Parrotheads feel connected to each other: it’s a group identity, not an individual one.

On fan websites, followers conduct polls calling for responses to message-board prompts such as “Why are you a Parrothead” and “Where is your Margaritaville?” To the latter question, fans

define the place as anywhere from a beach to a bar to a peaceful state of mind. Ultimately, however, “Margaritaville” is an imaginary place.

In their study, Mihelich and Papineau quote from a recent book by sociologist Richard Butsch, who writes, “un-self-conscious acts, if done by many people together, can produce change, even though the change may be unintended” (2000). Many Parrothead fan groups have performed good works in the name of Jimmy Buffett culture, donating to charities and volunteering their services.

However, the authors suggest that what really drives Parrothead culture is commercialism. Jimmy Buffett’s popularity was dying out in the 1980s until being reinvigorated after he signed a sponsorship deal with a beer company. These days, his concert tours alone generate nearly \$30 million a year. Buffett made a lucrative career for himself by partnering with product companies and marketing Margaritaville in the form of T-shirts, restaurants, casinos, and an expansive line of products. Some fans accuse Buffett of selling out, while others admire his financial success. Buffett makes no secret of his commercial exploitations; from the stage, he’s been known to tell his fans, “Just remember, I am spending your money foolishly.”

Mihelich and Papineau gathered much of their information online. Referring to their study as a “Web ethnography,” they collected extensive narrative material from fans who joined Parrothead clubs and posted their experiences on websites. “We do not claim to have conducted a complete ethnography of Parrothead fans, or even of the Parrothead Web activity,” state the authors, “but we focused on particular aspects of Parrothead practice as revealed through Web research” (2005). Fan narratives gave them insight into how individuals identify with Buffett’s world and how fans used popular music to cultivate personal and collective meaning.

In conducting studies about pockets of culture, most sociologists seek to discover a universal appeal. Mihelich and Papineau stated, “Although Parrotheads are a relative minority of the contemporary US population, an in-depth look at their practice and conditions illuminate [sic] cultural practices and conditions many of us experience and participate in” (2005).

Here, we will look at three types of field research: participant observation, ethnography, and the case study.

### 2.3.2.1 Participant Observation

In 2000, a comic writer named Rodney Rothman wanted an insider’s view of white-collar work. He slipped into the sterile, high-rise offices of a New York “dot com” agency. Every day for two weeks, he pretended to work there. His main purpose was simply to see if anyone would notice him or challenge his presence. No one did. The receptionist greeted him. The employees smiled and said good morning. Rothman was accepted as part of the team. He even went so far as to claim a desk, inform the receptionist of his whereabouts, and attend a meeting. He published an article about his experience in *The New Yorker* called “My Fake Job” (2000). Later, he was discredited for allegedly fabricating some details of the story and *The New Yorker* issued an apology. However, Rothman’s entertaining article still offered fascinating descriptions of the inside workings of a “dot com” company and exemplified the lengths to which a sociologist will go to uncover material.

Rothman had conducted a form of study called **participant observation**, in which researchers join people and participate in a group’s routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context. This method lets researchers experience a specific aspect of social life. A researcher might go to great lengths to get a firsthand look into a trend, institution, or behavior. Researchers temporarily put themselves into roles and record their observations. A researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, or live as a homeless person for several weeks, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, these researchers try to blend in seamlessly with the population they study, and they may not disclose their true identity or purpose if they feel it would compromise the results of their research.



**Figure 2.7:** Is she a working waitress or a sociologist conducting a study using participant observation?  
(Photo courtesy of zoetnet/flickr)

At the beginning of a field study, researchers might have a question: “What really goes on in the kitchen of the most popular diner on campus?” or “What is it like to be homeless?” Participant observation is a useful method if the researcher wants to explore a certain environment from the inside.

Field researchers simply want to observe and learn. In such a setting, the researcher will be alert and open minded to whatever happens, recording all observations accurately. Soon, as patterns emerge, questions will become more specific, observations will lead to hypotheses, and hypotheses will guide the researcher in shaping data into results.

In a study of small-town America conducted by sociological researchers John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, the team altered their purpose as they gathered data. They initially planned to focus their study on the role of religion in American towns. As they gathered observations, they realized that the effect of industrialization and urbanization was the more relevant topic of this social group. The Lynds did not change their methods, but they revised their purpose. This shaped the structure of *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*, their published results (Lynd and Lynd 1959).

The Lynds were upfront about their mission. The townspeople of Muncie, Indiana, knew why the researchers were in their midst. But some sociologists prefer not to alert people to their presence. The main advantage of covert participant observation is that it allows the researcher access to authentic, natural behaviors of a group’s members. The challenge, however, is gaining access to a setting without disrupting the pattern of others’ behavior. Becoming an inside member of a group, organization, or subculture takes time and effort. Researchers must pretend to be something they are not. The process could involve role playing, making contacts, networking, or applying for a job.

Once inside a group, some researchers spend months or even years pretending to be one of the people they are observing. However, as observers, they cannot get too involved. They must keep their purpose in mind

and apply the sociological perspective. That way, they illuminate social patterns that are often unrecognized. Because information gathered during participant observation is mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative, the end results are often descriptive or interpretive. The researcher might present findings in an article or book, describing what he or she witnessed and experienced.

This type of research is what journalist Barbara Ehrenreich conducted for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. One day over lunch with her editor, as the story goes, Ehrenreich mentioned an idea. *How can people exist on minimum-wage work? How do low-income workers get by?* she wondered. *Someone should do a study.* To her surprise, her editor responded, *Why don't you do it?*

That's how Ehrenreich found herself joining the ranks of the working class. For several months, she left her comfortable home and lived and worked among people who lacked, for the most part, higher education and marketable job skills. Undercover, she applied for and worked minimum wage jobs as a waitress, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a retail chain employee. During her participant observation, she used only her income from those jobs to pay for food, clothing, transportation, and shelter.

She discovered the obvious, that it's almost impossible to get by on minimum wage work. She also experienced and observed attitudes many middle and upper class people never think about. She witnessed firsthand the treatment of working class employees. She saw the extreme measures people take to make ends meet and to survive. She described fellow employees who held two or three jobs, worked seven days a week, lived in cars, could not pay to treat chronic health conditions, got randomly fired, submitted to drug tests, and moved in and out of homeless shelters. She brought aspects of that life to light, describing difficult working conditions and the poor treatment that low-wage workers suffer.

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, the book she wrote upon her return to her real life as a well-paid writer, has been widely read and used in many college classrooms.



**Figure 2.8:** Field research happens in real locations. What type of environment do work spaces foster? What would a sociologist discover after blending in? (Photo courtesy of drewzhrodague/flickr)

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### 2.3.2.2 Ethnography

**Ethnography** is the extended observation of the social perspective and cultural values of an entire social setting. Ethnographies involve objective observation of an entire community.

The heart of an ethnographic study focuses on how subjects view their own social standing and how they understand themselves in relation to a community. An ethnographic study might observe, for example, a small American fishing town, an Inuit community, a village in Thailand, a Buddhist monastery, a private boarding school, or Disney World. These places all have borders. People live, work, study, or vacation within those borders. People are there for a certain reason and therefore behave in certain ways and respect certain cultural norms. An ethnographer would commit to spending a determined amount of time studying every aspect of the chosen place, taking in as much as possible.

A sociologist studying a tribe in the Amazon might watch the way villagers go about their daily lives and then write a paper about it. To observe a spiritual retreat center, an ethnographer might sign up for a retreat and attend as a guest for an extended stay, observe and record data, and collate the material into results.

: In 1924, a young married couple named Robert and Helen Lynd undertook an unprecedented ethnography: to apply sociological methods to the study of one US city in order to discover what “ordinary” Americans did and believed. Choosing Muncie, Indiana (population about 30,000), as their subject, they moved to the small town and lived there for eighteen months.

Ethnographers had been examining other cultures for decades—groups considered minority or outsider—like gangs, immigrants, and the poor. But no one had studied the so-called average American.

Recording interviews and using surveys to gather data, the Lynds did not sugarcoat or idealize American life (PBS). They objectively stated what they observed. Researching existing sources, they compared Muncie in 1890 to the Muncie they observed in 1924. Most Muncie adults, they found, had grown up on farms but now lived in homes inside the city. From that discovery, the Lynds focused their study on the impact of industrialization and urbanization.

They observed that Muncie was divided into business class and working class groups. They defined business class as dealing with abstract concepts and symbols, while working class people used tools to create concrete objects. The two classes led different lives with different goals and hopes. However, the Lynds observed, mass production offered both classes the same amenities. Like wealthy families, the working class was now able to own radios, cars, washing machines, telephones, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. This was an emerging material new reality of the 1920s.

As the Lynds worked, they divided their manuscript into six sections: Getting a Living, Making a Home, Training the Young, Using Leisure, Engaging in Religious Practices, and Engaging in Community Activities. Each chapter included subsections such as “The Long Arm of the Job” and “Why Do They Work So Hard?” in the “Getting a Living” chapter.

When the study was completed, the Lynds encountered a big problem. The Rockefeller Foundation, which had commissioned the book, claimed it was useless and refused to publish it. The Lynds asked if they could seek a publisher themselves.

*Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* was not only published in 1929, but became an instant bestseller, a status unheard of for a sociological study. The book sold out six printings in its first year of publication, and has never gone out of print (PBS).

Nothing like it had ever been done before. *Middletown* was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times*. Readers in the 1920s and 1930s identified with the citizens of Muncie, Indiana, but they were equally fascinated by the sociological methods and the use of scientific data to define ordinary Americans. The book was proof that social data was important—and interesting—to the American public.



**Figure 2.9:** A classroom in Muncie, Indiana, in 1917, five years before John and Helen Lynd began researching this “typical” American community. (Photo courtesy of Don O'Brien/flickr)

### 2.3.2.3 Case Study

Sometimes a researcher wants to study one specific person or event. A **case study** is an in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual. To conduct a case study, a researcher examines existing sources like documents and archival records, conducts interviews, engages in direct observation, and even participant observation, if possible.

Researchers might use this method to study a single case of, for example, a foster child, drug lord, cancer patient, criminal, or rape victim. However, a major criticism of the case study as a method is that a developed study of a single case, while offering depth on a topic, does not provide enough evidence to form a generalized conclusion. In other words, it is difficult to make universal claims based on just one person, since one person does not verify a pattern. This is why most sociologists do not use case studies as a primary research method.

However, case studies are useful when the single case is unique. In these instances, a single case study can add tremendous knowledge to a certain discipline. For example, a feral child, also called “wild child,” is one who grows up isolated from human beings. Feral children grow up without social contact and language, elements crucial to a “civilized” child’s development. These children mimic the behaviors and movements of animals, and often invent their own language. There are only about one hundred cases of “feral children” in the world.

As you may imagine, a feral child is a subject of great interest to researchers. Feral children provide unique information about child development because they have grown up outside of the parameters of “normal” child development. And since there are very few feral children, the case study is the most appropriate method for researchers to use in studying the subject.

At age 3, a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya suffered severe parental neglect. She lived in a shed with dogs, eating raw meat and scraps. Five years later, a neighbor called authorities and reported seeing a girl who ran on all fours, barking. Officials brought Oxana into society, where she was cared for and taught some human behaviors, but she never became fully socialized. She has been designated as unable to support herself and now lives in a mental institution (Grice 2011). Case studies like this offer a way for sociologists to collect data that may not be collectable by any other method.



### 2.3.3 Experiments

You've probably tested personal social theories. "If I study at night and review in the morning, I'll improve my retention skills." Or, "If I stop drinking soda, I'll feel better." Cause and effect. If this, then that. When you test the theory, your results either prove or disprove your hypothesis.

One way researchers test social theories is by conducting an **experiment**, meaning they investigate relationships to test a hypothesis—a scientific approach.

There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a lab setting, the research can be controlled so that perhaps more data can be recorded in a certain amount of time. In a natural or field-based experiment, the generation of data cannot be controlled but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference or intervention by the researcher.

As a research method, either type of sociological experiment is useful for testing *if-then* statements: *if* a particular thing happens, *then* another particular thing will result. To set up a lab-based experiment, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables.

Classically, the sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. Those people are divided into two groups. One is the experimental group and the other is the control group. The experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s) and the control group is not. To test the benefits of tutoring, for example, the sociologist might expose the experimental group of students to tutoring but not the control group. Then both groups would be tested for differences in performance to see if tutoring had an effect on the experimental group of students. As you can imagine, in a case like this, the researcher would not want to jeopardize the accomplishments of either group of students, so the setting would be somewhat artificial. The test would not be for a grade reflected on their permanent record, for example.

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**Figure 2.10:** Sociologist Frances Heussenstamm conducted an experiment to explore the correlation between traffic stops and race-based bumper stickers. This issue of racial profiling remains a hot-button topic today. (Photo courtesy of dwightsguest/flickr)

A real-life example will help illustrate the experiment process. In 1971, Frances Heussenstamm,

a sociology professor at California State University at Los Angeles, had a theory about police prejudice. To test her theory she conducted an experiment. She chose fifteen students from three ethnic backgrounds: black, white, and Hispanic. She chose students who routinely drove to and from campus along Los Angeles freeway routes, and who'd had perfect driving records for longer than a year. Those were her independent variables—students, good driving records, same commute route.

Next, she placed a Black Panther bumper sticker on each car. That sticker, a representation of a social value, was the independent variable. In the 1970s, the Black Panthers were a revolutionary group actively fighting racism. Heussenstamm asked the students to follow their normal driving patterns. She wanted to see if seeming support of the Black Panthers would change how these good drivers were treated by the police patrolling the highways.

The first arrest, for an incorrect lane change, was made two hours after the experiment began. One participant was pulled over three times in three days. He quit the study. After seventeen days, the fifteen drivers had collected a total of thirty-three traffic citations. The experiment was halted. The funding to pay traffic fines had run out, and so had the enthusiasm of the participants (Heussenstamm 1971).

### 2.3.4 Secondary Data Analysis

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through **secondary data analysis**. Secondary data don't result from firsthand research collected from primary sources, but are the already completed work of other researchers. Sociologists might study works written by historians, economists, teachers, or early sociologists. They might search through periodicals, newspapers, or magazines from any period in history.

Using available information not only saves time and money, but it can add depth to a study. Sociologists often interpret findings in a new way, a way that was not part of an author's original purpose or intention. To study how women were encouraged to act and behave in the 1960s, for example, a researcher might watch movies, television shows, and situation comedies from that period. Or to research changes in behavior and attitudes due to the emergence of television in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a sociologist would rely on new interpretations of secondary data. Decades from now, researchers will most likely conduct similar studies on the advent of mobile phones, the Internet, or Facebook.

Social scientists also learn by analyzing the research of a variety of agencies. Governmental departments and global groups, like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or the World Health Organization, publish studies with findings that are useful to sociologists. A public statistic like the foreclosure rate might be useful for studying the effects of the 2008 recession; a racial demographic profile might be compared with data on education funding to examine the resources accessible by different groups.

One of the advantages of secondary data is that it is **nonreactive** (or unobtrusive) research, meaning that it does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors. Unlike studies requiring direct contact with people, using previously published data doesn't require entering a population and the investment and risks inherent in that research process.

Using available data does have its challenges. Public records are not always easy to access. A researcher will need to do some legwork to track them down and gain access to records. To guide the search through a vast library of materials and avoid wasting time reading unrelated sources, sociologists employ **content analysis**, applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as they relate to the study at hand.

But, in some cases, there is no way to verify the accuracy of existing data. It is easy to count how many drunk drivers, for example, are pulled over by the police. But how many are not? While it's possible to discover the percentage of teenage students who drop out of high school, it might be more challenging to determine the number who return to school or get their GED later.

Another problem arises when data are unavailable in the exact form needed or do not include the precise angle the researcher seeks. For example, the average salaries paid to professors at a public school is public



record. But the separate figures don't necessarily reveal how long it took each professor to reach the salary range, what their educational backgrounds are, or how long they've been teaching.

To write some of his books, sociologist Richard Sennett used secondary data to shed light on current trends. In *The Craftsman* (2008), he studied the human desire to perform quality work, from carpentry to computer programming. He studied the line between craftsmanship and skilled manual labor. He also studied changes in attitudes toward craftsmanship that occurred not only during and after the Industrial Revolution, but also in ancient times. Obviously, he could not have firsthand knowledge of periods of ancient history; he had to rely on secondary data for part of his study.

When conducting content analysis, it is important to consider the date of publication of an existing source and to take into account attitudes and common cultural ideals that may have influenced the research. For example, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd gathered research for their book *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* in the 1920s. Attitudes and cultural norms were vastly different then than they are now. Beliefs about gender roles, race, education, and work have changed significantly since then. At the time, the study's purpose was to reveal the truth about small American communities. Today, it is an illustration of 1920s attitudes and values.

### 2.3.5 Summary

Sociological research is a fairly complex process. As you can see, a lot goes into even a simple research design. There are many steps and much to consider when collecting data on human behavior, as well as in interpreting and analyzing data in order to form conclusive results. Sociologists use scientific methods for good reason. The scientific method provides a system of organization that helps researchers plan and conduct the study while ensuring that data and results are reliable, valid, and objective.

The many methods available to researchers—including experiments, surveys, field studies, and secondary data analysis—all come with advantages and disadvantages. The strength of a study can depend on the choice and implementation of the appropriate method of gathering research. Depending on the topic, a study might use a single method or a combination of methods. It is important to plan a research design before undertaking a study. The information gathered may in itself be surprising, and the study design should provide a solid framework in which to analyze predicted and unpredicted data.

**Main Sociological Research Methods**

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yields many responses</li> <li>• Can survey a large sample</li> <li>• Quantitative data are easy to chart</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be time consuming</li> <li>• Can be difficult to encourage participant response</li> <li>• Captures what people think and believe but not necessarily how they behave in real life</li> </ul>
continued on next page			

<b>Field Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Participant observation</li> <li>• Ethnography</li> <li>• Case study</li> </ul>	Yields detailed, accurate real-life information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Data captures how people behave but not what they think and believe</li> <li>• Qualitative data is difficult to organize</li> </ul>
<b>Experiment</b>	Deliberate manipulation of social customs and mores	Tests cause and effect relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hawthorne Effect</li> <li>• Ethical concerns about people's wellbeing</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary Data Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics)</li> <li>• Research of historic documents</li> </ul>	Makes good use of previous sociological information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data could be focused on a purpose other than yours</li> <li>• Data can be hard to find</li> </ul>

**Table 2.2:** Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

### 2.3.6 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 2.3.1

*(Solution on p. 51.)*

Which materials are considered secondary data?

- Photos and letters given to you by another person
- Books and articles written by other authors about their studies
- Information that you have gathered and now have included in your results
- Responses from participants whom you both surveyed and interviewed

#### Exercise 2.3.2

*(Solution on p. 51.)*

What method did researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau use to study Parrotheads?

- Survey
- Experiment
- Ethnography
- Case study

#### Exercise 2.3.3

*(Solution on p. 51.)*

Why is choosing a random sample an effective way to select participants?

- Participants do not know they are part of a study

- b. The researcher has no control over who is in the study
- c. It is larger than an ordinary sample
- d. Everyone has the same chance of being part of the study

**Exercise 2.3.4***(Solution on p. 51.)*

What research method did John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd mainly use in their *Middletown* study?

- a. Secondary data
- b. Survey
- c. Participant observation
- d. Experiment

**Exercise 2.3.5***(Solution on p. 51.)*

Which research approach is best suited to the scientific method?

- a. Questionnaire
- b. Case study
- c. Ethnography
- d. Secondary data analysis

**Exercise 2.3.6***(Solution on p. 51.)*

The main difference between ethnography and other types of participant observation is:

- a. ethnography isn't based on hypothesis testing
- b. ethnography subjects are unaware they're being studied
- c. ethnographic studies always involve minority ethnic groups
- d. there is no difference

**Exercise 2.3.7***(Solution on p. 51.)*

Which best describes the results of a case study?

- a. It produces more reliable results than other methods because of its depth
- b. Its results are not generally applicable
- c. It relies solely on secondary data analysis
- d. All of the above

**Exercise 2.3.8***(Solution on p. 51.)*

Using secondary data is considered an unobtrusive or \_\_\_\_\_ research method.

- a. Non-reactive
- b. non-participatory
- c. non-restrictive
- d. non-confrontive

### 2.3.7 Short Answer

#### Exercise 2.3.9

What type of data do surveys gather? For what topics would surveys be the best research method? What drawbacks might you expect to encounter when using a survey? To explore further, ask a research question and write a hypothesis. Then create a survey of about six questions relevant to the topic. Provide a rationale for each question. Now define your population and create a plan for recruiting a random sample and administering the survey.

#### Exercise 2.3.10

Imagine you are about to do field research in a specific place for a set time. Instead of thinking about the topic of study itself, consider how you, as the researcher, will have to prepare for the study. What personal, social, and physical sacrifices will you have to make? How will you manage your personal effects? What organizational equipment and systems will you need to collect the data?

#### Exercise 2.3.11

Create a brief research design about a topic in which you are passionately interested. Now write a letter to a philanthropic or grant organization requesting funding for your study. How can you describe the project in a convincing yet realistic and objective way? Explain how the results of your study will be a relevant contribution to the body of sociological work already in existence.

### 2.3.8 Further Research

For information on current real-world sociology experiments, visit: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Sociology-Experiments><sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Sociology-Experiments>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.pbs.org/fmc/index.htm>

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.richardsennett.com/site/SENN/Templates/General.aspx?pageid=40>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 2

to Exercise 2.2.1 (p. 31): Answer  
C  
to Exercise 2.2.2 (p. 31): Answers  
C  
to Exercise 2.2.3 (p. 31): Answers  
D  
to Exercise 2.2.4 (p. 32): Answers  
C  
to Exercise 2.3.1 (p. 47): Answer  
B  
to Exercise 2.3.2 (p. 47): Answer  
C  
to Exercise 2.3.3 (p. 47): Answer  
D  
to Exercise 2.3.4 (p. 48): Answer  
C  
to Exercise 2.3.5 (p. 48): Answer  
A  
to Exercise 2.3.6 (p. 48): Answer  
A  
to Exercise 2.3.7 (p. 48): Answer  
B  
to Exercise 2.3.8 (p. 48): Answer  
A



## Chapter 3

# Culture

### 3.1 Introduction to Culture<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 3.1:** Graffiti's mix of colorful drawings, words, and symbols is a vibrant expression of culture—or, depending on one's viewpoint, a disturbing expression of the creator's lack of respect for a community's shared space. (Photo courtesy of aikijuanma/flickr)

<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42983/1.2/>>.



Are there rules for eating at McDonald's? Generally, we do not think about rules in a fast food restaurant, but if you look around one on a typical weekday, you will see people acting as if they were trained for the role of fast food customer. They stand in line, pick items from the colorful menus, swipe debit cards to pay, and wait to collect trays of food. After a quick meal, customers wad up their paper wrappers and toss them into garbage cans. Customers' movement through this fast food routine is orderly and predictable, even if no rules are posted and no officials direct the process.

If you want more insight into these unwritten rules, think about what would happen if you behaved according to some other standards. (You would be doing what sociologists call *ethnomethodology*: deliberately disrupting social norms in order to learn about them.) For example, call ahead for reservations, ask the cashier detailed questions about the food's ingredients or how it is prepared. Ask to have your meal served to you at your table. Or throw your trash on the ground as you leave. Chances are, you will elicit hostile responses from the restaurant employees and your fellow customers.

People have written entire books analyzing the significance of fast food customs. They examine the extensive, detailed physicality of fast food: the food itself, wrappers, bags, trays, those tiny ketchup packets, the tables and chairs, and even the restaurant building. Everything about a chain restaurant reflects **culture**, the beliefs and behaviors that a social group shares. Sociological analysis can be applied to every expression of culture, from sporting events to holidays, from education to transportation, from fashion to etiquette.

In everyday conversation, people rarely distinguish between the terms *culture* and *society*, but the terms have slightly different meanings, and the distinction is important to a sociologist. A **society** describes a group of people who share a community and a culture. By "community," sociologists refer to a definable region—as small as a neighborhood (Brooklyn, or "the east side of town"), as large as a country (Ethiopia, the United States, or Nepal), or somewhere in between (in America, this might include someone who identifies with Southern or Midwestern society). To clarify, a culture represents the *beliefs and practices* of a group, while society represents the *people* who share those beliefs and practices. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between culture and society in greater detail, paying special attention to the elements and forces that shape culture, including diversity and cultural changes. A final discussion touches on the different theoretical perspectives from which sociologists research culture.

## 3.2 What Is Culture?<sup>2</sup>

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of *Homo sapiens* nearly 250,000 years ago, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families, or in other cases, through a direct system such as a "mail order bride." To someone raised in New York City, the marriage customs of a family from Nigeria may seem strange, or even wrong. Conversely, someone from a traditional Kolkata family might be perplexed with the idea of romantic love as the foundation for marriage lifelong commitment. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and "normal." Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42961/1.4/>>.

deal of cultural propriety.



**Figure 3.2:** How would a visitor from suburban America act and feel on this crowded Tokyo train?  
(Photo courtesy of simonglucas/flickr)

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same in all locations, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger would find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity.

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). **Material culture** refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. **Nonmaterial culture**, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As

we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

### 3.2.1 Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults will continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit consisting of parents and their offspring.

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death, or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Sociologists consider humor necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.

: Imagine that you are sitting in a theater, watching a film. The movie opens with the heroine sitting on a park bench, a grim expression on her face. Cue the music. The first slow and mournful notes are played in a minor key. As the melody continues, the heroine turns her head and sees a man walking toward her. The music slowly gets louder, and the dissonance of the chords sends a prickle of fear running down your spine. You sense that the heroine is in danger.

Now imagine that you are watching the same movie, but with a different soundtrack. As the scene opens, the music is soft and soothing, with a hint of sadness. You see the heroine sitting on the park bench and sense her loneliness. Suddenly, the music swells. The woman looks up and sees a man walking toward her. The music grows fuller, and the pace picks up. You feel your heart rise in your chest. This is a happy moment.

Music has the ability to evoke emotional responses. In television shows, movies, even commercials, music elicits laughter, sadness, or fear. Are these types of musical cues cultural universals?

In 2009, a team of psychologists, led by Thomas Fritz of the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Germany, studied people's reactions to music they'd never heard (Fritz et al. 2009). The research team traveled to Cameroon, Africa, and asked Mafa tribal members to listen to Western music. The tribe, isolated from Western culture, had never been exposed to Western culture and had no context or experience within which to interpret its music. Even so, as the tribal members listened to a Western piano piece, they were able to recognize three basic emotions: happiness, sadness, and fear. Music, it turns out, is a sort of universal language.

Researchers also found that music can foster a sense of wholeness within a group. In fact, scientists who study the evolution of language have concluded that originally language (an established component of group identity) and music were one (Darwin 1871). Additionally, since music is largely nonverbal, the sounds of music can cross societal boundaries more easily than words. Music allows people to make connections where language might be a more difficult barricade. As Fritz and his team found, music and the emotions it conveys can be cultural universals.

### 3.2.2 Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Despite how much humans have in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of particular language structures and conversational etiquette reveal tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. North Americans keep more distance, maintaining a large “personal space.” Even something as simple as eating and drinking varies greatly from culture to culture. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume she is drinking? In the United States, it’s most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

The way cuisines vary across cultures fascinates many people. Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain, while others return home expressing gratitude for their native culture’s fare. Often, Americans express disgust at other cultures’ cuisine, thinking it’s gross to eat meat from a dog or guinea pig, for example, while they don’t question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are an example of **ethnocentrism**, or evaluating and judging another culture based on how it compares to one’s own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism, as sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, involves a belief or attitude that one’s own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. For example, Americans tend to say that people from England drive on the “wrong” side of the road, rather than the “other” side. Someone from a country where dog meat is standard fare might find it off-putting to see a dog in a French restaurant—not on the menu, but as a pet and patron’s companion.

A high level of appreciation for one’s own culture can be healthy; a shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike for other cultures, causing misunderstanding and conflict. People with the best intentions sometimes travel to a society to “help” its people, seeing them as uneducated or backward; essentially inferior. In reality, these travelers are guilty of **cultural imperialism**, the deliberate imposition of one’s own cultural values on another culture. Europe’s colonial expansion, begun in the 16th century, was often accompanied by a severe cultural imperialism. European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural methods and plant species from developed countries while overlooking indigenous varieties and agricultural approaches that are better suited to the particular region.

Ethnocentrism can be so strong that when confronted with all the differences of a new culture, one may experience disorientation and frustration. In sociology, we call this **culture shock**. A traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. An exchange student from China might be annoyed by the constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana’s quiet beauty and the Chinese student was originally excited to see an American-style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situation. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they recover from culture shock.

Culture shock may appear because people aren’t always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when conducting participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he’d never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, “You really tried!” In Barger’s own culture, he had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning.

During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism. **Cultural rela-**

**tivism** is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to, new values and norms. However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—would question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Sociologists attempting to engage in cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to rectify feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. **Xenocentrism** is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. (The Greek root word *xeno*, pronounced “ZEE-no,” means “stranger” or “foreign guest.”) An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a sociologist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for sociologists studying different cultures is the matter of keeping a perspective. It is impossible for anyone to keep all cultural biases at bay; the best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye.

: During her summer vacation, Caitlin flew from Chicago to Madrid to visit Maria, the exchange student she'd befriended the previous semester. In the airport, she heard rapid, musical Spanish being spoken all around her. Exciting as it was, she felt isolated and disconnected. Maria's mother kissed Caitlin on both cheeks when she greeted her. Her imposing father kept his distance. Caitlin was half asleep by the time supper was served—at 10 pm! Maria's family sat at the table for hours, speaking loudly, gesturing, and arguing about politics, a taboo dinner subject in Caitlin's house. They served wine and toasted their honored guest. Caitlin had trouble interpreting her hosts' facial expressions, and didn't realize she should make the next toast. That night, Caitlin crawled into a strange bed, wishing she hadn't come. She missed her home and felt overwhelmed by the new customs, language, and surroundings. She'd studied Spanish in school for years—why hadn't it prepared her for this?

What Caitlin hadn't realized was that people depend not only on spoken words, but on subtle cues like gestures and facial expressions, to communicate. Cultural norms accompany even the smallest nonverbal signals (DuBois 1951). They help people know when to shake hands, where to sit, how to converse, and even when to laugh. We relate to others through a shared set of cultural norms, and ordinarily, we take them for granted.

For this reason, culture shock is often associated with traveling abroad, although it can happen in one's own country, state, or even hometown. Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) is credited with first coining the term “culture shock.” In his studies, Oberg found that most people found encountering a new culture to be exciting at first. But bit by bit, they became stressed by interacting with people from a different culture who spoke another language and used different regional expressions. There was new food to digest, new daily schedules to follow, and new rules of etiquette to learn. Living with this constant stress can make people feel incompetent and insecure. People react to frustration in a new culture, Oberg found, by initially rejecting it and glorifying one's own culture. An American visiting Italy might long for a “real” pizza or complain about the unsafe driving habits of Italians compared to people in the United States.

It helps to remember that culture is learned. Everyone is ethnocentric to an extent, and identifying with one's own country is natural.

Caitlin's shock was minor compared to that of her friends Dayar and Mahlika, a Turkish couple living in married student housing on campus. And it was nothing like that of her classmate Sanai. Sanai had been forced to flee war torn Bosnia with her family when she was fifteen. After two weeks in Spain, Caitlin had developed a bit more compassion and understanding for what those

people had gone through. She understood that adjusting to a new culture takes time. It can take weeks or months to recover from culture shock, and years to fully adjust to living in a new culture. By the end of Caitlin's trip, she'd made new lifelong friends. She'd stepped out of her comfort zone. She'd learned a lot about Spain, but she'd also discovered a lot about herself and her own culture.



**Figure 3.3:** Experiencing new cultures offers an opportunity to practice cultural relativism. (Photo courtesy of OledSidorenko/flickr)

### 3.2.3 Summary

Though “society” and “culture” are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. A society is a group of people sharing a community and culture. Culture generally describes the shared behaviors and beliefs of these people, and includes material and nonmaterial elements. Our experience of cultural difference is influenced by our ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. Sociologists try to practice cultural relativism.

### 3.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 3.2.1

(Solution on p. 79.)

The terms \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are often used interchangeably, but have nuances that differentiate them.

- a. imperialism and relativism
- b. culture and society
- c. society and ethnocentrism
- d. ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

**Exercise 3.2.2***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The American flag is a material object that denotes the United States of America; however, there are certain connotations that many associate with the flag, like bravery and freedom. In this example, what are bravery and freedom?

- a. Symbols
- b. Language
- c. Material culture
- d. Nonmaterial culture

**Exercise 3.2.3***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The belief that one's culture is inferior to another culture is called:

- a. ethnocentrism
- b. nationalism
- c. xenocentrism
- d. imperialism

**Exercise 3.2.4***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Rodney and Elise are American students studying abroad in Italy. When they are introduced to their host families, the families kiss them on both cheeks. When Rodney's host brother introduces himself and kisses Rodney on both cheeks, Rodney pulls back in surprise. Where he is from, unless they are romantically involved, men do not kiss one another. This is an example of:

- a. culture shock
- b. imperialism
- c. ethnocentrism
- d. xenocentrism

**Exercise 3.2.5***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Most cultures have been found to identify laughter as a sign of humor, joy, or pleasure. Likewise, most cultures recognize music in some form. Music and laughter are examples of:

- a. relativism
- b. ethnocentrism
- c. xenocentrism
- d. universalism

**3.2.5 Short Answer****Exercise 3.2.6**

Examine the difference between material and nonmaterial culture in your world. Identify ten objects that are part of your regular cultural experience. For each, then identify what aspects of nonmaterial culture (values and beliefs) that these objects represent. What has this exercise revealed to you about your culture?

**Exercise 3.2.7**

Do you feel that feelings of ethnocentricity or xenocentricity are more prevalent in U.S. culture? Why do you believe this? What issues or events might inform this?

### 3.2.6 Further Research

In January 2011, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America presented evidence indicating that the hormone oxytocin could regulate and manage instances of ethnocentrism. Read the full article here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/oxytocin><sup>3</sup>

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## 3.3 Elements of Culture<sup>6</sup>

### 3.3.1 Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. **Values** are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. **Beliefs** are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value the culture the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an **ideal culture**, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal

<sup>3</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/oxytocin>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.iupui.edu/~anthkb/ethnocen.htm>

<sup>5</sup><http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2003/entries/davidson/>

<sup>6</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42807/1.3/>>.



culture differs from **real culture**, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but that the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers from the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a “thank you.” A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People **sanction** certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and non-support. Sanctions are a form of **social control**, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers.

When people go against a society’s values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It’s rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.



**Figure 3.4:** In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Georgie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)

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### 3.3.2 Norms

So far, the examples in this chapter have often described how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. **Norms** define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

**Formal norms** are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and “no running” signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees, reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It’s against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it’s against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of **informal norms**—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—“Kiss your Aunt Edna” or “Use your napkin”—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well.

Think back to the discussion of fast food restaurants at the beginning of this chapter. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at these restaurants. Customers line up to order their food, and leave when they are done. They don't sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don't commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules.

: Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) studied people's customs in order to find out how societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but shaped social order. He believed that members of society together create a social order (Weber 2011). His resulting book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, published in 1967, discusses people's assumptions about the social make-up of their communities.

One of his research methods was known as a “breaching experiment.” His breaching experiments tested sociological concepts of social norms and conformity. In a breaching experiment, the researcher behaves in a socially awkward manner. The participants are not aware an experiment is in progress. If the breach is successful, however, these “innocent bystanders” will respond in some way. For example, if the experimenter is, say, a man in a business suit, and he skips down the sidewalk or hops on one foot, the passersby are likely to stare at him with surprised expressions on their faces. But the experimenter does not simply “act weird” in public. Rather, the point is to deviate from a specific social norm in a small way, to subtly break some form of social etiquette, and see what happens.

To conduct his ethnomethodology, Garfinkel deliberately imposed strange behaviors on unknowing people. Then he would observe their responses. He suspected that odd behaviors would shatter conventional expectations, but he wasn't sure how. He set up, for example, a simple game of tic-tac-toe. One player was asked beforehand not to mark Xs and Os in the boxes but on the lines dividing the spaces instead. The other player, in the dark about the study, was flabbergasted and did not know how to continue. Their reactions of outrage, anger, puzzlement, or other emotions illustrated the existence of cultural norms that constitute social life. These cultural norms play an important role. They let us know how to behave around each other and how to feel comfortable in our community.

There are many rules about speaking with strangers in public. It's okay to tell a woman you like her shoes. It's not okay to ask if you can try them on. It's okay to stand in line behind someone at the ATM. It's not okay to look over their shoulder as they make their transaction. It's okay to sit beside someone on a crowded bus. It's weird to sit beside a stranger in a half-empty bus.

For some breaches, the researcher directly engages with innocent bystanders. An experimenter might strike up a conversation in a public bathroom, where it's common to respect each other's privacy so fiercely as to ignore other people's presence. In a grocery store, an experimenter might take a food item out of another person's grocery cart, saying, “That looks good! I think I'll try it.” An experimenter might sit down at a table with others in a fast food restaurant, or follow someone around a museum, studying the same paintings. In those cases, the bystanders are pressured to respond, and their discomfort illustrates how much we depend on social norms. Breaching experiments uncover and explore the many unwritten social rules we live by.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. **Mores** (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are severe, and can usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, **folkways** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. Folkways indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, it's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). People who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily life within a given culture.

### 3.3.3 Symbols and Language

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. **Symbols**—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand the world. Symbols provide clues to understanding experiences. They convey recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are only valuable in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, serve no other purpose other than to represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

A police officer's badge and uniform are symbols of authority and law enforcement. The sight of an officer in uniform or a squad car triggers reassurance in some citizens, and annoyance, fear, or anger in others.

It's easy to take symbols for granted. Few people challenge or even think about stick figure signs on the doors of public bathrooms. But those figures are more than just symbols that tell men and women which bathrooms to use. They also uphold the value, in the United States, that public restrooms should be gender exclusive. Even though stalls are relatively private, most places don't offer unisex bathrooms.



**Figure 3.5:** Some road signs are universal. But how would you interpret the signage on the right? (Photo (a) courtesy of Andrew Bain/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of HonzaSoukup/flickr)

Symbols often get noticed when they are used out of context. Used unconventionally, symbols convey strong messages. A stop sign on the door of a corporation makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for “N” and “D” represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott 2008). Today, some college students have taken to wearing pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. Though students might deny it, the outfit defies traditional cultural norms and makes a statement.

Even the destruction of symbols is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are beaten to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, there is one that is common to all: language. **Language** is a symbolic system through which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Some languages contain a system of symbols used for written communication, while others rely only on spoken communication and nonverbal actions.

Societies often share a single language, and many languages contain the same basic elements. An alphabet is a written system made of symbolic shapes that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English alphabet uses a combination of 26 letters to create words; these 26 letters make up over 600,000 recognized English words (OED Online 2011).

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as “soda,” “pop,” or “Coke”? Is a household entertainment room a “family room,” “rec room,” or “den”? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a “check,” the “ticket,” or your “bill”?

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, people have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as “e-mail” and “Internet,” and verbs such as “downloading,” “texting,” and “blogging.” Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Even while it constantly evolves, language continues to shape our reality. This insight was established in the 1920s by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. They believed that reality is culturally determined, and that any interpretation of reality is based on a society's language. To prove this point, the sociologists argued that every language has words or expressions specific to that language. In the United States, for example, the number 13 is associated with bad luck. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for "death."

The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and that they therefore understand their world through the culture embedded in their language. The hypothesis, which has also been called linguistic relativity, states that language shapes thought (Swoyer 2003). Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word "ambivalent," they don't recognize an experience of uncertainty due to conflicting positive and negative feelings about one issue. Essentially, the hypothesis argues, if a person can't describe the experience, the person is not having the experience.

In addition to using language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, much of it is learned through one's culture. Some gestures are nearly universal: smiles often represent joy and crying often represents sadness. Other nonverbal symbols vary across cultural contexts in their meaning. A thumbs-up, for example, indicates positive reinforcement in the United States, whereas in Russia and Australia, it is an offensive curse (Passero 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it's done and for whom. It may mean "hello," "goodbye," "no thank you," or "I'm royalty." Winks convey a variety of messages, including "We have a secret," "I'm only kidding," or "I'm attracted to you." From a distance, a person can understand the emotional gist of two people in conversation just by watching their body language and facial expressions. Furrowed brows and folded arms indicate a serious topic, possibly an argument. Smiles, with heads lifted and arms open, suggest a lighthearted, friendly chat.

: In 1991, when she was 6 years old, Lucy Alvarez attended a school that allowed for the use of both English and Spanish. Lucy's teacher was bilingual, the librarian offered bilingual books, and many of the school staff spoke both Spanish and English. Lucy and many of her classmates who spoke only Spanish at home were lucky. According to the U.S. Census, 13.8 percent of U.S. residents speak a non-English language at home. That's a significant figure, but not enough to ensure that Lucy would be encouraged to use her native language in school (Mount 2010).

Lucy's parents, who moved to Texas from Mexico, struggled under the pressure to speak English. Lucy might easily have gotten lost and left behind if she'd felt the same pressure in school. In 2008, researchers from Johns Hopkins University conducted a series of studies on the effects of bilingual education (Slavin et al. 2008). They found that students taught in both their native tongue and English make better progress than those taught only in English.

Technically, the United States has no official language. But many believe English to be the rightful language of the United States, and over 30 states have passed laws specifying English as the official tongue. Proponents of English-only laws suggest that a national ruling will save money on translation, printing, and human resource costs, including funding for bilingual teachers. They argue that setting English as the official language will encourage non-English speakers to learn English faster and adapt to the culture of the United States more easily (Mount 2010).

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) oppose making English the official language, claiming that it violates the rights of non-English speakers. English-only laws, they believe, deny the reality of our nation's diversity and unfairly target Latinos and Asians. They point to the fact that much of the debate on this topic has risen since 1970, a time when the United States experienced new waves of immigration from Asia and Mexico.

Today, a lot of product information gets written in multiple languages. Enter a store like Home Depot and you'll find signs in both English and Spanish. Buy a children's product and the safety warnings will be presented in multiple languages. While marketers are financially motivated to

reach the largest number of consumers possible, this trend also may help people acclimate to a culture of bilingualism.

Studies show that most American immigrants eventually abandon their native tongue and become fluent in English. Bilingual education helps with that transition. Today, Lucy Alvarez is an ambitious and high-achieving college student. Fluent in both English and Spanish, Lucy is studying law enforcement, a field that seeks bilingual employees. The same bilingualism that contributed to her success in grade school will help her thrive professionally as a law officer serving her community.



**Figure 3.1:** Nowadays, many signs—on streets and in stores—include both English and Spanish. What effect does this have on members of society? What effect does it have on our culture? (Photo courtesy of istoletv/flickr)

### 3.3.4 Summary

A culture consists of many elements, such as the values and beliefs of its society. Culture is also governed by norms, including laws, mores, and folkways. The symbols and language of a society are key to developing and conveying culture.

### 3.3.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 3.3.1

(Solution on p. 79.)

A nation's flag is:

- a. A symbol
- b. A value
- c. A culture
- d. A folkway

**Exercise 3.3.2***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The existence of social norms, both formal and informal, is one of the main things that inform \_\_\_\_\_, otherwise known as a way to encourage social conformity.

- a. values
- b. sanctions
- c. social control
- d. mores

**Exercise 3.3.3***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The biggest difference between mores and folkways is that

- a. mores are primarily linked to morality, whereas folkways are primarily linked to being commonplace within a culture
- b. mores are absolute, whereas folkways are temporary
- c. mores refer to material culture, whereas folkways refer to nonmaterial culture
- d. mores refer to nonmaterial culture, whereas folkways refer to material culture

**Exercise 3.3.4***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The notion that people cannot feel or experience something that they do not have a word for can be explained by:

- a. linguistics
- b. Sapir-Whorf
- c. Ethnographic imagery
- d. bilingualism

**Exercise 3.3.5***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Cultural sanctions can also be viewed as ways that society:

- a. Establishes leaders
- b. Determines language
- c. Regulates behavior
- d. Determines laws

**3.3.6 Short Answer****Exercise 3.3.6**

What do you think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Do you agree or disagree with it? Cite examples or research to support your point of view.

**Exercise 3.3.7**

How do you think your culture would exist if there were no such thing as a social “norm”? Do you think chaos would ensue or relative peace could be kept? Explain.

**3.3.7 Further Research**

The science-fiction novel, *Babel-17*, by Samuel R. Delaney was based upon the principles of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Read an excerpt from the novel here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Babel-17><sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Babel-17>



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## 3.4 Pop Culture, Subculture, and Cultural Change<sup>13</sup>

It may seem obvious that there are a multitude of cultural differences between societies in the world. After all, we can easily see that people vary from one society to the next. It's natural that a young woman from rural Kenya would have a very different view of the world from an elderly man in Mumbai—one of the most populated cities in the world. Additionally, each culture has its own internal variations. Sometimes the differences between cultures are not nearly as large as the differences inside cultures.

### 3.4.1 High Culture and Popular Culture

Do you prefer listening to opera or hip hop music? Do you like watching horse racing or NASCAR? Do you read books of poetry or celebrity magazines? In each pair, one type of entertainment is considered high-brow and the other low-brow. Sociologists use the term **high culture** to describe the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the highest class segments of a society. People often associate high culture with intellectualism, political power, and prestige. In America, high culture also tends to be associated with wealth. Events considered high culture can be expensive and formal—attending a ballet, seeing a play, or listening to a live symphony performance.

The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a TV show. Rock and pop music—"pop" short for "popular"—are part of popular culture. In modern times, popular culture is often expressed and spread via commercial media such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites. Unlike high culture, popular culture is known and accessible to most people. You can share a discussion of favorite football teams with a new coworker, or comment on "American Idol" when making small talk in line at the grocery store. But if you tried to launch into a deep discussion on the classical Greek play *Antigone*, few members of American society today would be familiar with it.

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop\\_lang.html](http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_lang.html)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/260911>

<sup>10</sup><http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2003/entries/relativism/supplement2.html>

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/us/04garfinkel.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/us/04garfinkel.html?_r=2)

<sup>12</sup>[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/magazine/7292252.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7292252.stm)

<sup>13</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42810/1.3/>>.

Although high culture may be viewed as superior to popular culture, the labels of high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, considered pop culture when they were written, are now among our society's high culture. Five hundred years from now, will our descendants associate watching *Two and a Half Men* with members of the cultural elite?

### 3.4.2 Subculture and Counterculture

A **subculture** is just as it sounds—a smaller cultural group within a larger culture; people of a subculture are part of the larger culture, but also share a specific identity within a smaller group.

Thousands of subcultures exist within the United States. Ethnic and racial groups share the language, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are united by shared experiences. Biker culture revolves around a dedication to motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by members who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetic additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. In the United States, adolescents often form subcultures to develop a shared youth identity. Alcoholics Anonymous offers support to those suffering from alcoholism. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.

Sociologists distinguish subcultures from **countercultures**, which are a type of subculture that rejects some of the larger culture's norms and values. In contrast to subcultures, which operate relatively smoothly within the larger society, countercultures might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society.

Cults, a word derived from culture, are also considered counterculture group. The group "Yearning for Zion" (YFZ) in Eldorado, Texas, existed outside the mainstream, and the limelight, until its leader was accused of statutory rape and underage marriage. The sect's formal norms clashed too severely to be tolerated by U.S. law, and in 2008, authorities raided the compound, removing more than two hundred women and children from the property.

: Skinny jeans, chunky glasses, and T-shirts with vintage logos—the American hipster is a recognizable figure in the modern United States. Based predominately in metropolitan areas, sometimes clustered around hotspots such as the Williamsburg neighborhood in New York City, hipsters define themselves through a rejection of the mainstream. As a subculture, hipsters spurn many of the values and beliefs of American culture, preferring vintage clothing to fashion and a bohemian lifestyle to one of wealth and power. While hipster culture may seem to be the new trend among young, middle-class youth, the history of the group stretches back to the early decades of the 1900s.

Where did the hipster culture begin? In the early 1940s, jazz music was on the rise in the United States. Musicians were known as "hepcats" and had a smooth, relaxed quality that went against upright, mainstream life. Those who were "hep" or "hip" lived by the code of jazz, while those who were "square" lived according to society's rules. The idea of a "hipster" was born.

The hipster movement spread and young people, drawn to the music and fashion, took on attitudes and language derived from the culture of jazz. Unlike the vernacular of the day, hipster slang was purposefully ambiguous. When hipsters said, "It's cool, man," they meant not that everything was good, but that it was the way it was.



**Figure 3.6:** In the 1940s, American hipsters were associated with the “cool” culture of jazz. (Photo courtesy of William P. Gottlieb/Ira and Leonore S. Gershwin Fund Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress)

By the 1950s, the jazz culture was winding down and many traits of hepcat culture were becoming mainstream. A new subculture was on the rise. The “Beat Generation,” a title coined by writer Jack Kerouac, were anticonformist and antimaterialistic. They were writers who listened to jazz and embraced radical politics. They bummed around, hitchhiked the country, and lived in squalor.

The lifestyle spread. College students, clutching copies of Kerouac’s *On the Road*, dressed in berets, black turtlenecks, and black-rimmed glasses. Women wore black leotards and grew their hair long. Herb Caen, a San Francisco journalist, used the suffix from *Sputnik 1*, the Russian satellite that orbited Earth in 1957, to dub the movement’s followers “Beatniks.”

As the Beat Generation faded, a new, related movement began. It too focused on breaking social boundaries, but also advocated freedom of expression, philosophy, and love. It took its name from the generations before; in fact, some theorists claim that Beats themselves coined the term to describe their children. Over time, the “little hipsters” of the 1970s became known simply as “hippies.”

Today’s generation of hipsters rose out of the hippie movement in the same way that hippies rose from Beats and Beats from hepcats. Although contemporary hipsters may not seem to have much in common with 1940 hipsters, the emulation of nonconformity is still there. In 2010, sociologist Mark Greif set about investigating the hipster subculture of the United States and found that much of what tied the group members together was not based on fashion or musical taste or even a specific point of contention with the mainstream. “All hipsters play at being the inventors or first adopters of novelties,” Greif wrote. “Pride comes from knowing, and deciding, what’s cool in advance of the rest of the world. Yet the habits of hatred and accusation are endemic to hipsters because they feel the weakness of everyone’s position—including their own” (Greif 2010). Much as the hepcats of jazz era opposed common culture with carefully crafted appearances of coolness and relaxation, modern hipsters reject mainstream values with a purposeful apathy.

Young people are often drawn to oppose mainstream conventions, even if in the same way that others do. Ironic, cool to the point of non-caring, and intellectual, hipsters continue to embody a subculture, while simultaneously impacting mainstream culture.



**Figure 3.7:** Intellectual and trendy, today's hipsters define themselves through cultural irony. (Photo courtesy of Lorena Cupcake/Wikimedia Commons)

### 3.4.3 Cultural Change

As the hipster example illustrates, culture is always evolving. Moreover, new things are added to material culture every day, and they affect nonmaterial culture as well. Cultures change when something new (say, railroads or smartphones) opens up new ways of living and when new ideas enter a culture (say, as a result of travel or globalization).

#### 3.4.3.1 Innovation: Discovery and Invention

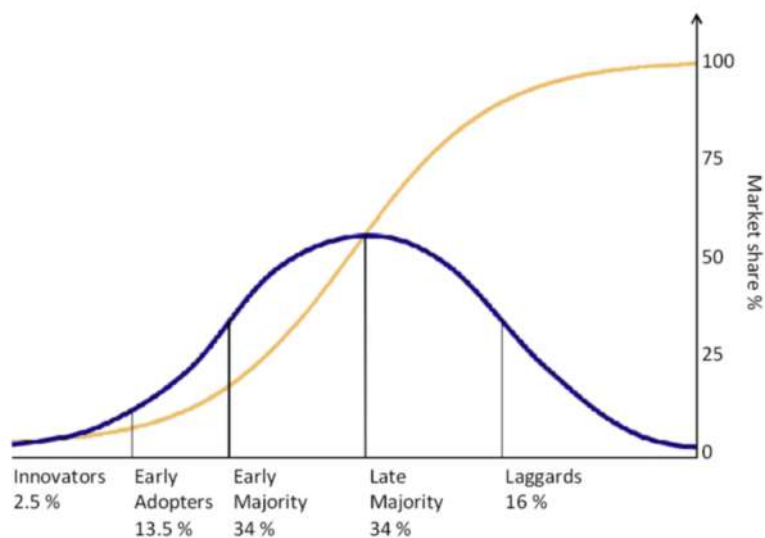
An **innovation** refers to an object or concept's initial appearance in society—it's innovative because it is markedly new. There are two ways to come across an innovative object or idea: discover it or invent it. **Discoveries** make known previously unknown but existing aspects of reality. In 1610, when Galileo looked through his telescope and discovered Saturn, the planet was already there, but until then, no one had known about it. When Christopher Columbus encountered America, the land was, of course, already well known to its inhabitants. However, Columbus's discovery was new knowledge for Europeans, and it opened the way to changes in European culture, as well as to the cultures of the discovered lands. For example, new foods such as potatoes and tomatoes transformed the European diet, and horses brought from Europe changed hunting practices of Native American tribes of the Great Plains.

**Inventions** result when something new is formed from existing objects or concepts—when things are put together in an entirely new manner. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, electric appliances were invented at an astonishing pace. Cars, airplanes, vacuum cleaners, lamps, radios, telephones, and televisions were all new inventions. Inventions may shape a culture when people use them in place of older ways of carrying out activities and relating to others, or as a way to carry out new kinds of activities. Their adoption reflects (and may shape) cultural values, and their use may require new norms for new situations.

Consider the introduction of modern communication technology such as mobile phones and smartphones. As more and more people began carrying these devices, phone conversations no longer were restricted to homes, offices, and phone booths. People on trains, in restaurants, and in other public places became annoyed by listening to one-sided conversations. Norms were needed for cell phone use. Some people pushed for the idea that those who are out in the world should pay attention to their companions and surroundings. However, technology enabled a workaround: texting, which enables quiet communication, and has surpassed phoning as the chief way to meet today's highly valued ability to stay in touch anywhere, everywhere.

When the pace of innovation increases, it can lead to generation gaps. Technological gadgets that catch on quickly with one generation are sometimes dismissed by a skeptical older generation. A culture's objects and ideas can cause not just generational but cultural gaps. Material culture tends to diffuse more quickly than nonmaterial culture; technology can spread through society in a matter of months, but it can take generations for the ideas and beliefs of society to change. Sociologist William F. Ogburn coined the term **culture lag** to refer to this time that elapses between when a new item of material culture is introduced and when it becomes an accepted part of nonmaterial culture (Ogburn 1957).

Culture lag can also cause tangible problems. The infrastructure of the United States, built a hundred years ago or more, is having trouble supporting today's more heavily populated and fast-paced life. Yet there is a lag in conceptualizing solutions to infrastructure problems. Rising fuel prices, increased air pollution, and traffic jams are all symptoms of culture lag. Although people are becoming aware of the consequences of overusing resources, the means to support changes takes time to achieve.

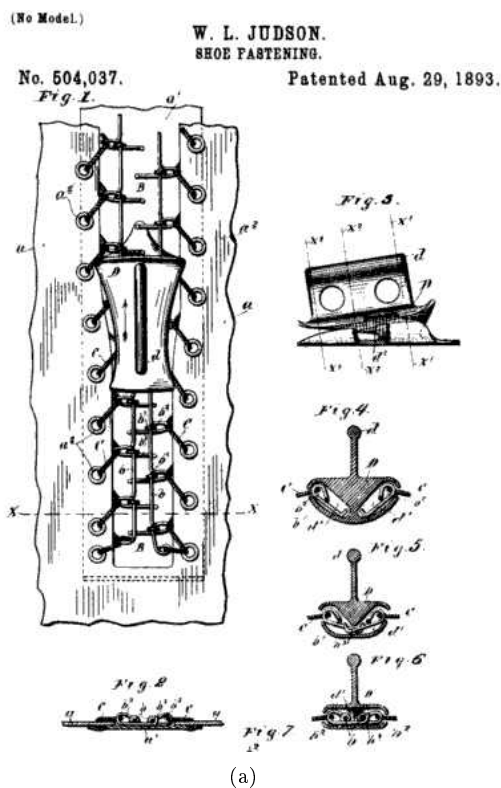


**Figure 3.8:** Sociologist Everett Rogers (1962) developed a model of the diffusion of innovations. As consumers gradually adopt a new innovation, the item grows toward a market share of 100 percent, or complete saturation within a society. (Graph courtesy of Tungsten/Wikimedia Commons)

### 3.4.3.2 Diffusion and Globalization

The integration of world markets and technological advances of the last decades have allowed for greater exchange between cultures through the processes of globalization and diffusion. Beginning in the 1980s, Western governments began to deregulate social services while granting greater liberties to private businesses. As a result, world markets became dominated by multinational companies in the 1980s, a new state of affairs at that time. We have since come to refer to this integration of international trade and finance markets as **globalization**. Increased communications and air travel have further opened doors for international business relations, facilitating the flow not only of goods but of information and people as well (Scheuerman 2010). Today, many U.S. companies set up offices in other nations where the costs of resources and labor are cheaper. When a person in the United States calls to get information about banking, insurance, or computer services, the person taking that call may be working in India or Indonesia.

Alongside the process of globalization is **diffusion**, or, the spread of material and nonmaterial culture. While globalization refers to the integration of markets, diffusion relates a similar process to the integration of international cultures. Middle-class Americans can fly overseas and return with a new appreciation of Thai noodles or Italian gelato. Access to television and the Internet has brought the lifestyles and values portrayed in American sitcoms into homes around the globe. Twitter feeds from public demonstrations in one nation have encouraged political protesters in other countries. When this kind of diffusion occurs, material objects and ideas from one culture are introduced into another.



**Figure 3.9:** Officially patented in 1893 as the “clasp locker” (left), the zipper did not diffuse through society for many decades. Today, it is immediately recognizable around the world. (Photo (a) courtesy of U.S. Patent Office/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Rabensteiner/Wikimedia Commons)

### 3.4.4 Summary

Sociologists recognize high culture and popular culture within societies. Societies are also comprised of many subcultures—smaller groups that share an identity. Countercultures reject mainstream values and create their own cultural rules and norms. Through invention or discovery, cultures evolve via new ideas and new ways of thinking. In many modern cultures, the cornerstone of innovation is technology, the rapid growth of which can lead to cultural lag. Technology is also responsible for the spread of both material and nonmaterial culture that contributes to globalization.

### 3.4.5 Section Quiz

**Exercise 3.4.1***(Solution on p. 79.)*

An example of high culture is \_\_\_\_\_, whereas an example of popular culture would be \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Dostoevsky style in film; “American Idol” winners
- b. medical marijuana; film noir
- c. country music; pop music
- d. political theory; sociological theory

**Exercise 3.4.2***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The Ku Klux Klan is an example of what part of culture?

- a. Counterculture
- b. Subculture
- c. Multiculturalism
- d. Afrocentricity

**Exercise 3.4.3***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Modern-day hipsters are an example of:

- a. ethnocentricity
- b. counterculture
- c. subculture
- d. high culture

**Exercise 3.4.4***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Your 83-year-old grandmother has been using a computer for some time now. As a way to keep in touch, you frequently send e-mails of a few lines to let her know about your day. She calls after every e-mail to respond point by point, but she has never e-mailed a response back. This can be viewed as an example of:

- a. cultural lag
- b. innovation
- c. ethnocentricity
- d. xenophobia

**Exercise 3.4.5***(Solution on p. 79.)*

Some jobs today advertise in multinational markets and permit telecommuting in lieu of working from a primary location. This broadening of the job market and the way that jobs are performed can be attributed to:

- a. cultural lag

- b. innovation
- c. discovery
- d. globalization

**Exercise 3.4.6***(Solution on p. 79.)*

The major difference between invention and discovery is:

- a. Invention is based on technology, whereas discovery is usually based on culture
- b. Discovery involves finding something that already exists, but invention puts things together in a new way
- c. Invention refers to material culture, whereas discovery can be material or theoretic, like laws of physics
- d. Invention is typically used to refer to international objects, whereas discovery refers to that which is local to one's culture

**Exercise 3.4.7***(Solution on p. 79.)*

That McDonald's is found in almost every country around the world is an example of:

- a. globalization
- b. diffusion
- c. culture lag
- d. xenocentrism

**3.4.6 Short Answer****Exercise 3.4.8**

Identify several examples of popular culture and describe how they inform larger culture. How prevalent is the effect of these examples in your everyday life?

**Exercise 3.4.9**

Consider some of the specific issues or concerns of your generation. Are any ideas countercultural? What subcultures have emerged from your generation? How have the issues of your generation expressed themselves culturally? How has your generation made its mark on society's collective culture?

**Exercise 3.4.10**

What are some examples of cultural lag that are present in your life? Do you think technology affects culture positively or negatively? Explain.

**3.4.7 Further Research**

The Beats were a counterculture that birthed an entire movement of art, music, and literature—much of which is still highly regarded and studied today. The man responsible for naming the generation was Jack Kerouac; however, the man responsible for introducing the world to that generation was John Clellon Holmes, a writer often lumped in with the group. In 1952 he penned an article for the *New York Times Magazine* titled “This Is the Beat Generation.” Read that article and learn more about Clellon Holmes and the Beats: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Beats><sup>14</sup>

Popular culture meets counterculture in this as Oprah Winfrey interacts with members of the Yearning for Zion cult. Read about it here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Oprah><sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Beats>

<sup>15</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Oprah>



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<sup>16</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/books/review/Greif-t.html?pagewanted=1>

<sup>17</sup><http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/globalization/>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 3

to Exercise 3.2.1 (p. 59): Answer

B

to Exercise 3.2.2 (p. 60): Answer

D

to Exercise 3.2.3 (p. 60): Answer

C

to Exercise 3.2.4 (p. 60): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.2.5 (p. 60): Answer

D

to Exercise 3.3.1 (p. 68): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.3.2 (p. 69): Answer

C

to Exercise 3.3.3 (p. 69): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.3.4 (p. 69): Answer

B

to Exercise 3.3.5 (p. 69): Answer

C

to Exercise 3.4.1 (p. 76): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.4.2 (p. 76): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.4.3 (p. 76): Answer

C

to Exercise 3.4.4 (p. 76): Answer

A

to Exercise 3.4.5 (p. 76): Answer

D

to Exercise 3.4.6 (p. 77): Answer

B

to Exercise 3.4.7 (p. 77): Answer

B



## Chapter 4

# Society and Social Interaction

### 4.1 Social Constructions of Reality<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 4.1:** Who are we? What role do we play in society? According to sociologists, we construct reality through our interactions with others. In a way, our day-to-day interactions are like those of actors on a stage. (Photo courtesy of Jan Lewandowski/flickr)

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Until now, we’ve primarily discussed the differences between societies. Rather than discuss their problems and configurations, we’ll now explore how society came to be and how sociologists view social interaction.

In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book called *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it, they argued that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call **habitualization**. Habitualization describes how “any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be ... performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42964/1.3/>>.

economical effort” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Not only do we construct our own society, but we accept it as it is because others have created it before us. Society is, in fact, “habit.”

For example, your school exists as a school and not just as a building because you and others agree that it is a school. If your school is older than you are, it was created by the agreement of others before you. In a sense, it exists by consensus, both prior and current. This is an example of the process of **institutionalization**, the act of implanting a convention or norm into society. Bear in mind that the institution, while socially constructed, is still quite real.

Another way of looking at this concept is through W.I. Thomas’s notable **Thomas theorem** which states, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928). That is, people’s behavior can be determined by their subjective construction of reality rather than by objective reality. For example, a teenager who is repeatedly given a label—overachiever, player, bum—might live up to the term even though it initially wasn’t a part of his character.

Like Berger and Luckmann’s description of habitualization, Thomas states that our moral codes and social norms are created by “successive definitions of the situation.” This concept is defined by sociologist Robert K. Merton as a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. Merton explains that with a self-fulfilling prophecy, even a false idea can become true if it is acted upon. One example he gives is of a “bank run.” Say for some reason, a number of people falsely fear that their bank is soon to be bankrupt. Because of this false notion, people run to their bank and demand all their cash at once. As banks rarely, if ever, have that much money on hand, the bank does indeed run out of money, fulfilling the customers’ prophecy. Here, reality is constructed by an idea.

Symbolic interactionists offer another lens through which to analyze the social construction of reality. With a theoretical perspective focused on the symbols (like language, gestures, and artifacts) that people use to interact, this approach is interested in how people interpret those symbols in daily interactions. For example, we might feel fright at seeing a person holding a gun, unless, of course, it turns out to be a police officer. Interactionists also recognize that language and body language reflect our values. One has only to learn a foreign tongue to know that not every English word can be easily translated into another language. The same is true for gestures. While Americans might recognize a “thumbs up” as meaning “great,” in Germany it would mean “one” and in Japan it would mean “five.” Thus, our construction of reality is influenced by our symbolic interactions.



**Figure 4.2:** The story line of a self-fulfilling prophecy appears in many literary works, perhaps most famously in the story of Oedipus. Oedipus is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. In going out of his way to avoid his fate, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills it. Oedipus's story illustrates one way in which members of society contribute to the social construction of reality. (Photo courtesy of Jean-Antoine-Theodore Giroust/Wikimedia Commons)

### 4.1.1 Roles and Status

As you can imagine, people employ many types of behaviors in day-to-day life. **Roles** are patterns of behavior that we recognize in each other that are representative of a person's social status. Currently, while reading this text, you are playing the role of a student. However, you also play other roles in your life, such as "daughter," "neighbor," or "employee." These various roles are each associated with a different status.

Sociologists use the term **status** to describe the responsibilities and benefits a person experiences according to their rank and role in society. Some statuses are **ascribed**—those you do not select, such as son, elderly person, or female. Others, called **achieved statuses**, are obtained by choice, such as a high school dropout, self-made millionaire, or nurse. As a daughter or son, you occupy a different status than as a neighbor or employee. One person can be associated with a multitude of roles and statuses. Even a single status such as "student" has a complex **role-set**, or array of roles, attached to it (Merton 1957).

If too much is required of a single role, individuals can experience **role strain**. Consider the duties of a parent: cooking, cleaning, driving, problem-solving, acting as a source of moral guidance—the list goes on. Similarly, a person can experience **role conflict** when one or more roles are contradictory. A parent who also has a full-time career can experience role conflict on a daily basis. When there is a deadline at the office but a sick child needs to be picked up from school, which comes first? When you are working toward a promotion but your children want you to come to their school play, which do you choose? Being a college student can conflict with being an employee, being an athlete, or even being a friend. Our roles in life have a great effect on our decisions and who we become.

### 4.1.2 Presentation of Self

Of course, it is impossible to look inside a person's head and study what role they are playing. All we can observe is behavior, or role performance. **Role performance** is how a person expresses his or her role. Sociologist Erving Goffman presented the idea that a person is like an actor on a stage. Calling his theory dramaturgy, Goffman believed that we use “impression management” to present ourselves to others as we hope to be perceived. Each situation is a new scene, and individuals perform different roles depending on who is present (Goffman 1959). Think about the way you behave around your coworkers versus the way you behave around your grandparents versus the way you behave with a blind date. Even if you're not consciously trying to alter your personality, your grandparents, coworkers, and date probably see different sides of you.

As in a play, the setting matters as well. If you have a group of friends over to your house for dinner, you are playing the role of a host. It is agreed upon that you will provide food and seating and probably be stuck with a lot of the cleanup at the end of the night. Similarly, your friends are playing the roles of guests, and they are expected to respect your property and any rules you may set forth (“Don't leave the door open or the cat will get out.”). In any scene, there needs to be a shared reality between players. In this case, if you view yourself as a guest and others view you as a host, there are likely to be problems.

Impression management is a critical component of symbolic interactionism. For example, a judge in a courtroom has many “props” to create an impression of fairness, gravity, and control—like her robe and gavel. Those entering the courtroom are expected to adhere to the scene being set. Just imagine the “impression” that can be made by how a person dresses. This is the reason that attorneys frequently select the hairstyle and apparel for witnesses and defendants in courtroom proceedings.



**Figure 4.3:** A courtroom exemplifies a scene where all players have clearly defined roles and expected performances. (Photo courtesy of John Marino/flicker)

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Goffman's dramaturgy ideas expand on the ideas of Charles Cooley and the **looking-glass self**. According to Cooley, we base our image on what we think other people see (Cooley 1902). We imagine how we must

appear to others, then react to this speculation. We don certain clothes, prepare our hair in a particular manner, wear makeup, use cologne, and the like—all with the notion that our presentation of ourselves is going to affect how others perceive us. We expect a certain reaction, and, if lucky, we get the one we desire and feel good about it. But more than that, Cooley believed that our sense of self is based upon this idea: we imagine how we look to others, draw conclusions based upon their reactions to us, and then we develop our personal sense of self. In other words, people's reactions to us are like a mirror in which we are reflected.

### 4.1.3 Summary

Society is based on the social construction of reality. How we define society influences how society actually is. Likewise, how we see other people influences their actions as well as our actions toward them. We all take on various roles throughout our lives, and our social interactions depend on what types of roles we assume, who we assume them with, and the scene where interaction takes place.

### 4.1.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 4.1.1

*(Solution on p. 87.)*

Mary works full-time at an office downtown while her young children stay at a neighbor's house. She's just learned that the childcare provider is leaving the country. Mary has succumbed to pressure to volunteer at her church, plus her ailing mother-in-law will be moving in with her next month. Which of the following is likely to occur as Mary tries to balance her existing and new responsibilities?

- a. Role strain
- b. Self-fulfilling prophecy
- c. Status conflict
- d. Status strain

#### Exercise 4.1.2

*(Solution on p. 87.)*

According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, society is based on \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. habitual actions
- b. status
- c. institutionalization
- d. role performance

#### Exercise 4.1.3

*(Solution on p. 87.)*

Paco knows that women find him attractive, and he's never found it hard to get a date. But as he ages, he dyes his hair to hide the gray and wears clothes that camouflage the weight he has put on. Paco's behavior can be best explained by the concept of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. role strain
- b. the looking-glass self
- c. role performance
- d. habitualization



### 4.1.5 Short Answer

#### Exercise 4.1.4

Draw a large circle and then “slice” the circle into pieces like a pie, labeling each piece with a role or status that you occupy. Add as many statuses, ascribed and achieved, that you have. Don’t forget things like dog owner, gardener, traveler, student, runner, employee. How many statuses do you have? In which ones are there role conflicts?

#### Exercise 4.1.5

Think of a self-fulfilling prophecy that you’ve experienced. Based on this experience, do you agree with the Thomas theorem? Use examples from current events to support your answer as well.

### 4.1.6 Further Research

TV Tropes is a website where users identify concepts that are commonly used in literature, film, and other media. Although its tone is for the most part humorous, the site provides a good jumping-off point for research. Browse the list of examples under the entry of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Pay careful attention to the real-life examples. Are there ones that surprised you or that you don’t agree with? <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/tv-tropes><sup>2</sup>

### 4.1.7 References

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- Thomas, W.I. and D.S. Thomas. 1928. *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*. New York: Knopf.

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<sup>2</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/tv-tropes>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 4

to Exercise 4.1.1 (p. 85): Answer

A

to Exercise 4.1.2 (p. 85): Answer

A

to Exercise 4.1.3 (p. 85): Answer

B



## Chapter 5

# Socialization

### 5.1 Introduction to Socialization<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 5.1:** Socialization is how we learn the norms and beliefs of our society. From our earliest family and play experiences, we are made aware of societal values and expectations. (Photo courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives/flickr)

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In the summer of 2005, police detective Mark Holste followed an investigator from the Department of Children and Families to a home in Plant City, Florida. They were there to look into a statement from the neighbor concerning a shabby house on Old Sydney Road. A small girl was reported peering from one of its broken windows. This seemed odd because no one in the neighborhood had seen a young child in or around the home, which had been inhabited for the past three years by a woman, her boyfriend, and two adult sons.

Who was the mystery girl in the window?

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43027/1.2/>>.

Entering the house, Detective Holste and his team were shocked. It was the worst mess they'd ever seen, infested with cockroaches, smeared with feces and urine from both people and pets, and filled with dilapidated furniture and ragged window coverings.

Detective Holste headed down a hallway and entered a small room. That's where he found the little girl, with big, vacant eyes, staring into the darkness. A newspaper report later described the detective's first encounter with the child: "She lay on a torn, moldy mattress on the floor. She was curled on her side . . . her ribs and collarbone jutted out . . . her black hair was matted, crawling with lice. Insect bites, rashes and sores pocked her skin . . . She was naked—except for a swollen diaper. . . . Her name, her mother said, was Danielle. She was almost seven years old" (DeGregory 2008).

Detective Holste immediately carried Danielle out of the home. She was taken to a hospital for medical treatment and evaluation. Through extensive testing, doctors determined that, although she was severely malnourished, Danielle was able to see, hear, and vocalize normally. Still, she wouldn't look anyone in the eyes, didn't know how to chew or swallow solid food, didn't cry, didn't respond to stimuli that would typically cause pain, and didn't know how to communicate either with words or simple gestures such as nodding "yes" or "no." Likewise, although tests showed she had no chronic diseases or genetic abnormalities, the only way she could stand was with someone holding onto her hands, and she "walked sideways on her toes, like a crab" (DeGregory 2008).

What had happened to Danielle? Put simply: beyond the basic requirements for survival, she had been neglected. Based on their investigation, social workers concluded that she had been left almost entirely alone in rooms like the one where she was found. Without regular interaction—the holding, hugging, talking, the explanations and demonstrations given to most young children—she had not learned to walk or to speak, to eat or to interact, to play or even to understand the world around her. From a sociological point of view, Danielle had not had been socialized.

**Socialization** is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values. *Socialization* is not the same as *socializing* (interacting with others, like family, friends, and coworkers); to be precise, it is a sociological process that occurs through socializing. As Danielle's story illustrates, even the most basic of human activities are learned. You may be surprised to know that even physical tasks like sitting, standing, and walking had not automatically developed for Danielle as she grew. And without socialization, Danielle hadn't learned about the material culture of her society (the tangible objects a culture uses): for example, she couldn't hold a spoon, bounce a ball, or use a chair for sitting. She also hadn't learned its nonmaterial culture, such as its beliefs, values, and norms. She had no understanding of the concept of "family," didn't know cultural expectations for using a bathroom for elimination, and had no sense of modesty. Most importantly, she hadn't learned to use the symbols that make up language—through which we learn about who we are, how we fit with other people, and the natural and social worlds in which we live.

Sociologists have long been fascinated by circumstances like Danielle's—in which a child receives sufficient human support to survive, but virtually no social interaction—because they highlight how much we depend on social interaction to provide the information and skills that we need to be part of society or even to develop a "self."

The necessity for early social contact was demonstrated by the research of Harry and Margaret Harlow. From 1957 to 1963, the Harlows conducted a series of experiments studying how rhesus monkeys, which behave a lot like people, are affected by isolation as babies. They studied monkeys raised under two types of "substitute" mothering circumstances: a mesh and wire sculpture, or a soft terrycloth "mother." The monkeys systematically preferred the company of a soft, terrycloth substitute mother (closely resembling a rhesus monkey) that was unable to feed them, to a mesh and wire mother that provided sustenance via a feeding tube. This demonstrated that while food was important, social comfort was of greater value (Harlow and Harlow 1962; Harlow 1971). Later experiments testing more severe isolation revealed that such deprivation of social contact led to significant developmental and social challenges later in life.



**Figure 5.2:** Baby rhesus monkeys, like humans, need to be raised with social contact for healthy development. (Photo courtesy of Paul Asman and Jill Lenoble/flickr)

In the following sections, we will examine the importance of the complex process of socialization and how it takes place through interaction with many individuals, groups, and social institutions. We will explore how socialization is not only critical to children as they develop, but how it is a lifelong process through which we become prepared for new social environments and expectations in every stage of our lives. But first, we will turn to scholarship about self development, the process of coming to recognize a sense of self, a “self” that is then able to be socialized.

### 5.1.1 References

DeGregory, Lane. 2008. “The Girl in the Window.” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 31. Retrieved January 31, 2012 (<http://www.tampabay.com/features/humaninterest/article750838.ece><sup>2</sup> ).

## 5.2 Why Socialization Matters<sup>3</sup>

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how completely intertwined human beings and their social worlds are. First, it is through teaching culture to new members that a society perpetuates itself. If new generations of a society don’t learn its way of life, it ceases to exist. Whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it in order for a society to survive. For American culture to continue, for example, children in the United States must learn about cultural values related to democracy: they have to learn the norms of voting, as well as how to use material objects such as voting machines. Of course, some would argue that it’s just as important in American culture for the younger generation to learn the etiquette of eating in a restaurant or the rituals of tailgate parties at football games. In fact, there are many ideas and objects that Americans teach children in hopes of keeping the society’s way of life going through another generation.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.tampabay.com/features/humaninterest/article750838.ece>

<sup>3</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42821/1.3/>>.



**Figure 5.3:** Socialization teaches us our society's expectations for dining out. The manners and customs of different cultures (When can you use your hands to eat? How should you compliment the cook? Who is the “head” of the table?) are learned through socialization. (Photo courtesy of Niyam Bhushan/flickr)

Socialization is just as essential to us as individuals. Social interaction provides the means via which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, learning who we are and how we fit into the world around us. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner to how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think. As we saw with Danielle, without socialization we literally have no self.

### 5.2.1 Nature versus Nurture

Some experts assert that who we are is a result of **nurture**—the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely in genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, then, who we are depends on **nature**.

One way that researchers attempt to prove the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetics, but, in some cases, were socialized in different ways. Instances of this type of situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same and different can give researchers insight into how our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment.

For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption. However, they were also separated from each other and raised in different households. The parents, and certainly the babies, did not realize they were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study (Flam 2007).

In 2003, the two women, then age 35, reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike, but they behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions (Spratling 2007). Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect that society has on human behavior, the "nurture" side of the nature versus nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All of these factors affect the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

: Bouncer. Firefighter. Factory worker. Cowboy. Chris Langan spent the majority of his adult life just getting by with jobs like these. He had no college degree, few resources, and a past filled with much disappointment. Chris Langan also had an IQ of over 195, nearly 100 points higher than the average person (Brabham 2001). So why didn't Chris become a neurosurgeon, professor, or aeronautical engineer? According to Malcolm Gladwell (2008) in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Chris didn't possess the set of social skills necessary to succeed on such a high level—skills that aren't innate, but learned.

Gladwell looked to a recent study conducted by sociologist Annette Lareau in which she closely shadowed 12 families from various economic backgrounds and examined their parenting techniques. Parents from lower income families followed a strategy of "accomplishment of natural growth," which is to say they let their children develop on their own with a large amount of independence; parents from higher income families, however, "actively fostered and accessed a child's talents, opinions, and skills" (Gladwell 2008). These parents were more likely to engage in analytical conversation, encourage active questioning of the establishment, and foster development of negotiation skills. The parents were also able to introduce their children to a wide range of activities, from sports to music to accelerated academic programs. When one middle class child was denied entry to a gifted and talented program, the mother petitioned the school and arranged additional testing until her daughter was admitted. Lower income parents, however, were more likely to unquestioningly obey authorities such as school boards. Their children were not being socialized to comfortably confront the system and speak up (Gladwell 2008).

What does this have to do with Chris Langan, deemed by some as the smartest man in the world (Brabham 2001)? Chris was born in severe poverty, moving across the country with an abusive and alcoholic stepfather. Chris's genius went greatly unnoticed. After accepting a full scholarship to Reed College, his funding was revoked after his mother failed to fill out necessary paperwork. Unable to successfully make his case to the administration, Chris, who had received straight A's the previous semester, was given F's on his transcript and forced to drop out. After enrolling in Montana State, an administrator's refusal to rearrange his class schedule left him unable to find the means necessary to travel the 16 miles to attend classes. What Chris had in brilliance, he lacked practical intelligence, or what psychologist Robert Sternberg defines as "knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect" (Sternberg et al. 2000). Such knowledge was never part of his socialization.

Chris gave up on school and began working an array of blue-collar jobs, pursuing his intellectual interests on the side. Though he's recently garnered attention from work on his "Cognitive Theoretic Model of the Universe," he remains weary and resistant of the educational system.

As Gladwell concluded, "He'd had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone" (2008).





**Figure 5.4:** Identical twins may look alike, but their differences can give us clues to the effects of socialization. (Photo courtesy of D. Flam/flickr)

Sociologists all recognize the importance of socialization for healthy individual and societal development. But how do scholars working in the three major theoretical paradigms approach this topic? Structural functionalists would say that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. Without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members died off. A conflict theorist might argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race. As in the illustration of Chris Langan, this creates different (unequal) opportunities. An interactionist studying socialization is concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is one small way that messages are conveyed about differences in gender roles.

### 5.2.2 Summary

Socialization is important because it helps uphold societies and cultures; it is also a key part of individual development. Research demonstrates that who we are is affected by both nature (our genetic and hormonal makeup) and nurture (the social environment in which we are raised). Sociology is most concerned with the

way that society's influence affects our behavior patterns, made clear by the way behavior varies across class and gender.

### 5.2.3 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 5.2.1

*(Solution on p. 109.)*

Why do sociologists need to be careful when drawing conclusions from twin studies?

- a. The results do not apply to singletons.
- b. The twins were often raised in different ways.
- c. The twins may turn out to actually be fraternal.
- d. The sample sizes are often small.

#### Exercise 5.2.2

*(Solution on p. 109.)*

From a sociological perspective, which factor does not greatly influence a person's socialization?

- a. Gender
- b. Class
- c. Blood type
- d. Race

#### Exercise 5.2.3

*(Solution on p. 109.)*

Chris Langan's story illustrates that:

- a. children raised in one-parent households tend to have higher IQs.
- b. intelligence is more important than socialization.
- c. socialization can be more important than intelligence.
- d. neither socialization nor intelligence affects college admissions.

### 5.2.4 Short Answer

#### Exercise 5.2.4

Why are twin studies an important way to learn about the relative effects of genetics and socialization on children? What questions about human development do you believe twin studies are best for answering? For what types of questions would twin studies not be as helpful?

#### Exercise 5.2.5

Why do you think that people like Chris Langan continue to have difficulty even after they are helped through societal systems? What is it they've missed that prevents them from functioning successfully in the social world?

### 5.2.5 Further Research

Learn more about five other sets of twins who grew up apart and discovered each other later in life at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/twins><sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/twins>

### 5.2.6 References

Brabham, Denis. 2001. “The Smart Guy.” *Newsday*, August 21. Retrieved January 31, 2012 (<http://www.megafoundation.org/CTMU/Press/TheSmartGuy.pdf><sup>5</sup>).

Flam, Faye. 2007. “Separated Twins Shed Light on Identity Issues.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 9. Retrieved January 31, 2012 (<http://www.megafoundation.org/CTMU/Press/TheSmartGuy.pdf><sup>6</sup>).

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2008. “The Trouble With Geniuses, Part 2.” *Outliers: The Story of Success*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Spratling, Cassandra. 2007. “Nature and Nurture.” *Detroit Free Press*. November 25. Retrieved January 31, 2012 ([http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-11-25/news/26786902\\_1\\_twins-adoption-identical-strangers](http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-11-25/news/26786902_1_twins-adoption-identical-strangers)<sup>7</sup>).

Sternberg, R.J., G.B. Forsythe, J. Hedlund, J. Horvath, S. Snook, W.M. Williams, R.K. Wagner, and E.L. Grigorenko. 2000. *Practical Intelligence in Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## 5.3 Agents of Socialization<sup>8</sup>

Socialization helps people learn to function successfully in their social worlds. How does the process of socialization occur? How do we learn to use the objects of our society’s material culture? How do we come to adopt the beliefs, values, and norms that represent its nonmaterial culture? This learning takes place through interaction with various agents of socialization, like peer groups and families, plus both formal and informal social institutions.

### 5.3.1 Social Group Agents

Social groups often provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. People first learn to use the tangible objects of material culture in these settings, as well as being introduced to the beliefs and values of society.

#### 5.3.1.1 Family

Family is the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, plus members of an extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes); how to relate to others (some as “family,” others as “friends,” still others as “strangers” or “teachers” or “neighbors”); and how the world works (what is “real” and what is “imagined”). As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or your role in helping to raise one, socialization involves teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors impact how a family raises its children. For example, we can use sociological imagination to recognize that individual behaviors are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, poor families usually emphasize obedience and conformity when raising their children, while wealthy families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may be because working-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which the ability to follow rules and to conform helps. Wealthy parents tend to have better educations and often work in managerial positions or in careers that require creative problem solving, so they teach their children

<sup>5</sup><http://www.megafoundation.org/CTMU/Press/TheSmartGuy.pdf>

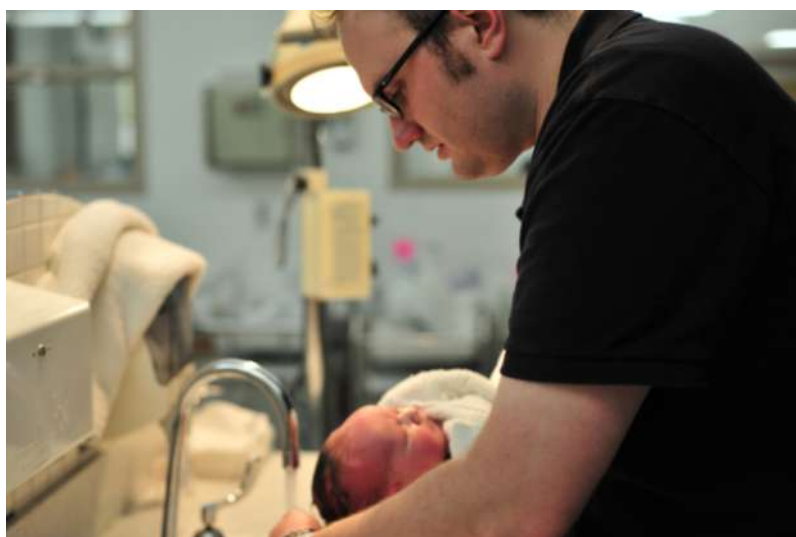
<sup>6</sup><http://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Separated-twins-shed-light-on-identity-issues-1808191.php>

<sup>7</sup>[http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-11-25/news/26786902\\_1\\_twins-adoption-identical-strangers](http://articles.southbendtribune.com/2007-11-25/news/26786902_1_twins-adoption-identical-strangers)

<sup>8</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42825/1.3/>>.

behaviors that would be beneficial in these positions. This means that children are effectively socialized and raised to take the types of jobs that their parents already have, thus reproducing the class system (Kohn 1977). Likewise, children are socialized to abide by gender norms, perceptions of race, and class-related behaviors.

In Sweden, for instance, stay-at-home fathers are an accepted part of the social landscape. A government policy provides subsidized time off work—480 days for families with newborns—with the option of the paid leave being shared between both mothers and fathers. As one stay-at-home dad says, being home to take care of his baby son “is a real fatherly thing to do. I think that’s very masculine” (Associated Press 2011). How do America’s policies—and our society’s expected gender roles—compare? How will Swedish children raised this way be socialized to parental gender norms? How might that be different from parental gender norms in the United States?



**Figure 5.5:** The socialized roles of dads (and moms) vary by society. (Photo courtesy of Nate Grigg/flickr)

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### 5.3.1.2 Peer Groups

A **peer group** is made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests. Peer group socialization begins in the earliest years, such as when kids on a playground teach younger children the norms about taking turns or the rules of a game or how to shoot a basket. As children grow into teenagers, this process continues. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. Additionally, peer groups provide their own opportunities for socialization since kids usually engage in different types of activities with their peers than they do with their families. Peer groups provide adolescents’ first major socialization experience outside the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents’ priorities, this is balanced by parental influence.

### 5.3.2 Institutional Agents

The social institutions of our culture also inform our socialization. Formal institutions—like schools, workplaces, and the government—teach people how to behave in and navigate these systems. Other institutions, like the media, contribute to socialization by inundating us with messages about norms and expectations.

#### 5.3.2.1 School

Most American children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not only in school to study math, reading, science, and other subjects—the manifest function of this system. Schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks.



**Figure 5.6:** These kindergarteners aren't just learning to read and write, they are being socialized to norms like keeping their hands to themselves, standing in line, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. (Photo courtesy of Bonner Springs Library/flickr)

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School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the **hidden curriculum**, the informal teaching done by schools.

For example, in the United States, schools have built a sense of competition into the way grades are awarded and the way teachers evaluate students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). When children participate in a relay race or a math contest, they learn that there are winners and losers in society. When children are required to work together on a project, they practice teamwork with other people in cooperative situations. The hidden curriculum prepares children for the adult world. Children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, rules, expectations, waiting their turn, and sitting still for hours during the day. Schools in different cultures socialize children differently in order to prepare them to function well in those cultures. The latent functions of teamwork and dealing with bureaucracy are features of American culture.

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

: On August 13, 2001, 20 South Korean men gathered in Seoul. Each chopped off one of his own fingers because of textbooks. These men took drastic measures to protest eight middle school textbooks approved by Tokyo for use in Japanese middle schools. According to the Korean government (and other East Asian nations), the textbooks glossed over negative events in Japan's history at the expense of other Asian countries.

In the early 1900s, Japan was one of Asia's more aggressive nations. Korea was held as a colony by the Japanese between 1910 and 1945. Today, Koreans argue that the Japanese are whitewashing that colonial history through these textbooks. One major criticism is that they do not mention that, during World War II, the Japanese forced Korean women into sexual slavery. The textbooks describe the women as having been "drafted" to work, a euphemism that downplays the brutality of what actually occurred. Some Japanese textbooks dismiss an important Korean independence demonstration in 1919 as a "riot." In reality, Japanese soldiers attacked peaceful demonstrators, leaving roughly 6,000 dead and 15,000 wounded (Crampton 2002).

Although it may seem extreme that people are so enraged about how events are described in a textbook that they would resort to dismemberment, the protest affirms that textbooks are a significant tool of socialization in state-run education systems.

### 5.3.2.2 The Workplace

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many American adults at some point invest a significant amount of time at a place of employment. Although socialized into their culture since birth, workers require new socialization into a workplace, both in terms of material culture (such as how to operate the copy machine) and nonmaterial culture (such as whether it's okay to speak directly to the boss or how the refrigerator is shared).

Different jobs require different types of socialization. In the past, many people worked a single job until retirement. Today, the trend is to switch jobs at least once a decade. Between the ages of 18 and 44, the average baby boomer of the younger set held 11 different jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). This means that people must become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments.

### 5.3.2.3 Religion

While some religions may tend toward being an informal institution, this section focuses on practices related to formal institutions. Religion is an important avenue of socialization for many people. The United States is full of synagogues, temples, churches, mosques, and similar religious communities where people gather to worship and learn. Like other institutions, these places teach participants how to interact with the

religion's material culture (like a mezuzah, a prayer rug, or a communion wafer). For some people, important ceremonies related to family structure—like marriage and birth—are connected to religious celebrations. Many of these institutions uphold gender norms and contribute to their enforcement through socialization. From ceremonial rites of passage that reinforce the family unit, to power dynamics which reinforce gender roles, religion fosters a shared set of socialized values that are passed on through society.

#### 5.3.2.4 Government

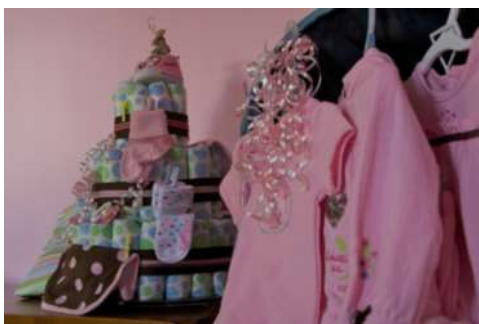
Although we do not think about it, many of the rites of passage people go through today are based on age norms established by the government. To be defined as an “adult” usually means being 18 years old, the age at which a person becomes legally responsible for themselves. And 65 is the start of “old age” since most people become eligible for senior benefits at that point.

Each time we embark on one of these new categories—senior, adult, taxpayer—we must be socialized into this new role. Seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and getting a senior discount where they shop. When American males turn 18, they must register with the Selective Service System within 30 days to be entered into a database for possible military service. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

#### 5.3.2.5 Mass Media

**Mass media** refers to the distribution of impersonal information to a wide audience, such as what happens via television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the TV (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influences social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—what is true (beliefs), what is important (values), and what is expected (norms).

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**Figure 5.7:** Some people are concerned about the way girls today are socialized into a “princess culture.” (Photo courtesy of Emily Stanchfield/flickr)

Pixar is one of the largest producers of children's movies in the world and has released large box office draws, such as *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, and *Up*. What Pixar has never before produced is a movie with a female lead role. This will change with Pixar's newest movie *Brave*, which is due out in 2012. Before *Brave*, women in Pixar served as supporting characters and love interests. In *Up*, for example, the only human female character dies within the first 10 minutes of the film. For the millions of girls watching Pixar films, there are few strong characters or roles for them to relate to. If they do not see possible versions of themselves, they may come to view women as secondary to the lives of men.

The animated films of Pixar's parent company, Disney, have many female lead roles. Disney is well known for films with female leads, such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Mulan*. Many of Disney's movies star a female, and she is nearly always a princess figure. If she is not a princess to begin with, she typically ends the movie by marrying a prince or, in the case of *Mulan*, a military general. Although not all "princesses" in Disney movies play a passive role in their lives, they typically find themselves needing to be rescued by a man, and the happy ending they all search for includes marriage.

Alongside this prevalence of princesses, many parents are expressing concern about the culture of princesses that Disney has created. Peggy Orenstein addresses this problem in her popular book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. Orenstein wonders why every little girl is expected to be a "princess" and why pink has become an all-consuming obsession for many young girls. Another mother wondered what she did wrong when her three-year-old daughter refused to do "non-princessy" things, including running and jumping. The effects of this princess culture can have negative consequences for girls throughout life. An early emphasis on beauty and sexiness can lead to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior among older girls.

What should we expect from Pixar's new movie, the first starring a female character? Although *Brave* features a female lead, she is still a princess. Will this film offer any new type of role model for young girls? (O'Connor 2011; Barnes 2010; Rose 2011).

### 5.3.3 Summary

Our direct interactions with social groups, like families and peers, teach us how others expect us to behave. Likewise, a society's formal and informal institutions socialize its population. Schools, workplaces, and the media communicate and reinforce cultural norms and values.

### 5.3.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 5.3.1

(Solution on p. 109.)

Why are wealthy parents more likely than poor parents to socialize their children toward creativity and problem solving?

- a. Wealthy parents are socializing their children toward the skills of white-collar employment.
- b. Wealthy parents are not concerned about their children rebelling against their rules.
- c. Wealthy parents never engage in repetitive tasks.
- d. Wealthy parents are more concerned with money than with a good education.

#### Exercise 5.3.2

(Solution on p. 109.)

How do schools prepare children to one day enter the workforce?

- a. With a standardized curriculum
- b. Through the hidden curriculum
- c. By socializing them in teamwork
- d. All of the above

#### Exercise 5.3.3

(Solution on p. 109.)

Which one of the following is *not* a way people are socialized by religion?

- a. People learn the material culture of their religion.
- b. Life stages and roles are connected to religious celebration.
- c. An individual's personal internal experience of a divine being leads to their faith.
- d. Places of worship provide a space for shared group experiences.



**Exercise 5.3.4****(Solution on p. 109.)**

Which of the following is a manifest function of schools?

- a. Understanding when to speak up and when to be silent
- b. Learning to read and write
- c. Following a schedule
- d. Knowing locker room etiquette

**Exercise 5.3.5****(Solution on p. 109.)**

Which of the following is typically the earliest agent of socialization?

- a. School
- b. Family
- c. Mass media
- d. Workplace

**5.3.5 Short Answer****Exercise 5.3.6**

Do you think it is important that parents discuss gender roles with their young children, or is gender a topic better left for later? How do parents consider gender norms when buying their children books, movies, and toys? How do you believe they *should* consider it?

**Exercise 5.3.7**

Based on your observations, when are adolescents more likely to listen to their parents or to their peer groups when making decisions? What types of dilemmas lend themselves toward one social agent over another?

**5.3.6 Further Research**

Most societies expect parents to socialize children into gender norms. See the controversy surrounding one Canadian couple's refusal to do so at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Baby-Storm><sup>9</sup>

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## 5.4 Socialization Across the Life Course<sup>19</sup>

Socialization isn't a one-time or even a short-term event. We aren't "stamped" by some socialization machine as we move along a conveyor belt and thereby socialized once and for all. In fact, socialization is a lifelong process.

In the United States, socialization throughout the life course is determined greatly by age norms and "time-related rules and regulations" (Setterson 2002). As we grow older, we encounter age-related transition points that require socialization into a new role, such as becoming school age, entering the workforce, or retiring. For example, the U.S. government mandates that all children attend school. Child labor laws, enacted in the early 20th century, nationally declared that childhood be a time of learning, not of labor. In countries such as Niger and Sierra Leone, however, child labor remains common and socially acceptable, with little legislation to regulate such practices (UNICEF 2011).

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<sup>13</sup><http://www.neontommy.com/news/2011/01/princess-effect-are-girls-too-tangled-disneys-fantasy>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/7638.pdf>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/jul/14/studio-ghibli-arrietty-heroines>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1337272/South-Koreans-sever-fingers-in-anti-Japan-protest.html>

<sup>17</sup><http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>[http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/tables/table\\_2004\\_06.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/tables/table_2004_06.asp)

<sup>19</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42829/1.3/>>.



**Figure 5.8:** Age transition points require socialization into new roles that can vary widely between societies. Young adults in America are encouraged to enter college or the workforce right away, students in England and India can take a year off like Princes William and Harry did, while young men in Singapore and Switzerland must serve time in the military. (Photo courtesy of Charles McCain/flickr)

Have you ever heard of gap year? It's a common custom in British society. When teens finish their secondary schooling (aka high school in the United States), they often take a year "off" before entering college. Frequently, they might take a job, travel, or find other ways to experience another culture. Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, spent his gap year practicing survival skills in Belize, teaching English in Chile, and working on a dairy farm in the United Kingdom (Prince of Wales 2012a). His brother, Prince Harry, advocated for AIDS orphans in Africa and worked as a jackaroo (a novice ranch hand) in Australia (Prince of Wales 2012b).

In the United States, this life transition point is socialized quite differently, and taking a year off is generally frowned upon. Instead, American youth are encouraged to pick career paths by their mid-teens, to select a college and a major by their late teens, and to have completed all collegiate schooling or technical training for their career by their early 20s.

In yet other nations, this phase of the life course is tied into conscription, a term that describes compulsory military service. Egypt, Switzerland, Turkey, and Singapore all have this system in place. Youth in these nations (often only the males) are expected to undergo a number of months or years of military training and service.

How might your life be different if you lived in one of these other countries? Can you think of similar social norms—related to life age-transition points—that vary from country to country?

Many of life's social expectations are made clear and enforced on a cultural level. Through interacting with others and watching others interact, the expectation to fulfill roles becomes clear. While in elementary or middle school, the prospect of having a boyfriend or girlfriend may have been considered undesirable. The socialization that takes place in high school changes the expectation. By observing the excitement and importance attached to dating and relationships within the high school social scene, it quickly becomes apparent that one is now expected not only to be a child and a student, but a significant other as well.

Graduation from formal education—high school, vocational school, or college—involves socialization into a new set of expectations.

Educational expectations vary not only from culture to culture, but from class to class. While middle or upper class families may expect their daughter or son to attend a four-year university after graduating from high school, other families may expect their child to immediately begin working full-time, as many within their family have done before.

: 2008 was a year of financial upheaval in the United States. Rampant foreclosures and bank failures set off a chain of events sparking government distrust, loan defaults, and large-scale unemployment. How has this affected America's young adults?

Millennials, sometimes also called Gen Y, is a term that describes the generation born during the early eighties to early nineties. While the recession was in full swing, many were in the process of entering, attending, or graduating from high school and college. With employment prospects at historical lows, large numbers of graduates were unable to find work, sometimes moving back in with their parents and struggling to pay back student loans.

According to the *New York Times*, this economic stall is causing the Millennials to postpone what most Americans consider to be adulthood: “The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life” (Henig 2010).

The five milestones, Henig writes, that define adulthood, are “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child” (Henig 2010). These social milestones are taking longer for Millennials to attain, if they're attained at all. Sociologists wonder what long-term impact this generation's situation may have on society as a whole.

In the process of socialization, adulthood brings a new set of challenges and expectations, as well as new roles to fill. As the aging process moves forward, social roles continue to evolve. Pleasures of youth, such as wild nights out and serial dating, become less acceptable in the eyes of society. Responsibility and commitment are emphasized as pillars of adulthood, and men and women are expected to “settle down.” During this period, many people enter into marriage or a civil union, bring children into their families, and focus on a career path. They become partners or parents instead of students or significant others.

Just as young children pretend to be doctors or lawyers, play house, and dress up, adults also engage **anticipatory socialization**, the preparation for future life roles. Examples would include a couple who cohabitate before marriage, or soon-to-be parents who read infant care books and prepare their home for the new arrival. As part of anticipatory socialization, adults who are financially able begin planning for their retirement, saving money and looking into future health care options. The transition into any new life role, despite the social structure that supports it, can be difficult.

### 5.4.1 Resocialization

In the process of **resocialization**, old behaviors that were helpful in a previous role are removed because they are no longer of use. Resocialization is necessary when a person moves to a senior care center, goes to boarding school, or serves time in jail. In the new environment, the old rules no longer apply. The process of resocialization is typically more stressful than normal socialization because people have to unlearn behaviors that have become customary to them.

The most common way resocialization occurs is in a total institution where people are isolated from society and are forced to follow someone else's rules. A ship at sea is a total institution, as are religious convents, prisons, or some cult organizations. They are places cut off from a larger society. The 7.1 million Americans who lived in prisons or penitentiaries at the end of 2010 are also members of this type of institution (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). As another example, every branch of the military is a total institution.

Many individuals are resocialized into an institution through a two-part process. First, members entering an institution must leave behind their old identity through what is known as a degradation ceremony. In a **degradation ceremony**, new members lose the aspects of their old identity and are given new identities. The process is sometimes gentle. To enter a senior care home, an elderly person often must leave a family home and give up many belongings which were part of his or her long-standing identity. Though caretakers guide the elderly compassionately, the process can still be one of loss. In many cults, this process is also gentle and happens in an environment of support and caring.

In other situations, the degradation ceremony can be more extreme. New prisoners lose freedom, rights (including the right to privacy), and personal belongings. When entering the army, soldiers have their hair cut short. Their old clothes are removed and they wear matching uniforms. These individuals must give up any markers of their former identity in order to be resocialized into an identity as a “soldier.”



**Figure 5.9:** In basic training, members of the Air Force are taught to walk, move, and look like each other. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sergeant Desiree N. Palacios, U.S. Air Force/Wikimedia Commons)

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After new members of an institution are stripped of their old identity, they build a new one that matches the new society. In the military, soldiers go through basic training together, where they learn new rules and bond with one another. They follow structured schedules set by their leaders. Soldiers must keep their areas clean for inspection, learn to march in correct formations, and salute when in the presence of superiors.

Learning to deal with life after having lived in a total institution requires yet another process of resocialization. In the U.S. military, soldiers learn discipline and a capacity for hard work. They set aside personal goals to achieve a mission, and they take pride in the accomplishments of their units. Many soldiers who leave the military transition these skills into excellent careers. Others find themselves lost upon leaving, uncertain about the outside world, and what to do next. The process of resocialization to civilian life is not a simple one.

### 5.4.2 Summary

Socialization is a lifelong process recurring as we enter new phases of life, such as adulthood or senior age. Resocialization is a process that removes the socialization we have developed over time and replaces it with

newly learned rules and roles. Because it involves removing old habits that have been built up, resocialization can be a stressful and difficult process.

### 5.4.3 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 5.4.1

(*Solution on p. 109.*)

Which of the following is *not* an age-related transition point when Americans must be socialized to new roles?

- a. Infancy
- b. School age
- c. Adulthood
- d. Senior citizen

#### Exercise 5.4.2

(*Solution on p. 109.*)

Which of the following is true regarding American socialization of recent high school graduates?

- a. They are expected to take a year “off” before college.
- b. They are required to serve in the military for one year.
- c. They are expected to enter college, trade school, or the workforce shortly after graduation.
- d. They are required to move away from their parents.

### 5.4.4 Short Answer

#### Exercise 5.4.3

Consider a person who is joining a sorority or fraternity, or attending college or boarding school, or even a child beginning kindergarten. How is the process the student goes through a form of socialization? What new cultural behaviors must the student adapt to?

#### Exercise 5.4.4

Do you think resocialization requires a total institution? Why or why not? Can you think of any other ways someone could be resocialized?

### 5.4.5 Further Research

Homelessness is an endemic problem among veterans. Many soldiers leave the military or return from war and have difficulty resocializing into civilian life. Learn more about this problem at <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Veteran-Homelessness><sup>20</sup> or <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/NCHV><sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Veteran-Homelessness>

<sup>21</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/1/NCHV>

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<sup>24</sup><http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/personalprofiles/princeharry/biography/gapyear/index.html>

<sup>25</sup>[http://www.childinfo.org/labour\\_countrydata.php](http://www.childinfo.org/labour_countrydata.php)

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 5

to Exercise 5.2.1 (p. 95): Answer

D

to Exercise 5.2.2 (p. 95): Answer

C

to Exercise 5.2.3 (p. 95): Answer

C

to Exercise 5.3.1 (p. 101): Answer

A

to Exercise 5.3.2 (p. 101): Answer

D

to Exercise 5.3.3 (p. 101): Answer

C

to Exercise 5.3.4 (p. 102): Answer

B

to Exercise 5.3.5 (p. 102): Answer

B

to Exercise 5.4.1 (p. 107): Answer

A

to Exercise 5.4.2 (p. 107): Answer

C





## Chapter 6

# Groups and Organization

### 6.1 Introduction Groups and Organizations<sup>1</sup>

The alternative punk band NOFX is playing outside in Los Angeles. The music is loud, the crowd pumped up and excited. But neither the lyrics nor the people in the audience are quite what you might expect. Mixed in with the punks and young rebel students are members of local unions, from well-dressed teachers to more grizzled labor leaders. The lyrics are not published anywhere but are available on YouTube: “We’re here to represent/The 99 percent/Occupy, occupy, occupy.” The song: “Wouldn’t It Be Nice If Every Movement Had a Theme Song” (Cabrel 2011).

Across the country at an Occupy camp in New York, roughly three dozen members of the Facilitation Working Group, a part of the General Assembly, take a steady stream of visitors with requests at their unofficial headquarters. One person wants a grant for \$1500 to make herbal medications available to those staying at the park. Another wants to present Native American peace principles derived from the Iroquois Confederacy. Yet another has a spreadsheet that he wants used as an evaluation tool for the facilitators. Numerous groups make up this movement, yet there’s no national leader. What makes a group something more than just a collection of people? How are leadership functions and styles established in a group dynamic?

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42991/1.2/>>.



**Figure 6.1:** Nurses, teachers, and Teamsters showed up to protest at the Occupy movement. (Photo courtesy of David Shankbone/flickr)

Most people have a sense of what it means to be a part of some kind of a group, whether it is a sports team, sorority, school club, or family. Groups connect us to others through commonalities of geography, interests, race, religion, and activities. But for the groups of people protesting from Augusta, Georgia, to Oakland, California, and hundreds of cities in between, their connection within the Occupy Wall Street movement is harder to define. What unites these people? Are the out-of-work doctoral candidates truly aligned with the high school dropouts? Do the urban poor genuinely feel for the campus-based protest against university tuition hikes?

Groups are prevalent in our social lives and provide a significant way we understand and define ourselves—both through groups we feel a connection to and those we don't. Groups also play an important role in society. As enduring social units, they help foster shared value systems and are key to the structure of society as we know it. There are three primary sociological perspectives for studying groups: Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist. We can look at the Occupy movement through the lenses of these methods to better understand the roles and challenges that groups offer.

The Functionalist perspective is a big-picture macro-level view that looks at how different aspects of society are intertwined. This perspective is based on the idea that society is a well-balanced system with all parts necessary to the whole, and it studies the roles these parts play in relation to the whole. In the case of the Occupy Movement, a Functionalist might look at what macro-level needs the movement serves. For example, a Structural Functionalist might ask how the Occupy Wall Street movement forces both haves and have-nots to pay attention to the economy, or the way urbanites are impacted by the influx of protestors who typically reside outside of their region.

The Conflict perspective is another macroanalytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth

of inequality. A conflict theorist studying the Occupy movement might look at how business interests have manipulated the system over the last 30 years, leading to the gross inequality we see today. Or this perspective might explore how the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class could lead to a two-class system reminiscent of Marxist ideas.

A third perspective is the Symbolic Interaction or Interactionist perspective. This method of analyzing groups takes a micro-level view. Instead of studying the big picture, these researchers look at the day-to-day interactions of groups. Studying these details, the Interactionist looks at issues like leadership style and group dynamics. In the case of the Occupy Movement, Interactionists might ask, “How does the group dynamic in New York differ from that in Atlanta?” Or, “What dictates who becomes the *de facto* leader in different cities—geography, social dynamics, economic circumstances?”

### 6.1.1 References

Cabrel, Javier. 2011. “NOFX - Occupy LA.” *LAWeekly.com*, November 28. Retrieved February 10, 2012 (<sup>2</sup>).

## 6.2 Types of Groups<sup>3</sup>

Most of us feel comfortable using the word “group” without giving it much thought. In everyday use, it can be a generic term, although it carries important clinical and scientific meanings. Moreover, the concept of a group is central to much of how we think about society and human interaction. Often, we might mean different things by using that word. We might say that a group of kids all saw the dog, and it could mean 250 students in a lecture hall or four siblings playing on a front lawn. In everyday conversation, there isn’t a clear distinguishing use. So how can we hone the meaning more precisely for sociological purposes?

### 6.2.1 Defining a Group

The term **group** is an amorphous one and can refer to a wide variety of gatherings, from just two people (think about a “group project” in school when you partner with another student), a club, a regular gathering of friends, or people who work together or share a hobby. In short, the term refers to any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share a sense that their identity is somehow aligned with the group. Of course, every time people are gathered it is not necessarily a group. A rally is usually a one-time event, for instance, and belonging to a political party doesn’t imply interaction with others. People who exist in the same place at the same time, but who do not interact or share a sense of identity—such as a bunch of people standing in line at Starbucks—are considered an **aggregate**, or a crowd. Another example of a non-group is people who share similar characteristics but are not tied to one another in any way. These people would be considered a **category**, and an example would be that all children born from approximately 1980–2000 are referred to as “Millennial.” Why are Millennials a category and not a group? Because while some of them may share a sense of identity, they do not, as a whole, interact frequently with each other.

Interestingly, people within an aggregate or category can become a group. During disasters, people in a neighborhood (an aggregate) who did not know each other might become friendly and depend on each other at the local shelter. After the disaster ends and the people go back to simply living near each other, the feeling of cohesiveness may last since they have all shared an experience. They might remain a group, practicing emergency readiness, coordinating supplies for next time, or taking turns caring for neighbors who need extra help. Similarly, there may be many groups within a single category. Consider teachers, for example. Within this category, groups may exist like teachers’ unions, teachers who coach, or staff members who are involved with the PTA.

<sup>2</sup>[http://blogs.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2011/11/nofx\\_-\\_occupy\\_la\\_-\\_11-28-2011.php](http://blogs.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2011/11/nofx_-_occupy_la_-_11-28-2011.php)

<sup>3</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42831/1.5/>>.

## 6.2.2 Types of Groups

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) suggested that groups can broadly be divided into two categories: **primary groups** and **secondary groups** (Cooley 1909). According to Cooley, primary groups play the most critical role in our lives. The primary group is usually fairly small and is made up of individuals who generally engage face-to-face in long-term emotional ways. This group serves emotional needs: **expressive functions** rather than pragmatic ones. The primary group is usually made up of significant others, those individuals who have the most impact on our socialization. The best example of a primary group is the family.

Secondary groups are often larger and impersonal. They may also be task-focused and time-limited. These groups serve an **instrumental function** rather than an expressive one, meaning that their role is more goal- or task-oriented than emotional. A classroom or office can be an example of a secondary group. Neither primary nor secondary groups are bound by strict definitions or set limits. In fact, people can move from one group to another. A graduate seminar, for example, can start as a secondary group focused on the class at hand, but as the students work together throughout their program, they may find common interests and strong ties that transform them into a primary group.

: Writer Allison Levy worked alone. While she liked the freedom and flexibility of working from home, she sometimes missed having a community of coworkers, both for the practical purpose of brainstorming and the more social “water cooler” aspect. Levy did what many do in the internet age: she found a group of other writers online through a web forum. Over time, a group of approximately 20 writers, who all wrote for a similar audience, broke off from the larger forum and started a private invitation-only forum. While writers in general represent all genders, ages, and interests, it ended up being a collection of 20- and 30-something women who comprised the new forum; they all wrote fiction for children and young adults.

At first, the writers’ forum was clearly a secondary group united by the members’ professions and work situations. As Levy explained, “On the internet, you can be present or absent as often as you want. No one is expecting you to show up.” It was a useful place to research information about different publishers and about who had recently sold what, and to track industry trends. But as time passed, Levy found it served a different purpose. Since the group shared other characteristics beyond their writing (such as age and gender), the online conversation naturally turned to matters such as child-rearing, aging parents, health, and exercise. Levy found it was a sympathetic place to talk about any number of subjects, not just writing. Further, when people didn’t post for several days, others expressed concern, asking whether anyone had heard from the missing writers. It reached a point where most members would tell the group if they were traveling or needed to be offline for awhile.

The group continued to share. One member on the site who was going through a difficult family illness wrote, “I don’t know where I’d be without you women. It is so great to have a place to vent that I know isn’t hurting anyone.” Others shared similar sentiments.

So is this a primary group? Most of these people have never met each other. They live in Hawaii, Australia, Minnesota, and across the world. They may never meet. Levy wrote recently to the group, saying, “Most of my ‘real-life’ friends and even my husband don’t really get the writing thing. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Despite the distance and the lack of physical contact, the group clearly fills an expressive need.



**Figure 6.2:** Engineering and construction students gather around a job site. How do your academic interests define your in and out-groups? (Photo courtesy of USACEpublicaffairs/flickr)

### 6.2.3 In-Groups and Out-Groups

One of the ways that groups can be powerful is through inclusion, and its inverse, exclusion. In-groups and out-groups are subcategories of primary and secondary groups that help identify this dynamic. Primary groups consist of both in-groups and out-groups, as do secondary groups. The feeling that one belongs in an elite or select group is a heady one, while the feeling of not being allowed in, or of being in competition with a group, can be motivating in a different way. Sociologist William Sumner (1840–1910) developed the concepts of **in-group** and **out-group** to explain this phenomenon (Sumner 1906). In short, an in-group is the group that an individual feels she belongs to, and she believes it to be an integral part of who she is. An out-group, conversely, is a group someone doesn't belong to; often there may be a feeling of disdain or competition in relation to an out-group. Sports teams, unions, and sororities are examples of in-groups and out-groups; people may belong to, or be an outsider to, any of these.

While these affiliations can be neutral or even positive, such as the case of a team sport competition, the concept of in-groups and out-groups can also explain some negative human behavior, such as white supremacist movements like the Ku Klux Klan, or the bullying of gay or lesbian students. By defining others as “not like us” and inferior, in-groups can end up practicing ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism—manners of judging others negatively based on their culture, race, sex, age, or sexuality. Often, in-groups can form within a secondary group. For instance, a workplace can have cliques of people, from senior executives who play golf together, to engineers who write code together, to young singles who socialize after hours. While these in-groups might show favoritism and affinity for other in-group members, the overall organization may be unable or unwilling to acknowledge it. Therefore, it pays to be wary of the politics of in-groups, since members may exclude others as a form of gaining status within the group.

: Most of us know that the old rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is inaccurate. Words can hurt, and never is that more apparent than in instances of bullying. Bullying has always existed, often reaching extreme levels of cruelty in children and young adults. People at these stages of life are especially vulnerable to others' opinions of them,

and they're deeply invested in their peer groups. Today, technology has ushered in a new era of this dynamic. Cyberbullying is the use of interactive media by one person to torment another, and it is on the rise. Cyberbullying can mean sending threatening texts, harassing someone in a public forum (such as Facebook), hacking someone's account and pretending to be him or her, posting embarrassing images online, and so on. A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center found that 20 percent of middle school students admitted to "seriously thinking about committing suicide" as a result of online bullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2010). Whereas bullying face-to-face requires willingness to interact with your victim, cyberbullying allows bullies to harass others from the privacy of their homes without witnessing the damage firsthand. This form of bullying is particularly dangerous because it's widely accessible and therefore easier to accomplish.

Cyberbullying, and bullying in general, made international headlines in 2010 when a 15-year-old girl, Phoebe Prince, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, committed suicide after being relentlessly bullied by girls at her school. In the aftermath of her death, the bullies were prosecuted in the legal system and the state passed anti-bullying legislation. This marked a significant change in how bullying, including cyberbullying, is viewed in the United States. Now there are numerous resources for schools, families, and communities to provide education and prevention on this issue. The White House hosted a Bullying Prevention summit in March 2011, and President and First Lady Obama have used Facebook and other social media sites to discuss the importance of the issue.

Will it change the behavior of would-be cyberbullies? That remains to be seen. But hopefully communities can work to protect victims before they feel they must resort to extreme measures.

## 6.2.4 Reference Groups



**Figure 6.3:** Athletes are often viewed as a reference group for young people. (Photo courtesy of Johnny Bivera/U.S. Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

A **reference group** is a group that people compare themselves to—it provides a standard of measurement. In American society, peer groups are common reference groups. Kids and adults pay attention to what their peers wear, what music they like, what they do with their free time—and they compare themselves to what they see. Most people have more than one reference group, so a middle school boy might not just look at his classmates but also at his older brother's friends and see a different set of norms. And he might observe the antics of his favorite athletes for yet another set of behaviors.

Some other examples of reference groups can be an individual's church, synagogue, or mosque; one's cultural center; workplace; family gathering; and even one's parents. Often, reference groups convey competing messages. For instance, on television and in movies, young adults often have wonderful apartments, cars, and lively social lives despite not holding a job. In music videos, young women might dance and sing in a sexually aggressive way that suggests experience beyond their years. At all ages, we use reference groups to help guide our behavior and show us social norms. So how important is it to surround yourself with positive reference groups? You may never meet or know a reference group, but it still impacts and influences how you act. Identifying reference groups can help you understand the source of the social identities you aspire to or want to distance yourself from.

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**Figure 6.4:** Which fraternity or sorority would you fit into, if any? Sorority recruitment day offers students an opportunity to learn about these different groups. (Photo courtesy of Murray State/flickr)

For a student entering college, the sociological study of groups takes on an immediate and practical meaning. After all, when we arrive someplace new, most of us glance around to see how well we fit in or stand out in the ways we want. This is a natural response to a reference group, and on a large campus, there can be many competing groups. Say you are a strong athlete who wants to play intramural sports, but your favorite musicians are a local punk band. You may find yourself engaged with two very different reference groups.

These reference groups can also become your in-groups or out-groups. For instance, different groups on campus might solicit you to join. Are there fraternities and sororities at your school? If so, chances are they will try to convince students—that is, students they deem worthy—to join them. And if you love playing soccer and want to play on a campus team, but you’re wearing shredded jeans, combat boots, and a local band T-shirt, you might have a hard time convincing the soccer team to give you a chance. While most campus groups refrain from insulting competing groups, there is a definite sense of an in-group versus an out-group. “Them?” a member might say. “They’re all right, but their parties are nowhere near as cool as ours.” Or, “Only serious engineering geeks join that group.” This immediate categorization into in-groups and out-groups means that students must choose carefully, since whatever group they associate with won’t just define their friends—it may also define their enemies.

### 6.2.5 Summary

Groups largely define how we think of ourselves. There are two main types of groups: primary and secondary. As the names suggest, the primary group is the long-term, complex one. People use groups as standards of comparison to define themselves—both who they are and who they are not. Sometimes groups can be used to exclude people or as a tool that strengthens prejudice.

### 6.2.6 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 6.2.1

What does a Functionalist consider when studying a phenomenon like the Occupy Wall Street movement?

- a. The minute functions that every person at the protests plays in the whole
- b. The internal conflicts that play out within such a diverse and leaderless group
- c. How the movement contributes to the stability of society by offering the discontented a safe, controlled outlet for dissension
- d. The factions and divisions that form within the movement

**Exercise 6.2.2**

What is the largest difference between the Functionalist and Conflict perspectives and the Interactionist perspective?

- a. The former two consider long-term repercussions of the group or situation, while the latter focuses on the present.
- b. The first two are the more common sociological perspective, while the latter is a newer sociological model.
- c. The first two focus on hierarchical roles within an organization, while the last takes a more holistic view.
- d. The first two perspectives address large-scale issues facing groups, while the last examines more detailed aspects.

**Exercise 6.2.3**

What role do secondary groups play in society?

- a. They are transactional, task-based, and short-term, filling practical needs.
- b. They provide a social network that allows people to compare themselves to others.
- c. The members give and receive emotional support.
- d. They allow individuals to challenge their beliefs and prejudices.

**Exercise 6.2.4**

When a high school student gets teased by her basketball team for receiving an academic award, she is dealing with competing \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. primary groups
- b. out-groups
- c. reference groups
- d. secondary groups

**Exercise 6.2.5**

Which of the following is NOT an example of an in-group?

- a. The Ku Klux Klan
- b. A fraternity
- c. A synagogue
- d. A high school

**Exercise 6.2.6**

What is a group whose values, norms, and beliefs come to serve as a standard for one's own behavior?

- a. Secondary group
- b. Formal organization
- c. Reference group
- d. Primary group

**Exercise 6.2.7****(Solution on p. 134.)**

A parent who is worrying over her teenager's dangerous and self-destructive behavior and low self-esteem may wish to look at her child's:

- a. reference group
- b. in-group
- c. out-group
- d. All of the above

**6.2.7 Short Answer****Exercise 6.2.8**

How has technology changed your primary groups and secondary groups? Do you have more (and separate) primary groups due to online connectivity? Do you believe that someone, like Levy, can have a true primary group made up of people she has never met? Why or why not?

**Exercise 6.2.9**

Compare and contrast two different political groups or organizations, such as the Occupy and Tea Party movements, or one of the Arab Spring uprisings. How do the groups differ in terms of leadership, membership, and activities? How do the group's goals influence participants? Are any of them in-groups (and have they created out-groups)? Explain your answer.

**Exercise 6.2.10**

The concept of hate crimes has been linked to in-groups and out-groups. Can you think of an example where people have been excluded or tormented due to this kind of group dynamic?

**6.2.8 Further Research**

For more information about cyberbullying causes and statistics, check out this website: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying><sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.cyberbullying.us>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2010/0401/Phoebe-Prince-case-a-watershed-in-fight-against-school-bullying>

<sup>7</sup><http://msnbc.com>

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41995126/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-security/t/facebook-obamas-denounce-cyberbullying/#.TtjrVUqY07A](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41995126/ns/technology_and_science-security/t/facebook-obamas-denounce-cyberbullying/#.TtjrVUqY07A)

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We Are the 99 Percent. Retrieved November 28, 2011 (<http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/page/2><sup>11</sup>).

## 6.3 Group Size and Structure<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 6.5:** Cadets illustrate how strongly conformity can define groups. (Photo courtesy David Spender/flickr)

### 6.3.1 Dyads, Triads, and Large Groups

A small group is typically one where the collection of people is small enough that all members of the group know each other and share simultaneous interaction, such as a nuclear family, a dyad, or a triad. Georg Simmel (1858–1915) wrote extensively about the difference between a **dyad**, or two-member group, and a **triad**, which is a three-member group (Simmel 1902). In the former, if one person withdraws, the group can no longer exist. One can think of a divorce, which effectively ends the “group” of the married couple, or of two best friends never speaking again. In a triad, however, the dynamic is quite different. If one person withdraws, the group lives on. A triad has a different set of relationships. If there are three in the group,

<sup>9</sup><http://occupywallst.org/about/>

<sup>10</sup>[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/o/occupy\\_wall\\_street/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=occupy%20wall%20street&st=cse](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/o/occupy_wall_street/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=occupy%20wall%20street&st=cse)

<sup>11</sup><http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/page/2>

<sup>12</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42832/1.3/>>.

two-against-one dynamics can develop and there exists the potential for a majority opinion on any issue. Small groups generally have strong internal cohesiveness and a sense of connection. The challenge, however, is for small groups to achieve large goals. They can struggle to be heard or to be a force for change if they are pushing against larger groups. In short, they are easier to ignore.

It is difficult to define exactly when a small group becomes a large group. One step might be when there are too many people to join in a simultaneous discussion. Another might be when a group joins with other groups as part of a movement that unites them. These larger groups may share a geographic space, such as a fraternity or sorority on the same campus, or they might be spread out around the globe. The larger the group, the more attention it can garner, and the more pressure members can put toward whatever goal they wish to achieve. At the same time, the larger the group becomes, the more the risk grows for division and lack of cohesion.

### 6.3.2 Group Leadership

Often, larger groups require some kind of leadership. In small, primary groups, leadership tends to be informal. After all, most families don't take a vote on who will rule the group, nor do most groups of friends. This is not to say that *de facto* leaders don't emerge, but formal leadership is rare. In secondary groups, leadership is usually more overt. There are often clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command to follow. Some secondary groups, like the army, have highly structured and clearly understood chains of command, and many lives depend on those. After all, how well could soldiers function in a battle if they had no idea whom to listen to or if different people were calling out orders? Other secondary groups, like a workplace or a classroom, also have formal leaders, but the styles and functions of leadership can vary significantly.

**Leadership function** refers to the main focus or goal of the leader. An **instrumental leader** is one who is goal-oriented and largely concerned with accomplishing set tasks. One can imagine that an army general or a Fortune 500 CEO would be an instrumental leader. In contrast, **expressive leaders** are more concerned with promoting emotional strength and health, and ensuring that people feel supported. Social and religious leaders—rabbis, priests, imams, directors of youth homes and social service programs—are often perceived as expressive leaders. There is a longstanding stereotype that men are more instrumental leaders and women are more expressive leaders. And although gender roles have changed, even today many women and men who exhibit the opposite-gender manner can be seen as deviants and can encounter resistance. Secretary of State and former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton provides an example of how society reacts to a high-profile woman who is an instrumental leader. Despite the stereotype, Boatwright and Forrest (2000) have found that both men and women prefer leaders who use a combination of expressive and instrumental leadership.

In addition to these leadership functions, there are three different **leadership styles**. **Democratic leaders** encourage group participation in all decision making. These leaders work hard to build consensus before choosing a course of action and moving forward. This type of leader is particularly common, for example, in a club where the members vote on which activities or projects to pursue. These leaders can be well liked, but there is often a challenge that the work will proceed slowly since consensus building is time-consuming. A further risk is that group members might pick sides and entrench themselves into opposing factions rather than reaching a solution. In contrast, a **laissez-faire leader** (French for “leave it alone”) is hands-off, allowing group members to self-manage and make their own decisions. An example of this kind of leader might be an art teacher who opens the art cupboard, leaves materials on the shelves, and tells students to help themselves and make some art. While this style can work well with highly motivated and mature participants who have clear goals and guidelines, it risks group dissolution and a lack of progress. As the name suggests, **authoritarian leaders** issue orders and assigns tasks. These leaders are clear instrumental leaders with a strong focus on meeting goals. Often, entrepreneurs fall into this mold, like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Not surprisingly, this type of leader risks alienating the workers. There are times, however, when this style of leadership can be required. In different circumstances, each of these leadership styles can be effective and successful. Consider what leadership style you prefer. Why? Do you like the same style in different areas of your life, such as a classroom, a workplace, and a sports team?



**Figure 6.6:** Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton drew fire for her leadership style. (Photo courtesy marc/flickr)

The 2008 presidential election marked a dynamic change when two female politicians entered the race. Of the 200 people who have run for president during the country's history, fewer than 30 have been women. Democratic presidential candidate and former First Lady Hillary Clinton was both famously polarizing and popular. She had almost as many passionate supporters as she did people who reviled her.

On the other side of the aisle was Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The former governor of Alaska, Palin was, to some, the perfect example of the modern woman. She juggled her political career with raising a growing family, and relied heavily on the use of social media to spread her message.

So what light did these candidates' campaigns shed on the possibilities of a female presidency? According to some political analysts, women candidates face a paradox: They must be as tough as their male opponents on issues such as foreign policy or risk appearing weak. However, the stereotypical expectation of women as expressive leaders is still prevalent. Consider that Hillary Clinton's popularity surged in her 2008 campaign after she cried on the campaign trail. It was enough for the *New York Times* to publish an editorial, "Can Hillary Cry Her Way Back to the White House?" (Dowd 2008). Harsh, but her approval ratings soared afterwards. In fact, many compared it to how politically likable she was in the aftermath of President Clinton's Monica Lewinsky scandal. Sarah Palin's expressive qualities were promoted to a greater degree. While she has benefited from the efforts of feminists before her, she self-identified as a traditional woman with traditional values, a point she illustrated by frequently bringing her young children up on stage with her.

So what does this mean for women who would be president, and for those who would vote for them? On the positive side, a recent study of 18- to 25-year-old women that asked whether female candidates in the 2008 election made them believe a woman would be president during their lifetime found that the majority thought they would (Weeks 2011). And the more that young women demand female candidates, the more commonplace female contenders will become. Women as

presidential candidates may no longer be a novelty with the focus of their campaign, no matter how obliquely, on their gender. Some, however, remain skeptical. As one political analyst said bluntly, “women don’t succeed in politics—or other professions—unless they act like men. The standard for running for national office remains distinctly male” (Weeks 2011).



**Figure 6.7:** This gag gift demonstrates how female leaders may be viewed if they violate social norms. (Photo courtesy of istoletv/flickr)

### 6.3.3 Conformity

We all like to fit in to some degree. Likewise, when we want to stand out, we want to choose how we stand out and for what reasons. For example, a woman who loves cutting-edge fashion and wants to dress in thought-provoking new styles likely wants to be noticed, but most likely she will want to be noticed within a framework of high fashion. She wouldn’t want people to think she was too poor to find proper clothes. **Conformity** is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations. As you might recall, we use reference groups to assess and understand how to act, to dress, and to behave. Not surprisingly, young people are particularly aware of who conforms and who does not. A high school boy whose mother makes him wear ironed button-down shirts might protest that he will look stupid—that everyone else wears T-shirts. Another high school boy might like wearing those shirts as a way of standing out. How much do you enjoy being noticed? Do you consciously prefer to conform to group norms so as not to be singled out? Are there people in your class who immediately come to mind when you think about those who don’t want to conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading the feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch’s experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

: In 1951, psychologist Solomon Asch sat a small group of about eight people around a table. Only one of the people sitting there was the true subject; the rest were associates of the experimenter. However, the subject was led to believe that the others were all, like him, people brought in for an experiment in visual judgments. The group was shown two cards, the first card with a single vertical line, and the second card with three vertical lines differing in length. The experimenter polled the group, asking each participant one at a time which line on the second card matched up with the line on the first card.

However, this was not really a test of visual judgment. Rather, it was Asch's study on the pressures of conformity. He was curious to see what the effect of multiple wrong answers would be on the subject, who presumably was able to tell which lines matched. In order to test this, Asch had each planted respondent answer in a specific way. The subject was seated in such a way that he had to hear almost everyone else's answers before it was his turn. Sometimes the non-subject members would unanimously choose an answer that was clearly wrong.

So what was the conclusion? Asch found that 37 out of 50 test subjects responded with an "obviously erroneous" answer at least once. When faced by a unanimous wrong answer from the rest of the group, the subject conformed to a mean of four of the staged answers. Asch revised the study and repeated it, wherein the subject still heard the staged wrong answers, but was allowed to write down his answer rather than speak it aloud. In this version, the number of examples of conformity—giving an incorrect answer so as not to contradict the group—fell by two thirds. He also found that group size had an impact on how much pressure the subject felt to conform.

The results showed that speaking up when only one other person gave an erroneous answer was far more common than when five or six people defended the incorrect position. Finally, Asch discovered that people were far more likely to give the correct answer in the face of near-unanimous consent if they had a single ally. If even one person in the group also dissented, the subject conformed only a quarter as often. Clearly, it was easier to be a minority of two than a minority of one.

Asch concluded that there are two main causes for conformity: people want to be liked by the group or they believe the group is better informed than they are. He found his study results disturbing. To him, they revealed that intelligent, well-educated people would, with very little coaxing, go along with an untruth. He believed this result highlighted real problems with the education system and values in our society (Asch 1956).

### 6.3.4 Summary

The size and dynamic of a group greatly affects how members act. Primary groups rarely have formal leaders, although there can be informal leadership. Groups generally are considered large when there are too many members for a simultaneous discussion. In secondary groups there are two types of leadership functions, with expressive leaders focused on emotional health and wellness, and instrumental leaders more focused on results. Further, there are different leadership styles: democratic leaders, authoritarian leaders, and laissez-faire leaders.

Within a group, conformity is the extent to which people want to go along with the norm. A number of experiments have illustrated how strong the drive to conform can be. It is worth considering real-life examples of how conformity and obedience can lead people to ethically and morally suspect acts.

### 6.3.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 6.3.1

Two people who have just had a baby have turned from a \_\_\_\_\_ to a \_\_\_\_\_.

- primary group; secondary group
- dyad; triad



- c. couple; family
- d. de facto group; nuclear family

**Exercise 6.3.2**

Who is more likely to be an expressive leader?

- a. The sales manager of a fast-growing cosmetics company
- b. A high school teacher at a reform school
- c. The director of a summer camp for chronically ill children
- d. A manager at a fast-food restaurant

**Exercise 6.3.3**

Which of the following is NOT an appropriate group for democratic leadership?

- a. A fire station
- b. A college classroom
- c. A high school prom committee
- d. A homeless shelter

**Exercise 6.3.4**

In Asch's study on conformity, what contributed to the ability of subjects to resist conforming?

- a. A very small group of witnesses
- b. The presence of an ally
- c. The ability to keep one's answer private
- d. All of the above

**Exercise 6.3.5**

*(Solution on p. 134.)*

Which type of group leadership has a communication pattern that flows from the top down?

- a. Authoritarian
- b. Democratic
- c. Laissez-faire
- d. Expressive

### 6.3.6 Short Answer

**Exercise 6.3.6**

Think of a scenario where an authoritarian leadership style would be beneficial. Explain. What are the reasons it would work well? What are the risks?

**Exercise 6.3.7**

Describe a time you were led by a leader using, in your opinion, a leadership style that didn't suit the situation. When and where was it? What could she or he have done better?

**Exercise 6.3.8**

Imagine you are in Asch's study. Would you find it difficult to give the correct answer in that scenario? Why or why not? How would you change the study now to improve it?

**Exercise 6.3.9**

What kind of leader do you tend to be? Do you embrace different leadership styles and functions as the situation changes? Give an example of a time you were in a position of leadership and what function and style you expressed.

### 6.3.7 Further Research

What is your leadership style? The website <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership><sup>13</sup> offers a quiz to help you find out!

Explore other experiments on conformity at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison><sup>14</sup>

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## 6.4 Formal Organizations<sup>19</sup>

A complaint of modern life is that society is dominated by large and impersonal secondary organizations. From schools to businesses to healthcare to government, these organizations, referred to as **formal organizations**, are highly bureaucratized. Indeed, all formal organizations are, or likely will become, **bureaucracies**. A bureaucracy is an ideal type of formal organization. Ideal doesn't mean "best" in its sociological usage; it refers to a general model that describes a collection of characteristics, or a type that could describe most examples of the item under discussion. For example, if your professor were to tell the class to picture a car in their minds, most students will picture a car that shares a set of characteristics: four wheels, a windshield, and so on. Everyone's car will be somewhat different, however. Some might picture a two-door sports car while others picture an SUV. The general idea of the car that everyone shares is the ideal type. We will discuss bureaucracies as an ideal type of organization.

<sup>13</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership>

<sup>14</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1229053,00.html>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/09/opinion/08dowd.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>17</sup><http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2010/09/30/sarah-palin-hillary-clinton-michelle-obama-and-women-in-politics>

<sup>18</sup><http://www.npr.org/2011/06/09/137056376/the-feminine-effect-on-presidential-politics>

<sup>19</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42833/1.4/>>.

### 6.4.1 Types of Formal Organizations



(a)



(b)

**Figure 6.8:** Girl Scout troops and correctional facilities are both formal organizations. (Photo (a) courtesy of moonlightbulb/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of CxOxS/flickr)

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) posited that formal organizations fall into three categories. **Normative organizations**, also called **voluntary organizations**, are based on shared interests. As the name suggests, joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The Audubon Society or a ski club are examples of normative organizations. **Coercive organizations** are groups that one must be coerced, or pushed, to join. These may include prison or a rehabilitation center. Goffman states that most coercive organizations are **total institutions** (1961). A total institution refers to one in which inmates live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization takes place. The third type is **utilitarian organizations**, which, as the name suggests, are joined because of the need for a specific material reward. High school or a workplace would fall into this category—one joined in pursuit of a diploma, the other in order to make money.

**Table of Formal Organizations**

	<b>Normative or Voluntary</b>	<b>Coercive</b>	<b>Utilitarian</b>
Benefit of Membership	Intangible benefit	Corrective benefit	Tangible benefit
Type of Membership	Volunteer basis	Required	Contractual basis
Feeling of Connectedness	Shared affinity	No affinity	Some affinity

**Table 6.1:** This table shows Etzioni's three types of formal organizations. (Table courtesy of Etzioni 1975)

#### 6.4.1.1 Bureaucracies

Bureaucracies are an ideal type of formal organization. Pioneer sociologist Max Weber popularly characterized a bureaucracy as having a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality (1922). People often complain about bureaucracies—declaring them slow, rule-bound, difficult to navigate, and unfriendly. Let's take a look at terms that define a bureaucracy to understand what they mean.

**Hierarchy of authority** refers to the aspect of bureaucracy that places one individual or office in charge of another, who in turn must answer to her own superiors. For example, as an employee at Walmart, your shift manager assigns you tasks. Your shift manager answers to his store manager, who must answer to her regional manager, and so on in a chain of command, up to the CEO who must answer to the board members, who in turn answer to the stockholders. Everyone in this bureaucracy follows the chain of command.

A **clear division of labor** refers to the fact that within a bureaucracy, each individual has a specialized task to perform. For example, psychology professors teach psychology, but they do not attempt to provide students with financial aid forms. In this case, it is a clear and commonsense division. But what about in a restaurant where food is backed up in the kitchen and a hostess is standing nearby texting on her phone? Her job is to seat customers, not to deliver food. Is this a smart division of labor?

The existence of **explicit rules** refers to the way in which rules are outlined, written down, and standardized. For example, at your college or university, the student guidelines are contained within the Student Handbook. As technology changes and campuses encounter new concerns like cyberbullying, identity theft, and other hot-button issues, organizations are scrambling to ensure their explicit rules cover these emerging topics.

Finally, bureaucracies are also characterized by **impersonality**, which takes personal feelings out of professional situations. This characteristic grew, to some extent, out of a desire to protect organizations from nepotism, backroom deals, and other types of favoritism, simultaneously protecting customers and others served by the organization. Impersonality is an attempt by large formal organizations to protect their members. However, the result is often that personal experience is disregarded. For example, you may be late for work because your car broke down, but the manager at Pizza Hut doesn't care about why you are late, only that you are late.

Bureaucracies are, in theory at least, **meritocracies**, meaning that hiring and promotion is based on proven and documented skills, rather than on nepotism or random choice. In order to get into a prestigious college, you need to perform well on the SAT and have an impressive transcript. In order to become a lawyer and represent clients, you must graduate law school and pass the state bar exam. Of course, there are many well-documented examples of success by those who did not proceed through traditional meritocracies. Think about technology companies with founders who dropped out of college, or performers who became famous after a YouTube video went viral. How well do you think established meritocracies identify talent? Wealthy families hire tutors, interview coaches, test-prep services, and consultants to help their kids get into the best schools. This starts as early as kindergarten in New York City, where competition for the most highly-regarded schools is especially fierce. Are these schools, many of which have copious scholarship funds that are intended to make the school more democratic, really offering all applicants a fair shake?

There are several positive aspects of bureaucracies. They are intended to improve efficiency, ensure equal opportunities, and increase efficiency. And there are times when rigid hierarchies are needed. But remember that many of our bureaucracies grew large at the same time that our school model was developed—during the Industrial Revolution. Young workers were trained and organizations were built for mass production, assembly line work, and factory jobs. In these scenarios, a clear chain of command was critical. Now, in the information age, this kind of rigid training and adherence to protocol can actually decrease both productivity and efficiency.

Today's workplace requires a faster pace, more problem-solving, and a flexible approach to work. Too much adherence to explicit rules and a division of labor can leave an organization behind. And unfortunately, once established, bureaucracies can take on a life of their own. Maybe you have heard the expression "trying to turn a tanker around mid-ocean," which refers to the difficulties of changing direction with something large and set in its ways. State governments and current budget crises are examples of this challenge. It is almost impossible to make quick changes, leading states to continue, year after year, with increasingly unbalanced budgets. Finally, bureaucracies, as mentioned, grew as institutions at a time when privileged white males held all the power. While ostensibly based on meritocracy, bureaucracies can perpetuate the existing balance of power by only recognizing the merit in traditionally male and privileged paths.

Michels (1911) suggested that all large organizations are characterized by the **Iron Rule of Oligarchy**, wherein an entire organization is ruled by a few elites. Do you think this is true? Can a large organization

be collaborative?



**Figure 6.9:** This McDonald's storefront in Egypt shows the McDonaldization of society. (Photo courtesy of s\_w\_ellis/flickr)

### 6.4.2 The McDonaldization of Society

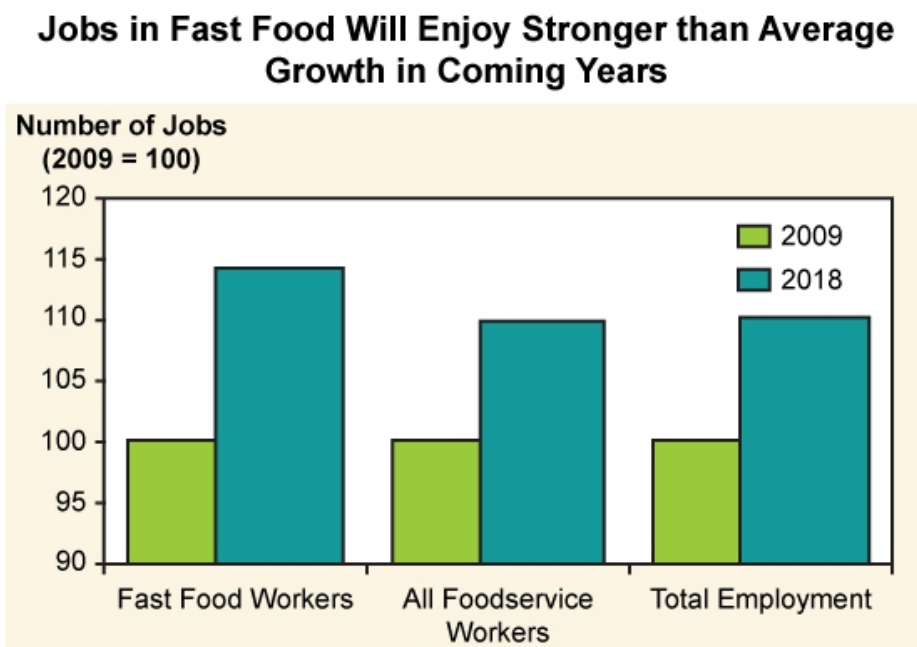
The **McDonaldization of Society** (Ritzer 1993) refers to the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions. This business model includes efficiency (the division of labor), predictability, calculability, and control (monitoring). For example, in your average chain grocery store, people at the register check out customers while stockers keep the shelves full of goods and deli workers slice meats and cheese to order (efficiency). Whenever you enter a store within that grocery chain, you receive the same type of goods, see the same store organization, and find the same brands at the same prices (predictability). You will find that goods are sold by the pound, so that you can weigh your fruit and vegetable purchase rather than simply guessing at the price for that bag of onions, while the employees use a timecard to calculate their hours and receive overtime pay (calculability). Finally, you will notice that all store employees are wearing a uniform (and usually a name tag) so that they can be easily identified. There are security cameras to monitor the store, and some parts of the store, such as the stockroom, are generally considered off-limits to customers (control). While McDonaldization has resulted in improved profits and an increased availability of various goods and services to more people worldwide, it has also reduced the variety of goods available in the marketplace while rendering available products uniform, generic, and bland. Think of the difference between a mass-produced shoe and one made by a local cobbler, between a chicken from a family-owned farm versus a corporate grower, or a cup of coffee from the local diner instead of one from Starbucks.

: We often talk about bureaucracies disparagingly, and no organization takes more heat than fast food restaurants. The book and movie *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schossler paints an ugly picture of what goes in, what goes on, and what comes out of fast food chains. From their environmental impact to their role in the US obesity epidemic, fast food chains are connected to numerous societal ills. Furthermore, working at a fast food restaurant is often disparaged, and even referred to dismissively, as a McJob rather than a real job.

But business school professor Jerry Newman went undercover and worked behind the counter at seven fast food restaurants to discover what really goes on there. His book, *My Secret Life on the McJob* documents his experience. Newman found, unlike Schossler, that these restaurants

have much good alongside the bad. Specifically, he asserted that the employees were honest and hardworking, the management was often impressive, and that the jobs required a lot more skill and effort than most people imagined. In the book, Newman cites a pharmaceutical executive who states that a fast-food service job on an applicant's résumé is a plus because it indicates the employee is reliable and can handle pressure.

So what do you think? Are these McJobs and the organizations that offer them still serving a role in the economy and people's careers? Or are they dead-end jobs that typify all that is negative about large bureaucracies? Have you ever worked in one? Would you?



**Figure 6.10:** Fast-food jobs are expected to grow more quickly than most industries. (Graph courtesy of U.S. LBS)

### 6.4.3 Summary

Large organizations fall into three main categories: normative/voluntary, coercive, and utilitarian. We live in a time of contradiction: while the pace of change and technology are requiring people to be more nimble and less bureaucratic in their thinking, large bureaucracies like hospitals, schools, and governments are more hampered than ever by their organizational format. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the development of a trend to bureaucratize and conventionalize local institutions. Increasingly, Main Streets across the country resemble each other; instead of a Bob's Coffee Shop and Jane's Hair Salon there is a Dunkin Donuts and a Supercuts. This trend has been referred to as the McDonaldization of society.

### 6.4.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 6.4.1

Which is NOT an example of a normative organization?

- a. A book club
- b. A church youth group
- c. A People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protest group
- d. A study hall

**Exercise 6.4.2**

Which of these is an example of a total institution?

- a. Jail
- b. High school
- c. Political party
- d. A gym

**Exercise 6.4.3**

Why do people join utilitarian organizations?

- a. Because they feel an affinity with others there
- b. Because they receive a tangible benefit from joining
- c. Because they have no choice
- d. Because they feel pressured to do so

**Exercise 6.4.4**

Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of bureaucracies?

- a. Coercion to join
- b. Hierarchy of authority
- c. Explicit rules
- d. Division of labor

**Exercise 6.4.5**

What are some of the intended positive aspects of bureaucracies?

- a. Increased productivity
- b. Increased efficiency
- c. Equal treatment for all
- d. All of the above

**Exercise 6.4.6**

What is an advantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is more variety of goods.
- b. There is less theft.
- c. There is more worldwide availability of goods.
- d. There is more opportunity for businesses.

**Exercise 6.4.7**

*(Solution on p. 134.)*

What is a disadvantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is less variety of goods.
- b. There is an increased need for employees with postgraduate degrees.
- c. There is less competition so prices are higher.
- d. There are fewer jobs so unemployment increases.

### 6.4.5 Short Answer

#### Exercise 6.4.8

What do you think about the recent spotlight on fast food restaurants? Do you think they contribute to society's ills? Do you believe they provide a needed service? Have you ever worked a job like this? What did you learn?

#### Exercise 6.4.9

Do you consider today's large companies like General Motors, Amazon, or Facebook to be bureaucracies? Why or why not? Which of the main characteristics of bureaucracies do you see in them? Which are absent?

#### Exercise 6.4.10

Where do you prefer to shop, eat out, or grab a cup of coffee? Large chains like Walmart or smaller retailers? Starbucks or a local restaurant? What do you base your decisions on? Does this section change how you think about these choices? Why or why not?

### 6.4.6 Further Research

As mentioned above, the concept of McDonaldization is a growing one. The following link discusses this phenomenon further: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/McDonaldization><sup>20</sup>

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos162.htm/>



## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 6

**to Exercise 6.2.7 (p. 120): Answers**

(1:C, 2:D, 3:A, 4:C, 5:D, 6:C, 7:D)

**to Exercise 6.3.5 (p. 126): Answers**

(1:B, 2:C, 3:A, 4:D, 5:A)

**to Exercise 6.4.7 (p. 132): Answers**

(1:D, 2:A, 3:B, 4:A, 5:D, 6:C, 7:A)

## Chapter 7

# Deviance, Crime, and Social Control

### 7.1 Introduction to Deviance, Crime, and Social Control<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 7.1:** Police are one resource that societies use to combat behavior considered deviant to the point of criminality. (Photo courtesy of David.Monniaux/Wikimedia Commons)

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42995/1.2/>>.

Philip Hudson entered Morehouse College at age 19 wearing men's jeans and long hair tied back in dreadlocks. "The first day I got to campus, I was a boy," Philip recalled a few years later. He said he was "trying to be this masculine boy, real cool and real quiet." By the end of his sophomore year, Philip had swapped his jeans for skirts and found himself the target of a strong backlash (King 2010). Morehouse College made national news for its response to the teen's lifestyle, establishing a schoolwide ban on the wearing of women's clothing by men (Chen 2010).

Morehouse College, an all-male college in Atlanta, Georgia, has a prestigious history. Established in 1867 as a place of higher learning for former slaves, Morehouse is the alma mater of great leaders such as "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman, and celebrities such as Samuel L. Jackson and Spike Lee" (Mungin 2009). The sense of revolution is what brought Philip to Morehouse, a place where he hoped he could be himself.

After a difficult upbringing where his gendered-ness resulted in abuse and rape, he realized that he identified as a female and wanted to express that aspect of his person. He began taking female hormones to start his biological transition to the female sex. Although Philip initially halted his treatment once he began college, he soon found others like himself. At Morehouse, he met Diamond Poulin, a student who defined himself as a man who felt comfortable in women's clothes. Joined by a handful of others, Philip and Diamond donned skirts, high heels, and other traditionally female attire on campus in an attempt to be themselves. They were jeered at and ridiculed—even attacked.

Then came the school's shocking decision in late 2009. The new rules, titled the "Appropriate Attire Policy," banned cross-dressing anywhere on the campus grounds. Those who broke the rules were not allowed to attend class unless they changed their clothing, and multiple transgressions led to disciplinary action and suspension.

Diamond left Morehouse that fall, but returned once in the spring to visit his friends. He found himself escorted off campus by school security for violating the dress code. Philip remained at Morehouse for another year before leaving because of stress. He now plans to resume his studies at a larger university in Florida. What he's most looking forward to is walking around in public without being verbally attacked. "They'll stare," Philip says with resignation, "but I'm used to that" (King 2010).

### 7.1.1 References

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2010/LIVING/11/08/single.sex.college.trangender.nongender/index.html>

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.urbanlifeandstyle.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1456&joscclean=1&comment\\_id=255&Itemid=221](http://www.urbanlifeandstyle.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1456&joscclean=1&comment_id=255&Itemid=221)

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/10/17/college.dress.code/index.html?iref=allsearch>

## 7.2 Deviance and Control<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 7.2:** Much of the appeal of watching entertainers perform in drag comes from the humor inherent in seeing everyday norms violated. (Photo courtesy of Cassiopeija/Wikimedia Commons)

What, exactly, is deviance? And what is the relationship between deviance and crime? As Philip Hudson found out, some behaviors, such as wearing clothes of the opposite sex, can be deviant in certain places, criminal in some places, and perfectly acceptable elsewhere. According to sociologist William Graham Sumner, **deviance** is a violation of established contextual, cultural, or social norms, whether folkways, mores, or codified law (1906). It can be as minor as picking one's nose in public or as major as committing murder. Although the word "deviance" has a negative connotation in everyday language, sociologists recognize that deviance is not necessarily bad (Schoepflin 2011). In fact, from a structural functionalist perspective, one of the positive contributions of deviance is that it fosters social change. For example, during the U.S. civil rights movement, Rosa Parks violated social norms when she refused to move to the "black section" of the bus, and the Little Rock Nine broke customs of segregation to attend an Arkansas public school.

"What is deviant behavior?" cannot be answered in a straightforward manner. Whether an act is labeled deviant or not depends on many factors, including location, audience, and the individual committing the act (Becker 1963). Listening to your iPod on the way to class is considered acceptable behavior. Listening to your iPod during your 2 o'clock sociology lecture is considered rude. Listening to your iPod when on the witness stand before a judge may cause you to be held in contempt of court, and consequently fined or jailed.

As norms vary across culture and time, it makes sense that notions of deviance change also. Fifty years ago, public schools in the United States had strict dress codes that, among other stipulations, often banned women from wearing pants to class. Today, it's socially acceptable for women to wear pants, but less so for men to wear skirts. In a time of war, acts usually considered morally reprehensible, such as taking the life of another, may actually be rewarded. Whether an act is deviant or not depends on society's response to that act.

: When sociologist Todd Schoepflin ran into his childhood friend Bill, he was shocked to see him

<sup>5</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42834/1.3/>>.

driving a hearse. A professionally trained researcher, Schoepflin wondered what effect driving a hearse had on his friend and what effect it might have on others on the road. Would using such a vehicle for everyday errands be considered deviant by most people?

Schoepflin interviewed Bill, curious first to know why he drove such an unconventional car. Bill had simply been on the lookout for a reliable winter car; on a tight budget, he searched used car ads and stumbled upon one for the hearse. The car ran well and the price was right, so he bought it.

Bill admitted that others' reactions to the car had been mixed. His parents were appalled and he received odd stares from his coworkers. A mechanic once refused to work on it, stating that it was "a dead person machine." On the whole, however, Bill received mostly positive reactions. Strangers gave him a thumbs-up on the highway and stopped him in parking lots to chat about his car. His girlfriend loved it, his friends wanted to take it tailgating, and people offered to buy it. Could it be that driving a hearse isn't really so deviant after all?

Schoepflin theorized that, although viewed as outside conventional norms, driving a hearse is such a mild form of deviance that it actually becomes a mark of distinction. Conformists find the choice of vehicle intriguing or appealing, while nonconformists see a fellow oddball to whom they can relate. As one of Bill's friends remarked, "Every guy wants to own a unique car like this and *you* can certainly pull it off." Such anecdotes remind us that although deviance is often viewed as a violation of norms, it's not always viewed in a negative light (Schoepflin 2011).



**Figure 7.3:** A hearse with the license plate "LASTRYD." How would you view the owner of this car? (Photo courtesy of Brian Teutsch/flickr)

### 7.2.1 Social Control

When a person violates a social norm, what happens? A driver caught speeding can receive a speeding ticket. A student who wears a bathrobe to class gets a warning from a professor. An adult belching loudly is avoided. All societies practice **social control**, the regulation and enforcement of norms. The underlying goal of social control is to maintain **social order**, an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which

society's members base their daily lives. Think of social order as an employee handbook and social control as a manager. When a worker violates a workplace guideline, the manager steps in to enforce the rules.

The means of enforcing rules are known as **sanctions**. Sanctions can be positive as well as negative. **Positive sanctions** are rewards given for conforming to norms. A promotion at work is a positive sanction for working hard. **Negative sanctions** are punishments for violating norms. Being arrested is a punishment for shoplifting. Both types of sanctions play a role in social control.

Sociologists also classify sanctions as formal or informal. Although shoplifting, a form of social deviance, may be illegal, there are no laws dictating the proper way to scratch one's nose. That doesn't mean picking your nose in public won't be punished; instead, you will encounter **informal sanctions**. Informal sanctions emerge in face-to-face social interactions. For example, wearing flip-flops to an opera or swearing loudly in church may draw disapproving looks or even verbal reprimands, whereas behavior that is seen as positive—such as helping an old man carry grocery bags across the street—may receive positive informal reactions, such as a smile or pat on the back.

**Formal sanctions**, on the other hand, are ways to officially recognize and enforce norm violations. If a student violates her college's code of conduct, for example, she might be expelled. Someone who speaks inappropriately to the boss could be fired. Someone who commits a crime may be arrested or imprisoned. On the positive side, a soldier who saves a life may receive an official commendation.

The table below shows the relationship between different types of sanctions.

**Informal/Formal Sanctions**

	<b>Informal</b>	<b>Formal</b>
Positive	An expression of thanks	A promotion at work
Negative	An angry comment	A parking fine

**Table 7.1:** Formal and informal sanctions may be positive or negative. Informal sanctions arise in social interactions, whereas formal sanctions officially enforce norms.

## 7.2.2 Summary

Deviance is a violation of norms. Whether or not something is deviant depends on contextual definitions, the situation, and people's response to the behavior. Society seeks to limit deviance through the use of sanctions that help maintain a system of social control.

## 7.2.3 Section Quiz

### Exercise 7.2.1

*(Solution on p. 161.)*

Which of the following best describes how deviance is defined?

- Deviance is defined by federal, state, and local laws.
- Deviance's definition is determined by one's religion.
- Deviance occurs whenever someone else is harmed by an action.
- Deviance is socially defined.

### Exercise 7.2.2

*(Solution on p. 161.)*

During the civil rights movement, Rosa Parks and other black protestors spoke out against segregation by refusing to sit at the back of the bus. This is an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- An act of social control
- An act of deviance

- c. A social norm
- d. Criminal mores

**Exercise 7.2.3***(Solution on p. 161.)*

A student has a habit of talking on her cell phone during class. One day, the professor stops his lecture and asks her to respect the other students in the class by turning off her phone. In this situation, the professor used \_\_\_\_\_ to maintain social control.

- a. Informal negative sanctions
- b. Informal positive sanctions
- c. Formal negative sanctions
- d. Formal positive sanctions

**Exercise 7.2.4***(Solution on p. 161.)*

Societies practice social control to maintain \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. formal sanctions
- b. social order
- c. cultural deviance
- d. sanction labeling

**Exercise 7.2.5***(Solution on p. 161.)*

One day, you decide to wear pajamas to the grocery store. While you shop, you notice people giving you strange looks and whispering to others. In this case, the grocery store patrons are demonstrating \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. deviance
- b. formal sanctions
- c. informal sanctions
- d. positive sanctions

**7.2.4 Short Answer****Exercise 7.2.6**

If given the choice, would you purchase an unusual car such as a hearse for everyday use? How would your friends, family, or significant other react? Since deviance is culturally defined, most of the decisions we make are dependent on the reactions of others. Is there anything the people in your life encourage you to do that you don't? Why don't you?

**Exercise 7.2.7**

Think of a recent time when you used informal negative sanctions. To what act of deviance were you responding? How did your actions affect the deviant person or persons? How did your reaction help maintain social control?

**7.2.5 Further Research**

Although we rarely think of it in this way, deviance can have a positive effect on society. Check out the Positive Deviance Initiative, a program initiated by Tufts University to promote social movements around the world that strive to improve people's lives, at [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Positive\\_Deviance](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Positive_Deviance)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Positive\\_Deviance](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Positive_Deviance)

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## 7.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 7.4:** Functionalists believe that deviance plays an important role in society and can be used to challenge people's views. Protesters, such as these PETA members, often use this method to draw attention to their cause. (Photo courtesy of David Shankbone/flickr)

Why does deviance occur? How does it affect a society? Since the early days of sociology, scholars have developed theories attempting to explain what deviance and crime mean to society. These theories can be grouped according to the three major sociological paradigms: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory.

### 7.3.1 Functionalism

Sociologists who follow the functionalist approach are concerned with how the different elements of a society contribute to the whole. They view deviance as a key component of a functioning society. Strain theory, social disorganization theory, and cultural deviance theory represent three functionalist perspectives on deviance in society.

#### 7.3.1.1 Émile Durkheim: The Essential Nature of Deviance

Émile Durkheim believed that deviance is a necessary part of a successful society. One way deviance is functional, he argued, is that it challenges people's present views (1893). For instance, when black students

<sup>7</sup><http://nortonbooks.typepad.com/everydaysociology/2011/01/deviant-while-driving.html>

<sup>8</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42950/1.3/>>.



across the United States participated in “sit-ins” during the civil rights movement, they challenged society’s notions of segregation. Moreover, Durkheim noted, when deviance is punished, it reaffirms currently held social norms, which also contributes to society (1893). Seeing a student given detention for skipping class reminds other high schoolers that playing hooky isn’t allowed and that they, too, could get detention.

### 7.3.1.2 Robert Merton: Strain Theory

Sociologist Robert Merton agreed that deviance is an inherent part of a functioning society, but he expanded on Durkheim’s ideas by developing **strain theory**, which notes that access to socially acceptable goals plays a part in determining whether a person conforms or deviates. From birth, we’re encouraged to achieve the “American Dream” of financial success. A woman who attends business school, receives her MBA, and goes on to make a million-dollar income as CEO of a company is said to be a success. However, not everyone in our society stands on equal footing. A person may have the socially acceptable goal of financial success but lack a socially acceptable way to reach that goal. According to Merton’s theory, an entrepreneur who can’t afford to launch his own company may be tempted to embezzle from his employer for start-up funds.

Merton defined five ways that people respond to this gap between having a socially accepted goal but no socially accepted way to pursue it.

1. *Conformity*: Those who conform choose not to deviate. They pursue their goals to the extent that they can through socially accepted means.
2. *Innovation*: Those who innovate pursue goals they cannot reach through legitimate means by instead using criminal or deviant means.
3. *Ritualism*: People who ritualize lower their goals until they can reach them through socially acceptable ways. These members of society focus on conformity rather than attaining a distant dream.
4. *Retreatism*: Others retreat and reject society’s goals and means. Some beggars and street people have withdrawn from society’s goal of financial success.
5. *Rebellion*: A handful of people rebel, replacing a society’s goals and means with their own. Terrorists or freedom fighters look to overthrow a society’s goals through socially unacceptable means.

### 7.3.1.3 Social Disorganization Theory

Developed by researchers at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, **social disorganization theory** asserts that crime is most likely to occur in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control. An individual who grows up in a poor neighborhood with high rates of drug use, violence, teenage delinquency, and deprived parenting is more likely to become a criminal than an individual from a wealthy neighborhood with a good school system and families who are involved positively in the community.



**Figure 7.5:** Proponents of social disorganization theory believe that individuals who grow up in impoverished areas are more likely to participate in deviant or criminal behaviors. (Photo courtesy of Apollo 1758/Wikimedia Commons)

Social disorganization theory points to broad social factors as the cause of deviance. A person isn't born a criminal, but becomes one over time, often based on factors in his or her social environment. Research into social disorganization theory can greatly influence public policy. For instance, studies have found that children from disadvantaged communities who attend preschool programs that teach basic social skills are significantly less likely to engage in criminal activity.

#### 7.3.1.4 Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay: Cultural Deviance Theory

**Cultural deviance theory** suggests that conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime. Researchers Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) studied crime patterns in Chicago in the early 1900s. They found that violence and crime were at their worst in the middle of the city and gradually decreased the farther one traveled from the urban center toward the suburbs. Shaw and McKay noticed that this pattern matched the migration patterns of Chicago citizens. New immigrants, many of them poor and lacking knowledge of English, lived in neighborhoods inside the city. As the urban population expanded, wealthier people moved to the suburbs, leaving behind the less privileged.

Shaw and McKay concluded that socioeconomic status correlated to race and ethnicity resulted in a higher crime rate. The mix of cultures and values created a smaller society with different ideas of deviance, and those values and ideas were transferred from generation to generation.

The theory of Shaw and McKay has been further tested and expounded upon by Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (1989). They found that poverty, ethnic diversity, and family disruption in given localities had a strong positive correlation with social disorganization. They also determined that social disorganization was, in turn, associated with high rates of crime and delinquency—or deviance. Recent studies Sampson conducted with Lydia Bean (2006) revealed similar findings. High rates of poverty and single-parent homes correlated with high rates of juvenile violence.

### 7.3.2 Conflict Theory

**Conflict theory** looks to social and economic factors as the causes of crime and deviance. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists don't see these factors as positive functions of society, but as evidence of inequality in the system. They also challenge social disorganization theory and control theory, arguing that both ignore racial and socioeconomic issues and oversimplify social trends (Akers 1991). Conflict theorists also look for answers to the correlation of gender and race with wealth and crime.

#### 7.3.2.1 Karl Marx: An Unequal System

Conflict theory is derived greatly from the work of sociologist, philosopher, and revolutionary Karl Marx. Marx divided the general population into two rigid social groups: the proletariat and the bourgeois. The bourgeois are a small and wealthy segment of society who controls the means of production, while the proletariat is composed of the workers who rely on those means of production for employment and survival. By centralizing these vital resources into few hands, the bourgeois also has the means to control the way society is regulated—from laws, to government, to other authority agencies—which gives the bourgeois the opportunity to maintain and expand their power in society. Though Marx spoke little of deviance, his ideas created the foundation for conflict theorists who study the intersection of deviance and crime with wealth and power.

#### 7.3.2.2 C. Wright Mills: The Power Elite

In his book *The Power Elite* (1956), sociologist C. Wright Mills described the existence of what he dubbed the **power elite**, a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources. Wealthy executives, politicians, celebrities, and military leaders often have access to national and international power, and in some cases, their decisions affect everyone in society. Because of this, the rules of society are stacked in favor of a privileged few who manipulate them to stay on top. It is these people who decide what is criminal and what is not, and the effects are often felt most by those who have little power. Mills' theories explain why celebrities such as Chris Brown and Paris Hilton, or once-powerful politicians such as Eliot Spitzer and Tom DeLay, can commit crimes with little or no legal retribution.

#### 7.3.2.3 Crime and Social Class

While crime is often associated with the underprivileged, crimes committed by the wealthy and powerful remain an under-punished and costly problem within society. The FBI reported that victims of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft lost a total of \$15.3 billion dollars in 2009 (FBI 2010). In comparison, when Bernie Madoff was arrested in 2008, the US Securities and Exchange Commission reported that the estimated losses of his financial Ponzi scheme fraud were close to \$50 billion (SEC 2009).

This imbalance based on class power is also found within US criminal law. In the 1980s, the use of crack cocaine (cocaine in its purest form) quickly became an epidemic sweeping the country's poorest urban communities. Its pricier counterpart, cocaine, was associated with upscale users and was a drug of choice for the wealthy. The legal implications of being caught by authorities with crack versus cocaine were starkly different. In 1986, federal law mandated that being caught in possession of 50 grams of crack was punishable by a 10-year prison sentence. An equivalent prison sentence for cocaine possession, however, required possession of 5,000 grams. In other words, the sentencing disparity was 1 to 100 (New York Times Editorial Staff 2011). This inequality in the severity of punishment for crack versus cocaine paralleled the unequal social class of respective users. A conflict theorist would note that those in society who hold the power are also the ones who make the laws concerning crime. In doing so, they make laws that will benefit them, while the powerless classes who lack the resources to make such decisions suffer the consequences. The crack-cocaine punishment disparity remained until 2010, when President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which decreased the disparity to 1 to 18 (The Sentencing Project 2010).



**Figure 7.6:** From 1986 until 2010, the punishment for possessing crack, a “poor person’s drug,” was 100 times stricter than the punishment for cocaine use, a drug favored by the wealthy. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

### 7.3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical approach that can be used to explain how societies and/or social groups come to view behaviors as deviant or conventional. Labeling theory, differential association, social disorganization theory, and control theory fall within the realm of symbolic interactionism.

#### 7.3.3.1 Labeling Theory

Although all of us violate norms from time to time, few people would consider themselves deviant. Those who do, however, have often been labeled “deviant” by society and have gradually come to believe it themselves. **Labeling theory** examines the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society. Thus, what is considered deviant is determined not so much by the behaviors themselves or the people who commit them, but by the reactions of others to these behaviors. As a result, what is considered deviant changes over time and can vary significantly across cultures.

Sociologist Edwin Lemert expanded on the concepts of labeling theory, identifying two types of deviance that affect identity formation. **Primary deviance** is a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual’s self-image or interactions with others. Speeding is a deviant act, but receiving a speeding ticket generally does not make others view you as a bad person, nor does it alter your own self-concept. Individuals who engage in primary deviance still maintain a feeling of belonging in society and are likely to continue to conform to norms in the future.

Sometimes, in more extreme cases, primary deviance can morph into secondary deviance. **Secondary deviance** occurs when a person’s self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society. The person may begin to take on and fulfill the role of a “deviant” as an act of rebellion against the society that has labeled that individual as such. For example, consider a high school student who often cuts class and gets into fights. The student is reprimanded frequently by

teachers and school staff, and soon enough, he develops a reputation as a “troublemaker.” As a result, the student starts acting out even more and breaking more rules; he has adopted the “troublemaker” label and embraced this deviant identity. Secondary deviance can be so strong that it bestows a **master status** on an individual. A master status is a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual. Some people see themselves primarily as doctors, artists, or grandfathers. Others see themselves as beggars, convicts, or addicts.

: Before she lost her job as an administrative assistant, Leola Strickland postdated and mailed a handful of checks for amounts ranging from \$90 to \$500. By the time she was able to find a new job, the checks had bounced, and she was convicted of fraud under Mississippi law. Strickland pleaded guilty to a felony charge and repaid her debts; in return, she was spared from serving prison time. Strickland appeared in court in 2001. More than ten years later, she is still feeling the sting of her sentencing. Why? Because Mississippi is one of 12 states in the United States that bans convicted felons from voting (ProCon 2011).

To Strickland, who said she had always voted, the news came as a great shock. She isn’t alone. Some 5.3 million people in the United States are currently barred from voting because of felony convictions (ProCon 2009). These individuals include inmates, parolees, probationers, and even people who have never been jailed, such as Leola Strickland.

Under the Fourteenth Amendment, states are allowed to deny voting privileges to individuals who have participated in “rebellion or other crime” (Krajick 2004). Although there are no federally mandated laws on the matter, most states practice at least one form of *felony disenfranchisement*. At present, it’s estimated that approximately 2.4 percent of the possible voting population is disenfranchised, that is, lacking the right to vote (ProCon 2011).

Is it fair to prevent citizens from participating in such an important process? Proponents of disenfranchisement laws argue that felons have a debt to pay to society. Being stripped of their right to vote is part of the punishment for criminal deeds. Such proponents point out that voting isn’t the only instance in which ex-felons are denied rights; state laws also ban released criminals from holding public office, obtaining professional licenses, and sometimes even inheriting property (Lott and Jones 2008).

Opponents of felony disenfranchisement in the United States argue that voting is a basic human right and should be available to all citizens regardless of past deeds. Many point out that felony disenfranchisement has its roots in the 1800s, when it was used primarily to block black citizens from voting. Even nowadays, these laws disproportionately target poor minority members, denying them a chance to participate in a system that, as a social conflict theorist would point out, is already constructed to their disadvantage (Holding 2006). Those who cite labeling theory worry that denying deviants the right to vote will only further encourage deviant behavior. If ex-criminals are disenfranchised from voting, are they being disenfranchised from society?



**Figure 7.7:** Should a former felony conviction permanently strip a U.S. citizen of the right to vote?  
(Photo courtesy of Joshin Yamada/flickr)

### 7.3.3.2 Edwin Sutherland: Differential Association

In the early 1900s, sociologist Edwin Sutherland sought to understand how deviant behavior developed among people. Since criminology was a young field, he drew on other aspects of sociology including social interactions and group learning (Laub 2006). His conclusions established **differential association theory**, stating that individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance. According to Sutherland, deviance is less a personal choice and more a result of differential socialization processes. A tween whose friends are sexually active is more likely to view sexual activity as acceptable.

Sutherland's theory may account for why crime is multigenerational. A longitudinal study beginning in the 1960s found that the best predictor of antisocial and criminal behavior in children was whether their parents had been convicted of a crime (Todd and Jury 1996). Children who were younger than 10 when their parents were convicted were more likely than other children to engage in spousal abuse and criminal behavior by their early thirties. Even when taking socioeconomic factors such as dangerous neighborhoods,

poor school systems, and overcrowded housing into consideration, researchers found that parents were the main influence on the behavior of their offspring (Todd and Jury 1996).

### 7.3.3.3 Travis Hirschi: Control Theory

Continuing with an examination of large social factors, **control theory** states that social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society. Individuals who believe they are a part of society are less likely to commit crimes against it.

Travis Hirschi (1969) identified four types of social bonds that connect people to society:

1. *Attachment* measures our connections to others. When we are closely attached to people, we worry about their opinions of us. People conform to society's norms in order to gain approval (and prevent disapproval) from family, friends, and romantic partners.
2. *Commitment* refers to the investments we make in the community. A well-respected local businesswoman who volunteers at her synagogue and is a member of the neighborhood block organization has more to lose from committing a crime than a woman who doesn't have a career or ties to the community.
3. Similarly, levels of *involvement*, or participation in socially legitimate activities, lessen a person's likelihood of deviance. Children who are members of little league baseball teams have fewer family crises.
4. The final bond, *belief*, is an agreement on common values in society. If a person views social values as beliefs, he or she will conform to them. An environmentalist is more likely to pick up trash in a park because a clean environment is a social value to him (Hirschi 1969).

### 7.3.4 Summary

The three major sociological paradigms offer different explanations for the motivation behind deviance and crime. Functionalists point out that deviance is a social necessity since it reinforces norms by reminding people of the consequences of violating them. Violating norms can open society's eyes to injustice in the system. Conflict theorists argue that crime stems from a system of inequality that keeps those with power at the top and those without power at the bottom. Symbolic interactionists focus attention on the socially constructed nature of the labels related to deviance. Crime and deviance are learned from the environment and enforced or discouraged by those around us.

### 7.3.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 7.3.1

(Solution on p. 161.)

A student wakes up late and realizes her sociology exam starts in five minutes. She jumps into her car and speeds down the road, where she is pulled over by a police officer. The student explains that she is running late, and the officer lets her off with a warning. The student's actions are an example of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. primary deviance
- b. positive deviance
- c. secondary deviance
- d. master deviance

#### Exercise 7.3.2

(Solution on p. 161.)

According to C. Wright Mills, which of the following people is most likely to be a member of the power elite?

- a. A war veteran

- b. A senator
- c. A professor
- d. A mechanic

**Exercise 7.3.3***(Solution on p. 161.)*

According to social disorganization theory, crime is most likely to occur where?

- a. A community where neighbors don't know each other very well
- b. A neighborhood with mostly elderly citizens
- c. A city with a large minority population
- d. A college campus with students who are very competitive

**Exercise 7.3.4***(Solution on p. 161.)*

Shaw and McKay found that crime is linked primarily to \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. power
- b. master status
- c. family values
- d. wealth

**Exercise 7.3.5***(Solution on p. 161.)*

According to the concept of the power elite, why would a celebrity such as Charlie Sheen commit a crime?

- a. Because his parents committed similar crimes
- b. Because his fame protects him from retribution
- c. Because his fame disconnects him from society
- d. Because he is challenging socially accepted norms

**Exercise 7.3.6***(Solution on p. 161.)*

A convicted sexual offender is released on parole and arrested two weeks later for repeated sexual crimes. How would labeling theory explain this?

- a. The offender has been labeled deviant by society and has accepted a new master status.
- b. The offender has returned to his old neighborhood and so reestablished his former habits.
- c. The offender has lost the social bonds he made in prison and feels disconnected from society.
- d. The offender is poor and responding to the different cultural values that exist in his community.

**Exercise 7.3.7***(Solution on p. 161.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ deviance is a violation of norms that \_\_\_\_\_ result in a person being labeled a deviant.

- a. Secondary; does not
- b. Negative; does
- c. Primary; does not
- d. Primary; may or may not



### 7.3.6 Short Answer

#### Exercise 7.3.8

Pick a famous politician, business leader, or celebrity who has been arrested recently. What crime did he or she allegedly commit? Who was the victim? Explain his or her actions from the point of view of one of the major sociological paradigms. What factors best explain how this person might be punished if convicted of the crime?

#### Exercise 7.3.9

If we assume that the power elite's status is always passed down from generation to generation, how would Edwin Sutherland explain these patterns of power through differential association theory? What crimes do these elite few get away with?

### 7.3.7 Further Research

The Skull and Bones Society made news in 2004 when it was revealed that then-President George W. Bush and his Democratic challenger, John Kerry, had both been members at Yale University. In the years since, conspiracy theorists have linked the secret society to numerous world events, arguing that many of the nation's most powerful people are former Bonesmen. Although such ideas may raise a lot of skepticism, many influential people of the past century have been Skull and Bones Society members, and the society is sometimes described as a college version of the power elite. Journalist Rebecca Leung discusses the roots of the club and the impact its ties between decision-makers can have later in life. Read about it at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull\\_and\\_Bones](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull_and_Bones)<sup>9</sup>.

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## 7.4 Crime and the Law<sup>21</sup>

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**Figure 7.8:** How is a crime different from other types of deviance? (Photo courtesy of Duffman/Wikimedia Commons.)

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On December 16, 2011, 20-year-old Colton Harris-Moore was sentenced to seven years in prison by an Island County judge after pleading guilty to dozens of charges including burglary, fraud, and identity theft. Harris-Moore, dubbed the “Barefoot Bandit,” spent two years evading the police by means of transportation theft and squatting, frequently leaving a trail of bare footprints in his wake (Johnson 2011).

"Colton's very pleased (with the sentence)," his attorney John Henry Browne told the *New York Times*. "He was expecting the worst."

The son of an alcoholic mother, Harris-Moore's life was filled with physical and verbal abuse, and a series of convict boyfriends frequently inhabited the Harris-Moore home. After dropping out of school in the ninth grade, Harris Moore's crimes increased in severity. His antics gained worldwide media attention after he began stealing and successfully piloting planes, though he'd had no aviation training. When authorities caught him, he was driving a stolen boat off the coast of the Bahamas (Yardley 2010).

"This case is a tragedy in many ways," said Judge Churchill, "but it's a triumph of the human spirit in other ways. I could have been reading about the history of a mass murderer. I could have been reading about a drug abusive, alcoholic young man. That is the triumph of Colton Harris-Moore: He has survived" (Johnson 2011).

Though the judge's ruling was largely sympathetic, Harris-Moore had immediate regrets. "Let me put it this way," said his attorney. "He wishes he had done things a little differently in his life" (CNN News Wire Staff 2010).

Although deviance is a violation of social norms, it's not always punishable, and it's not necessarily bad. **Crime**, on the other hand, is a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions.

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<sup>21</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42835/1.5/>>.

Walking to class backwards is a deviant behavior. Driving with a blood alcohol percentage over the state's limit is a crime. Like other forms of deviance, however, ambiguity exists concerning what constitutes a crime and whether all crimes are, in fact, "bad" and deserve punishment. For example, during the 1960s, civil rights activists often violated laws intentionally as part of their effort to bring about racial equality. In hindsight, we recognize that the laws that deemed many of their actions crimes—for instance, Rosa Parks taking a seat in the "whites only" section of the bus—were inconsistent with social equality.

As you learned previously, all societies have informal and formal ways of maintaining social control. Within these systems of norms, societies have **legal codes** that maintain formal social control through laws, which are rules adopted and enforced by a political authority. Those who violate these rules incur negative formal sanctions. Normally, punishments are relative to the degree of the crime and the importance to society of the value underlying the law. As we will see, however, there are other factors that influence criminal sentencing.

### 7.4.1 Types of Crimes

Not all crimes are given equal weight. Society generally socializes its members to view certain crimes as more severe than others. For example, most people would consider murdering someone to be far worse than stealing a wallet and would expect a murderer to be punished more severely than a thief. In modern American society, crimes are classified as one of two types based on their severity. **Violent crimes** (also known as "crimes against a person") are based on the use of force or the threat of force. Rape, murder, and armed robbery fall under this category. **Nonviolent crimes** involve the destruction or theft of property, but do not use force or the threat of force. Because of this, they are also sometimes called "property crimes." Larceny, car theft, and vandalism are all types of nonviolent crimes. If you use a crowbar to break into a car, you are committing a nonviolent crime; if you mug someone with the crowbar, you are committing a violent crime.

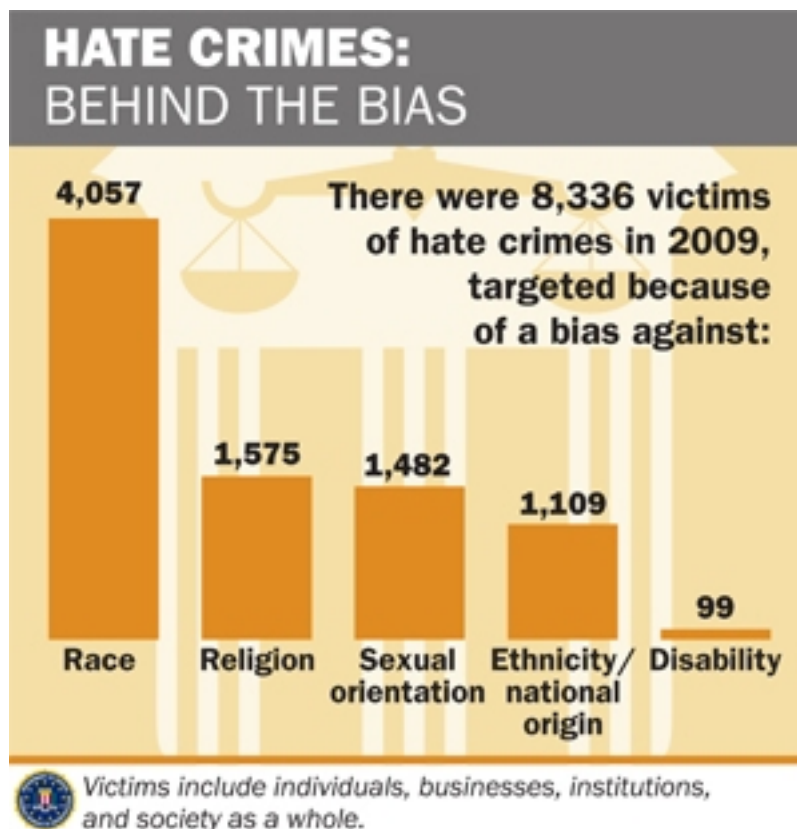
When we think of crime, we often picture **street crime**, or offenses committed by ordinary people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces. An often overlooked category is **corporate crime**, or crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment. Embezzlement, insider trading, and identity theft are all types of corporate crime. Although these types of offenses rarely receive the same amount of media coverage as street crimes, they can be far more damaging. The current economic recession in the United States is the ultimate result of a financial collapse triggered by corporate crime.

An often-debated third type of crime is **victimless crime**. These are called victimless because the perpetrator is not explicitly harming another person. As opposed to battery or theft, which clearly have a victim, a crime like drinking a beer at age 20 or selling a sexual act do not result in injury to anyone other than the individual who engages in them, although they are illegal. While some claim acts like these are victimless, others argue that they actually do harm society. Prostitution may foster abuse toward women by clients or pimps. Drug use may increase the likelihood of employee absences. Such debates highlight how the deviant and criminal nature of actions develops through ongoing public discussion.

: On the evening of October 3, 2010, a 17-year-old boy from the Bronx was abducted by a group of young men from his neighborhood and taken to an abandoned row house. After being beaten, the boy admitted he was gay. His attackers seized his partner and beat him as well. Both victims were drugged, sodomized, and forced to burn one another with cigarettes. When questioned by police, the ringleader of the crime explained that the victims were gay and "looked like [they] liked it" (Wilson and Baker 2010).

Attacks based on a person's race, religion, or other characteristics are known as **hate crimes**. Hate crimes in the United States evolved from the time of early European settlers and their violence toward Native Americans. Such crimes weren't investigated until the early 1900s, when the Ku Klux Klan began to draw national attention for its activities against blacks and other groups. The term "hate crime," however, didn't become official until the 1980s (Federal Bureau of Investigations 2011).

An average of 195,000 Americans fall victim to hate crimes each year, but fewer than five percent ever report the crime (FBI 2010). The majority of hate crimes are racially motivated, but many are based on religious (especially anti-Semitic) prejudice (FBI 2010). After incidents like the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming in 1998 and the tragic suicide of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi in 2010, there has been a growing awareness of hate crimes based on sexual orientation.



**Figure 7.9:** In the United States, there were 8,336 reported victims of hate crimes in 2009. This represents less than five percent of the number of people who claimed to be victims of hate crimes when surveyed. (Graph courtesy of FBI 2010)

### 7.4.2 Crime Statistics

What crimes are people in the United States most likely to commit, and who is most likely to commit them? To understand criminal statistics, you must first understand how these statistics are collected.

Since 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been collecting and publishing an archive of crime statistics. Known as *Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR), these annual publications contain data from approximately 17,000 law enforcement agencies (FBI 2011). Although the UCR contains comprehensive data on police reports, it fails to take into account the fact that many crimes go unreported due to the victim's unwillingness to report them, largely based on fear, shame, or distrust of the police. The quality of the data collected by the UCR also varies greatly. Because officers' approaches to gathering victims' accounts frequently differed, important details were not always asked for or reported (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

To offset this publication, in 1973 the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics began to publish a separate report known as the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (NCVS). The NCVS is a **self-report study**. A self-report study is a collection of data acquired using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews. Each year, survey data are gathered from approximately 135,000 people in the United States on the frequency and type of crime they experience in their daily lives (BJS 2011). The surveys are thorough, providing a wider scope of information than was previously available. This allows researchers to examine crime from more detailed perspectives and to analyze the data based on factors such as the relationship between victims and offenders, the consequences of the crimes, and substance abuse involved in the crimes. Demographics are also analyzed, such as age, race, gender, location, and income level (National Archive of Criminal Justice Data 2010). The NCVS reports a higher rate of crime than the UCR.

Though the NCVS is a critical source of statistical information, disadvantages exist. “Non-response,” or a victim’s failure to participate in the survey or a particular question, is among them. Inability to contact important demographics, such as those who don’t have access to phones or frequently relocate, also skews the data. For those who participate, memory issues can be problematic for the data sets. Some victims’ recollection of the crimes can be inaccurate or simply forgotten over time (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

While neither of these publications can take into account all of the crimes committed in the country, some general trends may be noted. Crime rates were on the rise after 1960, but following an all-time high in the 1980s and 1990s, rates of violent and non-violent crimes once again started to decline.

In 2009, approximately 4.3 million violent crimes occurred in the United States, the majority being assault and robbery. An estimated 15.6 million nonviolent crimes took place, the most common being larceny. Less than half of all violent and nonviolent crimes were reported to the police (BJS 2010).

In general, demographic patterns tend to correlate with crime: factors such as sex and socioeconomic status may relate to a person’s chances of being a crime victim or a perpetrator. Women are much more likely than men to be victimized by someone they know, such as a family member or friend, and one-fourth of all nonfatal attacks on women are carried out by a romantic partner (BJS 2011b).

### 7.4.3 The United States Criminal Justice System

A **criminal justice system** is an organization that exists to enforce a legal code. There are three branches of the United States criminal justice system: the police, the courts, and the corrections system.

#### 7.4.3.1 Police

**Police** are a civil force in charge of enforcing laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level. No unified national police force exists in the United States, although there are federal law enforcement officers. Federal officers operate under specific government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Federal officers can only deal with matters that are explicitly within the power of the federal government, and their field of expertise is usually narrow. A county police officer may spend time responding to emergency calls, working at the local jail, or patrolling areas as needed, whereas a federal officer would be more likely to investigate suspects in firearms trafficking or provide security for government officials.

State police have the authority to enforce statewide laws, including regulating traffic on highways. Local or county police, on the other hand, have a limited jurisdiction with authority only in the town or county in which they serve.



**Figure 7.10:** Here, Afghan National Police Crisis Response Unit members train in Surobi, Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy of isafmedia/flickr)

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#### 7.4.3.2 Courts

Once a crime has been committed and a violator is identified by the police, the case goes to the court. A **court** is a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law. Similar to the police, the U.S. judicial system is divided into federal courts and state courts. As the name implies, federal courts (including the U.S. Supreme Court) deal with federal matters, including trade disputes, military justice, and government lawsuits. Judges who preside over federal courts are selected by the president with the consent of Congress.

State courts vary in their structure, but generally include three levels: trial courts, appellate courts, and state supreme courts. Unlike the large courtroom trials in TV shows, most noncriminal cases are decided by a judge without a jury present. Traffic court and small claims court are both types of trial courts that handle specific civil matters.

Criminal cases are heard by trial courts that handle general jurisdictions. Usually, a judge and jury are both present. It is the jury's responsibility to determine guilt, and the judge's responsibility to determine the penalty, though in some states, the jury may also decide the penalty. Unless a defendant is found "not guilty," any member of the prosecution or defense can appeal the case to a higher court. In some states, the case then goes to a special appellate court; in others, it goes to the highest state court, often known as the state supreme court.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 7.11:** This county courthouse in Kansas (top) is a typical setting for a state trial court. Compare this to the courtroom of the Michigan Supreme Court (bottom). (Photo (a) courtesy of Ammodramus/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Steve & Christine/Wikimedia Commons)

### 7.4.3.3 Corrections

The **corrections system**, more commonly known as the prison system, is tasked with supervising individuals who have been arrested, convicted, and sentenced for a criminal offense. At the end of 2010, approximately seven million Americans were behind bars (BJS 2011d).

The United States incarceration rate has grown considerably in the last hundred years. In 2008, more than 1 in 100 U.S. adults were in jail or prison, the highest benchmark in our nation's history. And while Americans account for 5 percent of the global population, we have 25 percent of the world's inmates, the largest number of prisoners in the world (Liptak 2008b).

Prison is different from jail. A jail provides temporary confinement, usually while an individual awaits trial or parole. Prisons are facilities built for individuals serving sentences of more than a year. Whereas jails are small and local, prisons are large and run by either the state or the federal government.

Parole refers to a temporary release from prison or jail that requires supervision and the consent of officials. Parole is different from probation, which is supervised time used as an alternative to prison. Probation and parole can both follow a period of incarceration in prison, especially if the prison sentence is shortened.

### 7.4.4 Summary

Crime is established by legal codes and upheld by the criminal justice system. In the United States, there are three branches of the justice system: police, courts, and corrections. Although crime rates increased throughout most of the 20th century, they are now dropping.

### 7.4.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 7.4.1

*(Solution on p. 161.)*

Which of the following is an example of corporate crime?

- a. Embezzlement
- b. Larceny



- c. Assault
- d. Burglary

**Exercise 7.4.2***(Solution on p. 161.)*

Spousal abuse is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. street crime
- b. corporate crime
- c. violent crime
- d. nonviolent crime

**Exercise 7.4.3***(Solution on p. 161.)*

Which of the following situations best describes crime trends in the United States?

- a. Rates of violent and nonviolent crimes are decreasing.
- b. Rates of violent crimes are decreasing, but there are more nonviolent crimes now than ever before.
- c. Crime rates have skyrocketed since the 1970s due to lax corrections laws.
- d. Rates of street crime have gone up, but corporate crime has gone down.

**Exercise 7.4.4***(Solution on p. 161.)*

What is a disadvantage of the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (NCVS)?

- a. The NCVS doesn't include demographic data, such as age or gender.
- b. The NCVS may be unable to reach important groups, such as those without phones.
- c. The NCVS doesn't address the relationship between the criminal and the victim.
- d. The NCVS only includes information collected by police officers.

## 7.4.6 Short Answer

**Exercise 7.4.5**

Recall the crime statistics presented in this section. Do they surprise you? Are these statistics represented accurately in the media? Why or why not?

## 7.4.7 Further Research

Is the U.S. criminal justice system confusing? You're not alone. Check out this handy flowchart from the Bureau of Justice Statistics: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_BJS](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Criminal_Justice_BJS)<sup>22</sup>

How is crime data collected in the United States? Read about the methods of data collection and take the National Crime Victimization Survey. Visit [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization\\_Survey](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization_Survey)<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_BJS](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Criminal_Justice_BJS)

<sup>23</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization\\_Survey](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization_Survey)

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<sup>25</sup><http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>

<sup>26</sup><http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=92>

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<sup>35</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/us/28cnd-prison.html>

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(<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/us/22barefoot.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1324486879-2H5iJVkslFMlxUWlySPTcA&pagewanted=1><sup>39</sup> ).

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<sup>39</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/us/22barefoot.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1324486879-2H5iJVkslFMlxUWlySPTcA&pagewanted=1>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 7

to Exercise 7.2.1 (p. 139): Answer

D

to Exercise 7.2.2 (p. 139): Answer

B

to Exercise 7.2.3 (p. 140): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.2.4 (p. 140): Answer

B

to Exercise 7.2.5 (p. 140): Answer

C

to Exercise 7.3.1 (p. 148): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.3.2 (p. 148): Answer

B

to Exercise 7.3.3 (p. 149): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.3.4 (p. 149): Answer

D

to Exercise 7.3.5 (p. 149): Answer

B

to Exercise 7.3.6 (p. 149): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.3.7 (p. 149): Answer

C

to Exercise 7.4.1 (p. 157): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.4.2 (p. 158): Answer

C

to Exercise 7.4.3 (p. 158): Answer

A

to Exercise 7.4.4 (p. 158): Answer

B





## Chapter 8

# Social Stratification in the United States

### 8.1 Introduction to Social Stratification in the United States<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 8.1:** The car a person drives can be seen as a symbol of money and power. This Rolls Royce sits outside the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. (Photo courtesy of dave\_7/flickr)

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m42998/1.2/>.  
Available for free at Connexions <http://cnx.org/content/col11563/1.1>

Robert and Joan have spent their entire lives in Cudahy, Wisconsin, a small town of about 18,000. The high school sweethearts got married after graduation and later bought a house. After Robert served two years in the Army, he came home and accepted a job in a foundry, working on machinery and equipment. Joan worked as a hotel receptionist until she quit her job to raise their two children, Michael and Lisa.

Robert and Joan worked hard to make sure their kids had good lives. The kids went to Cudahy High School, like their parents, and took part in many extracurricular activities. Michael played football and Lisa participated in the debate team and Spanish Club, and served as class vice president.

After high school, Michael's and Lisa's lives took two divergent paths. Michael stayed close to home, earning a degree in hotel management at a community college. He began working the front desk of a downtown Milwaukee hotel, a job similar to the one his mother held so long ago. He married Donna, a high school classmate who now worked in a day-care center. The couple bought a house two miles from his parents and eventually had three children of their own.

Lisa's experiences, meanwhile, took her from place to place. She double-majored in psychology and social work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, then was accepted to the University of California-Berkeley, where she earned her master's and doctoral degrees in Social Welfare. She worked as a teaching assistant and helped organize a summit on institutional racism. Lisa received a grant to start a Hispanic youth program in Denver, Colorado. There, she met Mario, a cook, and helped him learn English. The couple soon got married and moved into an apartment in a poor section of the city. They had a daughter, Alaina.

Soon after, Lisa accepted an assistant professorship at the University of Colorado. That summer, while visiting her hometown of Cudahy, Lisa revealed some surprising news to her parents. She explained that she, Mario, and Alaina, were moving to Torreón, Mexico, to be close to Mario's family. Lisa would do research for a book proposal she'd written and guest lectured at the nearby university. They planned to return in two or three years, in time for Alaina to start school in the United States.

Robert and Joan were proud of their children. Michael and Lisa both had happy marriages, healthy children, and secure jobs. However, Robert and Joan puzzled over the different life paths their children took. Michael married a local woman, worked in the area, and stayed close with family and friends. Lisa moved far from home, married a foreigner, was fluent in two languages, and wanted to live in a foreign country. Joan and Robert had trouble understanding their daughter's choices. Michael was a chip off the old block, while Lisa seemed like a stranger.



## 8.2 What Is Social Stratification?<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 8.2:** In the upper echelons of the working world, people with the most power reach the top. These people make the decisions and earn the most money. The majority of Americans will never see the view from the top. (Photo courtesy of Alex Proimos/flickr)

In the opening story, two siblings chose different life paths. Michael stayed within his parents' social realm, achieving similar levels of education, occupation, and income. He retained social ties with community members. Lisa, however, rose from her parents' social position, achieving higher levels of education, occupation, and income. She broke old social ties and formed new ties, disregarding barriers and norms of race, gender, and class. Despite their different paths, both siblings were influenced by the social position of their parents. What determines a person's social standing? And how does social standing direct or limit a person's choices?

Sociologists use the term social stratification to describe the system of social standing. **Social stratification** refers to a society's categorization of its people into rankings of socioeconomic tiers based on factors like wealth, income, race, education, and power.

You may remember the word "stratification" from geology class. The distinct vertical layers found in rock, called stratification, are a good way to visualize social structure. Society's layers are made of people, and society's resources are distributed unevenly throughout the layers. The people who have more resources represent the top layer of the social structure of stratification. Other groups of people, with progressively fewer and fewer resources, represent the lower layers of our society.

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42965/1.4/>>.



**Figure 8.3:** Strata in rock illustrate social stratification. People are sorted, or layered, into social categories. Many factors determine a person's social standing, such as income, education, occupation, as well as age, race, gender, and even physical abilities. (Photo courtesy of Just a Prairie Boy/flickr)

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In the United States, people like to believe everyone has an equal chance at success. To a certain extent, Michael and Lisa illustrate the belief that hard work and talent—not prejudicial treatment or societal values—determine social rank. This emphasis on self-effort perpetuates the belief that people control their own social standing.

However, sociologists recognize that social stratification is a society-wide system that makes inequalities

apparent. While there are always inequalities between individuals, sociologists are interested in larger social patterns. Stratification is not about individual inequalities, but about systematic inequalities based on group membership, classes, and the like. No individual, rich or poor, can be blamed for social inequalities. A person's social standing is affected by the structure of society. Although individuals may support or fight inequalities, social stratification is created and supported by society as a whole.



**Figure 8.4:** The people who live in these houses most likely share similar levels of income and education. Neighborhoods often house people of the same social standing. Wealthy families do not typically live next door to poorer families, though this varies depending on the particular city and country. (Photo courtesy of Orin Zebest/flickr)

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Factors that define stratification vary in different societies. In most societies, stratification is an economic system, based on **wealth**, the net value of money and assets a person has, and **income**, a person's wages or investment dividends. While people are regularly categorized based on how rich or poor they are, other important factors influence social standing. For example, in some cultures, wisdom and charisma are valued, and people who have them are revered more than those who don't. In some cultures, the elderly are esteemed; in others, the elderly are disparaged or overlooked. Societies' cultural beliefs often reinforce the inequalities of stratification.

One key determinant of social standing is the social standing of one's parents. Parents tend to pass their social position on to their children. People inherit not only social standing but also the cultural norms that accompany a certain lifestyle. They share these with a network of friends and family members. Social standing becomes a comfort zone, a familiar lifestyle, and an identity.

Other determinants are found in a society's occupational structure. Teachers, for example, often have high levels of education but receive relatively low pay. Many believe that teaching is a noble profession, so

teachers should do their jobs for love of their profession and the good of their students, not for money. Yet no successful executive or entrepreneur would embrace that attitude in the business world, where profits are valued as a driving force. Cultural attitudes and beliefs like these support and perpetuate social inequalities.

### 8.2.1 Systems of Stratification

Sociologists distinguish between two types of systems of stratification. Closed systems accommodate little change in social position. They do not allow people to shift levels and do not permit social relations between levels. Open systems, which are based on achievement, allow movement and interaction between layers and classes. Different systems reflect, emphasize, and foster certain cultural values, and shape individual beliefs. Stratification systems include class systems and caste systems, as well as meritocracy.

#### 8.2.1.1 The Caste System



**Figure 8.5:** India used to have a rigid caste system. The people in the lowest caste suffered from extreme poverty and were shunned by society. Some aspects of India's defunct caste system remain socially relevant. In this photo, an Indian woman of a specific Hindu caste works in construction, demolishing and building houses. (Photo courtesy of Elessar/flickr)

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Caste systems are closed stratification systems in which people can do little or nothing to change their social standing. A **caste system** is one in which people are born into their social standing and will remain in it their whole lives. People are assigned occupations regardless of their talents, interests, or potential. There are virtually no opportunities to improve one's social position.



In the Hindu caste tradition, people were expected to work in the occupation of their caste and to enter into marriage according to their caste. Accepting this social standing was considered a moral duty. Cultural values reinforced the system. Caste systems promote beliefs in fate, destiny, and the will of a higher power, rather than promoting individual freedom as a value. A person who lived in a caste society was socialized to accept his or her social standing.

Although the caste system in India has been officially dismantled, its residual presence in Indian society is deeply embedded. In rural areas, aspects of the tradition are more likely to remain, while urban centers show less evidence of this past. In India's larger cities, people now have more opportunities to choose their own career paths and marriage partners. As a global center of employment, corporations have introduced merit-based hiring and employment to the nation.

### 8.2.1.2 The Class System

A **class system** is based on both social factors and individual achievement. A **class** consists of a set of people who share similar status with regard to factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. Unlike caste systems, class systems are open. People are free to gain a different level of education or employment than their parents. They can also socialize with and marry members of other classes, allowing people to move from one class to another.

In a class system, occupation is not fixed at birth. Though family and other societal models help guide a person toward a career, personal choice plays a role. Michael, the sibling in the chapter opening, chose a career similar to that of his parents. His sister Lisa chose a career based on individual interests that differed from her parents' social class.

In class systems, people have the option to form **exogamous** marriages, unions of spouses from different social categories. Marriage in these circumstances is based on values such as love and compatibility rather than on social standing or economics. Though social conformities still exist that encourage people to choose partners within their own class, people are not as pressured to choose marriage partners based solely on those elements. For example, although Michael formed an **endogamous** union, marrying a partner from his same social background, Lisa formed an exogamous union, marrying someone outside her social categories.

### 8.2.1.3 Meritocracy

**Meritocracy** is another system of social stratification in which personal effort—or merit—determines social standing. High levels of effort will lead to a high social position, and vice versa. The concept of meritocracy is an ideal—that is, a society has never existed where social rank was based purely on merit. Because of the complex structure of societies, processes like socialization, and the realities of economic systems, social standing is influenced by multiple factors, not merit alone. Inheritance and pressure to conform to norms, for instance, disrupt the notion of a pure meritocracy. Sociologists see aspects of meritocracies in modern societies when they study the role of academic performance and job performance, and the systems in place for evaluating and rewarding achievement in these areas.

## 8.2.2 Status Consistency

Social stratification systems determine social position based on factors like income, education, and occupation. Sociologists use the term **status consistency** to describe the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's rank across these factors. Caste systems correlate with high status consistency, whereas the more flexible class system has lower status consistency.

To illustrate, let's consider Susan. Susan earned her high school degree but did not go on to college. That factor is a trait of the lower-middle class. She began doing landscaping work, which, as manual labor, is also a trait of lower-middle or even lower class. However, over time, Susan started her own company. She hired employees. She won larger contracts. She became a business owner and earned a lot of money. Those traits represent the upper-middle class. Here there are inconsistencies between Susan's educational level, her occupation, and her income. In a class system, a person can work hard and have little education and still

be in middle or upper class, whereas in a caste system that would not be possible. In a class system, low status consistency correlates with having more choices and opportunities.

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**Figure 8.6:** Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, who is in line to be king of England, married Catherine Middleton, a so-called commoner, meaning she does not have royal ancestry. (Photo courtesy of UK\_repsome/flickr)

On April 29, 2011, in London, England, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, married Catherine Middleton, a commoner. It is rare, though not unheard of, for a member of the British royal family to marry a commoner. Kate Middleton had a middle-class upbringing. Her father was a former flight dispatcher and her mother a former flight attendant. Kate and William met when they were both students at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland (Köhler 2010).

Britain's monarchy arose during the Middle Ages. Its social hierarchy placed royalty at the top and commoners on the bottom. This was generally a closed system, with people born into positions of nobility. Wealth was passed from generation to generation through **primogeniture**, a law stating that all property would be inherited by the firstborn son. If the family had no son, the land went to the next closest male relation. Women could not inherit property and their social standing was primarily determined through marriage.

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution changed Britain's social structure. Commoners moved to cities, got jobs, and made better livings. Gradually, people found new opportunities to increase their wealth and power. Today, the government is a constitutional monarchy with the prime minister and other ministers elected to their positions, and with the royal family's role being largely ceremonial. The long-ago differences between nobility and commoners have blurred, and the modern class system in Britain is similar to that of the United States (McKee 1996).

Today, the royal family still commands wealth, power, and a great deal of attention. When Queen Elizabeth II retires or passes away, Prince Charles will be first in line to ascend the throne. If he abdicates (chooses not to become king) or dies, the position will go to Prince William. If that happens, Kate Middleton will be called Queen Catherine and hold the position of queen consort. She will be one of the few queens in history to have earned a college degree (Marquand 2011).

There is a great deal of social pressure on her not only to behave as a royal but to bear children. The royal family recently changed its succession laws to allow daughters, not just sons, to ascend the throne. Kate's experience—from commoner to possible queen—demonstrates the fluidity of social position in modern society.

### 8.2.3 Summary

Stratification systems are either closed, meaning they allow little change in social position, or open, meaning they allow movement and interaction between the layers. A caste system is one in which social standing is based on ascribed status or birth. Class systems are open, with achievement playing a role in social position. People fall into classes based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. A meritocracy is a system of social stratification that confers standing based on personal worth, rewarding effort.

### 8.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 8.2.1

*(Solution on p. 188.)*

What factor makes caste systems closed?

- a. They are run by secretive governments.
- b. People cannot change their social standings.
- c. Most have been outlawed.
- d. They exist only in rural areas.

#### Exercise 8.2.2

*(Solution on p. 188.)*

What factor makes class systems open?

- a. They allow for movement between the classes.
- b. People are more open-minded.
- c. People are encouraged to socialize within their class.
- d. They do not have clearly defined layers.

#### Exercise 8.2.3

*(Solution on p. 188.)*

Which of these systems allows for the most social mobility?

- a. Caste
- b. Monarchy
- c. Endogamy
- d. Class

#### Exercise 8.2.4

*(Solution on p. 188.)*

Which person best illustrates opportunities for upward social mobility in the United States?

- a. First-shift factory worker
- b. First-generation college student
- c. Firstborn son who inherits the family business
- d. First-time interviewee who is hired for a job

**Exercise 8.2.5***(Solution on p. 188.)*

Which statement illustrates low status consistency?

- a. A suburban family lives in a modest ranch home and enjoys nice vacation each summer.
- b. A single mother receives food stamps and struggles to find adequate employment.
- c. A college dropout launches an online company that earns millions in its first year.
- d. A celebrity actress owns homes in three countries.

**Exercise 8.2.6***(Solution on p. 188.)*

Based on meritocracy, a physician's assistant would:

- a. receive the same pay as all the other physician's assistants
- b. be encouraged to earn a higher degree to seek a better position
- c. most likely marry a professional at the same level
- d. earn a pay raise for doing excellent work

**8.2.5 Short Answer****Exercise 8.2.7**

Track the social stratification of your family tree. Did the social standing of your parents differ from the social standing of your grandparents and great-grandparents? What social traits were handed down by your forebears? Are there any exogamous marriages in your history? Does your family exhibit status consistencies or inconsistencies?

**Exercise 8.2.8**

What defines communities that have low status consistency? What are the ramifications, both positive and negative, of cultures with low status consistency? Try to think of specific examples to support your ideas.

**Exercise 8.2.9**

Review the concept of stratification. Now choose a group of people you have observed and been a part of—for example, cousins, high school friends, classmates, sport teammates, or coworkers. How does the structure of the social group you chose adhere to the concept of stratification?

**8.2.6 Further Research**

The *New York Times* investigated social stratification in their series of articles called “Class Matters.” The online accompaniment to the series includes an interactive graphic called “How Class Works,” which tallies four factors—occupation, education, income, and wealth—and places an individual within a certain class and percentile. What class describes you? Test your class rank on the interactive site: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NY\\_Times\\_how\\_class\\_works](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NY_Times_how_class_works)<sup>3</sup>

**8.2.7 References**

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## 8.3 Social Stratification and Mobility in the United States<sup>6</sup>

Most sociologists define social class as a grouping based on similar social factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. These factors affect how much power and prestige a person has. Social stratification reflects an unequal distribution of resources. In most cases, having more money means having more power or more opportunities. Stratification can also result from physical and intellectual traits. Categories that affect social standing include family ancestry, race, ethnicity, age, and gender. In the United States, standing can also be defined by characteristics such as IQ, athletic abilities, appearance, personal skills, and achievements.

### 8.3.1 Standard of Living

In the last century, the United States has seen a steady rise in its **standard of living**, the level of wealth available to a certain socioeconomic class in order to acquire the material necessities and comforts to maintain its lifestyle. The standard of living is based on factors such as income, employment, class, poverty rates, and affordability of housing. Because standard of living is closely related to quality of life, it can represent factors such as the ability to afford a home, own a car, and take vacations.

In the United States, a small portion of the population has the means to the highest standard of living. A Federal Reserve Bank study in 2009 showed that a mere one percent of the population holds one third of our nation’s wealth (Kennickell 2009). Wealthy people receive the most schooling, have better health, and consume the most goods and services. Wealthy people also wield decision-making power. Many people think of the United States as a “middle-class society.” They think a few people are rich, a few are poor, and most are pretty well off, existing in the middle of the social strata. But as the study above indicates, there is not an even distribution of wealth. Millions of women and men struggle to pay rent, buy food, find work, and afford basic medical care.

In the United States, as in most high-income nations, social stratifications and standards of living are in part based on occupation (Lin and Xie 1988). Aside from the obvious impact that income has on someone’s standard of living, occupations also influence social standing through the relative levels of prestige they afford. Employment in medicine, law, or engineering confers high status. Teachers and police officers are generally respected, though not considered particularly prestigious. On the other end of the scale, some of the lowest rankings apply to positions like waitress, janitor, and bus driver.

<sup>5</sup><http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2011/0415/What-Kate-Middleton-s-wedding-to-Prince-William-could-do-for-Britain>

<sup>6</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42843/1.4/>>.

### 8.3.2 Social Classes in the United States

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**Figure 8.7:** Does taste or fashion sense indicate class? Is there any way to tell if this young man comes from an upper, middle, or lower class background? (Photo courtesy of Kelly Bailey/flickr)

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Does a person's appearance indicate class? Can you tell a man's education level based on his clothing? Do you know a woman's income by the car she drives? There may have been a time in the United States when people's class was more visibly apparent. Today, however, it is harder to determine class.

For sociologists, too, categorizing class is a fluid science. Sociologists generally identify three levels of class in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Within each class, there are many subcategories. Wealth is the most significant way of distinguishing classes, because wealth can be transferred to one's children, perpetuating the class structure. One economist, J.D. Foster, defines the 20 percent of America's highest earners as "upper income," and the lower 20 percent as "lower income." The remaining 60 percent of the population make up the middle class. But by that distinction, annual household incomes for the middle class range between \$25,000 and \$100,000 (Mason and Sullivan 2010). How can a person earning \$25,000 a year have the same standing as someone earning \$100,000 a year—four times as much?

One sociological perspective distinguishes the classes, in part, according to their relative power and control over their lives. The upper class not only have power and control over their own lives, their social status gives them power and control over others' lives as well. The middle class don't generally control other strata of society, but they do exert control over their own lives. In contrast, the lower class has little control over their work or lives. Below, we will explore the major divisions of American social class and their key subcategories.

### 8.3.2.1 Upper Class



**Figure 8.8:** Members of the upper class can afford to live, work, and play in exclusive places designed for luxury and comfort. (Photo courtesy of PrimeImageMedia.com/flickr)

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The upper class is considered America's top, and only the powerful elite get to see the view from there. In the United States, people with extreme wealth make up one percent of the population, and they own one-third of the country's wealth (Beeghley 2008).

Money provides not just access to material goods, but also access to power. America's upper class wields a lot of power. As corporate leaders, their decisions affect the job status of millions of people. As media owners, they shape the collective identity of the nation. They run the major network television stations, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and sports franchises. As board members of the most influential colleges and universities, they shape cultural attitudes and values. As philanthropists, they establish foundations to support social causes they believe in. As campaign contributors, they influence politicians and fund campaigns, sometimes to protect their own economic interests.

American society has historically distinguished between "old money" (inherited wealth passed from one generation to the next) and "new money" (wealth you have earned and built yourself). While both types may have equal net worth, they have traditionally held different social standing. People of old money, firmly situated in the upper class for generations, have held high prestige. Their families have socialized them to know the customs, norms, and expectations that come with wealth. Often, the very wealthy don't work for wages. Some study business or become lawyers in order to manage the family fortune. Others, such as Paris Hilton, capitalize on being a rich socialite and transform that into celebrity status, flaunting a wealthy lifestyle.

However, new money members of the upper class are not oriented to the customs and mores of the elite. They haven't gone to the most exclusive schools. They have not established old-money social ties. People with new money might flaunt their wealth, buying sports cars and mansions, but they might still exhibit behaviors attributed to the middle and lower classes.

### 8.3.2.2 The Middle Class

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**Figure 8.9:** These members of a club likely consider themselves middle class. (Photo courtesy of United Way Canada-Centraide Canada/flickr)

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Many people call themselves middle class, but there are differing ideas about what that means. People with annual incomes of \$150,000 call themselves middle class, as do people who annually earn \$30,000. That helps explain why, in the United States, the middle class is broken into upper and lower subcategories.

Upper-middle-class people tend to hold bachelor's and postgraduate degrees. They've studied subjects such as business, management, law, or medicine. Lower-middle-class members hold bachelor's degrees or associate's degrees from two-year community or technical colleges.

Comfort is a key concept to the middle class. Middle-class people work hard and live fairly comfortable lives. Upper-middle-class people tend to pursue careers that earn comfortable incomes. They provide their families with large homes and nice cars. They may go skiing or boating on vacation. Their children receive quality education and health care (Gilbert 2010).

In the lower middle class, people hold jobs supervised by members of the upper middle class. They fill technical, lower-level management, or administrative support positions. Compared to lower-class work, lower-middle-class jobs carry more prestige and come with slightly higher paychecks. With these incomes, people can afford a decent, mainstream lifestyle, but they struggle to maintain it. They generally don't have enough income to build significant savings. In addition, their grip on class status is more precarious than in the upper tiers of the class system. When budgets are tight, lower-middle-class people are often the ones to lose their jobs.

### 8.3.2.3 The Lower Class



**Figure 8.10:** This man is a custodian at a restaurant. His job, which is crucial to the business, is considered lower class. (Photo courtesy of Frederick Md Publicity/flickr)

The lower class is also referred to as the working class. Just like the middle and upper classes, the lower class can be divided into subsets: the working class, the working poor, and the underclass. Compared to the lower middle class, lower-class people have less of an educational background and earn smaller incomes. They work jobs that require little prior skill or experience, often doing routine tasks under close supervision.

Working-class people, the highest subcategory of the lower class, often land decent jobs in fields like custodial or food service. The work is hands-on and often physically demanding, such as landscaping, cooking, cleaning, or building.

Beneath the working class is the working poor. Like the working class, they have unskilled, low-paying employment. However, their jobs rarely offer benefits such as healthcare or retirement planning, and their positions are often seasonal or temporary. They work as sharecroppers, migrant farm workers, housecleaners, and day laborers. Some are high school dropouts. Some are illiterate, unable to read job ads. Many do not vote because they do not believe that any politician will help change their situation (Beeghley 2008).

How can people work full time and still be poor? Even working full time, millions of the working poor earn incomes too meager to support a family. Minimum wage varies from state to state, but in many states it is \$7.25 (Department of Labor 2011). At that rate, working 40 hours a week earns \$290. That comes to \$15,080 a year, before tax and deductions. Even for a single person, the pay is low. A married couple with children will have a hard time covering expenses.

The underclass is America's lowest tier. Members of the underclass live mainly in inner cities. Many are unemployed or underemployed. Those who do hold jobs typically perform menial tasks for little pay. Some of the underclass are homeless. For many, welfare systems provide a much-needed support through food assistance, medical care, housing, and the like.

### 8.3.3 Social Mobility

**Social mobility** refers to the ability to change positions within a social stratification system. When people improve or diminish their economic status in a way that affects social class, they experience social mobility.

**Upward mobility** refers to an increase—or upward shift—in social class. In the United States, people applaud the rags-to-riches achievements of celebrities like Jennifer Lopez or Michael Jordan. Bestselling author Stephen King worked as a janitor prior to being published. Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty in rural Mississippi before becoming a powerful media personality. There are many stories of people rising from modest beginnings to fame and fortune. But the truth is that relative to the overall population, the number of people who launch from poverty to wealth is very small. Still, upward mobility is not only about becoming rich and famous. In the United States, people who earn a college degree, get a job promotion, or marry someone with a good income may move up socially.

**Downward mobility** indicates a lowering of one's social class. Some people move downward because of business setbacks, unemployment, or illness. Dropping out of school, losing a job, or becoming divorced may result in a loss of income or status and, therefore, downward social mobility.

**Intergenerational mobility** explains a difference in social class between different generations of a family. For example, an upper-class executive may have parents who belonged to the middle class. In turn, those parents may have been raised in the lower class. Patterns of intergenerational mobility can reflect long-term societal changes.

**Intragenerational mobility** describes a difference in social class that between different members of the same generation. For example, the wealth and prestige experienced by one person may be quite different from that of his or her siblings.

**Structural mobility** happens when societal changes enable a whole group of people to move up or down the social class ladder. Structural mobility is attributable to changes in society as a whole, not individual changes. In the first half of the 20th century, industrialization expanded the U.S. economy, raising the standard of living and leading to upward structural mobility. In today's work economy, the recession and the outsourcing of jobs overseas have contributed to high unemployment rates. Many people have experienced economic setbacks, creating a wave of downward structural mobility.

Many Americans believe that people move up in class because of individual efforts and move down by their own doing. In the example of the siblings Michael and Lisa, Lisa may have had more intelligence, drive, and ambition than her brother. She may have worked harder. However, Lisa's story can also be explained in the context of structural mobility. Lisa grew up during a time of expanding opportunities for women, opportunities that were not so readily available to her mother. She may have felt encouraged by her college mentors to pursue a higher degree, and she may have felt rewarded when she did so. If Michael and Lisa had grown up in an earlier era, their life paths may have been completely different.

When analyzing the trends and movements in social mobility, sociologists consider all modes of mobility. Scholars recognize that mobility is not as common or easy to achieve as many people think. In fact, some consider social mobility a myth.

### 8.3.4 Class Traits

**Class traits**, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class. Class traits indicate the level of exposure a person has to a wide range of cultures. Class traits also indicate the amount of resources a person has to spend on items like hobbies, vacations, and leisure activities.

People may associate the upper class with enjoyment of costly, refined, or highly cultivated tastes—expensive clothing, luxury cars, high-end fund-raisers, and opulent vacations. People may also believe that the middle and lower classes are more likely to enjoy camping, fishing, or hunting, shopping at large retailers, and participating in community activities. It is important to note that while these descriptions may be class traits, they may also simply be stereotypes. Moreover, just as class distinctions have blurred in recent decades, so too have class traits. A very wealthy person may enjoy bowling as much as opera. A factory worker could be a skilled French cook. A billionaire might dress in ripped jeans, and a low-income student might own designer shoes.

These days, individual taste does not necessarily follow class lines. Still, you are not likely to see someone driving a Mercedes living in an inner-city neighborhood. And most likely, a resident of a wealthy gated community will not be riding a bicycle to work. Class traits often develop based on cultural behaviors that stem from the resources available within each class.

: Class distinctions were sharper in the 19th century and earlier, in part because people easily accepted them. The ideology of social order made class structure seem natural, right, and just.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American and British novelists played a role in changing public perception. They published novels in which characters struggled to survive against a merciless class system. These dissenting authors used gender and morality to question the class system and expose its inequalities. They protested the suffering of urbanization and industrialization, drawing attention to these issues.

These “social problem novels,” sometimes called Victorian realism, forced middle-class readers into an uncomfortable position: they had to question and challenge the natural order of social class.

For speaking out so strongly about the social issues of class, authors were both praised and criticized. Most authors did not want to dissolve the class system. They wanted to bring about an awareness that would improve conditions for the lower classes, while maintaining their own higher class positions (DeVine 2005).

Soon, middle-class readers were not their only audience. In 1870, Forster’s Elementary Education Act required all children ages 5 through 12 in England and Wales to attend school. The act increased literacy levels among the urban poor, causing a rise in sales of cheap newspapers and magazines. Additionally, the increasing number of people who rode public transit systems created a demand for “railway literature,” as it was called (Williams 1984). These reading materials are credited with the move toward democratization in England. By 1900 the British middle class established a rigid definition for itself, and England’s working class also began to self-identify and demand a better way of life.

Many of the novels of that era are seen as sociological goldmines. They are studied as existing sources because they detail the customs and mores of the upper, middle, and lower classes of that period in history.

Examples of “social problem” novels include Charles Dickens’s *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1838), which shocked readers with its brutal portrayal of the realities of poverty, vice, and crime. Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) was considered revolutionary by critics for its depiction of working-class women (DeVine 2005), and American novelist Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) portrayed an accurate and detailed description of early Chicago.

### 8.3.5 Summary

There are three main classes in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Social mobility describes a shift from one social class to another. Class traits, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class.

### 8.3.6 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 8.3.1

(Solution on p. 188.)

In the United States, most people define themselves as:

- a. middle class
- b. upper class
- c. lower class
- d. no specific class

**Exercise 8.3.2***(Solution on p. 188.)*

Structural mobility occurs when:

- a. an individual moves up the class ladder
- b. an individual moves down the class ladder
- c. a large group moves up or down the class ladder due to societal changes
- d. a member of a family belongs to a different class than his or her siblings

**Exercise 8.3.3***(Solution on p. 188.)*

The behaviors, customs, and norms associated with a class are known as:

- a. class traits
- b. power
- c. prestige
- d. underclass

**Exercise 8.3.4***(Solution on p. 188.)*

Which of the following scenarios is an example of intergenerational mobility?

- a. A janitor belongs to the same social class as his grandmother did.
- b. An executive belongs to a different class than her parents.
- c. An editor shares the same social class as his cousin.
- d. A lawyer belongs to a different class than her sister.

**Exercise 8.3.5***(Solution on p. 188.)*

Occupational prestige means that jobs are:

- a. all equal in status
- b. not equally valued
- c. assigned to a person for life
- d. not part of a person's self-identity

**8.3.7 Short Answer****Exercise 8.3.6**

Which social class do you and your family belong to? Are you in a different social class than your grandparents and great-grandparents? Does your class differ from your social standing, and, if so, how? What aspects of your societal situation establish you in a social class?

**Exercise 8.3.7**

What class traits define your peer group? For example, what speech patterns or clothing trends do you and your friends share? What cultural elements, such as taste in music or hobbies, define your peer group? How do you see this set of class traits as different from other classes either above or below yours?

**Exercise 8.3.8**

Write a list of 10–20 class traits that describe the environment of your upbringing. Which of these seem like true class traits, and which seem like stereotypes? What items might fall into both categories? How do you imagine a sociologist might address the conflation of class traits and stereotypes?



### 8.3.8 Further Research

PBS made a documentary about social class called “People Like Us: Social Class in America.” The filmmakers interviewed people who lived in Park Avenue penthouses and Appalachian trailer parks. The accompanying website is full of information, interactive games, and life stories from those who participated. Read about it at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social\\_class\\_in\\_America](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social_class_in_America)<sup>7</sup>

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## 8.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Social Stratification<sup>11</sup>

Basketball is one of the highest-paying professional sports. There is stratification even among teams. For example, the Minnesota Timberwolves hand out the lowest annual payroll, while the Los Angeles Lakers reportedly pay the highest. Kobe Bryant, a Lakers shooting guard, is one of the highest paid athletes in the NBA, earning around \$25 million a year (Basketballreference.com 2011). Even within specific fields, layers are stratified and members are ranked.

In sociology, even an issue such as NBA salaries can be seen from various points of view. Functionalists will examine the purpose of such high salaries, while conflict theorists will study the exorbitant salaries as an unfair distribution of money. Social stratification takes on new meanings when it is examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

### 8.4.1 Functionalism

In sociology, the functionalist perspective examines how society’s parts operate. According to functionalism, different aspects of society exist because they serve a needed purpose. What is the function of social stratification?

In 1945, sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore published the **Davis-Moore thesis**, which argued that the greater the functional importance of a social role, the greater must be the reward. The

<sup>7</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social\\_class\\_in\\_America](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/social_class_in_America)

<sup>8</sup><http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/feds/2009/200913/200913pap.pdf>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/14/us-usa-taxes-middleclass-idUSTRE68D3QD20100914>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm>

<sup>11</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42845/1.2/>>.

theory posits that social stratification represents the inherently unequal value of different work. Certain tasks in society are more valuable than others. Qualified people who fill those positions must be rewarded more than others.

According to Davis and Moore, a firefighter's job is more important than, for instance, a grocery store cashier's. The cashier position does not require the same skill and training level as firefighting. Without the incentive of higher pay and better benefits, why would someone be willing to rush into burning buildings? If pay levels were the same, the firefighter might as well work as a grocery store cashier. Davis and Moore believed that rewarding more important work with higher levels of income, prestige, and power encourages people to work harder and longer.

Davis and Moore stated that, in most cases, the degree of skill required for a job determines that job's importance. They also stated that the more skill required for a job, the fewer qualified people there would be to do that job. Certain jobs, such as cleaning hallways or answering phones, do not require much skill. The employees don't need a college degree. Other work, like designing a highway system or delivering a baby, requires immense skill.

In 1953, Melvin Tumin countered the Davis-Moore thesis in "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." Tumin questioned what determined a job's degree of importance. The Davis-Moore thesis does not explain, he argued, why a media personality with little education, skill, or talent becomes famous and rich on a reality show or a campaign trail. The thesis also does not explain inequalities in the education system, or inequalities due to race or gender. Tumin believed social stratification prevented qualified people from attempting to fill roles (Tumin 1953). For example, an underprivileged youth has less chance of becoming a scientist, no matter how smart she is, because of the relative lack of opportunity available to her.

The Davis-Moore thesis, though open for debate, was an early attempt to explain why stratification exists. The thesis states that social stratification is necessary to promote excellence, productivity, and efficiency, thus giving people something to strive for. Davis and Moore believed that the system serves society as a whole because it allows everyone to benefit to a certain extent.

### 8.4.2 Conflict Theory



**Figure 8.11:** These people are protesting a decision made by Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, to lay off custodians and outsource the jobs to a private firm to avoid paying employee benefits. Private job agencies often pay lower hourly wages. Is it fair? (Photo courtesy of Brian Stansberry/Wikimedia Commons)

Conflict theorists are deeply critical of social stratification, asserting that it benefits only some people, not all of society. For instance, to a conflict theorist, it seems wrong that a basketball player is paid millions for an annual contract while a public school teacher earns \$35,000 a year. Stratification, conflict theorists believe, perpetuates inequality. Conflict theorists try to bring awareness to inequalities, such as how a rich society can have so many poor members.

Many conflict theorists draw on the work of Karl Marx. During the 19th-century era of industrialization, Marx believed social stratification resulted from people's relationship to production. People were divided by a single line: they either owned factories or worked in them. In Marx's time, bourgeois capitalists owned high-producing businesses, factories, and land, as they still do today. Proletariats were the workers who performed the manual labor to produce goods. Upper-class capitalists raked in profits and got rich, while working-class proletariats earned skimpy wages and struggled to survive. With such opposing interests, the two groups were divided by differences of wealth and power. Marx saw workers experience deep alienation, isolation and misery resulting from powerless status levels (Marx 1848).

Today, while working conditions have improved, conflict theorists believe that the strained working relationship between employers and employees still exists. Capitalists own the means of production, and a system is in place to make business owners rich and keep workers poor. According to conflict theorists, the resulting stratification creates class conflict.

### 8.4.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that uses everyday interactions of individuals to explain society as a whole. Symbolic interactionism examines stratification from a micro-level perspective. This analysis strives to explain how people's social standing affects their everyday interactions.

In most communities, people interact primarily with others who share the same social standing. It is precisely because of social stratification that people tend to live, work, and associate with others like themselves, people who share their same income level, educational background, or racial background, and even tastes in food, music, and clothing. The built-in system of social stratification groups people together.

Symbolic interactionists also note that people's appearance reflects their perceived social standing. Housing, clothing, and transportation indicate social status, as do hairstyles, taste in accessories, and personal style.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 8.12:** (a) A group of construction workers on the job site, and (b) a group of businessmen. What categories of stratification do these construction workers share? How do construction workers differ from executives or custodians? Who is more skilled? Who has greater prestige in society? (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Chun Kit/flickr)

**Conspicuous consumption** refers to buying certain products to make a social statement about status. Carrying pricey but eco-friendly water bottles could indicate a person's social standing. Some people buy expensive trendy sneakers even though they will never wear them to jog or play sports. A \$17,000 car provides transportation as easily as a \$100,000 vehicle, but the luxury car makes a social statement that the less expensive car can't live up to. All of these symbols of stratification are worthy of examination by an interactionist.

### 8.4.4 Summary

Social stratification can be examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. The functionalist perspective states that systems exist in society for good reasons. Conflict theorists observe that stratification promotes inequality, such as between rich business owners and poor workers. Symbolic interactionists examine stratification from a micro-level perspective.

They observe how social standing affects people's everyday interactions and how the concept of "social class" is constructed and maintained through everyday interactions.

### 8.4.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 8.4.1

(Solution on p. 188.)

The basic premise of the Davis-Moore thesis is that the unequal distribution of rewards in social stratification:

- a. is an outdated mode of societal organization
- b. is an artificial reflection of society
- c. serves a purpose in society
- d. cannot be justified

#### Exercise 8.4.2

(Solution on p. 188.)

Unlike Davis and Moore, Melvin Tumin believed that, because of social stratification, some qualified people were \_\_\_\_\_ higher-level job positions.

- a. denied the opportunity to obtain
- b. encouraged to train for
- c. often fired from
- d. forced into

#### Exercise 8.4.3

(Solution on p. 188.)

Which statement represents stratification from the perspective of symbolic interactionism?

- a. Men often earn more than women, even working the same job.
- b. After work, Pat, a janitor, feels more comfortable eating in a truck stop than a French restaurant.
- c. Doctors earn more money because their job is more highly valued.
- d. Teachers continue to struggle to keep benefits such as health insurance.

#### Exercise 8.4.4

(Solution on p. 188.)

When Karl Marx said workers experience alienation, he meant that workers:

- a. must labor alone, without companionship
- b. do not feel connected to their work
- c. move from one geographical location to another
- d. have to put forth self-effort to get ahead

#### Exercise 8.4.5

(Solution on p. 188.)

Conflict theorists view capitalists as those who:

- a. are ambitious
- b. fund social services
- c. spend money wisely
- d. get rich while workers stay poor

### 8.4.6 Short Answer

#### Exercise 8.4.6

Analyze the Davis-Moore thesis. Do you agree with Davis and Moore? Does social stratification play an important function in society? What examples can you think of that support the thesis? What examples can you think of that refute the thesis?

#### Exercise 8.4.7

Consider social stratification from the symbolic interactionist perspective. How does social stratification influence the daily interactions of individuals? How do systems of class, based on factors such as prestige, power, income, and wealth, influence your own daily routines, as well as your beliefs and attitudes? Illustrate your ideas with specific examples and anecdotes from your own life and the lives of people in your community.

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.basketball-reference.com/teams/LAL/2011.html>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.jstor.org/stable/2085643>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 8

to Exercise 8.2.1 (p. 172): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.2.2 (p. 172): Answer

A

to Exercise 8.2.3 (p. 172): Answer

D

to Exercise 8.2.4 (p. 172): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.2.5 (p. 173): Answer

C

to Exercise 8.2.6 (p. 173): Answer

D

to Exercise 8.3.1 (p. 180): Answer

A

to Exercise 8.3.2 (p. 181): Answer

C

to Exercise 8.3.3 (p. 181): Answer

A

to Exercise 8.3.4 (p. 181): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.3.5 (p. 181): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.4.1 (p. 186): Answer

C

to Exercise 8.4.2 (p. 186): Answer

A

to Exercise 8.4.3 (p. 186): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.4.4 (p. 186): Answer

B

to Exercise 8.4.5 (p. 186): Answer

D

## Chapter 9

# Work and the Economy

### 9.1 Introduction to Work and the Economy<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 9.1:** Today, the jobs of these assembly-line workers are increasingly being eliminated as technology grows. (Photo courtesy of John Lloyd/flickr)

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Ever since the first people traded one item for another, there has been some form of economy in the world. It is how people optimize what they have to meet their wants and needs. **Economy** refers to the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed. Goods, or **commodities**, are the physical objects we find, grow, or make in order to meet our needs and the needs of others. Goods can meet essential needs, such as a place to live, clothing, and food, or they can be luxuries—those things we do not *need* to live but *want* anyway. In contrast to these *objects*, **services** are *activities* that benefit people. Examples of services include food preparation and delivery, health care, education, and entertainment. These services provide some of the resources that help to maintain and improve a society. The food industry helps

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43017/1.2/>>.

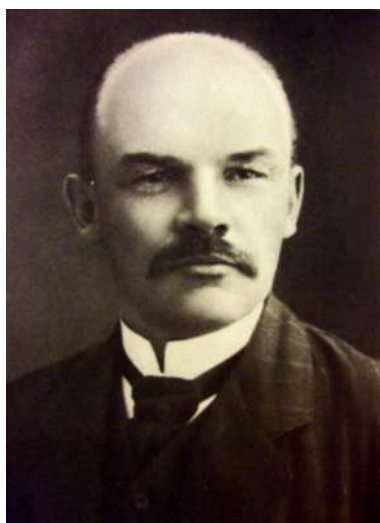


ensure that all of a society's members have access to sustenance. Health care and education systems care for those in need, help foster longevity, and equip people to become productive members of society.

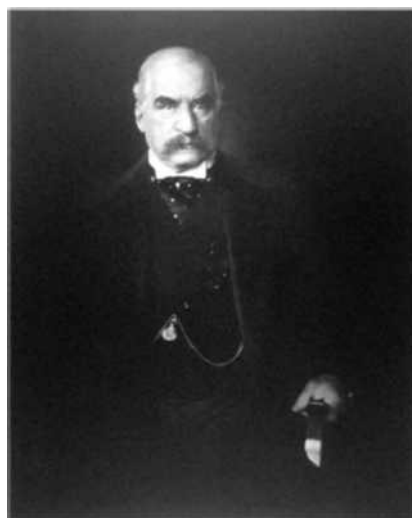
Economy is one of human society's earliest social structures. Our earliest forms of writing (such as Sumerian clay tablets) were developed to record transactions, payments, and debts between merchants. As societies grow and change, so do their economies. The economy of a small farming community is very different from the economy of a large nation with advanced technology. In this chapter, we will examine different types of economic systems and how they have functioned in various societies.

## 9.2 Economic Systems<sup>2</sup>

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(a)



(b)

**Figure 9.2:** Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was one of the founders of Russian communism. J.P. Morgan was one of the most influential capitalists in history. They have very different views on how economies should be run. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

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The dominant economic systems of the modern era have been capitalism and socialism, and there have been many variations of each system across the globe. Countries have switched systems as their rulers and economic fortunes have changed. For example, Russia has been transitioning to a market-based economy since the fall of communism in that region of the world. Vietnam, where the economy was devastated by the Vietnam War, restructured to a state-run economy in response, and more recently has been moving toward a socialist-style market economy. In the past, other economic systems reflected the societies that formed them. Many of these earlier systems lasted centuries. These changes in economies raise many questions for sociologists. What are these older economic systems? How did they develop? Why did they fade away? What are the similarities and differences between older economic systems and modern ones?

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<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m42922/1.6/>.

### 9.2.1 Economics of Agricultural, Industrial, and Postindustrial Societies

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(a)



(b)

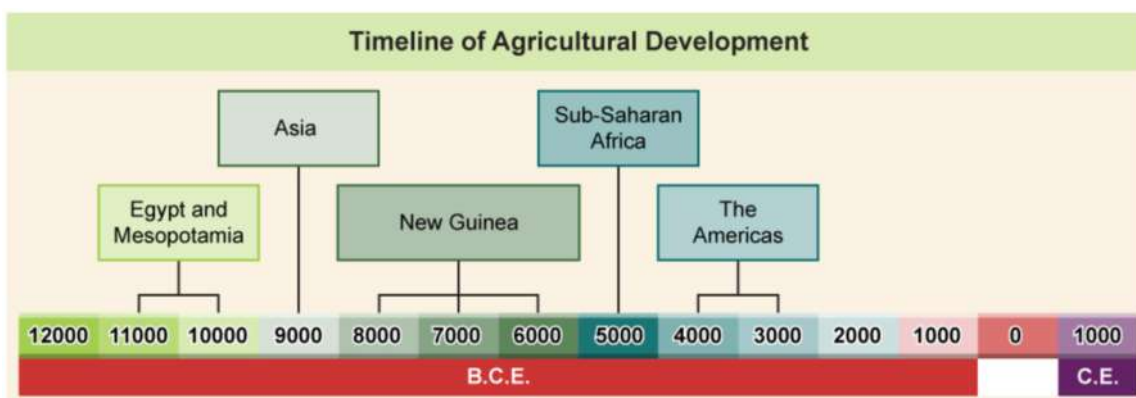
**Figure 9.3:** In an agricultural economy, crops are the most important commodity. In a postindustrial society, the most valuable resource is information. (Photo (a) courtesy Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy AntanaBhadraLamichhane/flickr)

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Our earliest ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers. Small groups of extended families roamed from place to place looking for means to subsist. They would settle in an area for a brief time when there were abundant resources. They hunted animals for their meat and gathered wild fruits, vegetables, and cereals. They ate what they caught or gathered as soon as possible because they had no way of preserving or transporting it. Once the resources of an area ran low, the group had to move on, and everything they owned had to travel with them. Food reserves only consisted of what they could carry. Many sociologists contend that hunter-gatherers did not have a true economy because groups did not typically trade with other groups due to the scarcity of goods.

#### 9.2.1.1 The Agricultural Revolution

The first true economies arrived when people started raising crops and domesticating animals. Although there is still a great deal of disagreement among archeologists as to the exact timeline, research indicates that agriculture began independently and at different times in several places around the world. The earliest agriculture was in the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East around 11,000–10,000 years ago. Next were the valleys of the Indus, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers in India and China, between 10,000 and 9,000 years ago. The people living in the highlands of New Guinea developed agriculture between 9,000 and 6,000 years ago, while people were farming in Sub-Saharan Africa between 5,000 and 4,000 years ago. Agriculture developed later in the western hemisphere, arising in what would become the eastern United States, central Mexico, and northern South America between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago (Diamond 2003).



**Figure 9.4:** Agricultural practices have emerged in different societies at different times. (Information courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Agriculture began with the simplest of technologies—for example, a pointed stick to break up the soil—but really took off when people harnessed animals to pull an even more efficient tool for the same task: a plow. With this new technology, one family could grow enough crops not only to feed themselves but others as well. Knowing there would be abundant food each year as long as crops were tended led people to abandon the nomadic life of hunter-gatherers and settle down to farm.

The improved efficiency in food production meant that not everyone had to toil all day in the fields. As agriculture grew, new jobs emerged, along with new technologies. Excess crops needed to be stored, processed, protected, and transported. Farming equipment and irrigation systems needed to be built and maintained. Wild animals needed to be domesticated and herds shepherded. Economies begin to develop because people now had goods and services to trade.

As more people specialized in nonfarming jobs, villages grew into towns and then into cities. Urban areas created the need for administrators and public servants. Disputes over ownership, payments, debts, compensation for damages, and the like led to the need for laws and courts—and the judges, clerks, lawyers, and police who administered and enforced those laws.

At first, most goods and services were traded as gifts or through bartering between small social groups (Mauss 1922). Exchanging one form of goods or services for another was known as **bartering**. This system only works when one person happens to have something the other person needs at the same time. To solve this problem, people developed the idea of a means of exchange that could be used at any time: that is, money. **Money** refers to an object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged for payment. In early economies, money was often objects like cowry shells, rice, barley, or even rum. Precious metals quickly became the preferred means of exchange in many cultures because of their durability and portability. The first coins were minted in Lydia in what is now Turkey around 650–600 B.C.E. (Goldsborough 2010). Early legal codes established the value of money and the rates of exchange for various commodities. They also established the rules for inheritance, fines as penalties for crimes, and how property was to be divided and taxed (Horne 1915). A symbolic interactionist would note that bartering and money are systems of symbolic exchange. Monetary objects took on a symbolic meaning, one that carries into our modern-day use of checks and debit cards.

: Imagine having no money. If you wanted some french fries, needed a new pair of shoes, or were due to get an oil change for your car, how would you get those goods and services?

This isn't just a theoretical question. Think about it. What do those on the outskirts of society do

in these situations? Think of someone escaping domestic abuse who gave up everything and has no resources. Or an immigrant who wants to build a new life but who had to leave another life behind to find that opportunity. Or a homeless person who simply wants a meal to eat.

This last example, homelessness, is what caused Heidemarie Schwermer to give up money. A divorced high school teacher in Germany, Schwermer's life took a turn when she relocated her children to a rural town with a significant homeless population. She began to question what serves as currency in a society and decided to try something new.

Schwermer founded a business called *Gib und Nimm*—in English, “give and take.” It operated on a moneyless basis and strived to facilitate people swapping goods and services for other goods and services—no cash allowed (Schwermer 2007). What began as a short experiment has become a new way of life. Schwermer says the change has helped her focus on people's inner value instead of their outward wealth. It has also led to two books telling her story (she's donated all proceeds to charity) and, most importantly, a richness in her life she was unable to attain with money.

How might our three sociological perspectives view her actions? What would most interest them about her nonconventional ways? Would a functionalist consider her aberration of norms a social dysfunction that upsets the normal balance? How would a conflict theorist place her in the social hierarchy? What might a symbolic interactionist make of her choice not to use money—such an important symbol in the modern world?

What do *you* make of *Gib und Nimm*?

As city-states grew into countries and countries grew into empires, their economies grew as well. When large empires broke up, their economies broke up too. The governments of newly formed nations sought to protect and increase their markets. They financed voyages of discovery to find new markets and resources all over the world, ushering in a rapid progression of economic development.

Colonies were established to secure these markets, and wars were financed to take over territory. These ventures were funded in part by raising capital from investors who were paid back from the goods obtained. Governments and private citizens also set up large trading companies that financed their enterprises around the world by selling stocks and bonds.

Governments tried to protect their share of the markets by developing a system called mercantilism. **Mercantilism** is an economic policy based on accumulating silver and gold by controlling colonial and foreign markets through taxes and other charges. The resulting restrictive practices and exacting demands included monopolies, bans on certain goods, high tariffs, and exclusivity requirements. Mercantilistic governments also promoted manufacturing and, with the ability to fund technological improvements, they helped create the equipment that led to the Industrial Revolution.

### 9.2.1.2 The Industrial Revolution

Up until the end of the 18th century, most manufacturing was done using manual labor. This changed as research led to machines that could be used to manufacture goods. A small number of innovations led to a large number of changes in the British economy. In the textile industries, the spinning of cotton, worsted yarn, and flax could be done more quickly and less expensively using new machines with names like the Spinning Jenny and the Spinning Mule (Bond 2003). Another important innovation was made in the production of iron: Coke from coal could now be used in all stages of smelting rather than charcoal from wood, dramatically lowering the cost of iron production while increasing availability (Bond 2003). James Watt ushered in what many scholars recognize as the greatest change, revolutionizing transportation and, thereby, the entire production of goods with his improved steam engine.

As people moved to cities to fill factory jobs, factory production also changed. Workers did their jobs in assembly lines and were trained to complete only one or two steps in the manufacturing process. These advances meant that more finished goods could be manufactured with more efficiency and speed than ever before.

The Industrial Revolution also changed agricultural practices. Until that time, many people practiced **subsistence farming** in which they produced only enough to feed themselves and pay their taxes. New technology introduced gasoline-powered farm tools such as tractors, seed drills, threshers, and combine harvesters. Farmers were encouraged to plant large fields of a single crop to maximize profits. With improved transportation and the invention of refrigeration, produce could be shipped safely all over the world.

The Industrial Revolution modernized the world. With growing resources came growing societies and economies. Between 1800 and 2000, the world's population grew sixfold, while per capita income saw a tenfold jump (Maddison 2003).

While many people's lives were improving, the Industrial Revolution also birthed many societal problems. There were inequalities in the system. Owners amassed vast fortunes while laborers, including young children, toiled for long hours in unsafe conditions. Workers' rights, wage protection, and safe work environments are issues that arose during this period and remain concerns today.

### 9.2.1.3 Postindustrial Societies and the Information Age

Postindustrial societies, also known as information societies, have evolved in modernized nations. One of the most valuable goods of the modern era is information. Those who have the means to produce, store, and disseminate information are leaders in this type of society.

One way scholars understand the development of different types of societies (like agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial) is by examining their economies in terms of four sectors: primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary. Each has a different focus. The primary sector extracts and produces raw materials (like metals and crops). The secondary sector turns those raw materials into finished goods. The tertiary sector provides services: child care, health care, and money management. Finally, the quaternary sector produces ideas; these include the research that leads to new technologies, the management of information, and a society's highest levels of education and the arts (Kenessey 1987).

In underdeveloped countries, the majority of the people work in the primary sector. As economies develop, more and more people are employed in the secondary sector. In well-developed economies, such as those in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, the majority of the workforce is employed in service industries. In the United States, for example, almost 80 percent of the workforce is employed in the tertiary sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

The rapid increase in computer use in all aspects of daily life is a main reason for the transition to an information economy. Fewer people are needed to work in factories because computerized robots now handle many of the tasks. Other manufacturing jobs have been outsourced to less-developed countries as a result of the developing global economy. The growth of the internet has created industries that exist almost entirely online. Within industries, technology continues to change how goods are produced. For instance, the music and film industries used to produce physical products like CDs and DVDs for distribution. Now those goods are increasingly produced digitally and streamed or downloaded at a much lower physical manufacturing cost. Information and the wherewithal to use it creatively become commodities in a postindustrial economy.

## 9.2.2 Capitalism



**Figure 9.5:** Companies sell stock to raise capital that they can invest in new projects, improving the company and producing the means for further income generation. (Photo courtesy of Ryan Lawler/Wikimedia Commons)

Scholars don't always agree on a single definition of capitalism. For our purposes, we will define **capitalism** as an economic system in which there is private ownership (as opposed to state ownership) and where there is an impetus to produce profit, and thereby wealth. This is the type of economy in place in the United States today. Under capitalism, people invest capital (money or property invested in a business venture) in a business to produce a product or service that can be sold in a market to consumers. The investors in the company are generally entitled to a share of any profit made on sales after the costs of production and distribution are taken out. These investors often reinvest their profits to improve and expand the business or acquire new ones. To illustrate how this works, consider this example. Sarah, Antonio, and Chris each invest \$250,000 into a start-up company offering an innovative baby product. When the company nets \$1 million in profits its first year, a portion of that profit goes back to Sarah, Antonio, and Chris as a return on their investment. Sarah reinvests with the same company to fund the development of a second product line, Antonio uses his return to help another start-up in the technology sector, and Chris buys a small yacht for vacations. The goal for all parties is to maximize profits.

To provide their product or service, owners hire workers, to whom they pay wages. The cost of raw materials, the retail price they charge consumers, and the amount they pay in wages are determined through the law of supply and demand and by competition. When demand exceeds supply, prices tend to rise. When supply exceeds demand, prices tend to fall. When multiple businesses market similar products and services to the same buyers, there is competition. Competition can be good for consumers because it can lead to lower prices and higher quality as businesses try to get consumers to buy from them rather than from their competitors.

Wages tend to be set in a similar way. People who have talents, skills, education, or training that is in short supply and is needed by businesses tend to earn more than people without comparable skills. Competition in the workforce helps determine how much people will be paid. In times when many people are unemployed and jobs are scarce, people are often willing to accept less than they would when their

services are in high demand. In this scenario, businesses are able to maintain or increase profits by not paying increasing wages.

### 9.2.2.1 Capitalism in Practice

As capitalists began to dominate the economies of many countries during the Industrial Revolution, the rapid growth of businesses and their tremendous profitability gave some owners the capital they needed to create enormous corporations that could monopolize an entire industry. Many companies controlled all aspects of the production cycle for their industry, from the raw materials to the production to the stores in which they were sold. These companies were able to use their wealth to buy out or stifle any competition.

In the United States, the predatory tactics used by these large monopolies caused the government to take action. Starting in the late 1800s, the government passed a series of laws that broke up monopolies and regulated how key industries—such as transportation, steel production, and oil and gas exploration and refining—could conduct business.

The United States is considered a capitalist country. However, the U.S. government has a great deal of influence on private companies through the laws it passes and the regulations enforced by government agencies. Through taxes, regulations on wages, guidelines to protect worker safety and the environment, plus financial rules for banks and investment firms, the government exerts a certain amount of control over how all companies do business. State and federal governments also own, operate, or control large parts of certain industries, such as the post office, schools, hospitals, highways and railroads, and many water, sewer, and power utilities. Debate over the extent to which the government should be involved in the economy remains an issue of contention today. Some criticize such involvements as socialism (a type of state-run economy), while others believe intervention is necessary to protect the rights of workers and the well-being of the general population.

### 9.2.3 Socialism

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**Figure 9.6:** The economies of China and Russia after World War II are examples of one form of socialism. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

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**Socialism** is an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as “state run”) of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society. Under socialism, everything that people produce, including services, is considered a social product. Everyone who contributes to the production of a good or to providing a service is entitled to a share in any benefits that come from its sale or use. To make sure all members of society get their fair share, government must be able to control property, production, and distribution.

The focus in socialism is on benefitting society, whereas capitalism seeks to benefit the individual. Social-

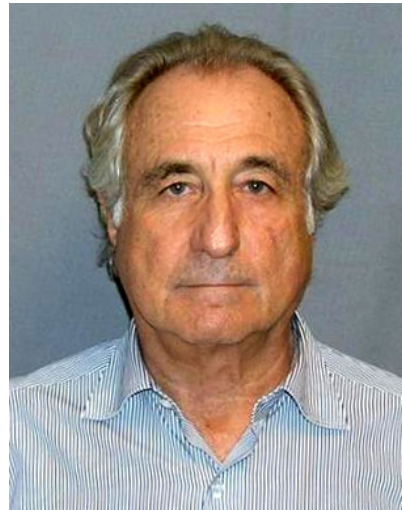


ists claim that a capitalistic economy leads to inequality, with unfair distribution of wealth and individuals who use their power at the expense of society. Socialism strives, ideally, to control the economy to avoid the problems inherent in capitalism.

Within socialism, there are diverging views on the extent to which the economy should be controlled. One extreme believes all but the most personal items are public property. Other socialists believe only essential services such as health care, education, and utilities (electrical power, telecommunications, and sewage) need direct control. Under this form of socialism, farms, small shops, and businesses can be privately owned but are subject to government regulation.



(a)



(b)



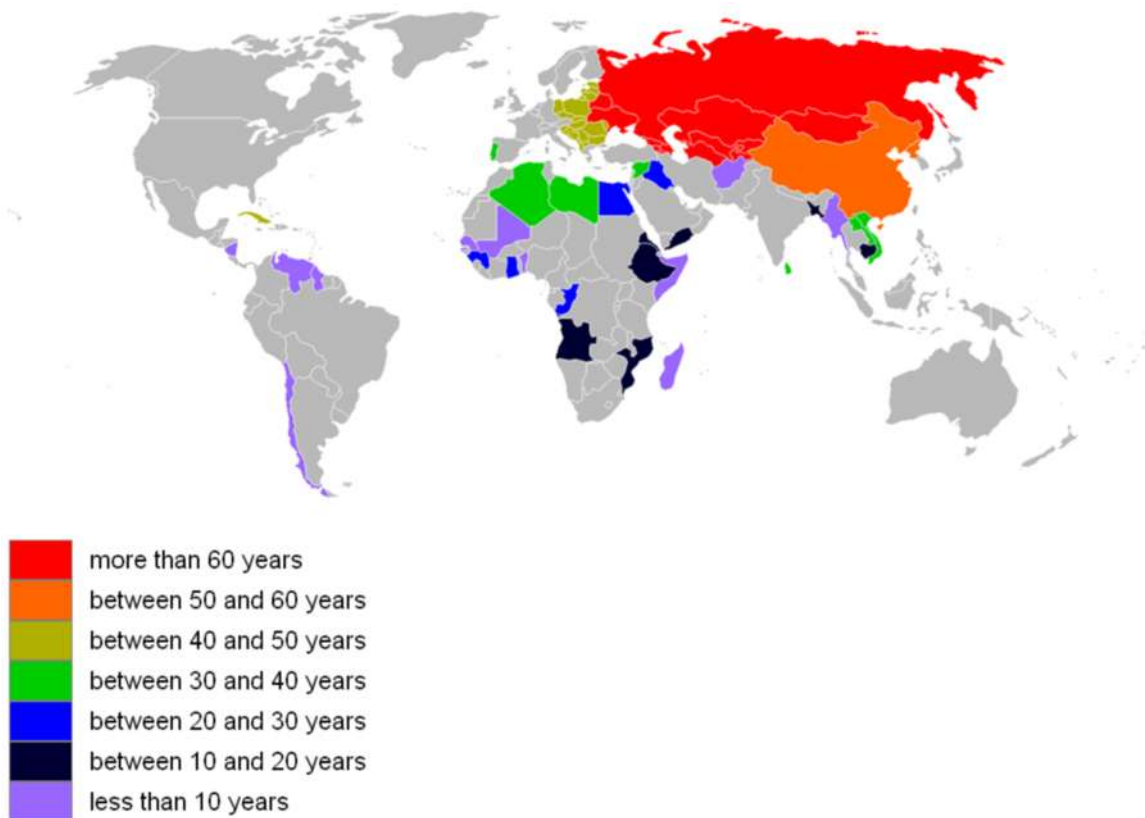
(c)

**Figure 9.7:** Capitalists criticize socialism, saying equal distribution of resources is an unachievable ideal. Socialists, on the other hand, criticize the way capitalism concentrates wealth in the hands of a few at the expense of many. (Photos (a), (b) and (c) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The other area on which socialists disagree is on what level society should exert its control. In communist countries like the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and North Korea, the national government exerts control over the economy centrally. They had the power to tell all businesses what to produce, how much to produce, and what to charge for it. Other socialists believe control should be decentralized so it can be exerted by those most affected by the industries being controlled. An example of this would be a town collectively owning and managing the businesses on which its populace depends.

Because of challenges in their economies, several of these communist countries have moved from central planning to letting market forces help determine many production and pricing decisions. **Market socialism** describes a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demands. This could involve situations like profits generated by a company going directly to the employees of the company or being used as public funds (Gregory and Stuart 2003). Many Eastern European and some South American countries have mixed economies. Key industries are nationalized and directly controlled by the government; however, most businesses are privately owned and regulated by the government.

Organized socialism never became powerful in the United States. The success of labor unions and the government in securing workers' rights, joined with the high standard of living enjoyed by most of the workforce, made socialism less appealing than the controlled capitalism practiced here.



**Figure 9.8:** This map shows countries that have adopted a socialist economy at some point. The colors indicate the duration that socialism prevailed. (Map courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

### 9.2.3.1 Socialism in Practice

As with capitalism, the basic ideas behind socialism go far back in history. Plato, in ancient Greece, suggested a republic in which people shared their material goods. Early Christian communities believed in common ownership, as did the systems of monasteries set up by various religious orders. Many of the leaders of the French Revolution called for the abolition of all private property, not just the estates of the aristocracy they had overthrown. Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, imagined a society with little private property and mandatory labor on a communal farm. Most experimental utopian communities had the abolition of private property as a founding principle.

Modern socialism really began as a reaction to the excesses of uncontrolled industrial capitalism in the 1800s and 1900s. The enormous wealth and lavish lifestyles enjoyed by owners contrasted sharply with the miserable conditions of the workers.

Some of the first great sociological thinkers studied the rise of socialism. Max Weber admired some aspects of socialism, especially its rationalism and how it could help social reform, but he worried that letting the government have complete control could result in an "iron cage of future bondage" (Greisman and Ritzer 1981).

Pierre-Joseph Proudon (1809–1865) was another early socialist who thought socialism could be used to create utopian communities. In his 1840 book, *What Is Property?*, he famously stated that "property is theft" (Proudon 1840). By this he meant that if an owner did not work to produce or earn the property, then the owner was stealing it from those who did. Proudon believed economies could work using a principle called **mutualism**, under which individuals and cooperative groups would exchange products with one another on the basis of mutually satisfactory contracts (Proudon 1840).

By far the most important influential thinker on socialism was Karl Marx. Through his own writings and those with his collaborator, industrialist Friedrich Engels, Marx used a scientific analytical process to show that throughout history the resolution of class struggles caused changes in economies. He saw the relationships evolving from slave and owner, to serf and lord, to journeyman and master, to worker and owner. Neither Marx nor Engels thought socialism could be used to set up small utopian communities. Rather, they believed a socialist society would be created after workers rebelled against capitalistic owners and seized the means of production. They felt industrial capitalism was a necessary step that raised the level of production in society to a point it could progress to a socialist state (Marx and Engels 1848). These ideas formed the basis of the sociological perspective of social conflict theory.

: In the 2008 presidential election, the Republican Party latched onto what is often considered a dirty word to describe then-Senator Barack Obama's politics: socialist. It may have been because the president was campaigning by telling workers it's good for everybody when wealth gets spread around. But whatever the reason, the label became a weapon of choice for Republicans during and after the campaign. In 2012, Republican presidential contender Rick Perry continued this battle cry. A *New York Times* article quotes him as telling a group of Republicans in Texas that President Obama is "hell bent on taking America towards a socialist country" (Wheaton 2011). Meanwhile, during the first few years of his presidency, Obama worked to create universal health care coverage and pushed forth a partial takeover of the nation's failing automotive industry. So does this make him a socialist? What does that really mean, anyway?

There is more than one definition of socialism, but it generally refers to an economic or political theory that advocates for shared or governmental ownership and administration of production and distribution of goods. Often held up in counterpoint to capitalism, which encourages private ownership and production, socialism is not typically an all-or-nothing plan. For example, both the United Kingdom and France, as well as other European countries, have socialized medicine, meaning that medical services are run nationally to reach as many people as possible. These nations are, of course, still essentially capitalist countries with free-market economies.

So is Obama a socialist because he wants universal health care? Or is the word a lightning rod for conservatives who associate it with a lack of personal freedom? By almost any measure, the answer is more the latter. A look at the politics of President Obama and Democrats in general shows that

there is, compared to most other free-market countries, very little limitation on private ownership and production. What this is, instead, is an attempt to ensure that the United States, like all other core nations, has a safety net for its poorest and most vulnerable. Although it might be in Perry's best interest to label this socialism, a study of the term makes it clear that it is untrue. Voters can go to the polls confident that, whoever their choice of candidate may be, socialism is far from finding a home in the United States.

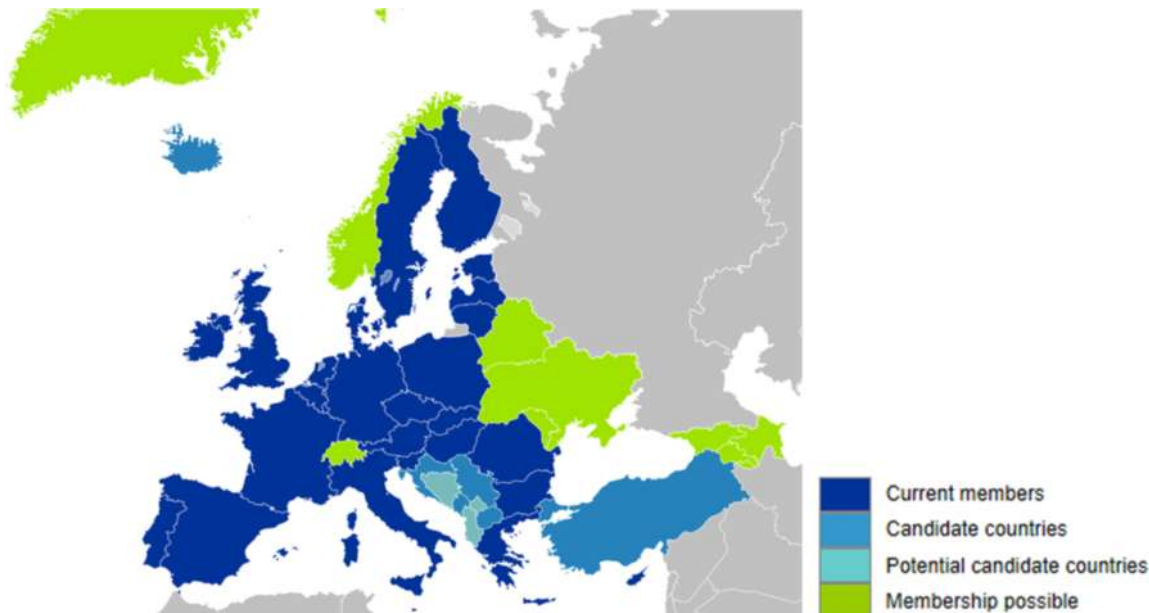
### 9.2.4 Convergence Theory

We have seen how the economies of some capitalist countries such as the United States have features that are very similar to socialism. Some industries, particularly utilities, are either owned by the government or controlled through regulations. Public programs such as welfare, Medicare, and Social Security exist to provide public funds for private needs. We have also seen how several large communist (or formerly communist) countries such as Russia, China, and Vietnam have moved from state-controlled socialism with central planning to market socialism, which allows market forces to dictate prices and wages, and for some business to be privately owned. In many formerly communist countries, these changes have led to economic growth compared to the stagnation they experienced under communism (Fidrmuc 2002).

In studying the economies of developing countries to see if they go through the same stages as previously developed nations did, sociologists have observed a pattern they call convergence. This describes the theory that societies move toward similarity over time as their economies develop.

**Convergence theory** explains that as a country's economy grows, its societal organization changes to become more like that of an industrialized society. Rather than staying in one job for a lifetime, people begin to move from job to job as conditions improve and opportunities arise. This means the workforce needs continual training and retraining. Workers move from rural areas to cities as they become centers of economic activity, and the government takes a larger role in providing expanded public services (Kerr et al. 1960).

Supporters of the theory point to Germany, France, and Japan—countries that rapidly rebuilt their economies after World War II. They point out how, in the 1960s and 1970s, East Asian countries like Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan converged with countries with developed economies. They are now considered developed countries themselves.



**Figure 9.9:** Sociologists look for signs of convergence and divergence in the societies of countries that have joined the European Union. (Map courtesy of Kolja21/Wikimedia Commons)

The theory is also known as the *catch-up effect* because the economies of poor countries that have capital invested in them will generally grow faster than countries that are already wealthy. This allows the income of poorer countries to "catch up" under the right conditions ("Catch-up Effect" 2011). To experience this rapid growth, the economies of developing countries must be able to attract inexpensive capital to invest in new businesses and to improve traditionally low productivity. They need access to new, international markets for buying the goods. If these characteristics are not in place, then their economies cannot catch up. This is why the economies of some countries are diverging rather than converging (Abramovitz 1986).

Another key characteristic of economic growth regards the implementation of technology. A developing country can bypass some steps of implementing technology that other nations faced earlier. Television and telephone systems are a good example. While developed countries spent significant time and money establishing elaborate system infrastructures based on metal wires or fiber-optic cables, developing countries today can go directly to cell phone and satellite transmission with much less investment.

Another factor affects convergence concerning social structure. Early in their development, countries such as Brazil and Cuba had economies based on cash crops (coffee or sugarcane, for instance) grown on large plantations by unskilled workers. The elite ran the plantations and the government, with little interest in training and educating the populace for other endeavors. This retarded economic growth until the power of the wealthy plantation owners was challenged (Sokoloff and Engerman 2000). Improved economies generally lead to wider social improvement. Society benefits from improved educational systems, allowing people more time to devote to learning and leisure.

### 9.2.5 Theoretical Perspectives on the Economy

Now that we've developed an understanding of the history and basic components of economies, let's turn to theory. How might social scientists study these topics? What questions do they ask? What theories do they develop to add to the body of sociological knowledge?

### 9.2.5.1 Functionalist Perspective

Someone taking a functional perspective will most likely view work and the economy as a well-oiled machine, designed for maximum efficiency. The Davis-Moore thesis, for example, suggests that some social stratification is a social necessity. The need for certain highly skilled positions combined with the relative difficulty of the occupation and the length of time it takes to qualify will result in a higher reward for that job, providing a financial motivation to engage in more education and a more difficult profession (Davis and Moore 1945). This theory can be used to explain the prestige and salaries that go to those with doctorates or medical degrees.

Like any theory, this is subject to criticism. For example, the thesis fails to take into account the many people who spend years on their education only to pursue work at a lower-paying position in a nonprofit organization, or who teach high school after pursuing a PhD. It also fails to acknowledge the effect of life changes and social networks on individual opportunities.

The functionalist perspective would assume that the continued health of the economy is vital to the health of the nation, as it ensures the distribution of goods and services. For example, we need food to travel from farms (high-functioning and efficient agricultural systems) via roads (safe and effective trucking and rail routes) to urban centers (high-density areas where workers can gather). However, sometimes a dysfunction—a function with the potential to disrupt social institutions or organization (Merton 1968)—in the economy occurs, usually because some institutions fail to adapt quickly enough to changing social conditions. This lesson has been driven home recently with the bursting of the housing bubble. Due to irresponsible lending practices and an underregulated financial market, we are currently living with the after-effects of a major dysfunction.

Some of this is cyclical. Markets produce goods as they are supposed to, but eventually the market is saturated and the supply of goods exceeds the demands. Typically the market goes through phases of surplus, or excess, inflation, where the money in your pocket today buys less than it did yesterday, and **recession**, which occurs when there are two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline. The functionalist would say to let market forces fluctuate in a cycle through these stages. In reality, to control the risk of an economic **depression** (a sustained recession across several economic sectors), the U.S. government will often adjust interest rates to encourage more spending. In short, letting the natural cycle fluctuate is not a gamble most governments are willing to take.

### 9.2.5.2 Conflict Perspective

For a conflict perspective theorist, the economy is not a source of stability for society. Instead, the economy reflects and reproduces economic inequality, particularly in a capitalist marketplace. The conflict perspective is classically Marxist, with the bourgeoisie (ruling class) accumulating wealth and power by exploiting the proletariat (workers), and regulating those who cannot work (the aged, the infirm) into the great mass of unemployed (Marx and Engels 1848). From the symbolic (though probably made up) statement of Marie Antoinette, who purportedly said “Let them eat cake” when told that the peasants were starving, to the Occupy Wall Street movement, the sense of inequity is almost unchanged. Both the people fighting in the French Revolution and those blogging from Zuccotti Park believe the same thing: wealth is concentrated in the hands of those who do not deserve it. As of 2007, 20 percent of Americans owned 80 percent of U.S. wealth (Domhoff 2011). While the inequality might not be as extreme as in pre-revolutionary France, it is enough to make many believe that the United States is not the meritocracy it seems to be.

### 9.2.5.3 Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Those working in the symbolic interaction perspective take a microanalytical view of society, focusing on the way reality is socially constructed through day-to-day interaction and how society is composed of people communicating based on a shared understanding of symbols.

One important symbolic interactionist concept related to work and the economy is **career inheritance**. This concept means simply that children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents, a

correlation that has been demonstrated in research studies (Antony 1998). For example, the children of police officers learn the norms and values that will help them succeed in law enforcement, and since they have a model career path to follow, they may find law enforcement even more attractive. Related to career inheritance is career socialization, learning the norms and values of a particular job.

Finally, a symbolic interactionist might study what contributes to job satisfaction. Melving Kohn and his fellow researchers (1990) determined that workers were most likely to be happy when they believed they controlled some part of their work, when they felt they were part of the decision-making processes associated with their work, when they have freedom from surveillance, and when they felt integral to the outcome of their work. Sunyal, Sunyal, and Yasin (2011) found that a greater sense of vulnerability to stress, the more stress experienced by a worker, and a greater amount of perceived risk consistently predicted a lower worker job satisfaction.

### 9.2.6 Summary

Economy refers to the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed. The Agricultural Revolution led to development of the first economies that were based on trading goods. Mechanization of the manufacturing process led to the Industrial Revolution and gave rise to two major competing economic systems. Under capitalism, private owners invest their capital and that of others to produce goods and services they can sell in an open market. Prices and wages are set by supply and demand and competition. Under socialism, the means of production is commonly owned, and the economy is controlled centrally by government. Several countries' economies exhibit a mix of both systems. Convergence theory seeks to explain the correlation between a country's level of development and changes in its economic structure.

### 9.2.7 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 9.2.1

(Solution on p. 221.)

Which of these is an example of a commodity?

- a. Cooking
- b. Corn
- c. Teaching
- d. Writing

#### Exercise 9.2.2

(Solution on p. 221.)

When did the first economies begin to develop?

- a. When all of the hunter-gatherers died
- b. When money was invented
- c. When people began to grow crops and domesticate animals
- d. When the first cities were built

#### Exercise 9.2.3

(Solution on p. 221.)

What is the most important commodity in a postindustrial society?

- a. Electricity
- b. Money
- c. Information
- d. Computers

#### Exercise 9.2.4

(Solution on p. 221.)

In which sector of an economy would someone working as a software developer be?

- a. Primary
- b. Secondary
- c. Tertiary
- d. Quaternary

**Exercise 9.2.5***(Solution on p. 221.)*

Which is an economic policy based on national policies of accumulating silver and gold by controlling markets with colonies and other countries through taxes and customs charges?

- a. Capitalism
- b. Communism
- c. Mercantilism
- d. Mutualism

**Exercise 9.2.6***(Solution on p. 221.)*

Who was the leading theorist on the development of socialism?

- a. Karl Marx
- b. Alex Inkeles
- c. Emile Durkheim
- d. Adam Smith

**Exercise 9.2.7***(Solution on p. 221.)*

The type of socialism now carried on by Russia is a form of \_\_\_\_\_ socialism.

- a. centrally planned
- b. market
- c. utopian
- d. zero-sum

**Exercise 9.2.8***(Solution on p. 221.)*

Among the reasons socialism never developed into a political movement in the United States was that trade unions \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. secured workers' rights
- b. guaranteed health care
- c. broke up monopolies
- d. diversified the workforce

**Exercise 9.2.9***(Solution on p. 221.)*

Which country serves as an example of convergence?

- a. Singapore
- b. North Korea
- c. England
- d. Canada



### 9.2.8 Short Answer

#### Exercise 9.2.10

Explain the difference between state socialism with central planning and market socialism.

#### Exercise 9.2.11

In what ways can capitalistic and socialistic economies converge?

#### Exercise 9.2.12

Describe the impact a rapidly growing economy can have on families.

#### Exercise 9.2.13

How do you think the United States economy will change as we move closer to a technology-driven service economy?

### 9.2.9 Further Research

Green jobs have the potential to improve not only your prospects of getting a good job, but the environment as well. To learn more about the green revolution in jobs go to <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenjobs><sup>3</sup>

One alternative to traditional capitalism is to have the workers own the company for which they work. To learn more about company-owned businesses check out: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/company-owned><sup>4</sup>

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<sup>13</sup><http://www.theworlddeconomy.org/>

<sup>14</sup><http://anarchism.pageabode.com/pjproudhon/property-is-theft>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.heidemarieschwermer.com/>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.livingwithoutmoney.org>

<sup>17</sup>[http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_201.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm)

### 9.3 Work in the United States<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 9.10:** Many people attend job fairs looking for their first job or for a better one. (Photo courtesy of Daniel Ramirez/flickr)

The American Dream has always been based on opportunity. There is a great deal of mythologizing about the energetic upstart who can climb to success based on hard work alone. Common wisdom states that if you study hard, develop good work habits, and graduate high school or, even better, college, then you'll have the opportunity to land a good job. That has long been seen as the key to a successful life. And although the reality has always been more complex than suggested by the myth, the worldwide recession that began in 2008 has made it harder than ever to play by the rules and win the game. The data are grim: From December 2007 through March 2010, 8.2 million workers in the United States lost their jobs, and the unemployment rate grew to almost 10 percent nationally, with some states showing much higher rates (Autor 2010). Times are very challenging for those in the workforce. For those looking to finish their schooling, often with enormous student-debt burdens, it is not just challenging—it is terrifying.

So where did all the jobs go? Will any of them be coming back, and if not, what new ones will there be? How do you find and keep a good job now? These are the kinds of questions people are currently asking about the job market in the United States.

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<sup>18</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42925/1.5/>>.



**Figure 9.11:** In a virtual world, living the good life still costs real money. (Photo courtesy of Juan Pablo Amo/flickr)

If you are not one of the tens of millions gamers who enjoy World of Warcraft or other online virtual world games, you might not even know what MMORPG stands for. But if you made a living playing MMORPGs, as a growing number of enterprising gamers do, then massive multiplayer online role-playing games might matter a bit more. According to an article in *Forbes* magazine, the online world of gaming has been yielding very real profits for entrepreneurs who are able to buy, sell, and manage online real estate, currency, and more for cash (Holland and Ewalt 2006). If it seems strange that people would pay real money for imaginary goods, consider that for serious gamers the online world is of equal importance to the real one.

These entrepreneurs can sell items because the gaming sites have introduced scarcity into the virtual worlds. The game makers have realized that MMORPGs lack tension without a level of scarcity for needed resources or highly desired items. In other words, if anyone can have a palace or a vault full of wealth, then what's the fun?

So how does it work? One of the easiest ways to make such a living is called gold farming, which involves hours of repetitive and boring play, hunting and shooting animals like dragons that carry a lot of wealth. This virtual wealth can be sold on eBay for real money: a timesaver for players who don't want to waste their playing time on boring pursuits. Players in parts of Asia engage in gold farming, playing eight hours a day or more, to sell their gold to players in Western Europe or North America. From virtual prostitutes to power levelers (people who play the game logged in as you so your characters get the wealth and power), to architects, merchants, and even beggars, online players can offer to sell any service or product that others want to buy. Whether buying a magic carpet in World of Warcraft or a stainless-steel kitchen appliance in Second Life, gamers have the same desire to acquire as the rest of us—never mind that their items are virtual. Once a gamer creates the code for an item, she can sell it again and again, for real money. And finally, you can sell yourself. According to *Forbes*, a University of Virginia computer science student sold his World of Warcraft character on eBay for \$1,200, due to the high levels of powers and skills it had gained (Holland and Ewalt 2006).

So should you quit your day job to make a killing in online games? Probably not. Those who work hard might eke out a decent living, but for most people, grabbing up land that doesn't really exist or selling your body in animated action scenes is probably not the best opportunity. Still, for some, it offers the ultimate in work-from-home flexibility, even if that home is a mountain cave in a virtual world.

### 9.3.1 Polarization in the Workforce

The mix of jobs available in the United States began changing many years before the recession struck, and, as mentioned above, the American dream has not always been easy to follow. Geography, race, gender, and other factors have always played a role in the reality of success. More recently, the increased **outsourcing** (or contracting a job or set of jobs to an outside source) of manufacturing jobs to developing nations has greatly diminished the number of high-paying, often unionized, blue-collar positions available. A similar problem has arisen in the white-collar sector, with many low-level clerical and support positions also being outsourced, as evidenced by the international technical-support call centers in Mumbai, India, and Newfoundland, Canada. The number of supervisory and managerial positions has been reduced as companies streamline their command structures and industries continue to consolidate through mergers. Even highly educated skilled workers such as computer programmers have seen their jobs vanish overseas.

The **automation** (replacing workers with technology) of the workplace is another cause of the changes in the job market. Computers can be programmed to do many routine tasks faster and less expensively than people who used to do such tasks. Jobs like bookkeeping, clerical work, and repetitive tasks on production assembly lines all lend themselves to automation. Think about the newer automated toll passes we can install in our cars. Toll collectors are just one of the many endangered jobs that will soon cease to exist.

Despite all this, the job market is actually growing in some areas, but in a very polarized fashion. **Polarization** means that a gap has developed in the job market, with most employment opportunities at the lowest and highest levels and few jobs for those with midlevel skills and education. At one end, there has been strong demand for low-skilled, low-paying jobs in industries like food service and retail. On the other end, some research shows that in certain fields there has been a steadily increasing demand for highly skilled and educated professionals, technologists, and managers. These high-skilled positions also tend to be highly paid (Autor 2010).

The fact that some positions are highly paid while others are not is an example of the class system, an economic hierarchy in which movement (both upward and downward) between various rungs of the socioeconomic ladder is possible. Theoretically, at least, the class system as it is organized in the United States is an example of a meritocracy, an economic system that rewards merit—typically in the form of skill and hard work—with upward mobility. A theorist working in the functionalist perspective might point out that this system is designed to reward hard work, which encourages people to strive for excellence in pursuit of reward. A theorist working in the conflict perspective might counter with the thought that hard work does not guarantee success even in a meritocracy, because social capital—the accumulation of a network of social relationships and knowledge that will provide a platform from which to achieve financial success—in the form of connections or higher education are often required to access the high-paying jobs. Increasingly, we are realizing intelligence and hard work aren't enough. If you lack knowledge of how to leverage the right names, connections, and players, you are unlikely to experience upward mobility.

With so many jobs being outsourced or eliminated by automation, what kind of jobs are there a demand for in the United States? While fishing and forestry jobs are in decline, in several markets jobs are increasing. These include community and social service, personal care and service, finance, computer and information services, and health care. The chart below, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, illustrates areas of projected growth.

**Chart 6. Percent change in total employment, by occupational group, 2010–20 (projected)**



Source: BLS Division of Occupational Outlook

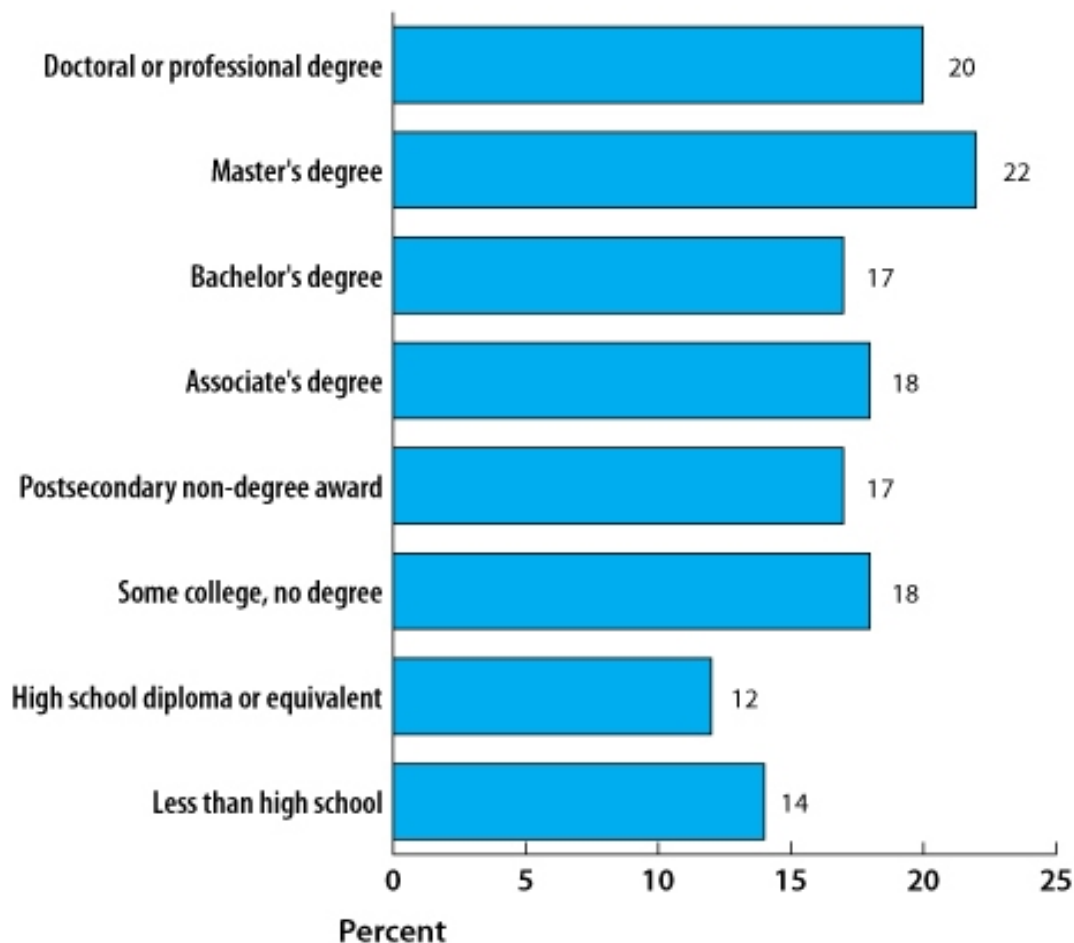
**Figure 9.12:** This chart shows the projected growth of several occupational groups. (Graph courtesy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook)

The professional and related jobs, which include any number of positions, typically require significant education and training and tend to be lucrative career choices. Service jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, can include everything from jobs with the fire department to jobs scooping ice cream (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). There is a wide variety of training needed, and therefore an equally large wage potential discrepancy. One of the largest areas of growth by industry, rather than by occupational group (as seen above), is in the health field. This growth is across occupations, from associate-level nurse's aides to management-level assisted-living staff. As baby boomers age, they are living longer than any generation before, and the growth of this population segment requires an increase in capacity throughout our country's elder care system, from home health care nursing to geriatric nutrition.

Notably, jobs in farming are in decline. This is an area where those with less education traditionally could be assured of finding steady, if low-wage, work. With these jobs disappearing, more and more workers will find themselves untrained for the types of employment that are available.

Another projected trend in employment relates to the level of education and training required to gain and keep a job. As the chart below shows us, growth rates are higher for those with more education. Those with a professional degree or a master's degree may expect job growth of 20 and 22 percent respectively, and jobs that require a bachelor's degree are projected to grow 17 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, jobs that require a high school diploma or equivalent are projected to grow at only 12 percent, while jobs that require less than a high school diploma will grow 14 percent. Quite simply, without a degree, it will be more difficult to find a job. It is worth noting that these projections are based on overall growth across all occupation categories, so obviously there will be variations within different occupational areas. However, once again, those who are the least educated will be the ones least able to fulfill the American Dream.

**Chart 7. Percent change in employment, by education category, 2010–20 (projected)**



*Source: BLS Division of Occupational Outlook*

**Figure 9.13:** More education means more jobs (generally). (Graph courtesy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook)

In the past, rising education levels in the United States had been able to keep pace with the rise in the number of education-dependent jobs. However, since the late 1970s, men have been enrolling in college at a lower rate than women, and graduating at a rate of almost 10 percent less. The lack of male candidates reaching the education levels needed for skilled positions has opened opportunities for women, minorities, and immigrants (Wang 2011).



### 9.3.2 Women in the Workforce

Women have been entering the workforce in ever-increasing numbers for several decades. They have also been finishing college and going on to earn higher degrees at higher rate than men do. This has resulted in many women being better positioned to obtain high-paying, high-skill jobs (Autor 2010).

While women are getting more and better jobs and their wages are rising more quickly than men's wages are, U.S. Census statistics show that they are still earning only 77 percent of what men are for the same positions (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

### 9.3.3 Immigration and the Workforce

Simply put, people will move from where there are few or no jobs to places where there are jobs, unless something prevents them from doing so. The process of moving to a country is called immigration. Due to its reputation as the land of opportunity, the United States has long been the destination of all skill levels of workers. While the rate decreased somewhat during the economic slowdown of 2008, immigrants, both legal and illegal, continue to be a major part of the U.S. workforce.

In 2005, before the recession arrived, immigrants made up a historic high of 14.7 percent of the workforce (Lowell et al. 2006). During the 1970s through 2000s, the United States experienced both an increase in college-educated immigrants and in immigrants who lacked a high school diploma. With this range across the spectrum, immigrants are well positioned for both the higher-paid jobs and the low-wage low-skill jobs that are predicted to grow in the next decade (Lowell et al. 2006). In the early 2000s, it certainly seemed that the United States was continuing to live up to its reputation of opportunity. But what about during the recession of 2008, when so many jobs were lost and unemployment hovered close to 10 percent? How did immigrant workers fare then?

The answer is that as of June 2009, when the National Bureau of Economic Research (NEBR) declared the recession officially over, "foreign-born workers gained 656,000 jobs while native-born workers lost 1.2 million jobs" (Kochhar 2010). As these numbers suggest, the unemployment rate that year decreased for immigrant workers and increased for native workers. The reasons for this trend are not entirely clear. Some Pew research suggests immigrants tend to have greater flexibility to move from job to job and that the immigrant population may have been early victims of the recession, and thus were quicker to rebound (Kochhar 2010). Regardless of the reasons, the 2009 job gains are far from enough to keep them inured from the country's economic woes. Immigrant earnings are in decline, even as the number of jobs increases, and some theorize that increase in employment may come from a willingness to accept significantly lower wages and benefits.

While the political debate is often fueled by conversations about low-wage-earning immigrants, there are actually as many highly skilled—and high-earning—immigrant workers as well. Many immigrants are sponsored by their employers who claim they possess talents, education, and training that are in short supply in the U.S. These sponsored immigrants account for 15 percent of all legal immigrants (Batalova and Terrazas 2010). Interestingly, the U.S. population generally supports these high-level workers, believing they will help lead to economic growth and not be a drain on government services (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). On the other hand, illegal immigrants tend to be trapped in extremely low-paying jobs in agriculture, service, and construction with few ways to improve their situation without risking exposure and deportation.

### 9.3.4 Poverty in the United States

When people lose their jobs during a recession or in a changing job market, it takes longer to find a new one, if they can find one at all. If they do, it is often at a much lower wage or not full time. This can force people into poverty. In the United States, we tend to have what is called relative poverty, defined as being unable to live the lifestyle of the average person in your country. This must be contrasted with the absolute poverty that can be found in underdeveloped countries, defined as being barely able, or unable, to afford basic necessities such as food (Byrns 2011).

We cannot even rely on unemployment statistics to provide a clear picture of total unemployment in the United States. First, unemployment statistics do not take into account **underemployment**, a state in

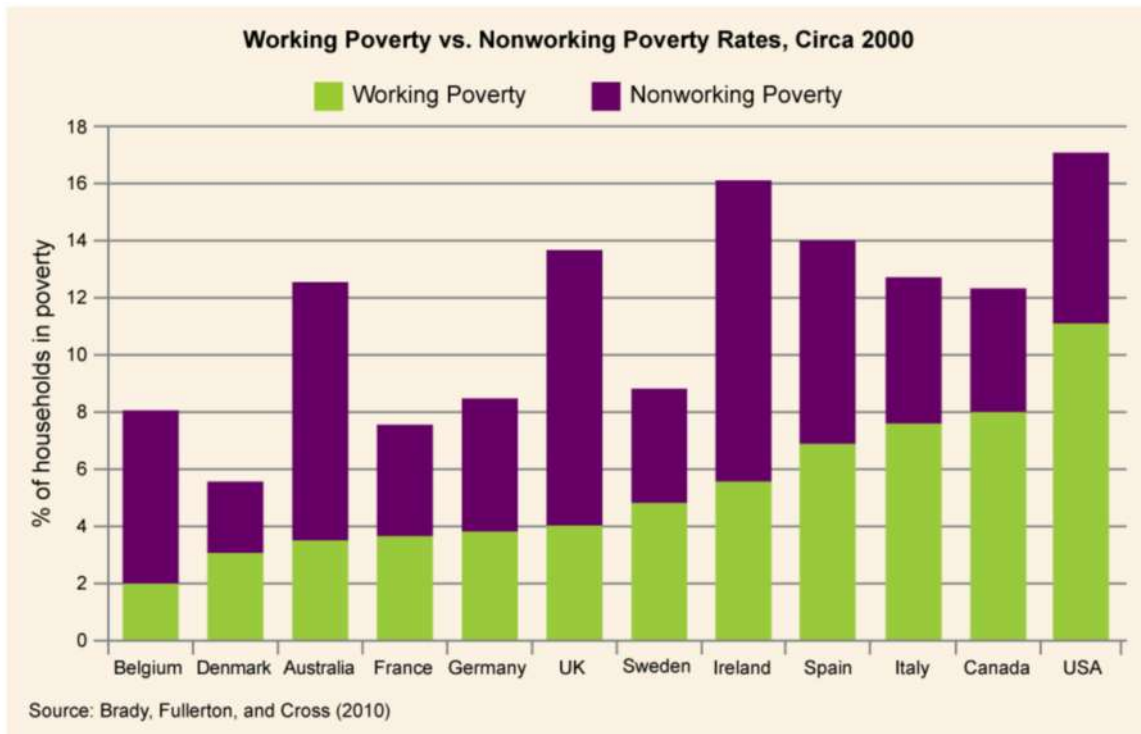
which a person accepts a lower paying, lower status job than their education and experience qualifies them to perform. Second, unemployment statistics only count those:

1. who are actively looking for work
2. who have not earned income from a job in the past four weeks
3. who are ready, willing, and able to work

The unemployment statistics provided by the U.S. government are rarely accurate, because many of the unemployed become discouraged and stop looking for work. Not only that, but these statistics undercount the youngest and oldest workers, the chronically unemployed (e.g., homeless), and seasonal and migrant workers.

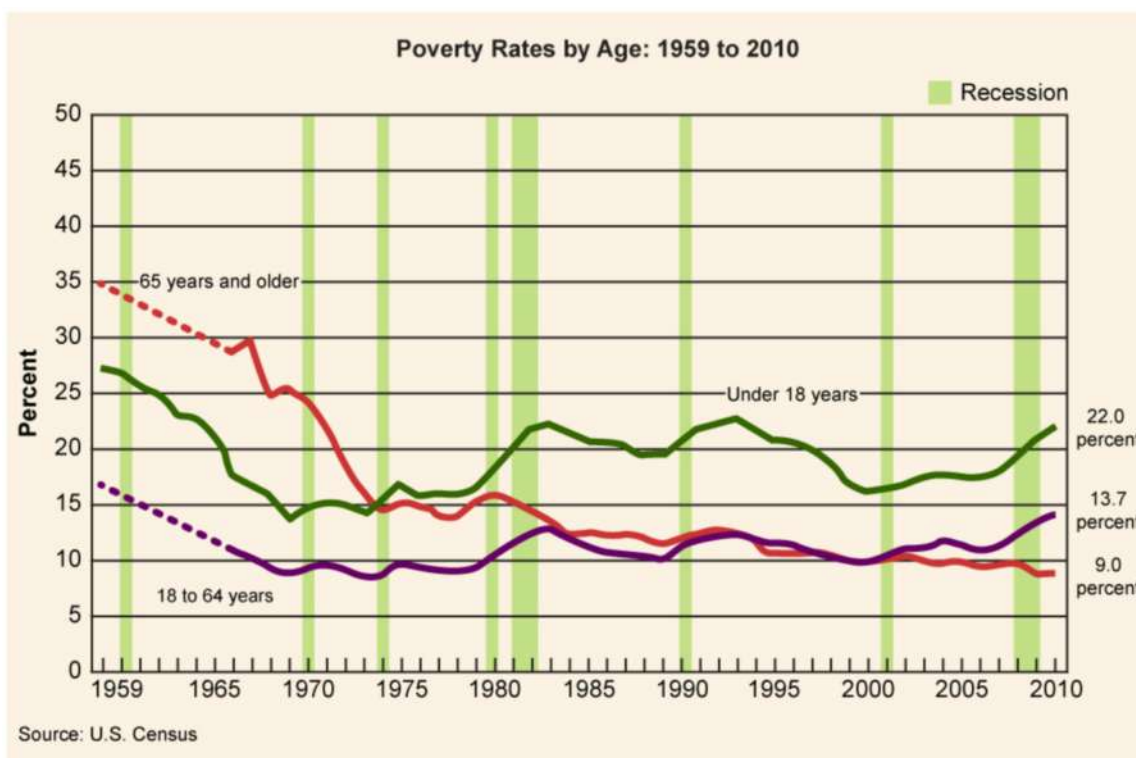
A certain amount of unemployment is a direct result of the relative inflexibility of the labor market, considered **structural unemployment**, which describes when there is a societal level of disjuncture between people seeking jobs and the available jobs. This mismatch can be geographic (they are hiring in California, but most unemployed live in Alabama), technological (skilled workers are replaced by machines, as in the auto industry), or can result from any sudden change in the types of jobs people are seeking versus the types of companies that are hiring.

Because of the high standard of living in the United States, many people are working at full-time jobs but are still poor by the standards of relative poverty. They are the working poor. The United States has a higher percentage of working poor than many other developed countries (Brady, Fullerton and Cross 2010). In terms of employment, the Bureau of Labor Statistics defines the working poor as those who have spent at least 27 weeks working or looking for work, and yet remain below the poverty line. Many of the facts about the working poor are as expected: Those who work only part time are more likely to be classified as working poor than those with full-time employment; higher levels of education lead to less likelihood of being among the working poor; and those with children under 18 are four times more likely than those without children to fall into this category. In 2009, the working poor included 10.4 million Americans, up almost 17 percent from 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).



**Figure 9.14:** A higher percentage of the people living in poverty in the United States have jobs compared to other developed nations.

### Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2010



**Figure 9.15:** While poverty rates among the elderly have fallen, an increasing number of children are living in poverty. (Graph courtesy of the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2011, Annual Social and Economic Supplements)

Most developed countries such as the United States protect their citizens from absolute poverty by providing different levels of social services such as unemployment insurance, welfare, food stamps, and so on. They may also provide job training and retraining so that people can reenter the job market. In the past, the elderly were particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty after they stopped working; however, pensions, retirement plans, and Social Security were designed to help prevent this. A major concern in the United States is the rising number of young people growing up in poverty. Growing up poor can cut off access to the education and services people need to move out of poverty and into stable employment. As we saw, more education was often a key to stability, and those raised in poverty are the ones least able to find well-paying work, perpetuating a cycle.

There is great debate about how much support local, state, and federal governments should give to help the unemployed and underemployed. The decisions made on these issues will have a profound effect on working in the United States.

### 9.3.5 Summary

The job market in the United States is meant to be a meritocracy that creates social stratifications based on individual achievement. Economic forces, such as outsourcing and automation, are polarizing the workforce,

with most job opportunities being either low-level, low-paying manual jobs or high-level, high-paying jobs based on abstract skills. Women's role in the workforce has increased, although they have not yet achieved full equality. Immigrants play an important role in the U.S. labor market. The changing economy has forced more people into poverty even if they are working. Welfare, Social Security, and other social programs exist to protect people from the worst effects of poverty.

### 9.3.6 Section Quiz

**Exercise 9.3.1***(Solution on p. 221.)*

Which is evidence that the United States workforce is largely a meritocracy?

- a. Job opportunities are increasing for highly skilled jobs.
- b. Job opportunities are decreasing for midlevel jobs.
- c. Highly skilled jobs pay better than low-skill jobs.
- d. Women tend to make less than men do for the same job.

**Exercise 9.3.2***(Solution on p. 221.)*

If someone does not earn enough money to pay for the essentials of life he or she is said to be \_\_\_\_\_ poor.

- a. absolutely
- b. essentially
- c. really
- d. working

**Exercise 9.3.3***(Solution on p. 221.)*

About what percentage of the workforce in the United States are legal immigrants?

- a. Less than 1%
- b. 1%
- c. 16%
- d. 66%

### 9.3.7 Short Answer

**Exercise 9.3.4**

As polarization occurs in the U.S. job market, this will affect other social institutions. For example, if midlevel education won't lead to employment, we could see polarization in educational levels as well. Use the sociological imagination to consider what social institutions may be impacted, and how.

**Exercise 9.3.5**

Do you believe we have a true meritocracy in the United States? Why or why not?

### 9.3.8 Further Research

The role of women in the workplace is constantly changing. To learn more check out [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women\\_workplace](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_workplace)<sup>19</sup>

The Employment Projections Program of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics looks at a 10-year projection for jobs and employment. To see some trends for the next decade check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/BLS><sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/BLS>

<sup>21</sup><http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/5554>

<sup>22</sup><http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=818>

<sup>23</sup><http://www.soc.duke.edu/~brady/web/Bradyetal2010.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>[http://www.forbes.com/2006/08/07/virtual-world-jobs\\_cx\\_de\\_0807virtualjobs.html](http://www.forbes.com/2006/08/07/virtual-world-jobs_cx_de_0807virtualjobs.html)

<sup>25</sup><http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1784/great-recession-foreign-born-gain-jobs-native-born-lose-jobs>

<sup>26</sup>[http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAF/TF17\\_Lowell.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAF/TF17_Lowell.pdf)

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<sup>28</sup><http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco2003.htm#industry>

<sup>29</sup><http://cnx.org/content/m42925/latest/www.bls.gov/cps/cpswp2009.pdf>

<sup>30</sup><http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>

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<sup>31</sup><http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/08/17/women-see-value-and-benefits-of-college-men-lag-on-both-fronts-survey-finds/5/#iv-by-the-numbers-gender-race-and-education>

<sup>32</sup><http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/15/perry-repeats-socialist-charge-against-obama-policies>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 9

to Exercise 9.2.1 (p. 204): Answer

B

to Exercise 9.2.2 (p. 204): Answer

C

to Exercise 9.2.3 (p. 204): Answer

C

to Exercise 9.2.4 (p. 204): Answer

D

to Exercise 9.2.5 (p. 205): Answer

C

to Exercise 9.2.6 (p. 205): Answer

A

to Exercise 9.2.7 (p. 205): Answer

B

to Exercise 9.2.8 (p. 205): Answer

A

to Exercise 9.2.9 (p. 205): Answer

A

to Exercise 9.3.1 (p. 218): Answer

C

to Exercise 9.3.2 (p. 218): Answer

A

to Exercise 9.3.3 (p. 218): Answer

C





## Chapter 10

# Race and Ethnicity

### 10.1 Introduction to Race and Ethnicity<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 10.1:** Race and ethnicity are part of the human experience. How do racial and ethnic diversity play in a role in who we are? (Photo courtesy of Agecom Bahia/flickr)

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In a mixed vocational/academic high school, Ms. Ellis grades papers for her large, diverse, 11<sup>th</sup> grade English class. She is currently looking at the papers of three students: Jose, who is Dominican, Kim, who is Vietnamese, and Anthony, who is Italian American.

Jose's grasp of English is weak, and he doesn't show a high degree of understanding of the themes of *Hamlet*. However, Ms. Ellis knows that Jose tried hard, and she also believes that, like many of his fellow Hispanic students, he will probably not go to college and continue any studies of English literature. His parents do not speak English and are not overly involved in his schooling. Jose excels in Automotive Shop,

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43001/1.2/>>.

which prepares him for a job in that industry, so Ms. Ellis feels that to push him in English will not help him. She gives him a C+ and a few neutral words of encouragement without spending a lot of time pointing out where he could improve.

Ms. Ellis wishes she could have more students like Kim. Kim is unfailingly polite, interested, and hardworking, even though her English still needs work. Her paper on *Hamlet* is far from perfect, but Ms. Ellis knows that she probably worked harder on it than anyone in the class. As is the case with most of Ms. Ellis's Asian students, both of Kim's parents are anxious for Kim to go to college, so even though Kim's paper does not show much more understanding of *Hamlet* than Jose's, Ms. Ellis gives her a B and writes ample comments for areas of improvement.

Anthony is a thorn in Ms. Ellis's side. In this school where most of the teachers and vocational instructors are Irish American or Italian American, Anthony has always felt at home and overconfident. His uncle is on the staff, and he has several siblings and cousins who have gone through the school. He is aggressive and disruptive in class, distracting other students and causing Ms. Ellis to spend an inordinate amount of time on maintaining discipline. Anthony's paper is about the same level as Jose's and Kim's, but since English is his first language, he really should be able to perform better. Ms. Ellis gives him a C- and a few curt comments.

Ms. Ellis graded three similar papers very differently. She didn't grade them only on their merits; she relied heavily on her own knowledge of and feelings about the students themselves. Ms. Ellis was guided by her prejudices: her preconceived notions of the students' work, attitudes, and abilities. To the extent that her prejudices affected her actions, Ms. Ellis also practiced discrimination. But what do these terms mean? Does everyone have prejudices? Is everyone guilty of discrimination? How does our society foster institutional prejudice and discrimination?

## 10.2 Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups<sup>2</sup>

While many students first entering a sociology classroom are accustomed to conflating the terms "race," "ethnicity," and "minority group," these three terms have distinct meanings for sociologists. The idea of race refers to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant, while ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture. And minority groups describe groups that are subordinate, or lacking power in society regardless of skin color or country of origin. For example, in modern U.S. history, the elderly might be considered a minority group due to a diminished status resulting from popular prejudice and discrimination against them. The World Health Organization's research on elderly maltreatment shows that 10 percent of nursing home staff admit to physically abusing an elderly person in the past year, and 40 percent admit to psychological abuse (2011). As a minority group, the elderly are also subject to economic, social, and workplace discrimination.

### 10.2.1 What Is Race?

Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras, eventually becoming less connected with ancestral and familial ties, and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists have posited categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colors, and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions (Mongolia and the Caucasus Mountains, for instance) or denoted skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).

However, this typology of race developed during early racial science has fallen into disuse, and the **social construction of race** is a far more common way of understanding racial categories. According to this school of thought, race is not biologically identifiable. When considering skin color, for example, the social construction of race perspective recognizes that the relative darkness or fairness of skin is an evolutionary adaptation to the available sunlight in different regions of the world. Contemporary conceptions of race, therefore, which tend to be based on socioeconomic assumptions, illuminate how far removed modern race understanding is from biological qualities. In modern society, some people who consider themselves "white"

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42857/1.3/>>.

actually have more melanin (a pigment that determines skin color) in their skin than other people who identify as "black." Consider the case of the actress Rashida Jones. She is the daughter of a black man (Quincy Jones) but she does not play a black woman in her television or film roles. In some countries, such as Brazil, class is more important than skin color in determining racial categorization. People with high levels of melanin in their skin may consider themselves "white" if they enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. On the other hand, someone with low levels of melanin in their skin might be assigned the identity of "black" if they have little education or money.

The social construction of race is also reflected in the way that names for racial categories change with changing times. It's worth noting that race, in this sense, is also a system of labeling that provides a source of identity; specific labels fall in and out of favor during different social eras. For example, the category "negroid," popular in the 19th century, evolved into the term "negro" by the 1960s, and then this term fell from use and was replaced with "African American." This latter term was intended to celebrate the multiple identities that a black person might hold, but the word choice is a poor one: it lumps together a large variety of ethnic groups under an umbrella term while excluding others who could accurately be described by the label but who do not meet the spirit of the term. For example, actress Charlize Theron is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed "African American." She was born in South Africa and later became a U.S. citizen. Is her identity that of an "African American" as most of us understand the term?

### 10.2.2 What Is Ethnicity?

**Ethnicity** is a term that describes shared culture—the practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. And like race, individuals may be identified or self-identify to ethnicities in complex, even contradictory, ways. For example, ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian American, Russian, Jewish, and Serbian might all be groups whose members are predominantly included in the racial category "white." Conversely, the ethnic group British includes citizens from a multiplicity of racial backgrounds: black, white, Asian, and more, plus a variety of race combinations. These examples illustrate the complexity and overlap of these identifying terms. Ethnicity, like race, continues to be an identification method that individuals and institutions use today—whether through the census, affirmative action initiatives, non-discrimination laws, or simply in personal day-to-day relations.

### 10.2.3 What Are Minority Groups?

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a **minority group** as "any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination." The term minority connotes discrimination, and in its sociological use, the term **subordinate** can be used interchangeably with the term minority, while the term **dominant** is often substituted for the group that's in the majority. These definitions correlate to the concept that the dominant group is that which holds the most power in a given society, while subordinate groups are those who lack power compared to the dominant group.

Note that being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group; sometimes larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group. For example, consider Apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the white minority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics: (1) unequal treatment and less power over their lives, (2) distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin color or language, (3) involuntary membership in the group, (4) awareness of subordination, and (5) high rate of in-group marriage. Additional examples of minority groups might include the LGBT community, religious practitioners whose faith is not widely practiced where they live, and people with disabilities.

**Scapegoat theory**, developed initially from Dollard's (1939) Frustration-Aggression theory, suggests that the dominant group will displace their unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group. History has shown us many examples of the scapegoating of a subordinate group. An example from the last century is the way that Adolf Hitler was able to use the Jewish people as scapegoats for Germany's social and economic problems. In the United States, recent immigrants have frequently been the scapegoat for the nation's—or an individual's—woes. Many states have enacted laws to disenfranchise immigrants; these laws are popular because they let the dominant group scapegoat a subordinate group.

#### 10.2.4 Multiple Identities

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**Figure 10.2:** Golfer Tiger Woods has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage. Individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds are becoming more common. (Photo courtesy of familymwr/flickr)

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Prior to the 20th century, racial intermarriage (referred to as miscegenation) was extremely rare, and in many places, illegal. While the sexual subordination of slaves did result in children of mixed race, these children were usually considered black, and therefore, property. There was no question of multiple racial identities with the possible exception of the Creole. Creole society developed in the port city of New Orleans, where a mixed-race culture grew from French and African inhabitants. Unlike in other parts of the country, “Creoles of color” had greater social, economic, and educational opportunities than most African Americans.

Increasingly during the modern era, the removal of miscegenation laws and a trend toward equal rights and legal protection against racism have steadily reduced the social stigma attached to racial exogamy (exogamy refers to marriage outside of one’s core social unit). It is now common for the children of racially mixed parents to acknowledge and celebrate their various ethnic identities. Golfer Tiger Woods, for instance, has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage; he jokingly refers to his ethnicity as “Cablinasian,” a term he coined to combine several of his ethnic backgrounds. While this is the trend, it is not yet evident in all aspects of our society. For example, the U.S. Census only recently added additional categories for people to identify themselves, such as non-white Hispanic. A growing number of people chose multiple races to describe themselves on the 2010 Census, paving the way for the 2020 Census to provide yet more choices.

### 10.2.5 Summary

Race is fundamentally a social construct. Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture and national origin. Minority groups are defined by their lack of power.

### 10.2.6 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 10.2.1

*(Solution on p. 235.)*

The racial term “African American” can refer to:

- a. a black person living in America
- b. people whose ancestors came to America through the slave trade
- c. a white person who originated in Africa and now lives in the United States
- d. any of the above

#### Exercise 10.2.2

*(Solution on p. 235.)*

What is the one defining feature of a minority group?

- a. Self-definition
- b. Numerical minority
- c. Lack of power
- d. Strong cultural identity

#### Exercise 10.2.3

*(Solution on p. 235.)*

Ethnicity describes shared:

- a. beliefs
- b. language
- c. religion
- d. any of the above

#### Exercise 10.2.4

*(Solution on p. 235.)*

Which of the following is an example of a numerical majority being treated as a subordinate group?

- a. Jewish people in Germany
- b. Creoles in New Orleans

- c. White people in Brazil
- d. Blacks under Apartheid in South Africa

**Exercise 10.2.5****(Solution on p. 235.)**

Scapegoat theory shows that:

- a. subordinate groups blame dominant groups for their problems
- b. dominant groups blame subordinate groups for their problems
- c. some people are predisposed to prejudice
- d. all of the above

**10.2.7 Short Answer****Exercise 10.2.6**

Why do you think the term “minority” has persisted when the word “subordinate” is more descriptive?

**Exercise 10.2.7**

How do you describe your ethnicity? Do you include your family’s country of origin? Do you consider yourself multiethnic? How does your ethnicity compare to that of the people you spend most of your time with?

**10.2.8 Further Research**

Explore aspects of race and ethnicity at PBS’s site, “What Is Race?”: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS\\_what\\_is\\_race](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_what_is_race)<sup>3</sup>

**10.2.9 References**

Caver, Helen Bush and Mary T. Williams. 2011. “Creoles.” *Multicultural America, Countries and Their Cultures*, December 7. Retrieved February 13, 2012 (<http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Bu-Dr/Creoles.html><sup>4</sup>).

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World Health Organization. 2011. “Elder Maltreatment.” Fact Sheet N-357. Retrieved December 19, 2011 (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs357/en/index.html><sup>6</sup>).

<sup>3</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS\\_what\\_is\\_race](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_what_is_race)

<sup>4</sup><http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Bu-Dr/Creoles.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/courses/womminor.html>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs357/en/index.html>

## 10.3 Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination<sup>7</sup>

### 10.3.1 Stereotypes

The terms stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, and racism are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation. But when discussing these terms from a sociological perspective, it is important to define them: **stereotypes** are oversimplified ideas about groups of people, **prejudice** refers to thoughts and feelings about those groups, while **discrimination** refers to actions toward them. **Racism** is a type of prejudice that involves set beliefs about a specific racial group.

As stated above, stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation—almost any characteristic. They may be positive (usually about one's own group, such as when women suggest they are less likely to complain about physical pain) but are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Where do stereotypes come from? In fact new stereotypes are rarely created; rather, they are recycled from subordinate groups that have assimilated into society and are reused to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, many stereotypes that are currently used to characterize black people were used earlier in American history to characterize Irish and Eastern European immigrants.

### 10.3.2 Prejudice and Racism

Prejudice refers to beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that someone holds about a group. A prejudice is not based on experience; instead, it is a prejudgment, originating outside of actual experience. Racism is a type of prejudice that is used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others. The Ku Klux Klan is an example of a racist organization; its members' belief in white supremacy has encouraged over a century of hate crime and hate speech.

### 10.3.3 Discrimination

While prejudice refers to biased *thinking*, discrimination consists of *actions* against a group of people. Discrimination can be based on age, religion, health, and other indicators; race-based discrimination and antidiscrimination laws strive to address this set of social problems.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity can take many forms, from unfair housing practices to biased hiring systems. Overt discrimination has long been part of U.S. history. In the late 19th century, it was not uncommon for business owners to hang signs that read, "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply." And of course, southern Jim Crow laws, with their "Whites Only" signs, exemplified overt discrimination that is not tolerated today.

However, discrimination cannot be erased from our culture just by enacting laws to abolish it. Even if a magic pill managed to eradicate racism from each individual's psyche, society itself would maintain it. Sociologist Émile Durkheim calls racism a social fact, meaning that it does not require the action of individuals to continue. The reasons for this are complex and relate to the educational, criminal, economic, and political systems that exist.

For example, when a newspaper prints the race of individuals accused of a crime, it may enhance stereotypes of a certain minority. Another example of racist practices is **racial steering**, in which real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race. Racist attitudes and beliefs are often more insidious and hard to pin down than specific racist practices.

Prejudice and discrimination can overlap and intersect in many ways. To illustrate, here are four examples of how prejudice and discrimination can occur. *Unprejudiced nondiscriminators* are open-minded, tolerant, and accepting individuals. *Unprejudiced discriminators* might be those who, unthinkingly, practice sexism in their workplace by not considering females for certain positions that have traditionally been held by

<sup>7</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42860/1.3/>>.



men. *Prejudiced nondiscriminators* are those who hold racist beliefs but don't act on them, such as a racist store owner who serves minority customers. *Prejudiced discriminators* include those who actively make disparaging remarks about others or who perpetuate hate crimes.

Discrimination also manifests in different ways. The illustrations above are examples of individual discrimination, but other types exist. Institutional discrimination is when a societal system has developed with an embedded disenfranchisement of a group, such as the U.S. military's historical nonacceptance of minority sexualities as recently experienced surrounding the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Institutional discrimination can also involve the promotion of a group's status, such as occurs with white privilege. While most white people are willing to admit that non-white people live with a set of disadvantages due to the color of their skin, very few white people are willing to acknowledge the benefits they receive simply by being white. **White privilege** refers to the fact that dominant groups often accept their experience as the normative (and hence, superior) experience. Failure to recognize this "normality" as race-based is an example of a dominant group institutionalizing racism. Feminist sociologist Peggy McIntosh (1988) described several examples of "white privilege." For instance, white women can easily find makeup that matches their skin tone. White people can be assured that, most of the time, they will be dealing with authority figures of their own race. How many other examples of white privilege can you think of?

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**Figure 10.3:** To some, the Confederate flag is a symbol of pride in Southern history. To others, it is a grim reminder of a degrading period of America's past. (Photo courtesy of Eyeliam/flickr)

In January 2006, two girls walked into Burleson High School in Texas carrying purses that displayed large images of Confederate flags. School administrators told the girls that they were in violation of the dress code, which prohibited apparel with inappropriate symbolism or clothing that discriminated based on race. To stay in school, they'd have to have someone pick up their purses or leave them in the office. The girls chose to go home for the day, but proceeded on a path of challenging

the action, appealing first to the principal, then to the district superintendent, then to the U.S. District Court, and finally to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Why did the school ban the purses, and why did they stand behind that ban, even when being sued? Why did the girls, identified anonymously in court documents as A.M. and A.T., pursue such strong legal measures for their right to carry the purses? The issue, of course, is not the purses: it is the Confederate flag that adorns them. This case, *A.M. and A.T. v Burleson Independent School District et al.* (2009), joins a long line of people and institutions that have fought for their right to display the Confederate flag. In the end, the court sided with the district and noted that the Confederate flag carried symbolism significant enough to disrupt normal school activities.

While many young Americans like to believe that racism is mostly in the country's past, this case illustrates how racism and discrimination are quite alive today. If the Confederate flag is synonymous with slavery, is there any place for its display in modern society? Those who fight for their right to display the flag say that such a display should be covered by the First Amendment: the right to free speech. But others say that the flag is equivalent to hate speech, which is not covered by the First Amendment. Do you think that displaying the Confederate flag should be considered free speech or hate speech?

### 10.3.4 Summary

Stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Prejudice refers to thoughts and feelings, while discrimination refers to actions. Racism refers to the belief that one race is inherently superior or inferior to other races.

### 10.3.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 10.3.1

(Solution on p. 235.)

Stereotypes can be based on:

- a. race
- b. ethnicity
- c. gender
- d. all of the above

#### Exercise 10.3.2

(Solution on p. 235.)

What is discrimination?

- a. Biased thoughts against an individual or group
- b. Biased actions against an individual or group
- c. Belief that a race different from yours is inferior
- d. Another word for stereotyping

#### Exercise 10.3.3

(Solution on p. 235.)

Which of the following is the best explanation of racism as a social fact?

- a. It needs to be eradicated by laws.
- b. It is like a magic pill.
- c. It does not need the actions of individuals to continue.
- d. None of the above

### 10.3.6 Short Answer

#### Exercise 10.3.4

How does racial steering contribute to institutionalized racism?

#### Exercise 10.3.5

Give an example of stereotyping that you see in everyday life. Explain what would need to happen for this to be eliminated.

### 10.3.7 Further Research

How far should First Amendment rights extend? Read more about the subject at the First Amendment Center: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first\\_amendment\\_center](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first_amendment_center)<sup>8</sup>

### 10.3.8 References

Hudson, David L. 2009. “Students Lose Confederate-Flag Purse Case in 5th Circuit.” Retrieved December 7, 2011 (<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/students-lose-confederate-flag-purse-case-in-5th-circuit><sup>9</sup>).

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## 10.4 Theories of Race and Ethnicity<sup>10</sup>

### 10.4.1 Theoretical Perspectives

Issues of race and ethnicity can be observed through three major sociological perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. As you read through these theories, ask yourself which one makes the most sense, and why. Is more than one theory needed to explain racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination?

#### 10.4.1.1 Functionalism

In the view of functionalism, racial and ethnic inequalities must have served an important function in order to exist as long as they have. This concept, of course, is problematic. How can racism and discrimination contribute positively to society? Sociologists who adhere to the functionalist view argue that racism and discrimination *do* contribute positively, but only to the dominant group. Historically, it has indeed served dominant groups well to discriminate against subordinate groups. Slavery, of course, was beneficial to slaveholders. Holding racist views can benefit those who want to deny rights and privileges to people they view as inferior to them, but over time, racism harms society. Outcomes of race-based disenfranchisement—such as poverty levels, crime rates, and discrepancies in employment and education opportunities—illustrate the long-term (and clearly negative) results of slavery and racism in American society.

#### 10.4.1.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theories are often applied to inequalities of gender, social class, education, race, and ethnicity. A conflict theory perspective of U.S. history would examine the numerous past and current struggles between the white ruling class and racial and ethnic minorities, noting specific conflicts that have arisen when the dominant group perceived a threat from the minority group. In the late 19th century, the rising power

<sup>8</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first\\_amendment\\_center](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first_amendment_center)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/students-lose-confederate-flag-purse-case-in-5th-circuit>

<sup>10</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42861/1.3/>>.

of black Americans after the Civil War resulted in draconian Jim Crow laws that severely limited black political and social power. The years since then have showed a pattern of attempted disenfranchisement, with gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts aimed at predominantly minority neighborhoods.

Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) developed **intersection theory**, which suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes. When we examine race and how it can bring us both advantages and disadvantages, it is important to acknowledge that the way we experience race is shaped, for example, by our gender and class. Multiple layers of disadvantage intersect to create the way we experience race. For example, if we want to understand prejudice, we must understand that the prejudice focused on a white woman because of her gender is very different from the layered prejudice focused on a poor Asian woman, who is affected by stereotypes related to being poor, being a woman, and her ethnic status.

#### 10.4.1.3 Interactionism

For symbolic interactionists, race and ethnicity provide strong symbols as sources of identity. In fact, some interactionists propose that the symbols of race, not race itself, are what lead to racism. Famed Interactionist Herbert Blumer (1958) suggested that racial prejudice is formed through interactions between members of the dominant group: Without these interactions, individuals in the dominant group would not hold racist views. These interactions contribute to an abstract picture of the subordinate group that allows the dominant group to support its view of the subordinate group, thus maintaining the status quo. An example of this might be an individual whose beliefs about a particular group are based on images conveyed in popular media, and those are unquestionably believed because the individual has never personally met a member of that group.

#### 10.4.2 Culture of Prejudice

**Culture of prejudice** refers to the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture. We grow up surrounded by images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Consider the casually racist imagery on grocery store shelves or the stereotypes that fill popular movies and advertisements. It is easy to see how someone living in the Northeastern United States, who may know no Mexican Americans personally, might gain a stereotyped impression from such sources as Speedy Gonzalez or Taco Bell's talking Chihuahua. Because we are all exposed to these images and thoughts, it is impossible to know to what extent they have influenced our thought processes.

#### 10.4.3 Summary

Functionalist views of race study the role dominant and subordinate groups play to create a stable social structure. Conflict theorists examine power disparities and struggles between various racial and ethnic groups. Interactionists see race and ethnicity as important sources of individual identity and social symbolism. The concept of culture of prejudice recognizes that all people are subject to stereotypes that are ingrained in their culture.

#### 10.4.4 Section Quiz

##### Exercise 10.4.1

(*Solution on p. 235.*)

As a Caucasian in the United States, being reasonably sure that you will be dealing with authority figures of the same race as you is a result of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. conflict theory
- c. white privilege
- d. scapegoating theory

**Exercise 10.4.2****(Solution on p. 235.)**

Speedy Gonzalez is an example of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. stereotyping
- c. interactionist view
- d. culture of prejudice

**10.4.5 Short Answer****Exercise 10.4.3**

Give three examples of white privilege. Do you know people who have experienced this? From what perspective?

**Exercise 10.4.4**

What is the worst example of culture of prejudice you can think of? What are your reasons for thinking it is the worst?

**10.4.6 Further Research**

Do you know someone who practices white privilege? Do you practice it? Explore the concept with this checklist: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white\\_privilege\\_checklist](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white_privilege_checklist)<sup>11</sup> to see how much of it holds true for you or others.

**10.4.7 References**

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<sup>11</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white\\_privilege\\_checklist](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white_privilege_checklist)

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 10

to Exercise 10.2.1 (p. 227): Answer

D

to Exercise 10.2.2 (p. 227): Answer

C

to Exercise 10.2.3 (p. 227): Answer

D

to Exercise 10.2.4 (p. 227): Answer

D

to Exercise 10.2.5 (p. 228): Answer

B

to Exercise 10.3.1 (p. 231): Answer

D

to Exercise 10.3.2 (p. 231): Answer

B

to Exercise 10.3.3 (p. 231): Answer

C

to Exercise 10.4.1 (p. 233): Answer

C

to Exercise 10.4.2 (p. 234): Answer

B







## Chapter 11

# Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

### 11.1 Introduction to Gender, Sex, and Sexuality<sup>1</sup>

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Available for free at Connexions <<http://cnx.org/content/col11563/1.1>>  
**Figure 11.1:** Some children may learn at an early age that their gender does not correspond with their sex. (Photo courtesy of trazomfreak/flickr)

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When Harry was born, his parents, Steve and Barb, were delighted to add another boy to their family. But as their baby boy began to grow and develop, they noticed that Harry began to express himself in a manner that they viewed as more feminine than masculine. He gravitated toward dolls and other toys that our culture typically associates with girls. But Harry's preference was not simply about liking pink more than blue or flowers more than fire trucks. He even began to draw himself as a girl, complete with a dress and high-heeled shoes. In fact, Harry did not just wish to be a girl; he believed he was a girl.

In kindergarten, Harry often got into arguments with male classmates because he insisted that he was a girl, not a boy. He even started calling himself "Hailey." Steve and Barb met with several psychologists, all of whom told them that Hailey was transgendered. But Steve and Barb had a hard time understanding that their five-year-old son could have already developed a gender identity that went against society's expectations. Concerned with the social ramifications associated with his child being transgendered, Steve hoped this was just a phase. But Barb, and eventually Steve, realized that Harry's feelings were genuine and unyielding, and they made the decision to let Harry live as Hailey—a girl. They came to this decision after concluding that the criticism he would endure from his peers and other members of society would be less damaging than the confusion he might experience internally if he were forced to live as a boy.

Many transgendered children grow up hating their bodies, and this population can have high rates of drug abuse and suicide (Weiss 2011). Fearful of these outcomes and eager to make their child happy, Steven and Barb now refer to Harry as Hailey and allow *her* to dress and behave in manners that are considered feminine. To a stranger, Hailey is likely to appear just like any other girl and may even be considered *extra girly* due to her love of all things pink. But to those who once knew Hailey as Harry, Hailey is likely to endure more ridicule and rejection as the result of adopting a feminine gender identity.

Currently, seven-year-old Hailey and her parents are comfortable with her gender status, but Steve and Barb are concerned about what questions and problems might arise as she gets older. "Who's going to love my child?" asks Steve (Ling 2011). This question isn't asked because Hailey is unlovable, but because American society has yet to fully listen to or understand the personal narratives of the transgendered population (Hanes and Sanger 2010).

In this chapter, we will discuss the differences between sex and gender, along with issues like gender identity and sexuality. We will also explore various theoretical perspectives on the subjects of gender and sexuality.

### 11.1.1 References

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Ling, Lisa. 2011. "Transgender Child: A Parent's Difficult Choice." <http://www.oprah.com><sup>2</sup>. Retrieved February 13, 2012 (<http://www.oprah.com/own-our-america-lisa-ling/Transgender-Child-A-Parents-Difficult-Choice><sup>3</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.oprah.com>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.oprah.com/own-our-america-lisa-ling/Transgender-Child-A-Parents-Difficult-Choice>

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/staggering\\_rate\\_of\\_attempted\\_suicides\\_by\\_transgenders\\_highlights\\_injustices/](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/staggering_rate_of_attempted_suicides_by_transgenders_highlights_injustices/)

## 11.2 The Difference Between Sex and Gender<sup>5</sup>

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**Figure 11.2:** While the biological differences between males and females are fairly straightforward, the social and cultural aspects of being a man or woman can be complicated. (Photo courtesy of FaceMePLS/flickr)

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When filling out a document such as a job application or school registration form you are often asked to provide your name, address, phone number, birth date, and sex or gender. But have you ever been asked to provide your sex *and* your gender? As with most people, it may not have occurred to you that sex and gender are not the same. However, sociologists and most other social scientists view sex and gender as conceptually distinct. **Sex** refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity. **Gender** is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female. **Gender identity** is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine (Diamond 2002).

A person's sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not always correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms sex and gender are not interchangeable. A baby boy who is born with male genitalia will be identified as male. As he grows, however, he may identify with the feminine aspects of his culture. Since the term sex refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. For example, all persons of the female sex, in general, regardless of culture, will eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate. Characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary greatly between different societies. For example, in American culture, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. However, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) can be considered masculine. The kilt worn by a Scottish male does not make him appear feminine in his culture.

The dichotomous view of gender (the notion that one is either male or female) is specific to certain cultures and is not universal. In some cultures gender is viewed as fluid. In the past, some anthropologists used the term *berdache* to refer to individuals who occasionally or permanently dressed and lived as the opposite

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<sup>5</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42869/1.5/>>.

gender. The practice has been noted among certain Native American tribes (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997). Samoan culture accepts what they refer to as a “third gender.” *Fa’afafine*, which translates as “the way of the woman,” is a term used to describe individuals who are born biologically male but embody both masculine and feminine traits. Fa’afafines are considered an important part of Samoan culture. Individuals from other cultures may mislabel them as homosexuals because fa’afafines have a varied sexual life that may include men or women (Poasa 1992).

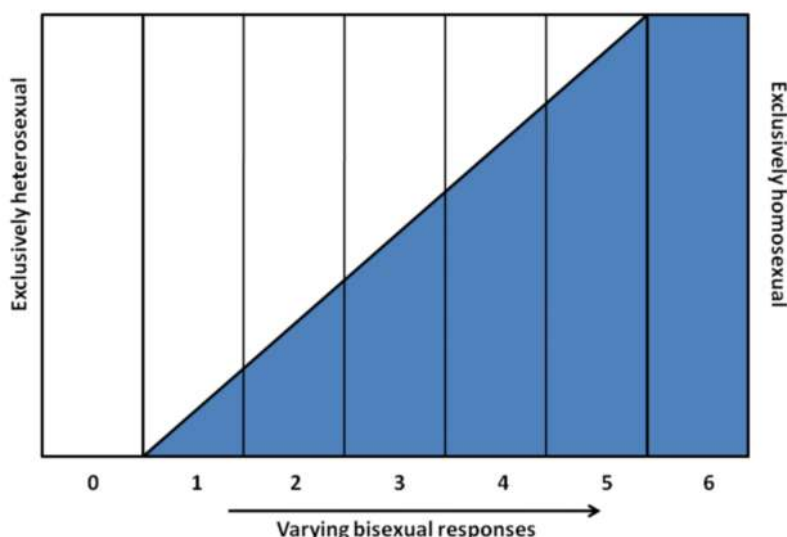
: The terms *sex* and *gender* have not always been differentiated in the English language. It was not until the 1950s that American and British psychologists and other professionals working with intersex and transsexual patients formally began distinguishing between sex and gender. Since then, psychological and physiological professionals have increasingly used the term *gender* (Moi 2005). By the end of the 21st century, expanding the proper usage of the term *gender* to everyday language became more challenging—particularly where legal language is concerned. In an effort to clarify usage of the terms *sex* and *gender*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in a 1994 briefing, “The word *gender* has acquired the new and useful connotation of cultural or attitudinal characteristics (as opposed to physical characteristics) distinctive to the sexes. That is to say, *gender* is to *sex* as *feminine* is to *female* and *masculine* is to *male*” (*J.E.B. v. Alabama*, 144 S. Ct. 1436 [1994]). Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had a different take, however. Viewing the words as synonymous, she freely swapped them in her briefings so as to avoid having the word “*sex*” pop up too often. It is thought that her secretary supported this practice by suggestions to Ginsburg that “those nine men” (the other Supreme Court justices), “hear that word and their first association is not the way you want them to be thinking” (Case 1995). This anecdote reveals that even human experience that is assumed to be biological and personal (such as our self-perception and behavior) is actually a socially defined variable by culture.

### 11.2.1 Sexual Orientation

A person’s **sexual orientation** is their emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female). Sexual orientation is typically divided into four categories: *heterosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the opposite sex; *homosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of one’s own sex; *bisexuality*, the attraction to individuals of either sex; and *asexuality*, no attraction to either sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals may also be referred to informally as “straight” and “gay,” respectively. The United States is a heteronormative society, meaning it supports heterosexuality as the norm. Consider that homosexuals are often asked, “When did you know you were gay?” but heterosexuals are rarely asked, “When did you know that you were straight?” (Ryle 2011).

According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence (American Psychological Association 2008). They do not have to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation. Homosexual women (also referred to as lesbians), homosexual men (also referred to as gays), and bisexuals of both genders may have very different experiences of discovering and accepting their sexual orientation. At the point of puberty, some may be able to claim their sexual orientations while others may be unready or unwilling to make their homosexuality or bisexuality known since it goes against American society’s historical norms (APA 2008).

Alfred Kinsey was among the first to conceptualize sexuality as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy of gay or straight. To classify this continuum of heterosexuality and homosexuality, Kinsey created a six-point rating scale that ranges from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual (see the figure below). In his 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey writes, “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats ... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects” (Kinsey 1948).



**Figure 11.3:** The Kinsey scale indicates that sexuality can be measured by more than just heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Later scholarship by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expanded on Kinsey's notions. She coined the term "homosocial" to oppose "homosexual," describing non-sexual same-sex relations. Sedgwick recognized that in American culture, males are subject to a clear divide between the two sides of this continuum, whereas females enjoy more fluidity. This can be illustrated by the way women in America can express homosocial feelings (nonsexual regard for people of the same sex) through hugging, handholding, and physical closeness. In contrast, American males refrain from these expressions since they violate the heteronormative expectation. While women experience a flexible norming of variations of behavior that spans the heterosexual-homosocial spectrum, male behavior is subject to strong social sanction if it veers into homosocial territory because of societal homophobia (Sedgwick 1985).

There is no scientific consensus regarding the exact reasons why an individual holds a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation. There has been research conducted to study the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, but there has been no evidence that links sexual orientation to one factor (APA 2008). Research, however, does present evidence showing that homosexuals and bisexuals are treated differently than heterosexuals in schools, the workplace, and the military. It is reported that in the workplace, for example, discrimination based on sexual orientation occurs at a rate of 4 per 10,000, which is higher than the rate of discrimination based on race, which stands at 3.90 (Sears and Mallory 2007.)

Much of this discrimination is based on stereotypes, misinformation, and **homophobia**, an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals. Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation have not come into effect until the last few years. In 2011, President Obama overturned "don't ask, don't tell," a controversial policy that required homosexuals in the US military to keep their sexuality undisclosed. Between 2004 and 2010, five states and the District of Columbia legalized gay marriage. The Employee Non-Discrimination Act, which ensures workplace equality regardless of sexual orientation, is still pending full government approval. Organizations such as GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) advocate for homosexual rights and encourage governments and citizens to recognize the presence of sexual discrimination and work to prevent it. Other advocacy agencies frequently use the acronyms LGBT and

LGBTQ, which stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender” (and “Queer” or “Questioning” when the Q is added).

### 11.2.2 Gender Roles

As we grow, we learn how to behave from those around us. In this socialization process, children are introduced to certain roles that are typically linked to their biological sex. The term **gender role** refers to society’s concept of how men and women are expected to act and how they should behave. These roles are based on norms, or standards, created by society. In American culture, masculine roles are usually associated with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles are usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination. Role learning starts with socialization at birth. Even today, our society is quick to outfit male infants in blue and girls in pink, even applying these color-coded gender labels while a baby is in the womb.

One way children learn gender roles is through play. Parents typically supply boys with trucks, toy guns, and superhero paraphernalia, which are active toys that promote motor skills, aggression, and solitary play. Daughters are often given dolls and dress-up apparel that foster nurturing, social proximity, and role play. Studies have shown that children will most likely choose to play with “gender appropriate” toys (or same-gender toys) even when cross-gender toys are available because parents give children positive feedback (in the form of praise, involvement, and physical closeness) for gender normative behavior (Caldera, Huston, and O’Brien 1998).



**Figure 11.4:** Fathers tend to be more involved when their sons engage in gender appropriate activities such as sports. (Photo courtesy of stephanski/flickr)

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The drive to adhere to masculine and feminine gender roles continues later in life. Men tend to outnumber women in professions such as law enforcement, the military, and politics. Women tend to outnumber men in care-related occupations such as childcare, healthcare, and social work. These occupational roles are examples of typical American male and female behavior, derived from our culture's traditions. Adherence to them demonstrates fulfillment of social expectations but not necessarily personal preference (Diamond 2002).

### 11.2.3 Gender Identity

American society allows for some level of flexibility when it comes to acting out gender roles. To a certain extent, men can assume some feminine roles and women can assume some masculine roles without interfering with their gender identity. **Gender identity** is an individual's self-conception of being male or female based on his or her association with masculine or feminine gender roles.

Individuals who identify with the role that is the opposite of their biological sex are called **transgender**. Transgendered males, for example, have such a strong emotional and psychological connection to the feminine aspects of society that they identify their gender as female. The parallel connection to masculinity exists for transgendered females. It is difficult to determine the prevalence of transgenderism in society. However, it is estimated that two to five percent of the US population is transgendered (Transgender Law and Policy

Institute 2007).

Transgendered individuals who wish to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy—so that their physical being is better aligned with gender identity—are called **transsexuals**. They may also be known as male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM). Not all transgendered individuals choose to alter their bodies: many will maintain their original anatomy but may present themselves to society as the opposite gender. This is typically done by adopting the dress, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other characteristic typically assigned to the opposite gender. It is important to note that people who cross-dress, or wear clothing that is traditionally assigned to opposite gender, are not necessarily transgendered. Cross-dressing is typically a form of self-expression, entertainment, or personal style, not necessarily an expression against one's assigned gender (APA 2008).

There is no single, conclusive explanation for why people are transgendered. Transgendered expressions and experiences are so diverse that it is difficult to identify their origin. Some hypotheses suggest biological factors such as genetics or prenatal hormone levels as well as social and cultural factors such as childhood and adulthood experiences. Most experts believe that all of these factors contribute to a person's gender identity (APA 2008).

It is known, however, that transgendered and transsexual individuals experience discrimination based on their gender identity. People who identify as transgendered are twice as likely to experience assault or discrimination as non-transgendered individuals; they are also one and a half times more likely to experience intimidation (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2010). Organizations such as the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and Global Action for Trans Equality work to prevent, respond to, and end all types of violence against transgender, transsexual, and homosexual individuals. These organizations hope that by educating the public about gender identity and empowering transgender and transsexual individuals, this violence will end.

: What if you had to live as the opposite sex? If you are a man, imagine that you were forced to wear frilly dresses, dainty shoes, and makeup to special occasions, and you were expected to enjoy romantic comedies and TLC reality shows. If you are a woman, imagine that you were forced to wear shapeless clothing, put only minimal effort into your personal appearance, not show emotion, and watch countless hours of sporting events and sports-related commentary. It would be pretty uncomfortable, right? Well, maybe not. Many people enjoy participating in activities that are typically associated with the opposite sex and would not mind if some of the cultural expectations for men and women were loosened.

Now, imagine that when you look at your body in the mirror, you feel disconnected. You feel your genitals are shameful and dirty, and you feel as though you are trapped in someone else's body with no chance of escape. As you get older, you hate the way your body is changing, and, therefore, you hate yourself. These elements of disconnect and shame are important to understand when discussing transgendered individuals. Fortunately, sociological studies pave the way for a deeper and more empirically grounded understanding of transgendered experience.





**Figure 11.5:** Chaz Bono is the transgendered son of Cher and Sonny Bono. Being transgendered is not about clothing or hairstyles; it is about self-perception. (Photo courtesy of Greg Hernandez/flickr)

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### 11.2.4 Summary

The terms “sex” and “gender” refer to two different identifiers. Sex denotes biological characteristics differentiating males and females, while gender denotes social and cultural characteristics of masculine and feminine behavior. Sex and gender are not always synchronous. Individuals who strongly identify with the opposing gender are considered transgendered.

### 11.2.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 11.2.1

(Solution on p. 267.)

The terms “masculine” and “feminine” refer to a person’s \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. sex
- b. gender
- c. both sex and gender
- d. none of the above

**Exercise 11.2.2***(Solution on p. 267.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ is/are an individual's self-conception of being male or female based on his or her association with masculine or feminine gender roles.

- a. Gender identity
- b. Gender bias
- c. Sexual orientation
- d. Sexual attitudes

**Exercise 11.2.3***(Solution on p. 267.)*

Research indicates that individuals are aware of their sexual orientation \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. at infancy
- b. in early adolescence
- c. in early adulthood
- d. in late adulthood

**Exercise 11.2.4***(Solution on p. 267.)*

A person who is biologically female but identifies with the male gender and has undergone surgery to alter her body is considered \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. transgendered
- b. transsexual
- c. a cross-dresser
- d. homosexual

**Exercise 11.2.5***(Solution on p. 267.)*

Which of following is correct regarding the explanation for transgenderism?

- a. It is strictly biological and associated with chemical imbalances in the brain.
- b. It is a behavior that is learned through socializing with other transgendered individuals.
- c. It is genetic and usually skips one generation.
- d. Currently, there is no definitive explanation for transgenderism.

**11.2.6 Short Answer****Exercise 11.2.6**

Why do sociologists find it important to differentiate between sex and gender? What importance does the differentiation have in modern society?

**Exercise 11.2.7**

How is children's play influenced by gender roles? Think back to your childhood. How "gendered" were the toys and activities available to you? Do you remember gender expectations being conveyed through the approval or disapproval of your playtime choices?

**11.2.7 Further Research**

For more information on gender identity and advocacy for transgendered individuals see the Global Action for Trans Equality web site at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans\\_equality](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans_equality)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans\\_equality](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans_equality)

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/biblio/articles/2000to2004/2002-sex-and-gender.html>

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/Reports/2012\\_NCAVP\\_2011\\_HV\\_Report.pdf](http://www.avp.org/storage/documents/Reports/2012_NCAVP_2011_HV_Report.pdf)

## 11.3 Gender<sup>10</sup>

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**Figure 11.6:** Traditional images of American gender roles reinforce the idea that women should be subordinate to men. (Photo courtesy of Sport Suburban/flickr)

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### 11.3.1 Gender and Socialization

The phrase “boys will be boys” is often used to justify behavior such as pushing, shoving, or other forms of aggression from young boys. The phrase implies that such behavior is unchangeable and something that is part of a boy’s nature. Aggressive behavior, when it does not inflict significant harm, is often accepted from boys and men because it is congruent with the cultural script for masculinity. The “script” written by society is in some ways similar to a script written by a playwright. Just as a playwright expects actors to adhere to a prescribed script, society expects women and men to behave according to the expectations of their respective gender role. Scripts are generally learned through a process known as socialization, which teaches people to behave according to social norms.

#### 11.3.1.1 Socialization

Children learn at a young age that there are distinct expectations for boys and girls. Cross-cultural studies reveal that children are aware of gender roles by age two or three. At four or five, most children are firmly entrenched in culturally appropriate gender roles (Kane 1996). Children acquire these roles through socialization, a process in which people learn to behave in a particular way as dictated by societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, society often views riding a motorcycle as a masculine activity and, therefore, considers it to be part of the male gender role. Attitudes such as this are typically based on

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<sup>10</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42871/1.4/>>.

stereotypes, oversimplified notions about members of a group. Gender stereotyping involves overgeneralizing about the attitudes, traits, or behavior patterns of women or men. For example, women may be thought of as too timid or weak to ride a motorcycle.



**Figure 11.7:** Although our society may have a stereotype that associates motorcycles with men, female bikers demonstrate that a woman's place extends far beyond the kitchen in modern America. (Photo courtesy of Robert Couse-Baker/flickr)

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Gender stereotypes form the basis of sexism. **Sexism** refers to prejudiced beliefs that value one sex over another. Sexism varies in its level of severity. In parts of the world where women are strongly undervalued, young girls may not be given the same access to nutrition, healthcare, and education as boys. Further, they will grow up believing that they deserve to be treated differently from boys (UNICEF 2011; Thorne 1993). While illegal in the United States when practiced as discrimination, unequal treatment of women continues to pervade social life. It should be noted that discrimination based on sex occurs at both the micro- and macro-levels. Many sociologists focus on discrimination that is built into the social structure; this type of discrimination is known as institutional discrimination (Pincus 2008).

Gender socialization occurs through four major agents of socialization: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behavior. Exposure also occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Repeated exposure to these agents over time leads men and women into a false sense that they are acting naturally rather than following a socially constructed role.

Family is the first agent of socialization. There is considerable evidence that parents socialize sons and daughters differently. Generally speaking, girls are given more latitude to step outside of their prescribed gender role (Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000; Raffaelli and Ontai 2004). However, differential socialization typically results in greater privileges afforded to sons. For instance, boys are allowed more autonomy and independence at an earlier age than daughters. They may be given fewer restrictions on appropriate clothing, dating habits, or curfew. Sons are also often free from performing domestic duties such as cleaning or cooking and other household tasks that are considered feminine. Daughters are limited by their expectation to be passive and nurturing, generally obedient, and to assume many of the domestic responsibilities.

Even when parents set gender equality as a goal, there may be underlying indications of inequality. For example, when dividing up household chores, boys may be asked to take out the garbage or perform other tasks that require strength or toughness, while girls may be asked to fold laundry or perform duties that require neatness and care. It has been found that fathers are firmer in their expectations for gender conformity than are mothers, and their expectations are stronger for sons than they are for daughters (Kimmel 2000). This is true in many types of activities, including preference of toys, play styles, discipline, chores, and personal achievements. As a result, boys tend to be particularly attuned to their father's disapproval when engaging in an activity that might be considered feminine, like dancing or singing (Coltraine and Adams 2008). It should be noted that parental socialization and normative expectations vary along lines of social class, race, and ethnicity. African-American families, for instance, are more likely than Caucasians to model an egalitarian role structure for their children (Staples and Boulin Johnson 2004).

The reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes continues once a child reaches school age. Until very recently, schools were rather explicit in their efforts to stratify boys and girls. The first step toward stratification was segregation. Girls were encouraged to take home economics or humanities courses and boys to take math and science courses.

Studies suggest that gender socialization still occurs in schools today, perhaps in less obvious forms (Lips 2004). Teachers may not even realize that they are acting in ways that reproduce gender differentiated behavior patterns. Yet, any time they ask students to arrange their seats or line up according to gender, teachers are asserting that boys and girls should be treated differently (Thorne 1993).

Even in levels as low as kindergarten, schools subtly convey messages to girls indicating that they are less intelligent or less important than boys. For example, in a study involving teacher responses to male and female students, data indicated that teachers praised male students far more than their female counterparts. Additionally, teachers interrupted girls more and gave boys more opportunities to expand on their ideas (Sadker and Sadker 1994). Further, in social as well as academic situations, teachers have traditionally positioned boys and girls oppositionally—reinforcing a sense of competition rather than collaboration (Thorne 1993). Boys are also permitted a greater degree of freedom regarding rule-breaking or minor acts of deviance, whereas girls are expected to follow rules carefully and to adopt an obedient posture (Ready 2001). Schools reinforce the polarization of gender roles and the age-old “battle of the sexes” by positioning girls and boys in competitive arrangements.

Mimicking the actions of significant others is the first step in the development of a separate sense of self (Mead 1934). Like adults, children become agents who actively facilitate and apply normative gender expectations to those around them. When children do not conform to the appropriate gender role, they may face negative sanctions such as being criticized or marginalized by their peers. Though many of these sanctions are informal, they can be quite severe. For example, a girl who wishes to take karate class instead of dance lessons may be called a “tomboy” and face difficulty gaining acceptance from both male and female peer groups (Ready 2001). Boys, especially, are subject to intense ridicule for gender nonconformity (Coltraine and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000).

Mass media serves as another significant agent of gender socialization. In television and movies, women tend to have less significant roles and are often portrayed as wives or mothers. When women are given a lead role, they are often one of two extremes: a wholesome, saint-like figure or a malevolent, hypersexual figure (Etaugh and Bridges 2003). This same inequality is pervasive in children's movies (Smith 2008). Research indicates that of the 101 top-grossing G-rated movies released between 1990 and 2005, three out of four characters were male. Out of those 101 movies, only seven were near being gender balanced, with a character ratio of less than 1.5 males per 1 female (Smith 2008).

Television commercials and other forms of advertising also reinforce inequality and gender-based stereotypes. Women are almost exclusively present in ads promoting cooking, cleaning, or childcare-related products (Davis 1993). Think about the last time you saw a man star in a dishwasher or laundry detergent commercial. In general, women are underrepresented in roles that involve leadership, intelligence, or a balanced psyche. Of particular concern is the depiction of women in ways that are dehumanizing, especially in music videos. Even in mainstream advertising, however, themes intermingling violence and sexuality are quite common (Kilbourne 2000).

### 11.3.1.2 Social Stratification and Inequality

Stratification refers to a system in which groups of people experience unequal access to basic, yet highly valuable, social resources. The United States is characterized by gender stratification (as well as stratification of race, income, occupation, and the like). Evidence of gender stratification is especially keen within the economic realm. Despite making up nearly half (49.8 percent) of payroll employment, men vastly outnumber women in authoritative, powerful, and, therefore, high-earning jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Even when a woman's employment status is equal to a man's, she will generally only make 77 cents for every dollar made by her male counterpart (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Additionally, women who are in the paid labor force still do the majority of the unpaid work at home. On an average day, 84 percent of women (compared to 67 percent of men) spend time doing household management activities (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). This double duty keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Gender stratification through the division of labor is not exclusively American. According to George Murdock's classic work, *Outline of World Cultures* (1954), all societies classify work by gender. When a pattern appears in all societies, it is called a cultural universal. While the phenomenon of assigning work by gender is universal, its specifics are not. The same task is not assigned to either men or women worldwide. But the way each task's associated gender is valued is notable. In Murdock's examination of the division of labor among 324 societies around the world, he found that in nearly all cases the jobs assigned to men were given greater prestige (Murdock and White 1968). Even if the job types were very similar and the differences slight, men's work was still considered more vital.

There is a long history of gender stratification in the United States. When looking to the past, it would appear that society has made great strides in terms of abolishing some of the most blatant forms of gender inequality (see timeline below) but underlying effects of male dominance still permeate many aspects of society.

- Before 1809—Women could not execute a will
- Before 1840—Women were not allowed to own or control property
- Before 1920—Women were not permitted to vote
- Before 1963—Employers could legally pay a woman less than a man for the same work
- Before 1973—Women did not have the right to a safe and legal abortion (Imbornoni 2009)



**Figure 11.8:** In some cultures, women do all of the household chores with no help from men, as doing housework is a sign of weakness, considered by society as a feminine trait. (Photo courtesy of Evil Erin/flickr)

### 11.3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Sociological theories serve to guide the research process and offer a means for interpreting research data and explaining social phenomena. For example, a sociologist interested in gender stratification in education may study why middle-school girls are more likely than their male counterparts to fall behind grade-level expectations in math and science. Another scholar might investigate why women are underrepresented in political office, while another might examine how congresswomen are treated by their male counterparts in meetings.

#### 11.3.2.1 Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism has provided one of the most important perspectives of sociological research in the twentieth century and has been a major influence on research in the social sciences, including gender studies. Viewing the family as the most integral component of society, assumptions about gender roles within marriage assume a prominent place in this perspective.

Functionalists argue that gender roles were established well before the pre-industrial era when men typically took care of responsibilities outside of the home, such as hunting, and women typically took care of the domestic responsibilities in or around the home. These roles were considered functional because women were often limited by the physical restraints of pregnancy and nursing and unable to leave the home for long periods of time. Once established, these roles were passed on to subsequent generations since they served as an effective means of keeping the family system functioning properly.

When changes occurred in the social and economic climate of the United States during World War II, changes in the family structure also occurred. Many women had to assume the role of breadwinner (or modern hunter and gatherer) alongside their domestic role in order to stabilize a rapidly changing society.



When the men returned from war and wanted to reclaim their jobs, society fell back into a state of imbalance, as many women did not want to forfeit their wage-earning positions (Hawke 2007).

### 11.3.2.2 Conflict Theory

According to conflict theory, society is a struggle for dominance among social groups (like women versus men) that compete for scarce resources. When sociologists examine gender from this perspective, we can view men as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Consider the Women's Suffrage Movement or the debate over women's "right to choose" their reproductive futures. It is difficult for women to rise above men, as dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunity in society (Farrington and Chertok 1993).

Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist, studied family structure and gender roles. Engels suggested that the same owner-worker relationship seen in the labor force is also seen in the household, with women assuming the role of the proletariat. This is due to women's dependence on men for the attainment of wages, which is even worse for women who are entirely dependent upon their spouses for economic support. Contemporary conflict theorists suggest that when women become wage earners, they can gain power in the family structure and create more democratic arrangements in the home, although they may still carry the majority of the domestic burden, as noted earlier (Rismanand and Johnson-Sumerford 1998).

### 11.3.2.3 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a type of conflict theory that examines inequalities in gender-related issues. It uses the conflict approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities. Radical feminism, in particular, considers the role of the family in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. Additionally, women often perceive a disconnect between their personal experiences and the experiences upheld by society as a whole. Patriarchal perspectives and arrangements are widespread and taken for granted. As a result, women's viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid.

Sanday's study of the Indonesian Minangkabau (2004) revealed that in societies that some consider to be matriarchies (where women comprise the dominant group), women and men tend to work cooperatively rather than competitively regardless of whether a job is considered feminine by American standards. The men, however, do not experience the sense of bifurcated consciousness under this social structure that modern U.S. females encounter (Sanday 2004).

### 11.3.2.4 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism aims to understand human behavior by analyzing the critical role of symbols in human interaction. This is certainly relevant to the discussion of masculinity and femininity. Imagine that you walk into a bank, hoping to get a small loan for school, a home, or a small business venture. If you meet with a male loan officer, you may state your case logically by listing all of the hard numbers that make you a qualified applicant as a means of appealing to the analytical characteristics associated with masculinity. If you meet with a female loan officer, you may make an emotional appeal by stating your good intentions as a means of appealing to the caring characteristics associated with femininity.

Because the meanings attached to symbols are socially created and not natural, and fluid, not static, we act and react to symbols based on the current assigned meaning. The word *gay*, for example, once meant "cheerful," but by the 1960s it carried the primary meaning of "homosexual." In transition, it was even known to mean "careless" or "bright and showing" (Oxford American Dictionary 2010). Furthermore, the word *gay* (as it refers to a homosexual), carried a somewhat negative and unfavorable meaning 50 years ago, but has since gained more neutral and even positive connotations.

These shifts in symbolic meaning apply to family structure as well. A half-century ago, when only 20 percent of married women with preschool-aged children were part of the paid workforce, a working mother

was considered an anomaly and there was a general view that women who worked were “selfish” and not good mothers. Today, when a majority of women with preschool-aged children are part of the paid workforce (60 percent), a working mother is viewed as more normal (Coltrane and Adams 2008).

Sociologist Charles H. Cooley’s concept of the “looking-glass self” (1902) can also be applied to interactionist gender studies. Cooley suggests that one’s determination of self is based mainly on the view of society (for instance, if society perceives a man as masculine, then that man will perceive himself as masculine). When people perform tasks or possess characteristics based on the gender role assigned to them, they are said to be **doing gender**. This notion is based on the work of West & Zimmerman (1987). Whether we are expressing our masculinity or femininity, West and Zimmerman argue, we are *always* “doing gender.” Thus, gender is something we *do* or perform, not something we *are*.

: In 1971, Broverman and Broverman conducted a groundbreaking study on the traits mental health workers ascribed to males and females. When asked to name the characteristics of a female, the list featured words such as unaggressive, gentle, emotional, tactful, less logical, not ambitious, dependent, passive, and neat. The list of male characteristics featured words such as aggressive, rough, unemotional, blunt, logical, direct, active, and sloppy (Seem and Clark 2006). Later, when asked to describe the characteristics of a healthy person (not gender specific), the list was nearly identical to that of a male.

This study uncovered the general assumption that being female is associated with being somewhat unhealthy or not of sound mind. This concept seems extremely dated, but in 2006, Seem and Clark replicated the study and found similar results. Again, the characteristics associated with a healthy male were very similar to that of a healthy (genderless) adult. The list of characteristics associated with being female broadened somewhat but did not show significant change from the original study (Seem and Clark 2006). This interpretation of feminine characteristic may help us one day better understand gender disparities in certain illnesses, such as why one in eight women can be expected to develop clinical depression in her lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health 1999). Perhaps these diagnoses are not just a reflection of women’s health, but also a reflection of society’s labeling of female characteristics, or the result of institutionalized sexism.

### 11.3.3 Summary

Children become aware of gender roles in their earliest years, and they come to understand and perform these roles through socialization, which occurs through four major agents: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Socialization into narrowly prescribed gender roles results in the stratification of males and females. Each sociological perspective offers a valuable view for understanding how and why gender inequality occurs in our society.

### 11.3.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 11.3.1

(Solution on p. 267.)

Which of the following is the best example of a gender stereotype?

- Women are typically shorter than men.
- Men do not live as long as women.
- Women tend to be overly emotional, while men tend to be levelheaded.
- Men hold more high-earning, leadership jobs than women.

#### Exercise 11.3.2

(Solution on p. 267.)

Which of the following is the best example of the role peers play as an agent of socialization for school-aged children?

- a. Children can act however they wish around their peers because children are unaware of gender roles.
- b. Peers serve as a support system for children who wish to act outside of their assigned gender roles.
- c. Peers tend to reinforce gender roles by criticizing and marginalizing those who behave outside of their assigned roles.
- d. None of the above

**Exercise 11.3.3***(Solution on p. 267.)*

To which theoretical perspective does the following statement most likely apply: Women continue to assume the responsibility in the household along with a paid occupation because it keeps the household running smoothly, i.e., at a state of balance?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Functionalism
- c. Feminist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

**Exercise 11.3.4***(Solution on p. 267.)*

Only women are affected by gender stratification.

- a. True
- b. False

**Exercise 11.3.5***(Solution on p. 267.)*

According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, we “do gender”:

- a. during half of our activities
- b. only when they apply to our biological sex
- c. only if we are actively following gender roles
- d. all of the time, in everything we do

**11.3.5 Short Answer****Exercise 11.3.6**

In what way do parents treat sons and daughters differently? How do sons and daughter typically respond to this treatment?

**Exercise 11.3.7**

What can be done to lessen the effects of gender stratification in the workplace? How does gender stratification harm both men and women?

**11.3.6 Further Research**

For more gender-related statistics see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center\\_disease\\_control](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_disease_control)<sup>11</sup> and browse through to pictures like “gender and education” and “gender and health.”

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<sup>11</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center\\_disease\\_control](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_disease_control)

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.campbell-kibler.com/Stereo.pdf>

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<sup>15</sup><http://www.mendeley.com/research/healthy-women-healthy-men-healthy-adults-evaluation-gender-role-stereotypes-twentyfirst-century/>

<sup>16</sup>[http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org/downloads/GDIGM\\_Gender\\_Stereotypes.pdf](http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org/downloads/GDIGM_Gender_Stereotypes.pdf)

<sup>17</sup>[http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index\\_40749.html](http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40749.html)

<sup>18</sup><http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

<sup>19</sup><http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.nr0.htm>

## 11.4 Sex and Sexuality<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 11.9:** Sexual practices can differ greatly among groups. Recent trends include the finding that married couples have sex more frequently than do singles and that 27 percent of married couples in their 30s have sex at least twice a week (NSSHB 2010). (Photo courtesy of epSos.de/flickr)

### 11.4.1 Sexual Attitudes and Practices

In the area of sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. **Sexuality** is viewed as a person's capacity for sexual feelings. Studying sexual attitudes and practices is a particularly interesting field of sociology because sexual behavior is a cultural universal. Throughout time and place, the vast majority of human beings have participated in sexual relationships (Broude 2003). Each society, however, interprets sexuality and sexual activity in different ways. Many societies around the world have different attitudes about premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation, and other sexual behaviors that are not consistent with universally cultural norms (Widmer, Treas and Newcomb 1998). At the same time, sociologists have learned that certain norms (like disapproval of incest) are shared among most societies. Likewise, societies generally have norms that reinforce their accepted social system of sexuality.

What is considered "normal" in terms of sexual behavior is based on the mores and values of the society. Societies that value monogamy, for example, would likely oppose extramarital sex. Individuals are socialized to sexual attitudes by their family, education system, peers, media, and religion. Historically, religion has been the greatest influence on sexual behavior in most societies, but in more recent years, peers and the media have emerged as two of the strongest influences, particularly with American teens (Potard, Courtois, and Rusch 2008). Let us take a closer look at sexual attitudes in the United States and around the world.

<sup>20</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42873/1.5/>>.

### 11.4.1.1 Sexuality around the World

Cross-national research on sexual attitudes in industrialized nations reveals that normative standards differ across the world. For example, several studies have shown that Scandinavian students are more tolerant of premarital sex than are American students (Grose 2007). A study of 37 countries reported that non-Western societies—like China, Iran, and India—valued chastity highly in a potential mate, while Western European countries—such as France, the Netherlands, and Sweden—placed little value on prior sexual experiences (Buss 1989).

Even among Western cultures, attitudes can differ. For example, according to a 33,590-person survey across 24 countries, 89 percent of Swedes responded that there is nothing wrong with premarital sex, while only 42 percent of Irish responded this way. From the same study, 93 percent of Filipinos responded that sex before age 16 is always wrong or almost always wrong, while only 75 percent of Russians responded this way (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998). Sexual attitudes can also vary within a country. For instance, 45 percent of Spaniards responded that homosexuality is always wrong, while 42 percent responded that it is never wrong; only 13 percent responded somewhere in the middle (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998).

Of industrialized nations, Sweden is thought to be the most liberal when it comes to attitudes about sex, including sexual practices and sexual openness. The country has very few regulations on sexual images in the media, and sex education, which starts around age six, is a compulsory part of Swedish school curricula. Sweden's permissive approach to sex has helped the country avoid some of the major social problems associated with sex. For example, rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease are among the world's lowest (Grose 2007). It would appear that Sweden is a model for the benefits of sexual freedom and frankness. However, implementing Swedish ideals and policies regarding sexuality in other, more politically conservative, nations would likely be met with resistance.

### 11.4.1.2 Sexuality in the United States

The United States prides itself on being the land of the “free,” but it is rather restrictive when it comes to its citizens' general attitudes about sex compared to other industrialized nations. In an international survey, 29 percent of Americans stated that premarital sex is always wrong, while the average among the 24 countries surveyed was 17 percent. Similar discrepancies were found in questions about the condemnation of sex before the age of 16, extramarital sex, and homosexuality, with American total disapproval of these each acts being 12, 13, and 11 percent higher, respectively, than the study's average (Widmer, Treas and Newcomb 1998).

American culture is particularly restrictive in its attitudes about sex when it comes to women and sexuality. It is widely believed that men are more sexual than are women. In fact, there is a popular notion that men think about sex every seven seconds. Research, however, suggests that men think about sex an average of 19 times per day, compared to 10 times per day for women (Fisher, Moore, and Pittenger 2011).

Belief that men have—or have the right to—more sexual urges than women creates a double standard. Ira Reiss, a pioneer researcher in the field of sexual studies, defined the *double standard* as prohibiting premarital sexual intercourse for women but allowing it for men (Reiss 1960). This standard has evolved into allowing women to engage in premarital sex only within committed love relationships, but allowing men to engage in sexual relationships with as many partners as they wish without condition (Milhausen and Herold 1999). Due to this double standard, a woman is likely to have fewer sexual partners in her life time than a man. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey, the average 35-year-old woman has had three opposite-sex sexual partners while the average 35-year-old man has had twice as many (Centers for Disease Control 2011).

The future of a society's sexual attitudes may be somewhat predicted by the values and beliefs that a country's youth expresses about sex and sexuality. Data from the 2008 National Survey of Family Growth reveals that 64 percent of boys and 71 percent of girls ages 15–19 said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that “it's okay for an unmarried female to have a child.” In a separate survey, 65 percent of teens stated that they “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that although waiting until marriage for sex is a nice idea, it's not realistic (NBC News 2005). This does not mean that today's youth have given up traditional sexual values such as monogamy. Nearly all college men (98.9 percent) and women (99.2 percent) who participated in a

2002 study on sexual attitudes stated they wished to settle down with one mutually exclusive sexual partner at some point in their lives, ideally within the next five years (Pedersen et al. 2002).

#### 11.4.1.3 Sex Education

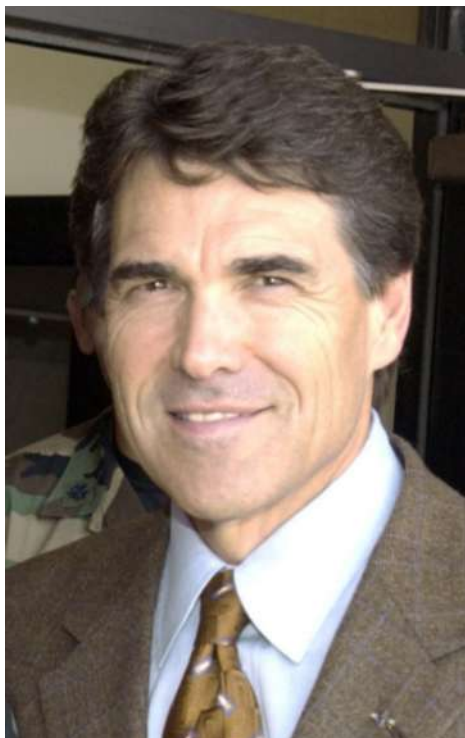
One of the biggest controversies regarding sexual attitudes is sexual education in American classrooms. Unlike in Sweden, sex education is not required in all public school curricula in the United States. The heart of the controversy is not about whether sex education should be taught in school (studies have shown that only seven percent of Americans oppose sex education in schools), it is about the *type* of sex education that should be taught.

Much of the debate is over the issue of abstinence. In a 2005 survey, 15 percent of Americans believed that schools should teach abstinence exclusively and should not provide contraceptives or information on how to obtain them. Forty-six percent believed that schools should institute an abstinence-plus approach, which teaches children that abstinence is best, but still gives information about protected sex. Thirty-six percent believed that teaching about abstinence is not important and that sex education should focus on sexual safety and responsibility (NPR 2010).

Research suggests that while government officials may still be debating about the content of sexual education in public schools, the majority of Americans are not. Those who advocated for abstinence-only programs may be the proverbial squeaky wheel when it comes to this controversy, as they represent only 15 percent of parents. Fifty-five percent of Americans feel that giving teens information about sex and how to obtain and use protection will not encourage them to have sexual relations earlier than they would under an abstinence program. Additionally, 77 percent think such a curriculum would make teens more likely to practice safe sex now and in the future (NPR 2004).

Sweden, which has a comprehensive sex education program in its public schools that educates participants about safe sex, can serve as a model for this approach. The teenage birthrate in Sweden is 7 per 1,000 births, compared with 49 per 1,000 births in the United States. Additionally, among 15- to 19-year-olds, reported cases of gonorrhea in Sweden are nearly 600 times lower than in the United States (Grose 2007).





**Figure 11.10:** Despite having a socially conservative ideology, Republican presidential nominee hopeful Rick Perry mandated the HPV vaccine for middle-school girls in his home state of Texas. Since the vaccine, which helps prevent cervical cancer, also protects against a sexually-transmitted virus, abstinence-only conservatives criticized his action. (Photo courtesy of Sandy Wassenmiller/Wikimedia Commons)

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## 11.4.2 Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Sexuality

Sociologists representing all three major theoretical perspectives study the role that sexuality plays in social life today. Scholars recognize that sexuality continues to be an important and defining social location and that the manner in which sexuality is constructed has a significant effect on perceptions, interactions, and outcomes.

### 11.4.2.1 Structural Functionalism

When it comes to sexuality, functionalists stress the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability. Since functionalists identify the family unit as the most integral component in society, they maintain a strict focus on it at all times and argue in favor of social arrangements that promote and ensure family preservation.

Functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (1955) have long argued that the regulation of sexual activity is an important function of the family. Social norms surrounding family life have, traditionally, encouraged sexual activity within the family unit (marriage) and have discouraged activity outside of it (premarital and extramarital sex). From a functionalist point of view, the purpose of encouraging sexual activity in the

confines of marriage is to intensify the bond between spouses and to ensure that procreation occurs within a stable, legally recognized relationship. This structure gives offspring the best possible chance for appropriate socialization and the provision of basic resources.

From a functionalist standpoint, homosexuality cannot be promoted on a large-scale as an acceptable substitute for heterosexuality. If this occurred, procreation would eventually cease. Thus, homosexuality, if occurring predominantly within the population, is dysfunctional to society. This criticism does not take into account the increasing legal acceptance of same-sex marriage, or the rise in gay and lesbian couples who choose to bear and raise children through a variety of available resources.

#### 11.4.2.2 Conflict Theory

From a conflict theory perspective, sexuality is another area in which power differentials are present and where dominant groups actively work to promote their worldview as well as their economic interests. Recently, we have seen the debate over the legalization of gay marriage intensify nationwide. While five states (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage, 30 states have adopted statutes or constitutional provisions preventing same-sex marriage. One of these provisions, the Defense of Marriage Act, states that marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized.

For conflict theorists, there are two key dimensions to the debate over same-sex marriage—one ideological and the other economic. Dominant groups (in this instance, heterosexuals) wish for their worldview—which embraces traditional marriage and the nuclear family—to win out over what they see as the intrusion of a secular, individually driven worldview. On the other hand, many gay and lesbian activists argue that legal marriage is a fundamental right that cannot be denied based on sexual orientation and that, historically, there already exists a precedent for changes to marriage laws: the 1960s legalization of formerly forbidden interracial marriages is one example.

From an economic perspective, activists in favor of same-sex marriage point out that legal marriage brings with it certain entitlements, many of which are financial in nature, like Social Security benefits and medical insurance (Solmonese 2008). Denial of these benefits to gay couples is wrong, they argue. Conflict theory suggests that as long as heterosexuals and homosexuals struggle over these social and financial resources, there will be some degree of conflict.

#### 11.4.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionists focus on the meanings associated with sexuality and with sexual orientation. Since femininity is devalued in American society, those who adopt such traits are subject to ridicule; this is especially true for boys or men. Just as masculinity is the symbolic norm, so too has heterosexuality come to signify normalcy. Prior to 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA) defined homosexuality as an abnormal or deviant disorder. Interactionist labeling theory recognizes the impact this has made. Before 1973, the APA was powerful in shaping social attitudes toward homosexuality by defining it as pathological. Today, the APA cites no association between sexual orientation and psychopathology and sees homosexuality as a normal aspect of human sexuality (APA 2008).

Interactionists are also interested in how discussions of homosexuals often focus almost exclusively on the sex lives of gays and lesbians; homosexuals, especially men, may be assumed to be hypersexual and, in some cases, deviant. Interactionism might also focus on the slurs used to describe homosexuals. Labels such as “queen” and “fag” are often used to demean homosexual men by feminizing them. This subsequently affects how homosexuals perceive themselves. Recall Cooley’s “looking-glass self,” which suggests that self develops as a result of one’s interpretation and evaluation of the responses of others (Cooley 1902). Constant exposure to derogatory labels, jokes, and pervasive homophobia would lead to a negative self-image, or worse, self-hate. The CDC reports that homosexual youths who experience high levels of social rejection are six times more likely to have high levels of depression and eight times more likely to have attempted suicide (CDC 2011).

### 11.4.2.4 Queer Theory

Queer Theory is a perspective that problematizes the manner in which we have been taught to think about sexual orientation. By calling their discipline “queer,” these scholars are rejecting the effects of labeling; instead, they embrace the word “queer” and have reclaimed it for their own purposes. Queer theorists reject the dichotomization of sexual orientations into two mutually exclusive outcomes, homosexual or heterosexual. Rather, the perspective highlights the need for a more flexible and fluid conceptualization of sexuality—one that allows for change, negotiation, and freedom. The current schema used to classify individuals as either “heterosexual” or “homosexual” pits one orientation against the other. This mirrors other oppressive schemas in our culture, especially those surrounding gender and race (black versus white, male versus female).

Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued against American society’s monolithic definition of sexuality—against its reduction to a single factor: the sex of one’s desired partner. Sedgwick identified dozens of other ways in which people’s sexualities were different, such as:

- Even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people.
- Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others’.
- Some people spend a lot of time thinking about sex, others little.
- Some people like to have a lot of sex, others little or none.
- Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don’t do, or don’t even want to do.
- Some people like spontaneous sexual scenes, others like highly scripted ones, others like spontaneous-sounding ones that are nonetheless totally predictable.
- Some people, homo- hetero- and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not (Sedgwick 1990).

In the end, queer theory strives to question the ways society perceives and experiences sex, gender, and sexuality, opening the door to new scholarly understanding.

Throughout this chapter we have examined the complexities of gender, sex, and sexuality. Differentiating between sex, gender, and sexual orientation is an important first step to a deeper understanding and critical analysis of these issues. Understanding the sociology of sex, gender, and sexuality will help to build awareness of the inequalities experienced by subordinate groups such as women, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals.

### 11.4.3 Summary

When studying sex and sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. Norms regarding gender and sexuality vary across cultures. In general, the United States tends to be fairly conservative in its sexual attitudes. As a result, homosexuals continue to face opposition and discrimination in most major social institutions.

### 11.4.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 11.4.1

(Solution on p. 267.)

What Western country is thought to be the most liberal in its attitudes toward sex?

- a. United States
- b. Sweden
- c. Mexico
- d. Ireland

#### Exercise 11.4.2

(Solution on p. 267.)

Compared to most Western societies, American sexual attitudes are considered \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. conservative
- b. liberal
- c. permissive
- d. free

**Exercise 11.4.3***(Solution on p. 267.)*

Sociologists associate sexuality with \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. heterosexuality
- b. homosexuality
- c. biological factors
- d. a person's capacity for sexual feelings

**Exercise 11.4.4***(Solution on p. 267.)*

According to national surveys, most American parents support which type of sex education program in school?

- a. Abstinence only
- b. Abstinence plus sexual safety
- c. Sexual safety without promoting abstinence
- d. No sex education

**Exercise 11.4.5***(Solution on p. 267.)*

Which theoretical perspective stresses the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability?

- a. Functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Symbolic interactionalism
- d. Queer theory

**11.4.5 Short Answer****Exercise 11.4.6**

Identify three examples of how American society is heteronormative.

**Exercise 11.4.7**

Consider the types of derogatory labeling that sociologists study and explain how these might apply to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

**11.4.6 Further Research**

For more information about sexual attitudes and practices in countries around the world, see the entire “Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries” article from the *Journal of Sex Research* at [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/journal\\_of\\_sex\\_research](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/journal_of_sex_research)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/1/journal\\_of\\_sex\\_research](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/journal_of_sex_research)

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<sup>22</sup><http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/orientation.aspx>

<sup>23</sup><http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>

<sup>24</sup><http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/070318/26sex.htm>

<sup>25</sup><http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1622610>

<sup>26</sup>[http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom/archives/2008/04/\\_pro\\_preempting.html](http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom/archives/2008/04/_pro_preempting.html)

<sup>27</sup><http://www.transgenderlaw.org/>

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 11

to Exercise 11.2.1 (p. 246): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.2.2 (p. 247): Answer

A

to Exercise 11.2.3 (p. 247): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.2.4 (p. 247): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.2.5 (p. 247): Answer

D

to Exercise 11.3.1 (p. 255): Answer

C

to Exercise 11.3.2 (p. 255): Answer

C

to Exercise 11.3.3 (p. 256): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.3.4 (p. 256): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.3.5 (p. 256): Answer

D

to Exercise 11.4.1 (p. 264): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.4.2 (p. 264): Answer

A

to Exercise 11.4.3 (p. 265): Answer

D

to Exercise 11.4.4 (p. 265): Answer

B

to Exercise 11.4.5 (p. 265): Answer

A







## Chapter 12

# Marriage and Family

### 12.1 Introduction to Marriage and Family<sup>1</sup>

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Christina and James met in college and have been dating for more than five years. For the past two years, they have been living together in a condo they purchased jointly. While Christina and James were confident in their decision to enter into a commitment like a 20-year mortgage, they are unsure if they want to enter into *marriage*. The couple had many discussions about marriage and decided that it just didn't seem necessary. Wasn't it only a piece of paper? And didn't half of all marriages end in divorce?

Neither Christina nor James had seen much success with marriage while growing up. Christina was raised by a single mother. Her parents never married, and her father has had little contact with the family since she was a toddler. Christina and her mother lived with her maternal grandmother, who often served as a surrogate parent. James grew up in a two-parent household until age seven, when his parents divorced. He lived with his mother for a few years, and then later with his mother and her boyfriend until he left for college. James remained close with his father who remarried and had a baby with his new wife.

Recently, Christina and James have been thinking about having children and the subject of marriage has resurfaced. Christina likes the idea of her children growing up in a traditional family, while James is concerned about possible marital problems down the road and negative consequences for the children should that occur. When they shared these concerns with their parents, James's mom was adamant that the couple should get married. Despite having been divorced and having a live-in boyfriend of 15 years, she believes that children are better off when their parents are married. Christina's mom believes that the couple should do whatever they want but adds that it would "be nice" if they wed. Christina and James's friends told them, married or not married, they would still be a family.

Christina and James's scenario may be complicated, but it is representative of the lives of many young couples today, particularly those in urban areas (Useem 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of unmarried couples has grown from fewer than one million in the 1970s to 6.4 million in 2008. Cohabiting, but unwed, couples account for 10 percent of all opposite-sex couples in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Some may never choose to wed (Jayson 2008). With fewer couples marrying, the traditional American family structure is becoming less common.

### 12.1.1 References

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2008-07-28-cohabitation-census\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2008-07-28-cohabitation-census_N.htm)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital\\_status\\_living\\_arrangements/cb08-115.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital_status_living_arrangements/cb08-115.html)

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2007/07/what\\_to\\_expect\\_when\\_youre\\_expecting\\_a\\_cowife.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2007/07/what_to_expect_when_youre_expecting_a_cowife.html)

## 12.2 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?<sup>5</sup>



(a)



(b)

**Figure 12.2:** The modern concept of family is far more encompassing than in past decades. What do you think constitutes a family? (Photo (a) courtesy Gareth Williams/flickr; photo (b) courtesy Guillaume Paumier/ Wikimedia Commons)

Marriage and family are key structures in most societies. While the two institutions have historically been closely linked in American culture, their connection is becoming more complex. The relationship between marriage and family is an interesting topic of study to sociologists.

What is marriage? Different people define it in different ways. Not even sociologists are able to agree on a single meaning. For our purposes, we'll define **marriage** as a legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union. In practicing cultural relativism, we should also consider variations, such as whether a legal union is required (think of "common law" marriage and its equivalents), or whether more than two people can be involved (consider polygamy). Other variations on the definition of marriage might include whether spouses are of opposite sexes or the same sex, and how one of the traditional expectations of marriage (to produce children) is understood today.

Sociologists are interested in the relationship between the institution of marriage and the institution of family because, historically, marriages are what create a family, and families are the most basic social unit upon which society is built. Both marriage and family create status roles that are sanctioned by society.

So what is a family? A husband, a wife, and two children—maybe even a pet—has served as the model for the traditional American family for most of the 20th century. But what about families that deviate from this model, such as a single-parent household or a homosexual couple without children? Should they be considered families as well?

The question of what constitutes a family is a prime area of debate in family sociology, as well as in politics and religion. Social conservatives tend to define the family in terms of structure with each family member filling a certain role (like father, mother, or child). Sociologists, on the other hand, tend to define

<sup>5</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42886/1.4/>>.

family more in terms of the manner in which members relate to one another than on a strict configuration of status roles. Here, we'll define **family** as a socially recognized group (usually joined by blood, marriage, or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. Sociologists identify different types of families based on how one enters into them. A **family of orientation** refers to the family into which a person is born. A **family of procreation** describes one that is formed through marriage. These distinctions have cultural significance related to issues of lineage.

Drawing on two sociological paradigms, the sociological understanding of what constitutes a family can be explained by symbolic interactionism as well as functionalism. These two theories indicate that families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly. In other words, families are groups in which people come together to form a strong primary group connection, maintaining emotional ties to one another over a long period of time. Such families may include groups of close friends or teammates. In addition, the functionalist perspective views families as groups that perform vital roles for society—both internally (for the family itself) and externally (for society as a whole). Families provide for one another's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Parents care for and socialize children. Later in life, adult children often care for elderly parents. While interactionism helps us to understand the subjective experience of belonging to a "family," functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their role in the maintenance of a balanced society (Parsons and Bales 1956). We will go into more detail about how these theories apply to family in.

### 12.2.1 Challenges Families Face

Americans, as a nation, are somewhat divided when it comes to determining what does and what does not constitute a family. In a 2010 survey conducted by professors at the University of Indiana, nearly all participants (99.8 percent) agreed that a husband, wife, and children constitute a family. Ninety-two percent stated that a husband and a wife without children still constitute a family. The numbers drop for less traditional structures: unmarried couples with children (83 percent), unmarried couples without children (39.6 percent), gay male couples with children (64 percent), and gay male couples without children (33 percent) (Powell et al. 2010). This survey revealed that children tend to be the key indicator in establishing "family" status: the percentage of individuals who agreed that unmarried couples and gay couples constitute a family nearly doubled when children were added.

The study also revealed that 60 percent of Americans agreed that if you consider yourself a family, you are a family (a concept that reinforces an interactionist perspective) (Powell 2010). The government, however, is not so flexible in its definition of "family." The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together" (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). While this structured definition can be used as a means to consistently track family-related patterns over several years, it excludes individuals such as cohabitating unmarried heterosexual and homosexual couples. Legality aside, sociologists would argue that the general concept of family is more diverse and less structured than in years past. Society has given more leeway to the design of a family making room for what works for its members (Jayson 2010).

Family is, indeed, a subjective concept, but it is a fairly objective fact that family (whatever one's concept of it may be) is very important to Americans. In a 2010 survey by Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., 76 percent of adults surveyed stated that family is "the most important" element of their life—just one percent said it was "not important" (Pew Research Center 2010). It is also very important to society. President Ronald Reagan notably stated, "The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation of our freedoms" (Lee 2009). While the design of the family may have changed in recent years, the fundamentals of emotional closeness and support are still present. Most responders to the Pew survey stated that their family today is at least as close (45 percent) or closer (40 percent) than the family with which they grew up (Pew Research Center 2010).

Alongside the debate surrounding what constitutes a family is the question of what Americans believe constitutes a marriage. Many religious and social conservatives believe that marriage can only exist between man and a woman, citing religious scripture and the basics of human reproduction as support. Social liberals

and progressives, on the other hand, believe that marriage can exist between two consenting adults—be they a man and a woman, or a woman and a woman—and that it would be discriminatory to deny such a couple the civil, social, and economic benefits of marriage.

### 12.2.2 Marriage Patterns

With single parenting and **cohabitation** (when a couple shares a residence but not a marriage) becoming more acceptable in recent years, people may be less motivated to get married. In a recent survey, 39 percent of respondents answered “yes” when asked whether marriage is becoming obsolete (Pew Research Center 2010). The institution of marriage is likely to continue, but some previous patterns of marriage will become outdated as new patterns emerge. In this context, cohabitation contributes to the phenomenon of people getting married for the first time at a later age than was typical in earlier generations (Glezer 1991). Furthermore, marriage will continue to be delayed as more people place education and career ahead of “settling down.”

#### 12.2.2.1 One Partner or Many?

Americans typically equate marriage with **monogamy**, when someone is married to only one person at a time. In many countries and cultures around the world, however, having one spouse is not the only form of marriage. In a majority of cultures (78 percent), **polygamy**, or being married to more than one person at a time, is accepted (Murdock 1967), with most polygamous societies existing in northern Africa and east Asia (Altman and Ginat 1996). Instances of polygamy are almost exclusively in the form of polygyny. **Polygyny** refers to a man being married to more than one woman at the same time. The reverse, when a woman is married to more than one man at the same time, is called **polyandry**. It is far less common and only occurs in about one percent of the world’s cultures (Altman and Ginat 1996). The reasons for the overwhelming prevalence of polygamous societies are varied but they often include issues of population growth, religious ideologies, and social status.

While the majority of societies accept polygyny, the majority of people do not practice it. Often fewer than 10 percent (and no more than 25–35 percent) of men in polygamous cultures have more than one wife; these husbands are often older, wealthy, high-status men (Altman and Ginat 1996). The average plural marriage involves no more than three wives. Negev Bedouin men in Israel, for example, typically have two wives, although it is acceptable to have up to four (Griver 2008). As urbanization increases in these cultures, polygamy is likely to decrease as a result of greater access to mass media, technology, and education (Altman and Ginat 1996).

In the United States, polygamy is considered by most to be socially unacceptable and it is illegal. The act of entering into marriage while still married to another person is referred to as **bigamy** and is considered a felony in most states. Polygamy in America is often associated with those of the Mormon faith, although in 1890 the Mormon Church officially renounced polygamy. Fundamentalist Mormons, such as those in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), on the other hand, still hold tightly to the historic Mormon beliefs and practices and allow polygamy in their sect.

The prevalence of polygamy among Mormons is often overestimated due to sensational media stories such as the Yearning for Zion ranch raid in Texas in 2008 and popular television shows such as HBO’s *Big Love* and TLC’s *Sister Wives*. It is estimated that there are about 37,500 fundamentalist Mormons involved in polygamy in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but that number has shown a steady decrease in the last 100 years (Useem 2007).

American Muslims, however, are an emerging group with an estimated 20,000 practicing polygamy. Again, polygamy among American-Muslims is uncommon and occurs only in approximately one percent of the population (Useem 2007). For now polygamy among American Muslims has gone fairly unnoticed by mainstream society, but like fundamentalist Mormons whose practices were off the public’s radar for decades, they may someday find themselves at the center of social debate.



**Figure 12.3:** Polygamy has a Judeo-Christian tradition, as exemplified by King Solomon, who was thought to have had more than 700 wives. (Photo courtesy of public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

### 12.2.3 Residency and Lines of Descent

When considering one's lineage, most Americans look to both their father's and mother's sides. Both paternal and maternal ancestors are considered part of one's family. This pattern of tracing kinship is called **bilateral descent**. Note that **kinship**, or one's traceable ancestry, can be based on blood or marriage or adoption. Sixty percent of societies, mostly modernized nations, follow a bilateral descent pattern. **Unilateral descent** (the tracing of kinship through one parent only) is practiced in the other 40 percent of the world's societies, with high concentration in pastoral cultures (O'Neal 2006).

There are three types of unilateral descent: **patrilineal**, which follows the father's line only; **matrilineal**, which follows the mother's side only; and **ambilineal**, which follows either the father's only or the mother's side only, depending on the situation. In patrilineal societies, such as those in rural China and India, only males carry on the family surname. This gives males the prestige of permanent family membership while females are seen as only temporary members (Harrell 2001). American society assumes some aspects of patrilineal descent. For instance, most children assume their father's last name even if the mother retains her birth name.

In matrilineal societies, inheritance and family ties are traced to women. Matrilineal descent is common in Native American societies, notably the Crow and Cherokee tribes. In these societies, children are seen as belonging to the women and, therefore, one's kinship is traced to one's mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and so on (Mails 1996). In ambilineal societies, which are most common in Southeast Asian countries, parents may choose to associate their children with the kinship of either the mother or the father. This choice maybe based on the desire to follow stronger or more prestigious kinship lines or on cultural customs such as men following their father's side and women following their mother's side (Lambert 2009).

Tracing one's line of descent to one parent rather than the other can be relevant to the issue of residence. In many cultures, newly married couples move in with, or near to, family members. In a **patrilocal residence** system it is customary for the wife to live with (or near) her husband's blood relatives (or family or orientation). Patrilocal systems can be traced back thousands of years. In a DNA analysis of 4,600-year-old bones found in Germany, scientists found indicators of patrilocal living arrangements (Haak et al 2008). Patrilocal residence is thought to be disadvantageous to women because it makes them outsiders in the home and community; it also keeps them disconnected from their own blood relatives. In China, where patrilocal and patrilineal customs are common, the written symbols for maternal grandmother (*wáipá*) are separately translated to mean “outsider” and “women” (Cohen 2011).

Similarly, in **matrilocal residence** systems, where it is customary for the husband to live with his wife's blood relatives (or her family of orientation), the husband can feel disconnected and can be labeled as an outsider. The Minangkabau people, a matrilineal society that is indigenous to the highlands of West Sumatra in Indonesia, believe that home is the place of women and they give men little power in issues relating to the home or family (Joseph and Najmabadi 2003). Most societies that use patrilocal and patrilineal systems are patriarchal, but very few societies that use matrilineal and matrilineal systems are matriarchal, as family life is often considered an important part of the culture for women, regardless of their power relative to men.

### 12.2.4 Stages of Family Life

As we've established, the concept of family has changed greatly in recent decades. Historically, it was often thought that most (certainly many) families evolved through a series of predictable stages. Developmental or “stage” theories used to play a prominent role in family sociology (Strong and DeVault 1992). Today, however, these models have been criticized for their linear and conventional assumptions as well as for their failure to capture the diversity of family forms. While reviewing some of these once-popular theories, it is important to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time is referred to as the **family life cycle**. One of the first designs of the family life cycle was developed by Paul Glick in 1955. In Glick's original design, he asserted that most people will grow up, establish families, rear and launch their children, experience an “empty nest” period, and come to the end of their lives. This cycle will then continue with each subsequent generation (Glick 1989). Glick's colleague, Evelyn Duvall, elaborated on the family life cycle by developing these classic stages of family (Strong and DeVault 1992):

#### Stage Theory

Stage	Family Type	Children
1	Marriage Family	Childless
2	Procreation Family	Children ages 0 to 2.5
3	Preschooler Family	Children ages 2.5 to 6
4	School-age Family	Children ages 6–13
5	Teenage Family	Children ages 13–20
6	Launching Family	Children begin to leave home
7	Empty Nest Family	“Empty nest”; adult children have left home

**Table 12.1:** This table shows one example of how a “stage” theory might categorize the phases a family goes through.

The family life cycle was used to explain the different processes that occur in families over time. Sociologists view each stage as having its own structure with different challenges, achievements, and accomplishments that transition the family from one stage to the next. For example, the problems and challenges that a family

experiences in Stage 1 as a married couple with no children are likely much different than those experienced in Stage 5 as a married couple with teenagers. The success of a family can be measured by how well they adapt to these challenges and transition into each stage. While sociologists use the family life cycle to study the dynamics of family overtime, consumer and marketing researchers have used it to determine what goods and services families need as they progress through each stage (Murphy and Staples 1979).

As early “stage” theories have been criticized for generalizing family life and not accounting for differences in gender, ethnicity, culture, and lifestyle, less rigid models of the family life cycle have been developed. One example is the **family life course**, which recognizes the events that occur in the lives of families but views them as parting terms of a fluid course rather than in consecutive stages (Strong and DeVault 1992). This type of model accounts for changes in family development, such as the fact that in today’s society, childbearing does not always occur with marriage. It also sheds light on other shifts in the way family life is practiced. Society’s modern understanding of family rejects rigid “stage” theories and is more accepting of new, fluid models.

: Whether you grew up watching the Cleavers, the Waltons, the Huxtables, or the Simpsons, most of the iconic families you saw in television sitcoms included a father, a mother, and children cavorting under the same roof while comedy ensued. The 1960s was the height of the suburban American nuclear family on television with shows such as *The Donna Reed Show* and *Father Knows Best*. While some shows of this era portrayed single parents (*My Three Sons* and *Bonanza*, for instance), the single status almost always resulted from being widowed, not divorced or unwed.

Although family dynamics in real American homes were changing, the expectations for families portrayed on television were not. America’s first reality show, *An American Family* (which aired on PBS in 1973) chronicled Bill and Pat Loud and their children as a “typical” American family. During the series, the oldest son, Lance, announced to the family that he was gay, and at the series’ conclusion, Bill and Pat decided to divorce. Although the Loud’s union was among the 30 percent of marriages that ended in divorce in 1973, the family was featured on the cover of the March 12 issue of *Newsweek* with the title “The Broken Family” (Ruoff 2002).

Less traditional family structures in sitcoms gained popularity in the 1980s with shows such as *Diff’rent Strokes* (a widowed man with two adopted African-American sons) and *One Day at a Time* (a divorced woman with two teenage daughters). Still, traditional families such as those in *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show* dominated the ratings. The late 1980s and the 1990s saw the introduction of the dysfunctional family. Shows such as *Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, and *The Simpsons* portrayed traditional nuclear families, but in a much less flattering light than those from the 1960s did (Museum of Broadcast Communications 2011).

Over the past 10 years, the nontraditional family has become somewhat of a tradition in television. While most situation comedies focus on single men and women without children, those that do portray families often stray from the classic structure: they include unmarried and divorced parents, adopted children, gay couples, and multigenerational households. Even those that do feature traditional family structures may show less-traditional characters in supporting roles, such as the brothers in the highly rated shows *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Two and Half Men*. Even wildly popular children’s programs as Disney’s *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody* feature single parents.

In 2009, ABC premiered an intensely nontraditional family with the broadcast of *Modern Family*. The show follows an extended family that includes a divorced and remarried father with one stepchild, and his biological adult children—one of who is in a traditional two-parent household, and the other who is a gay man in a committed relationship raising an adopted daughter. While this dynamic may be more complicated than the typical “modern” family, its elements may resonate with many of today’s viewers. “The families on the shows aren’t as idealistic, but they remain relatable,” states television critic Maureen Ryan. “The most successful shows, comedies especially, have families that you can look at and see parts of your family in them” (Respers France 2010).



**12.2.4.1 Summary**

Sociologists view marriage and families as societal institutions that help create the basic unit of social structure. Both marriage and a family may be defined differently—and practiced differently—in cultures across the world. Families and marriages, like other institutions, adapt to social change.

**12.2.4.2 Section Quiz****Exercise 12.2.1***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Sociologists tend to define family in terms of

- a. how a given society sanctions the relationships of people who are connected through blood, marriage, or adoption
- b. the connection of bloodlines
- c. the status roles that exist in a family structure
- d. how closely members adhere to social norms

**Exercise 12.2.2***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Research suggests that people generally feel that their current family is \_\_\_\_\_ than the family they grew up with.

- a. less close
- b. more close
- c. at least as close
- d. none of the above

**Exercise 12.2.3***(Solution on p. 299.)*

A woman being married to two men would be an example of:

- a. monogamy
- b. polygyny
- c. polyandry
- d. cohabitation

**Exercise 12.2.4***(Solution on p. 299.)*

A child who associates his line of descent with his father's side only is part of a \_\_\_\_\_ society.

- a. matrilocal
- b. bilateral
- c. matrilineal
- d. patrilineal

**Exercise 12.2.5***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Which of the following is a criticism of the family life cycle model?

- a. It is too broad and accounts for too many aspects of family.
- b. It is too narrowly focused on a sequence of stages.
- c. It does not serve a practical purpose for studying family behavior.
- d. It is not based on comprehensive research.

### 12.2.4.3 Short Answer

#### Exercise 12.2.6

According to research, what are American's general thoughts on family? How do they view nontraditional family structures? How do you think these views might change in 20 years?

#### Exercise 12.2.7

Explain the difference between bilateral and unilateral descent. Using your own association with kinship, explain which type of descent applies to you?

### 12.2.4.4 Further Research

For more information on family development and lines of descent, visit the New England Historical Genealogical Society's website, American Ancestors, and find out how genealogies have been established and recorded since 1845. [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American\\_Ancestors](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American_Ancestors)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>7</sup><http://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2011/11/16/chinese-maternal-grandmothers-outside-women/>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.thejc.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-features/one-wife-isn't-enough-so-they-take-two-or-three>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.pnas.org/content/105/47/18226>

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.usatoday.com/yourlife/sex-relationships/marriage/2010-11-18-pew18\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/yourlife/sex-relationships/marriage/2010-11-18-pew18_ST_N.htm)

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## 12.3 Variations in Family Life<sup>16</sup>

The combination of husband, wife, and children that 99.8 percent of Americans believes constitutes a family is not representative of 99.8 percent of U.S. families. According to 2010 census data, only 66 percent of children under age 17 live in a household with two married parents. This is a decrease from 77 percent in 1980 (U.S. Census 2011). This two-parent family structure is known as a **nuclear family**, referring to married parents and children as the nucleus, or core, of the group. Recent years have seen a rise in variations of the nuclear family with the parents not being married. Three percent of children live with two cohabiting parents (U.S. Census 2011).

<sup>11</sup>[http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship\\_2.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_2.htm)

<sup>12</sup><http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1802/decline-marriage-rise-new-families>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2010/SHOWBIZ/TV/09/01/families.on.tv/index.html>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.census.gov/population/www/cps/cpsdef.html>

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2007/07/what\\_to\\_expect\\_when\\_youre\\_expecting\\_a\\_cowife.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2007/07/what_to_expect_when_youre_expecting_a_cowife.html)

<sup>16</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42888/1.3/>>.



**Figure 12.4:** More than one quarter of American children live in a single-parent household. (Photo courtesy of Ross Griff/flickr)

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### 12.3.1 Single Parents

Single-parent households are on the rise. In 2010, 27 percent of children lived with a single parent only, up from 25 percent in 2008. Of that 27 percent, 23 percent live with their mother and three percent live with their father. Ten percent of children living with their single mother and 20 percent of children living with their single father also live with the cohabitating partner of their parent (i.e., boyfriends or girlfriends).

Stepparents are an additional family element in two-parent homes. Among children living in two-parent households, 9 percent live with a biological or adoptive parent and a stepparent. The majority (70 percent) of those children live with their biological mother and a stepfather. Family structure has been shown to vary with the age of the child. Older children (ages 15–17) are less likely to live with two parents than adolescent children (ages 6–14) or young children (ages 0–5). Older children who do live with two parents are also more likely to live with stepparents (U.S. Census 2011).

In some family structures a parent is not present at all. In 2010, three million children (4 percent of all children) lived with a guardian who was neither their biological nor adoptive parent. Of these children, 54 percent live with grandparents, 21 percent live with other relatives, and 24 percent live with non-relatives. This family structure is referred to as the **extended family**, and may include aunts, uncles, and cousins living in the same home. Foster parents account for about a quarter of non-relatives. The practice of grandparents acting as parents, whether alone or in combination with the child's parent, is becoming widespread among today's families (De Toledo and Brown 1995). Nine percent of all children live with a grandparent, and in nearly half of those cases, the grandparent maintains primary responsibility for the child (U.S. Census 2011). A grandparent functioning as the primary care provider often results from parental drug abuse, incarceration, or abandonment. Events like these can render the parent incapable of caring for his or her child.

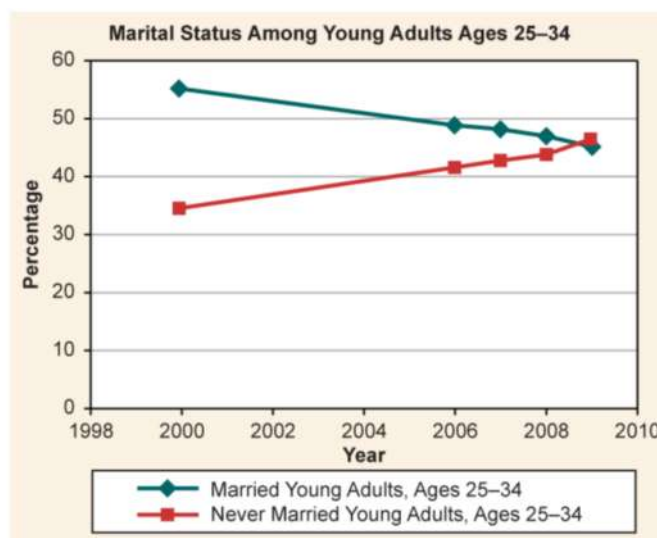
Changes in the traditional family structure raise questions about how such societal shifts affect children. U.S. Census statistics have long shown that children living in homes with both parents grow up with more financial and educational advantages than children who are raised in single-parent homes (U.S. Census 1997). Parental marital status seems to be a significant indicator of advancement in a child's life. Children living with a divorced parent typically have more advantages than children living with a parent who never married; this is particularly true of children who live with divorced fathers. This correlates with the statistic that never-married parents are typically younger, have fewer years of schooling, and have lower incomes (U.S. Census 1997). Six in ten children living with only their mother live near or below the poverty level. Of those being raised by single mothers, 69 percent live in or near poverty compared to 45 percent for divorced mothers (U.S. Census 1997). Though other factors such as age and education play a role in these differences, it can be inferred that marriage between parents is generally beneficial for children.

### 12.3.2 Cohabitation

Living together before or in lieu of marriage is a growing option for many couples. Cohabitation, when a man and woman live together in a sexual relationship without being married, was practiced by an estimated 7.5 million people (11.5 percent of the population) in 2010, which shows an increase of 13 percent since 2009 (U.S. Census 2010). This surge in cohabitation is likely due to the decrease in social stigma pertaining to the practice. In a 2010 National Center for Health Statistics survey, only 38 percent of the 13,000-person sample thought that cohabitation negatively impacted society (Jayson 2010). Of those who cohabitate, the majority are non-Hispanic with no high school diploma or GED and grew up in a single-parent household (U.S. Census 2010).

Cohabiting couples may choose to live together in an effort to spend more time together or to save money on living costs. Many couples view cohabitation as a “trial run” for marriage. Today, approximately 28 percent of men and women cohabitated before their first marriage. By comparison, 18 percent of men and 23 percent of women married without ever cohabitating (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The vast majority of cohabitating relationships eventually result in marriage; only 15 percent of men and women cohabitate only and do not marry. About one half of cohabitators transition into marriage within three years (U.S. Census 2010).

While couples may use this time to “work out the kinks” of a relationship before they wed, the most recent research has found that cohabitation has little effect on the success of a marriage. In fact, those who do not cohabitate before marriage have slightly better rates of remaining married for more than 10 years (Jayson 2010). Cohabitation may contribute to the increase in the number of men and women who delay marriage. The median age for marriage is the highest it has ever been since the U.S. Census kept records—age 26 for women and age 28 for men (U.S. Census 2010).



**Figure 12.5:** As shown by this graph of marital status percentages among young adults, more young people are choosing to delay or opt out of marriage. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and American Community Survey)

### 12.3.3 Same-Sex Couples

The number of same-sex couples has grown significantly in the past decade. The U.S. Census Bureau reported 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States, a 50 percent increase from 2000. This increase is a result of more coupling, the growing social acceptance of homosexuality, and a subsequent increase in willingness to report it. Nationally, same-sex couple households make up 1 percent of the population, ranging from as little as 0.29 percent in Wyoming to 4.01 percent in the District of Columbia (U.S. Census 2011). Legal recognition of same-sex couples as spouses is different in each state, as only six states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. The 2010 U.S. Census, however, allowed same-sex couples to report as spouses regardless of whether their state legally recognizes their relationship. Nationally, 25 percent of all same-sex households reported that they were spouses. In states where same-sex marriages are performed, nearly half (42.4 percent) of same-sex couple households were reported as spouses.

In terms of demographics, same-sex couples are not very different from opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couple households have an average age of 52 and an average household income of \$91,558; opposite-sex couple households have an average age of 59 and an average household income of \$95,075. Additionally, 31 percent of same-sex couples are raising children, not far from the 43 percent of opposite-sex couples (U.S. Census 2009). Of the children in same-sex couple households, 73 percent are biological children (of only one of the parents), 21 percent are adopted only, and 6 percent are a combination of biological and adopted (U.S. Census 2009).

While there is some concern from socially conservative groups regarding the well-being of children who grow up in same-sex households, research reports that same-sex parents are as effective as opposite-sex parents. In an analysis of 81 parenting studies, sociologists found no quantifiable data to support the notion that opposite-sex parenting is any better than same-sex parenting. Children of lesbian couples, however, were shown to have slightly lower rates of behavioral problems and higher rates of self-esteem (Biblarz and Stacey 2010).

### 12.3.4 Staying Single

Gay or straight, a new option for many Americans is simply to stay single. In 2010, there were 99.6 million unmarried individuals over age 18 in the United States, accounting for 44 percent of the total adult population (U.S. Census 2011). In 2010, never-married individuals in the 25 to 29 age bracket accounted for 62 percent of women and 48 percent of men, up from 11 percent and 19 percent, respectively, in 1970 (U.S. Census 2011). Single, or never-married, individuals are found in higher concentrations in large cities or metropolitan areas, with New York City being one of the highest.

Although both single men and single women report social pressure to get married, women are subject to greater scrutiny. Single women are often portrayed as unhappy “spinsters” or “old maids” who cannot find a man to marry them. Single men, on the other hand, are typically portrayed as lifetime bachelors who cannot settle down or simply “have not found the right girl.” Single women report feeling insecure and displaced in their families when their single status is disparaged (Roberts 2007). However, single women older than 35 report feeling secure and happy with their unmarried status, as many women in this category have found success in their education and careers. In general, women feel more independent and more prepared to live a large portion of their adult lives without a spouse or domestic partner than they did in the 1960s (Roberts 2007).

The decision to marry or not to marry can be based a variety of factors including religion and cultural expectations. Asian individuals are the most likely to marry while African Americans are the least likely to marry (Venugopal 2011). Additionally, individuals who place no value on religion are more likely to be unmarried than those who place a high value on religion. For black women, however, the importance of religion made no difference in marital status (Bakalar 2010). In general, being single is not a rejection of marriage; rather, it is a lifestyle that does not necessarily include marriage. By age 40, according to census figures, 20 percent of women and 14 of men will have never married (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).



**Figure 12.6:** More and more Americans are choosing lifestyles that don't include marriage. (Photo courtesy of Glenn Harper/flickr)

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: It is often cited that half of all marriages end in divorce. This statistic has made many people cynical when it comes to marriage, but it is misleading. Let's take a closer look at the data.

Using National Center for Health Statistics data from 2003 that show a marriage rate of 7.5 (per 1000 people) and a divorce rate of 3.8, it would appear that exactly one half of all marriages failed

(Hurley 2005). This reasoning is deceptive, however, because instead of tracing actual marriages to see their longevity (or lack thereof), this compares what are unrelated statistics: that is, the number of marriages in a given year does not have a direct correlation to the divorces occurring that same year. Research published in the *New York Times* took a different approach—determining how many people had ever been married, and of those, how many later divorced. The result? According to this analysis, American divorce rates have only gone as high as 41 percent (Hurley 2005). Another way to calculate divorce rates would be through a cohort study. For instance, we could determine the percentage of marriages that are intact after, say, five or seven years, compared to marriages that have ended in divorce after five or seven years. Sociological researchers must remain aware of research methods and how statistical results are applied. As illustrated, different methodologies and different interpretations can lead to contradictory, and even misleading, results.

### 12.3.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Marriage and Family

Sociologists study families on both the macro and micro level to determine how families function. Sociologists may use a variety of theoretical perspectives to explain events that occur within and outside of the family.

#### 12.3.5.1 Functionalism

When considering the role of family in society, functionalists uphold the notion that families are an important social institution and that they play a key role in stabilizing society. They also note that family members take on status roles in a marriage or family. The family—and its members—perform certain functions that facilitate the prosperity and development of society.

Sociologist George Murdock conducted a survey of 250 societies and determined that there are four universal residual functions of the family: sexual, reproductive, educational, and economic (Lee 1985). According to Murdock, the family (which for him includes the state of marriage) regulates sexual relations between individuals. He does not deny the existence or impact of premarital or extramarital sex, but states that the family offers a socially legitimate sexual outlet for adults (Lee 1985). This outlet gives way to reproduction, which is a necessary part of ensuring the survival of society.

Once children are produced, the family plays a vital role in training them for adult life. As the primary agent of socialization and enculturation, the family teaches young children the ways of thinking and behaving that follow social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents teach their children manners and civility. A well-mannered child reflects a well-mannered parent.

Parents also teach children gender roles. Gender roles are an important part of the economic function of a family. In each family, there is a division of labor that consists of instrumental and expressive roles. Men tend to assume the instrumental roles in the family, which typically involve work outside of the family that provides financial support and establishes family status. Women tend to assume the expressive roles, which typically involve work inside of the family which provides emotional support and physical care for children (Crano and Aronoff 1978). According to functionalists, the differentiation of the roles on the basis of sex ensures that families are well balanced and coordinated. When family members move outside of these roles, the family is thrown out of balance and must recalibrate in order to function properly. For example, if the father assumes an expressive role such as providing daytime care for the children, the mother must take on an instrumental role such as gaining paid employment outside of the home in order for the family to maintain balance and function.

#### 12.3.5.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists are quick to point out that American families have been defined as private entities, the consequence of which has been to leave family matters to only those within the family. Many Americans are resistant to government intervention in the family: parents do not want the government to tell them how to raise their children or to become involved in domestic issues. Conflict theory highlights the role of power in



family life and contends that the family is often not a haven but rather an arena where power struggles can occur. This exercise of power often entails the performance of family status roles. Conflict theorists may study conflicts as simple as the enforcement of rules from parent to child, or they may examine more serious issues such as domestic violence (spousal and child), sexual assault, marital rape, and incest.

The first study of marital power was performed in 1960. Researchers found that the person with the most access to value resources held the most power. As money is one of the most valuable resources, men who worked in paid labor outside of the home held more power than women who worked inside the home (Blood and Wolfe 1960). Conflict theorists find disputes over the division of household labor to be a common source of marital discord. Household labor offers no wages and, therefore, no power. Studies indicate that when men do more housework, women experience more satisfaction in their marriages, reducing the incidence of conflict (Coltrane 2000). In general, conflict theorists tend to study areas of marriage and life that involve inequalities or discrepancies in power and authority, as they are reflective of the larger social structure.

### 12.3.5.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionists view the world in terms of symbols and the meanings assigned to them (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). The family itself is a symbol. To some, it is a father, mother, and children; to others, it is any union that involves respect and compassion. Interactionists stress that family is not an objective, concrete reality. Like other social phenomena, it is a social construct that is subject to the ebb and flow of social norms and ever-changing meanings.

Consider the meaning of other elements of family: “parent” was a symbol of a biological and emotional connection to a child; with more parent-child relationships developing through adoption, remarriage, or change in guardianship, the word “parent” today is less likely to be associated with a biological connection than with whoever is socially recognized as having the responsibility for a child’s upbringing. Similarly, the terms “mother” and “father” are no longer rigidly associated with the meanings of caregiver and breadwinner. These meanings are more free-flowing through changing family roles.

Interactionists also recognize how the family status roles of each member are socially constructed, playing an important part in how people perceive and interpret social behavior. Interactionists view the family as a group of role players or “actors” that come together to act out their parts in an effort to construct a family. These roles are up for interpretation. In the late 19th and early 20th century, a “good father,” for example, was one who worked hard to provide financial security for his children. Today, a “good father” is one who takes the time outside of work to promote his children’s emotional well-being, social skills, and intellectual growth—in some ways, a much more daunting task.

### 12.3.5.4 Summary

Americans’ concepts of marriage and family are changing. Increases in cohabitation, same-sex partners, and singlehood are altering our ideas of marriage. Similarly, single parents, same-sex parents, cohabitating parents, and unwed parents are changing our notion of what it means to be a family. While most children still live in opposite-sex, two-parent, married households, that is no longer viewed as the only type of nuclear family.

### 12.3.5.5 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 12.3.1

*(Solution on p. 299.)*

The majority of American children live in:

- a. two-parent households
- b. one-parent households
- c. no-parent households
- d. multigenerational households

**Exercise 12.3.2***(Solution on p. 299.)*

According to the study cited from the U.S. Census Bureau, children who live with \_\_\_\_\_ grow up with more advantages than children who live with \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. one unwed parent; one divorced parent
- b. one divorced parent; two married parents
- c. one grandparent; two married parents
- d. one divorced parent; one unwed parent

**Exercise 12.3.3***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Couples who cohabitate before marriage are \_\_\_\_\_ couples who did not cohabitate before marriage to be married at least 10 years.

- a. far more likely than
- b. far less likely than
- c. slightly less likely than
- d. equally as likely as

**Exercise 12.3.4***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Same-sex couple households account for \_\_\_\_\_ percent of American households.

- a. 1
- b. 10
- c. 15
- d. 30

**Exercise 12.3.5***(Solution on p. 299.)*

The median age of first marriage has \_\_\_\_\_ in the last 50 years.

- a. increased for men but not women
- b. decreased for men but not women
- c. increased for both men and women
- d. decreased for both men and women

**12.3.5.6 Short Answer****Exercise 12.3.6**

Explain the different variations of the nuclear family and the trends that occur in each.

**Exercise 12.3.7**

Why are some couples choosing to cohabitate before marriage? What effect does cohabitation have on marriage?

**12.3.5.7 Further Research**

For more statistics on marriage and family, see the Forum on Child and Family Statistics at [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child\\_family\\_statistics](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child_family_statistics)<sup>17</sup>, as well as the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and the U.S. Census decennial survey at [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/US\\_Census](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/US_Census)<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child\\_family\\_statistics](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child_family_statistics)

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<sup>19</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/23/health/23stat.html><sup>20</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/19/health/19divo.html><sup>21</sup>[http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2010-03-02-cohabiting02\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2010-03-02-cohabiting02_N.htm)<sup>22</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/16/us/16census.html?pagewanted=all><sup>23</sup><http://www.census.gov/prod/3/97pubs/cb-9701.pdf><sup>24</sup><http://www.census.gov/acs/www/><sup>25</sup><http://www.census.gov/population/www/cps/cpsdef.html><sup>26</sup><http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/famsoc1.asp><sup>27</sup><http://www.wnyc.org/blogs/wnyc-news-blog/2011/sep/22/new-york-never-married-women/>

## 12.4 Challenges Families Face<sup>28</sup>

As the structure of family changes over time, so do the challenges families face. Events like divorce and remarriage present new difficulties for families and individuals. Other long-standing domestic issues such as abuse continue to strain the health and stability of today's families.

### 12.4.1 Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce, while fairly common and accepted in modern American society, was once a word that would only be whispered and was accompanied by gestures of disapproval. In 1960, divorce was generally uncommon, affecting only 9.1 out of every 1,000 married persons. That number more than doubled (to 20.3) by 1975 and peaked in 1980 at 22.6 (Popenoe 2007). Over the last quarter century, divorce rates have dropped steadily and are now similar to those in 1970. The dramatic increase in divorce rates after the 1960s has been associated with the liberalization of divorce laws and the shift in societal make up due to women increasingly entering the workforce (Michael 1978). The decrease in divorce rates can be attributed to two probable factors: an increase in the age at which people get married, and an increased level of education among those who marry—both of which have been found to promote greater marital stability.

Divorce does not occur equally among all Americans; some segments of the American population are more likely to divorce than others. According the American Community Survey (ACS), men and women in the Northeast have the lowest rates of divorce at 7.2 and 7.5 per 1,000 people. The South has the highest rate of divorce at 10.2 for men and 11.1 for women. Divorce rates are likely higher in the South because marriage rates are higher and marriage occurs at younger-than-average ages in this region. In the Northeast, the marriage rate is lower and first marriages tend to be delayed; therefore, the divorce rate is lower (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

The rate of divorce also varies by race. In a 2009 ACS study, American Indian and Alaskan Natives reported the highest percentages of currently divorced individuals (12.6 percent) followed by blacks (11.5 percent), whites (10.8 percent), Pacific Islanders (8 percent), Latinos (7.8 percent) and Asians (4.9 percent) (ACS 2011). In general those who marry at a later age, have a college education have lower rates of divorce.

**Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United States, 2000–2009**

Year	Divorces and annulments	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2009	840,000	242,497,000	3.5
2008	844,000	240,663,000	3.5
2007	856,000	238,759,000	3.6
2006	872,000	236,172,000	3.7
2005	847,000	234,114,000	3.6
2004	879,000	237,042,000	3.7
2003	927,000	245,200,000	3.8
2002	955,000	243,600,000	3.9
2001	940,000	236,650,000	4.0
2000	944,000	233,550,000	4.0

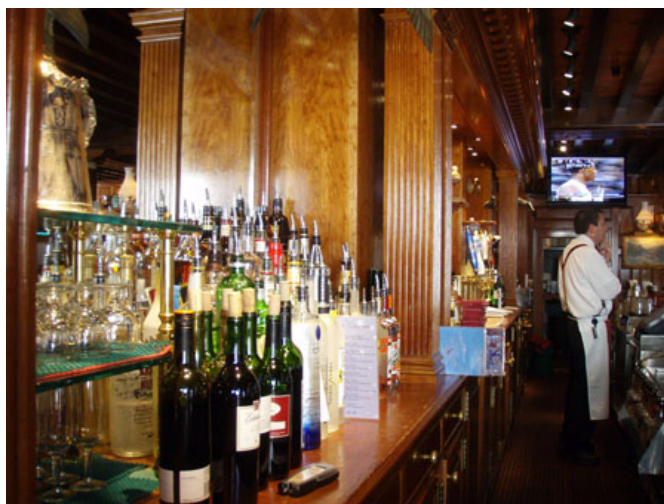
**Table 12.2:** There has been a steady decrease in divorce over the past decade. (National Center for Health Statistics, CDC)

<sup>28</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42890/1.5/>>.

So what causes divorce? While more young people are choosing to postpone or opt out of marriage, those who enter into the union do so with the expectation that it will last. A great deal of marital problems can be related to stress, especially financial stress. According to researchers participating in the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project, couples who enter marriage without a strong asset base (like a home, savings, and a retirement plan) are 70 percent more likely to be divorced after three years than are couples with at least \$10,000 in assets. This is connected to factors such as age and education level that correlate with low incomes.

The addition of children to a marriage creates added financial and emotional stress. Research has established that marriages enter their most stressful phase upon the birth of the first child (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). This is particularly true for couples who have multiples (twins, triplets, and so on). Married couples with twins or triplets are 17 percent more likely to divorce than those with children from single births (McKay 2010). Another contributor to the likelihood of divorce is a general decline in marital satisfaction over time. As people get older, they may find that their values and life goals no longer match up with those of their spouse (Popenoe and Whitehead 2004).

Divorce is thought to have a cyclical pattern. Children of divorced parents are 40 percent more likely to divorce than children of married parents. And when we consider children whose parents divorced and then remarried, the likelihood of their own divorce rises to 91 percent (Wolfinger 2005). This might result from being socialized to a mindset that a broken marriage can be replaced rather than repaired (Wolfinger 2005). That sentiment is also reflected in the finding that when both partners of a married couple have been previously divorced, their marriage is 90 percent more likely to end in divorce (Wolfinger 2005).



**Figure 12.7:** A study from Radford University indicated that bartenders are among the professions with the highest divorce rates (38.4 percent). Other traditionally low-wage industries (like restaurant service, custodial employment, and factory work) are also associated with higher divorce rates. (Aamodt and McCoy 2010). (Photo courtesy of Daniel Lobo/flickr)

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People in a second marriage account for approximately 19.3 percent of all married persons, and those who have been married three or more times account for 5.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). The vast majority (91 percent) of remarriages occur after divorce; only 9 percent occur after death of a spouse (Kreider 2006). Most men and women remarry within five years of a divorce, with the median length for men (three years) being lower than for women (4.4 years). This length of time has been fairly consistent since the 1950s. The

majority of those who remarry are between the ages of 25 and 44 (Kreider 2006). The general pattern of remarriage also shows that whites are more likely to remarry than black Americans.

Marriage the second time around (or third or fourth) can be a very different process than the first. Remarriage lacks many of the classic courtship rituals of a first marriage. In a second marriage, individuals are less likely to deal with issues like parental approval, premarital sex, or desired family size (Elliot 2010). In a survey of households formed by remarriage, a mere 8 percent included only biological children of the remarried couple. Of the 49 percent of homes that include children, 24 percent included only the woman's biological children, 3 percent included only the man's biological children, and 9 percent included a combination of both spouse's children (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

#### **12.4.1.1 Children of Divorce and Remarriage**

Divorce and remarriage can be stressful on partners and children alike. Divorce is often justified by the notion that children are better off in a divorced family than in a family with parents who do not get along. However, long-term studies determine that to be generally untrue. Research suggests that while marital conflict does not provide an ideal childrearing environment, going through a divorce can be damaging. Children are often confused and frightened by the threat to their family security. They may feel responsible for the divorce and attempt to bring their parents back together, often by sacrificing their own well-being (Amato 2000). Only in high-conflict homes do children benefit from divorce and the subsequent decrease in conflict. The majority of divorces come out of lower-conflict homes, and children from those homes are more negatively impacted by the stress of the divorce than the stress of unhappiness in the marriage (Amato 2000). Studies also suggest that stress levels for children are not improved when a child acquires a stepfamily through marriage. Although there may be increased economic stability, stepfamilies typically have a high level of interpersonal conflict (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Children's ability to deal with a divorce may depend on their age. Research has found that divorce may be most difficult for school-aged children, as they are old enough to understand the separation but not old enough to understand the reasoning behind it. Older teenagers are more likely to recognize the conflict that led to the divorce but may still feel fear, loneliness, guilt, and pressure to choose sides. Infants and preschool-age children may suffer the heaviest impact from the loss of routine that the marriage offered (Temke 2006).

Proximity to parents also makes a difference in a child's well-being after divorce. Boys who live or have joint arrangements with their fathers show less aggression than those who are raised by their mothers only. Similarly, girls who live or have joint arrangements with their mothers tend to be more responsible and mature than those who are raised by their fathers only. Nearly three-fourths of the children of parents who are divorced live in a household headed by their mother, leaving many boys without a father figure residing in the home (U.S. Census Bureau 2011b). Still, researchers suggest that a strong parent-child relationship can greatly improve a child's adjustment to divorce (Temke 2006).

There is empirical evidence that divorce has not discouraged children in terms of how they view marriage and family. In a survey conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, about three-quarters of high school seniors said it was "extremely important" to have a strong marriage and family life. And over half believed it was "very likely" that they would be in a lifelong marriage (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). These numbers have continued to climb over the last 25 years.

#### **12.4.2 Violence and Abuse**

Violence and abuse are among the most disconcerting of the challenges that today's families face. Abuse can occur between spouses, between parent and child, as well as between other family members. The frequency of violence among families is difficult to determine because many cases of spousal abuse and child abuse go unreported. In any case, studies have shown that abuse (reported or not) has a major impact on families and society as a whole.

### 12.4.2.1 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a significant social problem in the United States. It is often characterized as violence between household or family members, specifically spouses. To include unmarried, cohabitating, and same-sex couples, family sociologists have created the term **intimate partner violence (IPV)**. Women are the primary victims of intimate partner violence. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women has experienced some form of IPV in her lifetime (compared to 1 in 7 men) (Catalano 2007). IPV may include physical violence, such as punching, kicking, or other methods of inflicting physical pain; sexual violence, such as rape or other forced sexual acts; threats and intimidation that imply either physical or sexual abuse; and emotional abuse, such as harming another's sense of self-worth through words or controlling another's behavior. IPV often starts as emotional abuse and then escalates to other forms or combinations of abuse (Centers for Disease Control 2012).



**Figure 12.8:** Thirty percent of women who are murdered are killed by their intimate partner. What does this statistic reveal about societal patterns and norms concerning intimate relationships and gender roles? (Photo courtesy of Kathy Kimpel/flickr)

In 2010, of IPV acts that involved physical actions against women, 57 percent involved physical violence only; 9 percent involved rape and physical violence; 14 percent involved physical violence and stalking; 12 percent involved rape, physical violence, and stalking; and 4 percent involved rape only (CDC 2011). This is vastly different than IPV abuse patterns for men, which show that nearly all (92 percent) physical acts of IPV take the form of physical violence and fewer than one percent involve rape alone or in combination (Catalano 2007). IPV affects women at greater rates than men because women often take the passive role in relationships and may become emotionally dependent on their partner. Perpetrators of IPV work to establish and maintain such dependence in order to hold power and control over their victims, making them feel stupid, crazy, or ugly—in some way worthless.

IPV affects different segments of the population at different rates. The rate of IPV for black women (4.6 per 1,000 persons over the age of 12) is higher than that for white women (3.1). These numbers have been fairly stable for both racial groups over the last 10 years. However, the numbers have steadily increased for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (up to 11.1 for females) (Catalano 2007).

Those who are separated report higher rates of abuse than those with other marital statuses, as conflict is typically higher in those relationships. Similarly, those who are cohabitating are more likely than those who are married to experience IPV (Stets and Straus 1990). Other researchers have found that the rate of

IPV doubles for women in low-income disadvantaged areas when compared to IPV experienced by women who reside in more affluent areas (Benson and Fox 2004). Overall, women ages 20 to 24 are at the greatest risk of nonfatal abuse (Catalano 2007).

Accurate statistics on IPV are difficult to determine, as it is estimated that more than half of nonfatal IPV goes unreported. It is not until victims choose to report crimes that patterns of abuse are exposed. Most victims studied stated that abuse had occurred for at least two years prior to their first report (Carlson, Harris, and Holden 1999).

Sometimes abuse is reported to police by a third party, but it still may not be confirmed by victims. A study of domestic violence incident reports found that even when confronted by police about abuse, 29 percent of victims denied that abuse occurred. Surprisingly, 19 percent of their assailants were likely to admit to abuse (Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher 2005). According to the National Criminal Victims Survey, victims cite varied reason why they are reluctant to report abuse, as shown in the table below.

Reason Abuse Is Unreported	% Females	% Males
Considered a Private Matter	22	39
Fear of Retaliation	12	5
To Protect the Abuser	14	16
Belief That Police Won't Do Anything	8	8

**Table 12.3:** This chart shows reasons that victims give for why they fail to report abuse to police authorities (Catalano 2007).

Two-thirds of nonfatal IPV occurs inside of the home and approximately 10 percent occurs at the home of the victim's friend or neighbor. The majority of abuse takes place between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and nearly half (42 percent) involves alcohol or drug use (Catalano 2007). Many perpetrators of IPV blame alcohol or drugs for their abuse, though studies have shown that alcohol and drugs do not cause IPV, they may only lower inhibitions (Hanson 2011). IPV has significant long-term effects on individual victims and on society. Studies have shown that IPV damage extends beyond the direct physical or emotional wounds. Extended IPV has been linked to unemployment among victims, as many have difficulty finding or holding employment. Additionally, nearly all women who report serious domestic problems exhibit symptoms of major depression (Goodwin, Chandler, and Meisel 2003).

Female victims of IPV are also more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, suffer from eating disorders, and attempt suicide (Silverman et al. 2001). IPV is indeed something that impacts more than just intimate partners. In a survey, 34 percent of respondents said they have witnessed IPV, and 59 percent said that they know a victim personally (Roper Starch Worldwide 1995). Many people want to help IPV victims but are hesitant to intervene because they feel that it is a personal matter or they fear retaliation from the abuser—reasons similar to those of victims who do not report IPV.

#### 12.4.2.2 Child Abuse

Children are among the most helpless victims of abuse. In 2010, there were more than 3.3 million reports of child abuse involving an estimated 5.9 million children (Child Help 2011). Three-fifths of child abuse reports are made by professionals, including teachers, law enforcement personnel, and social services staff. The rest are made by anonymous sources, other relatives, parents, friends, and neighbors.

Child abuse may come in several forms, the most common being neglect (78.3 percent), followed by physical abuse (10.8 percent), sexual abuse (7.6 percent), psychological maltreatment (7.6 percent), and medical neglect (2.4 percent) (Child Help 2011). Some children suffer from a combination of these forms of abuse. The majority (81.2 percent) of perpetrators are parents; 6.2 percent are other relatives.

Infants (children less than one year old) were the most victimized population with an incident rate of 20.6 per 1,000 infants. This age group is particularly vulnerable to neglect because they are entirely dependent



on parents for care. Some parents do not purposely neglect their children; factors such as cultural values, standard of care in a community, and poverty can lead to hazardous level of neglect. If information or assistance from public or private services are available and a parent fails to use those services, child welfare services may intervene (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).



**Figure 12.9:** The Casey Anthony trial, in which Casey was ultimately acquitted of murder charges against her daughter, Caylee, created public outrage and brought to light issues of child abuse and neglect across the United States. (Photo courtesy of Bruce Tuten/flickr)

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Infants are also often victims of physical abuse, particularly in the form of violent shaking. This type of physical abuse is referred to as **shaken-baby syndrome**, which describes a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or causing impact to an infant's head. A baby's cry is the number one trigger for shaking. Parents may find themselves unable to soothe a baby's concerns and may take their frustration out on the child by shaking him or her violently. Other stress factors such as a poor economy, unemployment, and general dissatisfaction with parental life may contribute this type of abuse. While there is no official central registry of shaken-baby syndrome statistics, it is estimated that each year 1,400 babies die or suffer serious injury from being shaken (Barr 2007).

: Physical abuse in children may come in the form of beating, kicking, throwing, choking, hitting with objects, burning, or other methods. Injury inflicted by such behavior is considered abuse even if the parent or caregiver did not intend to harm the child. Other types of physical contact that are characterized as discipline (spanking, for example) are not considered abuse as long as no injury results (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2008).

This issue is rather controversial among modern-day Americans. While some parents feel that physical discipline, or corporal punishment, is an effective way to respond to bad behavior, others feel that it is a form of abuse. According to a poll conducted by ABC News, 65 percent of respondents approve of spanking and 50 percent said that they sometimes spank their child.

Tendency toward physical punishment may be affected by culture and education. Those who live in the South are more likely than those who live in other regions to spank their child. Those who do not have a college education are also more likely to spank their child (Crandall 2011). Currently, 23 states officially allow spanking in the school system; however, many parents may object and school officials must follow a set of clear guidelines when administering this type of punishment (Crandall

2011). Studies have shown that spanking is not an effective form of punishment and may lead to aggression by the victim, particularly in those who are spanked at a young age (Berlin 2009).

Child abuse occurs at all socioeconomic and education levels and crosses ethnic and cultural lines. Just as child abuse is often associated with stresses felt by parents, including financial stress, parents who demonstrate resilience to these stresses are less likely to abuse (Samuels 2011). Young parents are typically less capable of coping with stresses, particularly the stress of becoming a new parent. Teenage mothers are more likely to abuse their children than their older counterparts. As a parent's age increases, the risk of abuse decreases. Children born to mothers age 15 or younger are twice as likely to be abused or neglected by age five than are children born to mothers ages 20–21 (George and Lee 1997).

Drug and alcohol use is also a known contributor to child abuse. Children raised by substance abusers have a risk of physical abuse three times greater than other kids, and neglect is four times as prevalent in these families (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2011). Other risk factors include social isolation, depression, low parental education, and a history of being mistreated as a child. Approximately 30 percent of abused children will later abuse their own children (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006).

The long-term effects of child abuse impact the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of a child. Injury, poor health, and mental instability occur at a high rate in this group, with 80 percent meeting the criteria of one or more psychiatric disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal behavior, by age 21. Abused children may also suffer from cognitive and social difficulties. Behavioral consequences will affect most, but not all, of child abuse victims. Children of abuse are 25 percent more likely, as adolescents, to suffer from difficulties like poor academic performance and teen pregnancy, or to engage in behaviors like drug abuse and general delinquency. They are also more likely to participate in risky sexual acts that increase their chances of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006). Other risky behaviors include drug and alcohol abuse. As these consequences can affect the health care, education, and criminal systems, the problems resulting from child abuse do not just belong to the child and family, but to society as a whole.

#### 12.4.2.3 Summary

Today's families face a variety of challenges, specifically to marital stability. While divorce rates have decreased in the last 25 years, many family members, especially children, still experience the negative effects of divorce. Children are also negatively impacted by violence and abuse within the home, with nearly 6 million children abused each year.

#### 12.4.2.4 Section Quiz

##### Exercise 12.4.1

*(Solution on p. 299.)*

Current divorce rates are:

- a. at an all-time high
- b. at an all-time low
- c. steadily increasing
- d. steadily declining

##### Exercise 12.4.2

*(Solution on p. 299.)*

Children of divorced parents are \_\_\_\_\_ to divorce in their own marriage than children of parents who stayed married.

- a. more likely
- b. less likely
- c. equally likely

##### Exercise 12.4.3

*(Solution on p. 299.)*

In general, children in \_\_\_\_\_ households benefit from divorce.

- a. stepfamily
- b. multigenerational
- c. high-conflict
- d. low-conflict

**Exercise 12.4.4***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Which of the following is true of intimate partner violence (IPV)?

- a. IPV victims are more frequently men than women.
- b. One in ten women is a victim of IPV.
- c. Nearly half of instances of IPV involve drugs or alcohol.
- d. Rape is the most common form of IPV.

**Exercise 12.4.5***(Solution on p. 299.)*

Which type of child abuse is most prevalent in the United States?

- a. Physical abuse
- b. Neglect
- c. Shaken-baby syndrome
- d. Verbal mistreatment

**12.4.2.5 Short Answer****Exercise 12.4.6**

Explain how financial status impacts marital stability. What other factors are associated with a couple's financial status?

**Exercise 12.4.7**

Explain why more than half of intimate partner violence goes unreported? Why are those who are abused unlikely to report the abuse?

**12.4.2.6 Further Research**

To find more information on child abuse, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website at [http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child\\_welfare](http://openstaxcollege.org/1/child_welfare)<sup>29</sup> to review documents provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

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<sup>32</sup>[http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\\_FactSheet-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_FactSheet-a.pdf)

<sup>33</sup>[http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv\\_factsheet-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv_factsheet-a.pdf)

<sup>34</sup>[http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long\\_term\\_consequences.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long_term_consequences.cfm)

<sup>35</sup><http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm>

<sup>36</sup><http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/factors/parentcaregiver/substance.cfm>

<sup>37</sup>[http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/dailynews/spanking\\_poll021108.html](http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/dailynews/spanking_poll021108.html)

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<sup>41</sup><http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/guide2011/guide.pdf#page=29>

<sup>42</sup><http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/marriage/data/sipp/us-remarriage-poster.pdf>

<sup>43</sup>[http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital\\_status\\_living\\_arrangements/cb11-144.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/marital_status_living_arrangements/cb11-144.html)

<sup>44</sup><http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-126.pdf>

<sup>45</sup>[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/index.htm#can](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#can)

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 12

to Exercise 12.2.1 (p. 278): Answer

A

to Exercise 12.2.2 (p. 278): Answer

C

to Exercise 12.2.3 (p. 278): Answer

C

to Exercise 12.2.4 (p. 278): Answer

D

to Exercise 12.2.5 (p. 278): Answer

B

to Exercise 12.3.1 (p. 286): Answer

A

to Exercise 12.3.2 (p. 287): Answer

D

to Exercise 12.3.3 (p. 287): Answer

C

to Exercise 12.3.4 (p. 287): Answer

A

to Exercise 12.3.5 (p. 287): Answers

C

to Exercise 12.4.1 (p. 295): Answer

D

to Exercise 12.4.2 (p. 295): Answer

A

to Exercise 12.4.3 (p. 295): Answer

C

to Exercise 12.4.4 (p. 296): Answer

C

to Exercise 12.4.5 (p. 296): Answer

B







## Chapter 13

# Religion

### 13.1 Introduction to Religion<sup>1</sup>

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Why do sociologists study religion? For centuries, humankind has sought to understand and explain the “meaning of life.” Many philosophers believe this contemplation and the desire to understand our place in the universe are what differentiate humankind from other species. Religion, in one form or another, has been found in all human societies since human societies first appeared. Archaeological digs have revealed ritual objects, ceremonial burial sites, and other religious artifacts. Social conflict and even wars often result from religious disputes. To understand a culture, sociologists must study its religion.

What is religion? Pioneer sociologist Emile Durkheim described it with the ethereal statement that it consists of “things that surpass the limits of our knowledge” (1915). He went on to elaborate: Religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them” (1915). Some people associate religion with places of worship (a synagogue or church), others with a practice (confession or meditation), and still others with a concept that guides their daily lives (like dharma or sin). All of these people can agree that **religion** is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds sacred or considers to be spiritually significant.

Religion can also serve as a filter for examining other issues in society and other components of a culture. For example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it became important for teachers, church leaders, and the media to educate Americans about Islam to prevent stereotyping and to promote religious tolerance. Sociological tools and methods, such as surveys, polls, interviews, and analysis of historical data, can be applied to the study of religion in a culture to help us better understand the role religion plays in people’s lives and the way it influences society.

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## 13.2 The Sociological Approach to Religion<sup>2</sup>

From the Latin *religio* (respect for what is sacred) and *religare* (to bind, in the sense of an obligation), the term religion describes various systems of belief and practice concerning what people determine to be sacred or spiritual (Fasching and deChant 2001; Durkheim 1915). Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religious narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and understand the universe. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practiced in a public way by a group. The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, God or gods, marriage and funeral services, music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of culture.

While some people think of religion as something individual because religious beliefs can be highly personal, religion is also a social institution. Social scientists recognize that religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviors, and norms centered on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a cultural universal found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way, although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person’s death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition, and ceremony or ritual. These universals, and the differences in how societies and individuals experience religion, provide rich material for sociological study.

In studying religion, sociologists distinguish between what they term the experience, beliefs, and rituals of a religion. **Religious experience** refers to the conviction or sensation that one is connected to “the divine.” This type of communion might be experienced when people are praying or meditating. **Religious beliefs** are specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true, such as that Jesus Christ was the son of God, or believing in reincarnation. Another illustration of religious beliefs is that different religions adhere to certain stories of world creation. **Religious rituals** are behaviors or practices that are either required or

<sup>2</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42975/1.3/>>.

expected of the members of a particular group, such as bar mitzvah or confession (Barkan and Greenwood 2003).

### 13.2.1 The History of Religion as a Sociological Concept

In the wake of 19th century European industrialization and secularization, three social theorists attempted to examine the relationship between religion and society: Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. They are among the founding thinkers of modern sociology.

As stated earlier, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). To him, sacred meant extraordinary—something that inspired wonder and which seemed connected to the concept of “the divine.” Durkheim argued that “religion happens” in society when there is a separation between the profane (ordinary life) and the sacred (1915). A rock, for example, isn’t sacred or profane as it exists. But if someone makes it into a headstone, or another person uses it for landscaping, it takes on different meanings—one sacred, one profane.

Durkheim is generally considered the first sociologist who analyzed religion in terms of its societal impact. Above all, Durkheim believed that religion is about community: It binds people together (social cohesion), promotes behavior consistency (social control), and offers strength for people during life’s transitions and tragedies (meaning and purpose). By applying the methods of natural science to the study of society, he held that the source of religion and morality is the collective mind-set of society and that the cohesive bonds of social order result from common values in a society. He contended that these values need to be maintained to maintain social stability.

But what would happen if religion were to decline? This question led Durkheim to posit that religion is not just a social creation but something that represents the power of society: When people celebrate sacred things, they celebrate the power of their society. By this reasoning, even if traditional religion disappeared, society wouldn’t necessarily dissolve.

Whereas Durkheim saw religion as a source of social stability, German sociologist and political economist Max Weber (1864–1920) believed it was a precipitator of social change. He examined the effects of religion on economic activities and noticed that heavily Protestant societies—such as those in the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and Germany—were the most highly developed capitalist societies and that their most successful business leaders were Protestant. In his writing *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), he contends that the Protestant work ethic influenced the development of capitalism. Weber noted that certain kinds of Protestantism supported the pursuit of material gain by motivating believers to work hard, be successful, and not spend their profits on frivolous things. (The modern use of “work ethic” comes directly from Weber’s Protestant ethic, although it has now lost its religious connotations.)

: Max Weber (1904) posited that, in Europe in his time, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to value capitalist ideology, believing in hard work and savings. He showed that Protestant values directly influenced the rise of capitalism and helped create the modern world order. Weber thought the emphasis on community in Catholicism versus the emphasis on individual achievement in Protestantism made a difference. His century-old claim that the Protestant work ethic led to the development of capitalism has been one of the most important and controversial topics in the sociology of religion. In fact, scholars have found little merit to his contention when applied to modern society (Greeley 1989).

What does the concept of work ethic mean today? The work ethic in the information age has been affected by tremendous cultural and social change, just as workers in the mid- to late 19th century were influenced by the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Factory jobs tend to be simple and uninvolved and require very little thinking or decision making on the part of the worker. Today, the work ethic of the modern workforce has been transformed, as more thinking and decision making is required. Employees also seek autonomy and fulfillment in their jobs, not just wages. Higher levels of education have become necessary, as well as people management skills and access to the most recent information on any given topic. The information age has increased the rapid pace of production expected in many jobs.

On the other hand, the “McDonaldization” of the United States, in which many service industries, such as the fast-food industry, have established routinized roles and tasks, has resulted in a “discouragement” of the work ethic. In jobs where roles and tasks are highly prescribed, workers have no opportunity to make decisions. They are considered replaceable commodities as opposed to valued employees. During times of recession, these service jobs may be the only employment possible for younger individuals or those with low-level skills. The pay, working conditions, and robotic nature of the tasks dehumanizes the workers and strips them of incentives for doing quality work.

Working hard also doesn’t seem to have any relationship with Catholic or Protestant religious beliefs anymore, or those of other religions; information age workers expect talent and hard work to be rewarded by material gain and career advancement.

German philosopher, journalist, and revolutionary socialist Karl Marx (1818–1883) also studied the social impact of religion. He believed religion reflects the social stratification of society and that it maintains inequality and perpetuates the status quo. For him, religion was just an extension of working-class (proletariat) economic suffering. He famously argued that religion is “is the opium of the people” (1844).

For Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, who were reacting to the great social and economic upheaval of the late 19th century and early 20th century in Europe, religion was an integral part of society. For Durkheim, religion was a force for cohesion that helped bind the members of society to the group, while Weber believed religion could be understood as something separate from society. Marx considered religion inseparable from the economy and the worker. Religion could not be understood apart from the capitalist society that perpetuated inequality. Despite their different views, these social theorists all believed in the centrality of religion to society.

### 13.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Religion

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**Figure 13.2:** Functionalists believe religion meets many important needs for people, including group cohesion and companionship. (Photo courtesy of James Emery/flickr)

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Modern-day sociologists often apply one of three major theoretical perspectives. These views offer different lenses through which to study and understand society: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory. Let's explore how scholars applying these paradigms understand religion.

#### 13.2.2.1 Functionalism

Functionalists contend that religion serves several functions in society. Religion, in fact, depends on society for its existence, value, and significance, and vice versa. From this perspective, religion serves several purposes, like providing answers to spiritual mysteries, offering emotional comfort, and creating a place for social interaction and social control.

In providing answers, religion defines the spiritual world and spiritual forces, including divine beings. For example, it helps answer questions like "How was the world created?" "Why do we suffer?" "Is there a plan for our lives?" and "Is there an afterlife?" As another function, religion provides emotional comfort in times of crisis. Religious rituals bring order, comfort, and organization through shared familiar symbols and patterns of behavior.

One of the most important functions of religion, from a functionalist perspective, is the opportunities it creates for social interaction and the formation of groups. It provides social support and social networking, offering a place to meet others who hold similar values and a place to seek help (spiritual and material) in times of need. Moreover, it can foster group cohesion and integration. Because religion can be central to

many people's concept of themselves, sometimes there is an "in group" versus "out group" feeling toward other religions in our society or within a particular practice. On an extreme level, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and anti-Semitism are all examples of this dynamic. Finally, religion promotes social control: It reinforces social norms such as appropriate styles of dress, following the law, and regulating sexual behavior.

### 13.2.2.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists view religion as an institution that helps maintain patterns of social inequality. For example, the Vatican has a tremendous amount of wealth, while the average income of Catholic parishioners is small. According to this perspective, religion has been used to support the "divine right" of oppressive monarchs and to justify unequal social structures, like India's caste system.

Conflict theorists are critical of the way many religions promote the idea that one should be satisfied with existing circumstances because they are divinely ordained. This power dynamic has been used by Christian institutions for centuries to keep poor people poor, teaching them that they shouldn't be concerned with what they lack because their "true" reward (from a religious perspective) will come after death. Conflict theorists also point out that those in power in a religion are often able to dictate practices, rituals, and beliefs through their interpretation of religious texts or via proclaimed direct communication from the divine.



**Figure 13.3:** Feminist theorists focus on gender inequality and promote leadership roles for women in religion. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The feminist perspective is a conflict theory view that focuses specifically on gender inequality. In terms of religion, feminist theorists assert that, although women are typically the ones to socialize children into a religion, they have traditionally held very few positions of power within religions. A few religions and religious denominations are more gender equal, but male dominance remains the norm of most.

: How do people decide which religion to follow, if any? How does one pick a church or decide which denomination "fits" best? Rational choice theory (RCT) is one way social scientists have attempted to explain these behaviors. The theory proposes that people are self-interested, though not necessarily selfish, and that people make rational choices—choices that can reasonably be expected to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing negative outcomes. Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (1988) first considered the use of RCT to explain some aspects of religious behavior, with the assumption that there is a basic human need for religion in terms of providing

belief in a supernatural being, a sense of meaning in life, and belief in life after death. Religious explanations of these concepts are presumed to be more satisfactory than scientific explanations, which may help to account for the continuation of strong religious connectedness in countries such as the United States, despite predictions of some competing theories for a great decline in religious affiliation due to modernization and religious pluralism.

Another assumption of RCT is that religious organizations can be viewed in terms of “costs” and “rewards.” Costs are not only monetary requirements, but also include the time, effort, and commitment demands of any particular religious organization. Rewards are the intangible benefits in terms of belief and satisfactory explanations about life, death, and the supernatural, as well as social rewards from membership. RCT proposes that, in a pluralistic society with many religious options, religious organizations will compete for members, and people will choose between different churches or denominations in much the same way they select other consumer goods, balancing costs and rewards in a rational manner. In this framework, RCT also explains the development and decline of churches, denominations, sects, and even cults; this limited part of the very complex RCT theory is the only aspect well supported by research data.

Critics of RCT argue that it doesn’t fit well with human spiritual needs, and many sociologists disagree that the costs and rewards of religion can even be meaningfully measured or that individuals use a rational balancing process regarding religious affiliation. The theory doesn’t address many aspects of religion that individuals may consider essential (such as faith) and further fails to account for agnostics and atheists who don’t seem to have a similar need for religious explanations. Critics also believe this theory overuses economic terminology and structure, and point out that terms such as “rational” and “reward” are unacceptably defined by their use; they would argue that the theory is based on faulty logic and lacks external, empirical support. A scientific explanation for *why* something occurs can’t reasonably be supported by the fact that it *does* occur. RCT is widely used in economics and to a lesser extent in criminal justice, but the application of RCT in explaining the religious beliefs and behaviors of people and societies is still being debated in sociology today.

### 13.2.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Rising from the concept that our world is socially constructed, symbolic interactionism studies the symbols and interactions of everyday life. To interactionists, beliefs and experiences are not sacred unless individuals in a society regard them as sacred. The Star of David in Judaism, the cross in Christianity, and the crescent and star in Islam are examples of sacred symbols. Interactionists are interested in what these symbols communicate. Additionally, because interactionists study one-on-one everyday interactions between individuals, a scholar using this approach might ask questions focused on this dynamic. The interaction between religious leaders and practitioners, the role of religion in the banal components of everyday life, and the ways people express religious values in social interactions—all might be topics of study to an interactionist.

### 13.2.3 Summary

Religion describes the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns. Social theorist Émile Durkheim defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). Max Weber believed religion could be a force for social change. Karl Marx viewed religion as a tool used by capitalist societies to perpetuate inequality. Religion is a social institution because it includes beliefs and practices that serve the needs of society. Religion is also an example of a cultural universal because it is found in all societies in one form or another. Functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism all provide valuable ways for sociologists to understand religion.

### 13.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 13.2.1

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

In what ways does religion serve the role of a social institution?

- a. Religions have a complex and integrated set of norms.
- b. Religious practices and beliefs are related to societal values.
- c. Religions often meet several basic needs.
- d. All of the above

#### Exercise 13.2.2

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

A cultural universal is something that:

- a. addresses all aspects of a group's behavior
- b. is found in all cultures
- c. is based on social norms
- d. may or may not be of value in meeting social needs

#### Exercise 13.2.3

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

Which of the main theoretical perspectives would approach religion from the micro-level, studying how religion impacts an individual's sense of support and well-being?

- a. Functionalism
- b. Symbolic interactionism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Feminism

#### Exercise 13.2.4

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

Which perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps to keep the social system running smoothly?

- a. Functional perspective
- b. Symbolic interactionist perspective
- c. Conflict perspective
- d. Feminist perspective

#### Exercise 13.2.5

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

Which socialist perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps to maintain social inequalities within a society?

- a. Functional
- b. Symbolic interactionist
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Feminist perspective

#### Exercise 13.2.6

*(Solution on p. 316.)*

Which of the following do the functionalist and conflict perspectives share?

- a. Position that religion relates to social control, enforcing social norms
- b. Emphasis on religion as providing social support
- c. Belief that religion helps explain the mysteries of life
- d. None of the above



**Exercise 13.2.7****(Solution on p. 316.)**

The Protestant work ethic was viewed in terms of its relationship to:

- a. evolution and natural selection
- b. capitalism
- c. determinism
- d. prejudice and discrimination

**13.2.5 Short Answer****Exercise 13.2.8**

List some ways that you see religion having social control in the everyday world.

**Exercise 13.2.9**

What are some sacred items that you're familiar with? Are there some objects, such as cups, candles, or clothing, that would be considered profane in normal settings but are considered sacred in special circumstances or when used in specific ways?

**Exercise 13.2.10**

Consider a religion that you are familiar with and discuss some of its beliefs, behaviors, and norms. Discuss how these meet social needs. Then research a religion that you don't know much about. Explain how its beliefs, behaviors, and norms are like/unlike the other religion.

**13.2.6 Further Research**

For more discussion on the study of sociology and religion, check out the following blog: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent\\_frame](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent_frame)<sup>3</sup>. The Immanent Frame is a forum for the exchange of ideas about religion, secularism, and society by leading thinkers in the social sciences and humanities.

Read more about functionalist views on religion at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell\\_functionalism](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell_functionalism)<sup>4</sup>, symbolic interactionist view on religion at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat\\_Earth](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat_Earth)<sup>5</sup>, and women in the clergy at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women\\_clergy](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_clergy)<sup>6</sup>.

Some would argue that the Protestant work ethic is still alive and well in the United States. Read British historian Niall Ferguson's view at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant\\_work\\_ethic](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant_work_ethic)<sup>7</sup>.

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Ellway, P. 2005. "The Rational Choice Theory of Religion: Shopping for Faith or Dropping your Faith?" Retrieved February 21, 2012 (<http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/religion/overview.php><sup>8</sup>).

<sup>3</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent\\_frame](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent_frame)

<sup>4</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell\\_functionalism](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell_functionalism)

<sup>5</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat\\_Earth](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat_Earth)

<sup>6</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women\\_clergy](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_clergy)

<sup>7</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant\\_work\\_ethic](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant_work_ethic)

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## 13.3 Religion in the United States<sup>10</sup>

In examining the state of religion in the United States today, we see the complexity of religious life in our society, plus emerging trends like the rise of the megachurch, secularization, and the role of religion in social change.

### 13.3.1 Religion and Social Change

Religion has historically been an impetus to social change. The translation of sacred texts into everyday, non-scholarly language empowered people to shape their religions. Disagreements between religious groups and instances of religious persecution have led to wars and genocides. The United States is no stranger to religion as an agent of social change. In fact, our nation's first European arrivals were acting largely on religious convictions when they were compelled to settle in America.

### 13.3.2 Liberation Theology

**Liberation theology** began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America, and it combines Christian principles with political activism. It uses the church to promote social change via the political arena, and it is most often seen in attempts to reduce or eliminate social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. A list of proponents of this kind of social justice (although some pre-date liberation theory) could include Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu.

Although begun as a moral reaction against the poverty caused by social injustice in that part of the world, today liberation theology is an international movement that encompasses many churches and denominations. Liberation theologians discuss theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed, and some interpret the scriptures as a call to action against poverty and injustice. In Europe and North America, feminist theology has emerged from liberation theology, as a movement to bring social justice to women.

: What happens when a religious leader officiates a gay marriage against denomination policies? What about when that same minister defends the action in part by coming out and making her own lesbian relationship known to the church?

In the case of the Reverend Amy DeLong, it meant a church trial. Some leaders in her denomination assert that homosexuality is incompatible with their faith, while others feel this type of discrimination has no place in a modern church (Barrick 2011).

As the LGBT community increasingly advocates for, and earns, basic civil rights, how will religious communities respond? Many religious groups have traditionally discounted LGBT sexualities

<sup>9</sup><http://personal.lse.ac.uk/KANAZAWA/pdfs/ARS1997.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42900/1.3/>>.

as “wrong.” However, these organizations have moved closer to respecting human rights by, for example, increasingly recognizing females as an equal gender. The Roman Catholic Church drew controversial attention to this issue in 2010 when the Vatican secretary of state suggested homosexuality was in part to blame for pedophilic sexual abuse scandals that have plagued the church (Beck 2010). Because numerous studies have shown there to be no relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia, nor a higher incidence of pedophilia among homosexuals than among heterosexuals (Beck 2010), the Vatican’s comments seem suspect.

No matter the situation, most religions have a tenuous (at best) relationship with practitioners and leaders in the gay community. As one of the earliest Christian denominations to break barriers by ordaining women to serve as pastors, will Amy DeLong’s United Methodist denomination also be a leader in LGBT rights within Christian churchgoing society?

### 13.3.3 Megachurches

A **megachurch** is a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services. As of 2009, the largest megachurch in the United States was in Houston Texas, boasting an average weekly attendance of more than 43,000 (Bogan 2009). Megachurches exist in other parts of the world, especially in South Korea, Brazil, and several African countries, but the rise of the megachurch in the United States is a fairly recent phenomenon that has developed primarily in California, Florida, Georgia, and Texas.

Since 1970 the number of megachurches in this country has grown from about 50 to more than 1,000, most of which are attached to the Southern Baptist denomination (Bogan 2009). Approximately 6 million people are members of these churches (Bird and Thumma 2011). The architecture of these church buildings often resembles a sport or concert arena. The church may include jumbotrons (large-screen televisual technology usually used in sports arenas to show close-up shots of an event). Worship services feature contemporary music with drums and electric guitars and use state-of-the-art sound equipment. The buildings sometimes include food courts, sports and recreation facilities, and bookstores. Services such as child care and mental health counseling are often offered.

Typically, a single, highly charismatic pastor leads the megachurch; at present, all are male. Some megachurches and their preachers have a huge television presence, and viewers all around the country watch and respond to their shows and fundraising.

Besides size, U.S. megachurches share other traits, including conservative theology, evangelism, use of technology and social networking (Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, blogs), hugely charismatic leaders, few financial struggles, multiple sites, and predominantly white membership. They list their main focuses as youth activities, community service, and study of the Scripture (Hartford Institute for Religion Research b).

Critics of megachurches believe they are too large to promote close relationships among fellow church members or the pastor, as could occur in smaller houses of worship. Supporters note that, in addition to the large worship services, congregations generally meet in small groups and some megachurches have informal events throughout the week to allow for community-building (Hartford Institute for Religion Research a).

### 13.3.4 Secularization

Historical sociologists Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud anticipated secularization, claiming that the modernization of society would bring about a decrease in the influence of religion. Weber believed membership in distinguished clubs would outpace membership in Protestant sects as a way for people to gain authority or respect.

Conversely, some people contend that secularization is a root cause of many social problems, such as divorce, drug use, and educational downturn. Presidential contender Michele Bachmann even linked Hurricane Irene and the 2011 earthquake felt in Washington D.C. to politicians’ failure to listen to God (Ward 2011).

While some scholars see the United States becoming increasingly secular, others observe a rise in fundamentalism. Compared to other democratic, industrialized countries, the U.S. is generally perceived to

be a fairly religious nation. Whereas 65 percent of Americans in a 2009 Gallup survey said religion was an important part of their daily lives, the numbers were lower in Spain (49 percent), Canada (42 percent), France (30 percent), the United Kingdom (27 percent), and Sweden (17 percent) (Crabtree and Pelham 2009). Secularization interests social observers because it entails a pattern of change in a fundamental social institution.

: Imagine three public universities with football games scheduled on Saturday. At University A, a group of students in the stands who share the same faith decide to form a circle amid the spectators to pray for the team. For 15 minutes, people in the circle share their prayers aloud among their group. At University B, the team ahead at halftime decides to join together in prayer, giving thanks and seeking support from God. This lasts for the first 10 minutes of halftime on the sidelines of the field while spectators watch. At University C, the game program includes, among its opening moments, two minutes set aside for the team captain to share a prayer of his choosing with spectators.

In the tricky area of separation of church and state, which of these actions is allowed and which is forbidden? In these three fictional scenarios, the last example is against the law while the first two situations are perfectly acceptable.

In the United States, a nation founded on the principles of religious freedom (many settlers were escaping religious persecution in Europe), how stringently do we adhere to this ideal? How well do we respect people's right to practice any belief system of their choosing? The answer just might depend on what religion you practice.

In 2003, for example, a lawsuit escalated in Alabama regarding a monument to the Ten Commandments in a public building. In response, a poll was conducted by *USA Today*, CNN, and Gallup. Among the findings: 70 percent of people approved of a Christian Ten Commandments monument in public, while only 33 percent approved of a monument to the Islamic Qur'an in the same space. Similarly, survey respondents showed a 64 percent approval of social programs run by Christian organizations, but only 41 percent approved of the same programs run by Muslim groups (Newport 2003).

These statistics suggest that, for most Americans, freedom of religion is less important than the religion under discussion. And this is precisely the point made by those who argue for separation of church and state. According to their contention, any state-sanctioned recognition of religion suggests endorsement of one belief system at the expense of all others—contradictory to the idea of freedom of religion.

So what violates separation of church and state and what is acceptable? A myriad of lawsuits continue to contribute to the answer. In the case of the three fictional examples above, the issue of spontaneity is key, as is the existence (or lack thereof) of planning on the part of event organizers.

The next time you're at a state event—political, public school, community—and the topic of religion comes up, consider where it falls in this debate.

### 13.3.5 Summary

Liberation theology combines Christian principles with political activism to address social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. Megachurches are those with a membership of more than 2,000 regular attendees, and they are a vibrant, growing and highly influential segment of American religious life. Some sociologists believe levels of religiosity in the United States are declining (called secularization), while others observe a rise in fundamentalism.

### 13.3.6 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 13.3.1

(Solution on p. 316.)

Social scientists refer to the use of a church to combat social injustice in the political realm as:

- a. the protestant work ethic
- b. conflict management
- c. liberation theology
- d. justice work

#### Exercise 13.3.2

(Solution on p. 316.)

Megachurches tend to have:

- a. a variety of male and female clergy
- b. numerous buildings in which to meet
- c. high attendance for only a limited time
- d. large arenas where services are held

### 13.3.7 Short Answer

#### Exercise 13.3.3

Do you believe the United States is becoming more secularized or more fundamentalist? Comparing your generation to that of your parents or grandparents, what differences do you see in the relationship between religion and society? What would popular media have you believe is the state of religion in the United States today?

### 13.3.8 Further Research

What is a megachurch and how are they changing the face of religion? Read “Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context” at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/megachurch><sup>11</sup>.

Curious about the LGBT religious movement? Visit the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC) web sites for current news about the growing inclusion of LGBT citizens into their respective religious communities, both in the pews and from the pulpit: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/GLAAD><sup>12</sup> and [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human\\_rights\\_campaign](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_rights_campaign)<sup>13</sup>.

How do Christians feel about gay marriage? How many Mormons are there in the United States? Check out [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew\\_Forum](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew_Forum)<sup>14</sup>, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a research institute examining U.S. religious trends.

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<sup>11</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/megachurch>

<sup>12</sup><http://openstaxcollege.org/l/GLAAD>

<sup>13</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human\\_rights\\_campaign](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_rights_campaign)

<sup>14</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew\\_Forum/](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew_Forum/)

<sup>15</sup><http://www.christianpost.com/news/church-trial-set-for-lesbian-methodist-minister-48993>

<sup>16</sup><http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Spirituality/gay-priests-problem/story?id=10381964>

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>

<sup>24</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/29/michele-bachmann-hurricane-irene\\_n\\_940209.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/29/michele-bachmann-hurricane-irene_n_940209.html)

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 13

to Exercise 13.2.1 (p. 309): Answer

D

to Exercise 13.2.2 (p. 309): Answer

B

to Exercise 13.2.3 (p. 309): Answer

B

to Exercise 13.2.4 (p. 309): Answer

A

to Exercise 13.2.5 (p. 309): Answer

C

to Exercise 13.2.6 (p. 309): Answer

A

to Exercise 13.2.7 (p. 310): Answer

B

to Exercise 13.3.1 (p. 314): Answer

C

to Exercise 13.3.2 (p. 314): Answer

D





## Chapter 14

# Government and Politics

### 14.1 Introduction to Government and Politics<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 14.1:** Members of Britain's royal family still captivate audiences around the world, but they have limited involvement in the day-to-day operations of their country's government. (Photo courtesy of HerryLawford/flickr)

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43015/1.2/>>.

Dubbed the “wedding of the century” by journalists, dignitaries, and commoners alike, the April 29, 2011, nuptials of Prince William and Catherine Middleton ignited a media frenzy months before the ceremony even took place. Thousands of journalists reported on the ceremony, and the *New York Times* estimated that 3 billion viewers watched the bride and groom exchange vows (Lyll 2011). In the weeks leading up to the event, speculation about the wedding was a frequent topic of conversation on televised news shows as well as in everyday conversation. When the morning of the wedding finally arrived, nearly a million British citizens lined its procession route to catch a glimpse of the royals making their way to the palace.

The popularity of Will and Kate, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, did not diminish when the ceremony concluded. Competing tabloids began to feature headlines that proclaimed divorce, pregnancy, and other sensational events in the couple’s life, while others focused on the particulars of Kate’s hairstyles, dresses, and hats. Still other media focused their attention on the philanthropic endeavors of the duke and duchess, who frequently use their influence to promote charitable endeavors.

Despite their appeal and link to a long-standing monarchy, William and Kate, along with the other British royals, do not enjoy the same power their predecessors commanded in history. Instead, their role is largely symbolic. While Henry VIII, for instance, had the authority to order executions and make important state decisions based on what some might consider personal whims, today’s monarchs are more akin to celebrities who possess the wealth and fame to support their favorite causes.

### 14.1.1 References

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/30/world/europe/30britain.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/30/world/europe/30britain.html?_r=2)

## 14.2 Power and Authority<sup>3</sup>

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**Figure 14.2:** The White House, one of the world's most widely recognized state buildings, symbolizes the authority of the U.S. presidency. (Courtesy U.S. National Archives/Wikimedia Commons)

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From the time of King Henry VIII to the time of Will and Kate, the role of the royal family in the British government has shifted dramatically. Between those two eras—and across the Atlantic—former British subjects in what is now the United States fought for an alternative system of government . . . one that left no room for royalty. Despite these differences, governments play the same fundamental role: in some fashion, they exert control over the people they govern. The nature of that control—what we will define as power and authority—is an important part of society.

Sociologists have a distinctive approach to studying governmental power and authority that differs from the perspective of political scientists. For the most part, political scientists focus on studying how power is distributed in different types of political systems. They would observe, for example, that the United States' political system is divided into three distinct branches (legislative, executive, and judicial), and they would explore how public opinion affects political parties, elections, and the political process in general. Sociologists, however, tend to be more interested in the influences of governmental power on society and in how social conflicts arise from the distribution of power. Sociologists also examine how the use of power affects local, state, national, and global agendas, which in turn affect people differently based on status, class, and socioeconomic standing.

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<sup>3</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42912/1.3/>>.

### 14.2.1 What Is Power?



**Figure 14.3:** Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was one of the most powerful and destructive dictators in modern history, pictured here with fascist Benito Mussolini of Italy. (Photo courtesy of U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

For centuries, philosophers, politicians, and social scientists have explored and commented on the nature of power. Pittacus (c. 640-568 B.C.E.) opined, “The measure of a man is what he does with power,” and Lord Acton perhaps more famously asserted, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely” (1887). Indeed, the concept of power can have decidedly negative connotations, and the term itself is difficult to define.

Many scholars adopt the definition developed by German sociologist Max Weber, who said that **power** is the ability to exercise one’s will over others (Weber 1922). Power affects more than personal relationships; it shapes larger dynamics like social groups, professional organizations, and governments. Similarly, a government’s power is not necessarily limited to control of its own citizens. A dominant nation, for instance, will often use its clout to influence or support other governments or to seize control of other nation states. Efforts by the U.S. government to wield power in other countries have included joining with other nations to form the Allied forces during World War II, entering Iraq in 2002 to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime, and imposing sanctions on the government of North Korea in the hopes of constraining its development of nuclear weapons.

Endeavors to gain power and influence do not necessarily lead to violence, exploitation, or abuse. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, for example, commanded powerful movements that affected positive change without military force. Both men organized nonviolent protests to combat corruption and injustice and succeeded in inspiring major reform. They relied on a variety of nonviolent protest strategies such as rallies, sit-ins, marches, petitions, and boycotts.

Modern technology has made such forms of nonviolent reform easier to implement. Today, protesters can use cell phones and the internet to disseminate information and plans to masses of protesters in a rapid and efficient manner. In Tunisia in 2011, for example, a nonviolent popular uprising led to the president’s resignation, ushered in the end of one-party rule, and paved the way for efforts at reform. The success of the Tunisian uprising, broadcast worldwide via Twitter feeds and other social media, was an inspiration to political activists in other countries as well (a spread of demonstrations that the media called the “Arab

Spring”). Notice that, in this example, the users of power were the citizens rather than their governments. They found they had power because they were able to exercise their will over their own leader. Thus, government power does not necessarily equate with absolute power.



**Figure 14.4:** Young people and students were among the most ardent supporters of democratic reform in the recent Arab Spring. Social media also played an important role in rallying grassroots support. (Photo courtesy of cjb22/flickr)

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: Recent movements and protests that were organized to reform governments and install democratic ideals in northern African and the Middle East have been collectively labeled “Arab Spring” by journalists. In describing the dramatic reform and protests in these regions, journalists have noted the use of internet vehicles like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, some even implying that this technology has been instrumental in spurring these reforms. In a nation with a strong capacity for media censorship, social sites provided an opportunity for citizens to circumvent authoritarian restrictions (Zuckerman 2011).

As discontents in northern Africa used the Internet to communicate, it provided them with an invaluable tool: anonymity. John Pollock (2011), in an authoritative analysis published in MIT’s *Technology Review*, gave readers an intriguing introduction to two transformative revolutionaries named “Foetus” and “Waterman,” who are leaders in the Tunisian rebel group Takriz. Both men relied heavily on the internet to communicate and even went so far as to call it the “GPS” for the revolution (Pollock 2011). Before the internet, meetings of protestors led by dissidents like Foetus and Waterman often required participants to assemble in person, placing them at risk of being raided by government officials. Thus, leaders would more likely have been jailed, tortured—and perhaps even killed—before movements could gain momentum.

The Internet also enabled widespread publicity about the atrocities being committed in the Arab region. The fatal beating of Khaled Said, a young Egyptian computer programmer, provides a prime example. Said, who possessed videos highlighting acts of police corruption in Egypt, was brutally killed by law enforcement officers in the streets of Alexandria. After Said’s beating, Said’s brother used his cell phone to capture photos of his brother’s grisly corpse and uploaded them to Facebook. The photos were then used to start a protest group called “We Are All Khaled Said,”

which now has more than a million members (Pollock 2011). Numerous other videos and images, similarly appalling, were posted on social media sites to build awareness and incite activism among local citizens and the larger global community.

### 14.2.2 Types of Authority

The protesters in Tunisia and the civil rights protesters of Martin Luther King's day had influence apart from their position in a government. Their influence came, in part, from their ability to advocate for what many people held as important values. Government leaders might have this kind of influence as well, but they also have the advantage of wielding power associated with their position in the government. As this example indicates, there is more than one type of authority in a community.

**Authority** refers to accepted power—that is, power that people agree to follow. People listen to authority figures because they feel that these individuals are worthy of respect. Generally speaking, people perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable and beneficial, or true.

A citizen's interaction with a police officer is a good example of how people react to authority in everyday life. For instance, a person who sees the flashing red and blue lights of a police car in his rearview mirror usually pulls to the side of the road without hesitation. Such a driver most likely assumes that the police officer behind him serves as a legitimate source of authority and has the right to pull him over. As part of her official duties, the police officer then has the power to issue a speeding ticket if the driver was driving too fast. If the same officer, however, were to command the driver to follow her home and mow her lawn, the driver would likely protest that the officer does not have the authority to make such a request.

Not all authority figures are police officers or elected officials or government authorities. Besides formal offices, authority can arise from tradition and personal qualities. Economist and sociologist Max Weber realized this when he examined individual action as it relates to authority, as well as large-scale structures of authority and how they relate to a society's economy. Based on this work, Weber developed a classification system for authority. His three types of authority are traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority (Weber 1922).

**Weber's Three Types of Authority**

Traditional	Charismatic	Legal-Rational
Legitimized by long-standing custom	Based on a leader's personal qualities	Authority resides in the office, not the person
Historic personality	Dynamic personality	Bureaucratic officials
Patriarchy (traditional positions of authority)	Napoleon, Jesus Christ, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr.	U.S. presidency and Congress Modern British Parliament

**Table 14.1:** Max Weber identified and explained three distinct types of authority:

#### 14.2.2.1 Traditional Authority

According to Weber, the power of **traditional authority** is accepted because that has traditionally been the case; its legitimacy exists because it has been accepted for a long time. Britain's Queen Elizabeth, for instance, occupies a position that she inherited based on the traditional rules of succession for the monarchy. People adhere to traditional authority because they are invested in the past and feel obligated to perpetuate it. In this type of authority, a ruler typically has no real force to carry out his will or maintain his position but depends primarily on a group's respect.

A more modern form of traditional authority is **patrimonialism**, which is traditional domination that is facilitated by an administration and military that are purely personal instruments of the master (Eisenberg 1998). In this form of authority, all officials are personal favorites appointed by the ruler. These officials

have no rights, and their privileges can be withdrawn or augmented based on the caprices of the leader. The political organization of ancient Egypt typified such a system: when the royal household decreed that a pyramid be built, every Egyptian was forced to work toward its construction.

Traditional authority can be intertwined with race, class, and gender. In most societies, for instance, men are more likely to be privileged than women and thus are more likely to hold roles of authority. Similarly, members of dominant racial groups or upper-class families also win respect more readily. In the United States, the Kennedy family, which has spawned many prominent politicians, exemplifies this model.

#### 14.2.2.2 Charismatic Authority

The power of **charismatic authority** is accepted because followers are drawn to the leader's personal qualities. The appeal of a charismatic leader can be extraordinary, inspiring followers to make unusual sacrifices or to persevere in the midst of great hardship and persecution. Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of crisis and offer innovative or radical solutions. They may even offer a vision of a new world order. Hitler's rise to power in the postwar economic depression of Germany is an example.

Charismatic leaders tend to hold power for short durations, and according to Weber, they are just as likely to be tyrannical as they are heroic. Diverse male leaders such as Hitler, Napoleon, Jesus Christ, César Chávez, Malcolm X, and Winston Churchill are all considered charismatic leaders. Because so few women have held dynamic positions of leadership throughout history, the list of charismatic female leaders is comparatively short. Many historians consider figures such as Joan of Arc, Margaret Thatcher, and Mother Teresa to be charismatic leaders.

#### 14.2.2.3 Rational-Legal Authority

According to Weber, power made legitimate by laws, written rules, and regulations is termed **rational-legal authority**. In this type of authority, power is vested in a particular rationale, system, or ideology and not necessarily in the person implementing the specifics of that doctrine. A nation that follows a constitution is applying this type of authority. On a smaller scale, you might encounter rational-legal authority in the workplace via the standards set forth in the employee handbook, which provides a different type of authority than that of your boss.

Of course, ideals are seldom replicated in the real world. Few governments or leaders can be neatly categorized. Some leaders, like Mohandas K. Gandhi for instance, can be considered charismatic *and* legal-rational authority figures. Similarly, a leader or government can start out exemplifying one type of authority and gradually evolve or change into another type.

### 14.2.3 Summary

Sociologists examine government and politics in terms of their impact on individuals and larger social systems. Power is an entity or individual's ability to control or direct others, while authority is influence that is predicated on perceived legitimacy. Max Weber studied power and authority, differentiating between the two concepts and formulating a system for classifying types of authority.

### 14.2.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 14.2.1

(Solution on p. 331.)

Which statement best expresses the difference between power and authority?

- a. Authority involves intimidation.
- b. Authority is more subtle than power.
- c. Authority is based on the perceived legitimacy of the individual in power.
- d. Authority is inherited, but power is seized by military force.

**Exercise 14.2.2****(Solution on p. 331.)**

Which of the following types of authority does *not* reside primarily in a leader?

- a. Dictatorial
- b. Traditional
- c. Charismatic
- d. Legal-rational

**Exercise 14.2.3****(Solution on p. 331.)**

In the U.S. Senate, it is customary to assign each senator a seniority ranking based on years of government service and the population of the state he or she represents. A top ranking gives the senator priority for assignments to office space, committee chair positions, and seating on the senate floor. What type of authority does this example best illustrate?

- a. Dictatorial
- b. Traditional
- c. Charismatic
- d. Legal-rational

**Exercise 14.2.4****(Solution on p. 331.)**

Malcolm X used his public speaking abilities and magnetism to inspire African Americans to stand up against injustice in an extremely hostile environment. He is an example of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ leader.

- a. traditional
- b. charismatic
- c. legal-rational
- d. illegitimate

**Exercise 14.2.5****(Solution on p. 331.)**

Which current world figure has the least amount of political power?

- a. President Barack Obama
- b. Queen Elizabeth II
- c. British Prime Minister David Cameron
- d. North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un

**Exercise 14.2.6****(Solution on p. 331.)**

Which statement best expresses why there have been so few charismatic female leaders throughout history?

- a. Women have different leadership styles than men.
- b. Women are not interested in leading at all.
- c. Few women have had the opportunity to hold leadership roles over the course of history.
- d. Male historians have refused to acknowledge the contributions of female leaders in their records.



### 14.2.5 Short Answer

#### Exercise 14.2.7

Explain why leaders as divergent as Hitler and Jesus Christ are both categorized as charismatic authorities.

#### Exercise 14.2.8

Why do people accept traditional authority figures even though these types of leaders have limited means of enforcing their power?

#### Exercise 14.2.9

Charismatic leaders are among the most fascinating figures in history. Select a charismatic leader that you wish to learn more about, and conduct online research to find out more about this individual. Then, write a paragraph describing the personal qualities that led to this person's influence, considering the society in which this leader emerged.

### 14.2.6 Further Research

Want to learn more about sociologists at work in the real world? Read this blog posting to learn more about the roles sociology scholars played in the midst of the Arab Spring uprising: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology\\_Arab\\_Spring](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology_Arab_Spring)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology\\_Arab\\_Spring](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology_Arab_Spring)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.technologyreview.com/web/38379/>

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## 14.3 Politics in the United States<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 14.5:** Americans' right to vote in free elections is a fundamental element of the nation's democratic structure and a privilege envied by citizens of more oppressive societies. (Photo courtesy of David Goehring/flickr)

In describing a nation's politics, it's important to define the term. Some associate "politics" with power, others with freedom. Some with corruption, others with rhetoric. How do sociologists understand politics? To sociologists, **politics** is a means of studying a nation or group's underlying social norms and values. A group's political structure and practices provide insight into its distribution of power and wealth, as well as its larger philosophical and cultural beliefs. A cursory sociological analysis of U.S. politics might, for instance, suggest that Americans' desire to promote equality and democracy on a theoretical level is at odds with the nation's real-life capitalist orientation.

The famous phrase "by the people, for the people" is at the heart of American politics and sums up the most essential part of this nation's political system: the notion that citizens willingly and freely elect representatives they believe will look out for their interests. Although many Americans take for granted the right of citizens to hold free elections, it is a vital foundation of any democracy. However, at the time the U.S. government was formed, African Americans and women were denied voting privileges. History details the struggles that each of these minority groups undertook to secure rights that had been granted to their white male counterparts. Nevertheless, their history (and the earlier history of the struggle for American independence from British rule) has failed to inspire some Americans to show up at the polls or even to register to vote.

Naturally, citizens must participate in the democratic process in order for their voices to be heard. Sociologists understand voting to be at the heart of the U.S. political process because it is a fundamental political behavior in a democracy. Problems with the democratic process, which include more than limited voter turnout, require us to more closely examine complex social issues.

### 14.3.1 Voter Participation

Voter participation is essential to the success of the American political system. Although many Americans are quick to complain about laws and political leadership, roughly half of the population does not vote in

<sup>7</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42916/1.4/>>.

any given election year (United States Elections Project 2010). Some years have seen even lower turnouts; in 2010, for instance, only 37.8 percent of the population participated in the electoral process (United States Elections Project 2011). Poor turnout can skew election results, particularly if one age or socioeconomic group is more diligent in its efforts to make it to the polls.

Certain voting advocacy groups work to improve turnout. Rock the Vote, for example, targets and reaches out to America's youngest potential voters to educate and equip them to share their voice at the polls. Public service promos from celebrity musicians support their cause. Native Vote is an organization that strives to inform American Indians about upcoming elections and encourages their participation. America's Hispanic population is reached out to by the National Council of La Raza, which strives to improve voter turnout among the Latino population. According to the Pew Research Center, the portion of minority race voters has been increasing steadily over the past few decades (Lopez and Taylor 2009).

#### 14.3.1.1 Race, Gender, and Class Issues

Although recent records have shown more minorities voting now than ever before, this trend is still fairly new. Historically, African Americans and other minorities have been underrepresented at the polls. Black men were not allowed to vote at all until after the Civil War, and black women gained the right to vote along with other women only with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. For years, African Americans who were brave enough to vote were discouraged by discriminatory legislation, passed in many southern states, which required poll taxes and literacy tests of prospective voters. Literacy tests were not outlawed until 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

The 1960s saw other important reforms in U.S. voting. Shortly before the Voting Rights Act was passed, the 1964 U.S. Supreme Court case *Reynolds v. Sims* changed the nature of elections. This landmark decision reaffirmed the notion of “**one person, one vote**,” a concept holding that each person's vote should be counted equally. Before this decision, unequal distributions of population enabled small groups of people in sparsely populated rural areas to have as much voting power as densely populated urban areas. After *Reynolds v. Sims*, districts were redrawn so that they would include equal numbers of voters.

Evidence suggests that legal protection of voting rights does not directly translate into equal voting power. Relative to their presence in the U.S. population, women and racial/ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the U.S. Congress. White males still dominate both houses. For example, there is only a single Native American legislator currently in Congress. And until the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009, all U.S. presidents were white men.

Like race and ethnicity, social class also has impacted voting practices. Voting rates among lower-educated, lower-paid workers are less than for people with higher socioeconomic status, fostering a system in which people with more power and access to resources have the means to perpetuate their power. Several explanations have been offered to account for this difference (Raymond 2010). Workers in low-paying service jobs might find it harder to get to the polls because they lack flexibility in their work hours and quality daycare to look after children while they vote. Because a larger share of racial and ethnic minorities is employed in such positions, social class may be linked to race and ethnicity in influencing voting rates. Attitudes play a role as well. Some people of low socioeconomic status or minority race/ethnicity doubt their vote will count or voice will be heard because they have seen no evidence of their political power in their communities. Many believe that what they already have is all they can achieve.

In the American democracy, there are means to power and voice aside from holding political office. As suggested earlier in the discussion on oligarchy, money can carry a lot of influence. Free speech, a right available to all, can also be an influence. People can participate in a democracy through volunteering time toward political advocacy, writing to their elected officials, or sharing views in public forums like blogs or letters to the editor, forming or joining cause-related political organizations like PACs (political action committees) and interest groups, participating in public demonstrations, and even running for local office.

### 14.3.2 Summary

The success and validity of American democracy hinges on free, fair elections that are characterized by the support and participation of diverse citizens. In spite of their importance, elections have low participation. In the past, the voice of minority groups was nearly imperceptible in elections, but recent trends have shown increased voter turnout across many minority races and ethnicities. In the past, the creation and sustenance of a fair voting process has necessitated government intervention, particularly on the legislative level. The *Reynolds v. Sims* case, with its landmark “one person, one vote” ruling is an excellent example of such action.

### 14.3.3 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 14.3.1

(Solution on p. 331.)

In the past, Southern states discouraged African Americans from voting by requiring them to take a \_\_\_\_\_ test.

- a. blood
- b. literacy
- c. lie detector
- d. citizenship

#### Exercise 14.3.2

(Solution on p. 331.)

Which president signed the Voting Rights Act?

- a. Lyndon Johnson
- b. John F. Kennedy Jr.
- c. Barack Obama
- d. Franklin D. Roosevelt

#### Exercise 14.3.3

(Solution on p. 331.)

Which factor does not influence voting practices?

- a. Race
- b. Social class
- c. Ethnicity
- d. Voting booths

#### Exercise 14.3.4

(Solution on p. 331.)

The U.S. Supreme Court case \_\_\_\_\_ led to the revision of voting districts to account for differences in population density.

- a. *Roe v. Wade*
- b. *Reynolds v. Sims*
- c. *Brown v. Board of Education*
- d. *Marbury v. Madison*

#### Exercise 14.3.5

(Solution on p. 331.)

Which statement best explains the meaning of “one person, one vote”?

- a. One person should not be allowed to vote twice.
- b. A voter deserves one chance to vote.
- c. A voter should vote only once a year.
- d. Each voter’s vote should count equally.

### 14.3.4 Short Answer

**Exercise 14.3.6**

If the percentage of Asian Americans in Congress is far below the percentage of Asian Americans in the United States, does that mean Asian Americans lack political power? Why or why not?

**Exercise 14.3.7**

Explain how a voter's social class can affect his or her voting practices.

**Exercise 14.3.8**

Besides voting, how can U.S. citizens influence political processes and outcomes? Which of these strategies have you personally used?

### 14.3.5 Further Research

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was preceded by Lyndon Johnson's signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Both articles were instrumental in establishing equal rights for African Americans. Check out Cornell University's website on this topic to learn more about this civil rights legislation: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell\\_civil\\_rights](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell_civil_rights)<sup>8</sup>

### 14.3.6 References

Lopez, Mark Hugo and Paul Taylor. 2009. "Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: the Most Diverse in U.S. History." Pew Research Center. April 30. Retrieved April 24, 2012 (<http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/dissecting-2008-electorate.pdf><sup>9</sup>).

Raymond, Jose. 2010. "Why Poor People Don't Vote." Change.org, June 6. Retrieved February 17, 2012.

United States Elections Project. 2010. "2008 General Election Turnout Rates." October 6. Retrieved February 14, 2012 ([http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html)<sup>10</sup>).

United States Elections Project. 2011. "2010 General Election Turnout Rates." December 12. Retrieved February 14, 2012 ([http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2010G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html)<sup>11</sup>).

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<sup>8</sup>[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell\\_civil\\_rights](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell_civil_rights)

<sup>9</sup><http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/dissecting-2008-electorate.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>[http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2008G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html)

<sup>11</sup>[http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout\\_2010G.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html)

## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 14

to Exercise 14.2.1 (p. 324): Answer

C

to Exercise 14.2.2 (p. 325): Answer

D

to Exercise 14.2.3 (p. 325): Answer

B

to Exercise 14.2.4 (p. 325): Answer

B

to Exercise 14.2.5 (p. 325): Answer

B

to Exercise 14.2.6 (p. 325): Answer

C

to Exercise 14.3.1 (p. 329): Answer

B

to Exercise 14.3.2 (p. 329): Answer

A

to Exercise 14.3.3 (p. 329): Answer

D

to Exercise 14.3.4 (p. 329): Answer

B

to Exercise 14.3.5 (p. 329): Answer

D



## Chapter 15

# Social Movements and Social Change

### 15.1 Introduction to Social Movements and Social Change<sup>1</sup>

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**Figure 15.1:** When people join together, such as these 2011 Egyptian protestors, they are engaging in collective behavior. (Photo courtesy of Agent 021/Wikimedia Commons)

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#### 15.1.1

In January 2011, Egypt erupted in protests against the stifling rule of longtime President Hosni Mubarak. The protests were sparked in part by the revolution in Tunisia, and, in turn, they inspired demonstrations throughout the Middle East in Libya, Syria, and beyond. This wave of protest movements traveled across national borders and seemed to spread like wildfire. There have been countless causes and factors in play in these protests and revolutions, but many have noted the internet-savvy youth of these countries. Some believe that the adoption of social technology—from Facebook pages to cell phone cameras—that helped to organize and document the movement contributed directly to the wave of protests called Arab Spring. The

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m43026/1.2/>>.



combination of deep unrest and disruptive technologies meant these social movements were ready to rise up and seek change.

What do Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the anti-globalization movement, and the Tea Party have in common? Not much, you might think. But although they may be left-wing or right-wing, radical or conservative, highly organized or very diffused, they are all examples of social movements.

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common goal. These groups might be attempting to create change (Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring), to resist change (anti-globalization movement), or to provide a political voice to those otherwise disenfranchised (civil rights movements). Social movements, along with technology, social institutions, population, and environmental changes, create social change.

Consider the effect of the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This disaster exemplifies how a change in the environment, coupled with the use of technology to fix that change, combined with anti-oil sentiment in social movements and social institutions, led to changes in offshore oil drilling policies. Subsequently, in an effort to support the Gulf Coast's rebuilding efforts, new changes occurred. From grassroots marketing campaigns that promote consumption of local seafood to municipal governments needing to coordinate with federal cleanups, organizations develop and shift to meet the changing needs of the society. Just as we saw with the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, social movements have, throughout history, influenced societal shifts. Sociology looks at these moments through the lenses of three major perspectives.

The functionalist perspective looks at the big picture, focusing on the way that all aspects of society are integral to the continued health and viability of the whole. When studying social movements, a functionalist might focus on why social movements develop, why they continue to exist, and what social purposes they serve. For example, movements must change their goals as initial aims are met or they risk dissolution. Several organizations associated with the anti-polio industry folded after the creation of an effective vaccine that made the disease virtually disappear. Can you think of another social movement whose goals were met? What about one whose goals have changed over time?

The conflict perspective focuses on the creation and reproduction of inequality. Someone applying the conflict perspective would likely be interested in how social movements are generated through systematic inequality, and how social change is constant, speedy, and unavoidable. In fact, the conflict that this perspective sees as inherent in social relations drives social change. For example, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1908. Partly created in response to the horrific lynchings occurring in the southern United States, the organization fought to secure the constitutional rights guaranteed in the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, which established an end to slavery, equal protection under the law, and universal male suffrage (NAACP 2011). While those goals have been achieved, the organization remains active today, continuing to fight against inequalities in civil rights and to remedy discriminatory practices.

The symbolic interaction perspective studies the day-to-day interaction of social movements, the meanings individuals attach to involvement in such movements, and the individual experience of social change. An interactionist studying social movements might address social movement norms and tactics as well as individual motivations. For example, social movements might be generated through a feeling of deprivation or discontent, but people might actually join social movements for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the cause. They might want to feel important, or they know someone in the movement they want to support, or they just want to be a part of something. Have you ever been motivated to show up for a rally or sign a petition because your friends invited you? Would you have been as likely to get involved otherwise?

#### 15.1.1.1 References

NAACP. 2011. "100 Years of History." Retrieved December 21, 2011 (<http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history><sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history>

## 15.2 Social Movements<sup>3</sup>

**Social movements** are purposeful, organized groups striving to work toward a common social goal. While most of us learned about social movements in history classes, we tend to take for granted the fundamental changes they caused—and we may be completely unfamiliar with the trend toward global social movement. But from the anti-tobacco movement that has worked to outlaw smoking in public buildings and raise the cost of cigarettes, to uprisings throughout the Arab world, movements are creating social change on a global scale.

### 15.2.1 Levels of Social Movements

Movements happen in our towns, in our nation, and around the world. Let's take a look at examples of social movements, from local to global. No doubt you can think of others on all of these levels, especially since modern technology has allowed us a near-constant stream of information about the quest for social change around the world.

#### 15.2.1.1 Local

Chicago is a city of highs and lows, from corrupt politicians and failing schools to innovative education programs and a thriving arts scene. Not surprisingly, it has been home to a number of social movements over time. Currently, AREA Chicago is a social movement focused on “building a socially just city” (AREA Chicago 2011). The organization seeks to “create relationships and sustain community through art, research, education, and activism” (AREA Chicago 2011). The movement offers online tools like the Radicalendar—a calendar for getting radical and connected—and events such as an alternative to the traditional Independence Day picnic. Through its offerings, AREA Chicago gives local residents a chance to engage in a movement to help build a socially just city.

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<sup>3</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42945/1.3/>>.

### 15.2.1.2 State



**Figure 15.2:** Texas Secede! is an organization which would like Texas to secede from the United States. (Photo courtesy of Tim Pearce/flickr)

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At the other end of the political spectrum from AREA Chicago, there is a social movement across the country in Texas. There, the statewide Texas Secede! organization promotes the idea that Texas can and should secede from the United States to become an independent republic. The organization, which has 3,400 “likes” on Facebook, references both Texas and national history in promoting secession. The movement encourages Texans to return to their rugged and individualistic roots, and to stand up to what proponents believe is the theft of their rights and property by the U.S. government (Texas Secede! 2009).

### 15.2.1.3 National

A polarizing national issue which has helped spawn many activist groups is gay marriage. While the legal battle is being played out state-by-state, the issue is a national one and crops up in presidential debates quite frequently. There are ardent supporters on both sides of the issue.

The Human Rights Campaign, a nationwide organization that advocates for LGBT civil rights, has been around for over 30 years and claims more than a million members. One focus of the organization is their Americans for Marriage Equality campaign. Using public celebrities such as athletes, musicians, and political figures, the campaign seeks to engage the public in the issue of equal rights under the law. The campaign raises awareness of the over 1,100 different rights, benefits, and protections provided on the basis of marital status under federal law, and seeks to educate the public on why they believe these protections are due to committed couples, regardless of gender (Human Rights Campaign 2011).

A movement on the opposite end would be the National Organization for Marriage, an organization that funds campaigns to stop same-sex marriage (National Organization for Marriage 2011). Both of these organizations work on the national stage and seek to engage people through grassroots efforts to push their message.



**Figure 15.3:** The right of gays and lesbians to marry is a polarizing issue but is gaining support nationally. (Photo courtesy of Krossbow/flickr)

#### 15.2.1.4 Global

Despite their successes in bringing forth change on controversial topics, social movements are not always about volatile politicized issues. For example, let's look at the global movement called Slow Food. Slow Food, with the slogan "Good, Clean, Fair Food," is a global grassroots movement claiming supporters in 150 countries. The movement links community and environmental issues back to the question of what is on our plates and where it came from. Founded in 1989 in response to the increasing existence of fast food in communities that used to treasure their culinary traditions, Slow Food works to raise awareness of food choices (Slow Food 2011). With more than 100,000 members in 1,300 local chapters, Slow Food is a movement that crosses political, age, and regional lines.

#### 15.2.2 Types of Social Movements

We know that social movements can occur on the local, national, or even global stage. Are there other patterns or classifications that can help us understand them? Sociologist David Aberle (1966) addresses this question, developing categories that distinguish among social movements based on what they want to change and how much change they want. **Reform movements** seek to change something specific about the social structure. Examples include anti-nuclear groups, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), and the Human Rights Campaign's advocacy for Marriage Equality. **Revolutionary movements** seek to completely change every aspect of society. These would include the 1960's counterculture movement, as well as anarchist collectives. Texas Secede! is a revolutionary movement. **Religious/Redemptive movements** are "meaning seeking," and their goal is to provoke inner change or spiritual growth in individuals. Organizations pushing these movements might include Heaven's Gate or the Branch Davidians. **Alternative movements** are focused on self-improvement and limited, specific changes to individual beliefs and behavior. These include trends like transcendental meditation or a macrobiotic diet. **Resistance movements** seek to prevent or undo change to the social structure. The Ku Klux Klan and pro-life movements fall into this category.

### 15.2.3 Stages of Social Movements

Later sociologists studied the lifecycle of social movements—how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outline a four-stage process. In the *preliminary stage*, people become aware of an issue and leaders emerge. This is followed by the *coalescence stage* when people join together and organize in order to publicize the issue and raise awareness. In the *institutionalization stage*, the movement no longer requires grassroots volunteerism: it is an established organization, typically peopled with a paid staff. When people fall away, adopt a new movement, the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the *decline stage*. Each social movement discussed earlier belongs in one of these four stages. Where would you put them on the list?

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**Figure 15.4:** In 2008, Obama’s campaign used social media to tweet, like, and friend its way to victory. (Photos courtesy of bradleyolin/flickr)

Chances are you have been asked to tweet, friend, like, or donate online for a cause. Maybe you were one of the many people who, in 2010, helped raise over \$3 million in relief efforts for Haiti through cell phone text donations. Or maybe you follow presidential candidates on Twitter and retweet their messages to your followers. Perhaps you have “liked” a local nonprofit on Facebook, prompted by one of your neighbors or friends liking it too. Nowadays, woven throughout our social media activities, are social movements. After all, social movements start by activating people.

Referring to the ideal type stages discussed above, you can see that social media has the potential to dramatically transform how people get involved. Look at stage one, the *preliminary stage*: people become aware of an issue and leaders emerge. Imagine how social media speeds up this step. Suddenly, a shrewd user of Twitter can alert his thousands of followers about an emerging cause or an issue on his mind. Issue awareness can spread at the speed of a click, with thousands of people across the globe becoming informed at the same time. In a similar vein, those who are savvy and engaged with social media emerge as leaders. Suddenly, you don’t need to be a powerful public speaker. You don’t even need to leave your house. You can build an audience through social media without ever meeting the people you are inspiring.

At the next stage, the *coalescence stage*, social media also is transformative. Coalescence is the point when people join together to publicize the issue and get organized. President Obama’s

2008 campaign was a case study in organizing through social media. Using Twitter and other online tools, the campaign engaged volunteers who had typically not bothered with politics, and empowered those who were more active to generate still more activity. It is no coincidence that Obama's earlier work experience included grassroots community organizing. What is the difference between his campaign and the work he did in Chicago neighborhoods decades earlier? The ability to organize without regard to geographical boundaries by using social media. In 2009, when student protests erupted in Tehran, social media was considered so important to the organizing effort that the U.S. State Department actually asked Twitter to suspend scheduled maintenance so that a vital tool would not be disabled during the demonstrations.

So what is the real impact of this technology on the world? Did Twitter bring down Mubarak in Egypt? Author Malcolm Gladwell (2010) doesn't think so. In an article in *New Yorker* magazine, Gladwell tackles what he considers the myth that social media gets people more engaged. He points out that most of the tweets relating to the Iran protests were in English and sent from Western accounts (instead of people on the ground). Rather than increasing engagement, he contends that social media only increases participation; after all, the cost of participation is so much lower than the cost of engagement. Instead of risking being arrested, shot with rubber bullets, or sprayed with fire hoses, social media activists can click "like" or retweet a message from the comfort and safety of their desk (Gladwell 2010).

Sociologists have identified high-risk activism, such as the civil rights movement, as a "strong-tie" phenomenon, meaning that people are far more likely to stay engaged and not run home to safety if they have close friends who are also engaged. The people who dropped out of the movement—who went home after the danger got too great—did not display any less ideological commitment. But they lacked the strong-tie connection to other people who were staying. Social media, by its very makeup, is "weak-tie" (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). People follow or friend people they have never met. But while these online acquaintances are a source of information and inspiration, the lack of engaged personal contact limits the level of risk we'll take on their behalf.



Donation Update: Over \$21 Million in ☆  
\$10 donations raised for the people of  
#Haiti through the @RedCross text  
HAITI to 90999 campaign.



**Figure 15.5:** After a devastating earthquake in 2010, Twitter and the Red Cross raised millions for Haiti relief efforts through phone donations alone. (Photo courtesy of Cambodia4KidsOrg/flickr)

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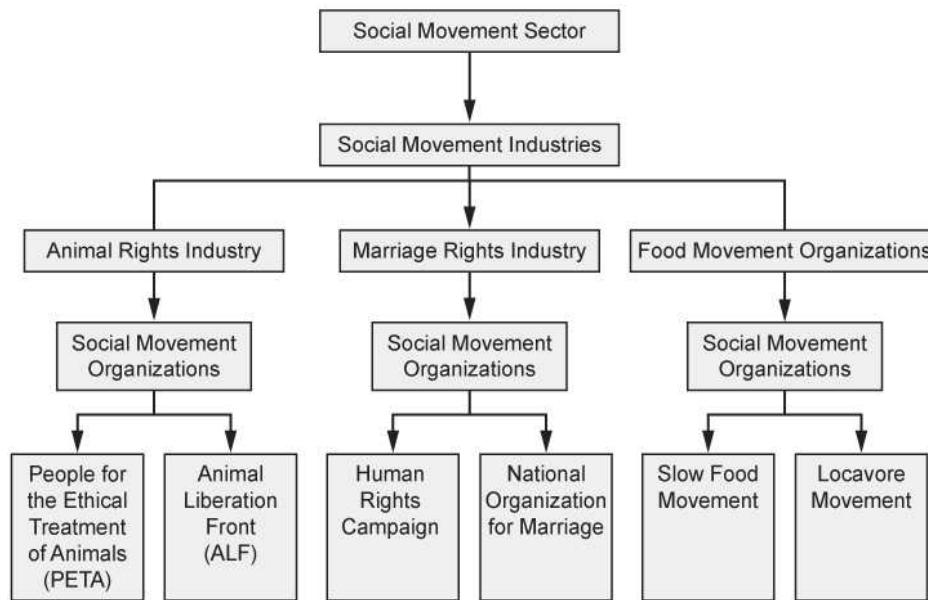
### 15.2.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Social Movements

Most theories of social movements are called collective action theories, indicating the purposeful nature of this form of collective behavior. The following three theories are but a few of the many classic and modern theories developed by social scientists.

#### 15.2.4.1 Resource Mobilization

Social movements will always be a part of society, and people will always weigh their options and make rational choices about which movements to follow. As long as social movements wish to thrive, they must find resources (such as money, people, and plans) for how to meet their goals. Not only will social movements compete for our attention with many other concerns—from the basic (our jobs or our need to feed ourselves) to the broad (video games, sports, or television), but they also compete with each other. For any individual, it may be a simple matter to decide you want to spend your time and money on animal shelters and Republican politics versus homeless shelters and Democrats. But which animal shelter, and which Republican candidate? Social movements are competing for a piece of finite resources, and the field is growing more crowded all the time.

McCarthy and Zald (1977) conceptualize **resource mobilization theory** as a way to explain movement success in terms of its ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals. For example, PETA, a social movement organization, is in competition with Greenpeace and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), two other social movement organizations. Taken together, along with all other social movement organizations working on animals rights issues, these similar organizations constitute a **social movement industry**. Multiple social movement industries in a society, though they may have widely different constituencies and goals, constitute a society's **social movement sector**. Every **social movement organization** (a single social movement group) within the social movement sector is competing for your attention, your time, and your resources. The chart below shows the relationship between these components.



**Figure 15.6:** Multiple social movement organizations concerned about the same issue form a social movement industry. A society's many social movement industries comprise its social movement sector. With so many options, who will you give your time or money to?

#### 15.2.4.2 Framing/Frame Analysis

Over the past several decades, sociologists have developed the concept of frames to explain how individuals identify and understand social events and which norms they should follow in any given situation (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). Imagine entering a restaurant. Your “frame” immediately provides you with a behavior template. It probably does not occur to you to wear pajamas to a fine dining establishment, throw food at other patrons, or spit your drink onto the table. However, eating food at a sleepover pizza party provides you with an entirely different behavior template. It might be perfectly acceptable to eat in your pajamas, and maybe even throw popcorn at others or guzzle drinks from cans.

Successful social movements use three kinds of frames (Snow and Benford 1988) to further their goals. The first type, **diagnostic framing**, states the problem in a clear, easily understood way. When applying diagnostic frames, there are no shades of gray: instead, there is the belief that what “they” do is wrong and this is how “we” will fix it. The anti-gay marriage movement is an example of diagnostic framing with its uncompromising insistence that marriage is only between a man and a woman. **Prognostic framing**, the second type, offers a solution and states how it will be implemented. Some examples of this frame, when looking at the issue of marriage equality as framed by the anti-gay marriage movement, include the plan to restrict marriage to “one man/one woman” or to allow only “civil unions” instead of marriage. As you can see, there may be many competing prognostic frames even within social movements adhering to similar diagnostic frames. Finally, **motivational framing** is the call to action: what should you do once you agree with the diagnostic frame and believe in the prognostic frame? These frames are action-oriented. In the gay marriage movement, a call to action might encourage you to vote “no” on Proposition 8 in California (a move to limit marriage to male-female couples), or conversely, to contact your local congressperson to express your viewpoint that marriage should be restricted to opposite-sex couples.



With so many similar diagnostic frames, some groups find it best to join together to maximize their impact. When social movements link their goals to the goals of other social movements and merge into a single group, a **frame alignment process** (Snow et al. 1986) occurs—an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to the movement.

This frame alignment process involves four aspects: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. *Bridging* describes a “bridge” that connects uninvolved individuals and unorganized or ineffective groups with social movements that, though structurally unconnected, nonetheless share similar interests or goals. These organizations join together creating a new, stronger social movement organization. Can you think of examples of different organizations with a similar goal that have banded together?

In the *amplification* model, organizations seek to expand their core ideas to gain a wider, more universal appeal. By expanding their ideas to include a broader range, they can mobilize more people for their cause. For example, the Slow Food movement extends its arguments in support of local food to encompass reduced energy consumption and reduced pollution, plus reduced obesity from eating more healthfully, and other benefits.

In *extension*, social movements agree to mutually promote each other, even when the two social movement organization’s goals don’t necessarily relate to each other’s immediate goals. This often occurs when organizations are sympathetic to each others’ causes, even if they are not directly aligned, such as women’s equal rights and the civil rights movement.



(a)



(b)



(c)

**Figure 15.7:** Extension occurs when social movements have sympathetic causes. Women's rights, racial equality, and LGBT advocacy are all human rights issues. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Charlie Nguyen/flickr)

Available for free at <http://cnx.org/content/col11563/1.1>

*Transformation* involves a complete revision of goals. Once a movement has succeeded, it risks losing relevance. If it wants to remain active, the movement has to change with the transformation or risk becoming obsolete. For instance, when the women's suffrage movement gained women the right to vote, they turned their attention to equal rights and campaigning to elect women. In short, it is an evolution to the existing diagnostic or prognostic frames generally involving a total conversion of movement.

#### 15.2.4.3 New Social Movement Theory

**New social movement theory**, a development of European social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to explain the proliferation of post-industrial and post-modern movements that are difficult to analyze using traditional social movement theories. Rather than being one specific theory, it is more of a perspective that revolves around understanding movements as they relate to politics, identity, culture, and social change. Some of these more complex interrelated movements include ecofeminism, which focuses on the patriarchal society as the source of environmental problems, and the transgender rights movement. Sociologist Steven Buechler (2000) suggests that we should be looking at the bigger picture in which these movements arise—shifting to a macro-level, global analysis of social movements.

#### 15.2.5 Summary

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups, either with the goal of pushing toward change, giving political voice to those without it, or gathering for some other common purpose. Social movements intersect with environmental changes, technological innovations, and other external factors to create social change. There are a myriad of catalysts that create social movements, and the reasons that people join are as varied as the participants themselves. Sociologists look at both the macro- and microanalytical reasons that social movements occur, take root, and ultimately succeed or fail.

#### 15.2.6 Section Quiz

##### Exercise 15.2.1

(Solution on p. 352.)

If we divide social movements according to their position among all social movements in a society, we are using the \_\_\_\_\_ theory to understand social movements.

- a. framing
- b. new social movement
- c. resource mobilization
- d. value-added

##### Exercise 15.2.2

(Solution on p. 352.)

While PETA is a social movement organization, taken together, the animal rights social movement organizations PETA, ALF, and Greenpeace are a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. social movement industry
- b. social movement sector
- c. social movement party
- d. social industry

##### Exercise 15.2.3

(Solution on p. 352.)

Social movements are:

- a. disruptive and chaotic challenges to the government
- b. ineffective mass movements
- c. the collective action of individuals working together in an attempt to establish new norms beliefs, or values

- d. the singular activities of a collection of groups working to challenge the status quo

**Exercise 15.2.4**

(Solution on p. 352.)

When the League of Women Voters successfully achieved its goal of women being allowed to vote, they had to undergo frame \_\_\_\_\_, a means of completely changing their goals to ensure continuing relevance.

- a. extension
- b. amplification
- c. bridging
- d. transformation

**Exercise 15.2.5**

(Solution on p. 352.)

If a movement claims that the best way to reverse climate change is to reduce carbon emissions by outlawing privately owned cars, “outlawing cars” is the \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. prognostic framing
- b. diagnostic framing
- c. motivational framing
- d. frame transformation

## 15.2.7 Short Answer

**Exercise 15.2.6**

Think about a social movement industry dealing with a cause that is important to you. How do the different social movement organizations of this industry seek to engage you? Which techniques do you respond to? Why?

**Exercise 15.2.7**

Do you think social media is an important tool in creating social change? Why or why not? Defend your opinion.

**Exercise 15.2.8**

Describe a social movement in the decline stage. What is its issue? Why has it reached this stage?

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## 15.3 Social Change<sup>10</sup>

Collective behavior and social movements are just two of the forces driving **social change**, which is the change in society created through social movements as well as external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations. Essentially, any disruptive shift in the status quo, be it intentional or random, human-caused or natural, can lead to social change. Below are some of the likely causes.

### 15.3.1 Causes of Social Change

Changes to technology, social institutions, population, and the environment, alone or in some combination, create change. Below, we will discuss how these act as agents of social change and we'll examine real-world examples. We will focus on four agents of change recognized by social scientists: technology, social institutions, population, and the environment.

#### 15.3.1.1 Technology

Some would say that improving technology has made our lives easier. Imagine what your day would be like without the internet, the automobile, or electricity. In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that technology is a driving force behind globalization, while the other forces of social change (social institutions, population, environment) play comparatively minor roles. He suggests that we can view globalization as occurring in three distinct periods. First, globalization was driven by military expansion, powered by horsepower and windpower. The countries best able to take advantage of these power sources expanded the most, exerting control over the politics of the globe from the late 15th century to around the year 1800. The second shorter period, from approximately 1800 C.E. to 2000 C.E., consisted of a globalizing economy. Steam and rail power were the guiding forces of social change and globalization in this period. Finally, Friedman brings us to the post-millennial era. In this period of globalization, change is driven by technology, particularly the internet (Friedman 2005).

<sup>6</sup><http://www.hrc.org>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.nationformarriage.org/>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.slowfood.com>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.texassecede.com>

<sup>10</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m42948/1.2/>>.

But also consider that technology can create change in the other three forces social scientists link to social change. Advances in medical technology allow otherwise infertile women to bear children, indirectly leading to an increase in population. Advances in agricultural technology have allowed us to genetically alter and patent food products, changing our environment in innumerable ways. From the way we educate children in the classroom to the way we grow the food we eat, technology has impacted all aspects of modern life.

Of course there are drawbacks. The increasing gap between the technological haves and have-nots—sometimes called the digital divide—occurs both locally and globally. Further, there are added security risks: the loss of privacy, the risk of total system failure (like the Y2K panic at the turn of the millennium), and the added vulnerability created by technological dependence. Think about the technology that goes into keeping nuclear power plants running safely and securely. What happens if an earthquake or other disaster, like in the case of Japan's Fukushima plant, causes the technology to malfunction, not to mention the possibility of a systematic attack to our nation's relatively vulnerable technological infrastructure?

### **15.3.1.2 Social Institutions**

Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labor to run a farm. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centers where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

This same shift towards industrial corporate entities also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, created the global economy, provided new political platforms, and even spurred new religions and new forms of religious worship like Scientology. It has also informed the way we educate our children: originally schools were set up to accommodate an agricultural calendar so children could be home to work the fields in the summer, and even today, teaching models are largely based on preparing students for industrial jobs, despite that being an outdated need. As this example illustrates, a shift in one area, such as industrialization, means an interconnected impact across social institutions.

### **15.3.1.3 Population**

Population composition is changing at every level of society. Births increase in one nation and decrease in another. Some families delay childbirth while others start bringing children into their fold early. Population changes can be due to random external forces, like an epidemic, or shifts in other social institutions, as described above. But regardless of why and how it happens, population trends have a tremendous interrelated impact on all other aspects of society.

In the United States, we are experiencing an increase in our senior population as baby boomers begin to retire, which will in turn change the way many of our social institutions are organized. For example, there is an increased demand for housing in warmer climates, a massive shift in the need for elder care and assisted living facilities, and growing awareness of elder abuse. There is concern about labor shortages as boomers retire, not to mention the knowledge gap as the most senior and accomplished leaders in different sectors start to leave. Further, as this large generation leaves the workforce, the loss of tax income and pressure on pension and retirement plans means that the financial stability of the country is threatened.

Globally, often the countries with the highest fertility rates are least able to absorb and attend to the needs of a growing population. Family planning is a large step in ensuring that families are not burdened with more children than they can care for. On a macro level, the increased population, particularly in the poorest parts of the globe, also leads to increased stress on the planet's resources.

### **15.3.1.4 The Environment**

Turning to human ecology, we know that individuals and the environment affect each other. As human populations move into more vulnerable areas, we see an increase in the number of people affected by natural disasters, and we see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of those disasters.

Part of this is simply the numbers: the more people there are on the planet, the more likely it is that people will be impacted by a natural disaster.

But it goes beyond that. We face a combination of too many people and the increased demands these numbers make on the earth. As a population, we have brought water tables to dangerously low levels, built up fragile shorelines to increase development, and irrigated massive crop fields with water brought in from several states away. How can we be surprised when homes along coastlines are battered and droughts threaten whole towns? The year 2011 holds the unwelcome distinction of being a record year for billion-dollar weather disasters, with about a dozen falling into that category. From twisters and floods to snowstorms and droughts, the planet is making our problems abundantly clear (CBS News 2011). These events have birthed social movements and are bringing about social change as the public becomes educated about these issues.

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**Figure 15.8:** Is the glass half-empty or half-full when it comes to social change? Fiction writers explore both sides of the issue through fantasy futuristic novels like the *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins. (Photo courtesy of Carissa Rogers/flickr)

Humans have long been interested in science fiction and space travel, and many of us are eager to see the invention of jet packs and flying cars. But part of this futuristic fiction trend is much darker and less optimistic. In 1932, when Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was published, there was a cultural trend towards seeing the future as golden and full of opportunity. In his novel set in 2540, there is a more frightening future. Since then, there has been an ongoing stream of dystopian novels, or books set in the future after some kind of apocalypse has occurred and when a totalitarian and restrictive government has taken over. These books have been gaining in popularity recently, especially among young adult readers. And while the adult versions of these books often have a grim or dismal ending, the youth-gearred versions usually end with some promise of hope.

So what is it about our modern times that makes looking forward so fearsome? Take the example of author Suzanne Collins's hugely popular *Hunger Games* trilogy for young adults. The futuristic setting isn't given a date, and the locale is Panem, a transformed version of North America with 12 districts ruled by a cruel and dictatorial capitol. The capitol punishes the districts for their long-ago attempt at rebellion by forcing an annual Hunger Game, where two children from each district are thrown into a created world where they must fight to the death. Connotations of gladiator games and video games come together in this world, where the government can kill people for their amusement, and the technological wonders never cease. From meals that appear at the touch of a button to mutated government-built creatures that track and kill, the future world of *Hunger Games* is a mix of modernization fantasy and nightmare.

When thinking about modernization theory and how it is viewed today by both functionalists and conflict theorists, it is interesting to look at this world of fiction that is so popular. When you think of the future, do you view it as a wonderful place, full of opportunity? Or as a horrifying dictatorship sublimating the individual to the good of the state? Do you view modernization as something to look forward to or something to avoid? And which media has influenced your view?

### 15.3.2 Modernization

**Modernization** describes the processes that increase the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies resulting in the move from an undeveloped society to developed, technologically driven society (Irwin 1975). By this definition, the level of modernity within a society is judged by the sophistication of its technology, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, industry, and the like. However, it is important to note the inherent ethnocentric bias of such assessment. Why do we assume that those living in semi-peripheral and peripheral nations would find it so wonderful to become more like the core nations? Is modernization always positive?

One contradiction of all kinds of technology is that they often promise time-saving benefits, but somehow fail to deliver. How many times have you ground your teeth in frustration at an internet site that refused to load or at a dropped call on your cell phone? Despite time-saving devices such as dishwashers, washing machines, and, now, remote control vacuum cleaners, the average amount of time spent on housework is the same today as it was fifty years ago. And the dubious benefits of 24/7 email and immediate information have simply increased the amount of time employees are expected to be responsive and available. While once businesses had to travel at the speed of the United States postal system, sending something off and waiting until it was received before the next stage, today the immediacy of information transfer means there are no such breaks.

Further, the internet bought us information, but at a cost. The morass of information means that there is as much poor information available as trustworthy sources. There is a delicate line to walk when core nations seek to bring the assumed benefits of modernization to more traditional cultures. For one, there are obvious pro-capitalist biases that go into such attempts, and it is short-sighted for western governments and social scientists to assume all other countries aspire to follow in their footsteps. Additionally, there can be a kind of neo-liberal defense of rural cultures, ignoring the often crushing poverty and diseases that exist in peripheral nations and focusing only on a nostalgic mythology of the happy peasant. It takes a very careful hand to understand both the need for cultural identity and preservation as well as the hopes for future growth.

### 15.3.3 Summary

There are numerous and varied causes of social change. Four common causes, as recognized by social scientists, are technology, social institutions, population, and the environment. All four of these areas can impact when and how society changes. And they are all interrelated: a change in one area can lead to changes throughout. Modernization is a typical result of social change. Modernization refers to the process of increased differentiation and specialization within a society, particularly around its industry and infrastructure. While this assumes that more modern societies are better, there has been significant pushback on this western-centric view that all peripheral and semi-peripheral countries should aspire to be like North America and Western Europe.

### 15.3.4 Section Quiz

#### Exercise 15.3.1

*(Solution on p. 352.)*

Children in peripheral nations have little to no daily access to computers and the internet, while children in core nations are constantly exposed to this technology. This is an example of:

- a. the digital divide



- b. human ecology
- c. modernization theory
- d. dependency theory

**Exercise 15.3.2***(Solution on p. 352.)*

When sociologists think about technology as an agent of social change, which of the following is *not* an example?

- a. Population growth
- b. Medical advances
- c. The Internet
- d. Genetically engineered food

**Exercise 15.3.3***(Solution on p. 352.)*

China is undergoing a shift in industry, increasing labor specialization and the amount of differentiation present in the social structure. This exemplifies:

- a. human ecology
- b. dependency theory
- c. modernization
- d. conflict perspective

**Exercise 15.3.4***(Solution on p. 352.)*

Core nations that work to propel peripheral nations toward modernization need to be aware of:

- a. preserving peripheral nation cultural identity
- b. preparing for pitfalls that come with modernization
- c. avoiding hegemonistic assumptions about modernization
- d. all of the above

**Exercise 15.3.5***(Solution on p. 352.)*

In addition to social movements, social change is also caused by technology, social institutions, population and \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. the environment
- b. modernization
- c. social structure
- d. new social movements

**15.3.5 Short Answer****Exercise 15.3.6**

Consider one of the major social movements of the 20th century, from civil rights in the United States to Gandhi's nonviolent protests in India. How would technology have changed it? Would change have come more quickly or more slowly? Defend your opinion.

**Exercise 15.3.7**

Discuss the digital divide in the context of modernization. Is there a real concern that poorer communities are lacking in technology? Why or why not?

**Exercise 15.3.8**

Which theory do you think better explains the global economy: dependency theory (global inequity is due to the exploitation of peripheral and semi-peripheral nations by core nations) or modernization theory? Remember to justify your answer and provide specific examples.

**Exercise 15.3.9**

Do you think that modernization is good or bad? Explain, using examples.

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## Solutions to Exercises in Chapter 15

to Exercise 15.2.1 (p. 344): Answer

C

to Exercise 15.2.2 (p. 344): Answer

A

to Exercise 15.2.3 (p. 344): Answer

C

to Exercise 15.2.4 (p. 345): Answer

D

to Exercise 15.2.5 (p. 345): Answer

A

to Exercise 15.3.1 (p. 349): Answer

A

to Exercise 15.3.2 (p. 350): Answer

A

to Exercise 15.3.3 (p. 350): Answer

C

to Exercise 15.3.4 (p. 350): Answer

D

to Exercise 15.3.5 (p. 350): Answer

A

## Glossary

### A achieved status

the status a person chooses, such as a level of education or income

### aggregate

a collection of people who exist in the same place at the same time, but who don't interact or share a sense of identity

### alternative movements

social movements that limit themselves to self-improvement changes in individuals

### ambilineal

a type of unilateral descent that follows either the father's or the mother's side exclusively

### anticipatory socialization

when we prepare for future life roles

### ascribed status

the status outside of an individual's control, such as sex or race

### authoritarian leader

a leader who issues orders and assigns tasks

### authority

power that people accept because it comes from a source that is perceived as legitimate

### automation

workers being replaced by technology

### B bartering

when people exchange one form of goods or services for another

### beliefs

tenets or convictions that people hold to be true

### bigamy

the act of entering into marriage while still married to another person

### bilateral descent

the tracing of kinship through both parents' ancestral lines

### bureaucracies

are formal organizations characterized by a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality.

### C capitalism

an economic system in which there is private ownership (as opposed to state ownership) and where there is an impetus to produce profit, and thereby wealth

### career inheritance

when children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents

### case study

in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual

### caste system

a system in which people are born into a social standing that they will retain their entire lives

### category

people who share similar characteristics but who are not connected in any way

### charismatic authority

power legitimized on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities

### class

a group who shares a common social status based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation

### class system

social standing based on social factors and individual accomplishments

### class traits

also called class markers, the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class

**clear division of labor**

refers to the fact that each individual in a bureaucracy has a specialized task to perform

**coercive organizations**

are organizations that people do not voluntarily join, such as prison or a mental hospital

**cohabitation**

when a couple shares a residence but is not married

**commodities**

physical objects we find, grow, or make to meet our needs and those of others

**conflict theory**

a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

**conformity**

the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms

**conspicuous consumption**

buying and using products to make a statement about social standing

**content analysis**

applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as it relates to the study at hand

**control group**

an experimental group that is not exposed to the independent variable

**control theory**

theory that states social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society

**convergence theory**

a sociological theory to explain how and why societies move toward similarity over time as their economies develop

**corporate crime**

crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment

**corrections system**

the system tasked with supervising individuals who have been arrested for, convicted of, or sentenced for criminal offenses

**correlation**

when a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, but does not necessarily indicate causation

**countercultures**

groups that reject and oppose society's widely accepted cultural patterns

**court**

a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law

**crime**

a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions

**criminal justice system**

an organization that exists to enforce a legal code

**cultural deviance theory**

theory that suggests conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime

**cultural imperialism**

the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture

**cultural relativism**

the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards, and not in comparison to another culture

**cultural universals**

patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies

**culture lag**

the gap of time between the introduction of material culture and nonmaterial culture's acceptance of it

**culture of prejudice**

the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture

**culture**

shared beliefs, values, and practices

**culture shock**

an experience of personal disorientation when confronted with an unfamiliar way of life

**D Davis-Moore thesis**

thesis that argues some social stratification is a social necessity

**degradation ceremony**

the process by which new members of a total institution lose aspects of their old identity and are given new ones

**democratic leader**

a leader who encourages group participation and consensus-building before moving into action

**dependent variables**

changed by other variables

**depression**

a sustained recession across several economic sectors

**deviance**

a violation of contextual, cultural, or social norms

**diagnostic framing**

when the social problem is stated in a clear, easily understood manner

**differential association theory**

theory that states individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance

**diffusion**

the spread of material and nonmaterial culture from one culture to another

**discoveries**

things and ideas found from what already exists

**discrimination**

prejudiced action against a group of people

**doing gender**

when people perform tasks based upon the gender assigned to them by society and, in turn, themselves

**dominant group**

a group of people who have more power in a society than any of the subordinate groups

**double standard**

concept that prohibits premarital sexual intercourse for women but allows it for men

**downward mobility**

a lowering of one's social class

**dramaturgical analysis**

a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

**dyad**

a two-member group

**dynamic equilibrium**

a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society are working together properly

**dysfunctions**

social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

**E economy**

the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed

**empirical evidence**

evidence corroborated by direct experience and/or observation.

**endogamous marriages**

unions of people within the same social category

**ethnicity**

shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion, and more

**ethnocentrism**

to evaluate another culture according to the standards of one's own culture

**ethnography**

observing a complete social setting and all that it entails

**exogamous marriages**

unions of spouses from different social categories

**experiment**

the testing of a hypothesis under controlled conditions

**explicit rules**

the types of rules in a bureaucracy; rules that are outlined, recorded, and standardized

**expressive function**

a group function that serves an emotional need

**expressive leader**

a leader who is concerned with process and with ensuring everyone's emotional wellbeing

**extended family**

a household that includes at least one parent and child as well as other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins

**F family life course**

a sociological model of family that sees the progression of events as fluid rather than as occurring in strict stages

**family life cycle**

a set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time

**family of orientation**

the family into which one is born

**family of procreation**

a family that is formed through marriage

**family**

socially recognized groups of individuals who may be joined by blood, marriage, or adoption and who form an emotional connection and an economic unit of society

**field research**

gathering data from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey

**figuration**

the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

**folkways**

direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture

**formal norms**

established, written rules

**formal organizations**

large, impersonal organizations

**formal sanctions**

sanctions that are officially recognized and enforced

**frame alignment process**

using bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation as an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to a movement

**function**

the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

**functionalism**

a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

**G gender**

a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions of behaviors that are considered male or female

**gender identity**

an individual's sense of being either masculine or feminine

**gender role**

society's concept of how men and women should behave

**generalizability**

the amount that information from a specific example can be generalized to apply to the overall population

**globalization**

the integration of international trade and finance markets

**grand theories**

attempts to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

**group**

any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share some sense of aligned identity

**H habitualization**

the idea that society is constructed by us and those before us, and it is followed like a habit

**hate crimes**

attacks based on a person's race, religion, or other characteristics

**Hawthorne effect**

when study subjects behave in a certain manner due to their awareness of being observed by a researcher

**hidden curriculum**

the informal teaching done in schools that socializes children to societal norms

**hierarchy of authority**

a clear chain of command found in a bureaucracy

**high culture**

the cultural patterns of a society's elite

**homophobia**

an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals

**hypothesis**

an educated guess with predicted outcomes about the relationship between two or more variables

**I ideal culture**

consists of the standards a society would like to embrace and live up to

**impersonality**

the removal of personal feelings from a professional situation

**in-group**

a group a person belongs to and feels is an integral part of his identity

**income**

the money a person earns from work or investments

**independent variables**

cause changes in dependent variables

**informal norms**

casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to

**informal sanctions**

sanctions that occur in face-to-face interactions

**innovations**

new objects or ideas introduced to culture for the first time

**institutionalization**

the act of implanting a convention or norm into society

**instrumental function**

being oriented toward a task or goal

**instrumental leader**

a leader who is goal oriented with a primary focus on accomplishing tasks

**intergenerational mobility**

a difference in social class between different generations of a family

**interpretive framework**

a sociological research approach that seeks in-depth understanding of a topic or subject through observation or interaction; this approach is not based on hypothesis testing

**intersection theory**



theory that suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes

**interview**

a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject

**intimate partner violence (IPV)**

violence that occurs between individuals who maintain a romantic or sexual relationship

**intragenerational mobility**

a difference in social class between different members of the same generation

**inventions**

a combination of pieces of existing reality into new forms

**Iron Rule of Oligarchy**

the theory that an organization is ruled by a few elites rather than through collaboration

**K kinship**

a person's traceable ancestry (by blood, marriage, and/or adoption)

**L labeling theory**

the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society

**laissez-faire leader**

a hands-off leader who allows members of the group to make their own decisions

**language**

a symbolic system of communication

**latent functions**

the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

**leadership function**

the main focus or goal of a leader

**leadership style**

the style a leader uses to achieve goals or elicit action from group members

**legal codes**

codes that maintain formal social control through laws

**liberation theology**

the use of a church to promote social change via the political arena

**literature review**

a scholarly research step that entails identifying and studying all existing studies on a topic to create a basis for new research

**looking-glass self**

our reflection of how we think we appear to others

**M macro-level**

a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

**manifest functions**

sought consequences of a social process

**market socialism**

a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demand

**marriage**

a legally recognized contract between two or more people in a sexual relationship who have an expectation of permanence about their relationship

**master status**

a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual

**material culture**

the objects or belongings of a group of people

**matrilineal descent**

a type of unilateral descent that follows the mother's side only

**matrilocal residence**

a system in which it is customary for a husband to live with the his wife's family

**McDonaldization**

the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions

**megachurch**

a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services

**mercantilism**

an economic policy based on national policies of accumulating silver and gold by controlling markets with colonies and other countries through taxes and customs charges

**meritocracy**

a bureaucracy where membership and advancement is based on merit—proven and documented skills

**meritocracy**

an ideal system in which personal effort—or merit—determines social standing

**micro-level theories**

the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

**minority group**

any group of people who are singled out from the others for differential and unequal treatment

**modernization**

the process that increases the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies

**money**

an object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged as payment

**monogamy**

when someone is married to only one person at a time

**mores**

the moral views and principles of a group

**motivational framing**

a call to action

**mutualism**

a form of socialism under which individuals and cooperative groups exchange products with one another on the basis of mutually satisfactory contracts

**N nature**

the influence of our genetic makeup on self-development

**negative sanctions**

punishments for violating norms

**new social movement theory**

theory that attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to understand using traditional social movement theories

**nonmaterial culture**

the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society

**nonreactive research**

using secondary data, does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors

**nonviolent crimes**

crimes that involve the destruction or theft of property, but do not use force or the threat of force

**normative or voluntary organizations**

organizations that people join to pursue shared interests or because they provide some intangible rewards

**norms**

the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured

**nuclear family**

two parents (traditionally a married husband and wife) and children living in the same household

**nurture**

the role that our social environment plays in self-development

**O one person, one vote**

a concept holding that each person's vote should be counted equally

**operational definitions**

specific explanations of abstract concepts that a researcher plans to study

**out-group**

a group that an individual is not a member of, and may even compete with

**outsourcing**

when jobs are contracted to an outside source, often in another country

**P paradigms**

philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

**participant observation**

when a researcher immerses herself in a group or social setting in order to make observations from an “insider” perspective

**patrilineal descent**

a type of unilateral descent that follows the father’s line only

**patrilocal residence**

a system in which it is customary for the a wife to live with (or near) the her husband’s family

**patrimonialism**

a type of authority wherein military and administrative factions enforce the power of the master

**peer group**

a group made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests

**polarization**

when the differences between low-end and high-end jobs becomes greater and the number of people in the middle levels decreases

**police**

a civil force in charge of regulating laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level

**politics**

a means of studying a nation’s or group’s underlying social norms as values as evidenced through its political structure and practices

**polyandry**

a form of marriage in which one woman is married to more than one man at one time

**polygamy**

the state of being committed or married to more than one person at a time

**polygyny**

a form of marriage in which one man is married to more than one woman at one time

**popular culture**

mainstream, widespread patterns among a society’s population

**population**

a defined group serving as the subject of a study

**positive sanctions**

rewards given for conforming to norms

**power elite**

a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources

**power**

the ability to exercise one’s will over others

**prejudice**

biased thought based on flawed assumptions about a group of people

**primary data**

data that are collected directly from firsthand experience

**primary deviance**

a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual’s self-image or interactions with others

**primary groups**

small, informal groups of people who are closest to us

**primogeniture**

a law stating that all property passes to the firstborn son

**prognostic framing**

when social movements state a clear solution and a means of implementation

**Q qualitative data**

comprise information that is subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting

**quantitative data**

represent research collected in numerical form that can be counted

**queer theory**

a scholarly discipline that questions fixed (normative) definitions of gender and sexuality

**R racial steering**

when real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race

**racism**

a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others

**random sample**

a study's participants being randomly selected to serve as a representation of a larger population

**rational-legal authority**

power that is legitimized by rules, regulations, and laws

**real culture**

the way society really is based on what actually occurs and exists

**recession**

when there are two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline

**reference groups**

groups to which an individual compares herself

**reform movements**

movements that seek to change something specific about the social structure

**reliability**

a measure of a study's consistency that considers how likely results are to be replicated if a study is reproduced

**religion**

a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds to be sacred or spiritually significant

**religious beliefs**

specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true

**religious experience**

the conviction or sensation that one is connected to "the divine"

**religious rituals**

behaviors or practices that are either required for or expected of the members of a particular group

**religious/redemptive movements**

movements that work to promote inner change or spiritual growth in individuals

**research design**

a detailed, systematic method for conducting research and obtaining data

**resistance movements**

those who seek to prevent or undo change to the social structure

**resocialization**

the process by which old behaviors are removed and new behaviors are learned in their place

**resource mobilization theory**

theory that explains social movements' success in terms of their ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals

**revolutionary movements**

movements that seek to completely change every aspect of society

**role conflict**

when one or more of an individual's roles clash

**role performance**

the expression of a role

**role strain**

stress that occurs when too much is required of a single role

**role-set**

an array of roles attached to a particular status

**roles**

patterns of behavior that are representative of a person's social status

## **S samples**

small, manageable number of subjects that represent the population

## **sanctions**

a way to authorize or formally disapprove of certain behaviors

## **sanctions**

the means of enforcing rules

## **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**

people understand the world based on their form of language

## **scapegoat theory**

suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group

## **scientific method**

an established scholarly research method that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions

## **secondary data analysis**

using data collected by others but applying new interpretations

## **secondary deviance**

occurs when a person's self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society

## **secondary groups**

larger and more impersonal groups that are task-focused and time limited

## **self-fulfilling prophecy**

an idea that becomes true when acted upon

## **self-report study**

collection of data acquired using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews

## **services**

activities that benefit people, such as health care, education, and entertainment

## **sex**

a term that denotes the presence of physical or physiological differences between males and females

## **sexism**

the prejudiced belief that one sex should be valued over another

## **sexual orientation**

a person's emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female)

## **sexuality**

a person's capacity for sexual feelings

## **shaken-baby syndrome**

a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or impacting an infant's head

## **social change**

the change in a society created through social movements as well as through external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations

## **social construction of race**

the school of thought that race is not biologically identifiable

## **social control**

a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms

## **social control**

the regulation and enforcement of norms

## **social disorganization theory**

theory that asserts crime occurs in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control

## **social facts**

the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

## **social mobility**

the ability to change positions within a social stratification system

## **social movement**

a purposeful organized group hoping to work toward a common social goal

**social movement industry**

the collection of the social movement organizations that are striving toward similar goals

**social movement organization**

a single social movement group

**social movement sector**

the multiple social movement industries in a society, even if they have widely varying constituents and goals

**social order**

an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society's members base their daily lives

**social solidarity**

the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

**social stratification**

a socioeconomic system that divides society's members into categories ranking from high to low, based on things like wealth, power, and prestige

**socialism**

an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as "state run") of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society

**socialization**

the process wherein people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values

**society**

people who live in a definable community and who share a culture

**sociological imagination**

the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

**sociology**

is the systematic study of society and social interaction

**standard of living**

the level of wealth available to acquire material goods and comforts to maintain a particular socioeconomic lifestyle

**status consistency**

the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's rank across social categories like income, education, and occupation

**status**

the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to their rank and role in society

**stereotypes**

oversimplified ideas about groups of people

**strain theory**

theory that addresses the relationship between having socially acceptable goals and having socially acceptable means to reach those goals

**street crime**

crime committed by average people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces

**structural mobility**

when societal changes enable a whole group of people to move up or down the class ladder

**structural unemployment**

when there is a societal level of disjuncture between people seeking jobs and the jobs that are available

**subcultures**

groups that share a specific identification, apart from a society's majority, even as the members exist within a larger society

**subordinate group**

a group of people who have less power than the dominant group

**subsistence farming**

when farmers grow only enough to feed themselves and their families

**surveys**

collect data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire

**symbolic interactionism**

a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

**symbols**

gestures or objects that have meanings associated with them that are recognized by people who share a culture

**T theory**

a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

**Thomas theorem**

how a subjective reality can drive events to develop in accordance with that reality, despite being originally unsupported by objective reality

**total institution**

an organization in which participants live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization occurs

**traditional authority**

power legitimized on the basis of long-standing customs

**transgender**

a term that refers to individuals who identify with the behaviors and characteristics that are opposite of their biological sex

**transsexuals**

transgendered individuals who wish to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy

**triad**

a three-member group

**U underemployment**

a state in which a person accepts a lower paying, lower status job than his or her education and experience qualifies him or her to perform

**unilateral descent**

the tracing of kinship through one parent only.

**upward mobility**

an increase—or upward shift—in social class

**utilitarian organizations**

organizations that are joined to fill a specific material need

**V validity**

the degree to which a sociological measure accurately reflects the topic of study

**values**

a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society

**victimless crime**

activities against the law, but that do not result in injury to any individual other than the person who engages in them

**violent crimes**

crimes based on the use of force or the threat of force

**W wealth**

the value of money and assets a person has from, for example, inheritance

**white privilege**

the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group

**X xenocentrism**

a belief that another culture is superior to one's own

## Index of Keywords and Terms

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