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Introduction to Sociology Textbook

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Introduction to Sociology

SOCY-101

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1 – Definition and History of Sociology[1]

1.1 What Is Sociology?

Sociology is the study of human social life. It involves the study of groups and group interactions, from small and personal groups to very large groups and societies. Society refers to a population of people who live in a defined geographic area, share a common culture and identity, and are subject to the same political authority.

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. Sociologists working on the micro level study small groups and individual interactions, while those working on the macro level look at trends among and between large groups and societies.

Sociologists also study culture. The term culture refers to a group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. Culture encompasses a group's way of life, from routine everyday interactions to the most important parts of group members' lives. It includes everything produced by a society, including all of the social rules.

Studying Social Influence and Patterns: How Sociologists View Society

Sociologists believe that society and culture influence individuals' attitudes and behavior. Moreover, sociologists believe that an individual's attitudes, behavior, and life chances depend, to some degree, on their location in society (i.e., their gender, race, social class, religion, and so forth). Does this mean that sociologists believe that society totally determines our attitudes, behaviors, and life chances? No; sociologists believe that individual differences matter, and that

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[1] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from OpenStax (2017).

we do have free will, but that our individuality and freedom are shaped and limited by society's expectations.[2]

For example, society and culture put pressure on people to make one decision over another. One illustration of this is a person's decision to marry. In the United States, this choice is heavily influenced by individual feelings; however, the social acceptability of marriage relative to a person's circumstances also plays a part, as revealed by trends in if, when, how, and whom we marry. Sociologists try to identify general social patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

Changes in the American family structure offer an example of patterns of interest to sociologists. A "typical" family now is vastly different than in past decades when most American families consisted of married parents living in a home with their unmarried children. The percentage of unmarried couples, same-sex couples, single-parent and single-adult households is increasing, as is the number of expanded households in which extended family members such as grandparents, cousins, or adult children live together in the family home (U.S. Census Bureau 2013).

Some sociologists might study the social expectations and cultural rules that govern social life, which may contribute to these changes in patterns of family form and life. Do people in the United States view marriage and family differently than before? Do employment and economic conditions play a role? How has culture influenced the choices that individuals make in living arrangements?

Other sociologists might study the consequences of these new patterns, such as the ways children are affected by them or how they are changing other aspects of society, like education, housing, and healthcare.

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[2] This text is from University of Minnesota (2010).

1.2 Approaches to the Sociological Study of Society and Culture

When sociologists study society, no topic is off limits. Sociologists question every aspect of the world that humans have created. To study these topics and best answer these questions, sociologists conduct research. This research typically follows one of two approaches: the first approach relies on the scientific method; the second approach engages a more interpretive framework. These two approaches provide the foundation for quantitative sociology and qualitative sociology, respectively.

Approach One: Use of the Scientific Method

A great deal of sociological research engages the scientific method. The scientific method is a procedural technique followed in the natural, physical, and social sciences to help yield the most accurate and reliable research conclusions possible, especially ones that are free of bias (or prejudice) and error.

The scientific method involves a series of prescribed steps that have been established over centuries. These basic steps include: (a) formulating a hypothesis (i.e., a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables) that answers a research question, (b) using research methods to collect empirical evidence (i.e., evidence that comes from direct experience, scientifically gathered data, or experimentation) to test that hypothesis, (c) analyzing these data, and (d) drawing appropriate conclusions.[3]

Quantitative sociology, which involves the use statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants, relies heavily on the scientific method. Quantitative sociologists

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[3] This text is from University of Minnesota (2010).

analyze data using statistical techniques to see if they can uncover patterns of – and even predict – human behavior.

Approach Two: Use of an Interpretive Framework

Other sociologists operate from an <u>interpretive framework</u>. While this framework also uses sociological research methods to collect empirical data, it doesn't follow a hypothesis-testing model or seek generalizable truths. Instead, sociologists working within the interpretive framework aim to understand social worlds from the point of view of participants, which leads to in-depth knowledge.

Interpretive research is generally more descriptive – and less predictive – in its findings. Thus, this approach aligns well with <u>qualitative sociology</u>, which seeks to understand human behavior by conducting in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnographic research or observational methods, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media). Researchers in this framework tend to learn as they go, often adjusting their research question and methods to optimize their findings and results.

1.3 The History of Sociology

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the social. As a result, many topics studied in modern sociology were also studied by ancient philosophers in their desire to describe an ideal society, including theories of social conflict, economics, social cohesion, and power (Hannoum 2003).

Following are brief descriptions of six thinkers credited with creating sociology as a <u>discipline</u>, or area of study. As you read each description, note the thinker's sociological interest in social

influence and patterns, as well as their embrace of one of the two approaches – scientific or interpretive – to sociological research.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript (Fauré et al. 1999). In 1838, the term was reinvented by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). Both Comte and Saint-Simon thought that social scientists could study society using the same scientific methods utilized in the natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000).

Comte named the scientific study of social patterns <u>positivism</u>. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that the scientific method could be used to reveal the laws by which societies and individuals interact, and that this knowledge could lead to the prediction and control of human behavior.

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)

Harriet Martineau was a writer who addressed a wide range of social science issues, including economics, social class, religion, suicide, government, and women's rights. She is widely considered the first woman sociologist. Her writing career began in 1931 with a series of stories titled *Illustrations of Political Economy*, in which she tried to educate ordinary people about the principles of economics (Johnson 2003).

Martineau was the first to translate Comte's writing from French to English, thereby introducing sociology to English-speaking scholars (Hill 1991). She is also credited with the first

systematic international comparisons of society: *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). Martineau found the workings of <u>capitalism</u>, an economic system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private interests for profit, at odds with the professed moral principles of people in the United States. She further noted that Americans' belief in equality was inconsistent with the lack of women's rights.

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848 he and Friedrich Engels coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx's theory of society: social conflict leads to social change.

Marx believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time of his writing, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of factories and their workers. Marx predicted that the inequalities of capitalism would eventually become so extreme that workers would revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, and the ascendance of communism (i.e., an economic system in which everything is owned communally and distributed as needed).

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by creating the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux (1895) and by publishing *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895). In another important work, *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive state into a capitalist, industrial society.

Durkheim argued that sociologists should study <u>social facts</u>, or those aspects of society and culture that exist outside of the individual but direct or constrain individual action. In 1897,

Durkheim demonstrated the relevance of this argument when he published *Suicide*. In this book, Durkheim examined suicide rates across societies, revealing patterns in who was most likely to die by suicide, when, and where. Given these patterns, he came to attribute suicide to social – rather than to individual or psychological – causes.

Durkheim also believed that it was possible to determine if a society was "healthy" or "pathological." He saw healthy societies as stable, while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in <u>social norms</u>, or expectations for behavior.

Max Weber (1864–1920)

Max Weber established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology, including political change in Russia and the social forces that affect factory workers. He is perhaps best known for *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), which argues that Protestant Christianity, especially Calvinism, led to the creation of capitalism.

Unlike Comte, Weber didn't think that the scientific method could be used to accurately predict human behavior in groups. Weber saw culture as a social force that made human behavior too difficult to predict. In fact, Weber argued that sociologists' cultural biases, if not controlled, could also influence their research. To deal with culture, Weber introduced the concept of <u>verstehen</u>, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking verstehen, sociologists try to understand a social world, like an entire culture or a small setting, from an insider's point of view.

In this way, Weber and other like-minded sociologists advanced a philosophy of <u>antipositivism</u>, in which sociological research methods are used not to generalize or make predictions but to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of different social worlds.

W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963)[4]

William Edward Burghardt DuBois was born free in Massachusetts in 1868. After graduating from Fisk University, he earned a Ph.D. (in sociology) from Harvard University – becoming the first black American to do so (USHistory.org). From academic positions at Wilberforce University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University, DuBois vociferously attacked the Jim Crow laws and practices that inhibited black suffrage. His most famous books include: *The Philadelphia Negro* (1896), which used statistical methods to study society's impacts on individuals and communities; *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which focused on African-Americans' "double consciousness" and demand for equal rights; and *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935), which analyzed how race impacted workers' solidarity in the Reconstruction south (Cole 2019).

In 1905, DuBois met with a group of 30 men at Niagara Falls, Canada. As the "Niagara Movement," they drafted a series of demands essentially calling for an immediate end to all forms of discrimination. Four years later, members of the Niagara Movement formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). DuBois became the editor of the organization's periodical, *The Crisis* – a job he performed for 20 years. *The Crisis* contained political essays, poems, and stories glorifying African American culture and accomplishments (Cole 2019).

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[4] This section is by Traver for this chapter.

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2 – Sociological Research Methods[5]

2.1 Introduction to Sociological Research Methods

Have you ever wondered if home schooling affects a person's later success in college, or how many people wait until they're in their forties to get married? Do you wonder if texting is changing teenagers' abilities to spell correctly or to communicate clearly? Do you want to know how social movements like Occupy Wall Street develop, or how the massive public followings for Star Trek and Harry Potter coalesced? Sociological research attempts to answer these questions and more by collecting <u>empirical evidence</u> (i.e., evidence that comes from direct experience, scientifically gathered data, or experimentation).

2.2 Research Methods

To collect empirical evidence, sociologists use <u>research methods</u>. A sociologist selects a research method based on the topic or focus of their sociological research question. Questions constructed around a hypothesis, or a testable educated guess, are best answered using methods aligned with the scientific method and quantitative data. Questions that aim to grow understanding are best answered using methods aligned with an interpretive framework and qualitative data.

Following are the research methods most typically used by sociologists. Regardless of the method used, all sociologists seek to maximize their research <u>reliability</u>, which refers to how likely their research results are to be replicated if the study is reproduced. Sociologists also

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strive for validity, which refers to how well the study measures what it was designed to measure.

Surveys

As a research method, a survey collects data from subjects who respond anonymously to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of an ordered questionnaire. The United States Census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey intended to gather empirical sociological data.

Sociologists use surveys to gather different types of information from a large number of people. While surveys are not great at capturing how people 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, report individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits), and even collect factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

A survey targets a specific population of people who are the focus of a study, such as college athletes, international students, or teenagers living with type 1 diabetes. Most sociologists choose to survey a small sector of the population, or a sample: that is, a manageable number of subjects who represent the larger population. The success of any sociological research 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.

After selecting subjects for the survey, a sociologist presents them with the questionnaire, which might consist of closed-ended or open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions might be yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, where subjects are asked to select from a limited number of responses to each question. This results in quantitative data, research collected in numerical form that can be counted and is easy to tabulate. For example, you could just count up the number of "yes" and "no" responses to survey questions and then chart them into percentages.

Surveys can also present more complex <u>open-ended questions</u> that seek answers beyond "yes" and "no." How do you plan to use your college education? Why do you like a particular musician or band? With these questions, the answers vary from person to person. They also require short essay responses, as well as participants who are willing to take the time to convey more personal information. This results in <u>qualitative data</u>, research that is subjective, based on what is seen in a natural setting, and is harder to organize and tabulate. Notably, while the sociologist will end up with a wide range of responses, these responses provide a wealth of insight that promote understanding.

Interviews

An <u>interview</u> is a one-on-one conversation between a sociologist and a research subject. Interviews mimic the open-ended questions on surveys: the subject is asked a series of questions to which they can respond as they wish. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a sociologist often asks for clarification, spends extended time on a subtopic, and poses additional questions. There are no right or wrong answers to interview questions. Ideally, a subject will feel free to open up and answer questions with honesty and in their complexity.

A sociologist engaged in interview-based research benefits from gaining a subject's trust, empathizing or commiserating with a subject, and listening without judgment. Sociologists should also avoid directing or prompting interview subjects to respond to questions in a specific way; otherwise, their research results will be unreliable.

Most typically, interviews are recorded and <u>transcribed</u> (i.e., turned into text). While sociologists are certainly interested in an interview subject's individual experiences and perspectives, they always interview *numerous* subjects; aggregating or combining the findings from each interview to learn something about the subjects, as a whole.

Interview questions like "How did society's view of alcohol influence your decision to drink/not drink?" and "Did your family support your efforts to enroll in college?" are difficult to answer.

Likewise, the answers to these questions are difficult to categorize and count. Thus, most interview transcripts are analyzed as qualitative data.

Observational Research/Field Work/Ethnography

Most sociologists conduct their research out in the world, meeting subjects where they live, work, and play. One method, known to sociologists by many names - observational research, field work, and/or ethnography – involves the collection of data through the lengthy/direct observation of a social life of a group. To conduct observational research, the sociologist must be willing to step into new environments and observe and experience those worlds. The key strength of this research method is that it unfolds in the subject's natural environment, whether it's a coffee shop, tribal village, homeless shelter, the Department of Motor Vehicles, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort. In observational research/field work, the sociologists, rather than the subjects, are the ones out of their element.

While in the subject's natural environment, the sociologist is busy collecting observational data. Initially, in the field, these observations are recording as jottings, or informal notes. Later, once the sociologist returns home or finds the time, these jottings are turned in to formal field notes (i.e., complete and detailed reports of what was observed).

In some observational research studies, the sociologist is a participant. In participant observation, sociologists join a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing group members within that context. This method lets sociologists experience – firsthand – a specific aspect of the group's social life. For example, a sociologist might work as a waitress in a diner, live as a homeless person, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, sociologists try to disappear into the population they're studying, hiding their true identity and purpose in an effort to protect the integrity of their research.

Once inside a group, some participant observers spend months or even years pretending to be one of the people they're observing. However, as observers, they cannot get too involved in the social life of the group; they must keep their purpose in mind and apply the sociological perspective.

In other observational research studies, the sociologist is a <u>non-participant observer</u> who is known, by members of the researched community, as someone studying that community. Observational research tends to focus on how subjects view their own social standing and how they understand themselves in relation to a community. Sociologists might observe, for example, a small American fishing town, an Inuit community, a village in Thailand, a Buddhist monastery, a private boarding school, or an amusement park. These places all have borders defined by specific behaviors and cultural norms. A non-participant observer would commit to spending a pre-determined amount of time studying every aspect of that bounded place, taking in as much as possible.

Both participant and non-participant observers engage in field work to watch and learn. As a result, observational research is a research method aligned with the interpretive framework (*not* the scientific method). Sociologists who use this method try to be alert and open minded, and they strive to record all observations accurately.

The aim of observational research is the identification of social patterns. As these patterns emerge, sociologists begin to develop specific questions about what they're observing; these questions lead to more pointed observations and further understanding. The sociologist might present their findings in an article or a book that describes what he or she witnessed, experienced, and learned.

Experiments

You've probably tested personal social theories before; theories like, "If I study at night and review in the morning, I'll strengthen my memory of the course material" or "If I stop eating junk food, I'll feel better." In each of these cases, you're testing a hypothesis or causal theory.

Sociologists do the same when they conduct an <u>experiment</u>. In an experiment, a social situation is constructed and observed to test a hypothesis or if-then statement. Experiments are a classic scientific method for collecting data.

To begin an experiment, a sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. These people are then divided into two groups: an <u>experimental group</u>, which is exposed to the <u>independent variable(s)</u> (i.e., the variable the is changed or controlled), and the <u>control group</u>, which is not. Then both groups are assessed on the same <u>dependent variable</u> (i.e., the variable of interest that is tested or measured). For example, to examine the impacts of tutoring, a sociologist might expose an experimental group of students to tutoring (the independent variable) while denying tutoring to the control group. Then, the sociologist would administer the same exam to both groups of students. Any difference in exam performance (the dependent variable) between the two groups would be attributed to the presence/absence of tutoring.

In sociology, there are two main types of experiments: <u>laboratory experiments</u> and <u>field experiments</u>. In a lab setting, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables. This means that the experiment unfolds in a research setting that can be closely controlled. In a field setting (i.e., in the world, as it exists), the experiment cannot be as easily controlled.

Secondary Analysis (of Existing Data)

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through the <u>secondary analysis of existing data</u>. Secondary data don't result from firsthand collection; instead they are data collected by someone else.

For example, sociologists often analyze data collected by agencies. In fact, governmental departments and global groups, like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the World Health Organization, collect data that are extremely useful to sociologists. Sociologists might find public statistics on foreclosure useful in studying the effects of the 2008 recession, or they

might compare racial demographic profiles with data on education funding to examine the public resources made available to different groups.

One of the advantages of secondary data is that it is <u>nonreactive</u> (or unobtrusive), meaning that it does not include direct contact with subjects. Unlike studies requiring direct contact with people, using previously-collected data doesn't require entering a population and the investment and risks inherent in that research process.

Yet, using available data does have its challenges. Public records are not always easy to access; a sociologist will often need to do some legwork to track them down. Likewise, there is no way to verify the accuracy of existing data. For instance, while it's easy to tally how many drunk drivers are pulled over by the police, does this number necessarily represent *all* drunk drivers? What about those who are never pulled over, thereby escaping count?

Another problem arises when data are unavailable in the exact form needed, or when they don't reflect the exact information sought. For example, while the average salaries paid to professors at a public college or university is public record, these 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.

Content Analysis

Many sociologists employ <u>content analysis</u>, engaging in the systematic examination of cultural products and documented communications.

For example, to study how women were encouraged to act and behave in the 1960s, a sociologist might watch movies, televisions shows, and situation comedies from that period. Likewise, to research changes in attitudes related to the #blacklivesmatter movement, a sociologist might rely on Facebook posts, tweets, and Instagram stories.

When conducting content analysis, it is important to consider the moment in time in which the analyzed products and communications were released, as they tend to reflect the attitudes and common cultural ideals that existed at the time of release.

Historical-Sociological Methods

According to Kristen Luker (2008:191), sociologists turn to historical methods "to answer one of two questions: either (a) what events in the past shaped how this turned out in the present? or (b) why did things turn out this way in one place and another way in another place?" In the process, they often draw on historical materials sourced from individuals or institutional archives, and they frequently engage in comparative and/or case-study analyses.[6]
For example, sociologists using _comparative_ historical-sociological methods are often interested in the development of a phenomenon over time and space. For example, they might use archived organizational records to understand how corporate missions have shifted over the century – or how they differ per national context.[7]

Sociologists engaged in historical-sociological _case-study_ research use archival materials for the in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual. A major criticism of this method is that, while offering in-depth knowledge on a topic, one case does not provide sufficient evidence to form a social pattern or generalized conclusion. However, case studies can be useful when the single case is unique. In these instances, a single case study can add tremendous knowledge to a certain discipline.

2.3 Ethical Concerns

Given their work with humans, sociologists must consider their ethical obligation to avoid harming subjects or groups while conducting their research. The American Sociological

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[6] This text is from Traver (2020).
[7] This text is from Traver (2020).

Association, or ASA, is the major professional organization of sociologists in North America. The ASA maintains a <u>code of ethics</u>, or formal guidelines for conducting sociological research, consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. This code also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct.

Some of the ASA guidelines state that sociologists must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work. Sociologist must obtain participants' informed consent and notify subjects of the responsibilities and risks of research before they agree to partake. During a study, sociologists must also ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject becomes endangered. Additionally, sociologists are required to protect the privacy of research participants; even if pressured by authorities, sociologists are not ethically allowed to release confidential information.

Sociologists must also make their research results available to other scholars, disclose sources of financial support, and refuse funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest. Notably, the ASA's ethical considerations shape both the study and the publication of results.

As an additional layer of subject protection, every college, university, or research institution has an <u>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</u> that oversees and makes sure all in-house research meets ethical standards. Thus, before they begin a research project, sociologists are required to submit a written description of their research plan to their IRB for approval.[8]

Notably, Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern deserving of sociologists' attention. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for collecting and disclosing study data. Sociologists, he stated, must establish <u>value neutrality</u>, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results.

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[8] This text is from Hammond and Cheney (n.d.).

Is value neutrality possible? Many sociologists believe it's impossible to set aside personal values and achieve complete objectivity. They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when collecting and analyzing data.

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3 – Sociological Theories and Paradigms[9]

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Society

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns, and they develop theories in an attempt to explain why things work as they do. In sociology, a <u>theory</u> is a logical explanation (or hypothesis) for a relationship between two or more aspects of social life.

Theories vary in scope depending on the issue(s) that they are meant to explain: <u>macro-level theories</u> relate to large-scale issues and large groups of people; <u>micro-level theories</u> look at relationships between individuals or small groups.

<u>Paradigms</u> are philosophical frameworks used to formulate theories in a discipline or area of study. A <u>*sociological* paradigm</u> is a general way of conceptualizing the world based on abstract assumptions about the nature of social action and the character of social organization. Three paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking and theory development: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. The work of Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber ground these paradigms, respectively.

Functionalism and Émile Durkheim

<u>Functionalism</u>, also called structural-functionalism, is a macro-level paradigm that views society as an organized system of integrated parts that are designed to meet the needs of society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spencer (1820–1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer 1898).

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[9] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from OpenStax (2017).

Building on Spencer, Alfred Radcliff-Brown (1881–1955) defined the <u>function</u> of any recurrent activity as the part it played in social life as a whole, and therefore the contribution it makes to social stability and continuity (Radcliff-Brown 1952). In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain social stability, a state called <u>dynamic equilibrium</u> (Parsons 1961).

Robert Merton (1910–2003) pointed out that social processes often have many functions. <u>Manifest functions</u> are the sought or anticipated consequences of a social process, while <u>latent functions</u> 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. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called <u>dysfunctions</u>. In education, examples of dysfunction include truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and under-employment.

As a functionalist, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) believed that all aspects of society serve a function in and for society. In fact, Durkheim even argued that <u>social deviance</u>, or behavior that is outside of what is normal or typical in society, is *functional*: a society's punishment of deviance affirms members' cultural values and norms and reaffirms their moral consciousness.

Durkheim also stressed the necessary interconnectivity of all elements of society. To Durkheim, society was greater than the sum of its parts. Durkheim's research on the <u>collective conscience</u>**,** or the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society, reflected this interest – as did his belief that <u>social integration</u>, or the ties that people have to their social groups, was a key factor in social life. In fact, one of Durkheim's primary interests was the cultural glue that held society together. In his book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim argued that as society grew more complex, our social glue, or bonds, changed.

Preindustrial societies, Durkheim explained, were held together by <u>mechanical solidarity</u>, a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture. Societies with mechanical solidarity acted in a mechanical fashion; things were done mostly because they had

always been done that way, and because bonds of kinship and a low division of labor created shared morals and values among people.

In industrial societies, mechanical solidarity is replaced with organic solidarity, which is social order based on an acceptance of economic and social differences. In capitalist societies, Durkheim wrote, the division of labor is so specialized that everyone is doing different things and people with differing values coexist. In societies defined by organic solidarity, laws exist as formalized morals.

While the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity is, in the long run, advantageous for a society, Durkheim noted that it can be a time of chaos and social anomie. Anomie – literally, "without law" – is a situation in which a firm collective consciousness no longer exists in society. People, while interdependent in the accomplishment of complex tasks, lack a shared sense of social rules and direction. According to Durkheim, societies that reach an advanced stage of organic solidarity can avoid anomie by redeveloping a collective consciousness.

Conflict Theory and Karl Marx

Conflict theory, a macro-level paradigm, views society as an arena in which people compete for scarce resources. This perspective is most closely aligned with the writings of German philosopher and sociologist Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx put forth the idea of "base and superstructure," arguing that a society's economic character forms its base, upon which rests its culture and social institutions (i.e., the superstructure). For Marx, it is the base (economy) that determines a society's structure – including its conflicts.

Marx believed that conflict was inherent to capitalism, existing most predominantly between the capitalist owners of the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and their laborers (the proletariat). For Marx, this relational dynamic changed the value of work: no longer an expression of human nature, work was now based on artificial conditions and completed for wages alone.

Based on these beliefs, Marx described modern society in terms of alienation. Alienation refers to the condition in which an individual is isolated or divorced from their society, work, or sense of self. Marx defined four types of alienation related to the conflicts of capitalism.

- Alienation from the product of one's labor. A modern worker is not given the opportunity to relate to their creations. For example, instead of training for years as a watchmaker, an unskilled worker now gets a job at a watch factory – pressing buttons to seal pieces together. In the same way, a modern worker may not even know what they're making. For instance, a worker on a Ford assembly line may spend all day installing windows on car doors without ever seeing the rest of the car. In other words, a modern worker doesn't care if they make watches or cars, only that they have a job.

- Alienation from the process of one's labor. A modern worker does not control the conditions of their job because they don't own the means of production. Every aspect of the product and production process is decided by the bourgeoisie, who dictate orders to the workers. For example, a fast-food worker is expected to make food in the way they were taught; all ingredients must be combined in a particular order and in a particular quantity, with no room for creativity or change.

- Alienation from others. In the modern workplace, workers are set up to compete – not cooperate: workers vie for time slots, bonuses, and job security. Even when a worker clocks out at night and goes home, the competition continues. As Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portion of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker."

- Alienation from one's self. A final outcome of capitalist industrialization is the worker's loss of an occupational identity. Because there is nothing that ties a worker to their labor, there is no longer a sense of self found in work. Instead of taking pride in an identity as a watchmaker, automobile builder, or chef, workers now see themselves as cogs in the machine.

Another idea that Marx developed is the concept of <u>false consciousness</u>. False consciousness is a condition in which the beliefs, ideals, or ideology of a person are not in the person's best interest. In a capitalist economy, the ideology of the dominant class (the bourgeoisie) is imposed upon the proletariat. When workers value competition over cooperation, or believe that hard work is its own reward, they uphold the power of the bourgeoisie, accept their place in society, and assume individual responsibility for existing conditions.

Marx proposed that false consciousness be replaced with <u>class consciousness</u>, the awareness of one's rank in society. Instead of existing as a "class in itself," the proletariat must become a "class for itself" in order to produce social change (Marx and Engels 1848). According to Marx, when a society enters this state of awareness, it is ready for a social revolution.

Several other sociologists proposed variations of Marx's ideas. For example, German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) believed that conflict helped to integrate and stabilize a society, and that resolving conflicts can reduce tension and hostility and pave the way for future agreements. Additionally, in the 1930s and 1940s, German philosophers, known as the Frankfurt School, developed <u>critical theory</u> as an elaboration on Marxist principles. Critical theorists address the structural issues that cause inequality, identify the people who can make change, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Horkeimer 1982).

More recently, critical theorists have turned their attention to inequalities of gender and race. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of <u>feminist theory</u> that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner 2003). Similarly, <u>critical race theory</u> grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

Symbolic Interactionism and Max Weber

<u>Symbolic interactionism</u> is a micro-level paradigm that focuses on the symbol-rich relationships between individuals. According to symbolic interactionists, communication – or the exchange of

meaning through language – is the way most people make sense of their social worlds. Thus, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist studying the same protest might focus on protester's interactions and the signs and symbols that they use to communicate their messages.

According to Herbert Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is premised on three ideas:

1. humans interact with things based on meanings;
2. these meaning comes from our interactions with others and society; and
3. these meanings are a matter of interpretation in context.

For example, if you love books, a symbolic interactionist might argue that you learned that books have value (i.e., a specific *meaning*) in your *interactions* with family, friends, or at school. Notably, and as this example exemplifies, symbolic interactionists see people as agents – they shape the social world rather than merely being shaped by it (Herman and Reynolds 1994).

Max Weber's work illustrates the power and perspective of symbolic interactionism. According to Weber, ideas form the basis of society. For example, Weber argued that modern society was grounded in the idea of <u>rationality</u>. A rational society values logic and efficiency over morality and tradition. To Weber, capitalism is entirely rational: it often leads to efficiency and merit-based success, but it can have negative effects when taken to the extreme.

As a symbolic interactionist, Weber was also interested in individuals' perspectives and relationships. For this reason, when Weber researched social divisions, he focused more on how individuals experienced those divisions than he did on the divisions themselves. An example: when studying rationality, Weber also studied the impacts of this idea, finding that individuals experience rational society as an <u>iron cage</u> in which they're trapped. For Weber, this sense of entrapment led to a "disenchantment of the world," or a reduction in our sense of magic and wonder in/about the world.

Weber's research, and that of other symbolic interactionists, has led to theories of <u>Constructivism</u>, which propose that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be.

According to constructivists, we develop social constructs based on our interactions with others and these constructs go on to shape our world. This approach is often used to understand what's defined as deviant in a society. According to constructivists, there is no absolute definition of deviance or normality; different societies have constructed different meanings for both, and these meanings have given society shape.

3.2 Sociological Theory Today

While these three paradigms still provide the foundation for modern sociological theory, some theoretical evolution has occurred in the discipline. Structural-functionalism was a dominant force after World War II and until the 1960s and 1970s, when sociologists realized that it could not explain the rapid social change happening across the United States.

Conflict theory gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, when sociologists revitalized the study of institutionalized social inequality and critical theorists began to promote change through the application of sociological principles. Yet, just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized for ignoring social stability.

Since the 1980s, symbolic interactionism has expanded in influence – particularly through the efforts of postmodern social theorists who emphasize the individual nature of reality. Research done from this perspective is often criticized for lacking objectivity and employing an extremely narrow focus. Proponents, of course, consider this one of the paradigm's greatest strengths.

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4 – The Sociological Imagination

4.1 The Sociological Imagination

Although the methods and paradigms that sociologists use in their research differ, all sociologists share at least one thing in common: each of them looks at society using what American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) called the <u>sociological imagination</u>[10]: the ability to situate private or "<u>personal troubles</u>" within an informed framework of larger social or "<u>public issues</u>."[11]

Personal Troubles and Public Issues

Mills defined <u>personal troubles</u> as private problems experienced within the character of an individual and the range of their immediate relations to others. In contrast, he defined <u>public issues</u> as those problems that lie beyond one's personal control and outside the range of one's inner life. Public issues pertain to society's organizations and processes; they're rooted in society – not the individual.

For Mills, the sociological imagination allows us to see the relationship between our individual experiences and the larger society.[12] It encourages us to see our personal troubles in the context of the broader social processes that structure them.

For example, personal troubles like being overweight, being unemployed, having marital difficulties, or feeling purposeless or depressed can be purely private in nature. It is possible for them to be addressed and understood in terms of individual, psychological, or moral attributes – either one's own or those of the people in one's immediate milieu. In an individualistic society like our own, this is, in fact, the most likely way that people will regard the struggles they confront: "I have an addictive personality;" "I can't get a break in the job market;" "My husband

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[10] This text is from Little (2016).
[11] This text is from Wikibooks (n.d.).
[12] This text is from Hammond and Cheney (n.d.).

is unsupportive," etc. However, if one's troubles are widely shared, they're not simply personal; rather, they're common social problems that have their source in the way social life is structured. Thus, they're best addressed as public issues requiring a collective response and solution.

Obesity, for example, has been increasingly recognized as an area of concern for children and adults in North America. Michael Pollan (2006) cites statistics that three out of five Americans are overweight, and one out of five is obese. Obesity is therefore not simply a personal trouble related to the medical issues, dietary practices, or exercise habits of specific individuals. Instead, it is a widely shared public issue that puts many people at risk for chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. It also creates significant social costs for our medical system and other aspects of society.

Given the number of people impacted by obesity, Pollan sees obesity as a public issue. More specifically, he argues that obesity is a product of the increasingly sedentary and stressful lifestyle of modern, capitalist society. He also claims that it's a product of the industrialization of our food chain, which, since the 1970s, has produced increasingly cheap and abundant food with significantly more calories due to processing. Additives like corn syrup, which are much cheaper and therefore more profitable to produce than natural sugars, have led to trends like supersized fast foods and soft drinks. In fact, according to Pollan, most processed foods available for purchase in American supermarkets are made with cheap, calorie-rich, corn-based additives.

In this example, the sociological imagination allows us to see how the personal trouble of obesity is related to the public issue of industrialized food.[13]

Biography and History

In advocating for the sociological imagination, Mills proposed that:

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[13] This text is from Little (2016).

"What people need... is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals."[14]

In other words, for Mills: "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both." Thus, Mills' conceptualization of the sociological imagination also encourages us to recognize how events in our own lives (or our "biography") and events in society/culture (or "history") are intertwined.[15]

As an example of this intertwining, consider the case of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Born in 1961, his "biography" reveals individual intelligence, charisma, and drive: Obama graduated with a B.A. from Columbia University and a J.D. from Harvard University; achieved a successful career in law and education; was elected to the Illinois State and United States Senate; and became the first African American President – all by 2008, when he was 47 years old (Wikipedia, n.d.).

But what role did "history" play in Obama's election to President? What if, for example, instead of being *born* in 1961, Obama *ran for President* in 1961? 1961 was a tumultuous year for the United States, especially in regards to race, race relations, and racial inequality. That year, in an effort to test a Supreme Court ban on the segregation of interstate bus travel, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) sent a small group of black and white Americans on desegregated buses from Washington, DC to New Orleans, LA. This "freedom ride" movement was interrupted by white supremacists, who attacked and even firebombed the buses. Pointedly, police and political leaders were slow to respond to this violence. Regardless of Obama's "biography," would Americans have elected him President in 1961 (History.com, n.d.)?

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[14] This text is from Wikibooks (n.d.).
[15] This text is from Hammond and Cheney (n.d.).

As Mills saw it, the sociological imagination can help us to cope with and change our "private troubles" and "biography" by directing our attention to the "public issues" and "history" that structure our lives. By stepping outside of our personal, self-centric view of the world, we can begin to see how society and culture – now, and over time – influence our attitudes, behavior, and life chances.[16]

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[16] This text is from Wikibooks (n.d.).

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5 – Culture and Socialization[17]

5.1 What is Culture?

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 a culture. <u>Culture</u> refers to all of the material and non-material products (including beliefs, values, and expectations for behaviors) that people create through interaction over time.

In a familiar context, culture recedes into the background: you know what is expected of you and how to conduct yourself, so your beliefs and behaviors are almost second nature. In an unfamiliar context, however, culture is made more obvious: you're struck by differences in expected beliefs and behaviors, and you become conscious of what others take for granted.

Take the case of traveling to work on public transportation. There are cultural differences in commuting in the United States, Cairo, Dublin, and Mumbai. In the United States, a commuter will find a marked bus stop, wait for the bus, pay the driver before boarding, and take a seat if one is available. In contrast, when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run; buses there don't often come to a full stop to take on commuters. Dublin commuters are expected to extend an arm to an approaching bus, indicating that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a train in Mumbai, commuters must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on crowded platforms.

In this single, simple example of commuting, culture's complexity is revealed. Culture consists of many components, including thoughts (e.g., expectations about personal space), behavior (e.g., extending an arm or pushing), and more tangible things (e.g., bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). <u>Material culture</u> refers to the tangible things of a culture, like 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. <u>Nonmaterial</u>

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[17] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from OpenStax (2017).

culture consists of the thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, however, as physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. In this example, a metro card is a material object, but it also represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely capitalism, and the widespread acceptance of the need to pay for public transportation.

Cultural Universals

While our movement between cultures brings differences to the fore, it also illuminates those cultural elements that we all share in common. 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, across cultures, there is variability in how a family unit is defined and how it functions. In some cultures, for example, family members from all generations live together in one household. In other cultures, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period of time before they form a nuclear family unit (i.e., a family consisting of a couple and their dependent children) of their own.

Anthropologist George Murdock (1897-1985) 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 cultural 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 across cultures (Murdock 1949).

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Despite how much humans have in common with each other, 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. For

example, in some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. In contrast, North Americans tend to keep more distance and maintain a large "personal space" during conversation.

Sociologists aim to understand cultural differences in a way that is unbiased, avoiding ethnocentrism, or the evaluation of another culture based on how it compares to one's own. According to sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906), ethnocentrism is grounded in the belief that one's own culture is better than all others. Notably, 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 on the "other" side. Our tendency towards ethnocentrism can be so strong that when we are confronted with all of the differences of a new culture, we often experience culture shock (i.e., disorientation and frustration).

To refrain from bias, many sociologists engage in cultural relativism. Cultural relativism 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 beliefs and behaviors. Yet, 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; it 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.")

Perhaps the greatest challenge for sociologists studying different cultures is this struggle to maintain perspective. It is impossible for anyone to keep all of their 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.

5.2 Categories of Culture

From a sociological perspective, culture consists of five categories or component parts: a shared system of symbols; shared technology; shared beliefs and ideologies; shared social norms; and shared values.

A System of Symbols

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. Symbols, or things that stand for or represent something else (i.e., gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words), help people comprehend that world. They provide clues to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In many cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional: stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. Each of the aforesaid objects are examples of material culture, yet, because they also function as symbols, these objects convey nonmaterial cultural meanings, as well. Some symbols are valuable only in what they represent: trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals serve no other purpose than to represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value. For example, a police officer's badge and uniform are symbols of authority and law enforcement. The sight of an officer in uniform triggers reassurance in some citizens, and annoyance, fear, and/or anger in others.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, one shared symbol system 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. In terms of nonverbal communication, 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).

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. Since the invention of the Internet, people have adapted to new nouns, such as "e-mail," and new verbs, such as "downloading," "texting," and "blogging." Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Yet, 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. The <u>Sapir-Whorf hypothesis</u> 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. More specifically, the hypothesis states that language shapes thought and reality (Swoyer 2003). Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word "ambivalent," they don't recognize an experience of uncertainty. Essentially, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, if a person can't *describe* an experience, the person can't *have* that experience.

Material Technology[18]

Material technology refers to all of the physical objects that we create and use to satisfy our needs and desires. In pre-industrial society, material technology was largely limited to a few tools, the homes people lived in, and the clothes people wore. Notably, one of the most important developments in the evolution of society was an object of material technology – the wheel.

Although the wheel was a great invention, material technology is obviously much more numerous and complex today. Because of technological advances during the past two decades, many societies now have a *wireless* culture defined by the dominance of smartphones, laptops, and GPS devices. Remarkably, these objects of material technology were unknown a generation ago. Technological development led to the creation of these objects, and to the new symbol

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[18] This text is from Barkan (n.d.).

system or language that we use to describe them and their functions. In turn, and as indicated above, this language helps to reinforce our commitment to these material objects.

Sometimes people in one society may find it difficult to understand the material technology of another society's culture. For example, if a member of a society in which there are no cell phones visited the United States, they would obviously have no idea what a cell phone is or of its importance. Conversely, if we were to visit that person's society, we might not recognize or appreciate the importance of their material technology.

Beliefs and Ideologies[19]

Beliefs are the tenets or convictions that an individual holds to be true. Ideologies are the belief systems that ground a society and/or culture. The difference between these two concepts is often difficult for students to grasp. This is because so many of our individual beliefs stem from the specific ideologies in which we're situated.

As an individual, you may believe that evil walks the earth or that children are smarter than adults. These are beliefs that you, personally, hold to be true. However, and at the same time, you might also believe that markets are the best decision-maker and that all voices matter. These are beliefs that are more widely held in America because they stem from our larger cultural ideologies of capitalism and democracy, respectively. Capitalism, democracy, communism, and socialism are ideologies that have long grounded the beliefs of the members of many modern societies.

Social Norms

Social norms are rules of conduct that stipulate proper or necessary social behavior. They are the visible and invisible behavioral expectations that structure society in accordance with what

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[19] This section is by Traver for this chapter.

that society defines as good, right, and important. Most social actors adhere to their society's norms.

Folkways are customary, widely-performed norms. Folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. They 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. Other accepted folkways in the United States may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). Those 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 – these norms help people negotiate their daily lives within a given culture.

Folkways are examples of informal norms, casual behaviors to which people generally and widely conform. Some informal norms are taught directly – "Kiss your Aunt Edna" or "Use your napkin" – while others are learned by observation, including observation of the consequences that follow when someone violates a norm.

Mores (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group, and violating them can bring serious consequences. Many mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment, and people who violate them are often shunned or banned from their group. The mores of the American 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 usually result in expulsion.

The strongest mores are codified into taboos and/or laws. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law. Laws are formal norms worked out, agreed upon, and written down in an effort to suit and serve the most people. Formal norms

are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced.

In terms of enforcement, people sanction certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and nonsupport. 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. In contrast, breaking norms can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label (i.e., "lazy, no-good") or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Values

Values are a culture's standard for discerning what is right and just in society. Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value that the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, Americans 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 that 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 opportunity for all people are valued in the United States, but the country's highest political offices have long 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 a society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, the way a 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, lawmakers, educators, social workers, and others strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices.

5.3 Socialization

Socialization is the process by which people learn to be a member of a culture. It describes the ways that people come to understand social norms, accept a society's ideological beliefs, and adhere to society's values. *Socialization* is not the same as *socializing* (i.e., interacting with others, like family, friends, and coworkers); to be precise, it is a learning process that occurs *through* socializing. In other words, if an individual is isolated from social interaction, they won't experience socialization and they'll be rendered ignorant of society's expected beliefs and behaviors.

Why Socialization Matters

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how human beings and their social worlds are completely intertwined. In fact, 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, that society will cease to exist. In order for a society to survive, whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it.

Yet, socialization is just as essential to individuals as it is to societies. Social interaction allows us to see ourselves through the eyes of others, and it teaches us who we are and how we fit into the world around us. It's also crucial to our acceptance and success: to function effectively in society, we have to learn the basics of that society's material and nonmaterial culture, and we have to learn language in order to communicate and to think.

Nature vs. Nurture

Sociology's emphasis on socialization reflects the long-running debate on the influence of nature vs. nurture. Some experts assert that who we are is a result of <u>nurture</u> – the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely on our genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth – or determined by <u>nature</u>.

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

While sociologists understand that genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, we tend to emphasize the effect that society (or "nurture") has on human behavior.

5.4 Agents of Socialization

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.

Family

Family is the primary – both first, and most significant – agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, and members of extended families, all teach a child what they need to know. For example, they show the child how to use material technology (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").

Keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors affect the way a family raises children. For example, we can use our sociological imagination to recognize that individual behaviors are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Likewise, we should understand that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization.

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 and playing in a game. As children grow into teenagers, peer groups help members develop identities separate from their parents. In fact, peer groups provide adolescents' first major socialization experiences outside

the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents' priorities, this impact is balanced by parental influence.

School

Most American children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Significantly, schools don't just serve a manifest social function by teaching children math, reading, science, and other subjects; they also serve a latent social function by socializing children into behaviors like practicing teamwork and following a schedule.

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 <u>hidden curriculum</u>, 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 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: while at school, children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, follow rules, meet expectations, take turns, and sit still for hours during the day.

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 at school. Most districts also require classes about American history and geography. As our academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to include new perspectives on other cultures and historical events; thus, children today are socialized into different national and world histories than were their parents.

The Workplace

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many American adults 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. For example, they must learn how to use new material culture (such as the copy machine) and to abide by new nonmaterial culture (such as expectations for speaking directly to the boss or sharing the office refrigerator).

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. This means that most people will become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments over the lifecourse.

Religion

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. These institutions teach participants how to interact with the religion's material culture (like a mezuzah, prayer rug, or communion wafer), and they uphold the beliefs, values, and ritualized behaviors of institutional members.

Government

Although rarely considered, 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 eighteen years old, as that is when legal responsibility for self begins. Likewise, sixty-five years old is widely considered the start of "old age" because it is when most Americans become eligible for senior benefits.

Each time we take on one of these new categorical identities – adult, senior, taxpayer – we must be socialized into our new social position. For example, when American males turn eighteen, they must register with the Selective Service System within thirty days to be entered into a database for possible military service. Likewise, seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and senior shopping discounts when they come of age. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

Mass Media

Mass media distribute impersonal information to a wide audience, via television, newspapers, radio, movies, music, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the television (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influence social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and consumer objects), as well as nonmaterial culture (like what to believe, what to value, and how to act), through mass media.

5.5 Socialization Across the Life Course

As the range of agents above indicates, socialization isn't a one-time or even a short-term event. In fact, socialization is an ongoing lifelong process.

In childhood, children experience anticipatory socialization, wherein they acquire the cultural content needed for future social positions. For example, in "playing pretend," children prepare to be doctors or lawyers and to set up homes and dress up.

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. Likewise, the pleasures of youth, such as wild nights out and serial dating, may become less socially acceptable. During adulthood, 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 significant others and students.

Resocialization

In the process of resocialization, we acquire new and replace old cultural content, as dictated by our move from an old to a new social position. Resocialization is necessary when a person goes to boarding school, serves time in jail, or moves to a senior care center. 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 forced to follow someone else's rules. A ship at sea is a total institution, as are religious convents, prisons, the military, and some cult organizations – all are places cut off from a larger society.

Typically, individuals are resocialized in total institutions through a two-part process. First, members endure a degradation ceremony. In a degradation ceremony, new members lose their old identity and are given new identities. This process is sometimes gentle, as when a person entering a senior care home is asked to leave their family home and belongings behind. In other situations, the degradation ceremony is more extreme, as when new prisoners lose freedom, rights (including the right to privacy), and personal belongings.

Second, after being stripped of their old identity, resocialized individuals must build a new identity that matches their new social context. In the military, soldiers go through basic training together, where they learn new rules and bond with one another. They follow structured schedules, 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 United States 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.

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6 – Social Structure[20]

6.1 What is Social Structure?

Social life is composed of many levels of building blocks, from the very micro to the very macro. These building blocks combine to form social structure. Social structure refers to the stable recurring patterns of behavior people create through interaction and through which a society is organized. Social structure can be both horizontal and vertical. While chapter seven deals with vertical social structure, this chapter focuses on horizontal social structure. Horizontal social structure refers to the relationships and characteristics of the communities to which we belong. Horizontal social structure comprises several components, to which we now turn, starting with the most micro and ending with the most macro.

Statuses

Social status is defined as the socially-defined position that someone occupies in society. While this position is often a job title, many other types of statuses exist: student, parent, sibling, relative, friend, etc. In sociology, status does not refer to the prestige of a position: "physician" is a social position with more prestige than "shoe-shiner," but both are equally considered a social status.

An individual can occupy several different statuses at the same time: someone can simultaneously be a banker, a troop leader, a father, a school board member, a volunteer at a homeless shelter, and a spouse. Status set refers to all of the social positions that an individual occupies.

Sociologists usually speak of three different types of statuses. The first is ascribed status, which refers to a status that someone is born with and has no control over. There are relatively few

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[20] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from University of Minnesota (2010).

ascribed statuses; some common examples are our race, parents' social class, parent's religious affiliation, and our biological relationships (child, grandchild, sibling, and so forth).

The second is <u>achieved status</u>, which refers to a status that you accomplish, at some point after birth. This achievement is sometimes the result of your own efforts and sometimes the result of good or bad luck. The status of "student" is an achieved status, as is the status of "restaurant server" or "romantic partner." Significantly, our ascribed statuses, like our race and social class, can have an impact on our ability to acquire and maintain many achieved statuses (such as "college graduate"). Likewise, our achieved statuses can be viewed positively or negatively. While society usually views achieved statuses like "college student" positively, it generally views achieved statuses such as "burglar" negatively.

The third is <u>master status</u>, which refers to a status that is so important that it overrides all other statuses one may hold. For example, while "working parent" is a social position defined by two achieved statuses, the expectations and importance of parenting may make "parent" (not "worker") one's master status.

Roles

Whatever its type, every status is accompanied by a <u>role</u>, which is the behavior expected of someone – and, in fact, *any* and *every*one – with a certain status. For example, you are a "student," and you share this status in common with other readers of this text. As a student, there are roles expected of you; these roles include coming to class regularly, doing all of the assigned reading, and studying for exams. A major dimension of socialization is learning the roles our society has for each status and then behaving in the way that status' roles demand.

Regular and predictable interaction is aided by our socialization into statuses and roles. Suppose you are shopping in a department store. Your status is "shopper," and the roles expected of you as a shopper – and of *all* shoppers – include looking quietly at items in the store, taking the items you want to purchase to a checkout line, and paying for them. The person who takes your money is occupying another status in the store, that of "cashier." The

roles expected of that cashier – and of *all* cashiers in *all* stores – is to accept your payment in a businesslike way and to put your items in a bag. Because shoppers and cashiers have these mutual expectations, their social interactions are possible.

Groups

Groups are the next component of social structure. A <u>group</u> consists of two or more people who regularly interact and share a common identity. To paraphrase John Donne, the 17th-century English poet, no one is an island; almost all people are members of many groups, including families, groups of friends, and groups of coworkers in a workplace.

It is important to distinguish social groups from two related concepts: social categories and social aggregates. A <u>social category</u> is a collection of individuals who have at least one attribute in common but who do not necessarily interact or identify with each other. "Music-lover" is an example of a social category. All music-lovers have at least one thing in common, their love of music, even though they don't interact, share any other similarities, or identify with each other. Gender, race, and ethnicity are the basis for many social categories. Other common social categories are based on our religious affiliation, geographical residence, and social class.

A <u>social aggregate</u> is a collection of people who share a common physical location but who do not necessarily interact or identify with each other. A crowd at a sporting event, the audience at a movie, and a long line of people at the Department of Motor Vehicles are all examples of social aggregates.

A common distinction is made between primary groups and secondary groups. A <u>primary group</u> is usually small, characterized by extensive interaction, defined by strong emotional ties, and lasting for a long period of time. Members of such groups care a lot about each other and identify strongly with the group. Indeed, their membership in a primary group gives them much of their social identity. Charles Horton Cooley (1909) called these groups primary because they are the first groups we belong to and because they are so important for social life. The family is

the primary group that comes most readily to mind, but small peer friendship groups are also primary groups.

Although primary groups are the most important groups in our lives, we belong to many more secondary groups, which are groups that are larger and more impersonal and that exist, often for a relatively short period of time, to achieve a specific purpose. Secondary group members feel less emotionally attached to each other and less identified with or loyal to the group. The sociology class for which you are reading this is an example of a secondary group, as are the clubs and organizations to which you might belong. Other secondary groups include religious, business, governmental, and civic clubs. In some of these groups, members get to know each other better than in other secondary groups; these members might find themselves creating primary groups out of their secondary-group memberships.

Organizations

One of the most important types of groups is the formal organization, a large secondary group that follows explicit rules and procedures to achieve specific goals and tasks. For better or for worse, organizations are an essential feature of modern societies. Our banks, our hospitals, and our supermarkets are just a few organizations that we encounter regularly.

Max Weber recognized long ago that as societies become more complex, their procedures for accomplishing tasks rely less on traditional customs and beliefs and more on rational (i.e., rule-guided and impersonal) methods of decision making. The development of formal organizations, he emphasized, allowed complex societies to accomplish their tasks in the most efficient way possible (Weber, 1921/1978).

Building on Weber, Amitai Etzioni (1975) developed a popular typology of organizations. This typology is based on how an organization induces and maintains membership. Utilitarian organizations (also called remunerative organizations) provide an income or another personal benefit. Business organizations, ranging from large corporations to small Mom-and-Pop corner stores, are examples of utilitarian organizations. Additionally, colleges and universities are

utilitarian organizations – both for the people who work at them and for their students, who certainly see education and a diploma as benefits gained from higher education.

In contrast, <u>normative organizations</u> (also called voluntary organizations) allow people to pursue their moral goals and commitments. Their members do not get paid; instead they contribute their time or money to the organization's mission. The many examples of normative organizations include the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Kiwanis Club and other civic organizations, and organizations with political objectives, such as the National Council of La Raza. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/1994) observed some 175 years ago that the United States was a nation of joiners, and contemporary research finds that Americans indeed rank above average among democratic nations in membership in normative organizations (Curtis, Baer, & Grabb, 2001).

Some people end up in organizations involuntarily because they've violated the law or been judged to be mentally ill. Juvenile detention facilities and mental hospitals are examples of <u>coercive organizations</u>, which, as total institutions, seek to control all aspects of their members' lives. Our chance of ending up in coercive organizations depends on various aspects of our social backgrounds. For prisons, one of these aspects is geographical. For example, the imprisonment rate (i.e., the number of inmates per 100,000 residents) is highest in the American South and in the American West. Do you think that this pattern exists because crime rates are highest in these regions or because these regions are more likely to send convicted criminals to prisons?

Social Networks

A <u>social network</u> is a broad web of social ties radiating out from a given individual linking that individual to a large number of others. While humans have always existed in social networks, modern life is increasingly characterized by them. And, as Instagram and other social media show, social networks can be incredibly extensive. In fact, a social network can be so large that one individual in a network may know little or nothing about another individual in that network (e.g., a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend). But these "friends of friends" can sometimes be

an important source of practical advice and other kinds of help. They can "open doors" in the job market, introduce a potential romantic partner, and even share information about the next big trend.

When considering career development, we often hear of the importance of "networking," or taking advantage of your connections with people who have connections to other people who can help you land a job. You do not necessarily know these "other people" who might be of help to you, but you do know the people who know them. Your ties to the "other people" are weak, but research indicates that your involvement in this network can help you find a job (see Granovetter 1973).

Social networks also bring benefits in other areas of life. For example, if you come down with a serious medical condition, you would probably first talk with your primary care physician, who would refer you to a specialist for professional and impartial care. But what if you have friends or relatives who are physicians? Because of their connections with other physicians, you might be able to secure an early appointment. And, because these specialists understand that you know other physicians in their network, they may treat you with more sensitivity and respect. In the long run, you may even get better medical care from these physicians. But who is most likely to have such connections? Factors such as social class and occupational status, race and ethnicity, and gender affect how likely we are to have social networks that can help us get jobs, good medical care, and other advantages.

Social Institutions

Social institutions are mini systems of social behavior with a recognized purpose rooted in a relatively stable value system. There are seven social institutions in American society: politics, education, family, healthcare, religion, the economy, and mass media. These social institutions help the United States satisfy basic social functions in key areas of social life. For example, education is a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic

knowledge, skills, and cultural norms. Additionally, the economy is a social institution through which a society's resources (i.e., goods and services) are managed. [21]

As macro-level entities, social institutions are an object of analysis for functionalists and conflict theorists, alike. Functionalists argue that a change in one social institution leads to a change in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of our economy meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labor to run a farm. This same shift also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, and it even spurred new religions and forms of religious worship. Industrialization also informed the way we educate our children: while schools were once set up to accommodate an agricultural calendar, teaching models today is largely focused on preparing students for more industrial jobs. In other words, a change – like industrialization – in one social institution brings an interconnected change in another social institution. [22]

On the other hand, conflict theorists contend that social institutions have failings that prevent the United States from meeting all of its needs. Given their focus on social inequality, they argue that social institutions often fail people because of their social class, race, ethnicity, and/or gender. Because these institutions affect our behavior, attitudes, and life chances, they have long been, and will continue to be, sources of significant social controversies.

Societies

The largest component of social structure is, of course, society itself. Society refers to a population of people who live in a defined geographic area, share a common culture and identity, and are subject to the same political authority. Societies certainly differ in many ways: some are larger in population and some are smaller; some are modern and some are more traditional. Since the origin of sociology during the 19th century, sociologists have tried to

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[21] This text is from Little (2016).
[22] This text is from Openstax (2017).

understand how and why modern, industrial society developed. Chapter eight takes up this focus on social or societal change.

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7 – Social Stratification[23]

Social structure can also have a vertical dimension. Vertical social structure, more commonly called social inequality, refers to ways in which a society or group ranks people in a hierarchy, with some more "equal" than others. In the United States and most other industrial societies, class, race and ethnicity, and gender help determine one's social ranking, or position, in the vertical social structure. Some people are at the top of society, while many more are in the middle or at the bottom. People's positions in society's hierarchy have profound consequences for their attitudes, behaviors, and life chances across generations.

7.1 What Is Social Stratification?

Sociologists use the term social stratification to describe the systemic nature of vertical social structure. Social stratification refers to a society's organization of people into tiers, which facilitate patterns of unequal access to basic, yet highly valuable, social resources.

You may remember the word "stratification" from geology class. The distinct vertical layers found in rock, called strata, 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 stratified social structure. Other groups of people, with progressively fewer and fewer resources, represent the lower layers of our society.

In the United States, people like to believe everyone has an equal chance at success. However, sociologists recognize that social stratification is a society-wide system that makes for unequal experiences. While there are always inequalities between individuals, sociologists are interested in larger social patterns. In other words, stratification is not about individual

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[23] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from OpenStax (2017).

inequalities, but about systematic inequalities based on group membership, categories, and classes. Although individuals may support or fight inequalities, social stratification is created and supported by society as a whole.

The factors that define stratification vary in different societies. For example, in some cultures, wisdom and charisma are valued, and people who have them are revered more than those who don't. In other cultures, the elderly are esteemed. Societies' cultural beliefs both establish and reinforce the inequalities of stratification.

One key determinant of our place in a social stratification system is the social standing of our parents. We inherit many of their social standings, and we are also socialized into the cultural norms that define them. As a result, our social standing can become a comfort zone, a familiar lifestyle, and an identity.

7.2 Class Stratification

Class refers to the economic position in which one is situated and the opportunities associated with that position. Classes are sets of people who share a similar position with regard to wealth (the net value of money and assets a person has accumulated), income (a person's annual wages), the highest level of education earned, and occupation (particularly occupational prestige).

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 means by which to distinguish classes, because wealth can be generationally to perpetuate the class structure.

The Upper Class in the United States

The upper class represents the top of the class stratification system, and only the powerful elite get to see the view from there. J.D. Foster, an economist, defines the top 20 percent of America's highest earners as "upper income." Within that group, people with extreme wealth, who make up one percent of the entire population, own one-third of the country's wealth (Beeghley 2008).

Money provides not just access to material goods, but also access to a lot of power. As corporate leaders, members of the upper class make decisions that affect the job status of millions of people. As media owners, they influence the collective identity of the nation. As board members of the most influential colleges and universities, they influence cultural attitudes and values. As philanthropists, they establish foundations to support specific social causes. As campaign contributors, they sway 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 that you have earned and built yourself). These means to wealth have traditionally been associated with different social standings. People of old money, firmly situated in the upper class for generations, have historically held high prestige.

The Middle Class in the United States

While many people consider themselves middle class, there are differing ideas about what that means. Approximately 60 percent of America's workers constitute the middle class, which includes people with annual incomes from $30,000 to $150,000. These figures help to 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 in school. Lower-middle-class people

tend to hold bachelor's degrees from four-year colleges or associate's degrees from two-year community or technical colleges.

Comfort is central to a middle-class identity. Middle-class people work hard and live fairly comfortable lives. Upper-middle-class people tend to pursue careers that earn sufficient incomes. They provide their families with large homes and nice cars, and their children receive high-quality education and healthcare (Gilbert 2010).

In the lower-middle class, people hold jobs – like technical, lower-level management and administrative support positions – that carry some prestige and are supervised by members of the upper-middle class. With a lower-middle-class income, people can afford a decent lifestyle, but they struggle to maintain it and to build significant savings. When budgets are tight, lower-middle-class people are often the first to lose their jobs.

The Lower Class in the United States

In the United States, the bottom 20 percent of American earners are defined as "lower income." 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, members of the lower class have less of an educational background and earn smaller incomes. They work jobs that require little prior skill or experience and they often perform routine tasks under close supervision. Public support, through food assistance, medical care, and housing, is often central to the experiences of members of the lower class.

Working-class people, the highest subcategory of the lower class, often land decent jobs in fields like custodial engineering and food service. This work is hands-on and often physically demanding, such as landscaping, cooking, cleaning, and building.

Beneath the working class is the working poor. Like the working class, they have low-paying or minimum-waged employment. However, their jobs rarely offer benefits such as healthcare or retirement planning, and their positions are often seasonal or temporary. Working-class

Americans often toil as sharecroppers, migrant farm workers, housecleaners, and day laborers, and many struggle to achieve success or complete milestones in school.

The underclass is the United States' lowest tier. Members of the underclass are often unemployed or under-employed. Those who do hold jobs typically perform menial tasks for little pay, and they often suffer from housing insecurity or homelessness.

Social Mobility

Significantly, class stratification systems are open: people are free to move between the layers or strata. For example, we can earn more education or income than our parents, and we can socialize with and marry members of other classes. Social mobility refers to the ability to change class positions within a class stratification system. When people improve or diminish their economic status in a way that affects their social class, they experience social mobility.

Intragenerational mobility refers to an individual's experience of upward or downward social mobility. Upward social mobility refers to an increase – or upward shift – in an individual's 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. Yet, while there are many stories of people rising from modest beginnings to fame and fortune, the truth is that the number of people who rise from poverty to wealth is very small. Still, upward social 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 also move up socially.

In contrast, downward social mobility indicates a lowering of an individual's social class. Some people move downward because of business setbacks, unemployment, or illness. Dropping out of school, losing a job, or getting a divorce can also result in a loss of income or status.

It is not uncommon for different generations of a family to belong to different social classes. Intergenerational mobility refers to those changes in class status that occur over generations. For example, an upper-class executive may have parents who belong to the middle class, where she was raised.

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 changes in individual lives or families. In the first half of the twentieth century, industrialization expanded the American economy, raising the standard of living and leading to upward structural mobility for many. In today's economy, the recent recession and the outsourcing of jobs overseas have contributed to high unemployment rates. As a result, many people have experienced economic setbacks, creating a wave of downward structural mobility.

7.3 Racial and Ethnic Stratification

The meaning of race, as a concept, has varied over time. Today, we use "race" to refer to a category of people labeled and treated as similar because of allegedly common physical traits determined by heredity and genes. Social science organizations, including the American Association of Anthropologists, the American Sociological Association, and the American Psychological Association, have all taken an official position rejecting biological explanations of race. All three groups emphasize the social construction of race, arguing that race is not biologically identifiable and that previous racial categories were arbitrarily assigned, based on pseudoscience, and used to justify racist practices (Omi and Winant 1994; Graves 2003).

Ethnicity is a concept that refers to a category of people bound together through actual or perceived common ancestry, culture, and identity. Like race, the meaning of ethnicity has changed over time, with individuals today identifying with ethnicities in complicated, and even contradictory, ways.

Racial and Ethnic Categories in the United States

Americans regularly engage racial and ethnic categories – through the census, affirmative action initiatives, nondiscrimination laws, and in personal day-to-day relations. A brief account of some of these categories follow.

Constituting the only non-immigrant ethnic group in the United States, <u>Native or Indigenous Americans</u> once numbered in the millions; today, however, they make up only 0.9 percent of the American populace. Currently, about 2.9 million people identify as Native American, while an additional 2.3 million identify as Native American *and* another ethnic group (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel 2012).

The category <u>Black/African American</u> is complex. Many Black Americans may have more recent ties to Europe or the Caribbean, seeing themselves as Dominican American or Dutch American instead of African American. Furthermore, immigrants from Africa may feel that they have more of a claim to the term "African American" than those who are many generations removed. This category also includes descendants of enslaved Americans, who were kidnapped from Africa and sold into slavery in the United States. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) estimates that 13.2 percent of the United States' population is Black/African American.

<u>Hispanic Americans</u> also reflect a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities. In U.S. census reports of 2014, 17.1 percent of the total American population self-identified as Hispanic. Additional census reports indicate that about 75 percent of those Americans who identify as Hispanic report being of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban origin. Notably, while there are significant differences among the groups that identify or are categorized as Hispanic, there are also different names for the category itself (i.e., Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, etc.).

The category <u>Asian American</u> denotes a diversity of cultures, experiences, and backgrounds, as well. For example, Japanese Americans who have lived in the United States for three

generations are situated differently than Laotian Americans who have only been in the United States for a few years. The most recent estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) suggests that about 5.3 percent of the American population identifies as Asian.

If ever a category was hard to define, <u>Arab American</u> is it. After all, Hispanic Americans or Asian Americans are so designated because of their counties of origin while, for Arab Americans, Arabia has not existed for centuries. Geographically, the Arab region comprises the Middle East and parts of northern Africa. People whose ancestry is tied to that area, or who primarily speak Arabic, may consider themselves Arab Americans. As in previous years, the 2010 U.S. Census did not offer "Arab American" as a census category; individuals who want to be counted as Arab Americans had to check the box for "some other race" and then write in "Arab American." It is important to note, however, that when U.S. Census data is tallied, "Arab American" is currently re-classified as "white." This is problematic, denying Arab Americans opportunities for federal assistance. According to the best estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Arab American population grew from 850,000 in 1990 to 1.2 million in 2000, an increase of .07 percent (Asi and Beaulieu 2013).

<u>White ethnic Americans</u> also come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), 77.7 percent of American adults currently identify as white, alone. Those white Americans who do ethnically identify tend to claim German, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European heritage. U.S. Census reports from 2008 shows that 16.5 percent of respondents reported being of German descent – the largest group in the country. Additionally, there are now more Irish Americans in the United States than there are Irish in Ireland.

Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

<u>Stereotypes</u> are oversimplified generalizations about groups of people. While frequently based on race and ethnicity, they can be grounded in almost any characteristic. Stereotypes may be "positive" (usually about one's own group, as when women suggest they are less likely than

men to complain about pain), but they are most often "negative" (usually toward other groups, as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, a stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Where do stereotypes come from? Significantly, *new* stereotypes are rarely created; rather, we tend to recycle generalizations about previously subordinate groups to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, most of the stereotypes now used to characterize immigrant groups from South America and Africa were used to characterize earlier waves of Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants.

Prejudice refers to the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes someone holds about a group. A prejudice is not based on experience; instead, it is a prejudgment originating outside actual experience. While prejudice is not necessarily specific to race, racism is a strong type of prejudice; one used to justify the belief that humans are subdivided into groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked hierarchically

Racism is also a set of practices used by a racial *majority* group to disadvantage a racial *minority* group. Institutional racism refers to the way in which racism is embedded in the fabric of society. For example, the disproportionate number of black men arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes may reflect racial profiling, a form of institutional racism.

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. 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 American history. In the late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for business owners to hang signs that read, "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply." And southern Jim Crow laws, with their "Whites Only" signs, exemplify overt discrimination that is not legal today.

While laws against race-based discrimination strive to address this set of social problems, discrimination is not easily eradicated. Even if a magic pill managed to remove 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 in our society.

Institutional discrimination occurs when a society's institutions have developed with and through the embedded disenfranchisement of a group. Institutional discrimination can also include advance a group's status, such in the case of white privilege, which refers to the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant racial group.

7.4 Stratification by Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

Sex refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the sexual and reproductive systems) and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity. Gender refers to the culturally-variable behaviors, personal traits, and social positions that society attributes to being male or female.

Dichotomous views of sex (the notion that someone is *either* male *or* female) and gender (the notion that behavior, for example, is *either* masculine *or* feminine) are specific to certain cultures and not universal. The idea that sex and gender are binaries (involving only two options) is also culturally and historically specific. In many cultures around the world, gender is viewed as a fluid accomplishment (i.e., an identity that can change over time) and individuals are gendered in multiple, diverse ways.

A person's sexual orientation is their physical, mental, emotional, and sexual attraction to a particular sex. Traditionally, sexual orientation was divided into four categories: *heterosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the other sex; *homosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the same sex; *bisexuality*, the attraction to individuals of either sex; and

asexuality, no attraction to either sex. Today, researchers understand that many more categories of sexual orientation exist, and that sexual orientation is fluid, as well.

Alfred Kinsey was among the first to conceptualize sexuality as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy of gay or straight. He created a six-point rating scale that ranges from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. In his 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey wrote, "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). The Kinsey scale indicates that sexuality can be measured by more than just heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality-Based Inequalities

Children learn at a young age that there are distinct expectations for boys and girls. In fact, cross-cultural studies reveal that children are aware of gender roles by the age of 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.

Gender stereotyping involves overgeneralizing about the attitudes, traits, or behavioral patterns of women or men. Gender stereotypes form the basis of sexism. Sexism refers to prejudiced beliefs that value one sex over another, and it varies in its level of severity. In parts of the world where women are strongly *under*valued, young girls may not be given the same access to nutrition, healthcare, and education as boys. Furthermore, they may grow up believing that they *deserve* to be treated differently than boys (UNICEF 2011; Thorne 1993).

The United States is one society characterized by gender stratification, particularly in 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 make less than her male counterpart (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Women in the paid labor force also tend to 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 (or "second shift") keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure, as well (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Notably, gender stratification through the division of labor is not exclusive to the United States. According to George Murdock's classic work *Outline of World Cultures* (1954), all societies classify work by gender. While the specifics of this classification are not universal, Murdock did find an important consistency: across 324 societies, nearly all of the jobs assigned to men were given greater prestige (Murdock and White 1968). In other words, even if the job types were very similar and the differences between men's and women's work were slight, men's work was still considered more vital.

Sexual orientation also mediates how Americans are treated in school, the workplace, and the military. According to Sears and Mallory (2011), General Social Survey data from 2008 showed that 27 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents reported experiencing sexual-orientation-based discrimination during the five years prior to the survey.

Sexual-orientation-based discrimination is often grounded in heterosexism, an ideology and a set of institutional practices that privilege heterosexuals and heterosexuality over other sexual orientations (Herek 1990). Much like racism and sexism, heterosexism is a systematic disadvantage embedded in our social institutions, offering power to those who conform to heterosexual expectations while simultaneously disadvantaging those who do not. Homophobia, an extreme or irrational aversion to gay people, accounts for further stereotyping and discrimination. Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation did not come into effect in the United States until the last few years.

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8 – Social Change[24]

8.1 Macro-Level Social Change

A central focus of sociology is <u>social change</u>, the process by which cultures, social institutions, social structure, and social interactions are transformed. Sociologists are particularly interested in the nature of social change and the *why* and *how* of social change.

Consider, for example, the social changes that define our collective global history. Our earliest ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers. Small groups of extended families roamed from place to place looking for means to subsist. They settled 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 distributed and ate what they caught/gathered as soon as possible because they had no way of preserving or transporting it. Once the resources of an area ran low, they moved on, taking everything that they possessed with them. Food reserves only consisted of what could be carried. Typically, groups did not trade essential goods with other groups due to scarcity. The use of resources was governed by the practice of <u>usufruct</u>, the distribution of resources according to need.

The Agricultural Revolution

Things changed 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. For example, the earliest examples of agriculture appeared in the Middle East around 11,000-10,000 years ago. Agriculture developed much 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 and Bellwood, 2003).

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[24] Except where otherwise indicated, the text in this chapter comes from Little (2016).

Agriculture began with the simplest of technologies, like a pointed stick to break up the soil, but it 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 to feed themselves and others, as well. Knowing there would be abundant food each year 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 and technologies emerged. 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 began 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, as well as the judges, clerks, lawyers, and police who administered and enforced those laws. 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).

As city-states grew into countries and countries grew into empires, their economies grew, as well. And, 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 opportunities and resources and to establish and secure colonies all over the world. This ushered in a long (and continuing) period of economic development and human and environmental exploitation.

The Industrial Revolution

Up until the end of the 18th century, most manufacturing was done using manual labor. This changed as research led to the development of machines that could be used to manufacture

goods. In fact, just a small number of technological innovations led to massive changes across economies. In the textile industries, the spinning of cotton, worsted yarn, and flax could be done more quickly and less expensively using new machines (Bond et al., 2003). Likewise, the use of coke from coal in all stages of smelting dramatically lowered the cost of iron production while increasing availability (Bond, 2003). Yet, James Watt ushered in what many scholars recognize as the greatest technological innovation, which revolutionized transportation and the production of goods – the 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.

At the same time, the Industrial Revolution also changed agricultural practices. 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, which helped to move agricultural economies from subsistence models to the pursuit of profit.

While many people's lives were improving, the Industrial Revolution also birthed and accentuated significant societal problems. In fact, there were many inequalities built into the system of industrialization. Owners amassed vast fortunes while laborers, including young children, toiled for long hours in unsafe conditions. Workers' rights, wage protection, and safe work environments were issues around which people began to organize for reform. Many of these concerns – and collective actions – continue today.

Postindustrial Societies and the Information Age

More recently, modernized nations have transitioned into postindustrial societies, where one of the most valuable goods is information. Those who have the means to produce, store, and disseminate information are leaders in this type of society.

The rapid increase in computer use is central to the transition to a postindustrial or information economy. Nowadays, fewer people are needed to work in factories because computerized robots handle many of the tasks. Other manufacturing jobs have also been outsourced to distant countries as a result of the developing global economy.

The growth of the Internet has created industries that exist almost entirely online. Likewise, technology has changed 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 are valuable commodities in a postindustrial economy.

8.2 Causes of Social Change

Across each of the aforesaid moments of macro-level social change, we see evidence of five agents or mechanisms of change. These agents are: social institutions, technology, population, social movements, and the environment.

Social Institutions

Functionalists argue that a change in one social institution yields changes in *all* social institutions. This argument is supported by an analysis of changes in – and because of – the economy.

Today, for example, many societal changes are related to the globalization of the economy. Globalization is defined as the process by which everyone/everything on earth becomes increasingly interconnected. Beginning in the 1970s, Western governments began to deregulate social services while granting greater liberties to private businesses. As a result, world markets became dominated by unregulated, international flows of capital investment and new multinational networks of corporations. With the introduction of new technologies, industrial production was moved to countries where labor costs were cheapest and profit greatest. A new global economy emerged to replace nationally based economies.

The existence of a global economy means that national borders are markedly less relevant to everyday life today than they were 50 years ago. The terrain on which corporate, political, environmental, and other types of decisions are made is no longer confined to the boundaries of the nation, which diminishes the ability of national governments to independently control economic and foreign policy. Thus, globalization also represents a weakening of the autonomy and power of nations.

Happening alongside the process of globalization is cultural diffusion, which refers to the global spread of material and nonmaterial culture. While globalization refers to the integration of markets, cultural diffusion refers to the integration of cultures. Middle-class Americans can now fly overseas and return with an appreciation for Thai noodles or Italian gelato. Access to television and the internet has brought the lifestyles and values portrayed in Hollywood 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 spread into another.

Global migration also encourages the diffusion of cultural ideas and artifacts, as people from around the world disperse from their original homeland into diasporas (or scattered, global communities). Migrants, refugees, and temporary foreign workers have long brought their beliefs, attitudes, languages, cuisines, music, religious practices, and other elements of life with them when they moved. What is different today, however, is the way in which electronic media has made it possible for migrants to keep in daily contact with the friends, family, and culture

left behind. Notably, these same media allow those left behind to imagine future homes elsewhere in the world, as well. In the era of globalization, the experience of culture is increasingly disembedded from location.

Cultural hybridity is one of the consequences of the increased global flows of capital, people, culture, and entertainment. Hybrid cultures are new forms of culture that arise from cross-cultural exchange, especially in the aftermath of colonialism. On one hand, there are blendings of different cultural elements that were, at one time, distinct and locally based. On the other hand, there are processes of indigenization and appropriation in which local cultures adopt and redefine foreign cultural forms.

Technology

When considering "technology," you probably picture computers and cell phones; however, and as discussed in chapter five, technology is not just a product of the modern era. For example, fire and stone tools were important forms of technology developed during the Stone Age. And, just as digital technology shapes how we live today, stone tools changed how premodern humans lived, as well. From the first calculator, invented as an abacus in 2400 BCE in Babylon, to the predecessor of the modern computer, created in 1882 by Charles Babbage, all of our technological innovations are advancements on previous iterations.

All aspects of our lives today are influenced by technology. In fact, globalization is impacted in large part by technological diffusion, the spread of technology across borders. A 2008 World Bank report found that technological progress and economic growth rates were linked, and that the rise in technological progress has helped to improve the situations of many living in absolute poverty around the globe (World Bank, 2008). Yet, it is often the population most in need of technology that lacks access to it. For example, technology to purify water could save many lives, but the villages most in need of water purification don't have access to the funds to purchase technology or the technological expertise required to introduce it as a solution.

Notably, the increasing gap between the technological haves and have-nots – sometimes called the digital divide – occurs both locally and globally.

Further, there are often risks associated with the development and use of new technologies, particularly in the information age: 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 are just three such risks.

Population

We recently hit a population milestone of 7 billion humans living on the Earth's surface. While it took approximately 12 years to grow from 6 to 7 billion people, and it is estimated that the global population will grow from 7 to 8 billion by 2025 (United Nations Population Fund 2011). How will that population be distributed? Where is that population going to be highest? Where is it slowing down? Where will people live? To explore these questions, we turn to demography, or the study of populations. Three of the most important components affecting population are fertility, mortality, and migration.

The fertility rate of a society is a measure noting the number of children born. The fertility number is generally lower than the fecundity number, which measures the potential number of children that could be born to women of childbearing age. Sociologists measure fertility using the crude birthrate (the number of live births per 1,000 people per year).

The mortality rate of a society is a measure of the number of people who die. The crude death rate is a number derived from the number of deaths per 1,000 people per year. When analyzed together, fertility and mortality rates help researchers understand the overall growth occurring in a population.

Another key element in studying populations is the movement of people into and out of an area. This movement is called migration. Migration may take the form of immigration, which describes people's movement *into* an area to take up permanent residence, or emigration,

which refers to people's movement *out of* an area to another place of permanent residence. Migration might be voluntary (as when students study abroad), involuntary (as when Somalians left the drought and famine-stricken portions of their nation for shelter in refugee camps), or forced (as when many Native/Indigenous Americans were removed from their ancestral lands).

The growth rate of a population, or how much the population of a defined area grows or shrinks in a specific time period, is therefore a function of the number of births and deaths as well as the number of people migrating to and from a country. It is calculated as the current population minus the initial population (at the beginning of the time period) divided by the initial population (then multiplied by 100).

Population changes can be due to random external forces, like an epidemic, or shifts in social institutions. Regardless of why and how such change happens, population trends have a tremendous impact on all aspects of society. For example, in the United States, we are experiencing an increase in our senior population as baby boomers begin to retire. This will change the way many of our social institutions are organized. For example, there is now 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 also concern about labor shortages and the knowledge gap, as the most senior and accomplished leaders in different sectors retire. Furthermore, 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.

Social Movements

Collective behavior refers to any non-institutionalized activity in which several people voluntarily engage. A social movement is a form of collective behavior that aims to further common interests through collaborative action outside the sphere of established institutions. Social movements aim to create social change (e.g., Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring), to

resist social change (e.g., the anti-globalization movement), or to provide a political voice to those otherwise disenfranchised (e.g., the civil rights movement).

Social movements can occur on the local, national, and global stage, and their foci can vary. Reform movements seek to change something specific about the social structure. Examples include antinuclear groups and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Revolutionary movements seek to completely change every aspect of society. These would include the Cuban 26th of July Movement (under Fidel Castro), the 1960s counterculture movement, and anarchist collectives. Redemptive movements are "meaning seeking," and their goal is to provoke inner change or spiritual growth in individuals. Organizations pushing these movements might include Alcoholics Anonymous, New Age movements, or Christian fundamentalist groups. Alternative movements are focused on self-improvement and limited, specific changes to individual beliefs and behavior. These include groups like the Slow Food movement, Planned Parenthood, and barefoot-jogging advocates. Resistance movements seek to prevent or undo changes to the social structure. The Ku Klux Klan and pro-life movements fall into this category.

Significantly, sociologists often study the life cycle of social movements – how they emerge, grow, and, in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outline a four-stage movement life-cycle. 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 paid staff. When people fall away, adopt a new movement, the movement brings about the change it sought, or people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the decline stage.

The Environment

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. We also see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of those disasters.

Presently, we face a combination of too many people and the increased demands made by these people 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 far away. These issues have birthed social movements and are bringing about social change as the public becomes more educated and aware.

The subfield of environmental sociology studies how humans interact with their environments. Two key concepts in environmental sociology are the concepts of carrying capacity, which refers to the maximum amount of life that can be sustained within a given area, and the commons, which refers to the collective resources – like air, water, plant and animal life, and ecosystems – that humans share in common and that have remained outside of private ownership or processes of commodification and trade. In an environmental context, the carrying capacity of different environments depends on the commons to the degree that the commons are necessary for sustaining life. When the commons are threatened through pollution or overexploitation, the carrying capacity of the environment is degraded.

Climate change is a global issue in which the degradation of the global commons through ecologically unsustainable human activities threatens the earth's carrying capacity as a whole. Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures due to human activity and, in particular, the release of greenhouse gases into the environment. A significant effect of climate change is more extreme weather. There are increasingly more record-breaking weather phenomena, from the number of Category 4 hurricanes to the amount of snowfall in a given winter. While the scientific consensus on climate change is overwhelming, some members of the American public continue to debate the topic. What's this argument about? The idea of

costly regulations that would require expensive operational upgrades has been a source of great anxiety to much of the business community, and, as a rebuttal, they argue, via lobbyists, that such regulations would be disastrous for the economy.

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