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Summary and Review
Even from the glow of the faded red-and-white exit sign, its faint light barely illuminating the upper bunk, I could see that the sheet was filthy. Resigned to another night of fitful sleep, I reluctantly crawled into bed.

The next morning, I joined the long line of disheveled men leaning against the chain-link fence. Their faces were as downcast as their clothes were dirty. Not a glimmer of hope among them.

No one spoke as the line slowly inched forward. When my turn came, I was handed a cup of coffee, a white plastic spoon, and a bowl of semiliquid that I couldn’t identify. It didn’t look like any food I had seen before. Nor did it taste like anything I had ever eaten.

My stomach fought the foul taste, every spoonful a battle. But I was determined. “I will experience what they experience,” I kept telling myself. My stomach reluctantly gave in and accepted its morning nourishment.

The room was eerily silent. Hundreds of men were eating, each immersed in his own private hell, his head awash with disappointment, remorse, bitterness.

As I stared at the Styrofoam cup that held my coffee, grateful for at least this small pleasure, I noticed what looked like tooth marks. I shrugged off the thought, telling myself that my long weeks as a sociological observer of the homeless were finally getting to me. “This must be some sort of crease from handling,” I concluded.

I joined the silent ranks of men turning in their bowls and cups. When I saw the man behind the counter swishing out Styrofoam cups in a washtub of cloudy water, I began to feel sick to my stomach. I knew then that the jagged marks on my cup really had come from a previous mouth.

How much longer did this research have to last? I felt a deep longing to return to my family—to a welcome world of clean sheets, healthy food, and “normal” conversations.
Seeing the Broader Social Context

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

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

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

Consider a newborn baby. If we were to take the baby away from its U.S. parents and place it with a Yanomamö Indian tribe in the jungles of South America, you know that when the child begins to speak, his or her words will not be in English. You also know that the child will not think like an American. He or she will not grow up

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The Sociological Perspective

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

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

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

Granted their deprivation, it is not surprising that the homeless are not brimming with optimism. This scene at the Atlanta Union Mission in Atlanta, Georgia, is typical of homeless shelters, reminiscent of the many meals I ate in soup kitchens with men like this.
wanting credit cards, for example, or designer jeans, a new car, and the latest video game. Equally, the child will unquestioningly take his or her place in Yanomamö society—perhaps as a food gatherer, a hunter, or a warrior—and he or she will not even know about the world left behind at birth. And whether male or female, the child will grow up assuming that it is natural to want many children, not debating whether to have one, two, or three children.

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

### Origins of Sociology

#### Tradition Versus Science

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

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

Sociology grew out of social upheaval. The Industrial Revolution had just begun, and masses of people were moving to cities in search of work. Their ties to the land—and to a culture that had provided them with ready answers to life’s difficult questions—were broken. The cities greeted them with horrible working conditions: low pay; long, exhausting hours; dangerous work. For families to survive, even children had to work in these conditions; some children were even chained to factory machines to make certain they could not run away. Life no longer looked the same, and tradition, which had provided the answers to social life, no longer could be counted on.

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

About this same time, the **scientific method**—using objective, systematic observations to test theories—was being tried out in chemistry and physics. Many secrets that had been concealed in nature were being uncovered. With

This eighteenth-century painting (artist unknown) depicts women from Paris joining the French Army on its way to Versailles on October 5, 1789. The French Revolution of 1789 not only overthrew the aristocracy but also upset the entire social order. This extensive change removed the security of looking to the past as a sure guide to the present. The events of this period stimulated Auguste Comte to analyze how societies change. His writings are often considered the origin of sociology.
tradition no longer providing the answers to questions about social life, the logical step was to apply the scientific method to these questions. The result was the birth of sociology.

**Auguste Comte and Positivism**

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

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

To Comte, however, applying the scientific method to social life meant practicing what we might call “armchair philosophy”—drawing conclusions from informal observations of social life. He did not do what today’s sociologists would call research, and his conclusions have been abandoned. Nevertheless, Comte’s insistence that we must observe and classify human activities to uncover society’s fundamental laws is well taken. Because he developed this idea and coined the term *sociology*, Comte often is credited with being the founder of sociology.

**Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism**

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who grew up in England, is sometimes called the second founder of sociology. Spencer disagreed profoundly with Comte that sociology should guide social reform. He was convinced that no one should intervene in the evolution of society. Spencer thought that societies evolve from lower (“barbarian”) to higher (“civilized”) forms. As generations pass, the most capable and intelligent (“the fittest”) members of the society survive, while the less capable die out. Thus, over time, societies improve. If you help the lower classes, you interfere with this natural process. The fittest members will produce a more advanced society—unless misguided do-gooders get in the way and help those who are less fit to survive.

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

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

**Herbert Spencer** (1820–1903), sometimes called the second founder of sociology, coined the term “survival of the fittest.” Spencer thought that helping the poor was wrong, that this merely helped the “less fit” survive.
Like Comte, Spencer was more of a social philosopher than a sociologist. Also like Comte, Spencer did not conduct scientific studies. He simply developed ideas about society. After gaining a wide following in England and the United States, Spencer’s ideas about social Darwinism were discarded.

Karl Marx and Class Conflict

The influence of Karl Marx (1818–1883) on world history has been so great that even the Wall Street Journal, that staunch advocate of capitalism, has called him one of the three greatest modern thinkers (the other two being Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein).

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

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

Emile Durkheim and Social Integration

The primary professional goal of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), who grew up in France, was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline (Coser 1977). Up to this time, sociology had been viewed as a part of the study of history and economics. Durkheim achieved this goal when he received the first academic appointment in sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1887.

Durkheim also had another goal: to show how social forces affect people’s behavior. To accomplish this, he conducted rigorous research. Comparing the suicide rates of several European countries, Durkheim (1897/1966) found that each country had a different suicide rate, and that these rates remained about the same year after year. He also found that different groups within a country had different suicide

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

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) contributed many important concepts to sociology. His comparison of the suicide rates of several countries revealed an underlying social factor: People are more likely to commit suicide if their ties to others in their communities are weak. Durkheim’s identification of the key role of social integration in social life remains central to sociology today.
rates and that these, too, remained stable from year to year. For example, Protestants, males, and the unmarried killed themselves at a higher rate than did Catholics, Jews, females, and the married. From this, Durkheim drew the insightful conclusion that suicide is not simply a matter of individuals here and there deciding to take their lives for personal reasons. Rather, social factors underlie suicide, and this is what keeps a group’s rates fairly constant year after year.

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

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

From Durkheim’s study of suicide, we see the principle that was central in his research: Human behavior cannot be understood simply in individualistic terms; we must always examine the social forces that affect people’s lives. Suicide, for example, appears at first to be such an intensely individual act that psychologists should study it, not sociologists. Yet, as Durkheim illustrated, if we look at human behavior (such as suicide) only in individualistic terms, we miss its social basis.

Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic

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

Religion and the Origin of Capitalism. Weber disagreed with Marx’s claim that economics is the central force in social change. That role, he said, belongs to religion. Weber (1904/1958) theorized that the Roman Catholic belief system encouraged its followers to hold onto traditional ways of life, while the Protestant belief system encouraged its members to embrace change. Protestantism, he said, undermined people’s spiritual security. Roman Catholics believed that they were on the road to heaven because they were baptized and were church members. Protestants, however, did not share this belief. Protestants of the Calvinist tradition were told that they wouldn’t know if they were saved until Judgment Day. Uncomfortable with this, they began to look for “signs” that they were in God’s will. Eventually, they concluded that financial success was the major sign that God was on their side. To bring about this “sign” and receive spiritual comfort, they began to live frugal lives, saving their money and investing the surplus in order to make even more. This, said Weber, brought about the birth of capitalism.

Weber called this self-denying approach to life the Protestant ethic. He termed the readiness to invest capital in order to make more money the spirit of capitalism. To test his theory, Weber compared the extent of capitalism in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries. In line with his theory, he found that capitalism was more likely to flourish in Protestant countries. Weber’s conclusion that religion was the key factor in the rise of capitalism was controversial when he made it, and it continues to be debated today (Barro and McCleary 2003). We’ll explore these ideas in more detail in Chapter 13.
Sexism in Early Sociology

Attitudes of the Time

As you may have noticed, we have discussed only male sociologists. In the 1800s, sex roles were rigidly defined, with women assigned the roles of wife and mother. In the classic German phrase, women were expected to devote themselves to the four K’s: Kirche, Küchen, Kinder, und Kleider (church, cooking, children, and clothes). Women who tried to break out of this mold experienced severe social disapproval.

Few people, male or female, received any education beyond basic reading, writing, and a little math. Higher education, for the rare few who received it, was reserved for men. A handful of women from wealthy families, however, did pursue higher education. A few even managed to study sociology, although the sexism that was so deeply entrenched in the universities stopped them from obtaining advanced degrees or becoming professors. In line with the times, their research was almost entirely ignored.

Harriet Martineau

and Early Social Research

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

Sociology in North America

Early History: The Tension Between Social Reform and Sociological Analysis

Transplanted to U.S. soil in the late nineteenth century, sociology first took root at the University of Kansas in 1890; at the University of Chicago in 1892; and at Atlanta University, then an all-black school, in 1897. It was not until 1922 that McGill University gave Canada its first department of sociology. Harvard University did not open a department of sociology until 1930, and the University of California at Berkeley didn’t have one until the 1950s.

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

Jane Addams and Social Reform

Although many North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer, none was as successful as Jane Addams (1860–1935). Like Harriet Martineau, Addams came from a background of wealth and privilege. She attended the Women’s Medical College of Philadelphia, but dropped out because of illness (Addams 1910/1981). During one of her many trips to Europe, Addams observed and was impressed by the

Interested in social reform, Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) turned to sociology, where she discovered the writings of Comte. She became an advocate for the abolition of slavery, traveled widely, and wrote extensive analyses of social life.
Jane Addams, 1860–1935, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, worked on behalf of poor immigrants. With Ellen G. Starr, she founded Hull-House, a center to help immigrants in Chicago. She was also a leader in women’s rights (women suffrage), as well as the peace movement of World War I.

In 1889, Addams cofounded Hull-House, located in Chicago’s notorious slums. Hull-House was open to people who needed refuge—to immigrants, the sick, the aged, the poor. Sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago were frequent visitors at Hull-House. With her piercing insights into the ways in which workers were exploited and how immigrants adjusted to city life, Addams strived to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. She worked with others to win the eight-hour work day and to pass laws against child labor. Her efforts at social reform were so outstanding that in 1931 she was a cowinner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, the only sociologist to win this coveted award.

W. E. B. Du Bois and Race Relations

Another sociologist who combined sociology and social reform is W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard. After completing his education at the University of Berlin, where he attended lectures by Max Weber, Du Bois taught Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University. He then went to Atlanta University in 1897, where he remained for most of his career.

Although Du Bois was invited to present a paper at the 1909 meetings of the American Sociological Society, he was too poor to attend. When he could afford to attend subsequent meetings, discrimination was so prevalent in the United States that hotels and restaurants would not allow him to room or eat with the white sociologists. Later in life, when Du Bois had the money to travel, the U.S. State Department feared that he would criticize the United States and at the height of the Cold War refused to give him a passport (Du Bois 1968).

Du Bois’ lifetime research interest was relations between whites and African Americans, and he published a book on this subject each year between 1896 and 1914. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page is taken from one of his books. Du Bois’ insights into race relations were heightened by personal experiences. For example, he once saw the fingers of a lynching victim on display in a Georgia butcher shop (Aptheker 1990).

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

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

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

It was a hot morning late in July when the school opened. I trembled when I heard the patter of little feet down the dusty road, and saw the growing row of dark solemn faces and bright eager eyes facing me. . . . There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces shading from a pale cream to deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, the eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster’s blue-black spelling-book. I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvelous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hill. . . .

On Friday nights I often went home with some of the children,—sometimes to Doc Burke’s farm. He was a great, loud, thin Black, ever working, and trying to buy these seventy-five acres of hill and dale where he lived; but people said that he would surely fail and the “white folks would get it all.” His wife was a magnificent Amazon, with saffron face and shiny hair, uncorseted and barefooted, and the children were strong and barefooted. They lived in a one-and-a-half-room cabin in the hollow of the farm near the spring. . . .

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

I liked to stay with the Dowells, for they had four rooms and plenty of good country fare. Uncle Bird had a small, rough farm, all woods and hills, miles from the big road; but he was full of tales,—he preached now and then,—and with his children, berries, horses, and wheat he was happy and prosperous. Often, to keep the peace, I must go where life was less lovely: for instance, ‘Tildy’s mother was incorrigibly dirty, Reuben’s larder was limited seriously, and herds of untamed insects wandered over the Eddinges’ beds. Best of all I loved to go to Josie’s, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was “mighty little” wages; how Josie longed to go away to school, but that it “looked liked” they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how mean some of the white folks were.

For two summers I lived in this little world. . . . I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages, and, above all, from the sight of the Veil* that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years before had seen “the glory of the coming of the Lord,” saw in every present hindrance or help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering.

* “The Veil” is shorthand for the Veil of Race, referring to how race colors all human relations. Du Bois’ hope was that “sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins” (p. 261).
Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: Theory Versus Reform

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

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) deplored the theoretical abstractions of this period, and he urged sociologists to get back to social reform. He warned that an imminent threat to freedom was the coalescing of interests on the part of a group he called the power elite—the top leaders of business, politics, and the military. Shortly after Mills’ death came the turbulent late 1960s and 1970s. This precedent-shaking era sparked interest in social activism, and Mills’ ideas grew popular among a new generation of sociologists.

The Continuing Tension and the Rise of Applied Sociology

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

Somewhere between these extremes lies applied sociology, which uses sociology to solve problems. (See Figure 1.1, which contrasts basic and applied sociology.) One of the first attempts at applied sociology—and one of the most successful—was one I just mentioned: the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As illustrated in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, today’s applied sociologists work in a variety of settings. Some work for business firms to solve problems in the workplace.

Figure 1.1 Comparing Basic and Applied Sociology

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<tr>
<th>BASIC SOCIOLOGY</th>
<th>APPLIED SOCIOLOGY</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong> Fellow sociologists</td>
<td><strong>Audience:</strong> Clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product:</strong> Knowledge</td>
<td><strong>Product:</strong> Change</td>
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- Constructing theory and testing hypotheses
- Research on basic social life, on how groups affect people
- The middle ground: criticisms of society and social policy
- Analyzing problems, evaluating programs, and suggesting solutions
- Implementing solutions (clinical sociology)

Source: By the author. Based on DeMartini 1982.
Others investigate social problems such as environmental pollution, the relationship between pornography and rape, or how AIDS spreads. A new specialty in applied sociology is determining ways to disrupt terrorist groups (Ebner 2005). The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page presents a startling example of applied sociology.

Applied sociology is not the same as social reform. It is an application of sociology in some specific setting, not an attempt to rebuild society, as early sociologists envisioned.

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

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**Careers in Sociology: What Applied Sociologists Do**

**M ost sociologists teach in colleges and universities, sharing sociological knowledge with college students, as your instructor is doing with you in this course. Applied sociologists, in contrast, work in a wide variety of areas—from counseling children to studying how diseases are transmitted. Some even make software more user-friendly. To give you an idea of this variety, let’s look over the shoulders of four applied sociologists.**

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

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

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

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

From just these few examples, you can catch a glimpse of the variety of work that applied sociologists do. Some work for corporations, some are employed by government and private agencies, and others run their own businesses. You can also see that you don’t need a doctorate in order to work as an applied sociologist.
Capturing Saddam Hussein: A Surprising Example of Applied Sociology

Applied sociology takes many twists and turns, but perhaps none as startling as assisting in the capture of Saddam Hussein. After U.S.-led forces took over Baghdad, Hussein disappeared. His capture became a pressing goal with two purposes. The first was symbolic: a sign of the coalition’s triumph. The second was practical: to prevent Hussein from directing resistance to the occupation of Iraq.

But Hussein was nowhere to be found. Rumors placed him all over the map, from neighboring countries to safe houses in Baghdad. To find him, U.S. intelligence officers began to apply sociology, specifically, a form known as network analysis. Analysts drew up a “people map.” On a color-coded map, they placed Hussein’s photo in a yellow circle, like a bull’s-eye. They then drew links to people who were connected to Hussein, placing their photos closer to or farther from Hussein’s photo on the basis of their level of intimacy with Hussein (Schmitt 2003).

The photos placed closest to Hussein on this map of social relationships represented an intimate and loyal group. These people were the most likely to know where Hussein was, but because of their close ties to him, they also were the least likely to reveal this information. Those who were pictured slightly farther away knew people in this more intimate group, so it was likely that some of them had information about Hussein’s whereabouts. Because these individuals’ social ties to Hussein were not as strong, they provided the weaker links to try to break.

The approach worked. Using software programs to sift through vast amounts of information gained from informants and electronic intercepts, the analysts drew an extensive people map that pictured these social relationships. Identifying and focusing on the weaker links led to the capture of Saddam Hussein.

As I write this, analysts are using applied sociology in a similar way to hunt down Osama bin Laden. They are mapping the links in bin Laden’s tribal network to identify weaknesses that might reveal his whereabouts (KRT 2003).

Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Facts never interpret themselves. In everyday life, we interpret what we observe by using “common sense.” We place our observations (our “facts”) into a framework of more-or-less related ideas. Sociologists do this, too, but they place their observations in a conceptual framework called a theory. A theory is a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work. It is an explanation of how two or more “facts” are related to one another.

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

Symbolic Interactionism

We can trace the origins of symbolic interactionism to the Scottish moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, who noted that individuals evaluate their own conduct by comparing themselves with others (Stryker 1990). This perspective was brought to sociology by Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), William I. Thomas (1863–1947),
Symbols in Everyday Life. Symbolic interactionists study how people use symbols to develop their views of the world and to communicate with one another. Without symbols, our social life would be more sophisticated than that of animals. For example, without symbols we would have no aunts or uncles, employers or teachers—or even brothers and sisters. I know that this sounds strange, but it is symbols that define for us what relationships are. There would still be reproduction, of course, but no symbols to tell us how we are related to whom. We would not know to whom we owe respect and obligations or from whom we can expect privileges—the stuff that human relationships are made of.

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

To make this clearer

Suppose that you are head-over-heels in love with someone and are going to marry this person tomorrow. The night before your marriage, your mother confides that she had a child before she married, a child that she gave up for adoption. She then adds that she has just discovered that the person you are going to marry is this child.

You can see how the symbol will change overnight!—and your behavior, too!

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

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

Applying Symbolic Interactionism. To explain the U.S. divorce rate (see Figure 1.2 on the next page), symbolic interactionists look at how people’s ideas and behavior change as symbols change. They note that until the early 1900s, Americans thought of marriage as a sacred, lifelong commitment. Divorce was seen as an immoral, harmful action, a flagrant disregard for public opinion.

Then, slowly, the meaning of marriage began to change. In 1933, sociologist William Ogburn observed that personality was becoming more important in mate selection. In 1945, sociologists Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke noted the growing importance of mutual affection, understanding, and compatibility in marriage. Gradually, people’s views changed. No longer did they see marriage as a lifelong commitment based on duty and obligation. Instead, they began to view marriage as an arrangement, often temporary, that was based on feelings of intimacy. The meaning of divorce also changed. Formerly a symbol of failure, it became an indicator of freedom and new beginnings. Removing the stigma from divorce shattered a strong barrier that had prevented husbands and wives from breaking up.

Symbolic interactionists note that ideas about marital roles and parenthood also changed—and they point out that none of these changes strengthen marriage. For example, from tradition, newlyweds knew what they had a right to expect from each other. In contrast, with today’s much vaguer guidelines, couples must figure out how to divide up responsibilities for work, home, and children. As they struggle to do so, many flounder. Although couples find it a relief not to have to conform to what they consider to be burdensome notions, those traditional expectations (or symbols) did provide a structure that made marriages last. When these symbols changed, the structure they had created was weakened, making marriage more fragile and divorce more common.

Similarly, ideas of parenthood and childhood used to be quite different. Parents had little responsibility for their children beyond providing food, clothing, shelter, and moral guidance. And this was only for a short time, for children began to contribute to the support of the family early in life. Among many people, parenthood is still like this. In Colombia, for example, children of the poor often are expected to support themselves by the age of 8 or 10. In advanced industrial societies, however, we assume that children are vulnerable beings who must depend on their parents for financial and emotional support for many years—often until they are well into their twenties. That this is not the case in many cultures often comes as a
surprise to Americans, who assume that their own situation is some sort of natural arrangement that is worldwide. The greater responsibilities that we assign to parenthood place heavy burdens on today’s couples and, with them, more strain on marriage.

Symbolic interactionists, then, look at how changing ideas (or symbols) put pressure on married couples. No single change is the cause of our divorce rate, but, taken together, these changes provide a strong push toward divorce.

Functional Analysis

The central idea of functional analysis is that society is a whole unit; it is made up of interrelated parts that work together. Functional analysis, also known as functionalism and structural functionalism, is rooted in the origins of sociology. Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer viewed society as a kind of living organism. Just as a person or animal has organs that function together, they wrote, so does society. Like an organism, if society is to function smoothly, its various parts must work together in harmony.

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

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

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

Figure 1.2 U.S. Marriage, U.S. Divorce

Sources: By the author. Based on Statistical Abstract 1998:Table 92; earlier editions for earlier years; “Population Today” 2006. The broken lines indicate the author’s estimates.
Of course, human actions can also hurt a system. Because such consequences usually are unintended, Merton called them latent dysfunctions. Let’s suppose that the government has failed to specify a stopping point with regard to its bonus system. To collect the bonus, some people keep on having children. The more children they have, however, the more they need the next bonus to survive. Large families become common, and poverty increases. Welfare is reinstated, taxes jump, and the nation erupts in protest. Because these results were not intended, and because they harmed the social system, they represent latent dysfunctions of the bonus program.

Applying Functional Analysis. Now let’s apply functional analysis to the U.S. divorce rate. Functionalists stress that industrialization and urbanization undermined the traditional functions of the family. For example, before industrialization, the family was a sort of economic team. On the farm, where most people lived, each member of the family had jobs or “chores” to do. The wife was in charge not only of household tasks but also of raising small animals, such as chickens. Milking cows, collecting eggs, and churning butter were also her responsibility—as were cooking, baking, canning, sewing, darning, washing, and cleaning. The daughters helped her. The husband was responsible for caring for large animals, such as horses and cattle, for planting and harvesting, and for maintaining buildings and tools. The sons helped him. Together, they formed an economic unit in which each depended on the others for survival.

The functions that bonded family members to one another also included educating the children, teaching them religion, providing home-based recreation, and caring for the sick and elderly. To see how sharply family functions have changed, look at this example from the 1800s:

When Phil became sick, he was nursed by Ann, his wife. She cooked for him, fed him, changed the bed linen, bathed him, read to him from the Bible, and gave him his medicine. (She did this in addition to doing the housework and taking care of their six children.) Phil was also surrounded by the children, who shouldered some of his chores while he was sick.

When Phil died, the male neighbors and relatives made the casket while Ann, her mother, and female friends washed and dressed the body. Phil was then “laid out” in the front parlor (the formal living room), where friends, neighbors, and relatives paid their last respects. From there, friends moved his body to the church for the final message and then to the grave they themselves had dug.

As you can see, the family used to have more functions than it does now. Families handled many aspects of life and

Sociologists who use the functionalist perspective stress how industrialization and urbanization undermined the traditional functions of the family. Before industrialization, members of the family worked together as an economic unit, as in this painting by Leopoldo Romanach (1958-) of Havana, Cuba. As production moved away from the home, it took with it first the father and, more recently, the mother. One consequence is a major dysfunction, the weakening of family ties.
death that we now assign to outside agencies. Similarly, economic production is no longer a cooperative, home-based effort, with husbands and wives depending on one another for their interlocking contributions to a mutual endeavor. In contrast, today’s husbands and wives earn individual paychecks and function as separate components in an impersonal, multinational, and even global system. When outside agencies take over family functions, this weakens the “ties that bind.” Marriages become more fragile, and divorce increases.

**Conflict Theory**

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

**Karl Marx and Conflict Theory.** Karl Marx, the founder of conflict theory, witnessed the Industrial Revolution that transformed Europe. He observed that peasants who had left the land to seek work in cities had to work for wages that provided barely enough to eat. The average worker died at age 30, the average wealthy person at age 50 (Edgerton 1992:87). Shocked by people’s deep suffering and their exploitation, Marx began to analyze society and history. As he did so, he developed conflict theory. He concluded that the key to human history is class conflict. In each society, some small group controls the means of production and exploits those who are not in control. In industrialized societies, the struggle is between the bourgeoisie, the small group of capitalists who own the means to produce wealth, and the proletariat, the mass of workers who are exploited by the bourgeoisie.

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

**Conflict Theory Today.** Some sociologists use conflict theory in a much broader sense than Marx did. They examine how conflict permeates every layer of society—whether that be a small group, an organization, a community, or the entire society. When people in a position of authority try to enforce conformity, which their position requires them to do, this creates resentment and resistance. The result is a constant struggle throughout society to determine who has authority over what (Turner 1978; Bartos and Wehr 2002).

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

**Feminists and Conflict Theory.** Feminists stress that men and women should have equal rights. As they view relations between men and women, they see a conflict that goes back to the origins of history. Just as Marx stressed conflict between capitalists and workers, so many feminists stress conflict between men and women. Feminists are not united by the conflict perspective, however. Although some focus on the oppression of women and women’s struggle against that oppression, feminists tackle a variety of topics and use a variety of theories. (Feminism is discussed in Chapter 10.)

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

In sum, the dominance of men over women was once considered natural and right. As women gained education and earnings, their willingness to accept men’s domination diminished, and they strived for more power. One consequence has been higher divorce rates as wives grew less inclined to put up with relationships that they defined as unfair. From the conflict perspective, then, our increase in divorce is not a sign that marriage has weakened but, rather, a sign that women are making headway in their historical struggle with men.

**Levels of Analysis: Macro and Micro**

A major difference among these three theoretical perspectives is their level of analysis. Functionalists and conflict theorists focus on the macro level; that is, they
examine large-scale patterns of society. In contrast, symbolic interactionists focus on the **micro level**, on **social interaction**—what people do when they are in one another’s presence. These levels are summarized in Table 1.1.

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

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

**Putting the Theoretical Perspectives Together**

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

**How Theory and Research Work Together**

Theory cannot stand alone. As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) so forcefully argued, if theory isn’t connected to research, it will be abstract and empty. It won’t represent the

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### Table 1.1 Major Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Usual Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Focus of Analysis</th>
<th>Key Terms</th>
<th>Applying the Perspective to the U.S. Divorce Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Interactionism</strong></td>
<td>Microsociological—examines small-scale patterns of social interaction</td>
<td>Face-to-face interaction; how people use symbols to create social life</td>
<td>Symbols Interaction, Meanings, Definitions</td>
<td>Industrialization and urbanization changed marital roles and led to a redefinition of love, marriage, children, and divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Macrosociological—examines large-scale patterns of society</td>
<td>Relationships among the parts of society; how these parts are functional (have beneficial consequences) or dysfunctional (have negative consequences)</td>
<td>Structure Functions (manifest and latent), Dysfunctions Equilibrium</td>
<td>As social change erodes the traditional functions of the family, family ties weaken, and the divorce rate increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict Theory</strong></td>
<td>Macrosociological—examines large-scale patterns of society</td>
<td>The struggle for scarce resources by groups in a society; how the elites use their power to control the weaker groups</td>
<td>Inequality, Power, Conflict, Competition, Exploitation</td>
<td>When men control economic life, the divorce rate is low because women find few alternatives to a bad marriage; the high divorce rate reflects a shift in the balance of power between men and women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
way life really is. It is the same for research. Without theory, Mills said, research is also of little value; it is simply a collection of meaningless “facts.”

Theory and research, then, go together like a hand and glove. Every theory must be tested, which requires research. And as sociologists do research, they often come up with surprising findings. Those findings must be explained, and for that, we need theory. As sociologists study social life, then, they combine research and theory.

Let’s turn now to how sociologists do research.

Doing Sociological Research

Around the globe, people make assumptions about the way the world “is.” Common sense, the things that “everyone knows are true,” may or may not be true, however. It takes research to find out. To test your own common sense, read the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Regardless of the topic that we want to investigate, we need to move beyond guesswork and common sense. We want to know what is really going on. To find out, sociologists do research on just about every aspect of social life. Let’s look at how they do their research.

A Research Model

As shown in Figure 1.3, scientific research follows eight basic steps. This is an ideal model, however, and in the real world of research, some of these steps may run together. Some may even be omitted.

1. Selecting a topic. First, what do you want to know more about? Let’s choose spouse abuse as our topic.
2. Defining the problem. The next step is to narrow the topic. Spouse abuse is too broad; we need to focus on a specific area. For example, you may want to know why men are more likely than women to be the abusers. Or perhaps you want to know what can be done to reduce domestic violence.
3. Reviewing the literature. You must review the literature to find out what has been published on the problem. You don’t want to waste your time rediscovering what is already known.
4. Formulating a hypothesis. The fourth step is to formulate a hypothesis, a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions that are based on a theory. A hypothesis predicts a relationship between or among variables, factors that vary, or change, from one person or situation to another. For example, the statement “Men who are more socially isolated are more likely to abuse their wives than are men who are more socially integrated” is a hypothesis.

Your hypothesis will need operational definitions, that is, precise ways to measure the variables.
In this example, you would need operational definitions for three variables: social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse.

5. Choosing a research method. The means by which you collect your data is called a research method or research design. Sociologists use six basic research methods, which are outlined in the next section. You will want to choose the method that will best answer your particular questions.

6. Collecting the data. When you gather your data, you have to take care to assure their validity; that is, your operational definitions must measure what they are intended to measure. In this case, you must be certain that you really are measuring social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse—and not something else. Spouse abuse, for example, seems to be obvious. Yet what some people consider to be abuse is not considered abuse by others. Which will you choose? In other words, your operational definitions must be so precise that no one has any question about what you are measuring.

You must also be sure your data are reliable. Reliability means that if other researchers use your operational definitions, their findings will be consistent with yours. If your operational definitions are sloppy, husbands who have committed the same act of violence might be included in some research but excluded in other studies. You would end up with erratic results. You might show a 10 percent rate of spouse abuse, but another researcher may conclude that it is 30 percent. This would make your research unreliable.

7. Analyzing the results. You can choose from a variety of techniques to analyze the data you gathered. If a hypothesis has been part of your research, it is during this step that you will test it. (Some research, especially that done by participant observation, has no hypothesis. You may know so little about the setting you are going to research that you cannot even specify the variables in advance.)

With today’s software, in just seconds you can run tests on your data that used to take days or even
weeks. Two basic programs that sociologists and many undergraduates use are Microcase and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Some software, such as the Methodologist’s Toolchest, provides advice about collecting data and even about ethical issues.

8. **Sharing the results.** To wrap up your research, you will write a report to share your findings with the scientific community. You will review how you did your research, including your operational definitions. You will also show how your findings fit in with the published literature and how they support or refute the theories that apply to your topic. As Table 1.2 on the next page illustrates, sociologists often summarize their findings in tables.

Let’s look in greater detail at the fifth step and examine the research methods that sociologists use.

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### Research Methods

As we review the six research methods (or research designs) that sociologists use, we will continue our example of spouse abuse. As you will see, the method you choose will depend on the questions you want to answer. So that you can have a yardstick for comparison, you will want to know what “average” is in your study. The ways to measure average are discussed in Table 1.3 on page 24.

### Surveys

Let’s suppose you want to know how many wives are abused each year. Some husbands are also abused, but let’s assume that you are going to focus on wives. An appropriate method would be the survey—asking people a series of questions. Before you begin your research, however, you

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### Sociological Findings Versus Common Sense—Answers to the Sociology Quiz

1. **False** More students were shot to death at U.S. schools in the early 1990s than now (National School Safety Center 2005).

2. **False** Over the years, the wage gap has narrowed, but only slightly. On average, full-time working women earn less than 70 percent of what full-time working men earn. This low figure is actually an improvement over earlier years. See Figures 10.5 and 10.6 on pages 270 and 271.

3. **False** Following disasters, people develop greater cooperation and social organization to deal with the catastrophe. For an example, see the photo essay on pages 108–109.

4. **False** Sociologists compared the psychological profiles of prisoners convicted of rape and prisoners convicted of other crimes. Their profiles were similar. Like robbery, rape is a learned behavior (Scully and Marolla 1984/2005).

5. **False** Most people on welfare are children, the old, the sick, the mentally and physically handicapped or young mothers with few skills. Fewer than 2 percent meet the stereotype of an able-bodied man. See page 213.

6. **False** Women make considerably more eye contact (Henley et al. 1985).

7. **False** The opposite is true. The reason, researchers suggest, is that many couples who cohabit before marriage are less committed to marriage in the first place—and a key to marital success is firm commitment to one another (Larson 1988; Dushl et al. 2003).

8. **False** Most husbands of working wives who get laid off from work reduce the amount of housework they do. See page 328 for an explanation.

9. **False** Bicyclists today are more likely to wear helmets, but their rate of head injuries is higher. Apparently, they take more risks because the helmets make them feel safer (Barnes 2001). (Unanticipated consequences of human action are studied by functionalists. See page 16.)

10. **False** The suicide rate of U.S. students is about double that of Japanese students (Haynes and Chalker 1997).
### Table 1.2 How to Read a Table

Tables summarize information. Because sociological findings are often presented in tables, it is important to understand how to read them. Tables contain six elements: title, headnote, headings, columns, rows, and source. When you understand how these elements fit together, you know how to read a table.

#### Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Husbands

Based on interviews with 150 husbands and wives in a Midwestern city who were getting a divorce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband's Achievement and Job Satisfaction</th>
<th>Violent Husbands $n = 25$</th>
<th>Nonviolent Husbands $n = 125$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He started but failed to complete high school or college.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is very dissatisfied with his job.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His income is a source of constant conflict.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has less education than his wife.</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His job has less prestige than his father-in-law’s.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Modification of Table 1 in O'Brien 1975.

#### Questions

1. The **title** states the topic. It is located at the top of the table. What is the title of this table? Please determine your answer before looking at the correct answer at the bottom of the page.

2. The **headnote** is not always included in a table. When it is, it is located just below the title. Its purpose is to give more detailed information about how the data were collected or how data are presented in the table. What are the first eight words of the headnote of this table?

3. The **headings** tell what kind of information is contained in the table. There are three headings in this table. What are they? In the second heading, what does $n = 25$ mean?

4. The **columns** present information arranged vertically. What is the fourth number in the second column and the second number in the third column?

5. The **rows** present information arranged horizontally. In the fourth row, which husbands are more likely to have less education than their wives?

6. The **source** of a table, usually listed at the bottom, provides information on where the data in the table originated. Often, as in this instance, the information is specific enough for you to consult the original source. What is the source for this table?

Some tables are much more complicated than this one, but all follow the same basic pattern. To apply these concepts to a table with more information, see page 241.
must deal with practical matters that face all researchers. Let’s look at these issues.

**Selecting a Sample.** Ideally, you might want to learn about all wives in the world. Obviously, your resources will not permit such research, and you will have to narrow your **population**, the target group that you are going to study.

Let’s assume that your resources allow you to investigate spouse abuse only on your campus. Let’s also assume that your college enrollment is large, so you won’t be able to survey all the married women who are enrolled. Now you must select a **sample**, individuals from among your target population. How you choose a sample is crucial, for your choice will affect the results of your study. For example, a survey of only women enrolled in introductory sociology courses, or only those in advanced physics classes, would produce skewed results.

Because you want to generalize your findings to your entire campus, you need a sample that is representative of the campus. How do you get a representative sample?

The best way is to obtain a **random sample.** This does not mean that you stand on some campus corner and ask questions of any woman who happens to walk by. In a random sample, everyone in your population has the same chance of being included in the study. In this case, because your population is every married woman enrolled in your college, all married women—whether first-year or graduate students, full- or part-time—must have an equal chance of being included in your sample.

How can you get a random sample? First, you need a list of all the married women enrolled in your college. Then you assign a number to each name on the list. Using a table of random numbers, you then determine which of these women become part of your sample. (Tables of random

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**Table 1.3 Three Ways to Measure “Average”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Mean</th>
<th>The Median</th>
<th>The Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The term average seems clear enough. As you learned in grade school, to find the average, you add a group of numbers and then divide the total by the number of cases that were added. For example, assume that the following numbers represent men convicted of battering their wives:</td>
<td>To compute the second average, the median, first arrange the cases in order—either from the highest to the lowest or from the lowest to the highest. In this example, that arrangement will produce the following distribution:</td>
<td>The third measure of average, the mode, is simply the cases that occur the most often. In this instance the mode is 57, which is way off the mark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>321</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>1,795</td>
<td>229 or 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>289</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,795</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total is 2,884. Divided by 7 (the number of cases), the average is 412. Sociologists call this form of average the **mean**. The mean can be deceptive because it is influenced by extreme scores, either low or high. Note that six of the seven cases are less than the mean.

Two other ways to compute averages are the **median** and the **mode**. The mean can be deceptive because it is influenced by extreme scores, either low or high. Note that six of the seven cases are less than the mean. Two other ways to compute averages are the median and the mode.

Because the mode is often deceptive and only by chance comes close to either of the other two averages, sociologists seldom use it. In addition, it is obvious that not every distribution of cases has a mode. And if two or more numbers appear with the same frequency, you can have more than one mode.
RESEARCH METHODS

numbers are available in statistics books, and computer programs also can generate random numbers.

Because a random sample represents your study’s population—in this case, married women enrolled at your college—you can generalize your findings to all the married women students on your campus, even if they were not included in your sample.

What if you want to know only about certain subgroups, such as freshmen and seniors? You could use a stratified random sample. You would need a list of the freshmen and senior married women. Then, using random numbers, you would select a sample from each group. This would allow you to generalize to all the freshmen and senior married women at your college, but you would not be able to draw any conclusions about the sophomores or juniors.

Types of Questions. You must also decide whether to use closed- or open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are followed by a list of possible answers. This format would work for questions about someone’s age (possible ages would be listed), but it wouldn’t work for many other items. For example, how could you list all the opinions that people hold about what should be done to spouse abusers? The answers provided for closed-ended questions can miss the respondent’s opinions.

As Table 1.4 on the next page illustrates, the alternative is open-ended questions, which allow people to answer in their own words. Although open-ended questions allow you to tap the full range of people’s opinions, they make it difficult to compare answers. For example, how would you compare these answers to the question “What do you think causes men to abuse their wives?”

“They’re sick.”
“I think they must have had problems with their mother.”
“We ought to string them up!”

Because sociologists find all human behavior to be valid research topics, their research runs from the unusual to the routines of everyday life. Their studies range from broad scale social change, such as the globalization of capitalism, to such events as exhibitions of tattooing, piercing, and body painting. Shown here at the Australian Museum in Sydney is Lucky Rich, displaying his stainless steel teeth.

Improperly worded questions can steer respondents toward answers that are not their own, thus producing invalid results.
CHAPTER 1 THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Loading the Dice: How Not to Do Research

THE METHODS OF SCIENCE LEND themselves to distortion, misrepresentation, and downright fraud. Consider these findings:

*Americans overwhelmingly prefer Toyotas to Chryslers.*

*Americans overwhelmingly prefer Chryslers to Toyotas.*

Obviously, these opposite conclusions cannot be true. Yet each comes from so-called scientific surveys. It turns out that both findings are misrepresentations. The surveys were conducted by researchers who were biased, not independent and objective.

It turns out that some consumer researchers load the dice. They are hired by firms that have a vested interest in the outcome of the research, and they deliver the results their clients are looking for.

Here are six ways to load the dice.

1. Choose a biased sample. If you want to “prove” that Americans prefer Chryslers over Toyotas, interview unemployed union workers who trace their job loss to Japanese imports. The answer is predictable. You’ll get what you’re looking for.

2. Ask biased questions. Even if you choose an unbiased sample, as in the Doonesbury cartoon on the preceding page, you can phrase questions in such a way that you direct people to the answer you’re looking for. Suppose that you asked the question this way: “We are losing millions of jobs to workers overseas who work for just a few dollars a day. More and more Americans are being fired. Some are even homeless and hungry. Do you prefer a car that gives jobs to Americans, or one that forces our workers to lose their homes?”

   Most biases aren’t this blatant, of course, but consider this question on a national survey conducted by Republicans:

   *Is President Bush right in trying to rein in the size and scope of the federal government against the wishes of the big government Democrats?*

   This question is obviously designed to channel people’s thinking toward a predetermined answer—quite contrary to the question that once rapport is gained (often by first asking non-sensitive questions), victims will talk about personal, sensitive matters.

   To go beyond police statistics, each year researchers interview a random sample of 100,000 Americans. They ask them whether they have been victims of burglary, robbery, and so on. After establishing rapport, the researchers ask about rape. They find that rape victims will talk about their experiences. The national crime victimization survey shows that the actual incidence of rape is three times higher than the official statistics (Statistical Abstract 2005: page 184).

   A new technique to gather data on sensitive areas, Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing, overcomes lingering problems of distrust. In this technique, the interviewer gives a laptop computer to the respondent, then moves aside, while the individual enters his or her own answers into the computer. In some versions of this method, the respondent listens to the questions on a headphone.

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Establishing Rapport. Will victims of abuse really give honest answers to strangers? The answer is yes, but first you must establish rapport (“ruh-POUR”), a feeling of trust, with your respondents. We know from studies of rape that once rapport is gained (often by first asking non-sensitive questions), victims will talk about personal, sensitive matters.

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---

**Table 1.4 Closed- and Open–Ended Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Closed–Ended Question</th>
<th>B. Open–Ended Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the following best fits your idea of what should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse?</td>
<td>What do you think should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. probation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. jail time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. community service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. counseling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. divorce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. nothing—it’s a family matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to the standards of scientific research. Democrats, by the way, do the same thing.

3. List biased choices. Another way to load the dice is to use closed-ended questions that push people into the answers you want. Consider this finding:

   U.S. college students overwhelmingly prefer Levis 501 to the jeans of any competitor.

Sound good? Before you rush out to buy Levis, note what these researchers did: In asking students which jeans would be the most popular in the coming year, their list of choices included no other jeans but Levis 501.

4. Discard undesirable results. Researchers can keep silent about results they find embarrassing, or they can continue to survey samples until they find one that matches what they are looking for.

As has been stressed in this chapter, research must be objective if it is to be scientific. Obviously, none of the preceding results qualifies. The underlying problem with the research cited here—and with so many surveys bandied about in the media as fact—is that survey research has become big business. Simply put, the money offered by corporations has corrupted some researchers.

The beginning of the corruption is subtle. Paul Light, dean at the University of Minnesota, put it this way: “A funder will never come to an academic and say, ‘I want you to produce finding X, and here’s a million dollars to do it.’ Rather, the subtext is that if the researchers produce the right finding, more work—and funding—will come their way.” He adds, “Once you’re on that treadmill, it’s hard to get off.”

The first four sources of bias are inexcusable, intentional fraud. The next two sources of bias reflect sloppiness, which is also inexcusable in science.

5. Misunderstand the subjects’ worlds. This route can lead to errors every bit as great as those just cited. Even researchers who use good samples, word their questions properly, and offer adequate choices can end up with skewed results. They may, for example, fail to anticipate that people may be embarrassed to express an opinion that isn’t “politically correct.” For example, surveys show that 80 percent of Americans are environmentalists. Most Americans, however, are probably embarrassed to tell a stranger otherwise. Today, that would be like going against the flag, motherhood, and apple pie.

6. Analyze the data incorrectly. Even when researchers strive for objectivity, the sample is good, the wording is neutral, and the respondents answer the questions honestly, the results can still be skewed. The researchers may make a mistake in their calculations, such as entering incorrect data into computers. This, too, of course, is inexcusable in science.

and answers them on the computer screen. When the respondent clicks the “Submit” button, the interviewer has no idea how the respondent answered any questions (Mosher et al. 2005).

**Participant Observation (Fieldwork)**

In **participant observation**, or *fieldwork*, the researcher participates in a research setting while observing what is happening in that setting. Obviously, this method does not mean that you would sit around and watch someone being abused. But if you wanted to learn how abuse has affected the victims’ hopes and goals, their dating patterns, or their marriages, you could use participant observation.

For example, if your campus has a crisis intervention center, you may be able to observe victims of spouse abuse from the time they report the attack through their participation in counseling. With good rapport, you may even be able to spend time with them in other settings, observing other aspects of their lives. What they say and how they interact with others may help you understand how the abuse has affected their lives. This, in turn, may give you insight into how to improve college counseling services.

**Secondary Analysis**

If you were to analyze data that someone else has already collected, you would be doing **secondary analysis**. For example, if you were to examine the original data from a study of women who had been abused by their husbands, you would be doing secondary analysis.

**Documents**

**Documents**, or written sources, include books, newspapers, bank records, immigration records, and so on. To study spouse abuse, you might examine police reports to find out how many men in your community have been arrested for abuse. You might also use court records to find out what proportion of those men were charged, convicted, or put on probation. If you wanted to learn about the social and emotional adjustment of the victims, however, these documents would tell you nothing. Other documents, though, might provide answers. For example, a crisis intervention center might have records that contain key information—but gaining access to them is almost impossible. Perhaps an unusually cooperative center might ask victims to keep diaries that you can study later.

**Experiments**

A lot of people say that abusers need therapy. But no one knows whether therapy really works. Let’s suppose that you want to find out. Frankly, no one knows how to change a wife abuser into a loving husband. This may be impossible, but knowing whether therapy works would certainly be a step in the right direction. To find out, you may want to conduct an **experiment**, for experiments are useful for determining cause and effect.

Let’s suppose that a judge likes your idea, and she gives you access to men who have been arrested for spouse abuse. You would randomly divide the men into two groups. (See Figure 1.4.) This would help to ensure that their individual characteristics (attitudes, number of arrests, severity of crimes, education, race-ethnicity, age, and so on) are distributed evenly between the groups. You would then arrange for the men in the **experimental group** to receive some sort of therapy. The men in the **control group** would not get therapy.

Your **independent variable**, something that causes a change in another variable, would be therapy. Your **dependent variable**, the variable that might change, would be the men’s behavior: whether they abuse women after they get out of jail. To make that determination, you would need to rely on a sloppy operational definition: either reports from the wives or records indicating which men were rearrested...
for abuse. This is sloppy because some of the women will not report the abuse, and some of the men who are reported for abuse will not be arrested. Yet it may be the best you can do.

Let’s assume that you choose rearrest as your operational definition. If you find that the men who received therapy are less likely to be rearrested for abuse, you can attribute the difference to the therapy. If you find no difference in rearrest rates, you can conclude that therapy was ineffective. If you find that the men who received therapy have a higher rearrest rate, you can conclude that the therapy backfired.

Unobtrusive Measures
Researchers sometimes use unobtrusive measures, observing the behavior of people who do not know they are being studied. For example, researchers have attached infrared devices on shopping carts to track customers’ paths through stores. Grocery chains use these findings to place higher-profit items in more strategic locations (McCarthy 1993). Other researchers have studied garbage, measuring whisky consumption in a town that was legally “dry” by counting empty bottles in trashcans (Lee 2000).

It would be considered unethical to use most unobtrusive measures to research spouse abuse. You could, however, analyze 911 calls. Also, if there were a public forum held by abused or abusing spouses on the Internet, you could record and analyze the online conversations. Ethics are still a matter of dispute: To secretly record the behavior of people in public settings, such as a crowd, is generally considered acceptable, but to do so in private settings is not.

Ethics in Sociological Research
In addition to choosing an appropriate research method, then, we must also follow the ethics of sociology, which center on assumptions of science and morality (American Sociological Association 1997). Research ethics require openness (sharing findings with the scientific community), honesty, and truth. Ethics clearly forbid the falsification of results. They also condemn plagiarism, that is, stealing someone else’s work. Another ethical guideline is that research subjects should generally be informed that they are being studied and never be harmed by the research. Ethics also require that sociologists protect the anonymity of people who provide private information. Finally, although not all sociologists agree, it generally is considered unethical for researchers to misrepresent themselves.

Sociologists take these ethical standards seriously. To illustrate the extent to which they will go to protect their respondents, consider the research conducted by Mario Brajuha.

Protecting the Subjects: The Brajuha Research
Mario Brajuha, a graduate student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, was doing participant observation of restaurant workers. He lost his job as a waiter when the restaurant where he was working burned down—a fire of “suspicious origin,” as the police said (Brajuha and Hallowell 1986). When detectives learned that Brajuha had taken field notes, they asked to see them. Because he had promised to keep his information confidential, Brajuha refused to hand them over. The district attorney subpoenaed the notes. Brajuha still refused. The district attorney then threatened to put Brajuha in jail. By this time, Brajuha’s notes had become rather famous, and unsavory characters—perhaps those who had set the fire—also began to wonder what was in them. They, too, demanded to see them, accompanying their demands with threats of a different nature. Brajuha found himself between a rock and a hard place.

For two years, Brajuha refused to hand over his notes, even though he grew anxious and had to appear at several court hearings. Finally, the district attorney dropped the subpoena. When the two men under investigation for setting the fire died, so did the threats to Brajuha, his wife, and their children.

Misleading the Subjects: The Humphreys Research
Sociologists agree on the necessity to protect respondents, and they applaud the professional manner in which Brajuha handled himself. Although there is less agreement that researchers should not misrepresent themselves, sociologists who violate this norm can become embroiled in ethical controversy. Let’s look at the case of Laud Humphreys, whose research forced sociologists to rethink and refine their ethical stance.

Laud Humphreys, a classmate of mine at Washington University in St. Louis, was an Episcopal priest who decided to become a sociologist. For his Ph.D. dissertation, Humphreys (1970, 1971, 1975) studied social interaction in “tearooms,” public restrooms where some men go for quick, anonymous sex with other men.

Humphreys found that some restrooms in Forest Park, just across from our campus, were tearooms. He began a participant observation study by hanging around these
restrooms. He found that in addition to the two men having sex, a third man—called a “watchqueen”—served as a lookout for police and other unwelcome strangers. Humphreys took on the role of watchqueen, not only watching for strangers but also observing what the men did. He wrote field notes after the encounters.

Humphreys decided that he wanted to know more about the regular lives of these men. For example, what was the significance of the wedding rings that many of the men wore? He came up with an ingenious technique. Many of the men parked their cars near the tearooms, and Humphreys recorded their license plate numbers. A friend in the St. Louis police department gave Humphreys each man’s address. About a year later, Humphreys arranged for these men to be included in a medical survey conducted by some of the sociologists on our faculty.

Disguising himself with a different hairstyle and clothing, Humphreys visited the men’s homes. He interviewed the men, supposedly for the medical study. He found that they led conventional lives. They voted, mowed their lawns, and took their kids to Little League games. Many reported that their wives were not aroused sexually or were afraid of getting pregnant because their religion did not allow them to use birth control. Humphreys concluded that heterosexual men were also using the tearooms for a form of quick sex.

This study stirred controversy among sociologists and nonsociologists alike. Many sociologists criticized Humphreys, and a national columnist even wrote a scathing denunciation of “sociological snoopers” (Von Hoffman 1970). As the controversy heated up and a court case loomed, Humphreys feared that his list of respondents might be subpoenaed. He gave me the list to take from Missouri to Illinois, where I had begun teaching. When he called and asked me to destroy it, I burned it in my backyard.

Was this research ethical? This question is not decided easily. Although many sociologists sided with Humphreys—and his book reporting the research won a highly acclaimed award—the criticisms mounted. At first, Humphreys vigorously defended his position, but five years later, in a second edition of his book (1975), he stated that he should have identified himself as a researcher.

**Values in Sociological Research**

Max Weber raised an issue that remains controversial among sociologists. He declared that sociology should be **value free**. By this he meant that a sociologist’s **values**—beliefs about what is good or worthwhile in life—should not affect research. Instead, he said, we need objectivity, total neutrality, for if values influence research, sociological findings will be biased.

Objectivity as an ideal is not a matter of debate in sociology. All sociologists agree that no one should distort data to make them fit preconceived ideas or values. It is equally clear, however, that, like everyone else, sociologists are members of a particular society at a given point in history and are, therefore, infused with values of all sorts. These values inevitably play a role in our research (Duneier 1999:78–79). For example, values are part of the reason that one sociologist chooses to do research on the Mafia while another turns a sociological eye on kindergarten students.

To overcome the distortions that values can cause and that unwittingly can become part of our research, sociologists stress **replication**, the repetition of a study by other...
researchers to compare results. If values have distorted research findings, replication by other sociologists should uncover the bias and correct it.

Despite this consensus, however, values remain a hotly debated topic in sociology (Burawoy 2003; Gans 2003). This debate illustrates again the tension in sociology that we discussed earlier: the goal of analyzing social life versus the goal of social reform. Some sociologists are convinced that research should be directed along paths that will help to reform society, that will alleviate poverty, racism, sexism, and so on. Other sociologists lean strongly toward basic or pure sociology, research that has no goal beyond understanding social life and testing social theories. They say that nothing but their own interests should direct sociologists to study one topic rather than another. These contrasting views are summarized in Figure 1.5.

In the midst of this controversy, sociologists study the major issues facing our society at this crucial juncture of world history. From racism and sexism to the globalization of capitalism—these are all topics that sociologists study and that we will explore in this book. Sociologists also examine face-to-face interaction—talking, touching, gestures, clothing. These, too, will be the subject of our discussions in the upcoming chapters. This beautiful variety in sociology—and the contrast of going from the larger picture to the smaller picture and back again—is part of the reason that sociology holds such fascination for me. I hope that you also find this variety appealing as you read the rest of this book.

### Summary and Review

#### The Sociological Perspective

**What is the sociological perspective?**

The *sociological perspective* stresses that people’s social experiences—the groups to which they belong and their experiences within these groups—underlie their behavior. C. Wright Mills referred to this as the intersection of biography (the individual) and history (social factors that influence the individual). P. 4–5.

#### Origins of Sociology

**When did sociology first appear as a separate discipline?**

Sociology emerged as a separate discipline in the mid-1800s in western Europe, during the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization affected all aspects of human existence—where people lived, the nature of their work, how they viewed life, and interpersonal relationships. Early sociologists who focused on these social changes include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Harriet Martineau, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Pp. 5–8.

#### Sexism in Early Sociology

**What was the position of women in early sociology?**

Sociology appeared during a historical period of deep sexism. Consequently, the few women who received the education required to become sociologists were ignored. P. 9.

#### Sociology in North America

**When was sociology established in the United States?**

The earliest departments of sociology were established in the late 1800s at the universities of Kansas, Chicago, and Atlanta. During the 1940s, the University of Chicago dominated sociology. A tension between social reform and social research and theory ran through sociology, and
in its early years, the contributions of women and minorities were largely overlooked. Pp. 9–12.

**What is the difference between basic (or pure) and applied sociology?**

U.S. sociology has experienced tension between pure or basic sociology, in which the aim is to analyze society, and attempts to use sociology to reform society. Today, these contrasting orientations exist dynamically side by side. **Applied sociology** is the use of sociology to solve problems. Pp. 12–14.

**Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology**

**What is a theory?**

A theory is a statement about how facts are related to one another. A theory provides a conceptual framework for interpreting facts. P. 14.

**What are sociology’s major theoretical perspectives?**

Sociologists use three primary theoretical frameworks to interpret social life. **Symbolic interactionists** examine how people use symbols to develop and share their views of the world. Symbolic interactionists usually focus on the *micro* level—on small-scale, face-to-face interaction. **Functional analysts**, in contrast, focus on the *macro* level—on large-scale patterns of society. Functional theorists stress that a social system is made up of interrelated parts. When working properly, each part contributes to the stability of the whole, fulfilling a function that contributes to the system’s equilibrium. **Conflict theorists** also focus on large-scale patterns of society. They stress that society is composed of competing groups that struggle for scarce resources. Pp. 14–19.

With each perspective focusing on select features of social life, and each providing a unique interpretation, no single theory is adequate. The combined insights of all three perspectives yield a more comprehensive picture of social life. P. 19.

**What is the relationship between theory and research?**

Theory and research depend on one another. Sociologists use theory to interpret the data they gather. Theory also generates questions that need to be answered by research, while research, in turn, helps to generate theory. Theory without research is not likely to represent real life, while research without theory is merely a collection of empty facts. P. 19–20.

**Doing Sociological Research**

**Why do we need sociological research when we have common sense?**

Common sense is unreliable. Research often shows that commonsense ideas are limited or false. Pp. 20, 21, 22.

**What are the eight basic steps in sociological research?**


These steps are explained on pp. 20–22.

**Research Methods**

**How do sociologists gather data?**

To gather data, sociologists use six research methods (or research designs): surveys, participant observation, secondary analysis, documents, experiments, and unobtrusive measures. Pp. 22–29.

**Ethics in Sociological Research**

**How important are ethics in sociological research?**

Ethics are of fundamental concern to sociologists, who are committed to openness, honesty, truth, and protecting their subjects from harm. The Brajuha research on restaurant workers and the Humphreys research on “tea-rooms” illustrate ethical issues of concern to sociologists. Pp. 29–30.

**What value dilemmas do sociologists face?**

Max Weber stressed that social research should be value free: The researcher’s personal beliefs must be set aside to permit objective findings. Like everyone else, however, sociologists are members of a particular society at a given point in history and are infused with values of all sorts. To overcome the distortions that values can cause, sociologists stress replication, the repetition of a study by other researchers in order to compare results. Values present a second dilemma for researchers: whether to do research solely to analyze human behavior (basic or pure sociology) or to reform harmful social arrangements. P. 30–31.
Thinking Critically
about Chapter 1

1. Do you think that sociologists should try to reform society or study it dispassionately?
2. Of the three theoretical perspectives, which one would you prefer to use if you were a sociologist? Why?
3. Considering the macro- and micro-level approaches in sociology, which one do you think better explains social life? Why?

Additional Resources

Companion Website  www.ablongman.com/henslin

- Content Select Research Database for Sociology, with suggested key terms and annotated references
- Link to 2000 Census, with activities
- Flashcards of key terms and concepts
- Flashcards of key terms and concepts
- Practice Tests
- Weblinks
- Interactive Maps

Where Can I Read More on This Topic?

Suggested readings for this chapter are listed at the back of this book.