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1 THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify and understand the difference between society and culture.

2. Describe the concept of the sociological imagination, particularly the connection between personal troubles and public issues.

3. Explain the three core foci of sociology: social inequality, social institutions, and social change.

4. Explain and give examples of the three core aims of sociology.

5. Assess how Durkheim's study of suicide illustrates the connection between the individual and society.

6. Discuss the main ways that sociologists study society and the parts of the research process.

7. Compare qualitative and quantitative research methods, highlighting the benefits and challenges of each approach.

Auguste Comte first coined the word "sociology." He believed that this new discipline had the potential to bring together all the sciences and to improve society. Comte was, in part, inspired to create this new area of study because he lived in a period of rapid social change (1798–1857). Industry was replacing agriculture as a way of life, democracies were emerging from monarchies, and populations were migrating from the countryside to the cities. To make sense of this immense social change, Comte sought to understand how society worked, as well as the effect of these larger processes on society and the people living in it.

Before and after Comte, individuals from all disciplines have been interested in explaining how society operates and why it sometimes does not work as well as we think it could. For example, philosophers as far back as Socrates and Plato considered what makes a good society. But sociology is different from this type of philosophical thought. In fact, the definition of **sociology** is that it is the systematic study of human society. This definition begs the question, "What is society?"

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Society is the largest-scale human group that shares a common geographic territory and common institutions. Societies are not necessarily the same as states. In fact, many states contain several different societies. For example, the United Kingdom is said to contain four distinct societies: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

Society is based on and requires social interaction among its members. These interactions can occur in a variety of settings and on many different levels, such as in neighborhoods, schools, or workplaces. Such connections are important because they create shared understandings and are the basis of continued cooperation among the members of a society. These interactions also work to socialize newcomers, either those who emigrated from other parts of the world or young people who are learning how to behave within our society. Through this socialization we teach others the written and unwritten rules and values of our society. We also use this interaction between members to monitor and regulate each other, making sure that we all follow society's rules and expectations.

Interactions within society happen in patterned ways; for example, most people go to the same coffee shop every morning and have the same conversation with the barista. The routines, expectations, and behaviors in these interactions are established over time so that ongoing cooperation between people is possible (Charon, 2012). Imagine if you replied to the barista's question, "How are you?" with a long story about your new sociology course or your indecision about whether to go on another date with someone. He would probably be quite surprised at your unusual behavior in this situation because the routine is that you simply say, "Fine, thank you." By responding in an unexpected way, you challenge the common expectations of how this social interaction should take place. The fact that most interactions in society are predictable establishes a common set of understandings of how our society works and how we are supposed to behave in it.

It is important to note that these patterns can change over time. When the COVID-19 pandemic became a global concern in 2020, it shaped our behavior in many different domains. Obviously, it had serious implications for our health and the health of our communities. However, the implications reached many other parts of society. Consider the interaction with the barista just discussed. Even this innocuous conversation was quite different in December 2020 than it was a year before. By December 2020, you would have been wearing a mask while talking to a masked barista. There would have been plexiglass in front of you as you were encouraged to pay with a credit card so as to minimize touching surfaces. And, you could not sit in the coffee shop to drink your latte. In fact, you were expected to move out of the store quickly and not engage in any casual conversation about the weather with the staff as you may have done the year before. This example illustrates how social interactions are patterned, but also how these patterns change and evolve over time.

Harold Garfinkel (1991) was interested in the unexamined ways that we follow the rules of our society. He argued that people unknowingly create and re-create the rules of society every day and that we do not really see or understand these rules until they are broken. Individuals are constantly interacting with one another, guided by a set of expectations regarding how they should act in a given situation. However, we are not always able to articulate, or even notice, these rules because we take them for granted. To examine these accepted ways of producing order in society, Garfinkel developed what he called **breaching experiments**. In a breaching experiment, the researcher breaks a social rule to reveal the unrecognized way that all individuals cooperate to maintain the smooth social interactions and social order. Garfinkel—or, more often, his graduate students—would break a social rule and then see how people reacted. By creating disorder, he hoped to demonstrate how social order is usually maintained.

In one experiment, Garfinkel instructed his students to act as guests in their parents' homes during their holiday visit. The students were to be excessively polite, ask permission to use the restroom, and pretend not to know the people in the household. By behaving like strangers, the students undermined the expectations of how children should act toward their parents. Students reported that parents were upset and confused by the behavior—some were even quite angry at being treated so formally. What would your parents think if you acted this way toward them?

Garfinkel also did many experiments in grocery stores. He had students take items from other people's carts. Shoppers initially assumed that a mistake had been made. Perhaps the students thought the cart was their own? However, the students told the other shoppers that they simply found it easier to take items from another cart instead of walking up and down the aisles. This behavior is not explicitly forbidden— grocery stores have no signs telling you not to take things from someone else's cart—and the items had not yet been purchased. However, the shoppers often were angry at having their carts raided.

Socially awkward behaviors can inspire sociologists to ask what we consider normal or acceptable behaviors. The TV show *Ted Lasso* follows a U.S. football coach who moves to the UK to coach a soccer team. The humor comes from Ted's inability to understand the culture and rules of both the UK and soccer.

27th Annual SAG Awards/Getty Images for WarnerMedia/Getty Images

Although many people find encounters with rule breakers frustrating, it is a long-standing part of comedy. The TV show *Ted Lasso* is based on the way that the main character, Ted, does things that break social norms because, as an American, he does not understand the cultural practices of the British. He is constantly friendly and chatty, is always very upbeat, and bakes cookies for his boss. The humor in the show comes from his inability to pick up on the social cues from people around him. Television shows such as *The Big Bang Theory, Arrested Development, Bob's Burgers,* and *The Office* are also based on the humor in seeing other people break social rules. When Tina Belcher from *Bob's Burgers* does something unusual, such as refusing to give a customer space to decide on their order and instead inching closer and closer, we find it humorous because social rules dictate that servers give their customers space and time to decide on their meal. It is only by breaking the social rule, or seeing others do so, that we can see what the social rule is and why following it makes society run smoothly.

Interactions in society are shaped by culture. **Culture** is a system of behaviors, beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, and materials. Cultures shape how we behave and the physical elements of our society. Our culture affects a myriad of elements of our lives, from how we set up cities to how we dress. It is clear from this definition that culture is contested: We certainly do not all agree on how we should act or what we should believe. There can be important distinctions between the dominant culture and subcultures or countercultures.

The **dominant culture** can impose its values, beliefs, and behaviors on a given society because of its political and economic power. Think about the human-interest stories discussed on *The View* or *Good Morning America.* They tend to be of interest to the people with a lot of money or power: how to decorate a home, what to wear, or which products to buy. These stories are based on the values of the dominant culture—that it is important to look attractive and fashionable, own an impressive house, and own lots of things. There are many people who disagree with these foci in our culture. A **counterculture** is a group that rejects certain elements of the dominant culture. For example, anticonsumerist groups are countercultural. They reject our society's dominant focus on the importance of acquiring and consuming mass amounts of products to show our status and worth.

The hit musical *Hamilton* brings together the high culture realm of theater with the popular culture sphere of rap music and modern dance. *Hamilton's* playwright, Lin Manuel Miranda, wrote another musical combining these high and popular culture elements called *In the Heights*.

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Subcultures also differ from the dominant culture, but they do not necessarily oppose it the way that countercultures do. For example, minor differences in occupational groups can create subcultures. Lawyers' daily routines, interests, and style of dress might differ significantly from those of plumbers. Students involved in fraternities or sororities, those on sports teams, and those in theater programs might also be quite different from each other in their behaviors and dress. However, they do not necessarily oppose the values or behaviors of the other groups.

Culture is often divided into high and popular culture. When people say that someone is cultured, they tend to mean that the person participates in **high culture**, the culture of a society's elite. In general, this type of culture may be difficult to appreciate without having been taught to enjoy and understand it. **Popular (or low) culture** is the culture of the majority. In the world of music, opera and classical music are high culture, while rap and pop are popular culture. In literature, classic novels and plays (think Austen or Shakespeare) are high culture; science fiction, fantasy, or romance novels are popular culture (*The Hunger Games, Harry Potter, Twilight,* or Jenny Han's novels).

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In American society, most people believe that individuals shape their own destiny. To a certain extent, this is true; we, as individuals, make decisions every day that shape the kind of life we lead. For example, you made decisions about whether to attend university or college, how hard to work in your classes, where to live while attending school, and what type of summer job you want. But, of course, many factors influence these decisions.

C. Wright Mills, the author of *The Sociological Imagination,* is pictured here. Using the social imagination, we can see how society can shape our individual experiences and how our own biographies are related to larger historical processes.

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Let's examine your decision about a summer job. If your parents are willing and able to help pay for your education, you might not need to work in the summer or you might choose to take an unpaid internship, which would be impossible if you needed to pay your own tuition. In this way, your individual choice of whether you work and what type of job you get is, to some degree, structured by the wealth and support of your parents.

We might be interested in how your individual choices are constrained because this might shape later outcomes. For example, students who have completed an unpaid internship might find it easier to get a good job after graduation because they will have gained skills and social contacts while interning. Students who have wealthy parents (and therefore do not need a summer job) are more likely than other students to have the time and resources to do an internship, which can perpetuate inequality in society over time.

This example illustrates how individual choices (sometimes called "agency") are structured in society. We can make decisions, but our choices are often shaped or limited by larger social forces such as our family, our social class, the economy, the education system, and gender norms. Many sociologists have tried to make sense of this complicated relationship between an individual's agency and society's constraints. Karl Marx famously said, "[People] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (in Tucker, 1978, p. 595).

Getting to Know: C. Wright Mills (1916–1962)

- As a child, he once wrapped his arms and legs around a telephone pole for many hours to protest attending a school he didn't like. His father tried to remove him but was unsuccessful.

- He often arrived at Columbia University on a roaring BMW motorcycle, dressed in plaid shirts, old jeans, and work boots that stood in sharp contrast to the gray flannel suits worn by his colleagues.

- He was a public intellectual whose work offered a scathing critique of American society, foreign policy, and an academic culture that promoted disinterested observations of society.

- His *Letter to the New Left* (1960) argued that young intelligentsia—university students—have the potential to bring about radical social change. This letter, as well as his book *The Power Elite* (1956), inspired many of the leaders and organizations of the vibrant student movement that erupted in 1960s America.

C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) also tried to tackle these complicated issues with what he called the **sociological imagination**. Mills called on us to try to see the connections between our individual lives and the larger society in which we live. He argued that we can only understand our own lives and biographies if we understand the larger history of our society. Once we make these connections, we will be able to see the relationship between our **personal troubles** (problems that we face as individuals) and larger **public issues** (social problems that arise in society).

READING: FROM *THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION*

C. Wright Mills

First published in 1959, Mills's The Sociological Imagination is one of the most widely read sociology books of all time. The sociological imagination is at the core of sociology. The following excerpt from Chapter 1 of the book discusses the links between personal troubles and public issues. When reading this chapter, consider how Mills encourages us to see connections between our own lives and larger social structures.

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: what ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighbourhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Surely it is no wonder. In what period have so many men been so totally exposed at so fast a pace to such earthquakes of change? That Americans have not known such catastrophic changes as have the men and women of other societies is due to historical facts that are now quickly becoming "merely history." The history that now affects every man is world history. Within this scene and this period, in the course of a single generation, one-sixth of mankind is transformed from all that is feudal and backward into all that is modern, advanced, and fearful. Political colonies are freed; new and less visible forms of imperialism installed. Revolutions occur; men feel the intimate grip of new kinds of authority. Totalitarian societies rise, and are smashed to bits—or succeed fabulously. After two centuries of ascendancy, capitalism is shown up as only one way to make society into an industrial apparatus. After two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind. Everywhere in the underdeveloped world, ancient ways of life are broken up and vague expectations become urgent demands. Everywhere in the overdeveloped world, the means of authority and of violence become total in scope and bureaucratic in form. Humanity itself now lies before us, the super-nation at either pole concentrating its most coordinated and massive efforts upon the preparation of World War III.

The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they cannot

understand the meaning of their epoch for their own lives? That—in defence of selfhood—they become morally insensible, trying to remain altogether private men? Is it any wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap?

It is not only information that they need—in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it. It is not only the skills of reason that they need—although their struggles to acquire these often exhaust their limited moral energy.

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination.

1

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one. We do not know the limits of man's capacities for supreme effort or willing degradation, for agony or glee, for pleasurable brutality or the sweetness of reason. But in our time, we have come to know that the limits of "human nature" are frighteningly broad. We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. And it is the signal of what is best in contemporary studies of man and society.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?
2. Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?
3. What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of "human nature" are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for "human nature" of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

Whether the point of interest is a great power state or a minor literary mood, a family, a prison, a creed—these are the kinds of questions the best social analysts have asked. They are the intellectual pivots of classic studies of man in society—and they are the questions inevitably raised by any mind possessing the sociological imagination. For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being.

That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society. In large part, contemporary man's self-conscious view of himself as at least an outsider, if not a permanent stranger, rests upon an absorbed realization of social relativity and of the transformative power of history. The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of this self-consciousness. By its use men whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar. Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summations, cohesive assessments, comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values: in a word, by their reflection and by their sensibility, they realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences.

2

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure." This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of a historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary men. An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements, and often too it involves what Marxists call "contradictions" or "antagonisms."

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

Consider war. The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honour; how to make money out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieux and within it to survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; . . . with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganized irresponsibility of a world of nation-states.

Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them.

Or consider the metropolis—the horrible, beautiful, ugly, magnificent sprawl of the great city. For many upper-class people, the personal solution to "the problem of the city" is to have an apartment with private garage under it in the heart of the city, and 40 miles out, a house by Henry Hill, garden by Garrett Eckbo, on a hundred acres of private land. In these two controlled environments—with a small staff at each end and a private helicopter connection—most people could solve many of the problems of personal milieux caused by the facts of the city. But all this, however splendid, does not solve the public issues that the structural fact of the city poses. What should be done with this wonderful monstrosity? Break it all up into scattered units, combining residence and work? Refurbish it as it stands? Or, after evacuation, dynamite it and build new cities according to new plans in new places? What should those plans be? And who is to decide and to accomplish whatever choice is made? These are structural issues; to confront them and to solve them requires us to consider political and economic issues that affect innumerable milieux.

In so far as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. In so far as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless—with or without psychiatric aid—to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposes upon him. In so far as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution. In so far as the overdeveloped megalopolis and the overdeveloped automobile are built-in features of the overdeveloped society, the issues of urban living will not be solved by personal ingenuity and private wealth.

What we experience in various and specific milieux, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieux we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieux. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination.

Reading Questions

1. What does Mills mean by, "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both"? How could you understand your own life better by knowing more about history? How do individual biographies shape history? Think of a concrete example of this connection between individual biography and larger social history.

2. What do the terms *personal troubles* and *public issues* mean?

3. How could we understand the issues of gender inequality, poverty, and crime as either a personal trouble or public issue? How does labelling these problems a personal trouble or a public issue shape the kinds of solutions we might propose?

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION:

COVID-19 AND THE OPIOID CRISIS AS PERSONAL TROUBLES OR PUBLIC ISSUES

The sociological imagination encourages us to understand how problems can be seen as personal troubles or public issues. In this activity, we consider how we can understand two issues, COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic, as personal troubles or as public issues.

1. First, let's consider these two problems as personal troubles and as public issues. How can we think of COVID-19 as a personal trouble, related to the personal circumstances of individuals? How is it a public issue, related to larger institutions and structures of society? Consider how the opioid crisis and drug-related deaths can be seen as personal troubles or public issues.

2. Search online for "COVID-19" and "Opioid Crisis." When you read newspaper articles about these two issues, do the articles tend to focus on them as personal troubles or public issues? Are these two social problems equally likely to be seen in each of these ways? Why or why not?

3. How much coverage and discussion has there been of each of these two social problems in the past two years? (Consider both in the news and among your family and friends.) Why might one of these issues be discussed more than the other?

4. Figure 1.1 shows the number of opioid overdose deaths reported to the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics between 2015 and 2023. Figure 1.2 shows the number of deaths per week in the U.S. due to COVID-19 from 2020 to 2023. Are you surprised to see the number of deaths from opioids in this period? Why do you think that the opioid deaths received so much less attention than COVID-19 in the media and in the community? How is this related to our understanding of these issues as personal trouble or public issues?

5. Why do you think that the government response to COVID-19 (including shutting down parts of the economy and schools) was so much more aggressive than the response to opioid deaths? What types of policies could the government enact if they were as focused on addressing drug-related deaths?

FIGURE 1.1 ■	U.S. Deaths from Opioid Overdose, 2015–2023
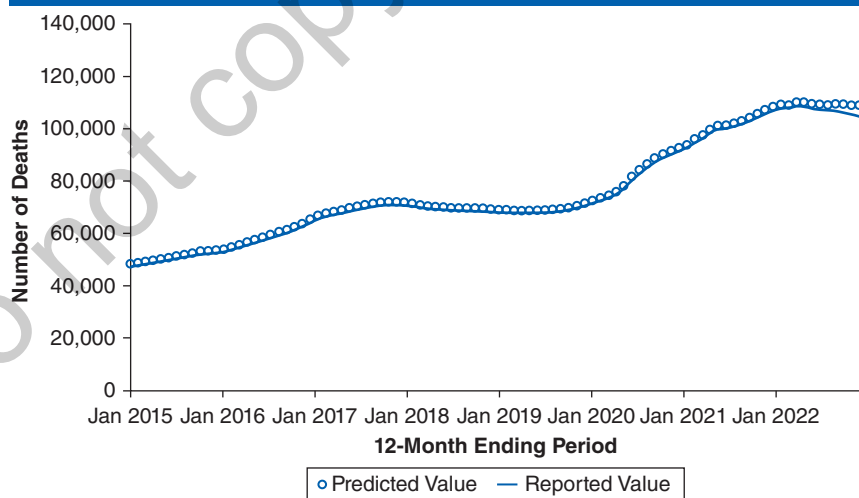
Source: National Center for Health Statistics (n.d.). *Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts.* Centers for Disease Control. Retrieved May 12, 2023, from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm

FIGURE 1.2 ■ U.S. Weekly Number of Deaths From COVID-19, January 2020–May 2023
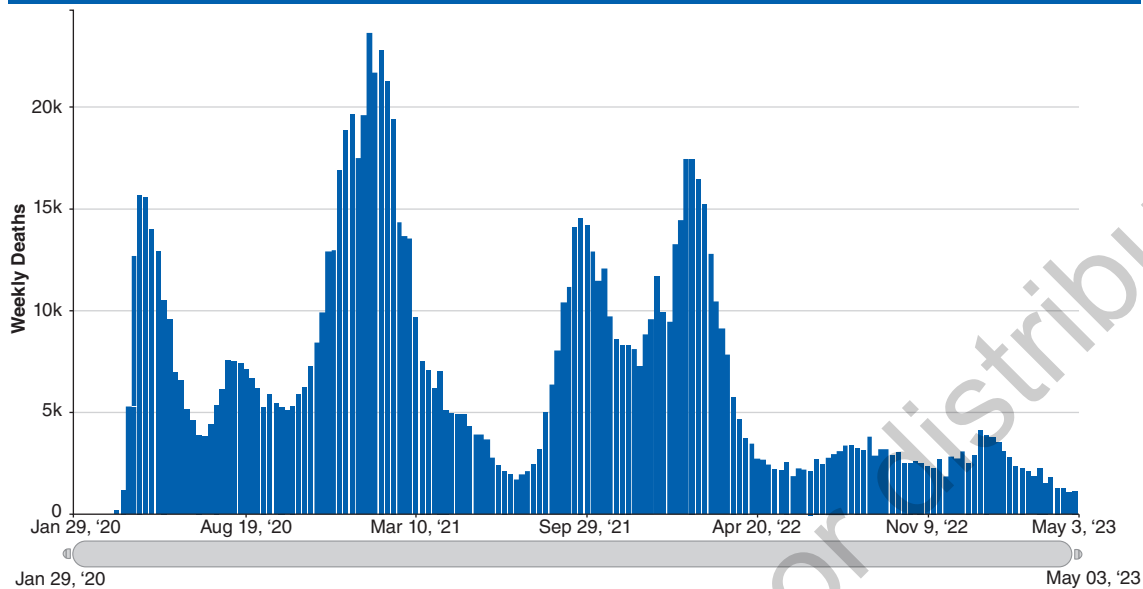
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review.* https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html

THREE CORE FOCI OF SOCIOLOGY

As we learned earlier, sociology is the systematic study of human society. Sociologists can study a wide variety of things; in fact, almost anything in human society can be examined with a sociological perspective. However, most of sociology focuses on three core areas: the study of social inequality, the role of social institutions, and the study of social change.

Social Inequality

The study of **social inequality** is at the core of sociology. Generally, inequality is the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged in society. More precisely, inequality is based on the "differences between people . . . that are *consequential* for the lives they lead, most particularly for the rights and opportunities they exercise and the rewards or privileges they enjoy" (Grabb, 2006, p. 2; emphasis in original). People differ from one another in an almost infinite number of ways. For example, humans have different eye colors, are different heights, and write with either their right or left hand (or both). Although these are all differences among people, they are not particularly consequential in a person's life. Differences that are more important, and that have been the basis of most sociological inquiry, include social class, gender, race, and ethnicity. These topics have been of interest to sociologists since the beginning of the discipline. More recently, sociologists—and society in general—are starting to see the importance of other differences, such as sexual orientation, age, immigration status, and disability status. All these differences can be very important for the lives that individuals lead.

Characteristics such as gender, race, or age can shape the rights, opportunities, rewards, or privileges that individuals enjoy. Examples include the right to vote and the opportunity to

attend college. Women were not afforded the right to vote in federal elections in the United States until 1920 and Native Americans were not fully enfranchised and able to vote in all states until 1957. Therefore, being female or Native American had important consequences for the political rights granted to these individuals. Rewards and privileges include access to good jobs and safe housing. We know, for example, that Americans who are of a lower social class are much less likely than those in a higher class to live in a safe neighborhood with good amenities (such as parks and schools nearby).

Inequality between people exists in all societies. When sociologists look at inequality, they are interested in several key questions: Why does inequality exist? How is inequality generated, maintained, and reproduced? What are the implications of inequality? How can inequality be reduced? These and other important questions form the basis of the sociological study of inequality.

Although the existence of inequality is universal, the type and amount differ across societies and over time. Different societies exhibit varying levels of inequality, with some societies being much more equitable than others. For example, the traditional caste system in India, which makes it almost impossible for people to move out of the social status of their birth, is much more unequal than modern American society. Inequality also increases and decreases within a single society. Even India's rigid caste system has been challenged over time. The Indian government passed legislation to fight the discrimination experienced by the lowest caste group, the Dalits. There has also been a rise in marriage between castes, which was historically unthinkable but has reduced prejudice and inequality between groups. In fact, India now has relatively high representation of the lowest class in elected office, showing how inequality can change over time. Finally, inequality is based on different factors across societies: Some societies have a lot of racial inequality but little class differentiation, while others have little racial inequality but strict class hierarchies.

Many people wonder if our society is becoming more or less equal. This question is extremely difficult to answer because it depends on the kind of inequality being examined and on the measures used. For simplicity's sake, we will examine income and assess whether inequality based on this factor is increasing or decreasing across social class, race, and gender groups.

There is a great deal of evidence that class inequality is increasing in the United States. We can see this trend if we compare the richest 20% of families with the poorest 20%. In an equal society, each group would earn 20% of the society's entire income. We know that this is certainly not the case, since there are some people who are much richer than others in this country. Class inequality has been increasing rapidly since the late 1960s. In 2006 the top 20% of Americans earned more than 14 times as much as the bottom 20%. Just 14 years later, in 2020, the top 20% were making 17.4 times the income of the bottom 20% (Shrider, Kollar, Chen, and Semega, 2021).

The growing divide between America's rich and poor does not tell the whole story of inequality in this country. Inequality between racial and ethnic groups illustrates the complexity of the issue. Let's compare earnings of individuals who self-categorize as White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian. In 1973 Black people made 60 cents for every dollar made by a White person and Hispanic people earned 77 cents for every dollar earned by a White person, on average. By 2020 this had remained relatively stagnant for Blacks (61 cents) but had declined for Hispanics (74 cents; Shrider et al., 2021). Asian Americans, however, have increased their earnings relative to Whites (from 114% in 1987 to 126% in 2020). Thus, racial and ethnic inequality has either risen, declined, or remained stagnant, depending on the group examined.

Some inequality is declining over time. For example, income inequality based on gender has diminished in a pronounced way in the past 60 years. In 1959 American women working full time made 61% of what their male counterparts did. This number increased to 82% by

2020 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). In other words, women went from making 61 cents for every dollar a man made to 82 cents per dollar. These examples show the challenges of assessing changing inequality. The task would be even more difficult if we looked beyond simple income to wealth inequality or educational and work opportunities. It is no surprise, then, that so many sociologists are concerned with such an important and challenging topic.

In addition to measuring and assessing social inequality, sociologists often study why and how inequality persists. We know that all societies have inequality. But why is this the case? How does inequality endure? How can it be reduced? This book examines all these questions. In particular, we will learn more about inequality that arises from social class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Social Institutions

Social institutions are the norms, values, and rules of conduct that structure human interactions. Institutions are not just physical places or buildings. They are also the social arrangements for how things are done. For example, the institution of education is not just a school or classroom, but is also a set of larger arrangements that organize how people will be educated and what they will learn. There are five core institutions in modern American society: the family, education, religion, the economy, and government. Other institutions, such as the mass media, medicine, science, and the military, are also important parts of American society.

Institutions are standardized ways of doing something. In institutions, actions become regularized, patterned, and reproduced. When you consider education, you might think of your specific teachers, your class experience, or the schools you attended. Such details are certainly important aspects of your education. However, the institution of education is far more than these parts. It is based on the routine and patterned ways that education is delivered and assessed. For example, the material that you learned in elementary and high school was not simply the choice of your teachers. The institution of education sets a curriculum and decides that all students in 9th grade will read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* Our education system is also based on teaching students from roughly 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., 5 days a week for 10 months of the year. All these routines are established by the institution of education in the United States and structure how education functions across states and in the country as a whole.

Institutions are important because they generally help society run smoothly. They do so, in part, by socializing us and teaching us the rules of our society. When you first go to school, you learn that you must sit quietly in class and raise your hand when you want to speak. These rules are important and help later schooling and other social interactions function. Imagine if everyone just wandered around the room during your college classes—the result would certainly be a chaotic environment and make it impossible to learn.

However, institutions can also serve a negative function by maintaining and reinforcing inequality. In fact, one of the main reasons that inequality tends to persist is the role of social institutions. Because standardized patterns of behavior become routine, they can reinforce some of the differences between people. For example, if your college has very high tuition, students of lower social classes might not be able to attend. In this way, the institution and decisions about tuition rates are partly responsible for people from lower social classes being less likely to get the degrees that would allow them to increase their social standing over time.

Institutions can also be an avenue for social change. We know that individuals from lower social classes are much less likely to get a university or college degree than those from higher social classes. Many social programs instituted by the U.S. government have tried to address this imbalance. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (commonly known as the G.I. Bill), passed in

1944, included a program that helped World War II veterans receive postsecondary education by paying their full tuition and living expenses to attend college or trade schools. The idea was that helping soldiers get an education would help them return to civilian life. From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to $4 billion from this program. This program vastly increased the educational attainment of this group of young people. However, it should be noted that White male veterans were more able to take advantage of the bill. African American and female veterans faced discrimination in applying to this program; as a result, these groups had less-dramatic outcomes from this legislation (Berman, 2015).

Social Change

Social change is the third core area of sociology. As we have seen, sociologists examine how social institutions can perpetuate inequality or create social change. If society is based on interactions among people, it can change just as people do.

One major institution in modern American society that has changed greatly is religion. **Secularization**—the process of a religion losing its authority over individuals and social life in general—is a frequently discussed social change. Core founders of sociology, such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim, all argued that the modernization of society would inevitably coincide with a decline in religiosity. Karl Marx was quite happy about this shift: He thought that religion was an opiate of the masses, something that just dulled our pain and senses so that we would not resist the great social inequality that we experience in our lives. Durkheim was more likely to lament the decline of religion; he thought religion was an important part of the glue that holds individuals together in society. Weber looked at how new rational systems, such as science and bureaucracies, would make religious answers to questions less relevant (Collins, 1994). These examples illustrate how sociologists have always been interested in religion's role in society while also highlighting that your perspective on religion is related to the theoretical lens you use to study it. (We will learn much more about these three sociologists throughout this book.)

Statues of the Ten Commandments outside of government buildings are frequent sites of contentious legal battles in the United States. Courts often find that these statues violate the principle of separation between church and state. Think about government institutions where you grew up. Did they adhere to this secular ideal?

Jana Birchum/Getty Images

The study of secularization seeks to explain how, why, and when religious values, practices, and institutions lose their power in modern society. It is certainly true that religion is currently less integral to many functions of American society than it was in the past. For example, many schools were once run by religious institutions. You can still attend a religious school, but most schools in the United States are now operated by the state and are nonreligious. Religious institutions were also once the main provider of charitable and welfare services, running orphanages, food banks, and hospitals. Now, many different groups perform such functions. Many religious institutions are still involved with these activities and raise money for these causes, but the control of these services rests mostly in the hands of the state or private foundations.

Religiosity (the measure of how religious a person is) is declining somewhat in the United States. In 1992, 58% of Americans said that religion was a very important part of their life. This number had declined to 49% by 2021 (Gallup, 2021). This decline is typical of the general secularization occurring across North America and Europe. However, some sociologists have questioned whether it is a universal trend or just a tendency in a certain set of countries that also share other characteristics, such as level of development.

In fact, religiosity is increasing in many parts of the world. Between 1950 and 2020, the number of Catholics in the world doubled from fewer than 500 million to more than 1.36 billion (National Catholic Register, 2022). There has also been a dramatic increase in the spread of evangelical Protestantism, which now has 700 million adherents worldwide (Bibby, 2011).

The discussion of religion's changing role illustrates several key elements in the study of sociology. Religion is an important institution in society. It provides norms, values, and rules of conduct for individuals and helps to structure human interactions. Religion's changing role shows the larger social transformations that are at the heart of the study of sociology. Finally, the changing nature of religion depends on the social context in which it is examined. Comparing across countries or religions highlights how the trends of rising or declining religiosity is context dependent.

THREE CORE AIMS OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociologists aim to do three main things: They try to see general themes in everyday life. They seek to assess critically what seems familiar and common sense. And they examine how individuals both shape society and are shaped by society.

Everyone has a lifetime of experiences in society. From all these experiences, we can generalize how society functions and how people behave in it. However, sometimes this familiarity can be a challenge—it can be difficult to study society because it is all around us. It is like a fish trying to study water. However, sociology, as the systematic study of human society, pushes us to make sense of all our experiences and what we see around us and to come up with general ideas of how society functions.

In *Invitation to Sociology,* Peter Berger (1963) calls on us to see the general in the particular. Put another way, sociologists should look for general patterns in particular people's experiences. We may know some women who are very successful in large companies and who have a great deal of responsibility in their jobs, but we see that most CEOs and senators are men. This information suggests that there is a general pattern of women being less likely than men to hold positions of power. We can now ask ourselves why this might be the case: Is it that fewer women choose to enter business or politics, or is there discrimination in these professions? Through systematic study, we can answer these types of questions.

READING: "BODY RITUAL AMONG THE NACIREMA"

Horace Miner

The following reading from Horace Miner helps us with this first core aim of sociology. In this article, Miner describes the Nacirema culture. He outlines the Naciremas' rituals, customs, and practices and encourages us to see the general themes in particular experiences. Remember how Berger (1963) also called on us to see the strange in the familiar. He said that the first wisdom of sociology is that things are not what they seem. When we travel to other countries, we expect to have some sort of culture shock—to see people eating different food, performing different customs, and wearing different clothing. Berger said that, when we study our own society, it should also be a culture shock minus the geographic displacement. In other words, the sociologist travels at home, with shocking results. Miner's article illustrates how we can work to see the strange in the familiar when confronted with a society and culture (even our own).

The anthropologist has become so familiar with the diversity of ways in which different peoples behave in similar situations that he is not apt to be surprised by even the most exotic customs. In fact, if all of the logically possible combinations of behaviour have not been found somewhere in the world, he is apt to suspect that they must be present in some yet undescribed tribe. This point has, in fact, been expressed with respect to clan organization by Murdock (1949: 71). In this light, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behaviour can go.

Professor Linton first brought the ritual of the Nacirema to the attention of anthropologists 20 years ago (1936: 326), but the culture of this people is still very poorly understood. They are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui, and Tarahumare of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a culture hero, Notgnihsaw, who is otherwise known for two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the Spirit of Truth resided.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labours and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in the society have several shrines in their houses and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such ritual centres it possesses. Most houses are of wattle and daub construction, but the shrine rooms of the more wealthy are walled with stone. Poorer families imitate the rich by applying pottery plaques to their shrine walls.

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live.

These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm.

The charm is not disposed of after it has served its purpose, but is placed in the charm-box of the household shrine. As these magical materials are specific for certain ills, and the real or imagined maladies of the people are many, the charm-box is usually full to overflowing. The magical packets are so numerous that people forget what their purposes were and fear to use them again. While the natives are very vague on this point, we can only assume that the idea in retaining all the old magical materials is that their presence in the charm-box, before which the body rituals are conducted, will in some way protect the worshipper.

Beneath the charm-box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablution. The holy waters are secured from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

In the hierarchy of magical practitioners, and below the medicine men in prestige, are specialists whose designation is best translated [as] "holy-mouth-men." The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them. They also believe that a strong relationship exists between oral and moral characteristics. For example, there is a ritual ablution of the mouth for children which is supposed to improve their moral fibre.

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth- man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy-mouth-man opens the client's mouth and, using the above-mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in the teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these ministrations is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay. . . .

The medicine men have an imposing temple, or *latipso,* in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can only be performed at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the thaumaturge but a permanent group of vestal maidens who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costume and headdress.

The *latipso* ceremonies are so harsh that it is phenomenal that a fair proportion of the really sick natives who enter the temple ever recover. Small children whose indoctrination is still incomplete have been known to resist attempts to take them to the temple because "that is where you go to die." Despite this fact, sick adults are not only willing but eager to undergo the protracted ritual purification, if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of many temples will not admit a

client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained admission and survived the ceremonies, the guardians will not permit the neophyte to leave until he makes still another gift.

The supplicant entering the temple is first stripped of all his or her clothes. In every-day life the Nacirema avoids exposure of his body and its natural functions. Bathing and excretory acts are performed only in the secrecy of the household shrine, where they are ritualized as part of the body-rites. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost upon entry into the *latipso.* A man, whose own wife has never seen him in an excretory act, suddenly finds himself naked and assisted by a vestal maiden while he performs his natural functions into a sacred vessel. This sort of ceremonial treatment is necessitated by the fact that the excreta are used by a diviner to ascertain the course and nature of the client's sickness. Female clients, on the other hand, find their naked bodies are subjected to the scrutiny, manipulation, and prodding of the medicine men.

Few supplicants in the temple are well enough to do anything but lie on their hard beds. The daily ceremonies, like the rites of the holy-mouth- men, involve discomfort and torture. With ritual precision, the vestals awaken their miserable charges each dawn and roll them about on their beds of pain while performing ablutions, in the formal movements of which the maidens are highly trained. At other times they insert magic wands in the supplicant's mouth or force him to eat substances which are supposed to be healing. From time to time the medicine men come to their clients and jab magically treated needles into their flesh. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill, the neophyte in no way decreases the people's faith in the medicine men.

There remains one other kind of practitioner, known as a "listener." This witch-doctor has the power to exorcise the devils that lodge in the heads of people who have been bewitched. The Nacirema believe that parents bewitch their own children. Mothers are particularly suspected of putting a curse on children while teaching them the secret body rituals. The counter-magic of the witch-doctor is unusual in its lack of ritual. The patient simply tells the "listener" all his troubles and fears, beginning with the earliest difficulties he can remember. The memory displayed by the Nacirema in these exorcism sessions is truly remarkable. It is not uncommon for the patient to bemoan the rejection he felt upon being weaned as a babe, and a few individuals even see their troubles going back to the traumatic effects of their own birth.

In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices which have their base in native esthetics but which depend upon the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Still other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large. General dissatisfaction with breast shape is symbolized in the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation. A few women afflicted with almost inhuman hypermammary development are so idolized that they make a handsome living by simply going from village to village and permitting the natives to stare at them for a fee.

Reference has already been made to the fact that excretory functions are ritualized, routinized, and relegated to secrecy. Natural reproductive functions are similarly distorted. Intercourse is taboo as a topic and scheduled as an act. Efforts are made to avoid pregnancy by the use of magical materials or by limiting intercourse to certain phases of the moon. Conception is actually very infrequent. When pregnant, women dress so as to hide their condition. Parturition takes place in secret, without friends or relatives to assist, and the majority of women do not nurse their infants.

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has certainly shown them to be a magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves. But even such exotic customs as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight provided by Malinowski when he wrote (1948: 70):

Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in the developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and

guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of civilization.

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Reading Questions

1. What group is Horace Miner really talking about in this classic article? (Hint: What is "Nacirema" spelled backwards?)
2. Miner mentions several interesting elements of Nacirema culture. What is he referring to when he talks about shrine rooms, charm-boxes, holy-mouth-men, mouth-rites, the *latipso,* and the listener?
3. Miner says that the Nacirema feel that the "human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease" and that this group has a "pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions." Do you think this is true? What evidence could you find to support or contradict these claims?
4. What is the main point of this article? How does this article help you develop a more critical sociological perspective, particularly an ability to see the strange in the familiar?

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ÉMILE DURKHEIM AND SOCIAL FACTS

The final goal of sociology is to understand the dual process of how we shape society and how society shapes us. People create institutions in society in many ways, such as by passing laws and electing leaders who decide how institutions will run. The institutions then influence individuals and the structure of society. Émile Durkheim's famous study of suicide illustrates this relationship.

Although Comte coined the term *sociology*, no universities offered courses or did research in sociology during his lifetime. Émile Durkheim, who was born in France in 1858, was one of the original proponents of creating a field of sociology that would have a significant presence at universities. He argued that sociology would be different from philosophy, a popular discipline at the time, because it would focus on empirical research. He claimed that sociology was distinct from psychology, another well-established discipline of the period, because this new discipline would prioritize the social over the individual. To help establish sociology as a discipline, Durkheim created *L'Année Sociologique,* an annual review of French sociology that became the country's most influential publication of its kind. He also wrote several significant books and other documents using the sociological perspective and method he was advocating, including *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1960), *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895), *Suicide* (1897/1951), and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/2008).

Getting to Know: Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

- Durkheim was part of the Army of Justice, a group of intellectuals who fought what they considered the unfair execution of a French captain accused of treason.

- Durkheim's early death was attributed to his "loss of spirit and well-being" after his son's death in World War I.

- Durkheim wrote three of sociology's most influential works (*Suicide, The Rules of Sociological Method*, and *The Division of Labour in Society*) within a 5-year period.

- Durkheim did not make it into the École Normale Supérieure until his third attempt.

For Durkheim, sociology was a unique discipline because it was based on the study of **social facts,** the external social structures, norms, and values that shape individuals' actions. As Durkheim (1897/1951, pp. 37–38) explained, the "sociological methods as we practice it rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual." He believed that society is something more than just a group of individuals and the individual in society is "dominated by a moral reality greater than himself" (p. 38).

The Study of Suicide

To illustrate his concept of social facts and the way the sociological method could work, Durkheim conducted a study of suicide. The topic was chosen deliberately. At first glance, suicide seems like an obviously individual act; a person's choice to take his own life is often explained in terms of the person's own psychology. For example, we often think that people die from suicide because they are depressed or unhappy. Although Durkheim acknowledged that psychology might matter, he argued that psychology alone cannot explain suicide. "Admittedly," he wrote, "under similar circumstances, the [unwell man] is more apt to commit suicide than the well man; but he does not necessarily do so because of his condition" (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 81). He asked the following question: If suicide is strictly an individual psychological decision, why are suicide rates different for men and women, for Protestants and Catholics, and across countries? These differences can be explained only by social facts, elements of society that are beyond the individual.

Durkheim began his study not by looking at an individual's decision to die from suicide but by comparing the rates of suicide across groups of people. This systematic study of suicide led him to argue that there are four **types of suicide** that differ based on the level of integration or regulation in a society. Societies differ in their level of individual integration. In societies with extremely low levels of integration, individuals commit egoistic suicide, whereas in societies with extremely high levels of integration, they commit altruistic suicide. Societies also differ in their level of regulation, the degree of external constraint on individuals. When regulation is excessively low, individuals commit anomic suicide; when it is excessively high, they commit fatalistic suicide. Durkheim thus argued that the conditions of society are so powerful that they influence even this most personal decision for individuals.

Durkheim believed that the best parts of individuals—their morals, values, and sense of purpose—come from society. When individuals do not feel integrated into society, that condition can lead to egoistic suicide. Being a part of society can give our lives meaning, and participating in religion is one way that many people derive such meaning. Despite this

important potential function, not all religions are equally effective at integrating individuals. For example, Durkheim found that Protestants were much more likely than Catholics to die from suicide, even though both religions prohibit and condemn suicide with equal fervor. He argued that this difference was partly because the Protestant Church is less effective than the Catholic Church at integrating its members. Protestantism focuses on individual faith, and adherents are encouraged to read and interpret the Bible on their own. Catholicism, however, places more emphasis on participating in church activities that are run by a clearly defined hierarchy of leaders. This feature encourages Catholics to interact with one another and to rely on the church to interpret religious teachings for them, both of which increase the amount of social interaction between members as well as the integration they feel.

In order to support this argument, Durkheim compared countries that were mostly Protestant (Prussia, Denmark, and Saxony) with those that were mostly Catholic (Spain, Portugal, and Italy). He found that the average suicide rate in the Protestant countries was 190 per million persons, whereas it was only 58 per million persons in the Catholic countries (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 152). The larger social context of Protestantism was associated with a suicide rate more than four times as high as the social context of Catholicism. However, some might argue that other differences between these countries might account for the different suicide rates. To test this claim, Durkheim compared suicide rates across regions of Switzerland, a country with both Catholic and Protestant areas. Even within this one country, the suicide rate of Protestants was four to five times higher than that of Catholics (p. 155). These data support Durkheim's argument that those who are less integrated are more likely to die from suicide and some religions are more effective at integrating their adherents than others.

Although a lack of integration in society can lead to suicide, Durkheim argued that excessively integrated societies can also have high suicide rates. Highly integrated societies can include cults in which some adherents commit mass suicide. For example, there was a mass suicide of 39 Heaven's Gate members in California in 1997. Terrorists who martyr themselves for a cause are also examples of how being excessively integrated into a society, so much so that a person thinks only about the group's needs, can be associated with suicide.

According to Durkheim, levels of regulation in society are also associated with suicide. In a society with very little regulation, individuals can begin to feel "anomic," a term Durkheim used to refer to a feeling of rootlessness or normlessness. When the rules and regulations of society are weak or unclear, individuals feel free to do anything they please. Although this freedom sounds good, a lack of regulation can reduce an individual's feeling of meaning and connection to others. Durkheim argued that a lack of regulation can occur in either good times, such as economic booms, or bad times, such as economic depressions. Any temporary disruption in the social order makes the collectivity unable to exercise its authority over the individual. In these times, the old rules and standards for behavior no longer apply, but new rules and standards have not yet been created. This situation can lead to anomic suicide.

The final type of suicide discussed by Durkheim, fatalistic suicide, occurs when there is excessive regulation in society. Durkheim named this type of suicide but did not spend much time discussing it in his work. He did say, however, that it occurs among "persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline" (1897/1951, p. 276). For example, an enslaved person might commit suicide because she feels she has no other option and her life is totally controlled by another.

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

SUICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

Can we still use Durkheim's insights to understand suicide rates today? Figure 1.3 shows suicide rates in the United States by gender and age. Table 1.1 lists countries by their level of religiosity and suicide rates. Examine the data and answer the following questions.

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Deaths by Suicide per 100,000 Persons in the United States, by Age and Gender, 2020
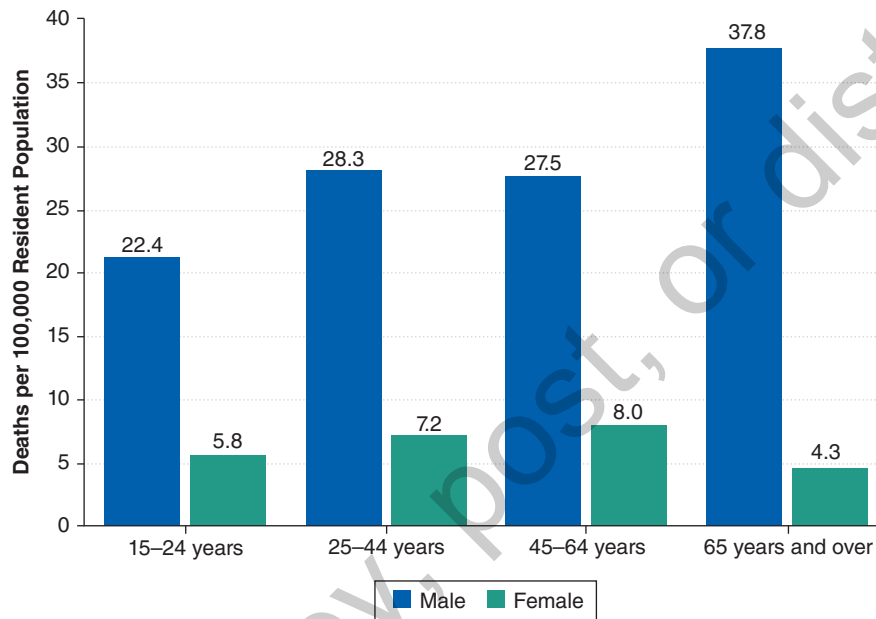
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Changes in suicide rates—United States, 2019 and 2020.* https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7108a5.htm#T1_down

TABLE 1.1 ■ Suicide Rates and Religiosity by Country, 2019

Country	Religiosity (%)	Suicide Rate (per 1,000 residents)
Philippines	79	2.54
India	76	12.91
Guatemala	75	6.23
Brazil	69	6.41
Ireland	63	8.90
United States	61	14.51
Chile	54	8.04

Country	Religiosity (%)	Suicide Rate (per 1,000 residents)
Canada	49	10.34
Israel	44	5.15
France	30	9.65
Japan	29	12.24
Russia	28	21.6

Sources: Religiosity: Adapted from Pelham, Brett, and Zsolt Nyiri. (2008, 3 July). "In more religious countries, lower suicide rates: Lower suicide rates not a matter of national income." https://www.gallup.com/poll/1086 25/more-religious-countries-lower-suiciderates.aspx (2005 Data); Suicide Rate: World Health Organization. (2019). *Suicide rates.* https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mental-health/suicide-rates

1. How are gender and age related to suicide rates? How does Durkheim's theory about certain social conditions leading to suicide explain the suicide rates among American men and women in different age groups?
2. How is religiosity related to suicide rates across countries? Would Durkheim be surprised that countries that are more religious tend to have lower levels of suicide? Why or why not? How would he explain this relationship?
3. In general, countries that are very religious have low levels of suicide and countries that are not very religious have higher levels. But Israel has a relatively low rate of suicide given its low level of religiosity, and India has a relatively high rate of suicide given its high rate of religiosity. How can you explain these unusual cases? Can you use Durkheim's theory? Why or why not?

The brilliance of Durkheim's study is in the way it shows how a phenomenon that is generally thought of as purely psychological, the decision to die from suicide, is shaped by the structure of the society in which a person lives. In other words, by examining the integration and regulation in a society, we can predict its suicide rate. Or, when examining groups of people, we can predict who will be more likely and who will be less likely to die from suicide based on the propensity of their group to be integrated into or regulated by society. For example, Durkheim compared the suicide rates of men and women and found that men are more likely to die from suicide, in part because they tend to be less integrated into society. In the same way, he found that unmarried individuals are more likely to commit suicide because they are less integrated into families.

Durkheim's work, though highly influential, has sparked criticism and debate. Some later researchers argue that there is a logical error in the research: Durkheim explained microlevel individual behavior (the act of suicide) with macrolevel country statistics (suicide rates). Despite this potential problem, the work illuminates the connection between individuals and the society in which they live, which is at the heart of sociology.

Women in Early Sociology

It is not surprising that the founding figures of sociology were male. This reflects the fact that sociology as a discipline emerged in a time when women were not able to attain higher education and were expected to focus on family roles instead of engaging in paid work. Because of this, feminist scholars have argued that sociology has traditionally been organized around men—their experiences

and their interests (Seidman, 2008). In essence, men have been both the subjects and the authors of sociology, and the experiences of women have been (largely) ignored until recently (Smith, 1987).

Despite their underrepresentation, there have been a few trail-blazing women active in early sociology. Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) is often called the first female sociologist. Jane Addams (1860–1935) was also an important early female sociologist. When we learn about the foundations of our discipline, it is important to consider the people from all backgrounds who made it what it is today.

Getting to Know: Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)

- Harriet's childhood experience was marked by increasing deafness that required her to use an ear trumpet (the precursor to the cochlear implant) as an adult. Her writing was some of the first to engage with issues related to disability. At 32, Harriet wrote an essay, *Letters to the Deaf* (1834), that detailed the social isolation, health care challenges, and stigma experienced by people with a hearing impairment.

- Social norms of 19th-century England prevented Martineau from attending university, so she committed herself to intense self-directed study at home.

- She translated and condensed Auguste Comte's *Cour de philosophie positive*, which significantly facilitated the introduction of positivist sociology to the United States.

- Harriet's book, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), is ground-breaking as the first foundational text on sociological methods and discussed topics such as class, forms of religion, and types of suicide long before "founding fathers" Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber.

Hulton-Deutsch/Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images

Getting to Know: Jane Addams (1860–1935)

- One of the first applied sociologists who co-founded (with friend Ellen G. Starr) and resided in the famous Hull House in Chicago, a social settlement that sought to improve conditions of residents in Chicago's industrial districts by offering kindergarten classes, club meetings, and in later years, social services such as a library, employment bureau, and art gallery.

- She was known as a strong advocate for progressive reforms that would improve the lives of marginalized people including immigrants, Black Americans, the working class, women, and children.

- Adams was the first woman to be awarded an honorary degree from Yale University in 1910.

- She was a committed feminist who championed women's suffrage and a pacifist who publicly opposed the Spanish-American War and World War I.

- Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

IS SOCIOLOGY JUST COMMON SENSE?

Because we all live within society, it is sometimes hard to see how there could be much to learn in sociology. Can't we just use our own experiences to make sense of the social world? Isn't sociology really just common sense? Randall Collins (1992), a well-known sociologist, notes that obvious social questions may not have obvious or simple answers. Sociology's greatest strength, he argues, is precisely its potential for moving past the superficial observation of everyday life and finding the fundamental social processes hidden beneath.

For example, many people wonder what makes a romantic couple compatible. Common sense tells us that opposites attract. However, it also tells us that birds of a feather flock together. If both axioms are common sense and are based on our lived experiences, how can we decide which idea is the better explanation of compatibility? Much systematic research has been conducted in sociology to answer just this question, and this research comes to a clear consensus that, although it may seem like opposites attract, most couples share similar characteristics. In fact, the **homophily** principle structures social relationships of every type, including marriage, friendship, and work relationships. Most people have personal networks that are very homogeneous, which is partly why most romantic partners are similar to one another. They are most likely to be similar in race and ethnicity, with age, religion, education, and occupation following, in roughly that order. In addition, couples are also most often similar in terms of their attitudes and values.

There are many reasons why most people romantically couple with and marry people who are like them. The most important reason is simple geography. Most people have more contact with those who are like them. For example, one of the main reasons that people tend to date and marry others of similar age is because of the age-based structure of schooling. The fact that schools group ages together into classrooms induces homophily. As many people meet romantic partners and select mates while they are attending school and are most likely to meet and interact with others of their age group in these settings, it is not surprising that they are most likely to choose a partner in their age group.

Partners are also most likely to come from the same social class. This is, in part, because our social class often determines the neighborhood where we grow up and live. People with more money and higher status occupations tend to live in more expensive neighborhoods, where other upper-class people live. They are also more likely to attend elite private schools, where they meet others of their social class. And they are more likely to work in fields such as law, business, or medicine, where other people of their class also work. These social networks bring people of the same class into contact with one another and provide opportunities to create friendships.

The finding that most relationships, be they romances, friendships, or acquaintances, tend to occur between people who are similar can be very important for understanding how society works. If people tend to know others like themselves, they might be less likely to be open to or tolerant of people who are different from them. It also might limit the amount and diversity of information people receive because they are generally just in contact with people who have the same opinions and experiences. Considering what we think we know about society and examining it in a systematic way can help us to better understand the world around us. This is what sociology is all about.

How Would Different Disciplines Study Your Classroom?

One way to think about how sociology is distinct as a discipline is to compare it with other academic areas of study. For example, how would a sociologist study your classroom? How might an engineer, biologist, historian, or psychologist study it differently?

According to the homophily principle, friends and romantic partners tend to have similar interests and to come from similar backgrounds. These friends at Coachella share an interest in music and fashion (particularly a love of cowboy hats) and probably come from similar ethnic and class backgrounds. What similarities and dissimilarities can you find between you and your friends?

Presley Ann/Getty Images for Coachella

An engineer might be interested in the classroom's acoustics and whether those sitting in the back can hear the professor. She might also study the airflow, the materials used for the furniture or fixtures, and the insulation. A biologist would be much less interested in these issues and would probably focus on the students' genetic diversity, the other organic material in the room (hopefully not bugs or rodents), and the spread of bacteria from person to person.

A historian would be more similar to a sociologist than would either the engineer or biologist, but he would still study very different elements of the classroom. He might be interested in the growth of universities over the past 100 years, the history of a school, and perhaps larger histories of migration that brought the students in this classroom to this particular area. Psychologists may be interested in the how students process information and learn the material in the class or how they made the decision to take this particular course.

Although sociologists share some of these interests (e.g., like the historians, they are also interested in migration patterns, and like the psychologists, they are interested in why a student took the class), they would be much more likely to emphasize the three core foci of sociology. Sociologists might ask, "Who is in this classroom and who is not?" They would examine how men and women, different ethnicities and religions, and different social classes are represented in the classroom, and they would try to understand the social processes that make some people more likely to attend college than others. They would also be interested in how the institution of education shapes young people: Who decides what material is covered in your education? What material is not covered? How does going to college socialize us? Finally, when examining social change, a sociologist might ask how the university has changed. Do different types of people attend today than attended in the past? Are different subjects taught? How does the relationship between the university and other institutions in society change over time? Although all the disciplines have important and interesting questions to ask about this classroom, each has a particular and distinct perspective for making sense of the world.

Who is in this classroom and who is not? To what extent does this photo depict the ethnic, class, and gender makeup of your college or university?

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The Role of Theory

Sociologists systematically study the social world, including the events, interactions, and institutions in our society. When they do this, they develop theories in an attempt to explain why things work as they do. A **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of society and to create hypotheses. **Hypotheses** are testable propositions about society. These hypotheses are very important. In order for theories to be useful, they should allow for hypotheses that can be subjected to empirical observation and testing. For example, we might have a theory that a person's gender is related to their income. To test this theory, we set out a hypothesis. We could have a hypothesis that men make more than women in a specific job, such as high school teaching. In order to test this theory, we would need a set of research methods that would see if this hypothesis has support in empirical data (that is coming up next!).

Theories vary in their scope and scale. **Macro-level theories** focus on large-scale issues and large groups of people. For example, we might have theories about why countries go to war, explaining patterns of global migration, or why there are changes in marriage rates over time. These are all theories concerned with large-scale trends and issues in society. We also might have **micro-level theories**, which focus on relationships between individuals and groups. For example, we could look at why some people chose to go into the military, how migration shapes the educational outcomes of children, or the impact of divorce on earnings. These are all focused on similar issues but examine their implications at the individual level.

In order for a theory to be useful, it should help us understand or explain the social world. If a theory does not do a good job of explaining why things are the way they are, we should consider how we might revise that theory so it is more effective at helping us make sense of the world around us. It is also useful for the theory to be able to make predictions, which can assist in making policies that concern the social world.

Many theories are introduced and discussed in this book. Table 1.2 lists the main theories that are discussed in this text and the chapters in which they are introduced.

TABLE 1.2　■　Theories and Theoretical Perspectives Discussed in This Textbook	
Theory	**Chapter**
Sociological Imagination	1
Structural Functionalism	2
Conflict Theory	2 and 4
Feminist Theory	2 and 6
Symbolic Interactionism	2
Dramaturgical Perspective	2
Social Construction	3
Labelling Theory	3
Thomas Principle	5
Critical Race Theory	5
Intersectionality	6
Rationalization	10
Modernization Theory	12
World Systems Theory	12
World Society Theory	12
Protest Paradigm	14
Framing Theory	14
Resource Mobilization Theory	14
Political Process Theory	14

RESEARCH METHODS: HOW DO SOCIOLOGISTS STUDY SOCIETY?

Sociologists conduct research in a systematic way in order to understand how society operates. They use this information to answer questions about individual behavior and the functioning of society.

When sociologists look at a social issue, one of the first things they do is posit a research question. **Research questions** focus on the relationship between two (or more) variables. A **variable** is any construct that can take on different values— that can vary. For example, age can be a variable because people are different ages. There are two main types of variables: independent variables and dependent variables. **Independent variables** *affect* other variables. By nature, they come before a dependent variable. **Dependent variables** are *affected by* independent variables. Research questions look at the relationship between independent and dependent variables—how the former affect the latter. For example, if we are asking, "What is the relationship between ethnicity and income?" ethnicity is the independent variable and income is the dependent variable. We are testing to see whether your ethnicity affects how much money you make. We would not expect that the amount of money that you make would change your ethnicity. Once sociologists have a research question and know the variables on which they will focus, they decide on the research method that is most appropriate for answering this question.

Quantitative Research

Sociology and the other social sciences use two major types of research: quantitative and qualitative (although many researchers use both types of methods). **Quantitative research** focuses on things that can be counted. This research examines how variables relate to one another and tests these relationships with statistical models. For example, a quantitative researcher interested in education might focus on the educational outcomes of different groups of people. They could record the age, sex, and ethnicity of people and their level of education. Then they could use statistical models to generalize about who is more or less likely to get degrees. Quantitative research focuses on measuring social phenomena and on using statistical models to assess the patterns of association among variables. Because these types of techniques require many cases to test for the relationships between variables effectively, quantitative research often must examine relationships at a more general level.

One of the major ways that quantitative research is conducted is with surveys. **Survey research** involves giving questionnaires to a large number of people to learn about their characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors. The census, collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, is an example of a survey. The census asks people living in the United States about themselves, including their age, gender, and income. We can use these data to examine many types of questions. For example, we can study whether men earn more money than women do, how this discrepancy might differ by education level, and whether it is increasing or decreasing over time. This information is quite important for understanding gender inequality.

Experiments are another major quantitative method. In experiments the researcher looks at the effect of some factor, sometimes called a treatment, on individual behavior. This approach involves comparing two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group is given the treatment, while the control group is not. If we wanted to understand the effect of money as an incentive for learning, for example, we could bring two groups of students to a lab. We would ask all the students to try to learn a list of words. Half the students would be paid money for each correct word they learned and the other students would receive nothing. Presuming that the students in each group were the same in terms of important characteristics (such as their intelligence), if the students who were told they would be paid for correct answers did better on the task than those not given this incentive, we would conclude that paying students to achieve was a useful way to increase performance. Garfinkel's breaching experiments, discussed earlier in the chapter, are a particular kind of experiment.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research tends to examine a smaller number of cases in more detail and emphasizes social processes. Instead of focusing on counting phenomena, qualitative researchers often examine the meaning of action for individuals and groups. Sociologists use a variety of qualitative techniques. Two major qualitative methods in sociology are interviewing and participant observation. **Interviewing** is a qualitative method in which a researcher asks each participant the same set of questions and records participant responses. Interviews allow the researcher to ask questions that require longer answers and to ask follow-up questions to get more detail. For example, interviews might be quite useful for understanding how going to college changes the way young people see themselves. To assess how various elements of university life, such as living in a dorm, taking classes, joining campus groups, and making friends, can shape an individual's identity, you might want to give individuals more time to explain these complicated changes and to ask follow- up questions to probe for more information.

Participant observation (ethnography) is another core qualitative method. The researcher actively engages with a group of individuals and works to understand their lives and experiences through intensive involvement with them over an extended period. For example, if you wanted to understand how young people pick up people in a bar, you might go to the same bar every Saturday night and watch as young people introduce themselves to one another. By observing them, you could see what types of people are the most likely to approach others or be approached. You could also see how couples interact with one another in the context of the bar. Though you could, of course, survey or interview people about their pick-up practices, you could certainly learn additional things by watching these interactions happen in person. In fact, as a researcher you might gain insights that the people had not considered; after all, we might not be the best assessors of our own pick-up techniques.

Content analysis or document coding is also used by sociologists and other social scientists. This involves the systematic coding of documents to answer research questions and can be done in a qualitative or quantitative way. For example, sociologists could look at all newspaper articles written about a key event, such as an election, to understand how people make sense of the event and how this might differ across places and times. We could also code Facebook pages, Twitter, or other social media. Archival documents, like meeting minutes, parliamentary debate, or personal letters, can be systematically coded to answer research questions.

These five core sociological methods are all good ways to understand the social world. No one method is the best method of research. All these techniques are simply tools. Just as it would be ridiculous to argue that a hammer is a better tool than a saw (it depends on whether you want to join things together or cut them in half), it does not make sense to argue which method is the best. Each method is more (or less) useful for understanding different types of phenomena, and it is always good to have as many tools in our toolkit as possible.

Doing Sociology: Making Use of Sociological Methods

The five main sociological methods are useful for answering different types of research questions. If you are interested in studying crime, for example, surveys could help you answer many questions. In the United States, the government conducts a survey of victimization every year as part of the National Crime Victimization Survey. In this survey, individuals are asked a whole series of questions about crime and being a victim of crime. Using these data you could answer research questions such as, "Who is most likely to be a victim of crime?" or "Who is most likely to report a crime to the police?" By comparing results from men and women, older and younger people, those who live in cities with those who live in rural areas, and different ethnic groups, you could better understand who is most likely to experience crime and who is most likely to report that crime to the police when it happens.

Experiments could also help you to better understand crime, albeit by answering different specific questions. An experiment would not be very effective at helping you understand who is most likely to be a victim of a crime because the group of people who you would have come to your laboratory to engage in your experiment would probably not accurately reflect the experiences of the entire American population. However, experiments could help you to answer different types of questions. For example, you could create an experiment to better understand how we perceive different perpetrators of crime. You could tell your research subjects to read a story of a crime, perhaps about a theft of a pair of jeans from a store. They would all read the same story, except half would be told that the thief was a woman and half would be told that the thief was a man. You could then ask each group how serious they considered the crime. Through this type of experiment you could better understand if people see the severity of a crime differently depending on who they think committed it. Are we more likely to see a male perpetrator as a real criminal and a female perpetrator as a casual shoplifter? Would we think differently of a 15-year-old perpetrator as opposed to one who is 50?

Interviews could also be effective ways to understand crime. They are most appropriate for unpacking complex thought processes because the interviewer has longer to talk with the respondent and is able to get answers that are more in-depth. We could use interviews to answer a research question such as, "How do people start to engage in criminal behavior?" To answer this question, we could go to a prison and interview inmates about how they first got involved in crime. By talking with them about how their involvement started, we could better understand how their family background, friends, neighborhood, and other factors did (or did not) relate to their entry into criminal activity. You could, of course, use a survey to ask how inmates got involved in crime, but respondents would then be forced to answer from a set of fixed categories (perhaps you would have a list of five or six reasons they could check off), and you would not be able to ask for more detail about this complex process.

Finally, you could engage in participant observation of crime. If you were interested in how police enforce crime, for example, you could engage in participant observation and ride along with police officers to see how they interact with people who are suspected of committing crimes. Police have a lot of discretion whether to stop people. And even when they stop someone and think that person committed a crime, the police often can decide to give them a warning, give them a ticket, or take them in to the police station and charge them with a crime. How do police officers make these decisions? It would be possible to conduct a survey or interviews of police officers. However, some of these processes are unconscious and may be better observed in real time.

All these methods, as well as other methods used by sociologists, can help us to understand the complex issues surrounding crime and criminality. Each can address slightly different research questions and provide different types of data. In order to really understand any social phenomenon, it is useful to have sociologists working with all these different research techniques and sharing their findings.

Methods in *Imagining Society*

Throughout this book, we will learn about studies using each of these core methods. When you come across these studies in this class and others, think about how the methods used were useful for answering the research question. How might the study be different if another method had been used? We will consider potential challenges or issues that arise in the research process, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of the methods employed. Table 1.3 highlights some of the places in this book where you will find examples of, and discussion of, the main methods sociologists use to study the social world.

TABLE 1.3 ■ Social Research Methods Discussed and Applied in This Text		
Method	**"Methods in Depth" sections**	**Readings**
Survey	Halpern & Perry-Jenkins (Chapter 6) James-Kangal et al. (Chapter 8) Gentrup et al. (Chapter 9) Rooney-Varga et al. (Chapter 12) Ozturk (Chapter 13) McAdam (Chapter 14)	
Experiment	Mayo (Chapter 10) Rooney-Varga et al. (Chapter 12)	Rosenhan (Chapter 3)

Method	"Methods in Depth" sections	Readings
Interviews	Blee (Chapter 2) Brayne (Chapter 3) Bettis (Chapter 4) Gentrup (Chapter 9) McAdam (Chapter 14)	Hochschild (Chapter 10)
Participant Observation	Blee (Chapter 2) Brayne (Chapter 3) Bettis (Chapter 4) Gentrup et al. (Chapter 9)	
Content Analysis/Document Analysis	Blee (Chapter 2) Stephens-Davidowitz (Chapter 5) Hoewe (Chapter 7) Brothers et al. (Chapter 11)	Pangborn (Chapter 4) Mullen (Chapter 9)

SUMMARY

We began this chapter, and this book, by introducing sociology as a discipline focused on the systematic study of human society. Sociologists focus on three core areas of study: social inequality, social institutions, and social change. When looking at these three areas, sociologists aim to see general themes in everyday life, critically examine the familiar world around them, and understand how society shapes individuals while individuals also shape society. We have begun to better understand these ideas through examining C. Wright Mills's concept of the sociological imagination, Harold Garfinkel's breaching experiments, Horace Miner's article on the Nacirema, and Émile Durkheim's study of suicide. Mills encourages us to connect our own individual biography with the history of society and to see how our personal troubles are connected to larger public issues. Through this lens of the sociological imagination, we can make sense of how society works and how individuals are connected to the society in which they live. Finally, we learned some of the major qualitative and quantitative ways that sociologists conduct research—something that will be highlighted throughout the book.

FOR FURTHER READING

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GLOSSARY

breaching experiments

content analysis

counterculture

culture

dependent variables

dominant culture

experiments

high culture

homophily

hypotheses

independent variables

interviewing

macro-level theories

micro-level theories

participant observation (ethnography)

personal troubles

popular (or low) culture

public issues

qualitative research

quantitative research

religiosity

research questions

secularization

social facts

social inequality

social institutions

society

sociological imagination

sociology

subcultures

survey research

types of suicide

theory

variable