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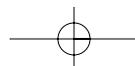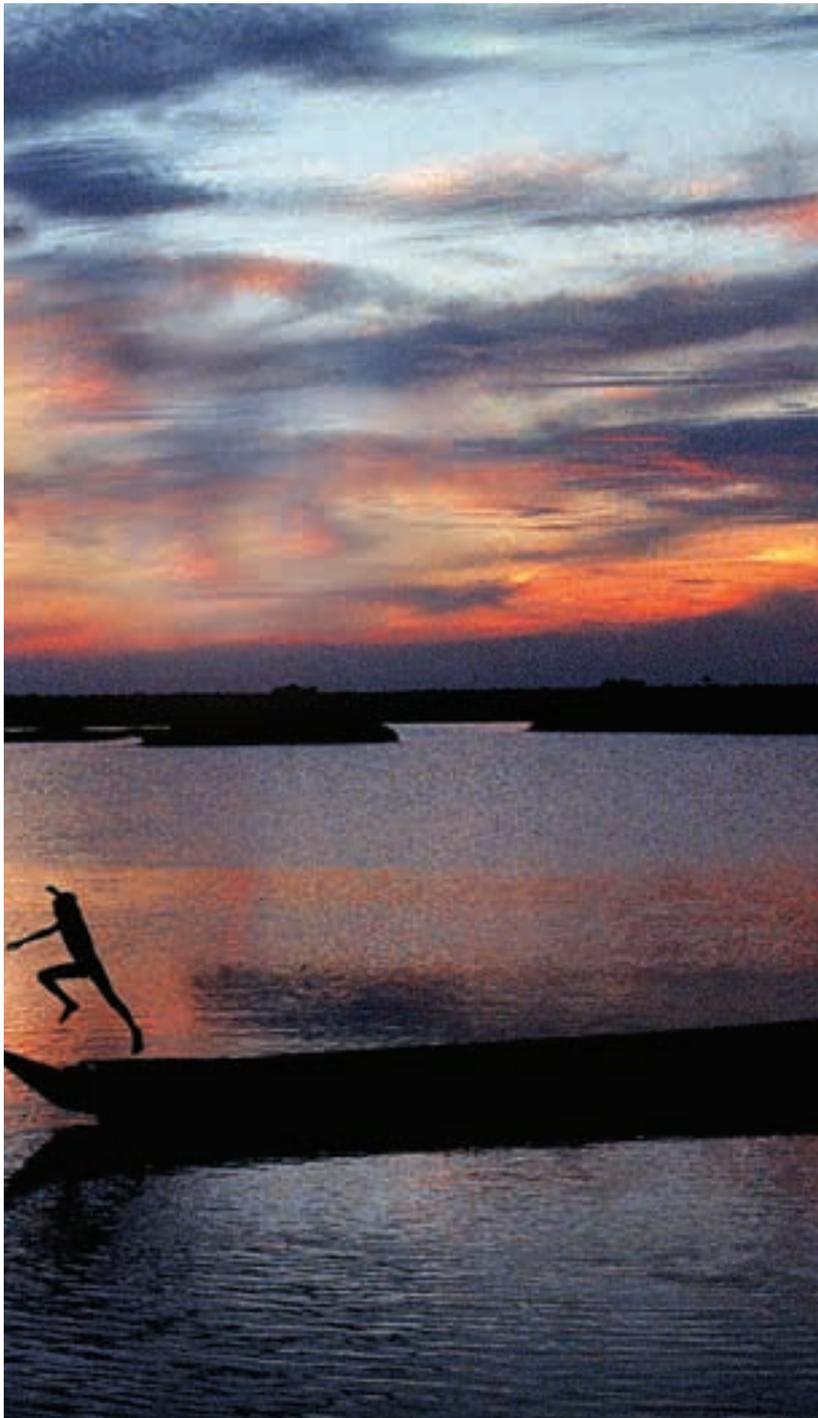
1

The Sociological Perspective

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

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

I was determined. "I will experience what they experience," I kept telling myself.

No one spoke as the line slowly inched forward.

When my turn came, I was handed a cup of coffee, a white plastic spoon, and a bowl of semiliquid that I couldn't identify. It didn't look like any food I had seen before. Nor did it taste like anything I had ever eaten.

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

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

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

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

How much longer did this research have to last? I felt a deep longing to return to my family—to a welcome world of clean sheets, healthy food, and "normal" conversations.

The Sociological Perspective

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

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

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

Seeing the Broader Social Context

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

To find out why people do what they do, sociologists look at **social location,** the corners in life that people occupy because of where they are located in a society. Sociologists look at how jobs, income, education, gender, age, and race–ethnicity affect people's ideas and behavior. Consider, for example, how being identified with a group called *females* or with a group called *males* when we

are growing up shapes our ideas of who we are and what we should attain in life. Growing up as a female or a male influences not only our aspirations but also how we feel about ourselves. It also affects the way we relate to others in dating and marriage and at work.

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

Consider a newborn baby. If we were to take the baby away from its U.S. parents and place it with the Yanomamö Indians in the jungles of South America, when the child begins to speak, his or her words will not be in English. You also know that the child will not think like an American. He or she will not grow up wanting credit cards, for example, or designer clothes, a car, a cell phone, an iPod, and the latest video game. Equally, the child will unquestioningly take his or her place in Yanomamö society—perhaps as a food gatherer, a hunter, or a warrior—and he or she will not even know about the world left behind at birth. And, whether male or female, the child will grow up assuming that it is natural to want many children, not debating whether to have one, two, or three children.

This brings us to *you*—to how *your* social groups have shaped *your* ideas and desires. Over and over in this text, you will see that

Examining the broad social context in which people live is essential to the *sociological perspective,* for this context shapes our beliefs and attitudes and sets guidelines for what we do. From this photo, you can see how distinctive those guidelines are for the Yanomamö Indians who live on the border of Brazil and Venezuela. How has this Yanomamö man been influenced by his group? How have groups influenced your views and behavior?

the way you look at the world is the result of your exposure to specific human groups. I think you will enjoy the process of self-discovery that sociology offers.

Origins of Sociology

Tradition Versus Science

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

Science, in contrast, requires theories that can be tested by research. Measured by this standard, sociology emerged about the middle of the 1800s, when social observers began to use scientific methods to test their ideas.

Sociology grew out of social upheaval. The Industrial Revolution had just begun. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Europe's economy was changing from agriculture to factory production. Masses of people were

moving to cities in search of work. Their ties to the land were broken, distancing them from a culture that had provided ready answers to the difficult questions of life. The city greeted them with horrible working conditions: miserable pay; long hours; dangerous, exhausting work. For families to survive, even children had to work in these conditions; some children were even chained to factory machines to make certain they would not run away. With their world turned upside down, people could no longer count on tradition to provide the answers to questions about social life.

The success of the American and French revolutions also encouraged people to rethink social life. As new ideas emerged, they uprooted traditional social arrangements even further. Especially powerful was the new idea that individuals possess inalienable rights. As this idea caught fire, many traditional Western monarchies gave way to more democratic forms of government. Increasingly, people found the answers provided by tradition inadequate.

About this same time, **the scientific method**—using objective, systematic observations to test theories—was being tried out in chemistry and physics. This revealed many secrets that had been concealed in nature. With traditional answers failing, the logical step was to apply the scientific method to questions about social life. The result was the birth of sociology.

Auguste Comte and Positivism

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


The French Revolution of 1789 not only overthrew the aristocracy but also upset the entire social order. This extensive change removed the past as a sure guide to the present. The events of this period stimulated Auguste Comte to analyze how societies change. His writings are often taken as the origin of sociology. This engraving depicts the 1794 execution of Maximilien Robespierre, a leader of the Revolution.

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

Herbert Spencer
(1820–1903), sometimes called the second founder of sociology, coined the term "survival of the fittest." Spencer thought that helping the poor was wrong, that this merely helped the "less fit" survive.
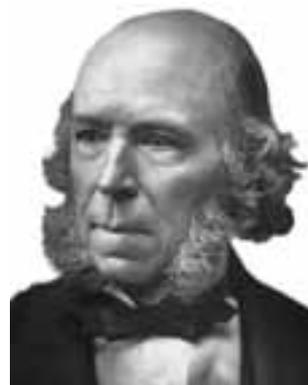
As Comte considered these questions, he concluded that the right way to answer them was to apply the scientific method to social life. Just as this method had revealed the law of gravity, so, too, it would uncover the laws that underlie society. Comte called this new science **sociology**—"the study of society" (from the Greek *logos,* "study of," and the Latin *socius,* "companion," or "being with others"). Comte stressed that this new science not only would discover social principles but also would apply them to social reform. Sociologists would reform the entire society, making it a better place to live.

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

Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who grew up in England, is sometimes called the second founder of sociology. Spencer disagreed profoundly with Comte that sociology should guide social reform. Spencer thought that societies evolve from lower ("barbarian") to higher ("civilized") forms. As generations pass, the most capable and intelligent ("the fittest") members of a society survive, while the less capable die out. Thus, over time, societies improve. To help the lower classes is to interfere with this natural process. The fittest members will produce a more advanced society—unless misguided do-gooders get in the way and help the less fit survive.

Spencer called this principle "the survival of the fittest." Although Spencer coined this phrase, it usually is attributed to his contemporary, Charles Darwin, who proposed that organisms evolve over time as they adapt to their environment. Because they are so similar to Darwin's ideas about the evolution of organisms, Spencer's views of the evolution of societies became known as *social Darwinism.*
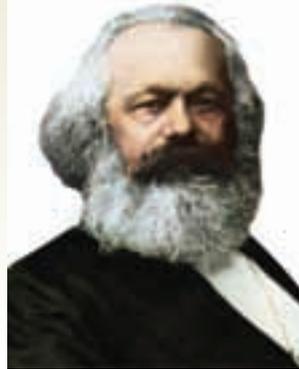
Spencer did not conduct scientific studies. Like Comte, he simply developed ideas about society. Spencer gained a wide following in England and the United States, where he was sought after as a speaker, but eventually social Darwinism was discredited.

Karl Marx and Class Conflict

Karl Marx (1818–1883) not only influenced sociology but also left his mark on world history. Marx's influence has been so great that even the *Wall Street Journal,* that staunch advocate of capitalism, has called him one of the three greatest modern thinkers (the other two being Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein).

Marx, who came to England after being exiled from his native Germany for proposing revolution, believed that the engine of human history is **class conflict.** He said that the *bourgeoisie* (boo-shwa-ZEE) (the *capitalists,* those who own the means to produce wealth—capital, land, factories, and machines) are locked in conflict with the *proletariat* (the exploited workers, who do not own the means of production). This bitter struggle can end only when members of the working class unite and violently break their chains of bondage. This revolution will usher in a classless society, one free of exploitation. People will work according to their abilities and receive goods and services according to their needs (Marx and Engels 1848/1967).

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

The French sociologist **Emile Durkheim** (1858–1917) contributed many important concepts to sociology. His comparison of the suicide rates of several countries revealed an underlying social factor: People are more likely to commit suicide if their ties to others in their communities are weak. Durkheim's identification of the key role of *social integration* in social life remains central to sociology today.

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

Emile Durkheim and Social Integration

The primary professional goal of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline (Coser 1977). Up to this time, sociology had been viewed as part of history and economics. Durkheim, who grew up in eastern France and was educated in both Germany and France, achieved his goal in 1887. That year, at the University of Bordeaux, he became the world's first professor of sociology.

Durkheim also had another goal: to show how social forces affect people's behavior. To accomplish this, he conducted rigorous research. Comparing the suicide rates of several European countries, Durkheim (1897/1966) found that each country has a different suicide rate—and that these rates remain about the same year after year. He also found that different groups within a country have different suicide rates and that these, too, remain stable from year to year. His data showed that Protestants, males, and the unmarried kill themselves at a higher rate than do Catholics or Jews, females, and the married. From these observations, Durkheim concluded that suicide is not what it appears—simply a matter of individuals here and there deciding to take their lives for personal reasons. Instead, *social factors underlie suicide,* which is why a group's rate remains fairly constant year after year.

But what are those social factors? Durkheim concluded that the main one is **social integration,** the degree to which people are tied to their social group. If people have weaker social ties, they are more likely to commit suicide. How does this apply to Protestants, males, and the unmarried, those who have the higher rates? Protestantism, said Durkheim, encourages greater freedom of thought and action; males are more independent than females; and the unmarried lack the ties and responsibilities that come with marriage. In other words, members of these groups have fewer of the social bonds that keep people from committing suicide. In Durkheim's terms, they have less social integration.

Despite the many years that have passed since Durkheim did his research, the principle he uncovered still applies: People who are less socially integrated have higher rates of suicide. Even today, those same groups that Durkheim identified—Protestants, males, and the unmarried—are more likely to kill themselves.

Here is the principle that was central in Durkheim's research: *Human behavior cannot be understood only in terms of the individual; we must always examine the social forces that affect people's lives.* Suicide, for example, appears to be such an intensely individual act that psychologists should study it, not sociologists. As Durkheim stressed, however, if we look at human behavior only in reference to the individual, we miss its *social* basis. For another glimpse of what Durkheim meant, look at Figure 1.1, on the next page, which shows the methods by which African Americans and whites commit suicide. I'm sure you'll be struck by how similar those methods are. Since these patterns remain year after year, they indicate something that goes beyond individuals. They reflect conditions in society, such as the popularity and accessibility of guns.

FIGURE 1.1   How Americans Commit Suicide
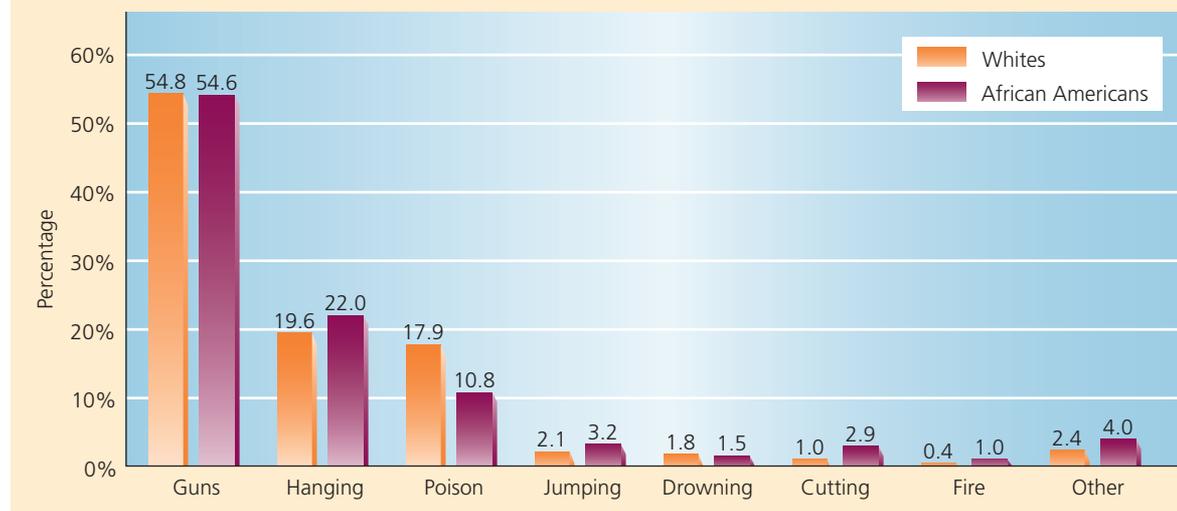
Source: By the author. Based on Centers for Disease Control 2006.

Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic

Max Weber (Mahx VAY-ber) (1864–1920), a German so-ciologist and a contemporary of Durkheim's, also became a professor in the new academic discipline of sociology. Like Durkheim and Marx, Weber is one of the most in-fluential of all sociologists, and you will come across his writings and theories in later chapters. Let's consider an issue Weber raised that remains controversial today.

Religion and the Origin of Capitalism   Weber disagreed with Marx's claim that economics is the central force in so-cial change. That role, he said, belongs to religion. He came to this conclusion when he (1904/1958) contrasted the Roman Catholic and Protestant belief systems. Roman Catholics, he said, were taught that because they were members of the only true church, they were on the road to heaven. This made them comfortable with traditional ways of life. The Protestant belief system, in contrast, un-dermined the spiritual security of its followers, motivating them to embrace change. Protestants of the Calvinist tra-dition were told that they wouldn't know if they were saved until Judgment Day. Acutely uncomfortable with this uncertainty, they began to look for "signs" that they were in God's favor. Concluding that financial success was a divine blessing and that God did not want them to waste this blessing, they began to live frugal lives. Saving their money, they began to invest it to make even more. This fundamental change in the way money was viewed, said Weber, produced the capital that brought about the birth of capitalism.

Weber called this self-denying approach to life the *Protestant ethic.* He termed the readiness to invest capital in order to make more money the *spirit of capitalism.* To test his theory, Weber compared the extent of capitalism in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries. In line with his theory, he found that capitalism was more likely to flourish in Protestant countries. Weber's conclusion that religion was the key factor in the rise of capitalism was controversial when he made it, and it continues to be debated today (Wade 2007). We'll explore these ideas in more detail in Chapter 13.

Max Weber (1864–1920) was another early sociologist who left a profound impression on sociology. He used cross-cultural and historical materials to trace the causes of social change and to determine how social groups affect people's orientations to life.

Sexism in Early Sociology

Attitudes of the Time

As you may have noticed, all the sociologists we have discussed are men. In the 1800s, sex roles were rigid, with women assigned the roles of wife and mother. In the classic German phrase, women were expected to devote themselves to the four K's: *Kirche, Küchen, Kinder, und Kleider* (church, cooking, children, and clothes). Trying to break out of this mold meant risking severe disapproval.

Few people, male or female, received any education beyond basic reading and writing and a little math. Higher education, for the rare few who received it, was reserved for men. A handful of women from wealthy families, however, did pursue higher education. A few even studied sociology, although the sexism so deeply entrenched in the universities stopped them from obtaining advanced degrees or becoming professors. In line with the times, the writings of women were almost entirely ignored. Jane Frohock, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, were little known beyond a small circle. Frances Perkins, a sociologist and the first woman to hold a cabinet position (as Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt), is no longer remembered.

Harriet Martineau and Early Social Research

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

Interested in social reform, **Harriet Martineau** (1802–1876) turned to sociology, where she discovered the writings of Comte. She became an advocate for the abolition of slavery, traveled widely, and wrote extensive analyses of social life.

Sociology in North America

Early History: The Tension Between Social Reform and Sociological Analysis

Transplanted to U.S. soil in the late nineteenth century, sociology first took root at the University of Kansas in 1890, at the University of Chicago in 1892, and at Atlanta University (then an all-black school) in 1897. From there, academic specialties in sociology spread throughout North America. The growth was gradual, however. It was not until 1922 that McGill University gave Canada its first department of sociology. Harvard University did not open its department of sociology until 1930, and the University of California at Berkeley did not follow until the 1950s.

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

The situation of women in North America was similar to that of European women, and their contributions to sociology met a similar fate. Among the early women sociologists were Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Isabel

Eaton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Florence Kelley, Elsie Clews Parsons, and Alice Paul. Denied faculty appointments in sociology, many turned to social activism (Young 1995).

Jane Addams and Social Reform

Although many North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer, none was as successful as Jane Addams (1860–1935). Like Harriet Martineau, Addams came from a background of wealth and privilege. She attended the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, but dropped out because of illness (Addams 1910/1981). On one of her trips to Europe, Addams was impressed with work being done to help London's poor. From then on, she worked tirelessly for social justice.

In 1889, Addams co-founded Hull-House, located in Chicago's notorious slums. Hull-House was open to people who needed refuge—to immigrants, the sick, the aged, the poor. Sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago were frequent visitors at Hull-House. With her piercing insights into the social classes, especially the ways in which workers were exploited and peasant immigrants adjust to city life, Addams strived to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. She co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union and campaigned for the eight-hour work day and for laws against child labor. Her efforts at social reform were so outstanding that in 1931, she was a co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, the first sociologist to win this coveted award.

W. E. B. Du Bois and Race Relations

With the racism of this period, African American professionals also found life difficult. The most notable example is W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), who, after earning a bachelor's degree from Fisk University, became the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard. After completing his education at the University of Berlin, where he attended lectures by Max Weber, Du Bois taught Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University. Hired by Atlanta University in 1897, he remained there for most of his career (Du Bois 1935/1992).

It is difficult to grasp how racist society was at this time. Du Bois once saw the fingers of a lynching victim displayed in a Georgia butcher shop (Aptheker 1990). Although Du Bois was invited to present a paper at the 1909 meetings of the American Sociological Society, he was too poor to attend, despite his education, faculty position, and accomplishments. When he could afford to attend meetings, discrimination was so prevalent that restaurants and hotels would not allow him to eat or room with the white sociologists. Later in life, when Du Bois had the money to travel, the U.S. State Department feared that he would criticize the United States and refused to issue him a passport (Du Bois 1968).

Each year between 1896 and 1914, Du Bois published a book on relations between African Americans and whites. Of his almost 2,000 writings, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1967) stands out. In this analysis of how African Americans in Philadelphia coped with racism, Du Bois noted that some of the successful African Americans were breaking their ties with other African Americans in order to win acceptance by whites. This, he stressed, was weakening the African American community by depriving it of their influence. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), one of Du Bois' most elegantly written books, preserves a picture of race relations immediately after the Civil War. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page is taken from this book.

Jane Addams (1860–1935), a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace, worked on behalf of poor immigrants. With Ellen G. Starr, she founded Hull-House, a center to help immigrants in Chicago. She was also a leader in women's rights (women's suffrage), as well as the peace movement of World War I.

W(illiam) **E**(dward) **B**(urghardt) **Du Bois** (1868–1963) spent his lifetime studying relations between African Americans and whites. Like many early North American sociologists, Du Bois combined the role of academic sociologist with that of social reformer. He was also the editor of *Crisis,* an influential journal of the time.

Down-to-Earth Sociology
Early Sociology in North America: Du Bois and Race Relations

W. E. B. Du Bois wrote more like an accomplished novelist than a sociologist. The following excerpts are from pages 66–68 of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In this book, Du Bois analyzes changes that occurred in the social and economic conditions of African Americans during the thirty years following the Civil War.

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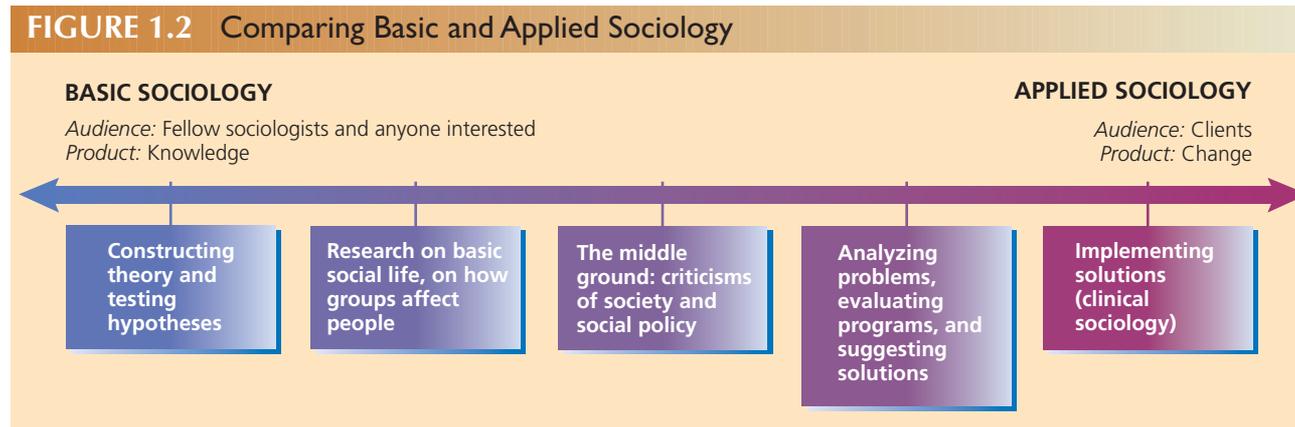

In the 1800s, poverty was widespread in the United States. Most people were so poor that they expended their life energies on just getting enough food, fuel, and clothing to survive. Formal education beyond the first several grades was a luxury. This photo depicts the conditions of the people Du Bois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

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

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

Often, to keep the peace, I must go where life was less lovely; for instance, 'Tildy's mother was incorrigibly dirty, Reuben's larder was limited seriously, and herds of untamed insects wandered over the Eddingses' beds. Best of all I loved to go to Josie's, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was

"mighty little" wages; how Josie longed to go away to school, but that it "looked liked" they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how mean some of the white folks were.

For two summers I lived in this little world. . . . I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages, and, above all, from the sight of the Veil* that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years had seen "the glory of the coming of the Lord," saw in every present hindrance or help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado.

*"The Veil" is shorthand for the Veil of Race, referring to how race colors all human relations. Du Bois' hope, as he put it, was that "sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins" (p. 261).

FIGURE 1.2   Comparing Basic and Applied Sociology

BASIC SOCIOLOGY

Audience: Fellow sociologists and anyone interested
Product: Knowledge

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

Audience: Clients
Product: Change

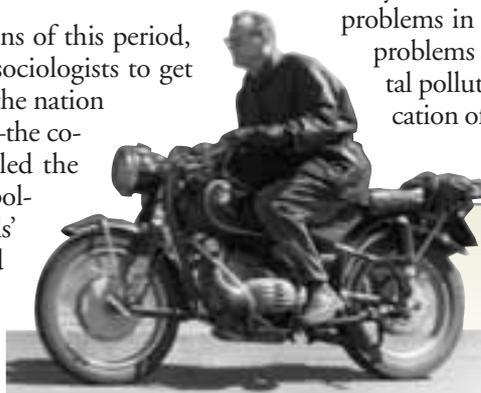| Constructing theory and testing hypotheses | Research on basic social life, on how groups affect people | The middle ground: criticisms of society and social policy | Analyzing problems, evaluating programs, and suggesting solutions | Implementing solutions (clinical sociology) |

Source: By the author. Based on DeMartini 1982.

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

Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: Theory Versus Reform

During the 1940s, the emphasis shifted from social reform to social theory. Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), an influential sociologist of this period, developed abstract models of society that influenced a generation of sociologists. Parsons' models of how the parts of society work together harmoniously did nothing to stimulate social activism.

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

The Continuing Tension and the Rise of Applied Sociology

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

Somewhere between these extremes lies **applied sociology,** using sociology to solve problems. (See Figure 1.2, which contrasts basic and applied sociology.) The founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People by W. E. B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, and others was one of the first attempts at applied sociology—and one of the most successful. As illustrated in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, applied sociologists work in a variety of settings. Some work for business firms to solve problems in the workplace. Others investigate social problems such as pornography, rape, environmental pollution, or the spread of AIDS. A new application of sociology is determining ways to disrupt

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) was a controversial figure in sociology because of his analysis of the role of the *power elite* in U.S. society. Today, his analysis is taken for granted by many sociologists and members of the public.

terrorist groups (Ebner 2005). As illustrated by the Cultural Diversity box on the next page, studying job discrimination is also part of applied sociology.

Today's applied sociology has created a new tension, with criticism coming from two directions. The first is from those who want sociologists to focus on social reform. They say that although sociology is applied in some specific setting, there is no goal of rebuilding society, as early sociologists en-

visioned. The second criticism comes from sociologists who want the emphasis to remain on discovering knowledge. Their position is that when sociology is applied, it is no longer sociology. For example, if sociologists use sociological principles to help teenagers escape from pimps, what makes it sociology and not social work?

At this point, let's consider how theory fits into sociology.

Down-to-Earth Sociology
Careers in Sociology: What Applied Sociologists Do

Most sociologists teach in colleges and universities, sharing sociological knowledge with college students, as your instructor is doing with you in this course. Applied sociologists, in contrast, work in a wide variety of areas—from counseling children to studying how diseases are transmitted. Some even make software more "user-friendly." (They study how people use software and give feedback to the programmers who design those products [Guice 1999].) To give you an idea of this variety, let's look over the shoulders of four applied sociologists.

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

Stanley Capela, whose master's degree is from Fordham University, works as an applied sociologist at HeartShare Human Services in New York City. He evaluates how children's programs—such as ones that focus on housing, AIDS, group homes, and preschool education—actually work, compared with how they are supposed to work. He spots problems and suggests solutions. One of his assignments was to find out why it was taking so long to get children adopted, even though

there was a long list of eager adoptive parents. Capela pinpointed how the paperwork got bogged down as it was routed through the system and suggested ways to improve the flow of paperwork.

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

Daniel Knapp, who earned a doctorate from the University of Oregon, decided to apply sociology by going to the city dump. Moved by the idea that urban wastes could be recycled and reused, he first tested this idea in a small way—by scavenging at the city dump at Berkeley, California. After starting a company called Urban Ore, Knapp (2005) did studies on how to recycle urban wastes and worked to change waste disposal laws. As a founder of the recycling movement in the United States, Knapp's application of sociology continues to influence us all.

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

Cultural Diversity in the United States

Studying Job Discrimination: A Surprising Example of Applied Sociology

Sometimes sociologists do basic sociology—research aimed at learning more about some behavior—and then someone else applies it.

Devah Pager was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. When she was doing volunteer work, homeless men told her how hard it was to find work if they had been in prison.

Pager decided to find out just what difference a prison record made in getting a job. She sent pairs of college men to apply for 350 entry-level jobs in Milwaukee. One team was African American, and one was white. Pager prepared identical résumés for the teams, but with one difference: On each team, one of the men said he had served 18 months in prison for possession of cocaine.
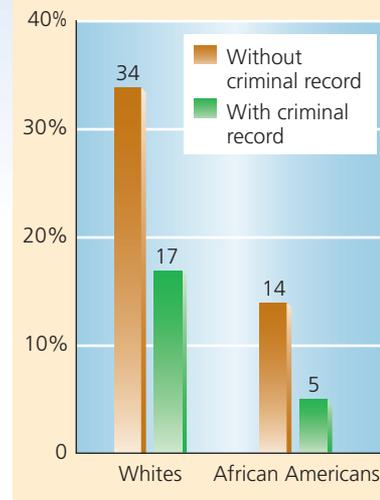
Figure 1.3 shows the difference that the prison record made. Men without a prison record were two or three times as likely to be called back.

But Pager came up with another significant finding. Look at the difference that race–ethnicity made. White men with a prison record were more likely to be offered a job than African American men who had a clean record!

The application of this research? Pager didn't apply anything, but others did. After President Bush was told of these results, he announced in his State of the Union

speech that he wanted Congress to fund a $300 million program to provide mentoring and other support to help former prisoners get jobs (Kroeger 2004).

As you can see, sometimes only a thin line separates basic and applied sociology.

For Your Consideration
What findings would you expect if women had been included in this study?

FIGURE 1.3   Call-Back Rates by Race–Ethnicity and Criminal Record

Legend: Without criminal record; With criminal record

Whites: 34 (without), 17 (with)
African Americans: 14 (without), 5 (with)

Source: Courtesy of Devah Pager.

Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Facts never interpret themselves. To make sense out of life, we use our common sense. That is, to understand our experiences (our "facts"), we place them into a framework of more-or-less related ideas. Sociologists do this, too, but

they place their observations into a conceptual framework called a theory. A **theory** is a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work. It is an explanation of how two or more "facts" are related to one another.

Sociologists use three major theories: symbolic interactionism, functional analysis, and conflict theory. Let's first examine the main elements of these theories. Then let's

apply each theory to the U.S. divorce rate, to see why it is so high. As we do this, you will see how each theory, or perspective, provides a distinct interpretation of social life.

Symbolic Interactionism

We can trace the origins of **symbolic interactionism** to the Scottish moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, who noted that individuals evaluate their own conduct by comparing themselves with others (Stryker 1990). This perspective was brought to sociology by Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), William I. Thomas (1863–1947), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Let's look at the main elements of this theory.

Symbols in Everyday Life   Symbolic interactionists study how people use *symbols*—the things to which we attach meaning—to develop their views of the world and to communicate with one another. Without symbols, our social life would be no more sophisticated than that of animals. For example, without symbols we would have no aunts or uncles, employers or teachers—or even brothers and sisters. I know that this sounds strange, but it is symbols that define our relationships. There would still be reproduction, of course, but no symbols to tell us how we are related to whom. We would not know to whom we owe respect and obligations, or from whom we can expect privileges—the essence of human relationships.

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

To make this clearer:

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

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

Symbols allow not only relationships to exist, but also society. Without symbols, we could not coordinate our actions with those of others. We could not make plans for a future day, time, and place. Unable to specify times, materials, sizes, or goals, we could not build bridges and highways. Without symbols, there would be no movies or

musical instruments. We would have no hospitals, no government, no religion. The class you are taking could not exist—nor could this book. On the positive side, there would be no war.

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

Applying Symbolic Interactionism   To better understand symbolic interactionism, let's see how changes in symbols (meanings) help to explain the high U.S. divorce rate shown in Figure 1.4 on the next page. For background, you should understand that marriage used to be a lifelong commitment. Getting divorced was viewed as an immoral act, a flagrant disregard for public opinion, and the abandonment of adult responsibilities.

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

Symbolic interactionists note that related symbols also changed—and that none of these changes strengthen marriage. For example, tradition's guidelines were firm, letting newlyweds know what to expect from each other. In contrast, today's guidelines are vague, and couples must figure out how to divide up responsibilities for work, home, and children. As they struggle to do so, many flounder. Although couples find it a relief not to have to conform to what they consider to be burdensome notions, those traditional expectations (or symbols) did provide a structure that made marriages last. When these symbols changed, the structure they had created was

FIGURE 1.4   U.S. Marriage, U.S. Divorce
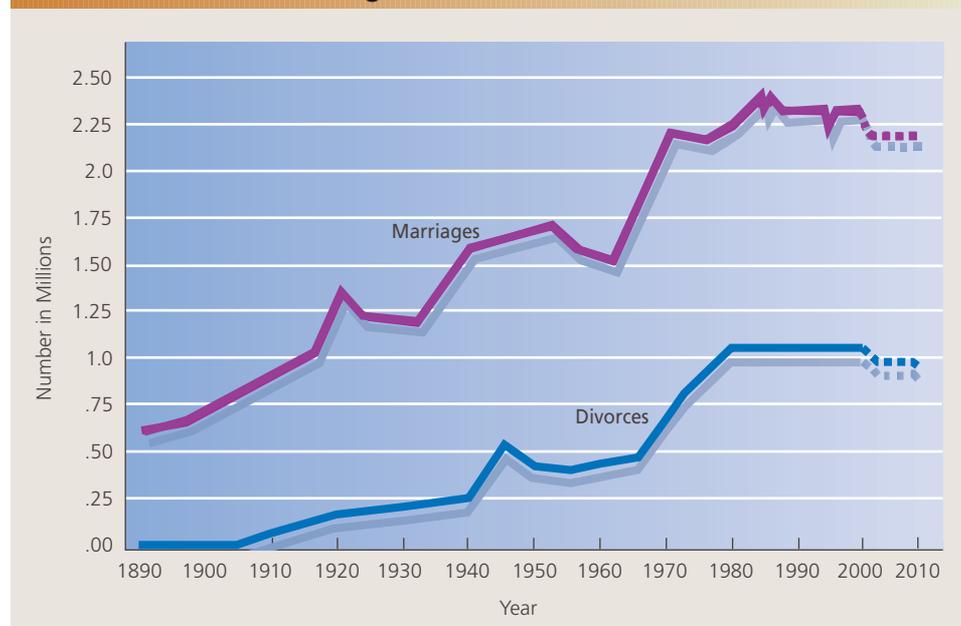
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1998: Table 92 and 2007: Table 119; earlier editions for earlier years. The broken lines indicate the author's estimates.

weakened, making marriage more fragile and divorce more common.

Similarly, ideas of parenthood and childhood used to be quite different. Parents had little responsibility for their children beyond providing food, clothing, shelter, and moral guidance. And this was for only a short time, because children began to contribute to the support of the family early in life. Among many people, parenthood is still like this. In Colombia, for example, children of the poor often are expected to support themselves by the age of 8 or 10. In advanced industrial societies, however, we assume that children are vulnerable beings who must depend on their parents for financial and emotional support for many years—often until they are well into their 20s. That this is not the case in many cultures often comes as a surprise to Americans, who assume that their own situation is some sort of worldwide, natural arrangement. The greater responsibilities that we assign to parenthood place heavy burdens on today's couples and, with them, more strain on marriage.

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

Functional Analysis

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

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

Robert Merton and Functionalism   Robert Merton (1910–2003) dismissed the organic analogy, but he did maintain the essence of functionalism—the image of society as a whole composed of parts that work together.

Merton used the term *functions* to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions: Functions help keep a group (society, social system) in balance. In contrast, *dysfunctions* are consequences that harm a society: They undermine a system's equilibrium.

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

Of course, human actions can also hurt a system. Because such consequences usually are unintended, Merton called them *latent dysfunctions.* Let's assume that the government has failed to specify a "stopping point" with regard to its bonus system. To collect more bonuses, some people keep on having children. The more children they have, however, the more they need the next bonus to survive. Large families become common, and poverty increases. Welfare is reinstated, taxes jump, and the nation erupts in protest. Because these results were not intended and because they harmed the social system, they would represent latent dysfunctions of the bonus program.

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

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

> When Phil became sick, he was nursed by Ann, his wife. She cooked for him, fed him, changed the bed linens, bathed him, read to him from the Bible, and gave him his medicine. (She did this in addition to doing the housework and taking care of their six children.) Phil was also surrounded by the children, who shouldered some of his chores while he was sick.
>
> When Phil died, the male neighbors and relatives made the casket while Ann, her mother, and female friends washed and dressed the body. Phil was then "laid out" in the front parlor (the formal living room), where friends,

Sociologists who use the *functionalist perspective* stress how industrialization and urbanization undermined the traditional *functions* of the family. Before industrialization, members of the family worked together as an economic unit, as in this 1860 photo of a farm family in France. Note that everyone has a job to do. As production moved away from the home, it took with it first the father and, more recently, the mother. One consequence of industrialization, then, is the weakening of family ties.

neighbors, and relatives paid their last respects. From there, friends moved his body to the church for the final message and then to the grave they themselves had dug.

In Sum: The family has lost many of its traditional functions, and others are presently under assault. Especially significant are changes in economic production. No longer is this a cooperative, home-based effort, with husbands and wives depending on one another for their interlocking contributions to a mutual endeavor. Husbands and wives today earn individual paychecks and increasingly function as separate components in an impersonal, multinational, and even global system. When outside agencies take over family functions, the family becomes more fragile and an increase in divorce is inevitable. The fewer functions that family members share, the fewer are their "ties that bind"—and these ties are what help husbands and wives get through the problems they inevitably experience.

Conflict Theory

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

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

When Marx made his observations, capitalism was in its infancy, and workers were at the mercy of their employers. Workers had none of what we take for granted

today—minimum wages, eight-hour days, coffee breaks, five-day workweeks, paid vacations and holidays, medical benefits, sick leave, unemployment compensation, Social Security, and, for union workers, the right to strike. Marx's analysis reminds us that these benefits came not from generous hearts, but by workers forcing concessions from their employers.

Conflict Theory Today   Many sociologists extend conflict theory beyond the relationship of capitalists and workers. They examine how opposing interests permeate every layer of society—whether that be a small group, an organization, a community, or the entire society. For example, when police, teachers, and parents try to enforce conformity, which they must do, this creates resentment and resistance. It is the same when a teenager tries to "change the rules" to gain more independence. There is, then, a constant struggle throughout society to determine who has authority or influence and how far that dominance goes (Turner 1978; Bartos and Wehr 2002).

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

Feminists and Conflict Theory   Just as Marx examined conflict between capitalists and workers, many feminists analyze conflict between men and women. A primary focus is the historical, contemporary, and global inequalities of men and women—and how the traditional dominance by men can be overcome to bring about equality of the sexes. Feminists are not united by the conflict perspective, however. They tackle a variety of topics and use whatever theory applies. (Feminism is discussed in Chapter 10.)

Applying Conflict Theory   To explain why the U.S. divorce rate is high, conflict theorists focus on how men's and women's relationships have changed. For millennia, men dominated women. Women had few alternatives other than to accept their exploitation. Then industrialization ushered in a new world, one in which women can meet their basic survival needs outside of marriage. Industrialization also fostered a culture in which females participate in social worlds beyond the home. With this new ability to refuse to bear burdens that earlier generations accepted as inevitable, today's women are likely to dissolve a marriage that becomes intolerable—or even unsatisfactory.

In Sum: The dominance of men over women was once considered natural and right. As women gained education and earnings, however, they first questioned and then rejected this assumption. As wives strove for more power and grew less inclined to put up with relationships that they defined as unfair, the divorce rate increased. From the conflict perspective, then, the significance of our high divorce rate is not that marriage has weakened, but, rather, that women are making headway in their historical struggle with men.

Levels of Analysis: Macro and Micro

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

To make this distinction between micro and macro levels clearer, let's return to the example of the homeless, with which we opened this chapter. To study homeless people, symbolic interactionists would focus on the micro level. They would analyze what homeless people do when they are in shelters and on the streets. They would also

analyze their communications, both their talk and their **nonverbal interaction** (gestures, silence, use of space, and so on). The observations I made at the beginning of this chapter about the silence in the homeless shelter, for example, would be of interest to symbolic interactionists.

This micro level, however, would not interest functionalists and conflict theorists. They would focus instead on the macro level. Functionalists would examine how changes in the parts of society have increased homelessness. They might look at how changes in the family (fewer children, more divorce) and economic conditions (inflation, fewer unskilled jobs, loss of jobs to workers overseas) cause homelessness among people who are unable to find jobs and who have no family to fall back on. For their part, conflict theorists would stress the struggle between social classes. They would be especially interested in how decisions by international elites on global production and trade affect the local job market and, along with it, unemployment and homelessness.

Putting the Theoretical Perspectives Together   Which theoretical perspective should we use to study human behavior? Which level of analysis is the correct one? As you have seen, these three perspectives produce contrasting pictures of social life. In the case of divorce, these interpretations are quite different from the commonsense understanding that

TABLE 1.1 Major Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology				
Perspective	Usual Level of Analysis	Focus of Analysis	Key Terms	Applying the Perspective to the U.S. Divorce Rate
Symbolic Interactionism	Microsociological: examines small-scale patterns of social interaction	Face-to-face interaction, how people use symbols to create social life	Symbols Interaction Meanings Definitions	Industrialization and urbanization changed marital roles and led to a redefinition of love, marriage, children, and divorce.
Functional Analysis (also called functionalism and structural functionalism)	Macrosociological: examines large-scale patterns of society	Relationships among the parts of society; how these parts are functional (have beneficial consequences) or dysfunctional (have negative consequences)	Structure Functions (manifest and latent) Dysfunctions Equilibrium	As social change erodes the traditional functions of the family, family ties weaken, and the divorce rate increases.
Conflict Theory	Macrosociological: examines large-scale patterns of society	The struggle for scarce resources by groups in a society; how the elites use their power to control the weaker groups	Inequality Power Conflict Competition Exploitation	When men control economic life, the divorce rate is low because women find few alternatives to a bad marriage. The high divorce rate reflects a shift in the balance of power between men and women.

two people are simply "incompatible." *Because each theory focuses on different features of social life, each provides a distinct interpretation. Consequently, we need to use all three theoretical lenses to analyze human behavior. By combining the contributions of each, we gain a more comprehensive picture of social life.*

How Theory and Research Work Together

Theory cannot stand alone. As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) argued so forcefully, if theory isn't connected to research, it will be abstract and empty. It won't represent the way life really is. It is the same for research. Without theory, Mills said, research is also of little value; it is simply a collection of meaningless "facts."

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

Doing Sociological Research

Around the globe, people make assumptions about the way the world "is." Common sense, the things that "everyone knows are true," may or may not be true, however. It takes research to find out. To move beyond guesswork and common sense, sociologists do research on just about every aspect of social life. Before we look at how they do their research, you can test your own "common sense" by taking the "fun quiz" on the next page.

A Research Model

As shown in Figure 1.5, scientific research follows eight basic steps. This is an ideal model, however, and in the real world of research, some of these steps may run together. Some may even be omitted.
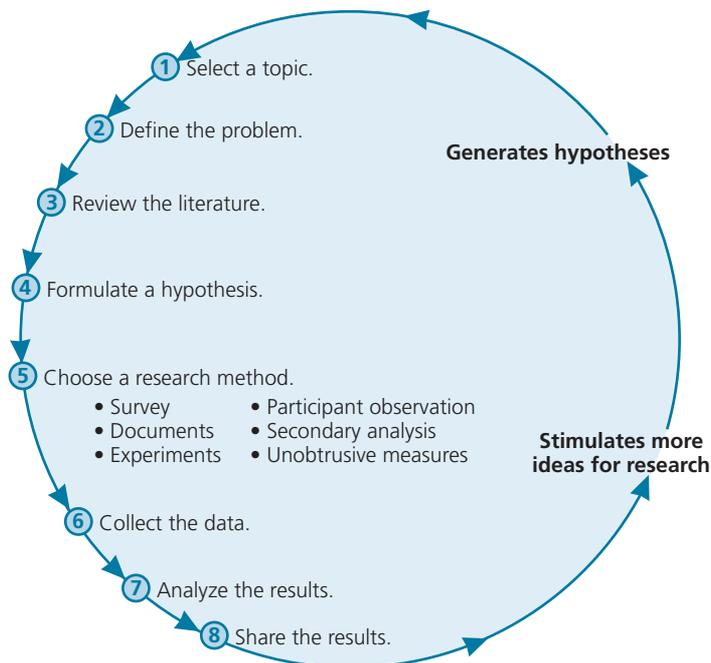
1. *Selecting a Topic.* What do you want to know more about? Let's use spouse abuse as our example.
2. *Defining the Problem.* The next step is to narrow the topic. Spouse abuse is too broad; you need to focus on a specific area. For example, you may want to know why men are more likely than women to be the abusers. Or perhaps you want to know what can be done to reduce spouse abuse.

3. *Reviewing the Literature.* You must read what has been published on your topic. You don't want to waste your time rediscovering what is already known.
4. *Formulating a Hypothesis.* The fourth step is to formulate a **hypothesis,** a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions from a theory. A hypothesis predicts a relationship between or among **variables,** factors that change, or vary, from one person or situation to another. For example, the statement "Men who are more socially isolated are more likely to abuse their wives than are men who are more socially integrated" is a hypothesis.

   Your hypothesis will need **operational definitions**—that is, precise ways to measure the variables. In this example, you would need operational definitions for three variables: social isolation, social integration, and spouse abuse.
5. *Choosing a Research Method.* The means by which you collect your data is called a **research method** (or *research design*). Sociologists use six basic research methods, which are outlined in the next section. You will want to choose the method that will best answer your particular questions.

FIGURE 1.5   The Research Model

1 Select a topic.
2 Define the problem.
3 Review the literature.
4 Formulate a hypothesis.
5 Choose a research method.
   • Survey   • Participant observation
   • Documents   • Secondary analysis
   • Experiments   • Unobtrusive measures
6 Collect the data.
7 Analyze the results.
8 Share the results.

Generates hypotheses

Stimulates more ideas for research

Source: Modification of Figure 2.2 of Schaeffer 1989.

Down-to-Earth Sociology
Enjoying a Sociology Quiz— Sociological Findings Versus Common Sense

Some findings of sociology support commonsense understandings of social life, but others contradict them. Can you tell the difference? To enjoy this quiz, complete *all* the questions before turning the page to check your answers.

1. **True/False**   More U.S. students are killed in school shootings now than ten or fifteen years ago.
2. **True/False**   The earnings of U.S. women have just about caught up with those of U.S. men.
3. **True/False**   It is more dangerous to walk near topless bars than fast-food restaurants.
4. **True/False**   Most rapists are mentally ill.

5. **True/False**   Most people on welfare are lazy and looking for a handout. They could work if they wanted to.
6. **True/False**   Compared with women, men make more eye contact in face-to-face conversations.
7. **True/False**   Couples who live together before marriage are usually more satisfied with their marriages than couples who do not live together before marriage.
8. **True/False**   Most husbands of employed wives who themselves get laid off from work take up the slack and increase the amount of housework they do.
9. **True/False**   Because bicyclists are more likely to wear helmets now than just a few years ago, their rate of head injuries has dropped.
10. **True/False**   Students in Japan are under such intense pressure to do well in school that their suicide rate is about double that of U.S. students.

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

You must also be sure that your data are reliable. **Reliability** means that if other researchers use your operational definitions, their findings will be consistent with yours. If your operational definitions are sloppy, husbands who have committed the same act of violence might be included in some research but excluded from other studies. You would end up with erratic results. If you show a 10 percent rate

Because sociologists find all human behavior to be valid research topics, their research runs from the unusual to the routines of everyday life. Their studies range from broad scale social change, such as the globalization of capitalism, to smaller scale social interaction, such as people having fun.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Sociological Findings Versus Common Sense—Answers to the Sociology Quiz

1. **False.**   More students were shot to death at U.S. schools in the early 1990s than now (National School Safety Center 2007).
2. **False.**   Over the years, the wage gap has narrowed, but only slightly. On average, full-time working women earn less than 70 percent of what full-time working men earn. This low figure is actually an improvement over earlier years. See Figures 10.5 and 10.6 on pages 277–278.
3. **False.**   The crime rate outside fast-food restaurants is considerably higher. The likely reason for this is that topless bars hire private security and parking lot attendants (Linz et al. 2004).
4. **False.**   Sociologists compared the psychological profiles of prisoners convicted of rape and prisoners convicted of other crimes. Their profiles were similar. Like robbery, rape is a learned behavior (Scully and Marolla 1984/2007).

5. **False.**   Most people on welfare are children, the old, the sick, the mentally and physically handicapped, or young mothers with few skills. Less than 2 percent fit the stereotype of an able-bodied man. See page 216.
6. **False.**   Women make considerably more eye contact (Henley et al. 1985).
7. **False.**   The opposite is true. The likely reason is that many couples who cohabit before marriage are less committed to marriage in the first place—and a key to marital success is a strong commitment to one another (Larson 1988; Dush et al. 2003).
8. **False.**   Most husbands who have employed wives and who themselves get laid off from work *reduce* the amount of housework they do (Hochschild 1989; Brines 1994).
9. **False.**   Bicyclists today are more likely to wear helmets, but their rate of head injuries is higher. Apparently, they take more risks because the helmets make them feel safer (Barnes 2001).
10. **False.**   The suicide rate of U.S. students is about double that of Japanese students (Lester 2003).

of spouse abuse, for example, but another researcher determines it to be 30 percent, the research is unreliable.

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

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

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

Let's look in greater detail at the fifth step to see what research methods sociologists use.

TABLE 1.2   How to Read a Table

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Husbands

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

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

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

Some tables are much more complicated than this one, but all follow the same basic pattern. To apply these concepts to a table with more information, see page 247.

ANSWERS
1. Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Husbands
2. Based on interviews with 150 husbands and wives
3. Husband's Achievement and Job Satisfaction, Violent Husbands, Nonviolent Husbands. The *n* is an abbreviation for number, and *n* = 25 means that 25 violent husbands were in the sample.
4. 56%, 18%
5. Violent Husbands
6. A 1975 article by O'Brien (listed in the References section of this text).

Research Methods

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

Surveys

Let's suppose that you want to know how many wives are abused each year. Some husbands also are abused, of course, but let's assume that you are going to focus on wives. An appropriate method for this purpose would be the **survey,** in which you would ask individuals a series of questions. Before you begin your research, however, you must deal with practical matters that face all researchers. Let's look at these issues.

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

Let's assume that your resources (money, assistants, time) allow you to investigate spouse abuse only on your campus. Let's also assume that your college enrollment is

---

TABLE 1.3	Three Ways to Measure "Average"	
The Mean	**The Median**	**The Mode**
The term *average* seems clear enough. As you learned in grade school, to find the average you add a group of numbers and then divide the total by the number of cases that you added. Assume that the following numbers represent men convicted of battering their wives:	To compute the second average, the *median*, first arrange the cases in order—either from the highest to the lowest or the lowest to the highest. That arrangement will produce the following distribution.	The third measure of average, the *mode*, is simply the cases that occur the most often. In this instance the mode is 57, which is way off the mark.

EXAMPLE (The Mean)

321
229
57
289
136
57
1,795

EXAMPLE (The Median)

57		1,795
57		321
136		289
229	or	229
289		136
321		57
1,795		57

EXAMPLE (The Mode)

57
57
136
229
289
321
1,795

The Mean	The Median	The Mode

The total is 2,884. Divided by 7 (the number of cases), the average is 412. Sociologists call this form of average the *mean*.
 	
    The mean can be deceptive because it is strongly influenced by extreme scores, either low or high. Note that six of the seven cases are less than the mean.
 	
    Two other ways to compute averages are the median and the mode.
	Then look for the middle case, the one that falls halfway between the top and the bottom. That number is 229, for three numbers are lower and three numbers are higher. When there is an even number of cases, the median is the halfway mark between the two middle cases.	Because the mode is often deceptive, and only by chance comes close to either of the other two averages, sociologists seldom use it. In addition, not every distribution of cases has a mode. And if two or more numbers appear with the same frequency, you can have more than one mode.

large, so you won't be able to survey all the married women. Now you must select a **sample,** individuals from among your target population. How you choose a sample is crucial, for your choice will affect the results of your research. For example, married women enrolled in introductory sociology and engineering courses might have quite different experiences. If so, surveying just one or the other would produce skewed results.

Because you want to generalize your findings to your entire campus, you need a sample that accurately represents the campus. How can you get a representative sample?

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

How can you get a random sample? First, you need a list of all the married women enrolled in your college. Then you assign a number to each name on the list. Using a table of random numbers, you then determine which of these women become part of your sample. (Tables of random numbers are available in statistics books and online, or they can be generated by a computer.)

A random sample will represent your study's population fairly—in this case, married women enrolled at your college. This means that you can generalize your findings to *all* the married women students on your campus, even if they were not included in your sample.

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

Asking Neutral Questions After you have decided on your population and sample, your next task is to make certain that your questions are neutral. Your questions must allow **respondents,** the people who answer your questions, to express their own opinions. Otherwise, you will end up with biased answers—which are worthless. For example, if you were to ask, "Don't you think that men who beat their wives should go to prison?" you would be tilting the answer toward agreement with a prison sentence. The *Doonesbury* cartoon below illustrates a more blatant example of biased questions. For examples of flawed research, see the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

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

As Table 1.4 on page 27 illustrates, the alternative is **open-ended questions,** which allow people to answer in their own words. Open-ended questions allow you to tap the full range of people's opinions, but they make it difficult

Doonesbury   BY GARRY TRUDEAU

Improperly worded questions can steer respondents toward answers that are not their own, thus producing invalid results.

Down-to-Earth Sociology
Loading the Dice: How *Not* to Do Research

The methods of science lend themselves to distortion, misrepresentation, and downright fraud. Consider these findings from surveys:

Americans overwhelmingly prefer Toyotas to Chryslers. Americans overwhelmingly prefer Chryslers to Toyotas.

Obviously, these opposite conclusions cannot both be true. In fact, both are misrepresentations, even though the responses came from surveys conducted by so-called independent researchers. These researchers, however, are biased, not independent and objective.

It turns out that some consumer researchers load the dice. Hired by firms that have a vested interest in the outcome of the research, they deliver the results their clients are looking for (Armstrong 2007). Here are six ways to load the dice.

1. **Choose a biased sample.** If you want to "prove" that Americans prefer Chryslers over Toyotas, interview unemployed union workers who trace their job loss to Japanese imports. The answer is predictable. You'll get what you're looking for.
2. **Ask biased questions.** Even if you choose an unbiased sample, as in the *Doonesbury* cartoon on page 25, you can phrase questions in such a way that you direct people to the answer you're looking for. Suppose that you ask this question: "We are losing milllions of jobs to workers overseas who work for just a few dollars a day. After losing their jobs, some Americans are even homeless and hungry. Do you prefer a car that gives jobs to Americans, or one that forces our workers to lose their homes?" Questions like this—usually more subtle—are designed to channel people's thinking toward a predetermined answer—quite contrary to the standards of scientific research.
3. **List biased choices.** Another way to load the dice is to use closed-ended questions that push people into the answers you want. Consider this finding:

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

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

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

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

The beginning of the corruption is subtle. Paul Light, dean at the University of Minnesota, put it this way: "A funder will never come to an academic and say, 'I want you to produce finding X, and here's a million dollars to do it.' Rather, the subtext is that if the researchers produce the right finding, more work—and funding—will come their way."

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

5. **Misunderstand the subjects' world.** This route can lead to errors every bit as great as those just cited. Even researchers who use an adequate sample and word their questions properly can end up with skewed results. They may, for example, fail to anticipate that people may be embarrassed to express an opinion that isn't "politically correct." For example, surveys show that 80 percent of Americans are environmentalists. Most Americans, however, are probably embarrassed to tell a stranger otherwise. Today, that would be like going against the flag, motherhood, and apple pie.
6. **Analyze the data incorrectly.** Even when researchers strive for objectivity, the sample is good, the wording is neutral, and the respondents answer the questions honestly, the results can still be skewed. The researchers may make a mistake in their calculations, such as entering incorrect data into a computer program. This, too, of course, is inexcusable in science.

Sources: Based on Crossen 1991; Goleman 1993; Barnes 1995; Resnik 2000; Hotz 2007.

to compare answers. For example, how would you compare these answers to the question "What do you think causes men to abuse their wives?"

"They're sick."

"I think they must have had problems with their mother."

"We ought to string them up!"

Establishing Rapport   Will women who have been abused really give honest answers to strangers? The answer is yes, but first you have to establish **rapport** (ruh-POUR), a feeling of trust, with your respondents. We know from studies of rape that once rapport is gained (often by first asking nonsensitive questions), victims will talk about personal, sensitive issues.

To go beyond police statistics, each year researchers interview a random sample of 100,000 Americans. They ask them whether they have been victims of burglary, robbery, and other crimes. After establishing rapport, the researchers ask about rape. They find that rape victims will talk about their experiences. The national crime victimization survey shows that the actual incidence of rape is three times higher than the official statistics (*Statistical Abstract* 2007: page 188).

A new technique to gather data on sensitive areas, Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing, overcomes linger-

TABLE 1.4 Closed and Open-Ended Questions	
A. Closed-Ended Question	B. Open-Ended Question
Which of the following best fits your idea of what should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse? 1. probation 2. jail time 3. community service 4. counseling 5. divorce 6. nothing—it's a family matter	What do you think should be done to someone who has been convicted of spouse abuse?

ing problems of distrust. In this technique, the interviewer gives a laptop computer to the respondent, then moves aside, while the individual enters his or her own answers into the computer. In one version of this method, the respondent listens to the questions on a headphone and answers them on the computer screen. When the respondent clicks the "Submit" button, the interviewer has no idea how the respondent answered any questions (Mosher et al. 2005).

Participant Observation (Fieldwork)

In **participant observation** (or **fieldwork),** the researcher *participates* in a research setting while *observing* what is happening in that setting. Obviously, this method does not mean that you would sit around and watch someone being abused. But let's suppose that you are interested in learning how the abuse has changed the victims' hopes and goals, their attitudes toward men, or their self-concept. For such questions, you could use participant observation.

For example, if your campus has a crisis intervention center, you might be able to observe victims of spouse abuse from the time they report the attack through their participation in counseling. With good rapport, you might even be able to spend time with them in other settings, observing further aspects of their lives. What they

Participant observation, participating and observing in a research setting, is usually supplemented by interviewing, asking questions to better understand why people do what they do. In this instance, the sociologist would want to know what this hair removal ceremony in Gujarat, India, means to the child's family and to the community.

say and how they interact with others might help you to understand how the abuse has affected them. This, in turn, could give you insight into how to improve college counseling services.

Secondary Analysis

In **secondary analysis,** researchers analyze data that others have collected. For example, if you were to analyze the original interviews from a study of women who had been abused by their husbands, you would be doing secondary analysis.

Documents

Documents, recorded sources, include books, newspapers, diaries, bank records, police reports, video and audio recordings, and so on. To study spouse abuse, you might examine police reports and court records. These could reveal the percentage of complaints that result in arrest and the percentage of the arrested men who are charged, convicted, or put on probation. But if you want to learn about the victims' social and emotional adjustment, those records would tell you little. Other documents, though, might provide answers. For example, diaries kept by victims could yield insight into how their attitudes and relationships change. Perhaps the director of a crisis intervention center might ask clients to keep diaries for you—or get the victims' permission for you to examine records of their counseling sessions.

Experiments

Is there a way to change a wife abuser into a loving husband? No one has made this claim, but a lot of people say that abusers need therapy. Yet no one knows whether therapy really works. Because **experiments** are useful for determining cause and effect, let's suppose that you propose an experiment to a judge and she gives you access to men who have been arrested for spouse abuse. As in Figure 1.6 below, you would randomly divide the men into two groups. This helps to ensure that their individual characteristics (attitudes, number of arrests, severity of crimes, education, race–ethnicity, age, and so on) are distributed evenly between the groups. You then would arrange for the men in the **experimental group** to receive some form of therapy. The men in the **control group** would not get therapy.

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

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

The Experiment
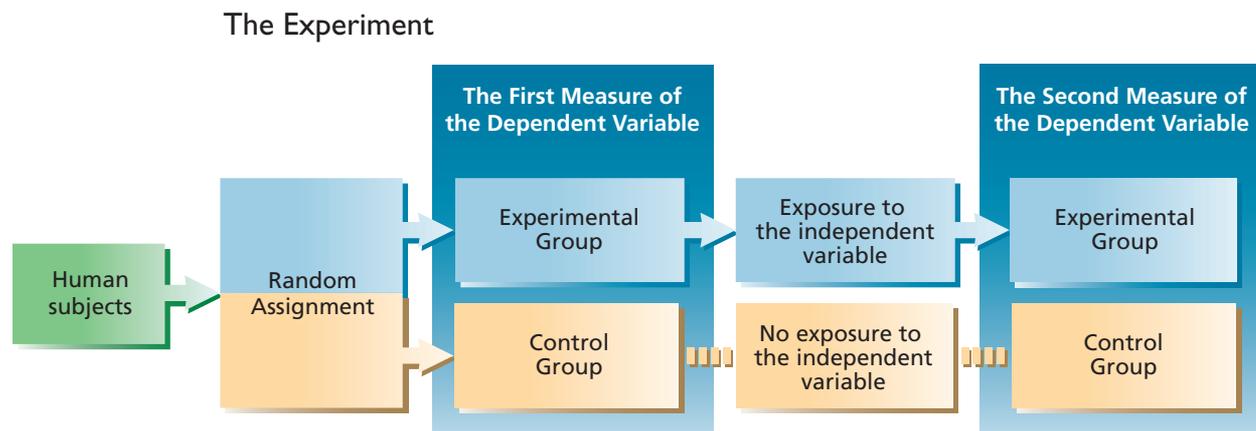
Source: By the author.

Unobtrusive Measures

Researchers sometimes use **unobtrusive measures,** observing the behavior of people who are not aware that they are being studied. For example, researchers studied the level of whisky consumption in a town that was legally "dry" by counting empty bottles in trashcans (Lee 2000). Casino operators use chips that transmit radio frequencies, allowing them to track how much their high rollers are betting at every hand of poker or blackjack (Sanders 2005). Billboards can read information embedded on a chip in your car key. As you drive by, the billboard displays *your* name with a personal message (Feder 2007). The same device can *collect* information as you drive by.

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

things that are intimate, potentially embarrassing, or otherwise harmful to themselves. Finally, although not all sociologists agree, it generally is considered unethical for researchers to misrepresent themselves.

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

Protecting the Subjects: The Brajuha Research

Mario Brajuha, a graduate student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, was doing participant observation of restaurant workers. He lost his job as a waiter when the restaurant where he was working burned down—a fire of "suspicious origin," as the police said. When detectives learned that Brajuha had taken field notes (Brajuha and Hallowell 1986), they

Ethics in Sociological Research

In addition to choosing an appropriate research method, we must also follow the ethics of sociology (American Sociological Association 1999). Research ethics require honesty, truth, and openness (sharing findings with the scientific community). Ethics clearly forbid the falsification of results. They also condemn plagiarism—that is, stealing someone else's work. Another ethical guideline states that research subjects should generally be informed that they are being studied and never be harmed by the research. Ethics also require that sociologists protect the anonymity of those who provide information. Sometimes people reveal

A major concern of sociologists and other social scientists is that their research methods do not influence their findings. Respondents often change their behavior when they know they are being studied.

THE FAR SIDE® BY GARY LARSON

"Anthropologists! Anthropologists!"

asked to see them. Because he had promised to keep the information confidential, Brajuha refused to hand them over. When the district attorney subpoenaed the notes, Brajuha still refused. The district attorney then threatened to put Brajuha in jail. By this time, Brajuha's notes had become rather famous, and unsavory characters—perhaps those who had set the fire—also wanted to know what was in them. They, too, demanded to see them, accompanying their demands with threats of a different nature. Brajuha found himself between a rock and a hard place.

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

Misleading the Subjects: The Humphreys Research

Sociologists agree on the necessity to protect respondents, and they applaud the professional manner in which Brajuha handled himself. Although it is considered acceptable for sociologists to do covert participant observation (studying some situation without announcing that they are doing research), to deliberately misrepresent oneself is considered unethical. Sociologists who violate this norm can become embroiled in ethical controversy. Let's look at the case of Laud Humphreys, whose research forced sociologists to rethink and refine their ethical stance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Values in Sociological Research

Max Weber raised an issue that remains controversial among sociologists. He said that sociology should be **value free.** By this, he meant that a sociologist's
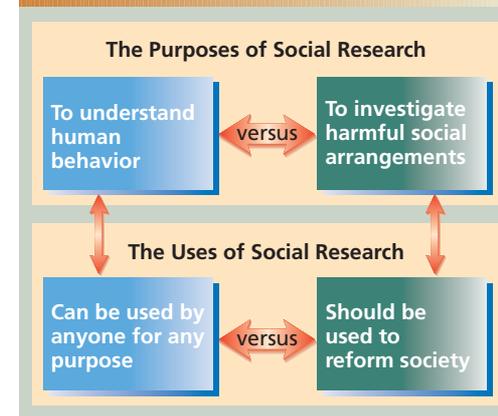
values—beliefs about what is good or desirable in life and the way the world ought to be—should not affect research. Weber wanted **objectivity,** total neutrality, for he said that if values influence research, sociological findings will be biased.

That bias has no place in research is not a matter of debate. All sociologists agree that no one should distort data to make them fit preconceived ideas or personal values. It is equally clear, however, that because sociologists—like everyone else—are members of a particular society at a given point in history, they, too, are infused with values of all sorts. These values inevitably play a role in the topics we choose to research. For example, values are part of the reason that one sociologist chooses to do research on the Mafia, while another turns a sociological eye on kindergarten students.

Because values can lead to unintended distortions in how we interpret our findings, sociologists stress the need for **replication,** repeating a study in order to compare the new results with the original findings. If an individual's values have distorted research findings, replication by other sociologists should uncover the bias and correct it.

Despite this consensus, however, values remain hotly debated in sociology (Holmwood 2007). As summarized in Figure 1.7, the disagreement centers on the proper purposes and uses of sociology. Some sociologists say that the purpose of sociology is to advance understanding of social life. Sociologists should do research on whatever interests them and then use the best theory available to interpret their findings. Others are convinced that the purpose of research should be to help improve society, to do research that helps alleviate poverty, racism, sexism, and other forms of human exploitation.

FIGURE 1.7   The Debate over Values in Sociological Research

The Purposes of Social Research

To understand human behavior   *versus*   To investigate harmful social arrangements

The Uses of Social Research

Can be used by anyone for any purpose   *versus*   Should be used to reform society

This debate illustrates again the tension in sociology that we discussed earlier, the goal of analyzing social life versus the goal of social reform.

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

SUMMARY *and* REVIEW

The Sociological Perspective

What is the sociological perspective?

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

Origins of Sociology

When did sociology first appear as a separate discipline?

Sociology emerged as a separate discipline in the mid-1800s in western Europe, during the onset of the Industrial

Revolution. Industrialization affected all aspects of human existence—where people lived, the nature of their work, their relationships, and how they viewed life. Early sociologists who focused on these social changes include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Harriet Martineau, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Pp. 5–8.

Sexism in Early Sociology

What was the position of women in early sociology?

Sociology developed during a historical period when deep sexism was common. Consequently, the few women who received the education necessary to become sociologists, such as Harriet Martineau, were ignored. P. 9.

Sociology in North America

When were the first academic departments of sociology established in the United States?

The earliest departments of sociology were established in the late 1800s at the universities of Kansas, Chicago, and Atlanta. During the 1940s, the University of Chicago dominated sociology. Today, no single university or theoretical perspective dominates. In sociology's early years, the contributions of women and minorities were largely ignored. Pp. 9–12.

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

Basic (or *pure*) *sociology* is sociological research whose purpose is to make discoveries. In contrast, **applied sociology** is the use of sociology to solve problems. Pp. 12–14.

Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

What is a theory?

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

What are sociology's major theoretical perspectives?

Sociologists use three primary theoretical frameworks to interpret social life. **Symbolic interactionists** examine how people use symbols to develop and share their views of the world. Symbolic interactionists usually focus on the **micro level**—on small-scale, face-to-face interaction. **Functionalists,** in contrast, focus on the **macro level**—on large-scale patterns of society. They stress that a social system is made up of interrelated parts. When working properly, each part fulfills a function that contributes to the system's stability. **Conflict theorists** also focus on

large-scale patterns of society. They stress that society is composed of competing groups that struggle for scarce resources.

With each perspective focusing on select features of social life and each providing a unique interpretation, no single theory is adequate. The combined insights of all three perspectives yield a more comprehensive picture of social life. Pp. 14–20.

What is the relationship between theory and research?

Theory and research depend on one another. Sociologists use theory to interpret the data they gather. Theory also generates questions that need to be answered by research. Research, in turn, helps to generate theory: Findings that don't match what is expected can indicate a need to modify theory. P. 20.

Doing Sociological Research

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

Common sense doesn't provide reliable information. When subjected to scientific research, commonsense ideas often are found to be limited or false. Pp. 20–22.

What are the eight basic steps of sociological research?

1. Selecting a topic, 2. Defining the problem, 3. Reviewing the literature, 4. Formulating a **hypothesis,** 5. Choosing a research method, 6. Collecting the data, 7. Analyzing the results, and 8. Sharing the results. These steps are explained in detail on pp. 20–23.

Research Methods

How do sociologists gather data?

To collect data, sociologists use six **research methods** (or research designs): **surveys, participant observation** (fieldwork), **secondary analysis, documents, experiments,** and **unobtrusive measures.** Pp. 24–29.

Ethics in Sociological Research

How important are ethics in sociological research?

Ethics are of fundamental concern to sociologists, who are committed to openness, honesty, truth, and protecting their subjects from harm. The Brajuha research on restaurant workers and the Humphreys research on "tearooms" were cited to illustrate ethical issues that concern sociologists. Pp. 29–30.

Values in Sociological Research

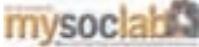*What value dilemmas do sociologists face?*

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

THINKING CRITICALLY *about* Chapter 1

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

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What can you find in MySocLab?   mysoclab   www.mysoclab.com

- **Complete Ebook**
- **Practice Tests and Video and Audio activities**
- **Mapping and Data Analysis exercises**
- **Sociology in the News**
- **Classic Readings in Sociology**
- **Research and Writing advice**

Where Can I Read More on This Topic?

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