

# **Sociology: A Brief Introduction**

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10<sup>th</sup> Edition

## **1 chapter**

## **Understanding Sociology**

# UNDERSTANDING SOCIOLOGY

# 1

- What is Sociology?
- The Development of Sociology
- Major Theoretical Perspectives
- Taking Sociology With You
- Appendix: Careers in Sociology

# A Look Ahead

- How did sociology develop?
- How does it differ from other social sciences?
- Who are the pioneers and what are their theoretical perspectives?
- How does sociology help us develop a sociological imagination?

# What is Sociology?

- **Sociology:** Scientific study of social behavior and human groups
- Focus on:
  - How relationships influence people's attitudes and behavior
  - How societies develop and change



# The Sociological Imagination

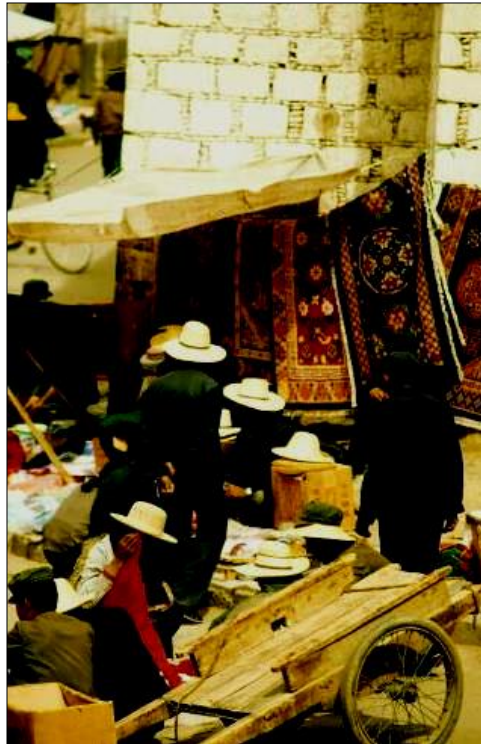
- C. Wright Mills describes sociological imagination as:

An awareness of the relationship between an individual and the wider society

Ability to view one's society as an outsider would

# The Sociological Imagination

- Looks beyond a limited understanding of human behavior



- See the world and its people in a new way
- See through a broader lens

# Sociology and the Social Sciences

- **Science:** Body of knowledge obtained by methods based on systematic observation

- **Natural science:**  
Study of physical features of nature and the ways they interact and change

- **Social science:**  
Study of social features of humans and the ways they interact and change

# Sociology and the Social Sciences

- Study influence society has on people's attitudes and behavior
- Seek to understand ways in which people interact and shape society
- Examine social relationships scientifically

Study impact of  
earthquake that hit  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Sociologists: long  
history of advising  
government agencies



## Table 1-1: Sections of the American Sociological Association

Aging and the Life Course	Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis	Peace, War, and Social Conflict
Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco	Evolution, Biology, and Society	Political Economy of the World-System
Animals and Society	Family	Political Sociology
Asia and Asian America	History of Sociology	Population
Body and Embodiment	Human Rights	Race, Gender, and Class
Children and Youth	International Migration	Racial and Ethnic Minorities
Collective Behavior and Social Movements	Labor and Labor Movements	Rationality and Society
Communication and Information Technologies	Latino/a Sociology	Religion
Community and Urban Sociology	Law	Science, Knowledge, and Technology
Comparative and Historical Sociology	Marxist Sociology	Sex and Gender
Crime, Law, and Deviance	Mathematical Sociology	Sexualities
Culture	Medical Sociology	Social Psychology
Economic Sociology	Mental Health	Sociological Practice and Public Sociology
Education	Methodology	Teaching and Learning
Emotions	Organizations, Occupations, and Work	Theory
Environment and Technology		

The range of sociological issues is very broad. For example, sociologists who belong to the Animals and Society section of the ASA may study the animal rights movement; those who belong to the Sexualities section may study global sex workers or the gay, bisexual, and transgendered movements. Economic sociologists may investigate globalization or consumerism, among many other topics.

Source: American Sociological Association 2010b.

# Sociology and Common Sense

- Sociologists do not accept something as fact because “everyone knows it”
  - Each piece of information must be tested, recorded, and analyzed

Women tend to be chattier than men

Military marriages more likely to end in separation or divorce

# What Is Sociological Theory?

- **Theory:** Set of statements that seeks to explain problems, actions, or behavior
  - Effective theories have explanatory and predictive power
  - Theories are not final statements about human behavior

Durkheim suicide studies:  
suggested suicide related to group life

# The Development of Sociology

- Philosophers/religious authorities of ancient and medieval societies made observations of human behavior
- European theorists in 19<sup>th</sup> century made pioneering contributions to development of the science of human behavior

# Early Thinkers

## ■ Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

- Systematic investigation of behavior needed to improve society
- Coined term “sociology”

## ■ Harriet Martineau (1802–1876)

- Studied social behavior in Britain and U.S.
- Emphasized impact of economy, law, trade, health, and population on social problems

# Early Thinkers

- Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)
  - Studied “evolutionary” change in society
- Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)
  - Behavior must be understood within larger social context

**Anomie:** Loss of direction felt in a society when social control of individual behavior becomes ineffective

# Early Thinkers

- Max Weber (1864–1920)
  - To comprehend behavior, one must learn subjective meaning people attach to actions
  - ***Verstehen***: understanding; insight

**Ideal type:** Construct for evaluating specific cases

# Early Thinkers

## ■ Karl Marx (1818–1883)

- Society divided between two classes that clash in pursuit of interests
- Worked with Engels
- Emphasized group identification and associations that influence one's place in society

Working class  
should overthrow  
existing class system



# Modern Developments

- W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963)
  - Black sociologists assisted struggle for racially egalitarian society
  - Knowledge essential in combating prejudice
  - In-depth studies of urban life
    - Focused on religion at community level

**Double consciousness:** Division of individual's identity into two or more social realities

# Twentieth-Century Developments

- Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929)
  - Used sociological perspective to examine face-to-face groups
- Jane Addams (1860–1935)
  - Combined intellectual inquiry, social service work, and political activism
  - Co-founded Hull House

# Modern Developments

- Robert Merton (1910–2003)
  - Combined theory and research
  - Developed explanation of deviant behavior

**Macrosociology:**  
Concentrates on  
large-scale  
phenomena or  
entire civilizations

**Microsociology:**  
Stresses study  
of small groups,  
often through  
experimental means

# Modern Developments

- Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)
  - Capital sustains individuals and families from one generation to the next

**Cultural capital:**  
noneconomic goods  
reflected in  
knowledge of  
language and arts

**Social capital:**  
collective benefit of  
social networks

# Major Theoretical Perspectives

- Functionalist perspective
- Conflict perspective
- Interactionist perspective



# Functionalist Perspective

- Emphasizes the way parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability
  - Talcott Parsons (1902–1972)
    - Viewed society as vast network of connected parts
    - Each helps maintain the system as a whole

# Functionalist Perspective

- **Manifest functions:** Institutions are open, stated, conscious functions that involve intended and recognized consequences of an aspect of society
- **Latent functions:** Unconscious or unintended functions that may reflect hidden purposes of an institution
- **Dysfunctions:** Elements or processes of society that may disrupt a social system or reduce its stability

# Conflict Perspective

- Assumes social behavior best understood in terms of conflict or tension between competing groups
- **The Marxist view:** Conflict is part of everyday life in all societies
  - Conflict theorists interested in how institutions may help maintain privileges of some groups and keep others subservient



# Conflict Perspective

## ■ The Feminist view

- Sees inequality in gender as central to all behavior and organization
- Often allied with conflict theory
- Proponents tend to focus on macro level
- Broadened social behavior by extending analysis beyond male point of view

# Interactionist Perspective

- Generalizes about everyday forms of social interaction to explain society as a whole
  - Humans viewed as living in a world of meaningful objects

**Nonverbal communication:** Includes gestures, facial expressions, and postures

# Interactionist Perspective

- “Slugging”
- Tattoos
- Dress codes

# Interactionist Perspective

- George Herbert Mead (1863–1931)
  - Regarded as founder of interactionist perspective
- Erving Goffman (1922–1982)
  - **Dramaturgical approach:**  
People seen as theatrical performers

## Table 1-2: Major Sociological Perspectives

	Functionalist	Conflict	Interactionist
<b>View of Society</b>	Stable, well integrated	Characterized by tension and struggle between groups	Active in influencing and affecting everyday social interaction
<b>Level of Analysis Emphasized</b>	Macro	Macro	Micro, as a way of understanding the larger macro phenomena
<b>Key Concepts</b>	Manifest functions Latent functions Dysfunctions	Inequality Capitalism Stratification	Symbols Nonverbal communication Face-to-face interaction
<b>View of the Individual</b>	People are socialized to perform societal functions	People are shaped by power, coercion, and authority	People manipulate symbols and create their social worlds through interaction
<b>View of the Social Order</b>	Maintained through cooperation and consensus	Maintained through force and coercion	Maintained by shared understanding of everyday behavior
<b>View of Social Change</b>	Predictable, reinforcing	Change takes place all the time and may have positive consequences	Reflected in people's social positions and their communications with others
<b>Example</b>	Public punishments reinforce the social order	Laws reinforce the positions of those in power	People respect laws or disobey them based on their own past experience
<b>Proponents</b>	Émile Durkheim Talcott Parsons Robert Merton	Karl Marx W. E. B. DuBois Ida Wells-Barnett	George Herbert Mead Charles Horton Cooley Erving Goffman

# The Sociological Approach

- Gain broadest understanding of society by drawing on all major perspectives, noting where they overlap or diverge
  - Each perspective offers unique insights into the same issue
- Researcher's work always guided by his or her theoretical viewpoint

# Research Today

- 1.1: Looking at Sports from Four Theoretical Perspectives
  - Have you experienced or witnessed discrimination in sports based on gender or race? If so, how did you react?
  - Which perspective do you think is most useful in looking at the sociology of sports?

## Video: The Philippines

[View video](#)



## Video: Malawi

[View video](#)

# Applied and Clinical Sociology

- **Applied sociology:** Use of sociology with intent of yielding practical applications for human behavior and organizations
- **Clinical sociology:** Facilitating change by altering social relationships or restructuring social institutions

**Basic sociology:** Seeks profound knowledge of fundamental aspects of social phenomena

# Developing a Sociological Imagination

- Theory in Practice
- Research Today
- Thinking Globally
  - **Globalization:** Worldwide integration of government policies, cultures, social movements, and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas

# Developing a Sociological Imagination

- The Significance of Social Inequality
  - **Social Inequality:** Condition in which members of society have differing amounts of wealth, prestige, or power
- Speaking Across Race, Gender, and Religious Boundaries
- Social Policy throughout the World

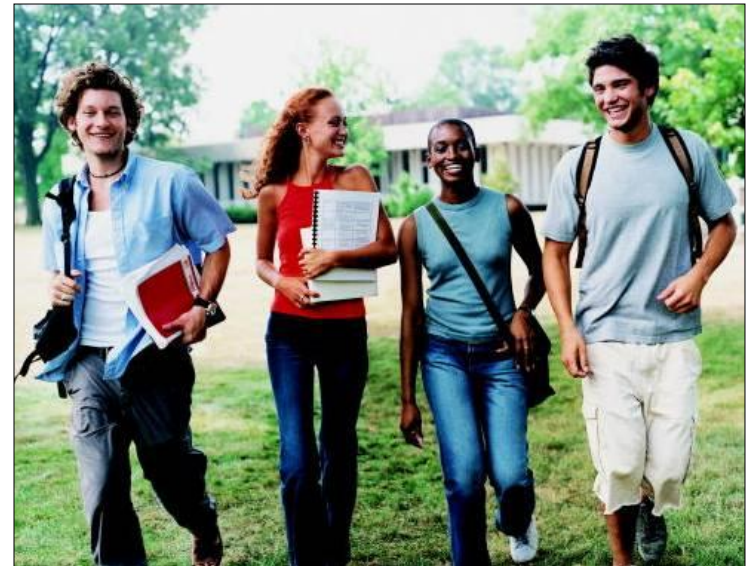
# Sociology in the Global Community

## ■ 1.2: Your Morning Cup of Coffee

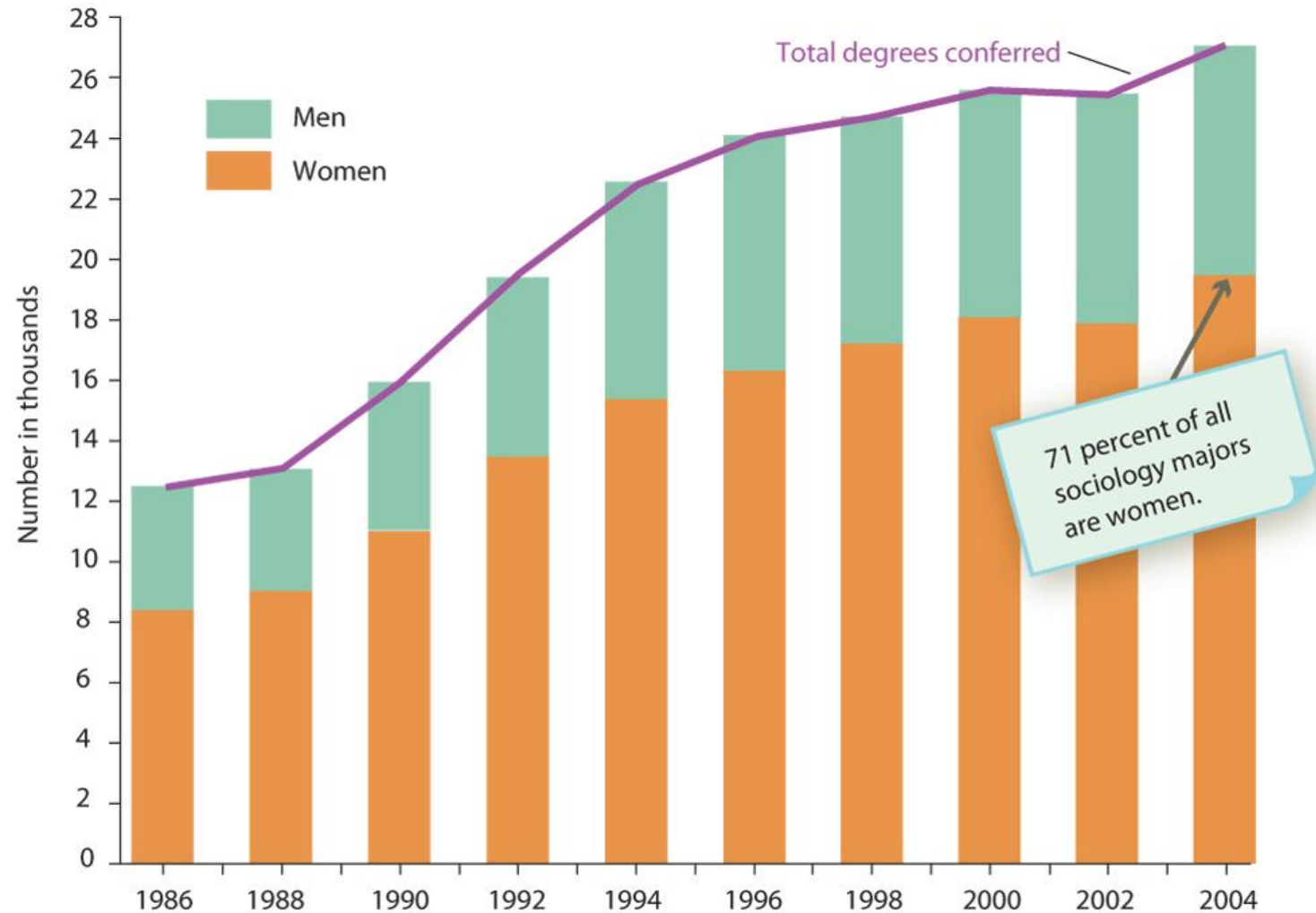
- Would you willingly pay more for a cup of coffee if you knew that the worker who picked the beans would benefit from the higher price?
- The coffee trade has been blamed for perpetuating social inequality, warfare, and global warming. Can you think of any positive effects of the coffee trade?

# Careers in Sociology

- Number of students graduating with degree in sociology has risen steadily
  - Provides strong liberal arts background for entry-level positions
    - Business
    - Social services
    - Foundations
    - Community organizations
    - Law enforcement
    - Government



## Figure 1-2: Sociology Degrees Conferred in the United States by Gender



## Figure 1-3: Occupations of Graduating Sociology Majors

