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1 DISCOVER SOCIOLOGY

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Can societies be studied scientifically? What does the scientific study of societies entail?
2. What is a theory? What role do theories play in sociology?
3. In your opinion, what social issues or problems are most interesting or important today? What questions about those issues or problems would you like to study?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Describe the sociological imagination.

1.2 Understand the significance of critical thinking in the study of sociology.

1.3 Trace the historical development of sociological thought.

1.4 Identify key theoretical paradigms in the discipline of sociology.

1.5 Identify the three main themes of this book.

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SOCIOLOGY AND THE CURIOUS MIND

A goal of this book is to take you on a sociological journey. But let's begin with a basic question: *What is sociology?* First of all, sociology is a discipline of and for curious minds. Sociologists are deeply committed to answering the question, "Why?" Why are some people desperately poor and others fabulously wealthy? Why does racial segregation in housing and public education exist, and why does it persist more than half a century after civil rights laws were enacted in the United States? What accounts for the decline of marriage among the poor and the working class—as well as among the millennial generation? Why is the proportion of women entering and completing college rising while men's enrollment has fallen? Why, despite this, do men as a group still earn higher incomes than do women as a group? And how is it that social media is simultaneously praised as a vehicle of transformational activism and criticized as a cause of social alienation and civic disengagement? Take a moment to think about some *why* questions you have about society and social life: As you look around you, hear the news, and interact with other people, what strikes you as fascinating but perhaps difficult to understand? What are you curious about?

Scientific: A way of learning about the world that combines logically constructed theory and systematic observation.

Sociology will take you on a journey to understanding and generating new knowledge about human behavior, social relations, and social institutions on a larger scale.

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Sociology is an academic discipline that takes a scientific approach to answering the kinds of questions our curious minds imagine. When we say that sociology is **scientific**, we mean that it is *a way of learning about the world that combines logically constructed theory and systematic observation*. The goal of sociological study and research is to base answers to questions, like those we just posed, on careful examination of the roots of social phenomena, such as poverty, segregation, and the wage gap. Sociologists do this with *research methods*—surveys, interviews, observations, and archival research, among others—that yield data that can be tested, challenged, and revised. In this text, you will see how sociology is done—and you will learn how to do sociology, yourself.

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Concisely stated, **sociology** is *the scientific study of human social relations, groups, and societies*. Unlike *physical and natural sciences*, such as physics, geology, chemistry, and biology, sociology is one of several *social sciences* engaged in the scientific study of human beings and the social worlds they consciously create and inhabit. The purpose of sociology is to understand and generate new knowledge about human behavior, social relations, and social institutions on a larger scale. The sociologist adheres to the principle of **social embeddedness**: *the idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relations*. Thus, sociologists pursue studies on a wide range of issues occurring within, between, and among families, communities, states, nations, and the world. Other social sciences, some of which you may be studying, include anthropology, economics, political science, and psychology.

Sociology seeks to construct a body of scientific and rigorous knowledge about social relations, groups, and societies. A new area of interest is the way social media is changing the way we interact with our social environment and with one another.

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Sociology is a field in which students have the opportunity to build strong core knowledge about the social world with a broad spectrum of important skills, ranging from gathering and analyzing information to identifying and addressing social problems to effective written and oral communication. Throughout this book, we draw your attention to important skills you can gain through the study of sociology and the kinds of jobs and fields in which these skills can be put to work.

Sociology: The scientific study of human social relations, groups, and societies.

Social embeddedness: The idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relations.

Doing sociology requires that you build a foundation for your knowledge and understanding of the social world. Some key foundations of sociology are the *sociological imagination* and *critical thinking*. We turn to these next.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

As we go about our daily lives, it is easy to overlook the fact that large-scale economic, political, and cultural forces shape even the most personal aspects of our lives. When parents divorce, for example, we tend to focus on individual explanations: A father was devoted more to his work than to his family; a mother may have felt trapped in an unhappy marriage but stuck with it for the sake of young children. Yet while personal issues are inevitable parts of a breakup, they can't tell the whole story. When many U.S. marriages end in divorce, forces larger than incompatible personalities or marital discord are at play. But what are those greater social forces, exactly?

As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) suggested half a century ago, uncovering the relationship between what he called *personal troubles* and *public issues* calls for a **sociological imagination** (Mills, 1959/2000b). The sociological imagination is *the ability to grasp the relationship between individual lives and the larger social forces that shape them*—that is, to see where biography and history intersect.

Sociological imagination: The ability to grasp the relationship between individual lives and the larger social forces that help to shape them.

In a country such as the United States, where individualism is part of the national heritage, people tend to believe that each person creates his or her life's path and largely disregards the social context in which this happens. When we cannot get a job, fail to earn enough to support a family, or experience marital separation, for example, we tend to see it as a personal trouble. We do not necessarily see it as a public issue. The sociological imagination, however, invites us to make the connection and to step away from the vantage point of a single life experience to see how powerful social forces—for instance, changes in social norms, racial or gender discrimination, large shifts in the economy, or the beginning or end of a military conflict—shape the obstacles and opportunities that contribute to the unfolding of our life's story. Among Mills's (1959/2000b) most often cited examples is the following:

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When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals. (p. 9)

Workers with a college degree fared better than those without a degree in the COVID-19 recession because they were more likely to work in jobs that can be done remotely. While about 62% of those with a college degree had that option, just 9% of those without a high school degree did (Kochhar, 2020).

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To apply the idea to contemporary economic conditions, we might look at recent college graduates. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. population and job market with force beginning in March of 2020. For nearly a decade, the job market for recent graduates had been relatively robust: Unemployment was low and while challenges, including underemployment and high levels of student debt, were present, the picture for those completing higher education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels was generally good. In early 2019, the rate of unemployment of young college graduates (ages 21–24) was about 6.4% for men and 4.1% for women. For college graduates 25 years and older, the rate was lower still: In April of 2019, it was just 2.1% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In April of 2020, however, it had risen precipitously, reaching 8.4% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). For new graduates, the job prospects were worse. According to a poll taken that month, even among students who had jobs lined up after graduation, about three quarters had their positions cancelled, delayed, or moved to remote work (Bahler, 2020). The sociological imagination invites us to recognize that employment or unemployment, like many other phenomena, are an outcome not only of individual choices, actions, and luck, but of larger social, economic, and political forces. Biography and history are, as the sociological imagination recognizes, closely intertwined.

Understanding this relationship is particularly critical for people in the United States, who often regard individuals as solely responsible for their social, educational, and economic successes and failures. For instance, it is easy to fault the poor for their poverty, assuming they only need to work harder and pull themselves up by their bootstraps. We may neglect the powerful role of social forces such as racial and ethnic discrimination, the outsourcing or automation of manufacturing jobs that used to employ those without a college education, or the dire state of public education in many economically distressed rural and urban areas. The sociological imagination implores us to seek the intersection between private troubles, such as a family's poverty, and public issues, such as lack of access to good schooling and jobs paying a living wage, to develop a more informed and comprehensive understanding of the social world and social issues.

Agency: The ability of individuals and groups to exercise free will and to make social changes on a small or large scale.

Structure: Patterned social arrangements that have effects on agency and are, in turn, affected by agency.

It is useful, when we talk about the sociological imagination, to bring in the concepts of *agency* and *structure.* Sociologists often talk about social actions—individual and group behavior—in these terms. **Agency** can be understood as *the ability of individuals and groups to exercise free will and to make social changes on a small or large scale.* **Structure** is a complex term but may be defined as *patterned social arrangements that have effects on agency and are, in turn, affected by agency.* Structure may enable

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or constrain social action. For example, sociologists talk about the class structure, which is composed of social groups that hold varying amounts of resources, such as money, political voice, and social status. They also identify normative structures—for instance, they might analyze patterns of social norms regarding "appropriate" gender behaviors in different cultural contexts.

Sociologists take a strong interest in the relationship between structure and agency. Consider that, on the one hand, we all have the ability to make choices—we have free will, and we can opt for one path over another. On the other hand, the structures that surround us impose obstacles on us or afford us opportunities to exercise agency: We can make choices, but they may be enabled or constrained by structure. For instance, in the early 1900s, we could surely have found bright young women in the nascent U.S. middle class who wanted to study law, medicine, or philosophy. The social norms of the time, however, held that young women of this status were better off marrying and caring for a husband, home, and children. There were also legal constraints to women's entry into higher education and the paid labor force. Women of color, poor women, and immigrant women were even less likely to have opportunities for education. So, although the women in our example might have individually aspired to an education and career, their dreams were constrained by powerful normative, educational, and legal structures, as well as economic constraints, that actively excluded them from the public sphere.

Homelessness is one of many public issues that sociologists seek to understand more fully. Homelessness may be chronic or short-term. It is often rooted in a lack of low-cost housing, particularly in urban areas where the cost of living is high.

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A growing number of high school graduates are enrolling in college immediately after high school. Those from higher-income schools, however, are more likely to do so than their peers at low-income schools: 69% of graduates from higher-income schools matriculate immediately compared to 55% from low-income schools (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). What sociological factors might explain this gap?

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Consider as well the relationship between the class structure and individual agency as a way of thinking about social mobility in U.S. society. If, for instance, a young man whose parents are well educated and whose family is economically comfortable wishes to go to college and study to be an architect, engineer, or lawyer, his position in the class structure (or the position of his family) is *enabling*—that is, it raises the probability that he will be able to make this choice and realize it. If, however, a young man from a poor family with no college background embraces these same dreams, his position in the class structure is likely to be *constraining*: Not only does his family have insufficient economic means to pay for college, but he also may be studying in an underfunded or underperforming high school that cannot provide the advanced courses and other resources he needs to prepare for college. A lack of college role models also may be a factor. This does not mean that the first young man will inevitably go to college and realize his hopes and the second will not; it does, however, suggest that structural conditions favor the first college aspirant over the second.

To understand why some students go to college and others do not, sociologists would say that we cannot rely on individual choice or will (agency) alone—structures, whether subtly or quite obviously, exercise an influence on social behavior and outcomes. At the same time, we should not see structures

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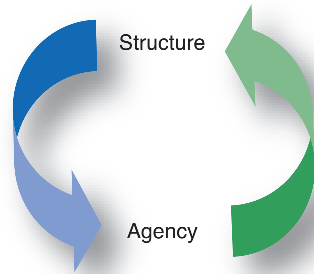
FIGURE 1.1 ■ Structure and Agency



as telling the whole story of social behavior because history shows the power of human agency in making change, even in the face of obstacles. Agency itself can transform structures. For example, think about the ways women's historical activism helped to transform gender norms, educational practices, and legal protections for women today. Sociologists weigh both agency and structure and study how the two intersect and interact. For the most part, sociologists understand the relationship as *reciprocal*—that is, it goes in both directions, as structure affects agency and agency, in turn, can change the dimensions of a structure (Figure 1.1).

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking: The ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence.

Taking a sociological perspective requires more than an ability to use the sociological imagination. It also entails **critical thinking**, *the ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence.* In everyday life, we often accept things as true because they are familiar, feel right, or are consistent with our beliefs. Critical thinking takes a different approach—recognizing weak arguments, rejecting statements not supported by empirical evidence, and questioning our assumptions. One of the founders of modern sociology, Max Weber, captured the spirit of critical thinking in two words when he said that a key task of sociological inquiry is to acknowledge "inconvenient facts."

Critical thinking requires us to be open-minded, but it does not mean that we must accept all arguments as equally valid. Those supported by logic and backed by evidence are clearly preferable to those that are not. For instance, we may passionately agree with Thomas Jefferson's famous statement, "That government is best that governs least." Nevertheless, as sociologists we must also ask, "What evidence backs up the claim that less government is better under all circumstances?" To think critically, it is useful to follow six simple rules (adapted from Wade & Tavris, 1997):

1. **Be willing to ask any question, no matter how difficult.** The belief in small government is a cherished U.S. ideal. But sociologists who study the role of government in modern society must be willing to ask whether there are circumstances under which more—not less—government is better. Government's role in areas such as homeland security, education, and health care has grown in recent decades—what are the positive and negative aspects of this growth?

2. **Think logically, and be clear.** Logic and clarity require us to define concepts in a way that allows us to study them. "Big government" is a vague concept that must be made more precise and measurable before it provides for useful research. Are we speaking of federal, state, or local government, or all of these? Is "big" measured by the cost of government services, the number of agencies or offices within the government, the number of people working for it, or something else? What did Jefferson mean by "best," and what would that "best" government look like? Who would have the power to define this notion?

3. **Back up your arguments with evidence.** Founding Father Thomas Jefferson is a formidable person to quote, but quoting him does not prove that smaller government is better in the 21st century. To find evidence, we need to seek out studies of contemporary societies to see whether there is a relationship between a population's well-being and the size of government in terms of agencies or public employees, or the breadth of services it provides. Because studies may offer contradictory evidence, we also need to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments on different sides of the issue.

4. **Think about the assumptions and biases—including your own—that underlie all studies.** You may insist that government has a key role to play in modern society. On the other

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hand, you may believe with equal passion that big government is one root of the problems in the United States. Critical thinking requires that we recognize our beliefs and biases. Otherwise, we might unconsciously seek out only evidence that supports our argument, ignoring evidence to the contrary. Passion has a role to play in research: It can motivate us to devote long hours to studying an issue. But passion should not play a role when we are weighing evidence and drawing conclusions.

5. **Avoid anecdotal evidence.** It is tempting to draw a general conclusion from a single experience or anecdote, but that experience may illustrate the exception rather than the rule. For example, you may know someone who just yesterday received a letter mailed 2 years ago, but that is not evidence that the U.S. Postal Service is inefficient or does not fulfill its mandates. To determine whether this government agency is working well, you would have to study its entire mail delivery system and its record of work over time.
6. **Be willing to admit when you are wrong or uncertain about your results, and when results themselves are mixed.** Sometimes, we expect to find support for an argument only to find that things are not so clear. For example, consider the position of a sociologist who advocates small government and learns that Japan and Singapore initially became economic powerhouses because their governments played leading roles in promoting growth or a sociologist who champions an expanded role for government but learns from the downturn of the 1990s in the Asian economies that some societal needs can be better met by private enterprise. Empirical evidence may contradict our beliefs: We learn from recognizing erroneous assumptions and having a mind open to new information.

Critical thinking also means becoming a critical consumer of the information that surrounds us—news, social media, surveys, texts, magazines, and scientific studies. To be a good sociologist, it is important to look beyond the commonsense understanding of social life and develop a critical perspective. Being a critical consumer of information entails paying attention to the sources of information we encounter, asking questions about how data were gathered, and keeping our minds open to information and evidence that challenge our beliefs. In this text, for example, we look at commonly cited data, including figures on poverty, unemployment, and crime, and inquire into how those phenomena are measured and what the resulting figures illuminate—and what they obscure—about those social issues.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING

Humans have been asking questions about the nature of social life as long as people have lived in societies. Aristotle and Plato wrote extensively about social relationships more than 2,000 years ago. Ibn Khaldun, an Arab scholar writing in the 14th century, advanced several sociological concepts we recognize today, including ideas about social conflict and cohesion. Yet modern sociological concepts and research methods did not emerge until the 19th century, after the industrial revolution, and then largely in those European nations undergoing dramatic societal changes, such as industrialization and urbanization.

The Birth of Sociology: Science, Progress, Industrialization, and Urbanization

We can trace sociology's roots to four interrelated historical developments that gave birth to the modern world: *the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, industrialization*, and *urbanization*. Since these developments initially occurred in Europe, it is not surprising that sociological perspectives and ideas evolved there during the 19th century. By the end of the 19th century, sociology had taken root in North America as well; some time later, it gained a foothold in Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. Sociology throughout the world initially bore the stamp of its European and North American origins, although recent decades have brought a greater diversity of perspectives to the discipline.

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The Scientific Revolution

The rise of modern natural and physical sciences, beginning in Europe in the 16th century, offered scholars a more advanced understanding of the physical world. The success of natural science contributed to the belief that science could be fruitfully applied to human affairs, thereby enabling people to improve society or even perfect it. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) coined the term *sociology* to characterize what he believed would be a new "social physics"—that is, the scientific study of society.

The Enlightenment

Inspired in part by the success of the physical sciences, French philosophers in the 18th century, such as Voltaire (1694–1778), Montesquieu (1689–1755), Diderot (1713–1784), and Rousseau (1712–1778), promised that humankind could attain lofty heights by applying scientific understanding to human affairs. Enlightenment ideals such as equality, liberty, and fundamental human rights found a home in the emerging social sciences, particularly sociology. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), considered by many to be the first modern sociologist, argued that sociological understanding would create a more egalitarian, peaceful society, in which individuals would be free to realize their full potential. Many of sociology's founders shared the hope that a fairer and more just society would be achieved through the scientific understanding of society.

The Industrial Revolution

The industrial revolution, which began in England in the mid- to late 18th century and soon spread to other countries, dramatically changed European societies. Traditional agricultural economies and the small-scale production of handicrafts in the home gave way to more efficient, profit-driven manufacturing based in factories. For instance, in 1801 in the English city of Leeds, there were about 20 factories manufacturing a variety of goods. By 1838, Leeds was home to 106 woolen mills alone, employing 10,000 people.

Industrialization brought new workers to cities, and urban populations grew dramatically in a short period of time. Sociologists such as Émile Durkheim theorized the normative effects of moving from small, traditional communities to diverse, unfamiliar, populous cities.

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Small towns, including Leeds, were transformed into bustling cities, showcasing extremes of wealth and poverty, as well as opportunity and struggle. In the face of rapid social change and growing inequality, sociologists sought to gain a social scientific perspective on what was happening and how it had come about. German theorist and revolutionary Karl Marx (1818–1883), who had an important impact on later sociological theory concerning modern societies and economies, predicted that industrialization would make life increasingly intolerable for the masses. He believed that private property ownership by the wealthy allowed for the exploitation of working people and that its elimination would bring about a future of equality for all.

Urbanization: The Population Shift Toward Cities

Industrialization fostered the growth of cities as people streamed from rural fields to urban factories in search of work. By the end of the 19th century, more than 20 million people lived in English cities. The population of London alone exceeded 7 million by 1910.

Early industrial cities were often fetid places, characterized by pollution and dirt, crime, and crowded housing tenements. In Europe, some sociologists lamented the passing of communal village life and its replacement by a savage and alienating urban existence. Durkheim, for example, worried about the breakdown of stabilizing beliefs and values in modern urban society. He argued that whereas traditional communities were held together by shared culture and **norms**, or *accepted social behaviors and beliefs*, modern industrial communities were threatened by **anomie**, or a *state of normlessness that*

Norms: Accepted social behaviors and beliefs.

Anomie: A state of normlessness that occurs when people lose touch with the shared rules and values that give order and meaning to their lives.

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occurs when people lose sight of the shared rules and values that give order and meaning to their lives. In a state of anomie, individuals often feel confused and anxious because they do not know how to interact with each other and their environment. Durkheim raised the question of what would hold societies and communities together as they shifted from homogeneity and shared cultures and values to heterogeneous masses of diverse cultures, norms, and occupations.

Nineteenth-Century Founders

Despite its largely European origins, early sociology sought to develop universal understandings that would apply to other peoples, times, and places. The discipline's principal acknowledged founders—Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber—left their marks on sociology in different ways.

Social statics: The way society is held together.

Social dynamics: The laws that govern social change.

Positivism: An approach to research that is based on scientific evidence.

Auguste Comte

Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a French social theorist, is credited with founding modern sociology, naming it, and establishing it as the scientific study of social relationships. The twin pillars of Comte's sociology were the study of **social statics**, *the way society is held together*, and the analysis of **social dynamics**, *the laws that govern social change*. Comte believed that social science could be used effectively to manage the social change resulting from modern industrial society, but always with a strong respect for traditions and history.

Comte proclaimed that his new science of society was **positivism**. This meant that it was to be *based on facts alone*, which should be determined scientifically and allowed to speak for themselves. Comte argued that this purely factual approach was the proper method for sociology. He argued that all sciences—and all societies—go through three stages. The first stage is a theological one, in which key ways of understanding the world are framed in terms of superstition, imagination, and religion. The second stage is a metaphysical one, characterized by abstract speculation but framed by the basic belief that society is the product of natural rather than of supernatural forces. The third and last stage is one in which knowledge is based on scientific reasoning from the "facts." Comte saw himself as leading sociology toward its final, positivist stage.

Comte left a lasting mark on modern sociology. The scientific study of social life continues to be the goal of sociological research. His belief that social institutions have a strong impact on individual behavior—that is, that our actions are the products of personal choices and the surrounding social context—remains at the heart of sociology.

As a founding figure in the social sciences, Auguste Comte is associated with positivism, the belief that the study of society must be anchored in facts and the scientific method.

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Harriet Martineau

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) was an English sociologist who, despite deafness and other physical challenges, became a prominent social and historical writer. Her greatest handicap was being a woman in male-dominated intellectual circles that failed to value female voices. Today, she is frequently recognized as the first major woman sociologist.

Deeply influenced by Comte's work, Martineau translated his six-volume treatise on politics into English. Her editing helped make Comte's esoteric prose accessible to the English-speaking world, ensuring his standing as a leading figure in sociology. Martineau was also a distinguished scholar in her own right. She wrote dozens of books; more than 1,000 newspaper columns; and 25 novels, including a three-volume study, *Society in America* (Martineau, 1837), based on observations of the United States that she made during a tour of the country.

Martineau, like Comte, sought to identify basic laws that govern society. She derived three of her four laws from other theorists. The fourth law, however, was her own and reflected her progressive

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Harriet Martineau translated into English the work of sociologist Auguste Comte, who dismissed women's intellect, saying, "Biological philosophy teaches us that . . . radical differences, physical and moral, distinguish the sexes . . . biological analysis presents the female sex . . . as constitutionally in a state of perpetual infancy, in comparison with the other" (Kandal, 1988, p. 75). The widespread exclusion of the voices of women and people of color from early sociology represents one of its key limitations.

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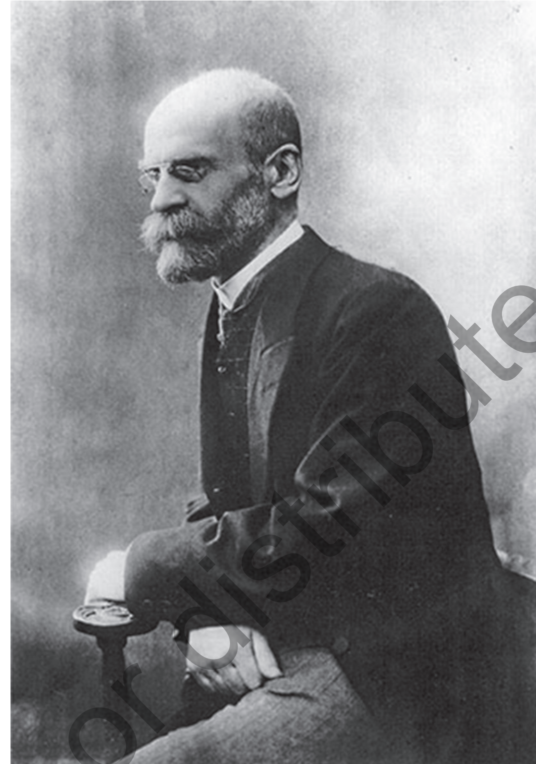

Émile Durkheim pioneered some of sociology's early research on such topics as social solidarity and suicide. His work continues to inform sociological study and understanding of social bonds and the consequences of their unraveling.

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(today we might say *feminist*) principles: For a society to evolve, it must ensure social justice for women and other oppressed groups. In her study of U.S. society, Martineau treated slavery and women's experience of dependence in marriage as indicators of the limits of the moral development of the United States. In her view, the United States was unable to achieve its full social potential while it was morally stunted by persistent injustices, such as slavery and women's inequality. The question of whether the provision of social justice is critical to societal development remains a relevant and compelling one today.

Émile Durkheim

Auguste Comte founded and named the discipline of sociology, but French scholar Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) set the field on its present course. Durkheim established the early subject matter of sociology, laid out rules for conducting research, and developed an important theory of social change.

Social facts: Qualities of groups that are external to individual members yet constrain their thinking and behavior.

For Durkheim, sociology's subject matter was **social facts**, *qualities of groups that are external to individual members yet constrain their thinking and behavior*. Durkheim argued that such social facts as religious beliefs and social duties are external—that is, they are part of the social context and are larger than our individual lives. They also have the power to shape our behavior. You may feel compelled to act in certain ways in different contexts—in the classroom, on a date, at a religious ceremony—even if you are not always aware of such social pressures.

Durkheim also argued that only social facts can explain other social facts. For example, there is no scientific evidence that men have an innate knack for business compared with women, but in 2020, women headed only 37 of the *Fortune* 500 companies. A Durkheimian approach would highlight women's experience in society—where historically they have been socialized into domestic roles, restricted to certain noncommercial professions, or discriminated against in hiring—and the fact that the social networks that foster mobility in the corporate world today are still primarily male to help explain why men dominate the upper ranks of the business world.

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Durkheim's principal concern was explaining the impact of modern society on **social solidarity**, *the bonds that unite the members of a social group*. In his view, in traditional society, these bonds are based on similarity—people speak the same language, share the same customs and beliefs, and do similar work tasks. He called this *mechanical solidarity*. In modern industrial society, however, bonds based on similarity break down. Everyone has a different job to perform in the industrial division of labor, and modern societies are more likely to be socially diverse. Nevertheless, workers in different occupational positions are dependent on one another for things such as safety, education, and the provision of food and other goods essential to survival. The people filling these positions may not be alike in culture, beliefs, or language, but their dependence on one another contributes to social cohesion. Borrowing from biology, Durkheim called this *organic solidarity*, suggesting that modern society functions as an interdependent organic whole, like a human body.

Social solidarity: The bonds that unite the members of a social group.

Yet organic solidarity, Durkheim argued, is not as strong as mechanical solidarity. People no longer necessarily share the same norms and values. The consequence, according to Durkheim, is anomie. In this weakened condition, the social order may disintegrate and pathological behavior increase (Durkheim, 1922/1973a).

Collective conscience: The common beliefs and values that bind a society together.

Consider whether the United States, a modern and diverse society, is held together primarily by organic solidarity or whether the hallmark of mechanical solidarity, a **collective conscience**—*the common beliefs and values that bind a society together*—is in evidence. Do public demonstrations of patriotism on nationally significant anniversaries such as September 11 and July 4 indicate mechanical solidarity built on a collective sense of shared values, norms, and practices? Or do the deeply divisive politics of recent years suggest that social bonds are based more fully on practical interdependence?

Class conflict: Competition between social classes over the distribution of wealth, power, and other valued resources in society.

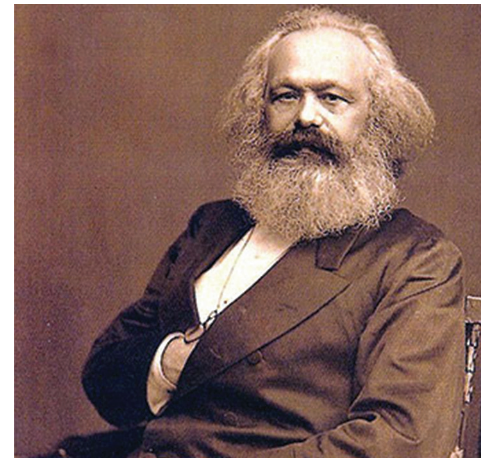
Proletariat: The working class; wage workers.

Karl Marx

The extensive writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883) influenced the development of economics and political science as well as sociology. They also shaped world politics and inspired communist revolutions in Russia (later the Soviet Union), China, and Cuba, among others.

Marx's central idea was deceptively simple: Almost all societies throughout history have been divided into economic classes, with one class prospering at the expense of others. All human history, Marx believed, should be understood as the product of **class conflict**, *competition between social classes over the distribution of wealth, power, and other valued resources in society* (Marx & Engels, 1998).

In the period of early industrialization in which he lived, Marx condemned capitalism's exploitation of *working people*, the **proletariat**, by the *ownership class*, the **bourgeoisie**. As we will see in later chapters, Marx's views on conflict and inequality are still influential in contemporary sociological thinking, even among sociologists who do not share his views on society.



Karl Marx was a scholar and critic of early capitalism. His theories of class struggle and alienation have influenced modern sociologists' thinking on the dynamics of social class.

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Marx focused his attention on the emerging capitalist industrial society (Marx, 1867/1992a, 1885/1992b, 1894/1992c). Unlike his contemporaries in sociology, however, Marx saw capitalism as a transitional stage to a final period in human history in which economic classes and the unequal distribution of rewards and opportunities linked to class inequality would disappear and be replaced by a utopia of equality.

Many of Marx's predictions have come to pass. Indeed, his critical analysis of the dynamics of capitalism proved insightful. Among other things, Marx argued that capitalism would lead to accelerating technological change, the replacement of workers by machines, and the growth of monopoly capitalism.

Bourgeoisie: The capitalist (or property-owning) class.

Marx presciently predicted that ownership of the **means of production**, *the sites and technology that produce the goods* (and sometimes services) *we need and use*, would come to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. As a result, he believed, a growing wave of people would be thrust down into the proletariat, which owns only its own labor power. In modern society, large corporations have progressively swallowed up or pushed out smaller businesses; where small lumberyards and pharmacies used to serve

Means of production: The sites and technology that produce the goods we need and use.

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many communities, corporate giants, such as Home Depot, CVS, and Best Buy, have moved in, putting locally owned establishments out of business.

In many U.S. towns, small-business owners have joined forces to protest the construction of "big box" stores such as Walmart (now the largest private employer in the United States), arguing that these enormous establishments, although they offer cheap goods, wreak havoc on local retailers and bring only the meager economic benefit of masses of entry-level, low-wage jobs. From a Marxist perspective, we might say that the local retailers, in resisting the incursion of the big-box stores into their communities, are fighting their own proletarianization. Even physicians, many of whom used to own their own means of production in the form of private medical practices, have increasingly been driven by economic necessity into working for large health maintenance organizations (HMOs), where they are salaried employees.

Verstehen: The German word for interpretive understanding; Weber's proposed methodology for explaining social relationships by having the sociologist imagine how subjects might perceive a situation.

Unlike Comte and Durkheim, Marx thought social change would be revolutionary, not evolutionary, and would be the product of oppressed workers rising up against a capitalist system that exploits the many to benefit the few.

Max Weber

Formal rationality: A context in which people's pursuit of goals is shaped by rules, regulations, and larger social structures.

Bureaucracies: Formal organizations characterized by written rules, hierarchical authority, and paid staff, intended to promote organizational efficiency.

Max Weber (1864–1920), a German sociologist who wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, left a substantial academic legacy. Among his contributions are an analysis of how Protestantism fostered the rise of capitalism in Europe (Weber, 1904–1905/2002) and insights into the emergence of modern bureaucracy (Weber, 1946/1919). Weber, like other founders of sociology, took up various political causes, condemning injustice wherever he found it. Although pessimistic about capitalism, he did not believe, as did Marx, that some alternative utopian form of society would arise. Nor did he see sociologists enjoying privileged insights into the social world that would qualify them to wisely counsel rulers and industrialists, as Comte (and, to some extent, Durkheim) had envisioned.

Weber believed that an adequate explanation of the social world begins with the individual and incorporates the meaning of what people say and do. Although he argued that research should be scientific and value free, Weber also believed that to explain what people do, we must use a method he termed **Verstehen**, *the German word for interpretive understanding. This methodology*, rarely used by sociologists today, *sought to explain social relationships by having the sociologist/observer imagine how the subjects being studied might have perceived and interpreted the situation*. Studying social life, Weber felt, is not the same as studying plants or chemical reactions because human beings act on the basis of meanings and motives.

Max Weber made significant contributions to the understanding of how capitalism developed in Western countries and its relationship to religious beliefs. His work on formal rationality and bureaucracy continues to influence sociologists' study of modern society.

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Weber's theories of social and economic organization have also been highly influential (Weber, 1921/2012). Weber argued that the modern Western world showed an ever-increasing reliance on logic, efficiency, rules, and reason. According to him, modern societies are characterized by the development and growing influence of **formal rationality**, a context in which people's pursuit of goals is increasingly shaped by rules, regulations, and larger social structures. One of Weber's most widely known illustrations of formal rationality comes from his study of **bureaucracies**, *formal organizations characterized by written rules, hierarchical authority, and paid staff, intended to promote organizational efficiency*. Bureaucracies, for Weber, epitomized formally rational systems: On the one hand, they offer clear, knowable rules and regulations for the efficient pursuit of particular ends, such as obtaining a passport or getting financial aid for higher education. On the other hand, he feared, the bureaucratization of modern society would also progressively strip people of their humanity and creativity and result in an iron cage of rationalized structures with irrational consequences.

Weber's ideas about bureaucracy were remarkably prescient in their characterization of our bureaucratic (and formally rationalized) modern

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world. Today, we are confronted regularly with both the incredible efficiency and baffling irrationality of modern bureaucratic structures. Within moments of entering into an efficiently concluded contract with a wireless phone service provider, we can become consumers of a cornucopia of technological opportunities, with the ability to chat on the phone with or receive text messages from a friend located almost anywhere in the world, post photographs or watch videos online, and pass the time on social-media platforms. Should we later be confused by a bill and need to speak to a company representative, however, we may be shuttled through endless repetitions of an automated response system that never seems to offer us the option of speaking with another human being. Today, Weber's theorized irrationality of rationality is alive and well.

Significant Founding Ideas in U.S. Sociology

Sociology was born in Europe, but it took firm root in U.S. soil, where it was influenced by turn-of-the-century industrialization and urbanization, as well as racial strife and discrimination. Strikes by organized labor, corruption in government, an explosion of European immigration, racial segregation, and the growth of city slums all helped mold early sociological thought in the United States. By the late 1800s, numerous universities in the United States were offering sociology courses. The first faculties of sociology were established at the University of Kansas (1889), the University of Chicago (1892), and Atlanta University (1897). Next, we look at a handful of sociologists who have had an important influence on modern sociological thinking in the United States. Throughout the book, we will learn about more U.S. sociologists who have shaped our perspectives today.

Robert Ezra Park

The Sociology Department at the University of Chicago, which gave us what is often known as the "Chicago School" of sociology, dominated the new discipline in the United States at the start of the 20th century. Chicago sociologist Robert Ezra Park (1864–1944) pioneered the study of urban sociology and race relations. Once a muckraking journalist, Park was an equally colorful academic, reportedly coming to class in disheveled clothes and with shaving soap still in his ears. But his students were devoted to him, and his work was widely recognized. His 1921 textbook, *An Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, coauthored with his Chicago colleague Ernest Burgess, helped shape the discipline. The Chicago School studied a broad spectrum of social phenomena, from hoboes and flophouses (inexpensive dormitory-style housing) to movie houses, dance halls, and slums, and from youth gangs and mobs to residents of Chicago's ritzy Gold Coast.

Park was a champion of racial integration, having once served as personal secretary to the African American educator Booker T. Washington. Yet racial discrimination was evident in the treatment of Black sociologists, including W. E. B. Du Bois, a contemporary of many of the sociologists working in the Chicago School.

W. E. B. Du Bois, the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard, wrote 20 books and more than 100 scholarly articles on race and race relations. Today, many of his works are classics in the study of African American lives and race relations in the United States at the turn of the 20th century.

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W. E. B. Du Bois

A prominent Black sociologist and civil rights leader at the African American Atlanta University, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) developed ideas that were considered too radical to find broad acceptance in the sociological community. At a time when the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that segregated "separate but equal" facilities for Blacks and whites were constitutional and when lynching of Black Americans had reached an all-time high, Du Bois condemned the deep-seated racism of white society. Today, his writings on race relations and the lives of Black Americans are classics in the field.

Du Bois sought to show that racism was widespread in U.S. society. He was also critical of Black Americans who had "made it" and then turned their backs on those who had not. One of his most enduring ideas is that in U.S. society, African Americans are never able to escape a fundamental awareness of race. They experience a **double consciousness**—*an awareness of themselves as both Americans*

Double consciousness: Among African Americans, an awareness of themselves as both American and Black, and never free of racial stigma.

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and Black, and never free of racial stigma. He wrote, "The Negro is sort of a seventh son . . . gifted with second-sight . . . this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 2008, p. 12). Today, as in Du Bois's time, physical traits such as skin color continue to shape people's perceptions and interactions in significant and complex ways.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) was a well-known novelist, feminist, and sociologist of her time. Because of her family's early personal and economic struggles, she had only a few years of formal schooling in childhood, although she would later enroll at the Rhode Island School of Design. She read widely, however, and she was influenced by her paternal aunts, who included suffragist Isabella Beecher Stowe and writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an antislavery novel written in 1852.

Gilman's (1892) most prominent publication was her semiautobiographical short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," which follows the decline of a married woman shut away in a room (with repellent yellow wallpaper) by her husband, ostensibly for the sake of her health. Gilman used the story to highlight the consequences of women's lack of autonomy in marriage. She continued to build this early feminist thesis in the book *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Gilman, 1898/2006)

> The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in society. But so are horses. The labor of horses enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could. The horse is an economic factor in society. But the horse is not economically independent, nor is the woman. (p. 7)

Gilman was critical of women's enforced dependence in marriage and society. Her work represents an early and notable effort to look at sex roles in the family not as static, natural, and inevitable, as many saw them at the time, but as dynamic social constructions with the potential to change and to bring greater autonomy to women in the home and society.

Robert K. Merton

After World War II, sociology began to apply sophisticated quantitative models to the study of social processes. There was also a growing interest in the grand theories of the European founders. At Columbia University, Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) undertook wide-ranging studies that helped further establish sociology as a scientific discipline. Merton is best known for his theory of deviance (Merton, 1938), his work on the sociology of science (Merton, 1996), and his iteration of the distinction between manifest and latent functions as a means for more fully understanding the relationships between and roles of sociological phenomena and institutions in communities and society (Merton, 1968). He emphasized the development of theories in what he called the *middle range*—midway between the grand theories of Weber, Marx, and Durkheim and quantitative studies of specific social problems.

C. Wright Mills

Columbia University sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) is best known in the discipline for describing the *sociological imagination*, the imperative in sociology to seek the nexus between private troubles and public issues. In his short career, Mills was prolific. He renewed interest in Max Weber by translating many of his works into English and applying his ideas to the contemporary United States. But Mills, who also drew on Marx, identified himself as a "plain Marxist." His concept of the sociological imagination can be traced, in part, to Marx's famous statement that "man makes history, but not under circumstances of his own choosing," meaning that even though we are agents of free will, the social context has a profound impact on the obstacles or opportunities in our lives.

Mills synthesized Weberian and Marxian traditions, applying sociological thinking to the most pressing problems of the day, particularly inequality. He advocated an activist sociology with a sense of social responsibility. Like many sociologists, he was willing to turn a critical eye on "common

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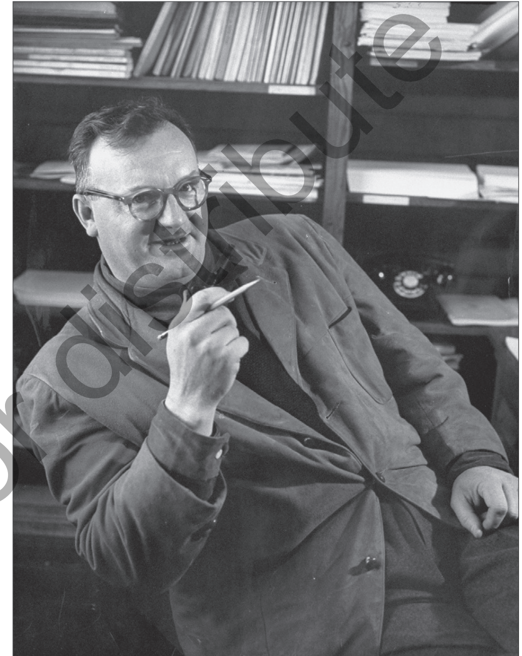
knowledge," including the belief that the United States is a democracy that represents the interests of all people. In a provocative study, he examined the workings of the "power elite," a small group of wealthy businessmen, military leaders, and politicians who Mills believed ran the country largely in their own interests (Mills, 1956/2000a).

Women in Early Sociology

Why did so few women social scientists find a place among sociology's founders? After all, the American (1775–1783) and French (1789–1799) revolutions elevated such lofty ideals as freedom, liberty, and equality. Yet long after these historical events, women and minorities were still excluded from public life in Europe and North America. Democracy—which gives people the right to participate in their governance—was firmly established as a principle for nearly a century and a half in the United States before women achieved the right to vote in 1920. In France, it took even longer—until 1945.



The sociological imagination involves viewing seemingly personal issues through a sociological lens and recognizing the relationship between biography and history. C. Wright Mills is best known for coining this catchy and popular term.

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Sociology as a discipline emerged during the first modern flourishing of feminism in the 19th century. Yet women and people of non-European heritage were systematically excluded from influential positions in the European universities where sociology and other modern social sciences originated. In 1861, feminist scholar Julie Daubié won a prize from the Lyon Academy for her essay, "Poor Women in the Nineteenth Century." For many years, she had been denied entry to higher education, but eventually she because the first woman in the country to earn a Baccalaureate degree (Kandal, 1988). Between 1840 and 1960, almost no women held senior academic positions in the sociology departments of any European or U.S. universities, with the exception of exclusively women's colleges.

Several female scholars managed to overcome these obstacles to make significant contributions to sociological inquiry. For example, in 1792, the British scholar Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, arguing that scientific progress could not occur unless women were allowed to become men's equals by means of universal education. In France in 1843, Flora Tristan called for equal rights for women workers, "the last remaining slaves in France." Also in France, Aline Valette published *Socialism and Sexualism* in 1893, nearly three quarters of a century before the term *sexism* found its way into spoken English (Kandal, 1988).

Underappreciated during her time, Jane Addams was a prominent scholar and early contributor to sociology. She is also known for her political activism and commitment to social reform.

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An important figure in early U.S. sociology is Jane Addams (1860–1935). Addams is best known as the founder of Hull House, a settlement house for the poor, sick, and aged that became a center for political activists and social reformers. Less well known is the fact that under Addams's guidance, the residents of Hull House engaged in important research on social problems in Chicago. *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, published in 1895, pioneered the study of Chicago neighborhoods, helping to shape the research direction of the Chicago School of sociology. Following Addams's lead, Chicago sociologists mapped the city's neighborhoods, studied their residents, and helped create the field of community studies. Despite her prolific work—she authored 11 books and hundreds of articles and received the Nobel Peace Prize for her dedication to social reform in 1931—she never secured a full-time position at the University of Chicago, and the school refused to award her an honorary degree.

As Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams, Julie Daubié, and others experienced, early female sociologists were not accorded the same status as their male counterparts. Only recently have many of their writings been rediscovered and their contributions acknowledged in sociology.

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WHAT IS SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY?

Often, multiple sociologists look at the same events, phenomena, or institutions and draw different conclusions. How can this be? One reason is that they may approach their analyses from different theoretical perspectives. In this section, we explore the key theoretical paradigms in sociology and look at how they are used as tools for the analysis of society.

Sociological theories: Logical, rigorous frameworks for the interpretation of social life that make particular assumptions and ask particular questions about the social world.

Sociological theories are *logical, rigorous frameworks for the interpretation of social life that make particular assumptions and ask particular questions about the social world*. The word *theory* is rooted in the Greek word *theoria*, which means "a viewing." An apt metaphor for a theory is a pair of glasses. You can view a social phenomenon such as socioeconomic inequality; poverty, deviance, or consumer culture; or an institution such as capitalism or the family by using different theories as lenses.

The word *theory* is rooted in the Greek word theoria, which means "a viewing." Sociological theories provide us different lenses for viewing social phenomena and institutions. They are analytical tools that illuminate some aspects of those phenomena and institutions while obscuring others.

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As you will see in the next section, in the discipline of sociology, several major categories of theories seek to examine and explain social phenomena and institutions. Imagine the various sociological theories as different pairs of glasses, each with colored lenses that change the way you see an image: You may look at the same institution or phenomenon as you put on each pair, but it will appear differently, depending on the glasses you are wearing. Keep in mind that sociological theories are not "truths" about the social world. They are logical, rigorous analytical tools that we can use to inquire about, interpret, and make educated predictions about the world around us. From the vantage point of any sociological theory, some aspects of a phenomenon or an institution are illuminated while others are obscured. In the end, theories are more or less useful depending on how well *empirical data*—that is, knowledge gathered by researchers through scientific methods—support their analytical conclusions. Next, we outline the basic theoretical perspectives that we will be using in this text.

The three dominant theoretical perspectives in sociology are *structural functionalism, social conflict theory*, and *symbolic interactionism*. We will outline their basic characteristics and revisit them again throughout the book. Symbolic interactionism shares with the functionalist and social conflict paradigms an interest in interpreting and understanding social life. Nevertheless, the first two are **macrolevel paradigms**, *concerned with large-scale patterns and institutions*. Symbolic interactionism is a **microlevel paradigm**—it is *concerned with small-group social relations and interactions*.

Macrolevel paradigms: Theories of the social world that are concerned with large-scale patterns and institutions.

Microlevel paradigm: A theory of the social world that is concerned with small-group social relations and interactions.

Structural functionalism, social conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism form the basic foundation of contemporary sociological theorizing (Table 1.1). Throughout this book, we will introduce variations on these theories, as well as new and evolving theoretical ideas in sociology.

The Functionalist Paradigm

Structural functionalism: A theory that seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the roles performed by different social structures, phenomena, and institutions; also known as functionalism.

Structural functionalism (or *functionalism*—the term we use in this book) *seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the roles performed by different social structures, phenomena, and institutions*. Functionalism characterizes society as made up of many interdependent parts—an analogy often cited is the human body. Each part serves a different function, but all parts work together to ensure the equilibrium and health of the entity as a whole. Society, too, is composed of a spectrum of different parts with a variety of different functions, such as the government, the family, religious and educational institutions, and the media. According to the theory, together, these parts contribute to the smooth functioning and equilibrium of society.

The key question posed by the functionalist perspective is, What function does a particular institution, phenomenon, or social group serve for the maintenance of society? That is, what contribution

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TABLE 1.1 ■ The Three Principal Sociological Paradigms

	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND FOUNDING THEORIST(S)		
	STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM (Émile Durkheim)	SOCIAL CONFLICT (Karl Marx)	SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM (Max Weber, George Herbert Mead)
Assumptions about self and society	Society is a system of interdependent, interrelated parts, like an organism, with groups and institutions contributing to the stability and equilibrium of the whole social system.	Society consists of conflicting interests, but only some groups have the power and resources to realize their interests. Some groups benefit from the social order at the expense of other groups.	The self is a social creation; social interaction occurs by means of symbols such as words, gestures, and adornments; shared meanings are important to successful social interactions.
Key focus and questions	Macrosociology: What keeps society operating smoothly? What functions do different societal institutions and phenomena serve for society as a whole?	Macrosociology: What are the sources of conflict in society? Who benefits and who loses from the existing social order? How can inequalities be overcome?	Microsociology: How do individuals experience themselves, one another, and society as a whole? How do they interpret the meanings of particular social interactions?

does a given institution, phenomenon, or social group make to the equilibrium, stability, and functioning of the whole? Note the underlying assumption of functionalism: Any existing institution or phenomenon does serve a function; if it served no function, it would evolve out of existence. Consequently, the central task of the functionalist sociologist is to discover what function an institution or a phenomenon—for instance, the traditional family, capitalism, social stratification, or deviance—serves in the maintenance of the social order.

Émile Durkheim is credited with developing the early foundations of functionalism. Among other ideas, Durkheim observed that all known societies have some degree of deviant behavior, such as crime. The notion that deviance is functional for societies may seem counterintuitive: Ordinarily, we do not think of deviance as beneficial or necessary to society. Durkheim, however, reasoned that since deviance is universal, it must serve a social function—if it did not serve a function, it would cease to exist. Durkheim concluded that one function of deviance—specifically, of society's labeling of some acts as deviant—is to remind members of society what is considered normal or moral; when a society punishes deviant behavior, it reaffirms people's beliefs in what is right and good.

Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) expanded functionalist analysis by looking at individual social institutions, such as government, the economy, and the family, and how they contribute to the functioning of society as a whole (Parsons, 1967, 2007). For example, he wrote that traditional sex roles for men and women contribute to stability on both the

From the structural functionalist perspective, if a phenomenon or institution exists and persists, it must serve a function. Talcott Parsons posited that traditional sex roles in the American family were positively functional because they ensured that the positions of husbands and wives were complementary rather than competitive. This analysis failed to recognize the inequality inherent in women's economic dependence on men in this relationship.

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microsociological level (that of the family, in this instance) and the macrosociological level (society). Parsons argued that traditional socialization produces "instrumental–rational and work-oriented–males and "expressive," or sensitive, nurturing, and emotional females. Instrumental males, he reasoned, are well suited for the competitive world of work, whereas their expressive female counterparts are appropriately prepared to care for the family. According to Parsons, these roles, which he saw as a product of socialization rather than nature, are complementary and positively functional, leading men and women to inhabit different spheres of the social world. Complementary rather than competing roles contribute to solidarity in a marriage by reducing competition between husband and wife. Critics have rejected this idea as a justification of inequality.

As this example suggests, functionalism is conservative in that it tends to accept rather than question the status quo; it holds that any institution or phenomenon exists because it is functional for society, rather than asking whether it might benefit one group to the detriment of other groups. One of functionalism's key weaknesses is a failure to recognize inequalities in the distribution of power and resources and how those affect social relationships.

Merton attempted to refine the functionalist paradigm by demonstrating that not all social structures work to maintain or strengthen the social organism, as Durkheim and other early functionalists seemed to suggest. According to Merton, a social institution or phenomenon can have both positive functions and problematic dysfunctions. Merton broadened the functionalist idea by suggesting that **manifest functions** are the *obvious and intended functions of a phenomenon or institution*. **Latent functions**, by contrast, are *functions that are not recognized or expected*. He used the famous example of the Hopi rain dance, positing that although the manifest function of the dance was to bring rain, a no less important latent function was to reaffirm social bonds in the community through a shared ritual. Consider another example: A manifest function of war is usually to vanquish an enemy, perhaps to defend a territory or to claim it. Latent functions of war—those that are not the overt purpose but may still have powerful effects—may include increased patriotism in countries engaged in the war, a rise in the profits of companies manufacturing military equipment or contracting workers to the military, and changes in national budgetary priorities.

Manifest functions: The obvious and intended functions of a phenomenon or institution.

Latent functions: Functions of a phenomenon or institution that are not recognized or expected.

The Social Conflict Paradigm

Social conflict paradigm: A theory that seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the conflict that is built into social relations; also known as conflict theory.

In contrast to functionalism, the **social conflict paradigm** (which we refer to in this book as *conflict theory*) *seeks to explain social organization and change in terms of the conflict that is built into social relationships*. Conflict theory is rooted in the ideas about class and power put forth by Marx. Although Durkheim's structural functionalist lens asked how different parts of society contribute to stability, Marx asked about the roots of conflict. Conflict theorists pose the questions, Who benefits from the way social institutions and relationships are structured, and who loses? The social conflict paradigm focuses on what divides people rather than on what unites them. It presumes that group interests drive relationships and that various groups in society (for instance, social classes, ethnic and racial groups, and women and men) will act in their own interests. Conflict theory thus assumes not that interests are shared but that they may be different and irreconcilable and, importantly, that only some groups have the power and resources to realize their interests. As a result, conflict is—sooner or later—inevitable.

From Marx's perspective, the bourgeoisie benefits directly from the capitalist social

The manifest function of a vehicle is to transport a person efficiently from Point A to Point B. One latent function is to say something about the status of the driver.

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order. If, as Marx suggests, the capitalist class has an interest in maximizing productivity and profit and minimizing costs (including the cost of labor in the form of workers' wages) and the working class has an interest in earning more and working less, then the interests of the two classes are difficult to reconcile. The more powerful group in society generally has the upper hand in furthering its interests.

The social conflict perspective posits that groups in society often have differing, irreconcilable interests. However, only some groups have the power and resources to realize their interests. For example, low-wage workers have a clear interest in earning more, but this may conflict with the interest of those who employ them in minimizing pay of workers in favor of higher profits. Which of these two groups has greater power to realize its interest?

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After Marx, the body of conflict theory expanded tremendously. In the 20th century and today, theorists have extended the reach of the perspective to consider how control of culture and the rise of technology (rather than just control of the means of production) underpin class domination (Adorno, 1975; Horkheimer, 1947), as well as how the expanded middle class can be accommodated in a Marxist perspective (Wright, 1998). Many key ideas in feminist theory take a conflict-oriented perspective, although the focus shifts from social class to gender power and conflict (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), as well as ways in which race is implicated in relations of power (Collins, 1990).

Recall Durkheim's functionalist analysis of crime and deviance. According to this perspective, society defines crime to reaffirm people's beliefs about what is right and to dissuade them from deviating. A conflict theorist might argue that dominant groups in society define the behaviors labeled *criminal* or *deviant* because they have the power to do so. For example, street crimes such as robbery and carjacking are defined and punished as criminal behavior. They are also represented in reality television programs, movies, and other cultural products as images of criminal deviance. On the other hand, corporate or white-collar crime, which may cause the loss of money or even lives, is less likely to be clearly defined, represented, and punished as criminal. From a conflict perspective, white-collar crime is more likely to be committed by members of the upper class (for instance, business or political leaders or financiers) and is less likely to be punished harshly compared with street crime, which is associated with the lower-income classes, although white-collar crime may have even greater economic and health consequences. A social conflict theorist would draw our attention to the fact that the decision makers who pass our laws, particularly at the federal level, are mostly members of the upper class and govern in the interests of capitalism and their own socioeconomic peers.

A key weakness of the social conflict paradigm is that it overlooks the forces of stability, equilibrium, and consensus in society. The assumption that groups have conflicting (even irreconcilable) interests and that those interests are realized by those with power at the expense of those with less power fails to account for forces of cohesion and stability in societies.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism argues that *both the individual self and society as a whole are the products of social interactions based on language and other symbols*. The term *symbolic interactionism* was coined by U.S. sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) in 1937, but the approach originated in the lectures of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), a University of Chicago philosopher allied with the Chicago School of sociology. The symbolic interactionist paradigm argues that people acquire their sense of who they are only through interaction with others. They do this by means of **symbols**, *representations of things that are not immediately present to our senses*. Symbols include such things as words, gestures,

Symbolic interactionism: A microsociological perspective that posits that both the individual self and society as a whole are the products of social interactions based on language and other symbols.

Symbols: Representations of things that are not immediately present to our senses.

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Symbolic interactionists take an interest in how people's self-perceptions are shaped by perceptions and actions of others. Consider how a child's self-perception might differ depending on whether he is labeled a "bad boy" or a "good boy who made a mistake and did a bad thing." Symbolic interactionists argue that labels matter. What do you think?

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emoticons, and tattoos, among others. Symbolic interactionists take an interest in how we develop social selves. Among other things, symbolic interactionists study the process of socialization and how we learn the culture of our own societies and internalize the roles, norms, and practices of those societies.

Recall our earlier discussions of the theoretical interpretations of deviance and crime. A symbolic interactionist might focus on the ways in which people label some acts or groups as *deviant* (a symbolic act that uses language), the sociological factors that make such a label stick, and the meanings underlying such a label. If you are accused of committing a crime you did not commit, how will the label of *criminal* affect the way others see you? How will it affect the way you see yourself, and will you begin to act differently as a result? Can being labeled *deviant* be a self-fulfilling prophecy? For the symbolic interactionist, sociological inquiry is the study of how people interact and how they create and interpret symbols in the social world.

Although symbolic interactionist perspectives draw our attention to important microlevel processes in society, they may miss the larger structural context of those processes, such as examining who has the power to make laws defining what or who is criminally deviant. For this reason, many sociologists use both macro- and microlevel perspectives when analyzing social phenomena such as deviance.

The three paradigms we described lead to diverse images of society, research questions, and conclusions about the patterns and nature of social life. Each "pair of glasses" can provide a different perspective on the social world. Throughout this text, the three major theoretical paradigms—and some new ones we will encounter in later chapters—will help us understand key issues and themes of sociology.

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PRINCIPAL THEMES IN THIS BOOK

We began this chapter with a list of *why* questions with which sociologists are concerned and about which any one of us might be curious. Behind these questions, we find several major themes, which are also some of the main themes in this book. Three important focal points for sociology—and for us—are (1) power and inequality and the ways in which the unequal distribution of social, economic, and political resources shape opportunities, obstacles, and relationships; (2) the societal changes occurring as a result of globalization and the growing social diversity of modern communities and societies; and (3) the powerful impact of technological change on modern lives, institutions, and states.

Power and Inequality

Power: The ability to mobilize resources and achieve goals despite the resistance of others.

As we consider broad social topics such as gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation and their effects on social relationships and resources, we will be asking who has **power**—*the ability to mobilize resources and achieve goals despite the resistance of others*—and who does not. We will also ask about variables that influence the uneven distribution of power and how some groups use power to create advantages for themselves (and disadvantages for others) and how disadvantaged groups mobilize to challenge the powerful.

Inequality: Differences in wealth, power, political voice, educational opportunities, and other valued resources.

Power is often distributed unequally and can be used by those who possess it to marginalize other social groups. **Inequality** refers to *differences in wealth, power, political voice, educational opportunities, and other valued resources*. The existence of inequality not only raises moral and ethical questions about fairness, but it also can tear at the very fabric of societies, fostering social alienation and instability. Furthermore, it may have negative effects on local and national economies. Notably, economic inequality is increasing both within and between many countries around the globe, a fact that makes understanding the roots and consequences of this phenomenon—that is, asking the *why* questions—ever more important.

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In recent decades, sociologists have increasingly focused on recognizing ways in which social statuses such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and others overlap and intersect with one another in our daily lives and, importantly, how these overlapping characteristics affect individual and group access to resources such as power, political voice, health, well-being, education, and justice. Put another way, "When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). **Intersectionality**, a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, captures the idea that people's individual and group experiences are shaped by overlapping oppression and privilege built into the structure of our societies. It also enables us to think critically and in a more complex way about social realities. To enlist an intersectional lens, we must carefully consider differences and similarities between groups of people and how these intersect.

Intersectionality: The confluence of social statuses that shape people's lives, access to resources and power, justice, health, and well-being.

Globalization and Diversity

Globalization is *the process by which people all over the planet have become increasingly interconnected economically, politically, socially, culturally, and environmentally*. Globalization is not new. It began nearly 200,000 years ago, when humans first spread from their African cradle into Europe and Asia. For thousands of years, humans have traveled, traded goods, and exchanged ideas over much of the globe, using seaways or land routes such as the famed Silk Road, a stretch of land that links China and Europe. But the rate of globalization took a giant leap forward with the industrial revolution, which accelerated the growth of global trade. It made another dramatic jump with the advent of the Information Age, drawing together individuals, cultures, and countries into a common global web of information exchange. In this book, we consider a spectrum of manifestations, functions, and consequences of globalization in areas such as the economy, culture, and the environment.

Globalization: The process by which people worldwide become increasingly connected economically, politically, socially, culturally, and environmentally.

Growing contacts between people and cultures have made us increasingly aware of social diversity as a feature of modern societies. **Social diversity** is *the social and cultural mixture of different groups in society and the societal recognition of difference as significant*. The spread of culture through the globalization of media and the rise of migration has created a world in which almost no place is isolated. As a result, many nations today, including the United States, are characterized by a high degree of social diversity.

Social diversity: The social and cultural mixture of different groups in society and the societal recognition of difference as significant.

Social diversity brings a unique set of sociological challenges. People everywhere have a tendency toward **ethnocentrism**, a *worldview whereby one judges other cultures by the standards of one's own culture and regards one's own way of life as normal—and often superior to others*. From a sociological perspective, no group can be said to be more human than any other. Yet history abounds with examples of people lashing out at others whose religion, language, customs, race, or sexual orientation differed from their own.

Ethnocentrism: A worldview whereby one judges other cultures by the standards of one's own culture and regards one's own way of life as normal and often superior to others.

Technology and Society

Technology is the practical application of knowledge to transform natural resources for human use. The first human technology was probably the use of rocks and other blunt instruments as weapons, enabling humans to hunt large animals for food. Agriculture—planting crops such as rice or corn in hopes of reaping a yearly harvest—represents another technological advance, one superior to simple foraging in the wild for nuts and berries. The use of modern machinery, which ushered in the industrial revolution, represents still another technological leap, multiplying the productivity of human efforts.

Today, we are in the midst of another revolutionary period of technological change: the information revolution. Thanks to the microchip, the Internet, and mobile technology, an increasing number of people around the world now have instant access to a mass of information that was unimaginable just 20 years ago. The information revolution is creating postindustrial economies based far more heavily on the production of knowledge than on the production of goods, as well as new ways of communicating that have the potential to draw people around the world together—or tear them apart. No less importantly, revolutions in robotics and artificial intelligence promise to alter the world of work in ways that we are only beginning to recognize.

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Together, these three themes provide the foundation for this text. Our goal is to develop a rigorous sociological examination of power and inequality, globalization and diversity, and technology and society to help you better understand the social world from its roots to its contemporary manifestations to its possible futures.

SOCIOLOGISTS ASK, WHAT'S NEXT?

In this book, we will be wrapping up each chapter with a brief reflection on *what's next*. That is, we want to invite you to consider how the events of our time may shape our individual and shared future. In this book we illustrate that a sociological perspective can help us see and understand the world, our lives, and the lives of those around us with new eyes. It highlights the ways that we both influence and are powerfully influenced by the social world around us: Society shapes us, and we, in turn, shape society. There are significant changes and challenges ahead in areas including technology, politics, the economy and labor market, public health, and social justice, among others. Sociology can give us important tools for understanding what may lie ahead—and to consider how social change is made.

Why are the issues and questions posed by sociology incredibly compelling for all of us to understand? One reason is that, as we will see throughout this book, many of the social issues sociologists study—crime, marriage, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, unemployment, poverty, consumption, discrimination, and many others—are related to one another in ways we may not immediately see. A sociological perspective helps us to make connections between diverse social phenomena. When we understand these connections, we are better able to understand social issues, to address social problems, and to make (or vote for) policy choices that benefit society.

In the coming chapters we highlight some significant social changes and phenomena that have had a broad impact. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in mainland China in December 2019 and quickly spread across the globe, was not just an epidemiological and medical phenomenon; it was also social and political. It impacted our norms of interaction, social practices, and behaviors, and caused change in social institutions, including schools, families, and the economy. Recent years have also seen mass public mobilizations around the pursuit of criminal justice reform and social justice, not only in the United States, where the disproportionate killing of Black Americans by law enforcement officers has been the object of social protest, but around the world. These are just two of the many dramatic changes and challenges of our time that led so many of us to ask, What's next?

WHAT CAN I DO WITH A SOCIOLOGY DEGREE?

An Introduction

Have you ever wondered what you can do with a sociology degree, or how you can take the skills you'll learn in this major and use them in your career? This book can help you answer that question: Near the end of each chapter, we feature a short essay that links your study of sociology to potential career fields. In the "What Can I Do With a Sociology Degree?" feature, we highlight the professional skills and core knowledge that the study of sociology helps you develop. This set of skills and competencies, which range from critical thinking and written communication skills to aptitude in qualitative and quantitative research to the understanding of diversity, prepares you for the workforce, as well as for graduate and professional school.

In every chapter that follows, this feature describes a specific skill that you can develop through the study of sociology. Each chapter also profiles a sociology graduate who shares what he or she learned through the study of sociology and how that particular skill has been valuable in his or her job. A short U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics overview of the occupational field in which the graduate is working, its educational requirements, median income, and expected growth potential is also included.

Although this feature highlights sociology graduates, it also speaks to students taking sociology who are majoring in other disciplines—being aware of your skills and having the ability to articulate them precisely and clearly is important, no matter what your chosen field of study or career path.

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SUMMARY

- **Sociology** is the **scientific** study of human social relationships, groups, and societies. Its central task is to ask what the dimensions of the social world are, how they influence our behavior, and how we, in turn, shape and change them.
- Sociology adheres to the principle of **social embeddedness**, the idea that economic, political, and other forms of human behavior are fundamentally shaped by social relationships. Sociologists seek to study, through scientific means, the social worlds that human beings consciously create.
- The **sociological imagination** is the ability to grasp the relationship between our individual lives and the larger social forces that help to shape them. It helps us see the connections between our private lives and public issues.
- **Critical thinking** is the ability to evaluate claims about truth by using reason and evidence. Often, we accept things as true because they are familiar, seem to mesh with our own experiences, and sound right. Critical thinking instead asks us to recognize poor arguments, reject statements not supported by evidence, and even question our own assumptions.
- Sociology's roots can be traced to the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, industrialization and the birth of modern capitalism, and the urbanization of populations. Sociology emerged in part as a tool to enable people to understand the dramatic changes taking place in modern societies.
- Sociology generally traces its classical roots to Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. Early work in sociology reflected the concerns of the men who founded the discipline.
- In the United States, scholars at the University of Chicago focused on reforming social problems stemming from industrialization and urbanization. Women and people of color worked on the margins of the discipline because of persistent discrimination.
- Sociologists base their study of the social world on different theoretical perspectives that shape theory and guide research, often resulting in different conclusions. The major sociological paradigms are **structural functionalism**, the **social conflict paradigm**, and **symbolic interactionism**.
- Major themes in sociology include the distribution of **power** and growing inequality, **globalization** and its accompanying social changes, the growth of **social diversity**, and the way advances in technology have changed communication, commerce, and communities.
- The early founders of sociology believed that scientific knowledge could lead to shared social progress. Some modern sociologists question whether such shared scientific understanding is indeed possible.

KEY TERMS

agency (p. 4)
anomie (p. 8)
bourgeoisie (p. 11)
bureaucracies (p. 12)
class conflict (p. 11)
collective conscience (p. 11)
critical thinking (p. 6)
double consciousness (p. 13)
ethnocentrism (p. 21)
formal rationality (p. 12)
globalization (p. 21)
inequality (p. 20)
intersectionality (p. 21)
latent functions (p. 18)
macrolevel paradigms (p. 16)
manifest functions (p. 18)
means of production (p. 11)
microlevel paradigm (p. 16)
norms (p. 8)
positivism (p. 9)
power (p. 20)
proletariat (p. 11)

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scientific (p. 2)
social conflict paradigm (p. 18)
social diversity (p. 21)
social dynamics (p. 9)
social embeddedness (p. 3)
social facts (p. 10)
social solidarity (p. 11)
social statics (p. 9)
sociological imagination (p. 3)
sociological theories (p. 16)
sociology (p. 3)
structural functionalism (p. 16)
structure (p. 4)
symbolic interactionism (p. 19)
symbols (p. 19)
Verstehen (p. 12)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about Mills's concept of the sociological imagination and its ambition to draw together what Mills called *private troubles* and *public issues*. Think of a private trouble that sociologists might classify as also being a public issue. Share your example with your classmates.
2. In the chapter, we asked why women's voices were marginal in early sociological thought. What factors explain the dearth of women's voices? What about the lack of minority voices? What effects do you think these factors may have had on the development of the discipline?
3. What is critical thinking? What does it mean to be a critical thinker in our approach to understanding society and social issues or problems?
4. Recall the three key theoretical paradigms discussed in this chapter—structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Discuss the ways these diverse "glasses" analyze deviance, its labeling, and its punishment in society. Try applying a similar analysis to another social phenomenon, such as class inequality or traditional gender roles.
5. Identify the three main themes of this book and explain their importance. Which most interests you and why?

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