1 Sociology: Perspective, Theory, and Method

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Explain how the sociological perspective helps us understand that society shapes our individual lives.
1.2 State several reasons that a global perspective is important in today’s world.
1.3 Identify the advantages of sociological thinking for developing public policy, for encouraging personal growth, and for advancing in a career.
1.4 Link the origins of sociology to historical social changes.
1.5 Summarize sociology’s major theoretical approaches.
1.6 Describe sociology’s three research orientations.
1.7 Identify the importance of gender in sociological research.
1.8 Discuss the importance of ethics to sociological research.
1.9 Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.
1.10 Recall the 10 important steps in carrying out sociological research.
How likely are you to get married? You might be surprised to find that part of the answer depends on your social class. Research in Canada indicates a “marriage gap” with wealthy Canadians forming more wedding unions than poor Canadians. That gap has also widened over time: In 1976, 95 percent of upper class and 25 percent of lower class Canadians were married (a gap of 70 percent), while by 2011 the numbers were 86 and 12 percent respectively (a gap of 74 percent). Although we tend to think of love and marriage as very personal matters, it is clear that society guides the process.
Chapter Overview

You are about to begin a course that could change your life. Sociology is a new and exciting way of understanding the world around you. It will change what you see, how you think about the world, and it may well change how you think about yourself. Chapter 1 of this text introduces the discipline of sociology. The most important skill to gain from this course is the ability to use what we call the sociological perspective. The chapter next introduces sociological theory, which helps us build understanding from what we see using the sociological perspective. The chapter continues by explaining how sociologists “do” sociology, describing three general approaches to conducting research and four specific methods of data collection.

From the moment he first saw Tonya step off the subway train, Duane knew she was “the one.” As the two walked up the stairs to the street and entered the building where they were both taking classes, Duane tried to get Tonya to stop and talk. At first, she ignored him. But after class they met again, and she agreed to join him for coffee. That was three months ago. Today, they are engaged to be married.

If you were to ask people in Canada, “Why do couples like Tonya and Duane marry?” it is a safe bet that almost everyone would reply, “People marry because they fall in love.” Most of us find it hard to imagine a happy marriage without love; for the same reason, when people fall in love we expect them to think about getting married.

But is the decision about whom to marry really just a matter of personal feelings? There is plenty of evidence to show that if love is the key to marriage, Cupid’s arrow is carefully aimed by the society around us.

Society has many “rules” about whom we should and should not marry. Until recently, Canadian law ruled out marriage between members of the same sex, even if a couple was deeply in love. But there are other rules as well. Sociologists have found that people, especially when they are young, are very likely to marry someone close in age, and people of all ages typically marry someone of the same race, of similar social class background, of much the same level of education, and with the same degree of physical attractiveness. (Chapter 13, “Family and Religion,” provides details). People end up making choices about whom to marry, but society narrows the field long before they do.

When it comes to love, our decisions do not result simply from what philosophers call “free will.” Sociology teaches us that our social world guides our life choices in much the same way that the seasons influence our choice of clothing.

The Sociological Perspective

1.1 Explain how the sociological perspective helps us understand that society shapes our individual lives.

Sociology is the systematic study of human society. At the heart of this discipline is a distinctive point of view called the sociological perspective.

Seeing the General in the Particular

One good way to define the sociological perspective is seeing the general in the particular (Berger, 1963). This definition tells us that sociologists look for general patterns in the behaviour of particular people. Although every individual is unique, society shapes the lives of people in various categories (such as children and adults, women and men, the rich and the poor) very differently.
We begin to see the world sociologically by realizing how the general categories into which we fall shape our particular life experiences.

For example, the Power of Society figure on page X shows how the social world shapes the likelihood of marriage by class background. We know that a large majority of married couples are from middle and upper, rather than lower, class backgrounds. In looking for general patterns, sociologists also ask more fine-tuned questions, like how does social class position affect what women look for in a spouse? In a classic study of women’s hopes for their marriages, Lillian Rubin (1976) found that higher-income women typically expected the men they married to be sensitive to others, to talk readily, and to share feelings and experiences. Lower-income women, she found, had very different expectations and were looking for men who did not drink too much, were not violent, and held steady jobs. Obviously, what women expect in a marriage partner has a lot to do with social class position.

This text explores the power of society to guide our actions, thoughts, and feelings. We may think that marriage results simply from the personal feeling of love. Yet the sociological perspective shows us that factors such as our sex, age, race, and social class guide our selection of a partner. It might be more accurate to think of love as a feeling we have for others who match up with what society teaches us to want in a mate.

**Seeing the Strange in the Familiar**

At first, using the sociological perspective may seem like seeing the strange in the familiar. Consider how you might react if someone were to say to you, “You fit all the right categories, which means you would make a wonderful spouse!” We are used to thinking that people fall in love and decide to marry based on personal feeling and the things that make us unique. But the sociological perspective reveals to us the initially strange idea that society shapes what we think and do in patterned ways.

**Seeing Society in Our Everyday Lives**

The society in which we live has a lot to do with our everyday choices in food, clothing, music, schooling, jobs, and just about everything else. Even the most “personal” decisions we make turn out to be shaped by society. To see how society shapes personal choices, consider the decision by women to bear children. Like the selection of a mate, the choice of having a child—or how many children to have—would seem to be very personal. Yet there are social patterns here as well. As shown in Global Map 1–1, the average woman in Canada has just about two children during her lifetime. In Honduras, however, the “choice” is about three; in Kenya, about four; in Yemen, five; and in Afghanistan, six; and in Niger, seven (Population Reference Bureau, 2012).

What accounts for these striking differences? Because poor countries provide women with less schooling and fewer economic opportunities, women’s lives are centred in the home, and they are less likely to use contraception. The strange truth is that society has much to do with the familiar decisions that women and men make about childbearing.

Another example of the power of society to shape even our most private choices comes from the study of suicide. What could be more personal than the lonely decision to end your own life? Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), one of sociology’s pioneers, showed that, even here, social forces are at work.

Examining official records in and around his native France, Durkheim (1966, orig. 1897) found that some categories of people were more likely than others to take their own lives. He found that men, Protestants, wealthy people, and the unmarried each had much higher suicide rates than women, Catholics and Jews, the poor, and married people. Durkheim explained these differences in terms of social integration: Categories of people with strong social ties had low suicide rates, and more individualistic people had high suicide rates.

In Durkheim’s time, men had much more freedom than women. But despite its advantages, freedom weakens social ties and thus increases the risk of suicide. Likewise, more individualistic Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than more tradition-bound Catholics and Jews, whose rituals encourage stronger social ties. The wealthy have much more freedom than the poor—but once again, at the cost of a higher suicide rate.
Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 1–1   Women’s Childbearing in Global Perspective

Is childbearing simply a matter of personal choice? A look around the world shows that it is not. In general, women living in poor countries have many more children than women in rich nations. Can you point to some of the reasons for this global disparity? In simple terms, such differences mean that if you had been born into another society (whether you are female or male), your life might be quite different from what it is now.

Sources: Data from Population Reference Bureau (2012).

A century later, Durkheim’s analysis still holds true. Figure 1–1 shows suicide rates for women and men in Canada between 1950 and 2009. While the suicide rate fluctuates over time, suicide remains three times as high for men than it does for women. In 2009, almost 3000 men and 900 women took their own lives. Applying Durkheim’s logic, the higher suicide rate among men reflects their greater wealth and freedom. Conversely, the lower rate among women follows from their limited social choices. On first glance, it does not appear that Durkheim’s theory fits the statistics on suicide among Canada’s Aboriginal peoples: Even though Aboriginals are poorer and less independent than non-Aboriginals, the rate of suicide among Aboriginals is more than twice the Canadian rate. Yet Durkheim also identified instability and change as factors that inhibit social integration and thus potentially contribute to higher suicide rates. We would thus do well to consider the legacy of colonial oppression, the residential school system, and continuing racism and alienation experienced by many Aboriginal peoples in Canada (see Chapter 11, “Race and Ethnicity”).

Seeing Sociologically: Marginality and Crisis

Anyone can learn to see the world using the sociological perspective. But two situations help people see clearly how society shapes individual lives: living on the margins of society and living through a social crisis.
Living on the Edge

From time to time, everyone feels isolated, as if we are living on the edge. For some categories of people, however, being an outsider—not part of the dominant category—is an everyday experience. The greater people’s social marginality, the better they are able to use the sociological perspective.

For example, no Black person grows up in the United States or Canada without understanding the importance of race in shaping people’s lives. Songs by rap artists and groups like Lupe Fiasco, Talib Kweli, KRS-One, Dead Prez, the Coup, Mos Def, and Public Enemy express not only the experience of poverty but also the experience of losing many innocent lives to violence in a society of such wide racial disparities. The perspective of such artists, which are spread throughout the world by mass and social media, show that some people of colour in the United States—especially African Americans living in inner cities—feel as if their hopes and dreams are crushed by society. As noted above, Aboriginal people in Canada often feel the same way. But white Canadians and Americans, as the dominant majority, think less often about race and the privileges whiteness provides them with, believing that race affects only non-white people and not themselves as well.

People at the margins of social life, including not only racial minorities but also women, Aboriginals, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and the very old, are aware of social patterns that others rarely think about.

Periods of Crisis

Periods of rapid change or crisis make everyone feel a little off balance, encouraging us to use the sociological perspective. The sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) illustrated this idea using the Great Depression of the 1930s. As the unemployment rate in North America soared to 25 percent, people without jobs could not help but see general social forces at work in their particular lives. Rather than saying, “Something is wrong with me; I can’t find a job,” they took a sociological approach and realized, “The economy

Diversity Snapshot

FIGURE 1–1  Rate of Death by Suicide, by Gender, for Canada, 1950-2009.

Suicide rates are consistently higher for men than for women. For both sexes, suicide rates rose between the 1960s and 1980s, peaking in 1983 at 15.1 per 100 000 and dropping to 10.7 per 100 000 by 2009.

Source: Statistics Canada (2012a).

People with the greatest privileges tend to see individuals as responsible for their own lives. Those at the margins of society, by contrast, are quick to see how race, class, and gender can create disadvantages. The rap artist Lupe Fiasco has given voice to the frustration felt by many African Americans living in inner cities.
has collapsed; there are no jobs to be found!” Mills believed that using what he called the “sociological imagination” in this way helps people understand their society and how it affects their own lives. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page X takes a closer look.

The Importance of a Global Perspective

1.2 State several reasons that a global perspective is important in today’s world.

As new information technology draws even the farthest reaches of the planet closer together, many academic disciplines are taking a global perspective, the study of the larger world and our society’s place in it. What is the importance of a global perspective for sociology?

First, global awareness is a logical extension of the sociological perspective. Sociology shows us that our place in society shapes our life experiences. It stands to reason, then, that the position of our society in the larger world system affects everyone in Canada.

The world’s 195 nations can be divided into three broad categories according to their level of economic development (see Global Map 9–1 on page XXX). High-income countries are the nations with the highest overall standards of living. The 74 countries in this category include Canada and the United States, Argentina, the nations of Western Europe, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Australia. Taken together, these nations generate most of the world’s goods and services, and the people who live in them own most of the planet’s wealth. Economically speaking, people in these countries are better off, not because they are smarter or work harder than anyone else but because they were lucky enough to be born in, or to have immigrated to, a rich region of the world.

A second category is middle-income countries, nations with a standard of living about average for the world as a whole. People in any of these 72 nations—many of the countries of Eastern Europe, South Africa and some other African nations, and almost all of Latin America and Asia—are as likely to live in rural villages as in cities and to walk or ride tractors, scooters, bicycles, or animals as they are to drive automobiles. On average, they receive eight years of schooling. Most middle-income countries also have considerable social inequality within their own borders, meaning that some people are extremely rich (members of the business elite in nations across North Africa, for example) but many more lack safe housing and adequate nutrition (people living in the shanty settlements that surround Lima, Peru, or Mumbai, India).

The remaining 49 nations of the world are low-income countries, nations with a low standard of living in which most people are poor. Most of the poorest countries in the world are in Africa, and a few are in Asia. Here again, a few people are very rich, but the majority struggle to get by with poor housing, unsafe water, too little food, and perhaps most serious of all, little chance to improve their lives (United Nations, 2012; World Bank, 2012).

Chapter 9 ("Global Stratification") explains the causes and consequences of global wealth and poverty. But every chapter of this text makes comparisons between Canada and other nations for five reasons:

1. Where we live shapes the lives we lead. As we saw in Global Map 1–1 on page X, women living in rich and poor countries have very different lives, as suggested by the number of children they have. To understand ourselves and appreciate how others live, we must understand something about how countries differ, which is one good reason to pay attention to the global maps found throughout this text.

2. Societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected. Historically, people in Canada took only passing note of the countries beyond our own borders. In recent decades, however, Canada and the rest of the world have become linked as never before. Electronic technology now transmits pictures, sounds, and written documents around the globe in seconds.
As Mike opened the envelope, he felt the tightness in his chest. The letter he dreaded was in his hands—his job was finished at the end of the day. After 11 years! Years in which he had worked hard, sure that he would move up in the company. All those hopes and dreams were now suddenly gone. Mike felt like a failure. Anger at himself—for not having worked even harder, for having wasted so many years of his life in what had turned out to be a dead-end job—swelled inside him.

But as he returned to his workstation to pack his things, Mike soon realized that he was not alone. Almost all his colleagues in the tech support group had received the same letter. Their jobs were moving to India, where the company was able to provide telephone tech support for less than half the cost of employing workers in Vancouver.

By the end of the weekend, Mike was sitting in his living room with a dozen other ex-employees. Comparing notes and sharing ideas, they now realized that they were simply a few of the victims of a massive outsourcing of jobs that is part of what analysts call the “globalization of the economy.”

In good times and bad, the power of the sociological perspective lies in making sense of our individual lives. We see that many of our particular problems (and our successes, as well) are not unique to us but are the result of larger social trends. Half a century ago, the sociologist C. Wright Mills pointed to the power of what he called the sociological imagination. As he saw it, society—not people’s personal failings—is the main cause of poverty and other social problems. By turning personal problems into public issues, the sociological imagination also is the key to bringing people together to create needed change. In this excerpt, Mills (1959:3–5) explains the need for a sociological imagination:

> When society becomes industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

> Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change…. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the society in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kind of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of men and society, of biography and history, of self and world…. What they need … is a quality of mind that will help them [see] what is going on in the world and … what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality … [that] may be called the sociological imagination.

What Do You Think?

1. As Mills sees it, how are personal troubles different from public issues? Explain this difference in terms of what happened to Mike in the story above.
2. Living in Canada, why do we often blame ourselves for the personal problems we face?
3. How can using the sociological imagination give us power to change the world?

One effect of this new technology is that people all over the world now share many of the same tastes in food, clothing, movies, and music. Rich countries such as Canada and the United States influence other nations, whose people are ever more likely to gobble up fast food, dance to the latest hip-hop music, and speak English.

But the larger world also has an impact on us. We are likely to know the contributions of famous immigrants such as Adrienne Clarkson, governor general of Canada from 1999 to 2005 (who came to Canada as a refugee from Hong Kong), and Dionne Brand, poet, novelist, essayist, and professor (who was born in Trinidad). About 250,000 immigrants enter Canada each year, bringing their skills and talents, along with their fashions and foods, greatly increasing the racial and cultural diversity of this country.

3. What happens in the rest of the world affects life here in Canada. As trade has increased across national boundaries, the world has developed a global economy. Large corporations make and market goods worldwide. Stock traders in Toronto pay close attention to the financial markets in Tokyo and Hong Kong even as wheat farmers in
Saskatchewan watch the price of grain in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Because most new Canadian jobs involve international trade, greater global understanding has never been more important.

In the last several decades, the power and wealth of North America has been challenged by what some analysts have called “the rise of the rest,” meaning the increasing power and wealth of the rest of the world. As nations such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China have expanded their economic production, many of the manufacturing and office jobs that once supported a large share of the Canadian and U.S. labour force have moved overseas. One consequence of this trend is that, as the United States struggles to climb out of its recent 2008 recession, Canada is affected as well. The United States is Canada’s largest trading partner, accounting for 75 percent of Canadian exports. A higher unemployment rate and decreased consumption in the United States have led to a slowdown in Canadian exports, particularly in the energy, industrial goods, and auto sectors. Although Canada has been relatively less affected by the recession, as many analysts see it, we now live in a new global economy that is reshaping societies all around the world (Cross, 2011).

4. **Many social problems that we face in Canada are far more serious elsewhere.** Poverty is a serious problem in Canada, but as Chapter 9 (“Global Stratification”) explains, poverty in Latin America, Africa, and Asia is both more common and more serious. In the same way, although women have lower social standing than men in Canada, gender inequality is much greater in the world’s poor countries.

5. **Thinking globally helps us learn more about ourselves.** We cannot walk the streets of a distant city without thinking about what it means to live in Canada. Comparing life in various settings often leads to unexpected lessons. For instance, were you to visit a squatter settlement in Chennai, India, you would likely find people thriving in the love and support of family members despite desperate poverty. Why, then, are so many poor

We can easily see the power of society over the individual by imagining how different our lives would be had we been born in place of any of these children from, respectively, Kenya, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Peru, South Korea, and India.
people in North America angry and alone? Are material things—so central to our definition of a “rich” life—the best way to measure human well-being?

In sum, in an increasingly interconnected world, we can understand our way of life and ourselves only to the extent that we understand others and the societies in which they live. Sociology is an invitation to learn a new way of looking at the world around us. But is this invitation worth accepting? What are the benefits of applying the sociological perspective?

**Applying the Sociological Perspective**

1.3 Identify the advantages of sociological thinking for developing public policy, for encouraging personal growth, and for advancing in a career.

Applying the sociological perspective is useful in many ways. First, sociology is at work guiding many of the laws and policies that shape our lives. Second, on an individual level, making use of the sociological perspective leads to important personal growth and expanded awareness. Third, studying sociology is excellent preparation for the world of work.

**Sociology and Public Policy**

Sociologists have helped shape public policy—the laws and regulations that guide how people in communities live and work—in countless ways, including health care, education, juvenile justice, divorce law, and social welfare. Canadian researcher Robin Bagley’s (1984) work on sex offences against minors had a major impact on public policy, leading among other things to the 1988 enactment of section 212 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits attempts to purchase sex from persons under 18 years of age (Lowman, 1987).

**Sociology and Personal Growth**

By applying the sociological perspective, we are likely to become more active and aware and to think more critically in our everyday lives. Using sociology pays off in four ways:

1. **The sociological perspective helps us assess the truth of “common sense.”** We all take many things for granted, but that does not make them true. One example is the idea that we are free individuals who are personally responsible for our own lives. If we think that we decide our own fate, we may be quick to praise successful people as superior and consider others with fewer achievements personally deficient. A sociological approach, by contrast, encourages us to ask whether common beliefs are really true and, to the extent that they are not, why they are so widely held.

2. **The sociological perspective helps us see the opportunities and constraints in our lives.** Sociological thinking leads us to see that in the game of life, we have a say in how to play our cards, but it is society that deals us the hand. The more we understand the game, the better players we will be. Sociology helps us learn more about the world so that we can pursue our goals more effectively.

3. **The sociological perspective empowers us to be active participants in our society.** The better we understand how society operates, the more effective citizens we become. As C. Wright Mills explained in the box on page X, it is the sociological perspective that turns a private problem (such as being out of work) into a public issue (a lack of good jobs). As we come to see how society affects us, we may decide to support society as it is, or we may set out with others to change it.

4. **The sociological perspective helps us live in a diverse world.** North Americans represent just 5 percent of the world’s population, and as the remaining chapters of this book explain, many of the other 95 percent live very differently than we do. Still, like people everywhere, we tend to view our own way of life as “right,” “natural,” and “better.” The sociological perspective prompts us to think critically about the relative strengths and weaknesses of all ways of life, including our own.
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Careers: The “Sociology Advantage”

Most students at colleges and universities today are very interested in getting a good job. A background in sociology is excellent preparation for the working world. Of course, completing a bachelor’s degree in sociology is the right choice for people who decide they would like to go on to graduate work and eventually become a secondary school teacher, professor, or researcher in this field. Throughout Canada and the United States, tens of thousands of men and women teach sociology in universities and colleges. But just as many professional sociologists work as researchers for government agencies or private foundations and businesses, gathering important information on social behaviour and carrying out evaluation research. In today’s cost-conscious world, agencies and companies want to be sure that the products, programs, and policies they create get the job done at the lowest cost. Sociologists, especially those with advanced research skills, are in high demand for this kind of work (Deutscher, 1999).

In addition, a smaller but increasing number of people work as clinical sociologists. These women and men work, much as clinical psychologists do, with the goal of improving the lives of troubled clients. A basic difference is that sociologists focus on difficulties not in the personality but in the individual’s web of social relationships.

But sociology is not just for people who want to be sociologists. People who work in criminal justice—including jobs in police departments, probation offices, and correction facilities—also gain the “sociology advantage” by learning what categories of people are most at risk of becoming criminals or victims, how effective various policing policies and programs are at preventing crime, and why people turn to crime in the first place. Similarly, people who work in the health care field—including physicians, nurses, and technicians—gain a sociology advantage by learning about patterns of health and illness within the population, as well as how factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class affect human well-being.

According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers, sociologists are hired for hundreds of jobs in fields such as advertising, banking, criminal justice, education, government, health care, public relations, and research. In almost any type of work, success depends on understanding how various categories of people differ in beliefs, family patterns, and other ways of life. Unless you have a job that never involves dealing with people, you should consider the workplace benefits of learning more sociology.

The Origins of Sociology

Link the origins of sociology to historical social changes.

Like the “choices” people make, major historical events rarely just “happen.” Even sociology itself is the result of powerful social forces.

Social Change and Sociology

Striking changes in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made people think more about society and their place in it, spurring the development of sociology. Three kinds of change were especially important in the development of sociology: the rise of a factory-based economy, the explosive growth of cities, and new ideas about democracy and political rights.

A New Industrial Economy

During the Middle Ages, most people in Europe plowed fields near their homes or engaged in small-scale manufacturing (a term derived from Latin words meaning “to make by hand”).
By the end of the eighteenth century, inventors used new sources of energy—the power of moving water and then steam—to operate large machines in mills and factories. As a result, instead of labouring at home or in tightly knit groups, workers became part of a large and anonymous labour force, under the control of strangers who owned the factories. This change in the system of production took people away from their homes, weakening the traditions that had guided community life for centuries.

**The Growth of Cities**

Across Europe, landowners took part in what historians call the *enclosure movement*—they fenced off more and more farmland to create grazing areas for sheep, the source of wool for the thriving textile mills. Without land, countless tenant farmers had little choice but to head to the cities in search of work in the new factories.

As cities grew larger, these urban migrants faced many social problems, including pollution, crime, and homelessness. Moving through streets crowded with strangers, they faced a new, impersonal social world.

**Political Change**

Economic development and the growth of cities also brought new ways of thinking. In the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704), and Adam Smith (1723–1790), we see a shift in focus from people's moral duties to God and king to the pursuit of self-interest. Philosophers now spoke of *personal liberty* and *individual rights*. Echoing these sentiments, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms clearly states that “every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (Department of Justice, 1982).

The French Revolution, which began in 1789, was an even greater break with political and social tradition. As the French social analyst Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) declared, the change in society in the wake of the French Revolution amounted to “nothing short of the regeneration of the whole human race” (1955:13, orig. 1856).

**A New Awareness of Society**

Huge factories, exploding cities, and a new spirit of individualism—these changes combined to make people more aware of their surroundings. The new discipline of sociology was born in England, France, and Germany—precisely the countries where these changes were greatest.

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1 The abbreviation *BCE* means “before the common era.” We use this throughout the text instead of the traditional *BC* (“before Christ”) to reflect the religious diversity of our society. Similarly, in place of the traditional *AD* (*anno Domini*, “in the year of our Lord”) we use the abbreviation *CE* (“common era”).

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What we see depends on our point of view. When gazing at the stars, lovers see romance, but scientists see thermal reactions. How does using the sociological perspective change what we see in the world around us?
CHAPTER 1

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Comte’s Three Stages of Society

| Theological Stage (the Church in the Middle Ages) | Metaphysical Stage (the Enlightenment and the ideas of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) | Scientific Stage (modern physics, chemistry, sociology) |

positivism a scientific approach to knowledge based on “positive” facts as opposed to mere speculation

Sociology as it really was. It was the French social thinker Auguste Comte (1798–1857) who coined the term sociology in 1838 to describe this new way of thinking. This makes sociology among the youngest of the academic disciplines—far newer than history, physics, or economics, for example.

Comte (1975, orig. 1851–54) saw sociology as the product of three stages of historical development. During the earliest theological stage, from the beginning of human history up to the end of the European Middle Ages about 1350 ce, people took the religious view that society expressed God’s will.

With the dawn of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, Comte explained, the theological stage gave way to a metaphysical stage in which people came to see society as a natural rather than a supernatural phenomenon. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), for example, suggested that society reflected not the perfection of God so much as the failings of a selfish human nature.

What Comte called the scientific stage began with the work of early scientists such as the Polish astronomer Copernicus (1473–1543), the Italian astronomer and physicist Galileo (1564–1642), and the English physicist and mathematician Isaac Newton (1642–1727). Comte’s contribution came in applying the scientific approach—first used to study the physical world—to the study of society. 2

Comte’s approach is called positivism a scientific approach to knowledge based on “positive” facts as opposed to mere speculation. Comte thought that knowledge based on tradition or metaphysics was really only speculation. A positivist approach to knowledge, however, is based on science. As a positivist, Comte believed that society operates according to certain laws, just as the physical world operates according to gravity and other laws of nature. Comte believed that by using science, people could come to understand the laws not only of the physical world but of society as well.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, sociology had taken hold in the United States (two decades earlier than in Canada) and showed the influence of Comte’s ideas. Today, most sociologists continue to consider science a crucial part of sociology, but we now realize that human behaviour is far more complex than the movement of planets. We are creatures of imagination and spontaneity, so human behaviour can never be explained by any rigid “laws of society.” In addition, early sociologists such as Karl Marx (1818–1883) were troubled by the striking inequalities of industrial society. They hoped that the new discipline of sociology would not just help us understand society but also lead to change toward greater social justice.

Sociological Theory

1.5  Summarize sociology’s major theoretical approaches.

The desire to translate observations into understanding brings us to the important part of sociology known as theory. A theory is a statement of how and why specific facts are related. The job of sociological theory is to explain social behaviour in the real world. For example, recall Durkheim’s theory that categories of people with low social integration (men, Protestants, the wealthy, and the unmarried) are at higher risk of suicide.

Figure 1–2 on page XX shows the suicide rates for each province and territory and gives you a chance to do some theorizing of your own.

In deciding which theory to use, sociologists face two basic questions: What issues should we study? And how should we connect the facts? Making a decision to use one theoretical approach over another, sociologists are choosing a “road map” to guide their thinking. In

2 Illustrating Comte’s stages, the ancient Greeks and Romans viewed the planets as gods; Renaissance metaphysical thinkers saw them as astral influences (giving rise to astrology); by the time of Galileo, scientists understood planets as natural objects moving according to natural laws.
Global Snapshot

FIGURE 1–2 Suicide Rates Across Canada, 2009–2011

Suicide rates vary across Canada. Look for patterns. By and large, high suicide rates occur where people live far apart from one another. More densely populated provinces have low suicide rates. How do these data support or contradict Durkheim’s theory of suicide?

Sources: Statistics Canada (2014); Conference Board of Canada (2015).

other words, a theoretical approach is a basic image of society that guides thinking and research. Sociologists make use of three major theoretical approaches: the structural-functional approach, the social-conflict approach, and the symbolic-interaction approach.

The Structural-Functional Approach

The structural-functional approach is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. As its name suggests, this approach points to social structure, any relatively stable pattern of social behaviour. Social structure gives our lives shape in families, the workplace, or the college classroom. This approach also looks for each structure’s social functions, the consequences of a social pattern for the operation of society as a whole. All social patterns, from a simple handshake to complex religious rituals, function to tie people together and to keep society going, at least in its present form.

The structural-functional approach owes much to Auguste Comte, who pointed out the need to keep society unified when many traditions were breaking down. Emile Durkheim,
who helped establish sociology in French universities, also based his work on this approach. A third structural-functional pioneer was the English sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Spencer, employing an “organic analogy,” compared society to the human body: Just as the structural parts of the human body—the skeleton, muscles, and internal organs—each carry out certain functions to help the entire organism survive, social structures work together to preserve society. The structural-functional approach, then, leads sociologists to identify various structures of society and to investigate their functions.

Sociologist Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) expanded our understanding of social function by pointing out that any social structure probably has many functions, some more obvious than others. He distinguished between manifest functions, the recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern, and latent functions, the unrecognized and unintended consequences of any social pattern. For example, the obvious function of this country’s system of higher education is to give young people the information and skills they will need to hold jobs after graduation. Perhaps just as important, although less often acknowledged, is higher education’s function as a “marriage broker,” bringing together young people of similar social backgrounds. Another latent function of higher education is to limit unemployment by keeping millions of people out of the labour market, where many of them might not easily find jobs.

But Merton also recognized that not all the effects of social structure are good. Thus a social dysfunction is any social pattern that may disrupt the operation of society. Globalization of the economy, a rising flow of immigrants, and increasing inequality of income are all factors that—in the eyes of some people—disrupt existing social patterns. As these examples suggest, what is helpful and what is harmful for society is a matter about which people often disagree. In addition, what is functional for one category of people (say, a banking system that provides high profits for Bay Street executives) may well be dysfunctional for other categories of people (workers who lose pension funds invested in banks that fail or people who cannot pay their mortgages and end up losing their homes).

EVALUATE The main idea of the structural-functional approach is its vision of society as stable and orderly. The main goal of the sociologists who use this approach, then, is to figure out “what makes society tick.”

In the mid-1900s, most sociologists favoured the structural-functional approach. In recent decades, however, its influence has declined. By focusing attention on social stability and unity, critics point out, structural-functionalism is not critical of inequalities based on social class, race, ethnicity, and gender, all of which cause tension and conflict. In general, its focus on stability at the expense of conflict makes this approach somewhat conservative. As a critical response, sociologists developed the social-conflict approach.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How do manifest functions differ from latent functions? Give an example of a manifest function and a latent function of automobiles in Canada.

The Social-Conflict Approach

The social-conflict approach is a framework for building theory that sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change. Unlike the structural-functional emphasis on solidarity and stability, this approach highlights how factors such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age are linked to inequality in terms of money, power, education, and social prestige. A conflict analysis rejects the idea that social structure promotes the operation of society as a whole, focusing instead on how any social pattern benefits some people while hurting others.

Sociologists using the social-conflict approach look at ongoing conflict between dominant and disadvantaged categories of people—the rich in relation to the poor, white people in relation to visible minorities, and men in relation to women. Typically, people on top try to protect their privileges while the disadvantaged try to gain more for themselves.
A social-conflict analysis of our educational system shows how schooling reproduces class inequality from one generation to the next. For example, secondary schools assign students to either college preparatory or vocational training programs. From a structural-functional point of view such “tracking” benefits everyone by providing schooling that fits students’ abilities. But conflict analysis argues that tracking often has less to do with talent than with social background, meaning that well-to-do students are placed in higher tracks, while poor children end up in lower tracks. In this way, young people from privileged families get the best schooling, which leads them to college and university and later to high-income careers. The children of poor families, by contrast, are not prepared for higher education and, like their parents before them, typically get stuck in low-paying jobs. In both cases, the social standing of one generation is passed on to the next, with schools justifying the practice in terms of individual merit (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1982, 1985).

Many sociologists use social-conflict theory not just to understand society but also as part of their efforts to reduce inequality. Karl Marx and W.E.B. Du Bois saw sociology as a key to solving society’s problems, especially racial inequality. Du Bois earned a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University and established the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, one of the first centres of sociological research in the United States. He helped his colleagues in sociology—and people everywhere—see the deep racial divisions in his country. While people can simply be “Americans,” Du Bois explained, but African Americans have a “double consciousness,” reflecting their status as citizens who are never able to escape identification based on the colour of their skin.

In his sociological classic The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study (1899), Du Bois explored Philadelphia’s African American community, identifying both the strengths and the weaknesses of people wrestling with overwhelming social problems on a day-to-day basis. He challenged the belief—widespread at that time—that Blacks were inferior to whites, and he blamed white prejudice for the problems African Americans faced. He also criticized successful people of colour for being so eager to win white acceptance that they gave up all ties with the Black community, which needed their help.

Despite notable achievements, Du Bois gradually grew impatient with academic study, which he felt was too detached from the everyday struggles of people of colour. Du Bois wanted change. It was the hope of sparking public action against racial separation that led Du Bois, in 1909, to participate in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization that has been active in supporting racial equality for more than a century. As the editor of the organization’s magazine, Crisis, Du Bois worked tirelessly to challenge laws and social customs that deprived African Americans of the rights and opportunities enjoyed by the white majority.

Du Bois described race as the major problem facing his country in the twentieth century. Early in his career, as a sociological researcher, he was hopeful about overcoming racial divisions. By the end of his life, however, he had grown bitter, claiming that little had changed. At the age of 93, Du Bois emigrated to Ghana, where he died two years later.

**What Do You Think?**

1. If he were alive today, do you think that Du Bois would still consider race a major problem in the twenty-first century? Why or why not?
2. How much do you think African Americans today experience “double consciousness”?
3. In what ways can sociology help us understand and reduce racial conflict?

Sources: Based on Blaustein (1967), Du Bois (1967, orig. 1899), E. Wright (2002a, 2002b), and personal communication with Earl Wright II.
championed the cause of workers in what he saw as their battle against
factory owners. In a well-known statement (inscribed on his monument
in London’s Highgate Cemetery), Marx declared, “The philosophers have
only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to
change it.”

Feminism and Gender-Conflict Theory

One important social-conflict theory is gender-conflict theory (or femi-
nist theory), the study of society that focuses on inequality and conflict between
women and men. The gender-conflict approach is closely linked to feminism,
support of social equality for women and men.

The importance of gender-conflict theory lies in making us aware of
the many ways in which our society places men in positions of power over
women, in the home (where men are usually considered “head of the household”), in
the workplace (where men earn more income and hold most positions of power), and in the mass
media (where, for instance, more men than women are hip-hop stars).

Another contribution of feminist theory is making us aware of the importance of
women to the development of sociology. Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) is regarded as
the first woman sociologist. Born to a wealthy English family, Martineau made her mark
in 1853 by translating the writings of Auguste Comte from French into English. She later
documented the evils of slavery and argued for laws to protect factory workers, defending
workers’ right to unionize. She was particularly concerned about the position of women in
society and fought for changes in education policy so that women could look forward to
more in life than being a wife and mother in the home.

In Canada, Nellie McClung (1873–1951) was a pioneer of women’s rights who started
school at age 10 and received a teaching certificate six years later. McClung was a supporter of
suffrage for women and a well-known advocate for Prohibition, factory laws for women, for-
nal compulsory education, reform in Canadian prisons, and equal representation for women
in the political realm. While an elected Liberal MLA in Alberta, she became a member of the
“Famous Five,” who in 1927 petitioned the Government of Canada to include women in
the definition of “person” in the British North America Act. The Famous Five’s success in 1929
meant that women could be appointed to the Senate.

All chapters of this book consider the importance of gender and gender inequality. For
an in-depth look at feminism and the social standing of women and men, see Chapter 10
(“Gender Stratification”).

Race-Conflict Theory

Another important type of social-conflict theory is race-conflict theory, the study of society that
focuses on inequality and conflict between people of different racial and ethnic categories. Just as men have
power over women, white people have numerous social advantages over visible minorities and
Aboriginal peoples, including, on average, higher incomes, more schooling, better health, and lon-
ger life expectancy.

Race-conflict theory also points out the contribu-
tions to the development of sociology made
by racial minorities. Cecil Foster (1954–) grew up
in a poor neighbourhood in Barbados when that
country was still a colony of Britain. He became a
reporter and columnist with a critical eye toward
that nation’s government. Finding himself a target
of threats, Foster immigrated to Canada in 1978 where he has since worked as a journalist and sociologist. He continues to write and lecture about the Caribbean immigrant experience, racism, and multiculturalism in Canada.

An important contribution to understanding race was made by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963). Born to a poor Massachusetts family, Du Bois enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and then at Harvard University, where he earned the first doctorate awarded by that university to a person of colour. Du Bois then founded the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, which was an important centre of sociological research in the early decades of the twentieth century. Like most people who follow the social-conflict approach (whether focusing on class, gender, or race), Du Bois believed that scholars should not simply learn about society’s problems but also try to solve them. He therefore studied the Black communities across the United States, pointing to numerous social problems ranging from educational inequality, a political system that denied people their right to vote, and the terrorist practice of lynching. Du Bois spoke out against racial inequality and participated in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (E. Wright, 2002a, 2002b). The Thinking About Diversity box takes a closer look at the ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois. An important contribution to understanding race in Canada was made by Daniel Grafton Hill (1923–2003), who is especially remembered for his sociological writings on Black history and human rights.

EVALUATE The various social-conflict theories have gained a large following in recent decades, but like other approaches, they have met with criticism. Because any social-conflict theory focuses on inequality, it largely ignores how shared values and interdependence can unify members of a society. In addition, say critics, to the extent that it pursues political goals, a social-conflict approach cannot claim scientific objectivity. Supporters of social-conflict theory respond that all theoretical approaches have political consequences.

A final criticism of both structural-functional and social-conflict theories is that they paint society in broad strokes—in terms of “family,” “social class,” “race,” and so on. A third theoretical approach views society less in general terms and more as the specific, everyday experiences of individual people. The Applying Theory table summarizes the contributions of each of these approaches.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING Why do you think sociologists characterize the social-conflict approach as “activist”? What is it actively trying to achieve?

The Symbolic-Interaction Approach

Both the structural-functional approach and the social-conflict approach share a macro-level orientation meaning a broad focus on social structures that shape society as a whole. Macro-level sociology takes in the big picture, rather like observing a city from a helicopter and seeing how highways help people move from place to place or how housing differs from rich to poor neighbourhoods. Sociology also uses a micro-level orientation, a close-up focus on social interaction in specific situations. Exploring city life in this way occurs at street level, where you might watch how children invent games on a school playground or observe how pedestrians respond to homeless people they pass on the street. The symbolic-interaction approach, then, is a framework for building theory that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals.

How does “society” result from the ongoing experiences of tens of millions of people? One answer, detailed in Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”), is that society is nothing more than the reality that people construct for themselves as they interact with one another. That is, we human beings live in a world of symbols, and we attach meaning to virtually everything, from the words on this page to the wink of an eye. We create

macro-level orientation a broad focus on social structures that shape society as a whole

micro-level orientation a close-up focus on social interaction in specific situations

symbolic-interaction approach a framework for building theory that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals
**Applying Theory**

**Major theoretical approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the level of analysis?</th>
<th>Structural-Functional Approach</th>
<th>Social-Conflict, Gender-Conflict, and Race-Conflict Approaches</th>
<th>Symbolic-Interaction Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What image of society does the approach have?</td>
<td>Macro-level</td>
<td>Society is a system of interrelated parts that is relatively stable. Each part works to keep society operating in an orderly way. Members generally agree about what is morally right and morally wrong.</td>
<td>Society is a system of social inequalities based on class (Maslow), gender (gender-conflict theory and feminism), and race (race-conflict theory). Society operates to benefit some categories of people and harm others. Social inequality causes conflict that leads to social change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What core questions does the approach ask?</td>
<td>How is society held together?</td>
<td>How does society divide a population?</td>
<td>How do people experience society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the major parts of society?</td>
<td>How do advantaged people protect their privileges?</td>
<td>How do people shape the reality they experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are these parts linked?</td>
<td>How do disadvantaged people challenge the system seeking change?</td>
<td>How do behaviour and meaning change from person to person and from one situation to another?</td>
</tr>
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**Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life**

**Sports: Playing the Theory Game**

Sport is a popular pastime. Many children and teens play two or more organized sports. Adults who don’t participate themselves follow their favourite teams or players on TV or on the internet. What can we learn by applying sociology’s major theoretical approaches to this familiar element of life in Canada?

**Structural-Functional Approach**

According to the structural-functional approach, the manifest functions of sports include recreation and getting in shape. Sports have important latent functions as well, from building social relationships to creating jobs. Perhaps the most important latent function of sports is to encourage competition, which is central to our society’s way of life.

Of course, sports also have dysfunctional consequences. Colleges and universities sometimes recruit students for their athletic skill rather than their academic ability. This practice lowers a school’s academic standards and shortchanges athletes, whose intense practice schedules often interfere with their studies (Upthegrove, Roscigno, & Charles, 1999).

**Social-Conflict Approach**

A social-conflict analysis points out how sports are linked to social inequality. Some sports—tennis, swimming, golf, skiing—are expensive, so participation is largely limited to the well-to-do. Football, baseball, and basketball, however, are accessible to people at almost all income levels. Thus the games people play are not simply a matter of choice but also a reflection of their social standing (Zirin, 2008).

**Gender-conflict or feminist theory**

leads us to recognize that, throughout history, men have dominated the world of sports. The first modern Olympic Games, held in 1896, excluded women from competition. Through most of the twentieth century in Canada, even hockey teams barred girls based on the traditional ideas that they lack the strength and the stamina to play sports and that they risk losing their femininity if they do. Even today, women still take a back seat to men, particularly in sports with the greatest earnings and social prestige (Travers, 2013).

**“Stacking” in Professional Baseball**

In professional baseball, white players are more likely to play the central positions in the infield, while people of colour are more likely to play in the outfield. What do you make of this pattern?

Source: Lapchick (2015a).
“reality,” therefore, as we define our surroundings, decide what we think of others, and shape our own identities.

Symbolic-interaction theory has roots in the thinking of Max Weber (1864–1920), a German sociologist who emphasized understanding a particular setting from the point of view of the people in it. Since Weber’s time, sociologists have taken micro-level sociology in a number of directions. Chapter 3 (“Socialization: From Infancy to Old Age”) discusses the ideas of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), who explored how our personalities develop as a result of social experience. Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”) presents the work of Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman (1922–1982), whose *dramaturgical analysis* describes how we resemble actors on a stage as we play out our various roles. Other contemporary sociologists, including George Homans and Peter Blau, have developed *social-exchange analysis*, the idea that interaction is guided by what each person stands to gain and lose from others. In the ritual of courtship, for example, people seek mates who offer at least as much—in terms of physical attractiveness, intelligence, and social background—as they offer in return. Social constructionist theory of knowledge, which maintains that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experiences and not from an objective reality, is a late modern outgrowth of the symbolic-interaction tradition.

**Race-conflict theory** reminds us that our society has long excluded visible minorities people from professional sports. Even so, opportunities have expanded in recent decades. In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke through the “colour line” to become the first African American player in Major League Baseball, playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1958, Canadian-born William O’Ree made headlines as the first Black player to be recruited into the National Hockey League. In 2015, African Americans (13 percent of the U.S. population) accounted for 8.3 percent of Major League Baseball players, 68.7 percent of National Football League (NFL) players, and 74.4 percent of National Basketball Association (NBA) players (Lapchick, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

But racial discrimination still exists in professional sports. The figure shows the results of a 2014 study of racial “stacking” in Major League Baseball. White players are concentrated in the central “thinking” positions of pitcher (69 percent white) and catcher (51.6 percent white). African Americans represent only 3 percent of pitchers, and there were no Black catchers. But 7.9 percent of infielders are African Americans, as are 25.4 percent of outfielders (positions characterized as requiring “speed and reactive ability”) (Lapchick, 2015a).

Who benefits most from professional sports? The vast profits that sports generate are controlled by a small number of people—predominantly white men. In sum, sports in our society are bound up with inequalities based on gender, race, and wealth.

**The Symbolic-Interaction Approach**

At the micro-level, a sporting event is a complex, face-to-face interaction. In part, play is guided by the players’ assigned positions and the rules of the game. But players are also spontaneous and unpredictable. Following the symbolic-interaction approach, we see sports less as a system and more as an ongoing process.

From this point of view, too, we would expect each player to understand the game a little differently. Some players enjoy stiff competition; for others, love of the game may be greater than the need to win. In addition, the behaviour of any single player is likely to change over time. A rookie may feel self-conscious during the first few games in the big leagues but go on to develop a comfortable sense of fitting in with the team. To fully appreciate the power of the sociological perspective, you should become familiar with all these approaches.

**What Do You Think?**

1. Describe how a macro-level approach to sports differs from a micro-level approach.
2. Make up three questions about sports that reflect the focus of each of the three theoretical approaches.
3. How might you apply the three approaches to other social patterns, such as the workplace or family life?
EVALUATE  Without denying the existence of macro-level social structures such as the family and social class, symbolic-interaction theory reminds us that society basically amounts to people interacting. That is, micro-level sociology shows us how individuals construct and experience society. However, by emphasizing what is unique in each social scene, this approach risks overlooking the widespread influence of culture, as well as structural factors such as class, gender, and race.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  How does a micro-level analysis differ from a macro-level analysis? Provide an explanation of a social pattern at both levels.

Keep in mind that each of the major theoretical approaches leads you to recognize particular facts as important and to answer questions in particular ways. As the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box exploring social patterns in sports on page XX shows, the fullest understanding of society comes from using all the approaches.

Three Ways to Do Sociology

Describe sociology’s three research orientations.

All sociologists want to learn about the social world. But just as some may prefer one theoretical approach to another, many sociologists favour one research orientation. The following sections describe three ways to do sociological research: positivist, interpretive, and critical sociology.

**Positivist Sociology**

One popular way to do sociological research is positivist sociology, which is the study of society based on scientific observation of social behaviour. As explained earlier, positivist research discovers facts through the use of science, a logical system that develops knowledge from direct, systematic observation. Positivist sociology is sometimes called empirical sociology because it is based on empirical evidence, which is information we can verify with our senses.

Scientific research often challenges what we accept as “common sense.” Here are five examples of widely held beliefs that are not supported by scientific evidence:

1. “Poor people are far more likely than rich people to break the law.” Not true. If you regularly watch television shows like COPS, you might think that police arrest only people from “bad” neighbourhoods. Chapter 7 (“Deviance”) explains that poor people do stand out in the official arrest statistics. But research also shows that police and prosecutors are more likely to treat well-to-do people more leniently, as when a celebrity is accused of shoplifting or drunk driving. Some laws are even written in a way that criminalizes poor people more and affluent people less.

2. “Canada is a middle-class society in which most people are more or less equal.” False. Data presented in Chapter 8 (“Social Stratification”) show that the richest 20 percent of Canadian families control 67 percent of the nation’s total wealth, but almost half of all families have scarcely any wealth at all. The gap between the richest people and average people in Canada has never been greater.

3. “Most poor people don’t want to work.” Wrong. Research described in Chapter 8 indicates that this statement is true of some but not most poor people. In fact, of the almost 5 million poor in Canada, a third are children, people with disabilities, and elderly people who are not expected to work.

4. “Differences in the behaviour of females and males are just ‘human nature.’” Wrong again. Much of what we call “human nature” is constructed by the society in
which we live. Further, as Chapter 10 (“Gender Stratification”) argues, some societies define “feminine” and “masculine” very differently than we do.

5. “People marry because they are in love.” Not exactly. To members of our society, few statements are so obvious. Surprisingly, however, in many societies, marriage has little to do with love. Chapter 13 (“Family and Religion”) explains why.

These examples confirm the old saying that “it’s not what we don’t know that gets us into trouble as much as the things we do know that just aren’t so.” The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page XX explains why we also need to think critically about the “facts” we find in the popular media and on the internet.

We have all been brought up hearing many widely accepted “truths,” being bombarded by “expert” advice in the popular media, and feeling pressure to accept the opinions of those around us. As adults, we need to evaluate more critically what we see, read, and hear. Sociology can help us do that. Sociologists (and everyone else) can use science to assess many kinds of information.

Concepts, Variables, and Measurement

Let's take a closer look at how science works. A basic element of science is the concept, a mental construct that represents some part of the world in a simplified form. Sociologists use concepts to label aspects of social life, including “the family” and “the economy,” and to categorize people in terms of their “gender” or “social class.”

A variable is a concept whose value changes from case to case. The familiar variable “height,” for example, has a value that varies from person to person. The concept “social class” can describe people’s social standing using the values “upper class,” “middle class,” “working class,” and “lower class.”

The use of variables depends on measurement, a procedure for determining the value of a variable in a specific case. Some variables are easy to measure, as when a nurse checks our blood pressure. But measuring sociological variables can be far more difficult, because the value of any variable in part depends on how it is defined.

Good research therefore requires that sociologists operationalize a variable by specifying exactly what is to be measured before assigning a value to a variable. Before measuring the concept of “social class,” for example, you would have to decide exactly what you were going to measure—say, income level, years of schooling, or occupational prestige.

Statistics

Sociologists also face the problem of dealing with large numbers of people. For example, how do you report income for thousands or even millions of individuals? Listing streams of numbers would carry little meaning and tells us nothing about the people as a whole. To solve this problem, sociologists use descriptive statistics to state the “average” for a large population. The most commonly used descriptive statistics are the mean (the arithmetic average of all measures, which you calculate by adding all the values and dividing by the number of cases), the median (the score at the halfway point in a listing of numbers from lowest to highest), and the mode (the score that occurs most often).

Reliability and Validity

For a measurement to be useful, it must be reliable and valid. Reliability refers to consistency in measurement. A measurement is reliable if repeated measurements give the same result time after time. But consistency does not guarantee validity, which is actually measuring exactly what you intend to measure. Valid measurement means more than hitting the same spot somewhere on a target again and again; it means hitting the exact target, the bull’s-eye.

Say you want to know just how religious the students at your university or college are. You might ask students how often they attend religious services. But is going to a house of worship really the same thing as being religious? Maybe not, because people take part in religious rituals...
Every day, we see stories in newspapers and magazines that tell us what people think and how they behave. But a lot of what you read turns out to be misleading or worse.

Take the issue of extramarital sex, meaning married or common-law people having sex with someone other than their spouse or partner. A look at the covers of the many "women's magazines" at the supermarket checkout or a quick reading of the advice column in your local newspaper might lead you to think that extramarital sex is a major issue.

The popular media seem full of stories about how to keep your spouse or partner from "cheating" or pointing out the clues that tip you off when he or she is having an affair. Most of the studies reported in the popular press, and on websites, suggest that more than half of people in intimate relationships—women as well as men—cheat.

But is extramarital sex really that widespread? No. Researchers who conduct sound sociological investigation have found that, in any given year, only 3 to 4 percent of married or common-law people have an extramarital relationship, and no more than 15 to 20 percent have ever done so. Why, then, do surveys in the popular media report rates of extramarital sex that are so much higher? We can answer this question by taking a look at who fills out pop surveys.

First, people with a personal interest in a topic are most likely to respond to an offer to complete a survey. For this reason, people who have some personal experience with extramarital sex (either their own behaviour or their partner’s) are more likely to show up in these studies. In contrast, studies correctly conducted by trained sociologists carefully select subjects so that the results are representative of the entire population.

Second, because the readership of the magazines and online sources that conduct these surveys is, on average, young, their surveys end up attracting a high proportion of young respondents. And one thing we know about young people is that they are more likely to have sex outside of their primary romantic relationship. For example, the typical married or common-law person who is age 30 is more than twice as likely to have had an extramarital relationship than the typical married or common-law person over age 60.

Third, women are much more likely than men to read the popular magazines that feature sex surveys. Therefore, women are more likely to fill out these surveys. In recent decades, the share of women, especially younger women, who have had extramarital sex has gone up. Why are today’s younger women more likely than women a generation or two earlier to have had extramarital sex? Probably because women today are working outside of the home and many are travelling as part of their job. In general, today’s women have a wider social network that brings them into contact with others.

Chapter 6 ("Sexuality and Society") takes a close look at sexual patterns, including extramarital relationships. For now, just remember that a lot of what you read in the popular media and online may not be as true as some people think.

What Do You Think?

1. Can you think of other issues on which popular media surveys may give misleading information? What are they?
2. Explain why we should have more trust in the results of sound research carried out by skilled sociologists than in the surveys conducted by the popular media.
3. Do you think companies are likely to sell more magazines or newspapers if they publish “research” results that distort the truth? Explain.

Sources: T.W. Smith (2006); Black (2007); and Parker-Pope (2008).
Correlation and Cause

The real payoff in scientific research is determining how variables are related. **Correlation** means a relationship in which two (or more) variables change together. But sociologists want to know not just how variables change but which variable changes the other. The scientific ideal is to determine cause and effect, a relationship in which change in one variable causes change in another. As noted earlier, Émile Durkheim found that the degree of social integration (the cause) affected the suicide rate (the effect) among categories of people. Scientists refer to the variable that causes the change as the independent variable and the variable that changes (the effect) as the dependent variable. Understanding cause and effect is valuable because it allows researchers to predict how one pattern of behaviour will produce another.

Just because two variables change together does not necessarily mean that they have a cause-and-effect relationship. For instance, the marriage rate in Canada falls to its lowest point in January, which also happens to be the month when the national death rate is highest. Does this mean that people drop dead because they don’t marry or that they don’t marry because they die? Of course not. More likely, it is the cold and often stormy weather across much of the country in January (perhaps combined with the post-holiday blues) that is responsible for both the low marriage rate and the high death rate.

When two variables change together but neither one causes the other, sociologists describe the relationship as a spurious correlation, an apparent but false relationship between two (or more) variables that is caused by some other variable. A spurious correlation between two variables usually results from some third factor. For example, delinquency rates are high where young people live in crowded housing, but this is not because crowded housing causes youngsters to “turn bad.” Both crowded housing and delinquency result from a third factor: poverty. To be sure of a real cause-and-effect relationship, we must show that (1) variables are correlated, (2) the independent (causal) variable occurs before the dependent variable, and (3) there is no evidence that a third variable has been overlooked, causing a spurious correlation.

The Ideal of Objectivity

A guiding principle of science is objectivity, or personal neutrality in conducting research. Ideally, objective research allows the facts to speak for themselves and not be influenced by the personal values and biases of the researcher. In reality, of course, achieving total neutrality is impossible for anyone. But carefully observing the rules of scientific research will maximize objectivity.

The German sociologist Max Weber noted that people usually choose value-relevant research topics—topics they care about. But once their work is under way, he cautioned, researchers should try to be value-free. That is, we must be dedicated to finding truth as it is rather than as we think it should be. For Weber, this difference sets science apart from politics. Researchers (unlike politicians) must stay open-minded and be willing to accept whatever results come from their work, whether they personally agree with them or not.

Weber’s argument still carries much weight in sociology, although most researchers realize that we can never be completely value-free or even fully aware of our biases. In addition, keep in mind that sociologists are not “average” people: Most are highly educated white men and women who are more politically liberal than the population as a whole. Sociologists need to remember that they, too, are influenced by their social backgrounds.

Interpretive Sociology

Not all sociologists agree that science is the only way—or even the best way—to study human society. This is because, unlike planets or
other elements of the natural world, humans are much more than objects moving around in ways that can be measured. Of course, we are active creatures, but our humanity lies in the fact that we attach meaning to our actions, and meaning is not easy to observe directly. Therefore, sociologists have developed a second research orientation known as interpretive sociology, the study of society that focuses on discovering the meanings people attach to their social world. Max Weber, the pioneer of this framework, argued that the proper focus of sociology is interpretation, or understanding the meanings people create in their everyday lives. Sociologists who use this approach may well measure behaviour, making use of the positivist approach, but their greater goal is discovering what people mean by what they do.

The Importance of Meaning

Interpretive sociology does not reject science completely, but it does change the focus of research. Interpretive sociology differs from positivist sociology in four ways. First, positivist sociology focuses on actions—on what people do—because that is what we can observe directly. Interpretive sociology, by contrast, focuses on people’s understanding of their actions and their surroundings. Second, positivist sociology claims that objective reality exists “out there,” but interpretive sociology counters that reality is subjective, constructed by people in the course of their everyday lives. Third, positivist sociology tends to favour quantitative data—numerical measurements of people’s behaviour—while interpretive sociology favours qualitative data, or researchers’ perceptions of how people understand their world. Fourth, the positivist orientation is best suited to research in a laboratory, where investigators conducting an experiment stand back and take careful measurements. On the other hand, the interpretive orientation claims that we learn more by interacting with people, focusing on subjective meaning, and learning how they make sense of their everyday lives. As the chapter will explain, this type of research often uses personal interviews or fieldwork and is best carried out in a natural or everyday setting.

Weber’s Concept of Verstehen

Max Weber claimed that the key to interpretive sociology lies in Verstehen (pronounced “fair-SHTAY-in”), the German word for “understanding.” It is the interpretive sociologist’s job not just to observe what people do but also to share in their world of meaning, coming to appreciate why they act as they do. Subjective thoughts and feelings, which scientists tend to dismiss because they are difficult to measure, are the focus of the interpretive sociologist’s attention.

Critical Sociology

Like the interpretive orientation, critical sociology developed in reaction to what many sociologists saw as the limitations of positivist sociology. In this case, however, the problem involves the central principle of scientific research: objectivity.

Positivist sociology holds that reality is “out there” and that the researcher’s job is to study and document how society works. But Karl Marx, who founded the critical orientation, rejected the idea that society exists as a “natural” system. To assume that society is somehow “fixed,” he claimed, is the same as saying that society cannot be changed. With a focus on society as it exists, positivist sociology, from this point of view, ends up supporting the status quo. Critical sociology, by contrast, is the study of society that focuses on the need for social change.

The Importance of Change

Critical sociology does not ignore “facts.” Researchers using this approach may well make use of scientific methods to learn, for example, how much income inequality there is in the United States. But rather than asking the positivist question “How much inequality is there?” critical sociologists ask moral and political questions, such as “Should we have this much inequality?” or “Should society exist in its present form?”

Their answer, typically, is that it should not. So, critical sociology does not reject using science to learn about what’s going on in the social world.
But critical sociology does reject the scientific neutrality that requires researchers to try to be “objective” and limit their work to studying the status quo.

One recent account of the critical orientation, echoing Marx, claims that the point of this type of sociology is “not just to research the social world but to change it in the direction of democracy and social justice” (Feagin & Hernán, 2001:1). In making value judgments about how society should be improved, critical sociology rejects Weber’s goal that sociology be a value-free science and emphasizes instead that sociologists should be activists in pursuit of greater social equality. Sociologists using the critical orientation seek to change not only society but also the character of research itself. They often identify personally with their research subjects and encourage them to help decide what to study and how to do the work. Often, researchers and subjects use their findings to provide a voice for less powerful people and to advance the political goal of a more equal society (Hess, 1999; 2001; Perrucci, 2001).

**Sociology as Politics**

Positivist sociologists object to researchers taking sides in this way. The positivist claim is that to the extent that critical sociology (whether feminist, Marxist, or of some other critical orientation) becomes political, it gives up scientific objectivity, and therefore cannot correct for its own biases. The critical sociology response is that *all* research is political in that either it calls for change or it does not. As critical sociology sees it, sociologists thus have no choice about their work being political, but they can choose which positions to support.

Critical sociology is an activist orientation that ties knowledge to action and seeks not just to understand the world as it exists but also to improve it. In general, positivist sociology tends to appeal to researchers who try to be non-political or who have more conservative political views; critical sociology appeals to those whose politics range from liberal to radical left.

**Research Orientations and Theory**

We have now considered various research orientations as well as various theoretical approaches. Is there a link between research orientations and sociological theory? The connection is not precise, but each of the three ways to do sociology—positivist, interpretive, and critical—does stand closer to one of the theoretical approaches presented earlier in this chapter. The positivist orientation is linked to the structural-functional approach, and this is because both are concerned with the scientific goal of understanding society as it is. The interpretive orientation is linked to the symbolic-interaction approach by the fact that both focus on the meanings people attach to their social world. Finally, the critical orientation is linked to the social-conflict approach because both are animated by the goal of reducing social inequality.

The Summing Up table provides a quick review of the differences among the three ways to do sociology. Many sociologists favour one orientation over another; however, because each provides useful insights, it is a good idea to become familiar with all three.

**Summing Up**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Research Orientations in Sociology</th>
<th>Positivist Sociology</th>
<th>Interpretive Sociology</th>
<th>Critical Sociology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is reality?</strong></td>
<td>Society is an orderly system. There is an objective reality “out there.”</td>
<td>Society is ongoing interaction. People construct reality as they attach meanings to their behaviour.</td>
<td>Society is patterns of inequality. Reality is that some categories of people dominate others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do we conduct research?</strong></td>
<td>Using a scientific orientation, the researcher carefully observes behaviour, gathering empirical, ideally quantitative, data. Researcher tries to be a neutral observer.</td>
<td>Seeking to look “deeper” than outward behaviour, the researcher focuses on subjective meaning. The researcher gathers qualitative data, discovering the subjective sense people make of their world. Researcher is a participant.</td>
<td>Seeking to go beyond positivism’s focus on studying the world as it is, the researcher is guided by politics and uses research as a strategy to bring about desired social change. Researcher is an activist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corresponding theoretical approach</strong></td>
<td>Structural-functional approach</td>
<td>Symbolic-interaction approach</td>
<td>Social-conflict approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender and Research

Identify the importance of gender in sociological research.

In recent years, sociologists have become aware that research is affected by gender, the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male. Margrit Eichler (1988) identifies five ways in which gender can shape research:

1. Androcentricity. Androcentricity (literally, “focus on the male”) means approaching an issue from a male perspective. Sometimes researchers act as if only men’s activities are important, ignoring what women do. For years, sociologists studying occupations focused on the paid labour of men and overlooked the housework and child care traditionally performed by women. Research that tries to explain human behaviour cannot ignore half of humanity.

Gynocentricity—seeing the world from a female perspective—can also limit good sociological investigation. However, in our male-dominated society, this problem arises less often.

2. Overgeneralizing. This problem occurs when sociologists gather data only from men but then use that information to draw conclusions about all people. For example, a researcher might speak to a handful of male public officials and then form conclusions about an entire community.

3. Gender blindness. Failing to consider gender at all is called gender blindness. The lives of men and women differ in many ways. A study of growing old in Canada might suffer from gender blindness if it overlooked the fact that most elderly men live with spouses but elderly women generally live alone.

4. Double standards. Researchers must be careful not to judge men and women by different standards. For example, a family researcher who labels a couple “man and wife” may define the man as the “head of the household” and treat him as important while assuming that the woman simply engages in family “support work.”

5. Interference. Another way gender can distort a study is if a subject reacts to the sex of the researcher, interfering with the research operation. While studying a small community in Sicily, for instance, Maureen Giovannini (1992) found that many men treated her as a woman rather than as a researcher. Some thought it inappropriate for an unmarried woman to speak privately with a man. Others denied Giovannini access to places they considered off-limits to women.

There is nothing wrong with focusing research on people of one sex or the other. But all sociologists, as well as people who read their work, should be mindful of how gender can affect an investigation.

Research Ethics

Discuss the importance of ethics to sociological research.

Like all other scientific investigators, sociologists must be aware that their work can harm as well as help subjects or communities. For this reason, the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) (2012)—the major professional association for sociologists in Canada—has established formal guidelines for conducting research.

Sociologists must try to be skilful and fair-minded in their work. They must disclose all research findings without omitting significant data. They should make their results available to other sociologists who may want to conduct a similar study.

Sociologists must also make sure that subjects taking part in a research project are not harmed, and they must stop their work right away if they suspect that any subject is at risk of
harm. Researchers are also required to protect the privacy of individuals involved in a research project, even if they come under pressure from authorities, such as the police or the courts, to release confidential information. Researchers must also get the informed consent of participants, which means that the subjects must fully understand their responsibilities and the risks that the research involves before agreeing to take part.

Another guideline concerns funding. Sociologists must include in their published results all sources of financial support. They must avoid accepting money from a source if there is any question of a conflict of interest. Researchers must never accept funding from any organization that seeks to influence the research results for its own purposes.

The federal government also plays a part in research ethics. Every Canadian college and university that seeks federal funding for research involving human subjects must have a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to ensure that the proposed research adheres to the guidelines stated in the second edition of *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC, 2014).

Finally, there are global dimensions to research ethics. Before beginning work in another country, an investigator must become familiar enough with that society to understand what people there are likely to regard as a violation of privacy or a source of personal danger. In a diverse society such as our own, the same rule applies to studying people whose cultural background differs from that of the researcher. The Thinking About Diversity box offers tips on the sensitivity outsiders should apply when studying Aboriginal communities in Canada.

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**What Do You Think?**

1. What are some likely consequences of researchers’ not being sensitive to the different histories and cultures of Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples?
2. What do researchers need to do to avoid these problems?
3. Discuss the research process with classmates from various cultural backgrounds. What similar or different concerns would be raised by these people when taking part in research?

Sources: CIHR (2007); CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC (2014).
Research Methods

1.9 Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.

A research method is a systematic plan for doing research. Four commonly used methods of sociological investigation are experiments, surveys, participant observation, and the use of existing data. None is better or worse than any other. Rather, just as a carpenter chooses a particular tool for a particular job, researchers select a method according to whom they want to study and what they want to learn.

Testing a Hypothesis: The Experiment

The experiment is a research method for investigating cause and effect under highly controlled conditions. Experiments closely follow the logic of science, testing a specific hypothesis, a statement of a possible relationship between two (or more) variables. A hypothesis is really an educated guess about how variables are linked, usually expressed as an if–then statement: If this particular thing were to happen, then that particular thing will result.

An experimenter gathers the evidence needed to reject or to not reject the hypothesis in four steps: (1) State which variable is the independent variable (the “cause” of the change) and which is the dependent variable (the “effect,” the thing that is changed). (2) Measure the initial value of the dependent variable. (3) Expose the dependent variable to the independent variable (the “cause” or “treatment”). (4) Measure the dependent variable again to see what change, if any, took place. If the expected change took place, the experiment supports the hypothesis; if not, the hypothesis must be modified.

Successful experiments depend on careful control of all factors that might affect what the experiment is trying to measure. Control is easiest in a research laboratory, but experiments in an everyday location—“in the field,” as sociologists say—have the advantage of letting researchers observe subjects in their natural settings.

Illustration of an Experiment: The “Stanford County Prison”

Prisons can be violent settings, but is this due simply to the “bad” people who end up there? Or, as Philip Zimbardo suspected, does prison itself somehow cause violent behaviour? To answer this question, Zimbardo devised a fascinating experiment that he called the “Stanford County Prison” (Zimbardo, 1972; Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

Zimbardo thought that once inside a prison, even emotionally healthy people are likely to engage in violence. So Zimbardo treated the prison setting as the independent variable capable of causing violence, the dependent variable.

To test this hypothesis, Zimbardo and his research team first constructed a realistic-looking “prison” in the basement of the psychology building on the campus of Stanford University in California. Then they placed an ad in a local newspaper, offering to pay young men to help with a two-week research project. To each of the 70 who responded they administered a series of physical and psychological tests and then selected the healthiest 24.

The next step was to assign randomly half of the men to be “prisoners” and half to be “guards.” The plan called for the guards and prisoners to spend the next two weeks in the mock prison. The prisoners began their part of the experiment when real police officers “arrested” them at their homes. After searching and handcuffing the men, the police drove them to the local police station, where they were fingerprinted. Then police transported their captives to the Stanford prison, where the guards locked them up. Zimbardo started his video camera and watched to see what would happen next.

The experiment turned into more than anyone had bargained for. Both guards and prisoners soon became embittered and hostile toward one another. Guards humiliated the prisoners by assigning them to jobs such as cleaning toilets with their bare hands. The prisoners resisted and insulted the guards. Within four days, the researchers had removed five prisoners who displayed “extreme emotional depression, crying, rage and acute anxiety” (Haney, Banks,
Before the end of the first week, the situation had become so bad that the researchers had to end the experiment. The events that unfolded at the “Stanford County Prison” supported Zimbardo’s hypothesis that prison violence is rooted in the social character of the jails themselves, not in the personalities of individual guards and prisoners. This finding raises questions about prisons, suggesting the need for some basic reforms. Zimbardo’s experiment also shows the potential of research to threaten the physical and mental well-being of subjects. Such dangers are not always as obvious as they were in this case. Therefore, researchers must carefully consider the potential harm to subjects at all stages of their work and halt any study, as Zimbardo did, if subjects suffer harm of any kind.

EVALUATE In carrying out the “Stanford County Prison” study, the researchers chose to do an experiment because they were interested in testing a hypothesis. In this case, Zimbardo and his colleagues wanted to find out if the prison setting itself (rather than the personalities of individual guards and prisoners) is the cause of prison violence. The fact that the “prison” erupted in violence—even when using guards and prisoners who had “healthy” profiles—supports their hypothesis.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How might Zimbardo’s findings help explain the abuse of a 16-year-old Somali boy in 1993 by two Canadian soldiers participating in the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Somalia or the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers after the 2003 invasion of Iraq?

Asking Questions: Survey Research

A survey is a research method in which subjects respond to a series of statements or questions on a questionnaire or in an interview. As the most widely used of all research methods, the survey is well suited to studying what cannot be observed directly, such as political attitudes or religious beliefs.

A survey targets some population, for example, unmarried mothers or adults living in rural Alberta. Sometimes every adult in the country is the survey population, as in polls taken during national political campaigns. Of course, contacting a vast number of people is all but impossible, so researchers usually study a sample, a much smaller number of subjects selected to represent the entire population. Surveys using samples of as few as 1,500 people commonly give accurate estimates of public opinion for the entire country.

Beyond selecting subjects, the survey must have a specific plan for asking questions and recording answers. The most common way to do this is to give subjects a questionnaire with a series of written statements or questions. Often the researcher lets subjects choose possible responses to each item, as on a multiple-choice test. Sometimes, though, a researcher may want subjects to respond freely to permit all opinions to be expressed. Of course, this free-form approach means that the researcher later has to make sense out of what can be a bewildering array of answers.

In an interview, a researcher personally asks subjects a series of questions, thereby solving one problem common to the questionnaire method: the failure of some subjects to return the questionnaire to the researcher. A further difference is that interviews give participants freedom to respond as they wish. Researchers often ask follow-up questions to clarify an answer or to probe a bit more deeply. In doing this, however, a researcher must avoid influencing the subject even in subtle ways, such as by raising an eyebrow as the subject offers an answer.

Illustration of Survey Research: Longitudinal Studies of Hidden Populations

How do you contact and stay in touch with research participants who are not members of mainstream society? Some individuals cannot be reached through a straightforward survey because they

Focus groups are a type of survey in which a small number of people representing a target population are asked for their opinions about some issue or product. Here a sociology professor asks students to evaluate textbooks for use in her introductory class.
belong to what academics call hard-to-reach or hidden populations (Spreen & Zwaagstra, 1994). Such populations share three main characteristics: (1) there is no known list of the members of the population; (2) acknowledgement of belonging to the group is threatening because membership involves fear of prosecution or of being the object of hate or scorn; and (3) members are distrustful of non-members, do whatever they can to avoid revealing their identities, and are likely to refuse to co-operate with outsiders or to give unreliable answers to questions about themselves and their networks. Intravenous drug users and those who trade sex for money are examples of two hidden populations. Yet the need for reliable research on the individuals who are members of these populations has become urgent, given public concern over high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), hepatitis, HIV infections, HIV transmission, and generally poor health status among these groups (Heckathorn, 1997).

One of the more powerful ways to understand health changes over time is to use a longitudinal research design and collect data from individuals repeatedly for as long as possible. But this again is problematic for studies of hidden populations, because members are unlikely to freely give their real names and reliable contact information.

Cecilia Benoit and Mikael Jansson, two of the authors of this text, are leading a research project in British Columbia that adopts a longitudinal design to better understand the causal links between youth marginalization, street involvement, and health. Youth qualify for the project based on their weak attachment to parents or guardians and the school system and their strong association with the street economy. They are interviewed twice in the first month of contact and then every few months for as long as they are willing to participate in the study (to a maximum of four years). Because of particular characteristics of this hidden population, combined with distrust of academics and others in positions of authority, several sampling techniques are being used to increase the probability of obtaining a reliable sample. Four non-profit community organizations are helping to establish respondent contact strategies to advertise the study and access the various subgroups of marginalized youth. The study is also widely advertised in shelters, drop-in centres, and other places that marginalized youth concentrate.

A final method of recruiting research participants is a technique known as respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn, 1997). The technique begins with a small number of research participants who serve as “seeds.” The seeds are given three recruitment coupons to hand to peers they believe may want to come forward for an interview (based on the rationale that reclusive participants are more likely to respond to the appeals of their peers). The seeds are paid a nominal fee for each peer who comes forward for an interview (paid at the seed’s third interview).

EVALUATE Cecilia Benoit and Mikael Jansson chose the survey as their method because they wanted to ask a lot of questions and gather information from their subjects. Certainly, some of the information they collected could have been obtained using a questionnaire. But they decided to carry out interviews because they are dealing with a complex and sensitive topic. Interacting with their subjects one on one for several hours, the researchers could put them at ease, discuss personal matters, and ask them follow-up questions.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING What strategies might researchers use to establish trust with populations that are skeptical of academics?

In the Field: Participant Observation

Participant observation is a research method in which investigators systematically observe people while joining them in their routine activities. This method lets researchers to study everyday social life in any natural setting, from a nightclub to a religious seminary. Cultural anthropologists use participant observation to study other societies, calling this method fieldwork and calling their research results an ethnography.

At the beginning of a field study, most researchers do not have a specific hypothesis in mind. In fact, they may not yet realize what the important questions will turn out to be. This makes most participant observation exploratory and descriptive, falling within interpretive
sociology and producing mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative, data. Compared with experiments and surveys, participant observation has few hard-and-fast rules. But this flexibility allows investigators to explore the unfamiliar and adapt to the unexpected.

Participant observers try to gain entry into a setting without disturbing the routine behaviour of others. Their role is twofold: To gain an insider’s viewpoint, they must become participants in the setting, “hanging out” for months or even years, trying to act, think, and even feel the same way as the people they are observing; at the same time, they must remain observers, standing back from the action and applying the sociological perspective to social patterns that others take for granted.

Because the personal impressions of a single researcher play such a central role, critics claim that participant observation falls short of scientific standards. Yet its personal approach is also its strength: Where a high-profile team of sociologists administering a formal survey might disrupt a setting, a sensitive participant observer often can gain important insight into people’s behaviour.

Illustration of Participant Observation: Street Corner Society

Did you ever wonder what everyday life was like in an unfamiliar neighbourhood? In the late 1930s, a young graduate student at Harvard University named William Foote Whyte (1914–2000) set out to study social life in a rather rundown section of Boston. His curiosity led him to carry out four years of participant observation in this neighbourhood, which he called “Cornerville.”

At the time, Cornerville was home to first- and second-generation Italian immigrants, many of whom were poor. Many Bostonians considered Cornerville a place to avoid: a slum inhabited by criminals. Wanting to learn the truth, Whyte set out to discover for himself exactly what life was like inside this community. His celebrated book, *Street Corner Society* (1981, orig. 1943), describes Cornerville as a community with its own code of values, complex social patterns, and particular social conflicts.

To start, Whyte considered a range of research methods. He could have taken questionnaires to one of Cornerville’s community centres and asked local people to fill them out. Or he could have invited members of the community to come to his Harvard office for interviews. But it is easy to see that such formal strategies would have gained little co-operation from the local people and produced few insights. Whyte decided, therefore, to ease into Cornerville life and slowly build a personal understanding of this rather mysterious place.

Right away, Whyte discovered the challenges of even getting started in field research. As an upper-middle-class WASP graduate student from Harvard, he stood out on the streets of Cornerville. Even a friendly overture from such an outsider could seem pushy and rude. Early on, Whyte dropped in at a local bar, hoping to buy a woman a drink and encourage her to talk about Cornerville. Looking around the room, he could find no woman alone. He thought he might have an opportunity when he saw a man sit down with two women. He walked over and asked, “Pardon me. Would you mind if I joined you?” Instantly, Whyte realized his mistake:

There was a moment of silence while the man stared at me. Then he offered to throw me down the stairs. I assured him that this would not be necessary, and demonstrated as much by walking right out of there without any assistance. (1981:289)

As this incident suggests, gaining entry to a community is the vital (and sometimes hazardous) first step in field research. “Breaking in” requires patience, ingenuity, and a little luck. Whyte’s big break came in the form of a young man named “Doc,” whom he met in a local social service agency. Whyte complained to Doc about how hard it was to make friends in Cornerville. Doc responded by taking Whyte under his wing and introducing him to others in the community. With Doc’s help, Whyte soon became a neighbourhood regular.
Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

Youth Marginalization, Street Involvement and Health: Using Tables in Research

A table provides a lot of information in a small amount of space, so learning to read tables can increase your reading efficiency. When you spot a table, look first at the title to see what information it contains. The title of the table below tells you that the table presents characteristics of a representative sample of all youth in Victoria, British Columbia, and also a group of street-involved youth in Victoria.

Across the top of the table, you will see that the first column lists the characteristics described in the middle column for the representative sample of all youth and in the third column for the street-involved youth. Reading down each column, note the categories within each variable; even though the percentages in each column add up to a number very close to 100, they do not total exactly 100 percent because of rounding errors.

Starting at the top left, we see that the youth in both samples are aged 14 through 18 and that the street-involved youth are a little older than the random sample since there are almost three times as many 18-year-olds (27 percent) as there are 14-year-olds (10 percent) in the street-involved youth sample. Moving down the table, we see that there are slightly more females than males in both samples.

The two groups of youth differ quite markedly in the remaining three characteristics displayed. First, there are many more youth in the street-involved youth sample who claim an Aboriginal background (31 percent) than do so in the random sample (2 percent). Second, the youth in the two groups have very different sexual orientation, since 59 percent of street-involved youth labelled themselves heterosexual compared to 88 percent of youth in the random sample.

But the biggest differences between these two groups of youth is found in the third remaining group of percentages that shows who the youth lived with while they were 12 years old. While 62 percent of youth in the random sample lived with both biological parents throughout that year, only 15 percent of street-involved youth did so. Remarkable also is the high number of street-involved youth who lived the whole year before they became teenagers with foster parents (7 percent).

What Do You Think?
1. Why are statistical data, such as those in this table, an efficient way to convey a lot of information?
2. Looking at the table, how do you think the future life course of these two groups of youth will differ? Explain.

3. Do you see any ways in which this group of street-involved youth in Victoria may differ from marginalized youth in other areas of Canada? If so, what are they?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Random Sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Situation While 12 Years Old</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both biological parents</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother only</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and partner</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father only</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parents</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These percentages are calculated based on original data collected by Cecilia Benoit and Mikael Jansson in Victoria, British Columbia, from two groups of youth. The first is a group of 484 youth who were randomly selected and the second consists of 164 street-involved youth.

Whyte’s friendship with Doc illustrates the importance of a key informant in field research. Such people not only introduce a researcher to a community but often remain a source of information and help. But using a key informant also has its risks. Because any person has a particular circle of friends, a key informant’s guidance is certain to “spin” the study in one way...
or another. Moreover, in the eyes of others, the reputation of the key informant, for better or worse, usually rubs off on the investigator. So although a key informant is helpful early on, a participant observer must seek a broader range of contacts.

Having entered the Cornerville world, Whyte quickly learned another lesson: A field researcher needs to know when to speak and when to shut up. One evening, Whyte joined a group discussing neighbourhood gambling. Wanting to get the facts straight, he asked innocently, “I suppose the cops were all paid off?”

The gambler’s jaw dropped. He glared at me. Then he denied vehemently that any policeman had been paid off and immediately switched the conversation to another subject. For the rest of that evening I felt very uncomfortable. The next day, Doc offered some sound advice:

“Go easy on that ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘why,’ ‘when,’ ‘where’ stuff, Bill. You ask those questions and people will clam up on you. If people accept you, you can just hang around, and you’ll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions.” (1981:303)

In the months and years that followed, Whyte became familiar with everyday life in Cornerville, married a local woman, and learned that the common stereotypes were wrong. In Cornerville, most people worked hard, many were quite successful, and some even boasted of sending children to college. Even today, Whyte’s book makes for fascinating reading about the deeds, dreams, and disappointments of immigrants and their children living in one ethnic community, and it contains the rich detail that can only come from years of participant observation.

EVALUATE To study the community he called “Cornerville,” William Whyte chose participant observation—a good choice because he did not have a specific hypothesis to test, nor did he know at the outset what questions he would ask. By living in the community for several years, Whyte was able to paint a complex picture of its social life.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING Give an example of topics for sociological research that would be best studied using (1) an experiment, (2) a survey, and (3) participant observation.

Using Available Data: Existing Sources

Not all research requires investigators to collect new data. Sometimes sociologists make use of existing sources, a research method in which a researcher uses data already collected by others.

The data most widely used by researchers are gathered by government agencies such as Statistics Canada. Every five years, Statistics Canada conducts a census of all Canadian households, mailing forms to each address. While historically the response rate has been quite high (it was 93.5 percent for the 2006 Census), the rate fell to 69.3 percent in 2011. What might explain the drop? Many academics, library organizations, think tanks, and members of the business community agree that the change, which significantly lowers the validity of the data, has to do with the government’s elimination of the mandatory long form census, last used in 2006. The voluntary National Household Survey (NHS), which came to replace it, fails to include 1,128 Canadian subdivisions. National Map 1–1 on page XX provides a look at the share of census subdivisions in the Greater Toronto Area that filled out and returned their information forms as part of the 2011 National Household Survey.
Data about other nations in the world are found in various publications of the United Nations and the World Bank. In short, data about the whole world are as close as your library or the internet.

Using available information saves time and money. This method has special appeal to sociologists with low budgets. And in fact, government data are usually more extensive and more accurate than what most researchers could obtain on their own.

But using available data, as we noted above, has problems of its own. Data may not be available in the exact form that is needed. For example, you may be able to find the average salaries paid to professors at your school but not separate figures for the amounts paid to women and men. Further, there are always questions about how accurate the existing data are. In his nineteenth-century study of suicide, described earlier, Emile Durkheim used official records. But Durkheim had no way to know if a death classified as a suicide was really an accident or vice versa.

Illustration of the Use of Existing Sources: Studying Media Narratives

Media representations of human activity constitute an important source of data. Academic analysis of media’s place in the production and reproduction of dominant ideas, meanings,
and values has been greatly influenced by the work of sociologist Stuart Hall (1978) and other contributors to the field of cultural studies (Pateman, 1988; Sacks, 1996; Kitzinger, 2000; Watkins & Emerson, 2000). These approaches to media illustrate how the transmission of social knowledge changes over time.

Because media representations of key social categories such as gender, class, race, and sexuality are important loci of self and personal identity construction (Seale, 2003), unfavourable media stories can negatively affect a person’s sense of self and emotional well-being, whether or not these stories are actually true. In addition, contemporary media create social understanding between spatially distanced or socially segregated groups. The standard images found in the media become taken as truth unless the audience has the empirical knowledge to reject them. Thus, in the absence of personal experience with, for example, members of ethnic and visible minorities (Ungerleider, 1991), media stories can serve as key cultural sites where negative labels are created and taken up by the majority of citizens.

Hallgrimsdottir, Phillips, and Benoit (2006) compared media stories of people who work in the sex industry with these individuals’ self-reports of their personal backgrounds and experiences of what they do for a living. The authors aimed to describe the level of similarity between media depictions of sex workers and their own description of their lives. The authors relied on two different kinds of data. First, they analyzed the print media discussion of the sex industry in one metropolitan region of Canada, the capital metropolitan region of Victoria, British Columbia. In doing so, they focused on the years 1980 to 2004 in a single regional daily newspaper, the Victoria Times Colonist. Articles of newspaper coverage of sex industry–related work were located using both a computerized and a paper subject index. Each article was analyzed in terms of both explicit and embedded content to generate a long list of themes. These themes were subsequently collapsed into a series of narrative categories and, in a final reading of the data, each article was assigned once to a single category. Second, the authors compared these media narratives with the self-reported experiences of sex workers—their background and personal lives, work experiences, and health and well-being—in the same city and over a comparable time period (Benoit & Millar, 2001).

Not surprisingly, the researchers found that most media narratives of the sex industry were not reflected in the personal stories of sex workers themselves. The interview data showed instead that media narratives follow relatively rigid and standardized cultural scripts in which individuals in the sex industry are presented as having poor moral character and who break the law, cause social disruption, and spread contagious diseases. These cultural scripts organized the media narratives by directing what was included as newsworthy and what was left out of news accounts. The researchers also found that the contents of these cultural scripts can be used to understand how stigma is reproduced in our society.

Summing Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Research Methods</th>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Participant Observation</th>
<th>Existing Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application</strong></td>
<td>For explanatory research that specifies relationships between variables</td>
<td>For gathering information about issues that cannot be directly observed, such as attitudes and values</td>
<td>For exploratory and descriptive study of people in a “natural” setting</td>
<td>For exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research whenever suitable data are available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generates quantitative data</td>
<td>Useful for descriptive and explanatory research</td>
<td>Generates qualitative data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td>Provides the greatest opportunity to specify cause-and-effect relationships</td>
<td>Sampling, using questionnaires, allows surveys of large populations. Interviews provide in-depth responses</td>
<td>Allows study of “natural” behaviour</td>
<td>Saves time and expense of data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replication of research is relatively easy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Usually inexpensive</td>
<td>Makes historical research possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitations</strong></td>
<td>Laboratory settings have an artificial quality</td>
<td>Questionnaires must be carefully prepared and may yield a low return rate</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
<td>Researcher has no control over possible biases in data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unless the research environment is carefully controlled, results may be biased</td>
<td>Interviews are expensive and time-consuming</td>
<td>Replication of research is difficult</td>
<td>Data may only partially fit current research needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher must balance roles of participant and observer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATE  The main reason why Hallgrimsdottir and colleagues chose to use existing media sources is that they provided a context for understanding the interview data. Using existing sources alone can sometimes be problematic because they were not created with the purpose of answering sociologists’ questions. For this reason, using such documents requires a critical eye and a good deal of creative thinking.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING  What other questions about the media and human activity might you wish to answer using existing sources?

Putting It All Together: Ten Steps in Sociological Research

Recall the 10 important steps in carrying out sociological research.

The following 10 questions will guide you through a research project in sociology:

1. **What is your topic?** Being curious and using the sociological perspective can generate ideas for social research at any time and in any place. Pick a topic you find interesting and that you think is important to study.

2. **What have others already learned?** You are probably not the first person with an interest in some issue. Visit the library and search the internet to see what theories and methods other researchers have applied to your topic. In reviewing the existing research, note problems that have come up to avoid repeating past mistakes.

3. **What, exactly, are your questions?** Are you seeking to explore an unfamiliar social setting? To describe some category of people? To investigate cause and effect among variables? Clearly state the goals of your research, and operationalize all variables.

4. **What will you need to carry out research?** How much time and money are available to you? What special equipment or skills does the research require? Can you do all of the work yourself?

5. **Are there ethical concerns?** Might the research harm anyone? How can you minimize the chances for injury? Will you promise your subjects anonymity? If so, how will you ensure that anonymity will be maintained?

6. **What method will you use?** Consider all major research strategies and combinations of methods. The most suitable method will depend on the kinds of questions you are asking and the resources available to you.

7. **How will you record the data?** The research method you use guides your data collection. Be sure to record information accurately and in a way that will make sense to you later on (it may be months before you write up the results of your work). Watch out for any personal bias that may creep into your work.

8. **What do the data tell you?** Determine what the data say about your initial questions. If your study involves a specific hypothesis, you should be able to confirm, reject, or modify it on the basis of your findings. Keep in mind that there will be several ways to interpret your results, depending on the theoretical approach you apply, and you should consider them all.

The Controversy & Debate box discusses the use of the sociological perspective and reviews many of the ideas presented in this chapter. This box will help you apply what you have learned to the important question of how the generalizations made by sociologists differ from the common stereotypes we hear every day.
Controversy & Debate

Is Sociology Nothing More Than Stereotypes?

Jena: (raising her eyes from her notebook) Today, in sociology class, we talked about stereotypes.

Marcia: (trying to focus on her science lab) OK, here’s one: Roommates don’t like to be disturbed when they’re studying.

Jena: Seriously, my studious friend, we all have stereotypes, even professors.

Marcia: (becoming faintly interested) Like what?

Jena: Professor Chandler said today in class that Protestants are most likely to kill themselves. And later Yannina—this girl from, I think, Ecuador—said something like “You Canadians are rich, but you don’t take marriage seriously, and you love to divorce!”

Marcia: My brother said to me last week that “everybody knows you have to be Black to play professional basketball.” Now there’s a stereotype!

Students, like everyone else, are quick to make generalizations about people. As this chapter explains, sociologists, too, love to generalize by looking for social patterns in everyday life. However, beginning students of sociology may wonder if sociological generalizations aren’t really the same thing as stereotypes. For example, are the statements reported by Jena and Marcia true generalizations or false stereotypes?

A stereotype is a simplified description applied to every person in some category. Each of the statements the students made is a stereotype that is false, for three reasons. First, rather than describing averages, each statement describes every person in some category in exactly the same way; second, even though many stereotypes often contain an element of truth, each of these three statements leaves out relevant facts and distorts reality; and third, each statement is motivated by bias, spoken more as a put-down than as a fair-minded observation.

Good sociology makes generalizations, but they must meet three conditions. First, sociologists do not carelessly apply any generalization to everyone in a category. Second, sociologists make sure that a generalization squares with all available facts. And third, sociologists make generalizations fair-mindedly, in the interest of getting at the truth.

Jena remembered her professor saying (although not in quite the same words) that the suicide rate among Protestants is higher than among Catholics or Jews. Based on information presented earlier in this chapter, that is a true statement. However, the way Jena incorrectly reported the classroom remark—“If you’re a Protestant, you’re likely to kill yourself”—is not good sociology. It is not a true generalization because the vast majority of Protestants do no such thing. It would be just as wrong to jump to the conclusion that a particular friend, because he is a Protestant male, is about to end his own life. (Imagine refusing to lend money to a roommate who happens to be an Anglican, explaining, “Well, given the way people like you commit suicide, I might never get paid back!”)

Second, sociologists shape their generalizations to available facts. A more factual version of the statement Yannina made is that while by world standards the Canadian population has a very high standard of living, almost everyone in our society does marry at some point with every intention of staying married, with only few people taking pleasure in divorcing.

Third, sociologists try to be fair-minded and want to get at the truth. The statement made by Marcia’s brother about African Americans and basketball is a stereotype and therefore not good sociology for two reasons. First, as stated it is simply not true, and second, it seems motivated by racial bias rather than truth-seeking.

The bottom line, then, is that good sociological generalizations are not the same as stereotyping. But a sociology course is an excellent setting for getting at the truths behind common stereotypes. The classroom encourages discussion and offers the factual information you need to decide whether a particular statement is a valid sociological generalization or a harmful or unfair stereotype.

What Do You Think?

1. Can you think of a common stereotype of sociologists? What is it? After reading this box, do you still think it is valid?

2. Do you think taking a sociology course can help correct people’s stereotypes? Why or why not?

3. Can you think of a stereotype of your own that might be challenged by sociological analysis?
Why do couples marry?

We asked this question at the beginning of this chapter. The common sense answer is that people marry because they are in love. But as this chapter has explained, society guides our everyday lives, affecting what we do, think, and feel. Look at the three photographs, each showing a couple that, we can assume, is “in love.” In each case, can you provide some of the rest of the story? By looking at the categories that the people involved represent, explain how society is at work in bringing the two people together.

In 2011, American actress Eva Mendes began dating her co-star, Canadian actor, Ryan Gosling. Mendes gave birth to their first child in 2014. Looking at this common-law couple, what social patterns do you see?
HINT Society is at work on many levels. Consider (1) rules about same-sex and other-sex marriage, (2) laws defining the categories of people whom one may marry, (3) the importance of race and ethnicity, (4) the importance of social class, (5) the importance of age, and (6) the importance of social exchange (what each partner offers the other). All societies enforce various rules that state who should or should not marry whom.

In 1997, during the fourth season of her hit TV show, *Ellen*, Ellen DeGeneres “came out” as a lesbian, which put her on the cover of *Time* magazine. Since then, she has been an activist on behalf of gay and lesbian issues. Following California’s brief legalization of same-sex marriage in 2008, she married her long-time girlfriend, Australian actress Portia de Rossi.

In 1980, when she was 12 years old, singer Celine Dion met her manager, René Angélil, who is 26 years her senior. The couple married in 1994. What social patterns do you see in this relationship?

**Applying Sociology in Your Everyday Life**

1. Analyze the marriages of your parents, other family members, and friends in terms of class, race, age, and other factors. What evidence can you find that society guides the feelings that we call “love”?

2. Go to MySocLab and click on the Student Resources link to access the Sociology in Focus blog, where you can read the latest posts by a team of young sociologists who apply the sociological perspective to topics of popular culture.

3. As this chapter has explained, the time in human history when we are born, the society in which we are born, as well as our class position, race, and gender all shape the personal experiences we have throughout our lives. Does this mean we have no power over our own destiny? No, in fact, the more we understand how society works, the more power we have to shape our own lives. Go to the “Seeing Sociology in Your Everyday Life” feature in MySocLab to learn more about how the material in this chapter can help deepen your understanding of yourself and others around you so that you can more effectively pursue your life goals. A second feature shows ways that what you have learned about sociological research enhances your ability for critical thinking.
What is the Sociological Perspective?

1.1 Explain how the sociological perspective helps us understand that society shapes our individual lives. (pages 4–8)

The sociological perspective reveals the power of society to shape individual lives.

- C. Wright Mills called this point of view the “sociological imagination,” which transforms personal troubles into public issues.
- Being an outsider or experiencing a social crisis encourages the sociological perspective.

The Importance of a Global Perspective

1.2 State several reasons that a global perspective is important in today’s world. (pages 8–11)

Global awareness is an important part of the sociological perspective because

- where we live shapes the lives we lead.
- societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected.
- what happens in the rest of the world affects life here in Canada.
- many social problems that we face in Canada are far more serious elsewhere.
- thinking globally helps us learn more about ourselves.

Applying the Sociological Perspective

1.3 Identify the advantages of sociological thinking for developing public policy, for encouraging personal growth, and for advancing in a career. (pages 11–12)

The sociological perspective

- is used by government agencies when developing laws and regulations that guide how people in communities live and work.
- helps us understand the barriers and opportunities in our lives.
- is an advantage in many fields of work that involve working with people.

Origins of Sociology

1.4 Link the origins of sociology to historical social changes. (pages 12–14)

Rapid social change helped trigger the development of sociology:

- rise of an industrial economy
- explosive growth of cities
- new political ideas.

Auguste Comte named the discipline of sociology in 1838.

- Early philosophers had tried to describe the ideal society, but Comte wanted to understand society as it really is.
- Karl Marx and many later sociologists used sociology to try to make society better.

Sociological Theory

1.5 Summarize sociology’s major theoretical approaches. (pages 14–19)

macro-level The structural-functional approach explores how social structures work together to help society operate.

- Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, and Herbert Spencer helped develop the structural-functional approach.

The social-conflict approach shows how inequality creates conflict and causes change.

- Two important types of conflict analysis are gender-conflict theory, which is also called feminist theory, and race-conflict theory.
• Karl Marx helped develop the social-conflict approach.
• Max Weber and George Herbert Mead helped develop the social-interaction approach.

Three Ways to Do Sociology

**1.6 Describe sociology’s three research orientations.** (pages 19–27)

**Positivist sociology** uses the logic of science.
- tries to establish cause and effect
- demands that researchers try to be objective
- is loosely linked to structural-functional theory

**Interpretive sociology** focuses on the meanings people attach to behaviour.
- people construct reality in their everyday lives.
- Weber’s *Verstehen* is learning how people understand their world.
- is linked to symbolic-interaction theory

**Critical sociology** uses research to bring about social change.
- focuses on inequality
- rejects the principle of objectivity, claiming that all research is political
- is linked to social-conflict theory

**Gender and Research**

**1.7 Identify the importance of gender in sociological research.** (pages 27–28)

Gender can affect sociological research if a researcher fails to avoid problems of androcentricity, overgeneralizing, gender blindness, double standards, or interference.

**Research Ethics**

**1.8 Discuss the importance of ethics to sociological research.** (pages 28–29)

Sociologists must ensure that subjects in a research project are not harmed, and include in their published results all sources of financial support.

**Methods: Strategies for Doing Research**

**1.9 Explain why a researcher might choose each of sociology’s research methods.** (pages 29–38)

- The **experiment** allows researchers to study cause and effect between two or more variables in a controlled setting.
- **Survey** research uses questionnaires or interviews to gather subjects’ responses to a series of questions.
- Through **participant observation**, researchers join with people in a social setting for an extended period of time.
- Researchers use data collected by others from **existing sources** to save time and money.

**Putting It All Together: Ten Steps in Sociological Research**

**1.10 Recall the 10 important steps in carrying out sociological research.** (pages 38–39)

- **step by step**, researchers use data collected by others from **existing sources** to save time and money.
- **Ethics** is a key consideration in all research.
- **Hypothesis** is a statement of a possible relationship between two (or more) variables.
- **Experiment** is a research method for investigating cause and effect under highly controlled conditions.
- **Survey** is a research method in which subjects respond to a series of statements or questions on a questionnaire or in an interview.
- **Participatory action** is a research method in which investigators systematically observe people while joining them in their routine activities.

**Key Terms**

- **Gender** the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male
- **Stereotype** a simplified description applied to every person in some category