

Think About It	
Self and Inner Circle	How can sociology help me understand my own life and my sense of self?
Local Community	How can sociology help me to be a more effective employee and citizen in my community?
National Institutions; Complex Organizations; Ethnic Groups	How do sociologists help us understand and even improve our lives in families, classrooms, and health care offices?
National Society	How do national loyalty and national policies affect my life?
Global Community	How might global events affect my life?

It may win the prize for the strangest place to get a back massage,” but according to a recent scientific article, twins do a good deal of it (Weaver 2010). Scientists studied the movement of five pairs of twin fetuses using ultrasonography, a technique that visualizes internal body structures. By the fourth month of gestation, twin fetuses begin reaching for their “womb-mates,” and by 18 weeks, they spend more time touching their neighbors than themselves or the walls of the uterus. Fetuses that have single-womb occupancy tend to touch the walls of the uterus a good deal to make contact with the mother. Nearly 30% of the movement of twins was directed toward their companions. Movements toward the partner, such as stroking the back of the head, are more sustained and more precise than movements toward themselves, such as touching their own mouths or other facial features. As the authors

put it, they’re “wired to be social” (Castiello et al. 2010). In short, humans are innately social creatures.

Strange as it may seem, the social world is not merely something that exists outside of us. As the twins illustrate, the social world is also something we carry inside of us. We are part of it, we reflect on it, and we are influenced by it, even when we are alone. The patterns of the social world engulf us in ways both subtle and obvious, with profound implications for how we create order and meaning in our lives.

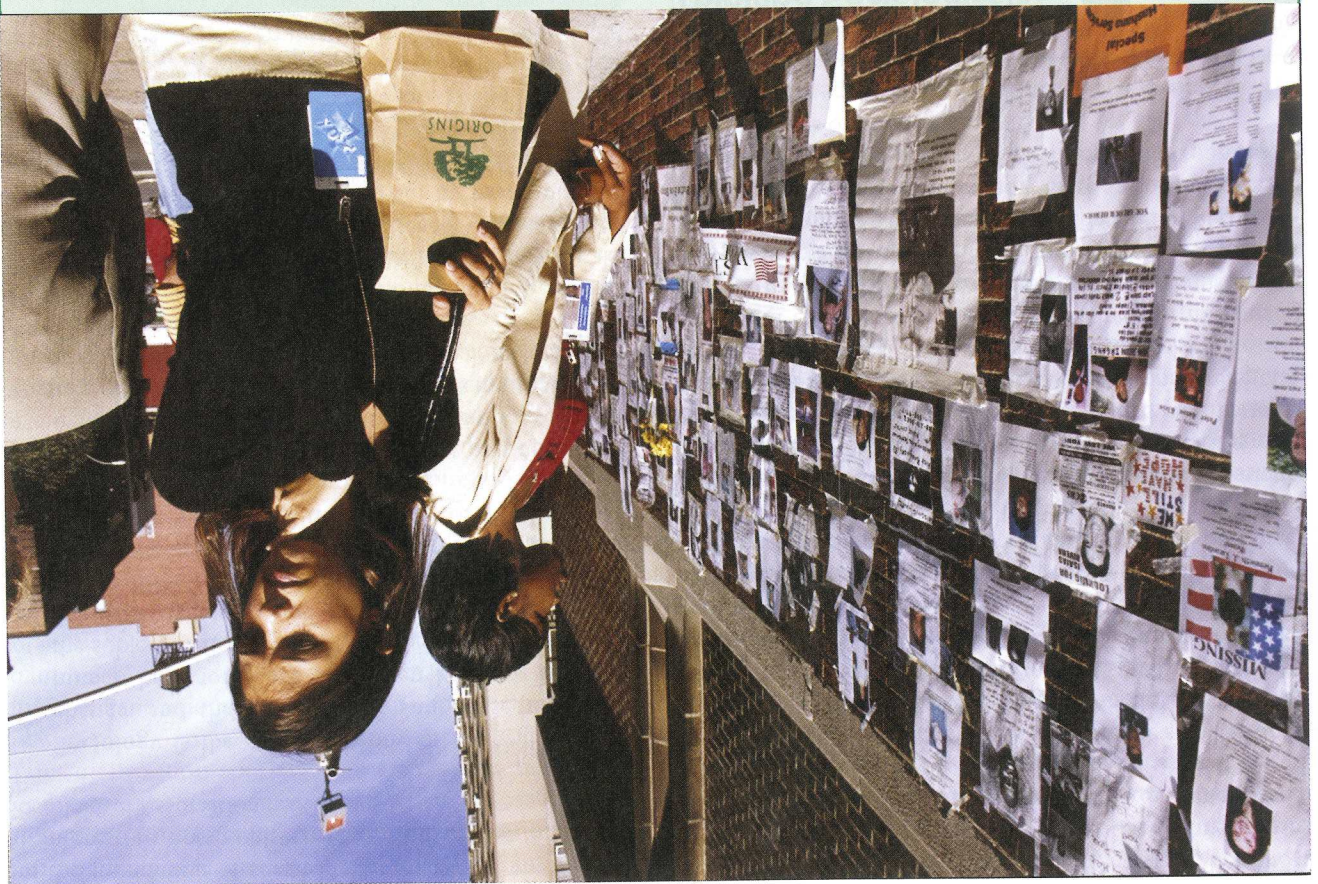
Sometimes it takes a dramatic and shocking event for us to realize just how deeply embedded we are in a social world that we take for granted. “It couldn’t happen in the United States,” read typical world newspaper accounts. “This is something you see in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East, Central Africa, and other war-torn areas. . . . It’s hard to imagine this happening in the economic center of the United States.” Yet on September 11, 2001, shortly after 9 A.M., a commercial airliner crashed into a New York City skyscraper, followed a short while later by another plummeting into the paired tower, causing this mighty symbol of financial wealth—the World Trade Center—to collapse. After the dust settled and the rescue crews finished their gruesome work, nearly 3,000 people were dead or unaccounted for. The world as we knew it changed forever that day. This event taught U.S. citizens how integrally connected they are with the international community.

Following the events of September 11, the United States launched its highly publicized War on Terror, and many terrorist strongholds and training camps were destroyed. Still, troubling questions remain unanswered. Why did this extremist act occur? How can such actions be deterred in the future? How do the survivors recover from such a horrific event? Why was this event so completely disorienting to Americans and to the world community? These terrorist acts horrified people because they were unpredicted and unexpected in a normally predictable world. They violated the rules that foster our connections to one another. They also brought attention to the discontent and disconnectedness that lie under the surface in many societies—discontent that expressed itself in hateful violence. That discontent and hostility is likely to continue until the root causes are addressed.

Terrorist acts represent a rejection of modern civil society (Smith 1994). The terrorists themselves see their acts as



Within hours after their birth in October 2010, Jackson and Audrey Pietrykowski became highly fussy if the nurses tried to put them in separate bassinets. At one point shortly after birth, both babies were put in a warmer, and Jackson cried until he found Audrey, proceeding to intertwine his arms and legs with hers. Twins, like all humans, are hardwired to be social and in relationships with others.



These signs were put up right after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center by people looking for missing loved ones. The experience of New Yorkers was alarm, fear, grief, and confusion—precisely the emotions that the terrorists sought to create. Terrorism disrupts normal social life and daily routines and undermines security. It provides an effective tool for those with no power.

justifiable, but few outside their inner circle can sympathize with their behavior. When terrorist acts occur, we struggle to fit such events into our mental picture of a just, safe, comfortable, and predictable social world. The events of September 11 forced U.S. citizens to realize that, although they may see a great diversity among themselves, people in other parts of the world view them as all the same. U.S. citizens may also be despised for what they represent, as perceived by others. In other words, terrorists view U.S. citizens as intimately connected. For many U.S. citizens, their sense of loyalty to the nation was deeply stirred by the events of 9/11. Patriotism abounded. So, in fact, the nation's people became more connected as a reaction to an act against the United States.

Most of the time, we live with social patterns that we take for granted as routine, ordinary, and expected. These social patterns, or social facts, characterize social groups. The social expectations are external to each individual (unlike motivations or drives), but they still guide (or constrain) our behaviors and thoughts. Without shared expectations between humans about proper patterns of behavior, life would be chaotic. Connections require some

What Is Sociology?

basic rules of interaction, and these rules create routine and anyone live in society if there were no rules?

This first chapter examines the social ties that make up our social world, as well as sociology's focus on those ties. We will learn what sociology is and why it is valuable to study it; how sociologists view the social world and what they do; how studying sociology can help us in our everyday life; and how the social world model is used to present the topics we will study throughout this book.

Whether we are in a coffee shop, in a classroom, in a dining hall, at a party, in our residence hall, at work, or within our home, we interact with other people. Such interactions

are the foundation of social life, and they are the subject of interest to sociologists. According to the American Sociological Association (2002),

Sociology is the scientific study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob; from organized crime to religious cults; from the divisions of race, gender, and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture; and from the sociology of work to the sociology of sports. (p. 1)

As we shall see, sociology is relevant and applicable to our lives in many ways. Sociologists conduct scientific research on social relationships and problems that range from tiny groups of two people to national societies and global social networks.

Unlike the discipline of psychology, which focuses on attributes, motivations, and behaviors of individuals, sociology tends to focus on group patterns. Whereas a psychologist might try to explain behavior by examining the personality traits of individuals, a sociologist would examine the position of different people within the group and how positions influence what people do. Sociologists seek to analyze and explain why people interact with others and belong to groups, how groups work, who has power and who does not, how decisions are made, and how groups deal with conflict and change. From the early beginnings of their discipline (discussed in Chapter 2), sociologists have

asked questions about the rules that govern group behavior; about the causes of social problems, such as child abuse, crime, and poverty; and about why nations declare war and kill each other's citizens.

Two-person interactions—*dyads*—are the smallest units sociologists study. Examples of dyads include roommates discussing their classes, a professor and student going over an assignment, a husband and wife negotiating their budget, and two children playing. Next in size are small groups consisting of three or more interacting people—a family, a neighborhood or peer group, a classroom, a work group, or a street gang. Then come increasingly larger groups—organizations such as sports or scouting clubs, neighborhood associations, and local religious congregations. Among the largest groups contained within nations are ethnic groups and national organizations, including economic, educational, religious, health, and political systems. Nations themselves are still larger and can sometimes involve hundreds of millions of people. In the past several decades, social scientists have also pointed to globalization, the process by which the entire world is becoming a single interdependent entity. Of particular interest to sociologists are how these various groups are organized, how they function, why they conflict, and how they influence one another.

Thinking Sociologically



Identify several dyads, small groups, and large organizations to which you belong. Did you choose to belong, or were you born into membership in the group? How does each group influence decisions you make?

Underlying Ideas in Sociology

All sciences rest on certain fundamental ideas or principles. The idea that one action can cause something else is a core idea in all science—for example, that heavy drinking before driving might cause an automobile accident. Sociology is based on several principles that sociologists take for granted about the social world. These ideas about humans and social life are supported by considerable evidence, but they are no longer matters of debate or controversy—they are assumed at this point to be true. Understanding these core principles helps us see how sociologists approach the study of people in groups.

People are social by nature. This means that humans seek contact with other humans, interact with each other, and influence and are influenced by the behaviors of one another. Furthermore, humans need groups to survive. Although a few individuals may become socially isolated



An athletic team teaches members to interact, cooperate, develop awareness of the power of others, and deal with conflict. Here, children experience ordered interaction in the competitive environment of a football game. What values, skills, attitudes, and assumptions about life and social interaction do you think these young boys are learning?

racial superiority. Consider for a moment some events that have captured media attention, and ask yourself questions about these events: Why do some families remain poor generation after generation? Are kids from certain kinds of neighborhoods more likely to get into trouble with the law than kids from other neighborhoods? Why do political, religious, and ethnic conflicts exist in the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, the Middle East, and other areas? Our answers to such questions reflect our beliefs and assumptions about the social world. These assumptions often are based on our experiences, our judgments about what our friends and family believe, what we have read or viewed on television, and common stereotypes, which are rigid beliefs, often untested and unfounded, about a group or a category of people.

Common sense refers to ideas that are so completely taken for granted that they have never been seriously questioned and seem to be sensible to any reasonable person. Commonsense interpretations based on personal experience are an important means of processing information and deciding on a course of action. Although all of us



An East German border guard shakes hands with a West German woman through a hole in the Berlin Wall. Although their governments were hostile to one another, the people themselves often had very different sentiments toward those on the other side of the divide.

as adults, they could not have reached adulthood without sustained interactions with others. The central point here is that we become who we are because other people and groups constantly influence us.

People live much of their lives belonging to social groups. It is in social groups that we interact, learn to share goals and to cooperate, develop identities, obtain power, and have conflicts. Our individual beliefs and behaviors, our experiences, our observations, and the problems we face are derived from connections to our social groups.

Interaction between the individual and the group is a two-way process in which each influences the other. Individuals can influence the shape and direction of groups; groups provide the rules and the expected behaviors for individuals.

Recurrent social patterns, ordered behavior, shared expectations, and common understandings among people characterize groups. A degree of continuity and recurrent behavior is present in human interactions, whether in small groups, large organizations, or society.

The processes of conflict and change are natural and inevitable features of groups and societies. No group can remain stagnant and hope to perpetuate itself. To survive, groups must adapt to changes in the social and physical environment. Rapid change often comes at a price. It can lead to conflict within a society—between traditional and new ideas and between groups that have vested interests in particular ways of doing things. Rapid change can give rise to protest activities, changing in a controversial direction or failing to change fast enough can spark conflict, including revolution. The collapse of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the violence of citizens against what some saw as a corrupt election in Kenya illustrate the demand for change that can spring from citizens' discontent with corrupt or authoritarian rule.

As you read this book, keep in mind these basic ideas that form the foundation of sociological analysis: People are social; they live and carry out activities largely in groups; interaction influences both individual and group behavior; people share common behavior patterns and expectations; and processes such as change and conflict are always present. In several important ways, sociological understandings differ from our everyday views of the social world and provide new lenses for looking at our social world.

Sociology Versus Common Sense

Human tragedy can result from inaccurate commonsense beliefs. For example, both the Nazi genocide and the existence of slavery have their roots in false beliefs about

hold such ideas and assumptions, that does not mean they are accurate. Sociologists assume human behavior can be studied scientifically; they use scientific methods to test the accuracy of commonsense beliefs and ideas about human

behavior and the social world. Would our commonsense notions about the social world be reinforced or rejected if examined with scientifically gathered information? Many commonsense notions are actually contradictory:

Birds of a feather flock together
Absence makes the heart grow fonder
Look before you leap
You can't teach an old dog new tricks
Above all to thine own self be true
Variety is the spice of life
Two heads are better than one
You can't tell a book by its cover
Haste makes waste
There's no place like home

Opposites attract
Out of sight, out of mind
He who hesitates is lost
It's never too late to learn
When in Rome, do as the Romans do
Never change horses in midstream
If you want something done right, do it yourself
The clothes make the man
Strike while the iron is hot
The grass is always greener on the other side

These are examples of maxims that people use as “absolute” guides to live by. They become substitutes for real analysis of situations. The fact is that all of them are accurate *at some times, in some places, about some things*. Sociological thinking and analysis are about studying the conditions in which they hold and do not hold (Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith 2009).

The difference between common sense and sociology is that sociologists test their beliefs by gathering information and analyzing the evidence in a planned, objective, systematic,

and replicable (repeatable) scientific way. Indeed, they set up studies to see if they can disprove what they think is true. This is the way science is done. Consider the following examples of commonsense beliefs about the social world and some research findings about these beliefs.

Thinking Sociologically

Do you know any other commonsense sayings that contradict one another? You may also want to take the common sense quiz online at www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed2e.



Wodaabe society in Niger in sub-Saharan Africa illustrates that our notions of masculinity and femininity—which common sense tells us are innate and universal—are actually socially defined, variable, and learned. Wodaabe men are known for their heavy use of makeup to be attractive to women.

Commonsense Beliefs and Social Science Findings

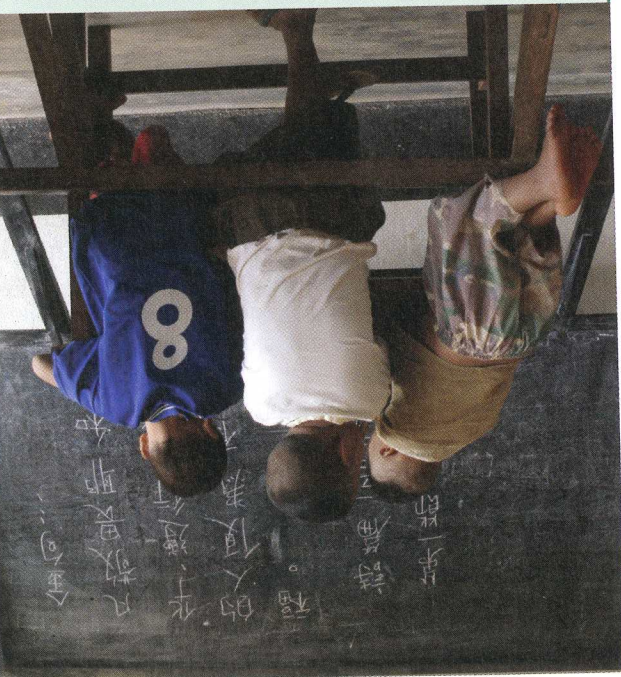
Belief: Most of the differences in the behaviors of women and men are based on “human nature”; men and women are just plain different from each other. Research shows that biological factors certainly play a part in the behaviors of men and women, but the culture (beliefs, values, rules, and way of life) that people learn as they grow up determines how biological tendencies are played out. A unique example illustrates this: In the Wodaabe tribe in Africa, women do most of the heavy work while men adorn themselves with makeup, sip tea, and gossip (Beckwith 1983). Variations in behavior of men and women around the world are so great that it is impossible to attribute behavior to biology or human nature alone.

Belief: As developing countries modernize, the lives of their female citizens improve. This is generally false. In fact, the status of women in many developed and developing countries is getting worse. Women make up roughly 51% of the world's approximately 6.8 billion people and account for two thirds of the world's hours-at-work. However, in no country for which data are available do they earn what men earn, and sometimes, the figures show women earning less than 50% of men's earnings for similar work. Women hold many unpaid jobs in agriculture, and they own only 1% of the world's property. Furthermore, of the world's 1 billion illiterate adults, two thirds are women (World Factbook 2009). Only 77% of the world's women over age 15 can read and write compared to 87% of men. Illiteracy rates for women in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East are highest in the world, implying lack of access to education. These are only a few examples of the continuing poor status of women in many countries (Institute for Statistics 2006a; World Factbook 2009; youthexchange 2007).

Belief: Given high divorce rates in the United States and Canada, marriages are in serious trouble.

Although the divorce rate in North America is high, the rate of marriage is also one of the highest in the world (Coontz 2005). If the fear-of-commitment hypothesis were true, it is unlikely the marriage rate would be so high. Moreover, even those who have been divorced tend to remarry. Despite all the talk about decline and despite genuine concern about high levels of marital failure, Americans now spend more years of their lives in marriage than at any other time in history. Divorce appears to be seen as rejection of a particular partnership rather than as rejection of marriage itself (Coontz 2005; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1996). The divorce rate reached a peak in the United States in 1982 and has declined modestly since that time (Newman and Grauerholz 2002).

As these examples illustrate, many of our commonsense beliefs are challenged by social scientific evidence. On examination, the social world is often more complex than our commonsense understanding of events, which is based on limited evidence. Throughout history, there are examples of beliefs that seemed obvious at one time but have been shown to be mistaken through scientific study. Social scientific research may also confirm some common notions about the social world. For example, the unemployment rate among African Americans in the United States is higher than that of most other groups; women with similar education and jobs earn less income than men with the same education and jobs; excessive consumption of alcohol is associated with high levels of domestic violence; people tend to marry others who are of a similar social class. The point is that the discipline of sociology provides a method to assess the accuracy of our commonsense assumptions about the social world.



Literacy is a major issue for societies around the globe. These Chinese children are learning to read, but in many developing countries, boys have more access to formal education than girls have. The commonsense notion is that most children in the world, boys and girls, have equal access to education, yet many children, especially girls, do not gain literacy.

To improve lives of individuals in societies around the world, decision makers must rely on an accurate understanding of the society. Accurate information gleaned from sociological research can be the basis for more rational and just social policies—policies that better meet the needs of all groups in the social world. The sociological perspective, discussed below, helps us gain reliable understanding.

Thinking Sociologically

Think of a commonsense belief that you disagree with. Why did you develop this belief?

The Sociological Perspective and the Sociological Imagination

What happens in the social world affects our individual lives. If we are unemployed or lack funds for our college education, we may say this is a personal problem when often broader social issues are at the root of our situation. The sociological perspective holds that we can best understand

our personal experiences and problems by examining their broader social context—by looking at the big picture.

As sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) explains, individual problems or private troubles are rooted in social or public issues, what is happening in the social world outside of one's personal control. This relationship between individual experiences and public issues is the **sociological imagination**. For Mills, many personal experiences can and should be interpreted in the context of large-scale forces in the wider society.

Consider, for example, the personal trauma caused by being laid off from a job. The unemployed person often experiences feelings of inadequacy or lack of worth. This, in turn, may produce stress in a marriage or even result in divorce. These conditions not only are deeply troubling to the person most directly affected but also are related to wider political and economic forces in society. The unemployment may be due to corporate downsizing or to a corporation taking operations to another country where labor costs are cheaper and where there are fewer environmental regulations on companies. People may blame themselves or each other for personal troubles such as unemployment or a failed marriage, believing that they did not try hard enough. Often, they do not see the connection between their private lives and larger economic forces beyond their control. They fail to recognize the public issues that create private troubles.

Families also experience stress as partners have, over time, assumed increasing responsibility for their mate's and their children's emotional and physical needs. Until the second half of the twentieth century, the community and the extended family unit—aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins—assumed more of that burden. Extended families continue to exist in countries where children settle near their parents, but in modern urban societies, both the sense of community and the connection to the extended family are greatly diminished. There are fewer intimate ties to call on for help and support. Divorce is a very personal condition for those affected, but it can be understood far more clearly when considered in conjunction with the broader social context of economics, urbanization, changing gender roles, lack of external support, and legislated family policies.

As we learn about sociology, we will come to understand how social forces shape individual lives, and this will help us understand aspects of everyday life we take for granted. In this book, we will investigate how group life influences our behaviors and interactions and why some individuals follow the rules of society and others do not. A major goal is to help us incorporate the sociological perspective into our way of looking at the social world and our place in it. Indeed, the notion of sociological imagination—connecting events from the global and national level to the personal and intimate level of our own lives—is the core organizing theme of this book.

Thinking Sociologically



How does poverty, a war, or a recession cause personal troubles for someone you know? Why is trying to explain the causes of these personal troubles by examining only the personal characteristics of those affected not adequate?

Some sociologists study issues and problems and present their results for others to use. Others become involved in solving the very problems they study. The “Sociology in Your Social World” feature on the next page provides an extension on the sociological imagination, illustrating how some use their sociological knowledge to become involved in their communities or the larger world; these students of sociology advocate an active role in bringing about change.

Questions Sociologists Ask—and Don't Ask

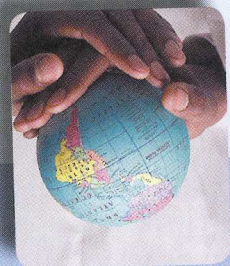
Sociologists ask questions about human behavior in social groups and organizations—questions that can be studied scientifically. Sociologists, like other scientists, cannot answer certain questions—philosophical questions about the existence of God, the meaning of life, the ethical implications of stem cell research, or the morality of physician-assisted suicide. What sociologists do ask, however, is this: What effect does holding certain ideas or adhering to certain ethical standards have on the behavior and attitudes of people? For example, are people more likely to obey rules if they believe that there are consequences for their actions in an afterlife? What are the consequences—positive and negative—of allowing suicide for terminally ill patients who are in pain? Although sociologists may study philosophical or religious beliefs held by groups, they do not make judgments about what beliefs are right or wrong or about moral issues involving philosophy, religion, values, or opinion. They focus on issues that can be studied objectively and scientifically, rather than those that are judgmental or value based.

Applied sociologists, those who carry out research to help organizations solve problems, agree that the research itself should be as objective as possible. After the research is completed, the applied sociologists might use the research findings to explore policy implications and make recommendations for change.

Consider the following examples of questions sociologists might ask:

- Who gets an abortion, why do they do so, and how does society as a whole view abortion? These are matters of fact that a social scientist can explore. However, sociologists avoid making

Sociology in Your Social World



By Peter Dreier

How Will You Spend the Twenty-First Century?

- The United States has the highest per capita income among those countries. At the same time, the United States has, by far, the widest gap between the rich and the poor.
- Almost 30% of American workers work full-time, year-round, for poverty-level wages.
- The United States has the highest overall rate of poverty. More than 33 million Americans live in poverty.
- More than 12 million of these Americans are children. In fact, 1 out of 6 American children is poor. They live in slums and trailer parks, eat cold cereal for dinner, share a bed or a cot with their siblings and sometimes with their parents, and are often one disaster away from becoming homeless.
- Only 3 out of 5 children eligible for the Head Start program are enrolled because of the lack of funding.
- The United States has the highest infant mortality rate among the major industrial nations.
- The United States is the only one of these nations without universal health insurance. More

Today, Americans enjoy more rights, better working conditions, better living conditions, and old age than anyone could have imagined 100 years ago. . . . But that doesn't let you off the hook! There are still many problems and much work to do. Like all agents for social change, . . . social reformers [such as] Martin Luther King, Jr., [a sociology major] understood the basic point of sociology—that is, to look for the connections between people's everyday personal problems and the larger trends in society. Things that we experience as personal matters—a woman facing domestic violence, or a low-wage worker who cannot afford housing, or middle-class people stuck in daily traffic jams—are really about how our institutions function. Sociologists hold a mirror up to our society and help us see our society objectively. One way to do this is by comparing our own society to others. This sometimes makes us uncomfortable—because we take so much about our society for granted. Conditions that we may consider “normal” may be considered serious problems by other societies. For example, if we compare the United States to other advanced industrial countries such as Canada, Germany, France, Sweden, Australia, Holland, and Belgium, we find some troubling things:

- than 43 million Americans—including 11 million children—have no health insurance.
 - Americans spend more hours stuck in traffic jams than people of any of these other countries. This leads to more pollution, more auto accidents, and less time spent with families.
 - Finally, the United States has a much higher proportion of our citizens in prison than any of these societies. . . .
- ... What would you like your grandchildren to think about how you spent the twenty-first century? . . . No matter what career you pursue, you have choices about how you will live your lives. As citizens, you can sit on the sidelines and merely be involved in your society, or you can decide to become really committed to making this a better world.
- Today, there are hundreds of thousands of patriotic Americans committed to making our country live up to its ideals. . . . They are asking the same questions that earlier generations of active citizens asked: Why can't our society do a better job of providing equal opportunity, a clean environment, and a decent education for all? They know there are many barriers and obstacles to change, but they want to figure out how to overcome these barriers and to help build a better society.
- So ask yourselves: What are some of the things that we take for granted today that need to be changed? What are some ideas for changing things that today might seem “outrageous” but that—25 or 50 or 100 years from now—will be considered common sense?
- ... A record number of college students today are involved in a wide variety of “community service” activities—such as mentoring young kids in school, volunteering in a homeless shelter, or working in an AIDS hospice. As a result of this student activism, more than 100 colleges and universities have adopted “anti-sweatshop” codes of conduct for the manufacturers of clothing that bear the names and logos of their institutions. Positive change is possible, but it is not inevitable. . . . I am optimistic that your generation will follow a lifelong commitment to positive change.
- I know you will not be among those who simply “see things the way they are and ask: why?” Instead, you will “dream things that never were and ask: why not?” [Robert Kennedy].

ethical judgments about whether abortion is right or wrong. Such a judgment is a question of values, not one that can be answered through scientific analysis. The question about the morality of abortion is very important to many people, but it is based on philosophical or theological rationale, not on sociological findings.

- Who is most beautiful? Cultural standards of beauty impact individual popularity and social interaction, and this issue interests some social scientists. However, the sociologist would not judge which individuals are more or less attractive. Such questions are matters of aesthetics, a field of philosophy and art.
- What are the circumstances around individuals becoming drunk and drunken behavior? This question is often tied more to social environment than to alcohol itself. Note that a person might be very intoxicated at a fraternity party but behave differently at a wedding reception, where the expectations for behavior are very different. The researcher does not make judgments about whether use of alcohol is good or bad or right or wrong and avoids—as much as possible—opinions regarding responsibility or irresponsibility. The sociologist does, however, observe variations in the use of alcohol in social situations and resulting behaviors. An applied sociologist researching alcohol use on campus for a college or for a national fraternity may, following the research, offer advice based on that research about how to reduce the number of alcohol-related deaths or sexual assault incidents on college campuses (Sweet 2001).

Sociologists learn techniques to avoid letting their values influence their research designs, data gathering, and analysis. Still, complete objectivity is difficult at best, and what one chooses to study may be influenced by one's interests and concerns about injustice in society. The fact that sociologists know they will be held accountable by other scientists for the objectivity of their research is a major factor in encouraging them to be objective when they do their research.

Thinking Sociologically

From the information you have just read, what are some questions sociologists might ask about divorce or cohabitation or same-sex unions? What are some questions sociologists *would not* ask about these topics, at least while in their roles as researchers?



What is acceptable or unacceptable drinking behavior varies according to the social setting. Binge drinking, losing consciousness, vomiting, or engaging in sexual acts while drunk may be a source of storytelling at a college party but be offensive at a wedding reception. Sociologists study different social settings and how the norms of acceptability vary in each, but they do not make judgments about those behaviors.

The Social Sciences: A Comparison

Not so long ago, our views of people and social relationships were based on stereotypes, intuition, superstitions, supernatural explanations, and traditions passed on from one generation to the next. Natural sciences first used the scientific method, a model later adopted by social sciences. Social scientists, including anthropologists, psychologists,



Psychology as a discipline tends to focus on individuals, including such fields as sensation, perception, memory, and thought processes. In this study, the researcher is using some equipment and a computer to measure how the eye and the brain work together to help create depth perception.

What all of these social sciences—sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, cultural geography, and history—have in common is that they study aspects of human behavioral and social life. Social sciences share many common topics, methods, concepts, research findings, and theories, but each has a different focus or perspective on the social world. Each of these social sciences relates to topics studied by sociologists, but sociologists focus on human interaction, groups, and social structure, providing the broadest overview of the social world.

Thinking Sociologically

Consider other issues such as the condition of poverty in developing countries or homelessness in North America. What question(s) might different social sciences ask about these problems?

Why Study Sociology . . . and What Do Sociologists Do?

Did you ever wonder why some families are close and others are estranged? Why some work groups are very productive while others are not? Why some people are rich and

economists, cultural geographers, historians, and political scientists, apply the scientific method to study social relationships, to correct misleading and harmful misconceptions about human behaviors, and to guide policy decisions. Consider the following examples of specific studies a social scientist might conduct. These are followed by a brief description of the focus of sociology as a social science.

One anthropological study focused on garbage, studying what people discard to understand their patterns of life. Anthropology is closely related to sociology. In fact, the two areas have common historical roots. *Anthropology* is the study of humanity in its broadest context. There are four subfields within anthropology: physical anthropology (which is related to biology), archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology (sometimes called *ethnology*). This last field has the most in common with sociology. Cultural anthropology focuses on the culture, or way of life, of the society being studied and uses methods appropriate to understanding culture.

After wiring research subjects to a machine that measures their physiological reaction to a violent film clip, a psychologist asks them questions about what they were feeling. *Psychology* is the study of individual behavior and mental processes (e.g., sensation, perception, memory, and thought processes). It differs from sociology in that it focuses on individuals, rather than on groups, institutions, and societies as sociology does. Although there are different branches of psychology, most psychologists are concerned with what motivates individual behavior, personality attributes, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. Psychologists also explore abnormal behavior, the mental disorders of individuals, and stages of normal human development (Wallerstein 1996; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 2004).

A political scientist studies opinion poll results to predict who will win the next election, how various groups of people are likely to vote, or how elected officials will vote on proposed legislation. *Political science* is concerned with government systems and power—how they work, how they are organized, forms of government, relations between governments, who holds power and how they obtain it, how power is used, and who is politically active. Political science overlaps with sociology, particularly in the study of political theory and the nature and the uses of power.

An economist studies the banking system and market trends, trying to determine what will remedy the global recession. *Economists* analyze economic conditions and explore how people organize, produce, and distribute material goods. They are interested in supply and demand, inflation and taxes, prices and manufacturing output, labor organization, employment levels, and comparisons of industrial and nonindustrial nations.

others remain impoverished? Why some people engage in criminal behaviors and others conform rigidly to rules? Although sociologists do not have all the answers to such questions, they do have the perspective and methods to search for a deeper understanding of these and other patterns of human interaction.

Two ingredients are essential to the study of our social world: a keen ability to observe what is happening in the social world and a desire to find answers to the question of why it is happening. The value of sociology is that it affords us a unique perspective from which to examine the social world, and it provides the methods to study systematically important questions about human interaction, group behavior, and social structure. The practical significance of the sociological perspective is that it

- fosters greater self-awareness, which can lead to opportunities to improve one's life;
- encourages a more complete understanding of social situations by looking beyond individual explanations to include group analyses of behavior;
- helps people understand and evaluate problems by enabling them to view the world systematically and objectively rather than in strictly emotional or personal terms;
- cultivates an understanding of the many diverse cultural perspectives and how cultural differences are related to behavioral patterns;
- provides a means to assess the impact of social policies;
- reveals the complexities of social life and provides methods of inquiry to study them; and
- provides useful skills in interpersonal relations, critical thinking, data collection and analysis, problem solving, and decision making.

This unique perspective has practical value as we carry out our roles as workers, friends, family members, and citizens. For example, an employee who has studied sociology may better understand how to work with groups and how the structure of the workplace affects individual behavior, how to approach problem solving, and how to collect and analyze data. Likewise, a schoolteacher trained in sociology may have a better understanding of classroom management, student motivation, causes of poor student learning that have roots outside the school, and other variables that shape the professional life of teachers and the academic success of students. Consider the example in "Sociology in Your Social World," which explores how high school groups such as "jocks" and "burnouts" behave and why each clique's behavior might be quite logical in certain circumstances. *Burnouts and Jocks in a Public High School* explores a social environment very familiar to most of us, the social cliques in a high school.

What Sociologists Do

Sociologists are employed in a variety of settings. Although students may first encounter them as teachers and researchers in higher education, sociologists also hold nonacademic, applied sociology jobs in social agencies, government, and business. Table 1.1 illustrates that a significant portion of sociologists work in business, government, and social service agencies (American Sociological Association 2006; Dotzler and Koppel 1999).

Table 1.1 Where Sociologists Are Employed

Places of Employment	Percentage Employed
College or university	75.5
Government (all positions)	7.1
Private, for-profit business	6.2
Not-for-profit public service organizations	7.6
Self-employed	0.4

Source: American Sociological Association (2006).

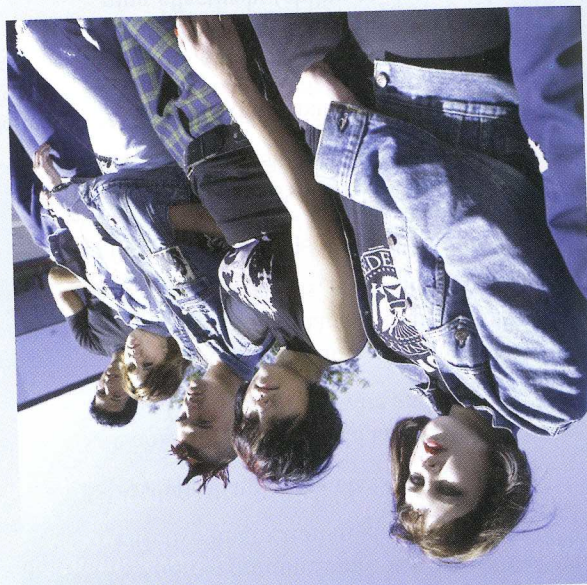
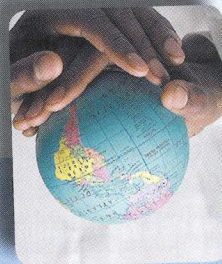
College graduates who seek employment immediately after college (without other graduate work) are most likely to find their first jobs in social services, administrative assistantships, or some sort of management position. The areas of first jobs of sociology majors are indicated in Figure 1.1 on page 16. With a master's or a doctorate degree, graduates usually become college teachers, researchers, clinicians, and consultants.

Consider your professor. The duties of professors vary depending on the type of institution and the level of courses offered. Classroom time fills only a portion of the professor's working days. Other activities include preparing for classes, preparing and grading exams and assignments, advising students, serving on committees, keeping abreast of new research in the field, and conducting research studies and having them published. This "publish or perish" task is deemed the most important activity for faculty in some major universities.

In businesses, applied sociologists use their knowledge and research skills in human resources or to address organizational needs or problems. In government jobs, they provide data such as population projections for education and health care planning. In social service agencies, such as police departments, they help address deviant behavior, and in health agencies, they may be concerned with doctor-patient interactions. Applied sociology is an important aspect of the field; you will find featured inserts in some chapters discussing the work of an applied sociologist.

Sociology in Your Social World

Burnouts and Jocks in a Public High School



High schools are big organizations made up of smaller friendship networks and cliques; a careful examination can give us insight into the tensions that exist as the groups struggle for resources and power in the school.

Sociologist Penelope Eckert (1989) focused on two categories of students that exist in many high schools in North America: "burnouts" and "jocks." The burnouts defied authorities, smoked in the restrooms, refused to use their lockers, made a public display of not eating in the school cafeteria, and wore their jackets all day. Their open and public defiance of authority infuriated the jocks—the college prep students who participated in choir, band, student council, and athletics and who held class offices. The burnouts were disgusted with the jocks. In their view, by constantly sucking up to the authorities, the jocks received special privileges and, by playing the goody-two-shoes role, made life much more difficult for the burnouts.

Despite their animosity toward one another, the goal of both groups was to gain more autonomy from the adult authorities who constantly bossed students around. As the burnouts saw things, if the jocks would have even a slight bit of backbone and stand up for the dignity of students as adults, life would be better for everyone.

The burnouts believed that school officials should earn their obedience. The burnouts maintained their dignity by affirming that they did not recognize bossy adults as authorities. Wearing coats all day was another way to emphasize the idea that "I'm just a visitor in this school." The jocks, for their part, became irritated at the burnouts when they caused trouble and were belligerent with authorities; then the administration would crack down on everyone, and no one had any freedom. Jocks found that if they did what the adults told them to do—at least while the adults were around—they got a lot more freedom. When the burnouts got defiant, however, the principal got mad and removed everyone's privileges.

Sociologist Eckert (1989) found that the behavior of both groups was quite logical for their circumstances and ambitions. Expendable energy as a class officer or participating in extracurricular activities is a rational behavior for college preparatory students because those leadership roles help students get into their college of choice.

However, those activities do not help students get a better job in a factory in town. In fact, hanging out at the bowling alley makes far more sense. For the burnouts, having friendship networks and acquaintances in the right places is more important to achieving their goals than a class office listed on their résumé.

Eckert's (1989) method of gathering information was effective in showing how the internal dynamics of schools—conflicts between student groups—were influenced by outside factors such as working- and upper-middle-class status. Recent research upholds Eckert's findings on the importance cliques play in shaping school behavior. Like Eckert, Bonnie Barber, Jacquelynne Eccles, and Margaret Stone (2001) found various friendship cliques starting in 10th grade in a Michigan high school. The jocks in their study were the most integrated to mainstream society in adult life. The burnouts (or criminals, as they are labeled in Barber's research) were most likely to have been arrested or incarcerated, showing that the propensity to defy authority figures may carry on into adult life.

These studies show that sociological analysis can help us understand some ways that connections between groups—regardless of whether they are in conflict or harmony—shape the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of people living in this complex social world.

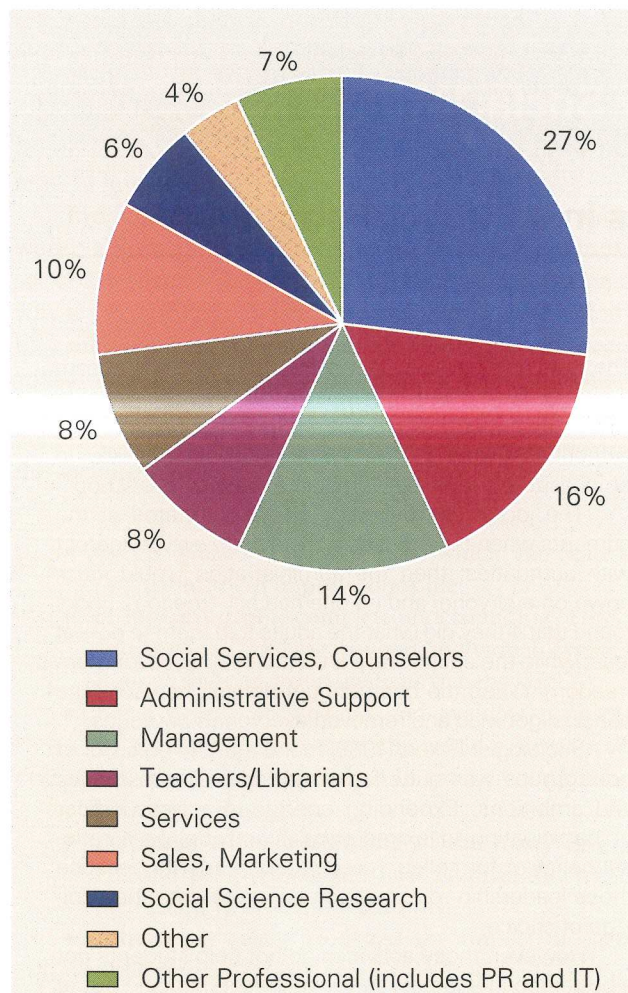


Figure 1.1 Occupational Categories for Sociology Graduates' First Jobs

Source: Based on "21st Century Careers With an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology," American Sociological Association, 2009.

These examples will provide a picture of what one can do with a sociology degree. In addition, at the end of some chapters you will find a section discussing policy examples and implications related to that chapter topic. Table 1.2 provides some ideas of career paths for graduates with a degree in sociology.

What Employers Want and What Sociology Majors Bring to a Career

Sociologists and other social scientists have studied what job skills and competencies employers seek in new employees, in addition to subject matter expertise. They tend to

focus on writing, speaking, analytical skills—especially when faced with complex problems, comprehension of other cultures and of diversity within the United States, ability to work effectively in diverse teams, and ability to gather and interpret quantitative information. As Table 1.3 indicates, employers want more of these kinds of skills from college graduates.

The following skills and competencies are part of most sociological training:

1. Communication skills (listening, verbal and written communication, working with peers, and effective interaction in group situations)
2. Analytical and research skills
3. Computer and technical literacy (basic understanding of computer hardware and software programs)
4. Flexibility, adaptability, and multitasking (ability to set priorities, manage multiple tasks, adapt to changing situations, and handle pressure)
5. Interpersonal skills (working with coworkers)
6. Effective leadership skills (ability to take charge and make decisions)
7. Sensitivity to diversity in the workplace and with clients
8. Organizing thoughts and information and planning effectively (ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and to be self-motivated)
9. Ability to conceptualize and solve problems and be creative (working toward meeting the organization's goals)
10. Working with others (ability to work toward a common goal)
11. Personal values (honesty, flexibility, work ethic, dependability, loyalty, positive attitude, professionalism, self-confidence, willingness to learn) (Hansen and Hansen 2003)

These competencies reflect skills stressed in the sociology curriculum: an ability to understand and work with others, research and computer skills, planning and organizing skills, oral and written communication skills, and critical thinking skills (WorldWideLearn 2007).

We now have a general idea of what sociology is and what sociologists do. It should be apparent that sociology is a broad field of interest; sociologists study all aspects of human social behavior. The next section of this chapter shows how the parts of the social world that sociologists study relate to each other, and it outlines the model you will follow as you continue to learn about sociology.

Table 1.2 What Can You Do With a Sociology Degree?

Business or Management	
Market researcher	Social worker
Sales manager	Criminologist
Customer relations	Gerontologist
Manufacturing representative	Hospital administrator
Banking or loan officer	Charities administrator
Data processor	Community advocate or organizer
Attorney	Dean of student life
Research	
Population analyst	Policy advisor or administrator
Surveyor	Labor relations
Market researcher	Legislator
Economic analyst	Census worker
Public opinion pollster	International agency representative
Interviewer	City planning officer
Policy researcher	Prison administrator
Telecommunications researcher	Law enforcement
FBI agent	Customs agent
Government	
Public Relations	
Publisher	Mass communications
Advertising	Writer or commentator
Journalist	
Education	
Teacher	Academic research
Administration	School counselor
Policy analyst	College professor
Dean of student life	

Note: Surveys of college alumni with undergraduate majors in sociology indicate that this field of study prepares people for a broad range of occupations. Notice that some of these jobs require graduate or professional training. For further information, contact your department chair or the American Sociological Association in Washington, DC, for a copy of *Careers in Sociology*, 6th edition (2002).

Source: American Sociological Association (2006).

Table 1.3 Percentage of Employers Who Want Colleges to "Place More Emphasis" on Essential Learning Outcomes

Knowledge of Human Culture	
Global issues	72%
The role of the United States in the world	60%
Cultural values and traditions—U.S. and global	53%
Intellectual and Practical Skills	
Teamwork skills in diverse groups	76%
Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	73%
Written and oral communication	73%
Information literacy	70%
Complex problem solving	64%
Quantitative reasoning	60%
Personal and Social Responsibility	
Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)	76%
Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	72%

Source: American Sociological Association (2009).

Thinking Sociologically

What are some advantages of mayors, legislators, police chiefs, or government officials making decisions based on information gathered and verified by sociological research rather than on their own intuition or assumptions?

The Social World Model

Think about the different groups you depend on and interact with on a daily basis. You wake up to greet members of your family or your roommate. You go to a larger group—a class—that exists within an even larger organization—the college or university. Understanding sociology and comprehending the approach of this book requires a grasp of levels of analysis, social groups from the smallest to the largest. It may be relatively easy to picture small groups, such as a family, a sports team, or a sorority or fraternity. It is more difficult to visualize large groups such as corporations—the



These men carry the supplies for a new school to be built in their local community—Korphe, Pakistan. The trek of more than 20 miles up mountainous terrain was difficult, but their commitment to neighbors and children of the community made it worthwhile. The project was a local one (micro level), but it also was made possible by an international organization—Central Asia Institute—founded as a charitable organization by Greg Mortenson of Montana.

Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, Eddie Bauer, General Motors Corporation, or Starbucks—or organizations such as local or state governments. The largest groups include nations or international organizations, such as the sprawling networks of the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Groups of various sizes shape our lives. Sociological analysis requires that we understand these groups at various levels of analysis.

The **social world model** helps us picture the levels of analysis in our social surroundings as an interconnected series of small groups, organizations, institutions, and societies. Sometimes, these groups are connected by mutual support and cooperation, but sometimes, there are conflicts and power struggles over access to resources. What we are asking you to do here and throughout this book is to develop a sociological imagination—the basic lens used by sociologists. Picture the social world as a linked system made up of increasingly larger circles. To understand the units or parts in each circle of the social world model, look at the social world model shown on this page:

