

Chapter 1: The Sociological Perspective

Learning Objectives

LO 1.1: Explain why both history and biography are essential for the sociological perspective. (p. 3)

LO 1.2: Know the focus of each social science. (p. 5)

LO 1.3: Trace the origins of sociology, from tradition to Max Weber. (p. 8)

LO 1.4: Summarize the opposing arguments in the debate about values in sociological research. (p. 13)

LO 1.5: State what *Verstehen* is and why it is valuable. (p. 14)

LO 1.6: Trace the development of sociology in North America and explain the tension between objective analysis and social reform. (p. 16)

LO 1.7: Explain the basic ideas of symbolic interactionism, functional analysis, and conflict theory. (p. 23)

LO 1.8: Explain how research versus reform and globalization are likely to influence sociology. (p. 30)

REVEL Media

Module 1.1: Video: *The Basics: What Is Sociology?*; Social Explorer: *Explore: The Development of American Society*; Video: *Sociology in Focus: What Is Sociology?*; End of Module Quiz: *Quiz 1.1: The Sociological Perspective*

Module 1.2: Video: *Thinking like a Sociologist: What Is Sociology*; Catalog: *Down-to-Earth Sociology: Enjoying a Sociology Quiz—Testing Your Common Sense*; Audio: *Down-to-Earth Sociology: An Updated Version of the Old Elephant Story*; End of Module Quiz: *Quiz 1.2: Sociology and the Other Sciences*

Module 1.3: Video: *The Big Picture: What Is Sociology?* Tabs—Accordion: *Social Integration*; Document: *Read the Document: Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor*; Social Explorer: *Figure 1.1: How Americans Commit Suicide*; Document: *Read the Document: Max Weber, Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism*; End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.3: Origins of Sociology*

Module 1.4: End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.4: Values in Sociological Research*

Module 1.5: End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.5: Verstehen and Social Facts*

Module 1.6: Document: *Read the Document: Harriet Martineau, Society in America*; Audio: *Down-to-Earth Sociology: Harriet Martineau and U.S. Customs: Listening to an Early Feminist*; Journal Prompt: JOURNAL: *Harriet Martineau and Early Feminism*; Audio: *Down-to-Earth Sociology: W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk*; Audio: *Down-to-Earth Sociology: Careers in Sociology: What Applied Sociologists Do*; Audio: *Cultural Diversity in the United States: Unanticipated Public Sociology: Studying Job Discrimination*; Social Explorer: *Figure 1.5: Call-Back Rates by Race-Ethnicity and Criminal Record*; Journal Prompt: JOURNAL: *Studying Job Discrimination*; End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.6: Sociology in North America*

Module 1.7: Document: *Read the Document: Herbert Blumer, The Nature of Symbolic Interactionism*; Survey: *Divorce*; Journal Prompt: Journal: *Theoretical Perspectives*; Document: *Read the Document: Joel M. Charon, What Does It Mean to Be Human? Human Nature, Society, and Culture*; Journal Prompt: Levels of Analysis; End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.7: Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology*

Module 1.8: End of Module Quiz: *QUIZ 1.8: Trends Shaping the Future of Sociology*; SHARED WRITING: *The Sociological Perspective*; Advanced Flashcards: *Chapter 1 Key Terms*; End of Chapter Quiz: *CHAPTER 1 QUIZ: The Sociological Perspective*

Chapter Overview

I. The Sociological Perspective

- A. This perspective is important because it provides a different way of looking at familiar worlds. It allows us to gain a new vision of social life.
- B. The sociological perspective is an approach to understanding human behavior by placing it within its broader social context. The sociologist, C. Wright Mills referred to the sociological perspective as the intersection of biography (the individual) and history (social factors that influence the individual).
- C. This perspective stresses the broader social context of behavior by looking at individuals' social location—employment, income, education, gender, age, and race—and by considering external influences—people's experiences—which are internalized and become part of a person's thinking and motivations. We are able to see the links between what people do and the social settings that shape their behavior.
- D. This perspective enables us to analyze and understand both the forces that contribute to the emergence and growth of the global village and our unique experiences in our own smaller corners of this village.

II. Sociology and the Other Sciences

- A. Science is the systematic methods used to obtain knowledge and the knowledge obtained by those methods. It can be divided into the natural sciences and the social sciences. Sociology is defined as “the scientific study of society and human behavior.”
- B. The natural sciences attempt to comprehend, explain, and predict events in our natural environment.

- C. Social sciences attempt to objectively study the social world. Akin to the natural sciences, the social sciences are divided into specialized fields based on their subject matter.
 - 1. Anthropology is the sister discipline of sociology that attempts to understand culture (a people's total way of life) by focusing primarily on tribal people. This is giving way though, to study of groups in industrialized settings.
 - 2. Economics analyzes the production, distribution, and allocation of the material goods and services of a society.
 - 3. Political science focuses on politics or government.
 - 4. Psychology concentrates on processes that occur within the individual.
 - 5. Sociology is similar to the other social sciences in some ways, but it is distinct because it looks at all social institutions, focuses on industrialized societies, and looks at external factors that influence people.
- D. All sciences have certain goals.
 - 1. The first goal is to explain *why* something happens.
 - 2. The second goal is to make generalizations by looking for patterns, recurring characteristics, or events.
 - 3. The third goal is to predict what will happen in the future, given current knowledge.
- E. To achieve these goals, scientists must move beyond common sense and rely on conclusions based on systematic study.
- F. Although sociologists usually do not make decisions on how society should be changed or people treated, sociologists provide valuable research data that can be used by authorities who do make such decisions.

III. Origins of Sociology

- A. Sociology developed in the middle of the nineteenth century when European social observers began to use scientific methods to test their ideas. The following four factors led to its development:
 - 1. The social upheaval in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which led to changes in the way people lived their lives.
 - 2. The political revolutions in America and France, which encouraged people to rethink their ideas about social life.
 - 3. The development of imperialism—as the Europeans conquered other nations, they came in contact with different cultures and began to ask why cultures varied.
 - 4. The success of the natural sciences, which created a desire to apply scientific methods in order to find answers for the questions being raised about the social world.
- B. Auguste Comte coined the term “sociology” and suggested the use of positivism—applying the scientific approach to the social world—but he did not utilize this approach himself. Comte believed that this new science should not only discover sociological principles, but should then apply those principles to social reform.
- C. Herbert Spencer viewed societies as evolutionary, coined the term “the survival of the fittest,” and became known for social Darwinism. Spencer was convinced that no one should intervene in the evolution of society and that attempts at social reform were wrong.

- D. Karl Marx, whose ideas about social classes and class struggle between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* was the foundation of the conflict perspective, believed that class conflict was the key to human history. Marx believed that the conflict and struggle would end only with a revolution by the working class.
- E. Emile Durkheim played an important role in the development of sociology.
 - 1. One of his primary goals was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline.
 - 2. He was interested in understanding the social factors that influence individual behavior; he studied suicide rates among different groups and concluded that social integration—the degree to which people are tied to their social group—was a key social factor in suicide.
 - 3. Durkheim's third concern was that social research be practical; sociologists should not only diagnose the causes of social problems but should also develop solutions for them.
- F. Max Weber was one of the most influential of all sociologists, raising issues that remain controversial even today. Disagreeing with Karl Marx, Weber defined religion as a central force in social change (i.e., Protestantism encourages greater economic development and was the central factor in the rise of capitalism in some countries).
 - 1. The Protestant belief system encouraged its members to embrace change.
 - 2. Protestants sought “signs” that they were in God's will; financial success became a major sign. The more money they made, the more secure they were about their religious standing.
 - 3. Weber called this behavior the *Protestant ethic*; he called their readiness to invest capital in order to make more money the *spirit of capitalism*.

IV. Values in Sociological Research

- A. Weber advocated that sociological research should be value free (personal values or biases should not influence social research) and objective (totally neutral).
 - 1. Sociologists agree that objectivity is a proper goal, but acknowledge that no one can escape values entirely.
 - 2. Replication is when a study is repeated to see if the same results are found. It is one means to avoid the distortions that values can cause.
- B. Although sociologists may agree that research should be objective, the proper purposes and uses of sociology are argued among sociologists, with some taking the position that the proper role of sociology is to advance understanding of social life, while others believe that it is the responsibility of sociologists to explore harmful social arrangements of society.
- C. On the one side are those who say that understanding social behavior is sociology's proper goal and that the knowledge gained through research belongs to the scientific community and can be used by anyone for any purpose. On the other side are those who say the goal of sociological research should be to investigate harmful social conditions and that sociologists should lead the way in reforming society.

V. *Verstehen* and Social Facts

- A. Max Weber advocated *Verstehen*, the German term for “grasp by insight,” to understand why people act as they do. In contrast, Emile Durkheim believed that

sociologists should focus primarily on uncovering social facts—the objective social conditions that influence people's behaviors. *Verstehen* and social facts are not mutually exclusive types of social research. Contemporary sociologists often employ both approaches to examine and understand the social contexts that underlie human behavior.

VI. Sociology in North America

- A. The first departments of sociology in the United States were at the University of Kansas (1890), the University of Chicago (1892), and Atlanta University (1897); the first in Canada was at McGill University (1922).
 - 1. Albion Small, founder of the department of sociology at the University of Chicago, also established the *American Journal of Sociology*.
 - 2. The department of sociology at the University of Chicago dominated North American sociology. Other early sociologists from the University of Chicago were Robert E. Park, Ernest Burgess, and George Herbert Mead.
- B. In the early years of sociology, the field was dominated by men because rigidly defined social roles prevented most women from pursuing an education.
 - 1. Women were supposed to devote themselves to the four Ks: *Kirche, Küchen, Kinder, und Kleider* (church, cooking, children, and clothes).
 - 2. At the same time, a few women from wealthy families managed to get an education. A few even studied sociology, although the sexism in the universities stopped them from earning advanced degrees, becoming professors, or having their research recognized.
- C. Harriet Martineau studied social life in both Great Britain and the United States, publishing *Society in America* decades before Durkheim and Weber were even born. While her original research has been largely ignored by the discipline, she is known for her translations of Comte's ideas into English.
- D. African-American professionals also faced problems.
 - 1. W. E. B. Du Bois was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. He conducted extensive research on race relations in the United States, publishing one book a year on this subject between 1896 and 1914.
 - 2. Despite his accomplishments, he encountered prejudice and discrimination in his professional and personal life. When he attended professional sociologists' meetings, he was not permitted to eat or stay in the same hotels as the white sociologists.
 - 3. Frustrated at the lack of improvements in race relations, he turned to social action, helping to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and others from Hull-House.
 - 4. Until recently, his contributions to sociology were overlooked.
- E. Jane Addams is an example of a sociologist who was able to combine the role of sociologist with that of social reformer.
 - 1. In 1889, she founded Hull-House, a settlement house for the poor, and worked to bridge the gap between the powerful and powerless.
 - 2. Sociologists from nearby University of Chicago visited Hull-House frequently.

3. She is the only sociologist to have won the Nobel Peace Prize; she was awarded this in 1931.
- F. Many other early North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer. For example, University of Chicago sociologists Park and Burgess, studied many urban problems and offered suggestions on how to alleviate them. By the 1940s, as sociologists became more concerned with establishing sociology as an academic discipline, the emphasis shifted from social reform to social theory.
 1. Talcott Parsons developed abstract models of society to show how the parts of society harmoniously work together.
 2. Countering this development was C. Wright Mills, who urged sociologists to get back to social reform. He saw the emergence of the *power elite* as an imminent threat to freedom.
- G. The debate over what should be the proper goals of sociological analysis—analyzing society versus reforming society—continues today.
 1. Applied sociology exists between these two extremes. One of the first attempts at applied sociology was the founding of the NAACP.
 2. Today, applied sociologists work in a variety of settings, from business and hi-tech organizations to government and not-for-profit agencies.
 3. Applied sociology is the application of sociological knowledge in some specific setting, rather than an attempt to rebuild society. Both sociologists who focus on social reform and those who emphasize basic sociology reject applied sociology.
 4. In an effort to pursue a social reform agenda, the American Sociological Association is now promoting “public sociology” with the goal of influencing politicians, public officials, and policy makers.

VII. Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- A. Central to the study of any science is the development of theory. A theory is a general statement about how parts of the world fit together, relate to one another, and affect each other. Sociologists use three major theories—symbolic interactionism, functional analysis, and conflict theory—to observe and interpret social contexts, relationships, and realities in distinct ways.
- B. Symbolic interactionism views symbols, things to which we attach meaning, as the basis of social life.
 1. Through the use of symbols, people are able to define relationships to others; to coordinate actions with others, thereby making social life possible; and to develop a sense of themselves.
 2. A symbolic interactionist studying divorce would focus on how the changing meanings of marriage, family, and divorce have all contributed to the increase in the rate of divorce in the U.S. society.
- C. The central idea of functional analysis is that society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together.
 1. To understand society, we must look at both structure (how the parts of society fit together to make up the whole) and function (how each part contributes to society).

2. Robert Merton used the term function to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions to keep society stable, and dysfunction to refer to consequences that undermine stability. Functions can be either manifest (actions that are intended) or latent (unintended consequences).
 3. In trying to explain divorce, a functionalist would look at how industrialization and urbanization both contributed to the changing function of marriage and the family.
- D. According to conflict theory, society is viewed as composed of groups competing for scarce resources.
- E. Karl Marx focused on struggles between the *bourgeoisie* (the small group of capitalists who own the means of production) and the *proletariat* (the masses of workers exploited by the capitalists).
1. Contemporary conflict theorists have expanded this perspective to include conflict in all relations of power and authority.
 2. Just as Marx stressed conflict between capitalists and workers, many feminists stress a similar conflict between men and women.
 3. Divorce is seen as the outcome of the shifting balance of power within a family; as women have gained power and try to address inequalities in their relationships, men resist.
 4. The perspectives differ in their level of analysis. Functionalists and conflict theorists provide macro-level analysis because they examine the large-scale patterns of society. Symbolic interactionists carry out micro-level analysis because they focus on the small-scale patterns of social life.
- F. Each perspective provides a different and often sharply contrasting picture of the world. However, sociologists often use all three perspectives because no one theory or level of analysis encompasses all of reality.

VIII. Trends Shaping the Future of Sociology

- A. As the world becomes more globally connected, American sociology is likely to expand its current horizons: incorporating new perspectives and worldviews that include—and encompass—global issues and concerns.
- B. To understand the tension between social reform and social analysis, sociologists have found it useful to divide sociology into three phases.
1. In the first phase, the primary concern of sociologists was making the world a better place.
 2. During the second phase, from the 1920s until World War II, sociologists sought to establish sociology as a respected field of knowledge, emphasizing basic, or pure, sociology.
 3. In the third (current) phase, there has been an attempt to merge sociological knowledge and practical work with the development of applied sociology. This trend has gained momentum in recent years.
 4. Despite being able to identify three phases, each of which has been characterized by a different position on reform versus analysis, there has never been complete consensus on which approach is better.
- C. Globalization is a second major trend destined to leave its mark on sociology.

1. Globalization is the breaking down of national boundaries because of advances in communications, trade, and travel.
 2. Globalization is likely to broaden the scope of sociological analysis as sociologists look beyond the boundaries of the United States in considering global issues.
- D. Globalization is one of the most significant events in world history. This book stresses the impact of globalization on our lives today.

Special Features

- Down-to-Earth Sociology: An Updated Version of the Old Elephant Story
- Down-to-Earth Sociology: Harriet Martineau and U.S. Customs: Listening to an Early Feminist
- Down-to-Earth Sociology: W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk
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- Cultural Diversity in the United States: Unanticipated Public Sociology: Studying Job Discrimination

Lecture Suggestions

- To understand peoples' behavior, sociologists look at their social location in society. Ask students to identify the corners in life they occupy by describing their jobs, income, education, gender, age, and race-ethnicity. Have them explain how each of these elements influences their self-concept and behavior. Then have them select two or three elements to change (for example, gender and race-ethnicity) and describe what differences may exist in their self-concept and behavior if they occupied this social location.
- Using the symbolic interactionist perspective, have the students evaluate the sociology course and its instructor. Identify the symbols that are a part of the course and the meanings that each student applies to that symbol. Initially, have the students make their own lists that include symbols and meanings and then share them with the class in a group discussion.
- The introduction of sociology as "the study of society" or "the science of man" created a social upheaval in the nineteenth century that destroyed many traditions and social norms. Among these were challenges to religion and the divine right of kings. During the 1960s, other traditions were being challenged by the feminist perspective such as the family and the role of women. What traditions and social norms in today's society are being challenged in a similar manner?
- Herbert Spencer is credited with developing the "survival of the fittest" concept and the philosophic approach known as social Darwinism. The idea behind this approach was societies evolve from primitive to civilized and that helping primitive societies interferes with the natural process of either evolving or becoming extinct. As an example, nations like the United States have for decades intervened in sub-Saharan African countries in an attempt to fight AIDS and end poverty with little success. Discuss your thoughts on this subject and whether aid to poor societies actually helps them or simply creates dependency?

- An issue that remains controversial among sociologists is the degree to which personal values should enter into research efforts. Ask students who support the pro-choice position and students who support the pro-life position to participate in a debate. Try to keep the numbers in each group approximately the same. Have each group research their position and then present their positions to the class. The rest of the class will then critique the presentations based on each group's objectivity. Can people who have a stake in a position objectively research that topic? Regardless of the presence or lack of objectivity, which side of the debate had the most support among students? If the results support the research that younger people hold a more liberal ideology, then the pro-choice team should win the debate because they will also lack objectivity and allow their own attitudes to affect their decisions.

Suggested Assignments

- Have students attend a local conference to observe the field from within the sociological community. Afterward, students could write a reflection on what they experienced and if any particular elements sparked their interest.
- Assign students to choose a film that illustrates one of the three sociological perspectives and to write a brief report on how that film illustrated the perspective. A few examples of the film and the perspective(s) it illustrates include *Shrek* (symbolic interactionism), *Antz* (functionalism), *Titanic* (the conflict perspective), or *Apollo 13* (a case can be made for this film as illustrating any of the three perspectives). Other films may also be used depending on their subject matter and plot.
- W.E.B. Du Bois was a forerunner to promoting racial equality. Oddly, even though racism seemed more prominent in those days, Du Bois was able to fund his education and pursue a Ph.D. at Harvard University. He was also able to gain a position at Atlanta University. Ask students to think about and openly debate how a black man was able to fund an education at a prestigious university like Harvard, and study in Berlin, yet Henslin states in the textbook that he was too poor to attend an ASA convention in the United States? Then have students write an article that reflects how they think Du Bois would respond to the current state of race relations, and what would be his reaction to the current N.A.A.C.P. if he were still alive?
- The War on Terrorism, which the United States has been waging since September 11, 2001, has its share of advocates and critics. Select a committee of volunteers from the course who will organize opposing presentations, one advocating the present national policy, and another opposing the use of force. The presenters may be students who have served in the military during the war, other professors, or community leaders. If possible, the presentations may be made at a time and place that will accommodate more students than a single classroom. Following the presentations, have the students evaluate the current War on Terror based on the three sociological perspectives.

Journal Prompts/Shared Writing

J_1.1 Journal Prompt: Harriet Martineau and Early Feminism

How do you think relations between men and women have changed since Martineau did her research?

J_1.2 Journal Prompt: Studying Job Discrimination

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

J_1.3 Journal Prompt: Theoretical Perspectives

Of the three theoretical perspectives, which one would you prefer to use if you were a sociologist? Why?

SW_1.1 Shared Writing: The Sociological Perspective

Do you think that sociologists should try to reform society or to study it dispassionately?

Annotated Suggested Films/TV Shows

Under the Dome. CBS, June 2013 (TV Series).

An adaptation of Steven King's best-selling 2009 novel *Under the Dome*, this science-fiction drama follows the residents of a small Maine town after an invisible barrier suddenly and mysteriously appears, cutting them off from the rest of the world and trapping them inside together.

For additional video resources, please click this link to visit a full list of our Core Concept Video Series:

http://media.pearsoncmg.com/ph/hss/SSA_CCND_RESOURCES_1/mmnd_winter_2013/hss/sociology/core_concept_video_series/index.php