

ESSENTIALS OF **SOCIOLOGY**

ANTHONY GIDDENS

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FIFTH EDITION

ESSENTIALS OF
SOCIOLOGY

fifth edition

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ESSENTIALS OF **SOCIOLOGY**

fifth edition

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LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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New York • London

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Printed in the United States of America

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Information Graphics Design: Kiss Me I'm Polish LLC, New York
Composition: Graphic World
Manufacturing: Courier-Kendallville

The text of this book is composed in Sentinel with the display set in Gotham.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Giddens, Anthony.

Essentials of sociology / Anthony Giddens, Mitchell Duneier, Richard P. Appelbaum, Deborah Carr. -- Fifth edition.

pages cm

Revised edition of: Essentials of sociology / Anthony Giddens ... [et al.]. 4th ed.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-393-93745-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Sociology. I. Title.

HM585.G52 2015

301--dc23

2014027695

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
W. W. Norton & Company, Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT
wwnorton.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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self-understanding, which in turn can be focused back on an improved understanding of the social world. Studying sociology can be a liberating experience: It expands our sympathies and imagination, opens up new perspectives on the sources of our own behavior, and creates an awareness of cultural settings different from our own. Sociological ideas challenge dogma, teach appreciation of cultural variety, and allow us insight into the working of social institutions. At a more practical level, the text shows how sociological concepts are used every day by American workers (“Making Sociology Work” boxes), how technology affects our daily experiences (new “Digital Life” sections), and how societal trends vary from place to place (“Globalization by the Numbers” full-page infographics).

Our second theme is inequalities. Throughout the text, we highlight that important resources—whether education, health, income, or social support—are not fairly or evenly distributed to all individuals. We highlight the ways that gender, race, social class, and age shape our daily life in the United States. We also pay keen attention to global inequalities, and reveal how differences in economic and even natural resources throughout the world powerfully influence even very personal experiences—including health, religion, and relationships.

A third theme of the book is that of social and historical context. Sociology was born of the transformations that wrenched the industrializing social order of the West away from the lifestyles characteristic of earlier societies. The pace of social change has continued to accelerate, and it is possible that we now stand on the threshold of transitions as significant as those that occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sociology has the prime responsibility for charting the transformations of our past and for grasping the major lines of development taking place today. Our understanding of the past also contributes to our understanding of institutions in the present and future.

The fourth fundamental theme of the book is globalization. For far too long, sociology has been dominated by the view that societies can be studied as independent entities. But even in the past, societies never really existed in isolation. Today we can see a clear acceleration in processes of global integration. This is obvious, for example, in the expansion of international trade across the world. The emphasis on globalization also connects closely with the weight given to the interdependence of the industrialized and developing worlds today.

Despite these interconnections, however, societies have their own distinctive attributes, traditions, and experiences. Sociology cannot be taught solely by understanding the institutions of any one particular society. While we have slanted our discussion toward the United States, we have also balanced it with a rich variety of materials drawn from other regions—especially those undergoing rapid social change, such as the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The book also includes much more material on developing countries than has been usual in introductory texts.

All of the chapters in the book have been updated and revised to reflect the most recent available data. Each chapter opens with a contemporary news event or social trend—ranging from the most local and seemingly trivial (like a young boy’s choice of Halloween costume) to the most global and profound (such as the catastrophic earthquakes in Haiti and Japan). These events are used to motivate and explain the key sociological concepts, themes, and studies that are elaborated throughout the text. Other substantive changes include:

Chapter 1 (Sociology: Theory and Method) opens by recounting the recent suicides of middle-schooler Devin Brown and fifteen-year-old Audrie Pott, both

victims of bullying, some of which took place online. These timely and tragic deaths are used to illustrate key principles of sociological theory and research methods. Data on college students' goals and values are revised to reflect the most recent studies, and the discussion of bullying focuses more on its growing cyber side. The Digital Life box "Bullying Goes Viral" speaks to cyberbullying, apps like Ugly Meter and Back Off Bully, and the "It Gets Better" project.

Chapter 2 (Culture and Society) begins with a discussion of the plight of Pussy Riot, the masked punk rock protest band that has gained an international following for its condemnation of Russia's stances on issues of LGBT and women's rights and its challenges to the Russian Orthodox Church. This segues into musing on how the Internet has helped foster such acts of revolution prompted by clashes of cultural values. The chapter also includes updated data on Internet usage throughout the world and a brief look at *biological determinism*, a new key term. The Digital Life box "The Secret Power of Cultural Norms and Values" talks about the highly popular PostSecret website, which showcases secrets sent anonymously on one side of a postcard by people from all walks of life. The infographic about global Internet connectivity has been re-designed and its data updated.

Chapter 3 (Socialization, the Life Course, and Aging) now includes a discussion of fitness video games' effect on kids and the story of two parents who decided, to the anger of many, not to reveal their baby's sex. It outlines five benchmarks of adulthood and shows that such a transition from adolescence has been delayed in recent years, and how definitions of "middle-aged" are changing as well. New data in this chapter involves the spousal situations of older men and women. The Digital Life box "Projecting Your Future" looks at apps like AgingBooth, Aging Album, and Age My Face, which allow users to see what old age has in store for them. To better compare life course transitions among different cultures, the new Globalization by the Numbers infographic compares the mean age of first sexual experience, first marriage, and first childbirth in ten countries.

Chapter 4 (Social Interaction and Everyday Life in the Age of the Internet) demonstrates, through the story of "catfished" football star Manti Te'o and his faked online girlfriend, the ways that social networking sites have drastically changed social interaction. The concepts of microsociology and agency are examined and the actions of impression management and eye contact are studied more in-depth. Highly relevant additions to this chapter are new discussions of WikiLeaks and street harassment. The Digital Life box "Dating and Mating Online" discusses online dating apps and websites like Tinder and Skout, and the pros and cons thereof. An all-new Globalization by the Numbers infographic highlights cell phone usage across the world.

Chapter 5 (Groups, Networks, and Organizations) begins with an account of the lethal hazing of drum major Robert Champion by fellow members of the marching band of Florida A&M University. This story introduces the sociological concept of "group," which the band's actions clearly demonstrate. Similarly, this chapter points out the groupthink involved in the Penn State sexual abuse case. The new policies of Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer are touched on to show that women in the corporate world are still on the outside of the male network, and the company culture of Google is described to show its focus on innovation and teamwork. Statistics on Internet usage and telecommuting have been updated,

along with data on citizens' trust in the government following the NSA revelations of 2013. The Digital Life box "Fund-Raising Goes Online" details the success of crowdfunding apps and websites like Kickstarter and Watsi. The new infographic for this chapter highlights nonprofit work and rates of volunteering in selected countries.

Chapter 6 (Conformity, Deviance, and Crime) opens with the tragic story of the lethal shooting of Trayvon Martin in February 2012 by George Zimmerman. A racially charged event, Martin's death and Zimmerman's subsequent trial and acquittal quickly became the center of a reinvigorated discussion of race relations and the "stand your ground" self-defense statute in America. This illuminates current issues of crime and deviance, including what deviant behavior is, why people commit crimes, and what the statistical profiles of criminals and crime victims look like. Also added is more context about gun ownership and hate crimes in the United States, plus a deeper look at the gender gap and age range of American criminals. The chapter refines its treatment of the concepts of values and self-perception. Additionally, it updates statistics on imprisonment in the United States and throughout the world, as well as the rates of violent crime, crime reporting, victimization, and death penalty usage in the United States. The section on corporate crime now highlights the devastation collapse of Rana Plaza. The Digital Life box "The New War on Crime" talks about crime detection and reporting apps that can let users report crimes, submit tips to police, or even determine the location of registered sex offenders. Data for the "Incarceration Rates" infographic has also been updated.

Chapter 7 (Stratification, Class, and Inequality) opens with a discussion of Liz Murray's autobiography *Breaking Night* (2010), which recounts how Liz went from being a young homeless girl in the Bronx to a Harvard-educated graduate student. Her story is used to convey the concepts and patterns of social mobility in the United States and elsewhere. This fifth edition incorporates more attention to issues of inequality as manifested in the growing gap between America's rich and poor, illustrated by rates of college attendance and subprime home loans, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the demographics of the middle class and working poor. New key terms defined here to expand students' sociological vocabulary include *bourgeoisie* and *proletariat*, *cultural capital*, and *blue- and pink-collar jobs*. Other chapter features include updated statistics on education, income, occupations, and assets in the United States (with an emphasis on racial disparities), and poverty rates throughout the world. The Digital Life box "A Class-Free Virtual Society?" discusses social networking apps like The Right Stuff and Good Part of Town that provide search results based on class lines, and the advantages or disadvantages of such engines. The new Globalization by the Numbers infographic for this chapter sheds light on income inequality throughout the world and within the United States.

Chapter 8 (Global Inequality) begins with a summary of two devastating recent events: the earthquakes in Haiti and Japan. Despite the tragedy of these natural disasters, Haiti received far more charitable donations from Americans than did Japan, illustrating the magnitude and impact of global inequalities. Alongside examples of struggling people in places like Bangladesh and Zambia, the chapter provides the most current data on economic inequalities throughout the world, such as malnourishment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and on the impact of these inequalities for people's health and well-being. The discussion of the four theories of global inequality has also been deepened here. The Digital Life box "Can Apps Heal Global

Inequalities?” looks at how smartphones are being transformed into tools in the battle against HIV/AIDS in Africa. Statistics for the infographic on global inequality now reflect the most recent findings.

Chapter 9 (Gender Inequality) opens with a summary of two recent court cases brought against the brokerage firm Merrill Lynch, each by three female former employees who alleged they were treated differently than their male colleagues. These lawsuits reveal the ways that gender shapes one’s experiences in the workplace, including one’s pay, status, and interactions with coworkers. The chapter also includes new examples of gendered (or non-gendered) societies throughout the world, an added discussion of the gender divide in and after college, an explanation of the “he-cession,” and more emphasis on the *glass ceiling* and balancing paid work with the *second shift*. It pays increased attention to hegemonic masculinity, intersex infants, and sexual harassment and assault. Statistics and legislation on the gender pay gap, work-family strategies, sex segregation in the workplace, gender inequalities in politics in and outside of the United States, violence against women, and global gender inequalities have been updated. The Digital Life box “His’ and ‘Hers’ Apps?” explores the gender divide of app and website users, like male-dominated Reddit versus female-dominated Pinterest. To highlight gender inequality clearly throughout the globe, the infographic for this chapter has been re-designed and its data updated.

Chapter 10 (Ethnicity and Race) opens with a summary of a recent Cheerios commercial featuring a mixed-race family that garnered a swift racist backlash. The ad, and the acknowledgment that Americans of multiracial identity are more populous than ever, provides a springboard for understanding the ways that race is socially constructed, and the ways that race shapes everyday experiences, such as in the New York stop-and-frisk policy, the death of Trayvon Martin, and the conflict over education for undocumented immigrants. New key terms include *theory of racial formation*, *scientific racism*, and *refugee*. Additional updates include new data from the Pew Research Center on racial identity in the United States and updated statistics on racial differences in a range of areas, including health, education, income, residential patterns, and political representation. The Digital Life box “What Are You, Anyway?” speaks to issues involved with the Guess My Race smartphone app. The infographic for this chapter, now re-imagined and made global in scope, shows the racial and ethnic populations of several different countries.

Chapter 11 (Families and Intimate Relationships) starts with the story of Edith Windsor’s historic Supreme Court fight to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and thus allow same-sex married couples to have all the legal and financial federal benefits that heterosexual ones do. This opener launches a discussion of the changing attitudes toward personal relationships, such as gay couples’ marriage and adoption, single-parent families, divorce’s effect on children, and China’s one-child policy. The chapter also newly outlines five trends related to marriage in Western industrialized countries in the last thirty years. The data for statistics like fertility rates and American family structure have also been updated. The Digital Life box “Divorce—There’s an App for That” details apps like iDivorce and Parenting Apart that help ease the logistical difficulty of spousal and parental splits. The new Globalization by the Numbers infographic compares maternity leave benefits given to new mothers in the workplace in eleven different countries.

Chapter 12 (Education and Religion) begins by recounting the bravery of Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani woman who was shot in the head at age fifteen for protesting the Taliban's restrictions on female education. This example reveals the principles and characteristics of the social institutions of both education and religion, which have profound effects on individuals' lives throughout the world. With an expanded discussion of Jonathan Kozol's study of American schools, of the No Child Left Behind Act, and of the privatization of school services and administration, this chapter raises important questions about the state of education in the United States. It also includes summaries about religious nationalism being globally on the rise while religious participation is simultaneously declining across the country and yet growing ever more visible in American politics. All statistics, such as the number of Jews and Muslims living in the United States, have been updated to reflect the most recent available data. The Digital Life box "From Pulpits to iPads?" shows ways in which technology provides easier access to aspects of religion, such as apps that allow users to download scripture, live-stream services, and present virtual prayer offerings. The new Globalization by the Numbers infographic compares levels of educational attainment in ten different countries.

Chapter 13 (Politics and Economic Life) opens with a recounting of the December 2013 strikes by fast-food workers across the United States. These protests over low hourly pay and a lack of health benefits reveal the complex interplay between government and the economy, as legislators begin to discuss raising the national minimum wage and allowing low-wage workers to unionize. The chapter has also been updated to include the most recent data on earnings, occupational structure, voter turnouts, and the demographic composition of U.S. elected officials. The consideration of Communism, minority political parties, and American labor unions has been expanded and new material has been added on the Knowledge Economy Index and how health care reform would apply to immigrants. The Digital Life box "Job Searches Go High Tech" details some of the apps available to job hunters. The new Globalization by the Numbers infographic depicts unemployment levels in eleven different countries, with a detailed look at unemployment in the United States.

Chapter 14 (The Sociology of the Body: Health, Illness, and Sexuality) introduces the Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Obama that increases Americans' access to health care through controversial provisions like the individual mandate and low-income subsidies. This opening section on "Obamacare" provides the foundation for a discussion of the *social class gradient in health*. The social factors surrounding the sick role, current stigmas of illness, the various causes of changes in mental health, and homophobia have all been detailed further. New studies exploring the racial differences in mental health and the gender gap in life expectancy are also discussed. All health statistics, including data related to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and sexual experiences, have been updated to reflect the most current available data. The five-year results of the 2005 President's Malaria Initiative are included as well. The Digital Life box "Can Your Smartphone Keep You Healthy?" lists health-related apps—like nutritional databases and diaries, drug information records, and fitness and sleep trackers—that make people more aware of their daily state of being and their good or bad habits. The new Globalization by the Numbers infographic provides a global picture of sexual habits.

Chapter 15 (Urbanization, Population, and Environment) begins by highlighting the challenges that China now faces: Its large population is threatening the nation's economic and environmental well-being. The case of China clearly demonstrates issues at the core of population and environment. In this revision, more information has been added to the discussions of suburbanization and rural America, and the terms *exurban county* and *informal economy* are introduced. The plight of Detroit, the recent slackening of China's one-child policy, and a discussion of the current trend toward "child quality" versus "child quantity" has been added. The section on *created environment* and restructured space has also been expanded. Statistics on population growth, birthrates, death rates, urbanization, suburbanization, and global warming have been updated. The Digital Life box "What's Your Carbon Footprint?" talks about apps that track individuals' carbon emissions—whether via vehicular usage or normal daily routines—with an aim toward reducing them through raised awareness. This chapter's Globalization by the Numbers infographic depicts the quickly growing rates of urbanization in areas all across the globe.

Chapter 16 (Globalization in a Changing World) begins by describing the Arab Spring protests and how subsequent protests emerged, powered by youth and making full use of social media, from Yemen to the Ukraine (a political hotbed that is focused on here). The Arab Spring protests reveal how globalization may forge and facilitate social change. With new references to elements of American life like bitcoin, the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, Hurricane Sandy, and the Tea Party, this chapter helps put the United States in global perspective. Additionally, statistics on transnational corporations, Internet usage, egregious global economic inequalities, and global farm subsidies have been updated. The Digital Life box "Online Activism Trends Upward" describes the use of social media sites like Twitter and Facebook in recent protest movements. The Globalization by the Numbers Infographic "The Widening Gap" has been updated to include data from 2012.

ORGANIZATION

There is very little abstract discussion of basic sociological concepts at the beginning of this book. Instead, concepts are explained when they are introduced in the relevant chapters, and we have sought throughout to illustrate them by means of concrete examples. While these are usually taken from sociological research, we have also used material from other sources (such as newspaper or popular magazine articles). We have tried to keep the writing style as simple and direct as possible, while endeavoring to make the book lively and full of surprises.

The chapters follow a sequence designed to help achieve a progressive mastery of the different fields of sociology, but we have taken care to ensure that the book can be used flexibly and is easy to adapt to the needs of individual courses. Chapters can be skipped or studied in a different order without much loss. Each has been written as a fairly autonomous unit, with cross-referencing to other chapters at relevant points.

STUDY AIDS

In the Fifth Edition of *Essentials of Sociology*, we have expanded the pedagogical program. Each chapter features:

- **New “Digital Life” boxes** in every chapter get students thinking critically about how the Internet and smartphones are transforming the way we date, manage our health, and even practice religion.
- **New “Globalization by the Numbers” infographics** transform raw numbers into visually interesting displays that put the United States in a global context. Interactive versions in the ebook make the data dynamic and include integrated assignments that engage students with the data.
- **“Big Picture” Concept Maps** at the end of every chapter, which integrate the “Big Questions,” key terms, and “Concept Checks” into a handy and visually interesting study tool, serve as both a pre-reading guide to the chapter as well as a post-reading review.
- **“Concept Checks”** throughout the chapter help students assess their understanding of the major topics in the chapter. Each “Concept Check” has at least three questions that range from reading comprehension to more advanced critical thinking skills.
- **Learning Goals** are outlined at the start of the chapter and then recur throughout the chapter in marginal notations at the beginning of the relevant sections to promote active learning.
- **“Making Sociology Work” features** provide students with scenarios from the working world and ask them to apply sociological concepts to each situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals offered us helpful comments and advice on particular chapters, and, in some cases, large parts of the text. They helped us see issues in a different light, clarified some difficult points, and allowed us to take advantage of their specialist knowledge in their respective fields. We are deeply indebted to them. Special thanks go to Jason Phillips, who worked assiduously to help us update data in all chapters and contributed significantly to editing as well; and Dmitry Khodyakov, who wrote thought-provoking Concept Check questions for each chapter.

We would like to thank the many readers of the text who have written with comments, criticisms, and suggestions for improvements. We have adopted many of their recommendations in this new edition.

Adalberto Aguirre, University of California, Riverside
Colleen Avedikian, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Debbie Bishop, Lansing Community College
Kim Brackett, Auburn University
Edith Brotman, Towson University
Caroline Calogero, Brookdale Community College
Paul Calarco, Hudson Valley Community College
Karen Coleman, Winona State University
Dawn Conley, Gloucester County College
Raymonda Dennis, Delgado Community College
Matthew Flynn, University of Texas at Austin

Nicole Hotchkiss, Washington College
Howard Housen, Broward College
Annie Hubbard, Northwest Vista College
Onoso Imoagene, University of Pennsylvania
Ryan Kelty, Washington College
Kalyna Lesyna, Palomar College
Danilo Levi, Delgado Community College
Ke Liang, Baruch College
Jayne Mooney, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Kendra Murphy, University of Memphis
Rafael Narvaez, Winona State University
Carolyn Pevey, Germanna Community College
Robert Pullen, Troy University
Fernando Rivera, University of Central Florida
Susan Cody-Rydzewski, Georgia Perimeter College
Rachel Stehle, Cuyahoga Community College
Larry Stern, Collin College
Daniel Steward, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Richard Sweeney, Modesto Junior College
Kristi Williams, Ohio State University
Annice Yarber, Auburn University

We have many others to thank as well. Nina Hnatov did a marvelous job of copyediting the new edition. We are also extremely grateful to project editor Diane Cipollone, who managed the countless details involved in creating the book. Assistant editor Thea Goodrich skillfully tracked all the moving parts that go into publishing this complicated project. Production manager Vanessa Nuttry did impressive work guiding the book through production, so that it came out on time and in beautiful shape. We also thank Eileen Connell, our e-media editor, and Laura Musich, our associate e-media editor, for developing all of the useful supplements that accompany the book. Agnieszka Gasparska and the entire team of designers at Kiss Me I'm Polish managed to digest a huge amount of data to create the “Globalization by the Numbers” infographics throughout *Essentials of Sociology*. Finally, Hope Miller Goodell earns our special thanks for creating the elegant design.

We are also grateful to our editors at Norton—Steve Dunn, Melea Seward, Karl Bakeman, and Sasha Levitt—who have made important substantive and creative contributions to the book’s chapters and have ensured that we have referenced the very latest research. We also would like to register our thanks to a number of current and former graduate students—many of whom are now tenured professors at prestigious universities—whose contributions over the years have proved invaluable: Wendy Carter, Audrey Devin-Eller, Neha Gondal, Neil Gross, Black Hawk Hancock, Paul LePore, Alair MacLean, Ann Meier, Susan Munkres, Josh Rossol, Sharmila Rudrappa, Christopher Wildeman, David Yamane, and Katherina Zippel.

Anthony Giddens
Mitchell Duneier
Richard Appelbaum
Deborah Carr

ESSENTIALS OF
SOCIOLOGY

fifth edition

1

Sociology: Theory and Method

THE BIG QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE “SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION”?

Learn what sociology covers as a field and how everyday topics like love and romance are shaped by social and historical forces. Recognize that sociology involves developing a sociological imagination and a global perspective, and understanding social change.

WHAT THEORIES DO SOCIOLOGISTS USE?

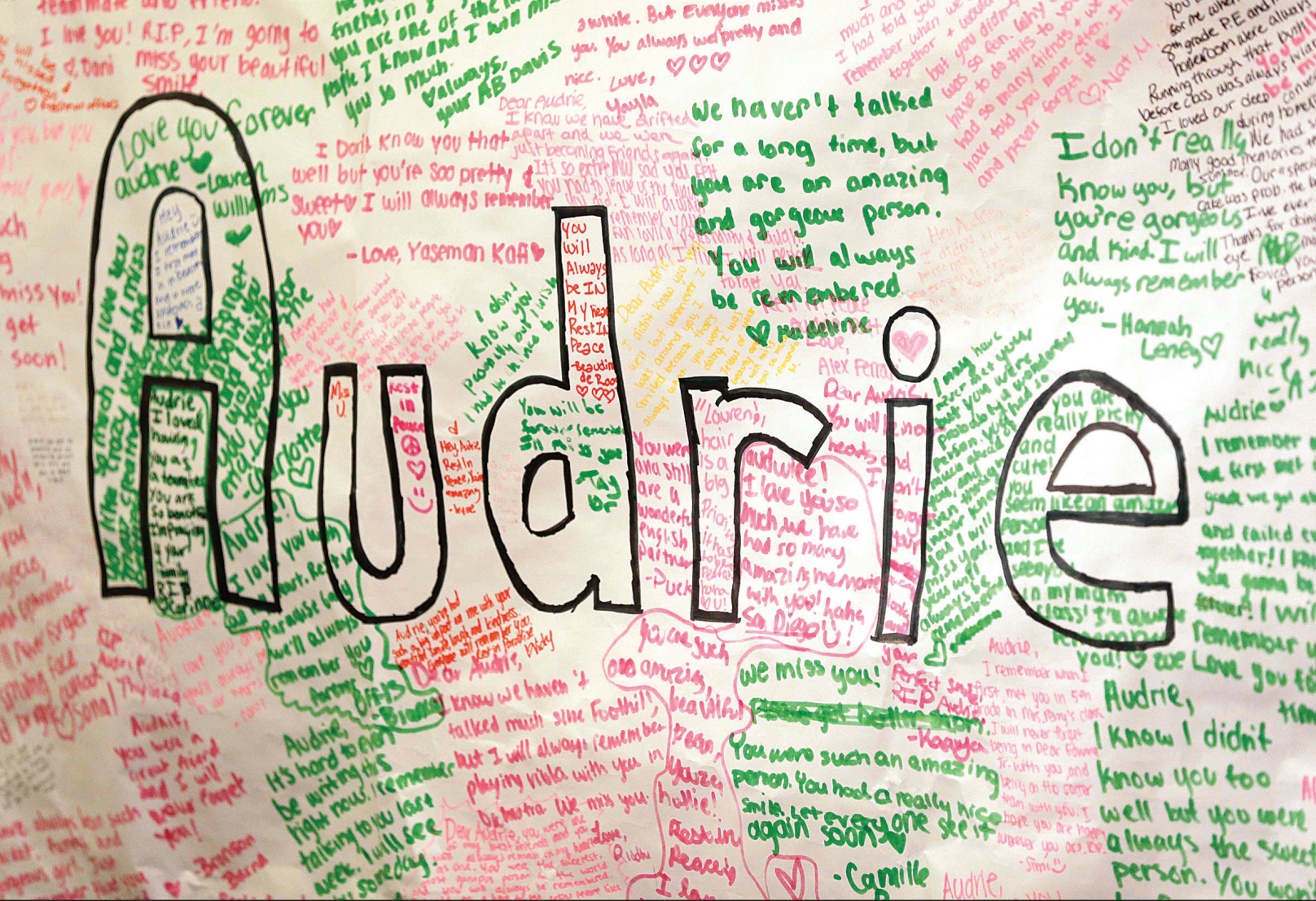
Learn about the development of sociology as a field. Be able to name some of the leading social theorists and the concepts they contributed to sociology. Learn the different theoretical approaches modern sociologists bring to the field.

WHAT KINDS OF QUESTIONS CAN SOCIOLOGISTS ANSWER?

Be able to describe the different types of questions sociologists address in their research.

WHAT ARE THE SEVEN STEPS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS?

Learn the steps of the research process and be able to complete the process yourself.



In April 2013, fifteen-year-old high school student Audrie Pott was sexually assaulted by three sixteen-year-old boys at a classmate's house party. The boys took cell phone photos of Audrie while she was unconscious, later sharing them with other students. Eight days later, Audrie hanged herself.

WHAT RESEARCH METHODS DO SOCIOLOGISTS USE?

Familiarize yourself with the methods available to sociological researchers, and know the advantages and disadvantages of each. See how researchers use multiple methods in a real study.

WHAT ETHICAL DILEMMAS DO SOCIOLOGISTS FACE?

Recognize the ethical problems researchers may face and identify possible solutions to these dilemmas.

HOW DOES THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AFFECT YOUR LIFE?

Understand how adopting a sociological perspective allows us to develop a richer understanding of ourselves, our significant others, and the world.

sociology • The study of human groups and societies, giving particular emphasis to analysis of the industrialized world. Sociology is one of a group of social sciences, which include anthropology, economics, political science, and human geography. The divisions among the various social sciences are not clear-cut, and all share a certain range of common interests, concepts, and methods.

Sociology is the scientific study of human social life, groups, and societies. It is a dazzling and compelling enterprise, as its subject matter is our own behavior as social beings. The scope of sociological study is extremely wide, ranging from the analysis of how people establish social connections with one another in interactions to the investigation of global social processes such as the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Sociology teaches us that what we regard as natural, inevitable, good, or true may not be such, and that the “givens” of our life—including things we assume to be genetic or biological—are strongly influenced by historical and social forces. Understanding the subtle yet complex and profound ways in which our individual lives reflect the contexts of our social experience is basic to the sociological outlook. A brief example will provide a taste of the nature and objectives of sociology.

Anyone who has attended middle school or high school knows that bullying is a common occurrence. Through much of history, teachers, principals, and parents turned a blind eye, often believing that “boys will be boys.” This cavalier attitude toward bullying has been called into question by students, teachers, and policymakers alike in recent years. A recent spate of suicides by teenagers subjected to merciless bullying has raised awareness that bullying is no longer “kid stuff,” and in nearly all states is grounds for suspension, expulsion, or even more serious punishment. Over the past five years, bullying-related tragedies have been documented throughout the United States, involving teenagers of all backgrounds—male and female, black and white, Asian and Latino, gay and straight, rich and poor, rural and suburban.

For Devin Brown, the bullying began shortly after he started at Rothschild Middle School. Things escalated after he reported another student for carrying a knife and threatening a teacher. Rather than being regarded as a hero by his classmates, he was derided as a “snitch” and was regularly threatened and beaten up at school. In April 2013, after months of relentless harassment, Brown hanged himself at home in his closet.

That same month, fifteen-year-old high school student Audrie Pott hanged herself in her San Jose, California, home. Eight days earlier, Pott had been sexually assaulted at a classmate’s house party by three sixteen-year-old boys. She woke up to find her clothes pulled off and her body covered in lewd markings. The trauma didn’t end there, though. The boys took pictures of Pott while she was unconscious and shared them with other students. Just days before she took her life, a devastated Pott posted messages on Facebook that read, “My life is over” and “The whole school knows.”

Brown and Pott are just two of hundreds of teenagers who have committed suicide after being bullied and humiliated by their classmates. Today, anti-bullying laws exist in forty-nine of the fifty United States; Montana is the one state yet to pass such legislation (Sacco et al. 2013). In 2011, New Jersey passed the nation’s toughest anti-bullying legislation, triggered in part by the high-profile suicide of Tyler Clementi. In 2010, the eighteen-year-old Rutgers University freshman committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge, just two weeks after he started his first semester in college. The suicide came days after his sexual encounter with a man in his dorm room was video streamed over the Internet without Clementi’s knowledge by his roommate and a fellow hallmate.

Sociology helps us to understand and analyze scientifically social phenomena like bullying and suicide. American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) observed that social sciences enable people to “translate private troubles into public issues.” What Mills meant is that individuals often believe that the problems that they (and others) face are personal, perhaps resulting from one’s own traits or decisions. But social scientists recognize that these seemingly “**personal**” troubles, if occurring in patterned ways, to large numbers of individuals, reflect important “**public issues**,” or consequences of social structures.

personal troubles • Difficulties that are located in individual biographies and their immediate milieu, a seemingly private experience.

public issues • Difficulties or problems that are linked to the institutional and historical possibilities of social structure.

For example, Devin Brown, Audrie Pott, and Tyler Clementi all committed suicide shortly after being tormented by their peers. Some observers might think that the suicides are an isolated problem, perhaps the reaction of three teens who were depressed or emotionally unstable. However, a sociologist would look at the social context and try to understand just how common such events are and to understand whether some subgroups are particularly vulnerable to such problems.

They might consult data from national surveys, such as the 2011 Pew Internet and American Life Project, which found that one in three teenagers who use the Internet say he or she has been the target of annoying and potentially menacing online activities. Nearly four in ten teens who use social networking sites say that they've been cyberbullied. The study also detected strong gender differences, with girls (like Audrie Pott) reporting more online victimization than boys; 38 percent of girls but only 26 percent of boys who use the Internet report harassment (Lenhart 2007). However, recent research suggests that the gender gap is largest among young teenagers; one-third of young teenage girls (ages twelve to thirteen), yet just 9 percent of young teenage boys, report unkind interactions online. As teens age, the gender gap narrows. By ages fourteen to seventeen, roughly equal numbers of teenage girls (20 percent) and boys (18 percent) report harassment or mistreatment online (Jones, Mitchell, and Finkelhor 2012; Lenhart et al. 2011).

Other sociologists have studied bullying “off-line” and found that gay and lesbian teens are far more likely than their straight peers to be harassed at school. One survey of more than 7,500 high school students found that nearly 44 percent of gay male and 40 percent of lesbian teens said they had been bullied in the previous year, compared with just 26 and 15 percent of heterosexual boys and girls, respectively (Berlan et al. 2010). Studies such as these help us recognize that the anguish experienced by Clementi, Pott, and Brown is hardly an isolated incident and instead reflects pervasive social problems that require far-reaching solutions. Sociology can help us understand the questions of what, why, and how public issues and personal troubles arise.

WHAT IS THE “SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION”?

When we learn to think sociologically, we can also better understand the most personal aspects of our own lives. For instance, have you ever been in love? Almost certainly you have. Most people who are in their teens or older know what being in love is like. Love and romance provide some of the most intense feelings we ever experience. Why do people fall in love? The answer may seem obvious: Love expresses a mutual physical and personal attachment between two individuals. These days, we might not all think that love is “forever,” but falling in love, we may agree, is an experience arising from universal human emotions. It seems natural for a couple in love to want personal and sexual fulfillment in their relationship, perhaps through marriage.

Yet this pattern whereby love leads to marriage is in fact very unusual. Romantic love is not an experience all people across the world have—and where it does happen, it is rarely connected to marriage. The idea of romantic love did not become widespread until fairly recently in our society, and it has never even existed in many other cultures.

Only in modern times have love and sexuality become closely connected. In the Middle Ages and for centuries afterward, men and women married mainly to keep

Learn what sociology covers as a field and how everyday topics like love and romance are shaped by social and historical forces. Recognize that sociology involves developing a sociological imagination and a global perspective, and understanding social change.