

THINK

Second Canadian Edition

SOCIOLOGY

CARL • BÉLANGER

**Idle No
More**
Social
movements
that change
society *p. 289*

Globalization
Who made my
shoes? *p. 123*

**Free
Health
Care**
Is it really
free? *p. 202*

**Blended,
Same-Sex,
Lone-Parent**
The family is
changing... *p. 239*



THINK

SOCIOLOGY

Second Canadian Edition

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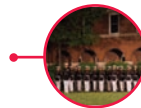
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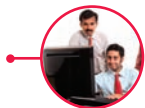
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PREFACE

Think Sociology, Second Canadian Edition, is part of the popular THINK series of textbooks and follows the distinctive format of that series. It is a good basic introduction to sociology, and while it provides a firm theoretical grounding, it also includes many practical and applied examples. This makes it appealing to students who might want to pursue further study in the field of sociology. It is also suitable for students who are interested in finding employment in any domain that involves working with groups of people.

The first Canadian edition of this book was well received, and we appreciate the feedback and suggestions from the many reviewers, instructors, and especially students who have used this text. Many of their suggestions have been incorporated into this second edition. While the concise writing style and brevity of the chapters are appealing to both instructors and students, one of the recurring requests was for more content. In the second edition, this has been addressed. More concepts have been included in a number of topics, and the theoretical discussions have been expanded to include more applied examples. Overall, the goal was to make this edition more “sociological” while still maintaining the succinct presentation.

As with the first edition, we have not attempted to write an exhaustive explanation of the field of sociology. Rather, we present a brief and interesting introduction to the subject and show students that it is relevant to everything they do in social settings. One advantage of a new edition is the chance to benefit from the feedback of those who have used the text. In addition to updating the statistics and presenting more recent research, we have made the following improvements:

- An entirely new chapter (Chapter 8), titled “Population and Environmental Impact,” has been added. This chapter focuses on the Canadian context and also includes a global perspective on these important topics.
- Many students and teachers have expressed much appreciation for the feature called “Wrap Your Mind around the Theory,” popularly referred to as the “Theory Wheels.” We have kept them, but in many cases we have significantly revised them to reflect the content changes in the chapters.
- The box titled “From Classroom to Community” has been deleted from each chapter in order to allow space for greater topic coverage and additional examples within the chapters.
- In Chapter 1, the all-important theory chapter, we have revised and expanded the four major perspectives. Since these are the foundation of sociology, we have given particular attention to making the different theoretical perspectives clear and easy to understand.
- Chapter 2, “Sociological Research,” has been reorganized in order to make this challenging topic easier to understand.
- The first edition chapters titled “Social Structure and Interaction” and “Groups and Societies” have been combined, and some of their material has been distributed to other chapters.
- Chapter 10 has a new title: “Gender and Sexuality.” This reflects the addition of the important topics of sexuality and sexual orientation, which were absent in the first edition.
- Chapter 12 also has a new title: “Deviance and Crime.” The discussion of deviance is broader, and crime is described as a particular kind of deviance.

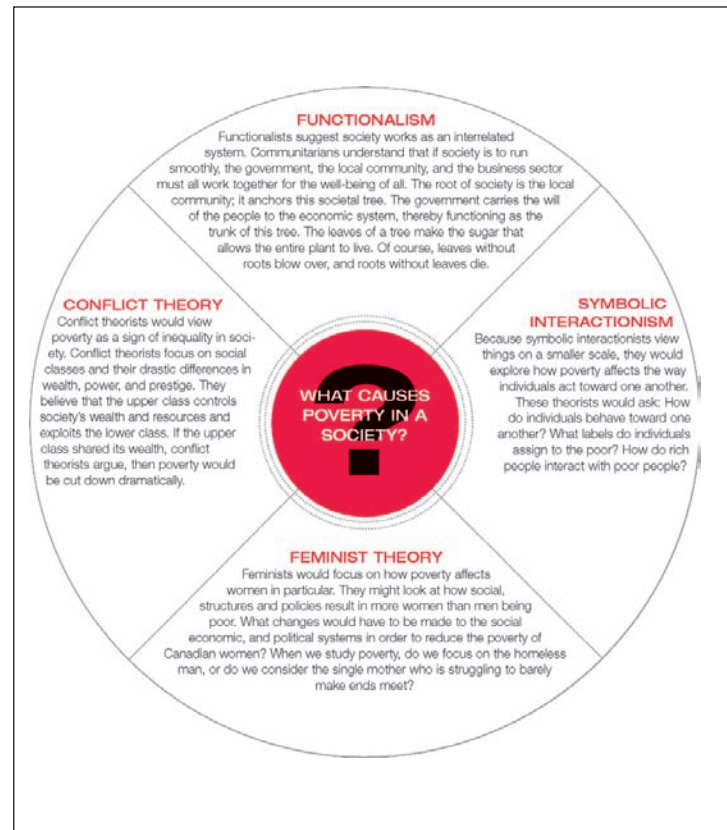
- Chapter 13 has been retitled “The Family” instead of “Marriage and Family.” This is an acknowledgment of the increasing diversity of family forms in Canada. These new family forms have been presented in greater detail, and information on mate selection has also been added. The theoretical section of this chapter has been significantly revised.
- In Chapter 15, “Collective Behaviour and Social Movements,” a section on the theories of collective behaviour has been added.

While it is essential that an introductory text present the primary theories, concepts, and issues of the field, it is also important that the text challenges students to explore these topics as well. In sociology, we want students to learn and to practise using their sociological imagination. Hopefully, it is apparent that the main orientation of *Think Sociology* is practical and that it invites students to realize that the theoretical perspectives and concepts of sociology can help them better understand and appreciate their social lives.

THINKING TOOLS

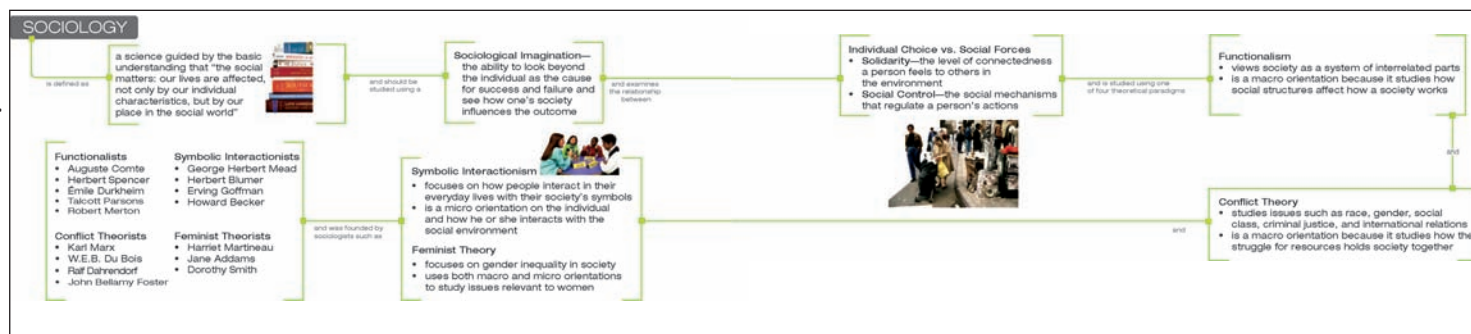
Within this text are the following tools to help students succeed:

- **Theory Wheels** visually connect chapter topics to four theoretical perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, feminist theory, and symbolic interactionism—and help students see how these theories apply to everyday life.



- **Concept maps** illustrate relationships among topics in each chapter and show students how these topics connect to form the overall picture.
- **Think Sociology boxes** present sociological findings on provocative topics, demonstrating how research can help students better understand the everyday world.
- **Go Global boxes** provide insights into topics and issues from countries around the world, allowing students to draw comparisons between Canada and international communities.

- **Where to Start Your Research Paper** sections at the end of each chapter feature trustworthy internet sources that can serve as a starting point for students researching an essay.
- A tear-out **Study Card** at the end of the text highlights key terms and points for every chapter and can make studying on-the-go easy.
- **The Think Spot** is an open-access website at www.thinkspot.ca that helps students review the material with chapter-by-chapter quizzes.



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Thank you to Matthew Christian, acquisitions editor at Pearson Canada, who promoted my proposal for a second Canadian edition until it was accepted. Since that time, I have had the pleasure of working with many wonderful, inspired, and dedicated people. Thank you to Lisa Gillis, the marketing manager for the project. Katherine Goodes has been amazing as developmental editor; she managed to coordinate a very complicated project and made everything run smoothly. Andrea Falkenberg was the project manager at Pearson Canada who ensured that this book got produced. Many talented people at Cenveo helped in the production of this book. Heidi Allgair was the production editor, and she did an amazing job of keeping countless edits and revisions in order. Her dedication to this project has been admirable. Kitty Wilson was a fantastic copy editor. Suzanne DeWorken was an incredible and thorough proofreader; many small (and not so small) details have been corrected, thanks to her sharp eye.

Thank you to the many educators who provided helpful feedback for this new edition, including:

Tara Gauld, Confederation College
 Cindy Gervais, Fleming College
 Thomas Groulx, St. Clair College
 Wendi Hadd, John Abbott College
 Marc Leger, Algonquin College
 Karen Moreau, Niagara College
 Greg Nepean, University of Guelph

Thank you especially to all my colleagues at Vanier College. You inspire me with your ideas and your dedication to teaching, and it is a joy to work alongside so many talented people.

My parents continue to teach me, by their words and by their actions, that with hard work and perseverance, anything is possible.

Christine, you have helped me in so many ways. You encourage me, you challenge me, and you make me feel special.

I have had many wonderful teachers, but one especially stands out. Donald Von Eschen was my thesis adviser many years ago. He showed me what good teaching and good sociology are all about.

Thank you to all the wonderful, curious, and brilliant students I have had over the years. Your genuine interest has inspired me to explain the wonders of sociology more clearly. This book is for you.

Finally, to my wonderful children, Tommy and Katerina, you are my constant inspiration. I am so proud to watch you both growing up and making your own way in the world. It has been a very difficult time for all of us, but you have patiently allowed me the time to work on this project.

Marc Bélanger

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JOHN CARL'S interest in sociology grew from his interests and job experiences after college, which included working in hospitals, schools, churches, and prisons. John reflects, "In these many diverse encounters, I continued to notice how often the structures of society frequently did not support the change so desperately sought after by the individual. I began to reflect on my sociology courses from my undergraduate work and decided to return to graduate school to study sociology."

At the University of Oklahoma, he became passionate about the study of criminology and stratification, and he completed his Ph.D. while teaching full time at Rose State College. John says, "I found that every part of my life, to this point, fit perfectly with the study of sociology. It is a diverse and exciting field that helps each of us understand our world."

Today, teaching remains his primary focus. John Carl has excelled in the classroom, winning awards for his teaching and working to build and improve the sociology program at Rose State College. "I teach the introductory class every semester because I believe it is the most important course in any department. It is where students get the foundation they need for their continued study of sociology. In these classes, my goal is simple: to teach students to think sociologically so that they can consider any new event in the light of that thought."

When asked why he wrote *THINK Sociology*, the answer was simple: "This book is truly a labour of love for me. I wanted to write a book that is filled with examples used in the classroom and written in a language that students can understand without compromising the core concepts of sociology."

John lives in Oklahoma with his family: wife, Keven, and daughters, Sara and Caroline. In his free time, John plays golf, gardens, throws pottery, and plays his guitar. He continues to move from the classroom to community by being active in non-profit leadership in his home community and providing training to non-profit boards so they may better achieve their goals. John suggests, "It is all part of sociology, not only to understand the world in which we live, but to take that understanding from the classroom and use it to improve the community."

MARC BÉLANGER'S natural curiosity about why people do the things they do and a passion for anything academic led to his study of sociology. Marc holds a B.A. and an M.A. from McGill University in Montreal, and he is currently working on a master's in education from the Université de Sherbrooke. In the 10 years that he has been at Vanier College, Marc has taught the introductory sociology course many times.

"When I first saw John Carl's book, like many, I was attracted by the visual format. After a closer reading, I also appreciated that there was a lot of good sociology in it. It has been an honour and a pleasure to work on the Canadian edition of *THINK Sociology*."

Marc lives in Montreal with his wonderful children, Tommy and Katerina.

The authors welcome your comments
and suggestions about this *THINK Sociology*
text at jcthinksociology@gmail.com
and belangem@vaniercollege.qc.ca.

To Keven: Thanks for everything you do.
I love you.

—J. D. C.

In memory of Denise Papadatos-Bélanger,
1965–2011

A wonderful wife and mother.

—M. B.



Monkey Business/Fotolia

SOCIOLOGY

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

WHAT ARE THE FOUR MAJOR SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES?

WHY IS COMMUNITY LEARNING IMPORTANT?

“Although

historically, poverty has been thought of as a matter to be dealt with privately, through charity or the family, during important decades in Canada, principally between the 1950s and the 1980s, protection from poverty was also regarded as a critical subject matter for legislation and redistributive measures. Lately, however, governments have been allowing poverty to disappear from the social policy agenda, apparently content to permit poverty and extreme disparities in income and wealth to flourish . . .

“The idea that all human beings are equal in worth is the foundation of the rule of law and of democracy, positing that

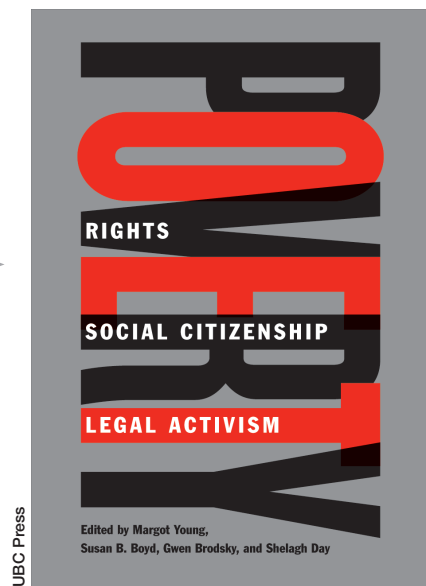
every person is entitled to be treated with equal concern and respect by governments and to have an equal voice in political decision making. The poverty and economic inequality of some, disproportionately of those who are already disadvantaged because of their female sex, non-white race, or disability, stands in marked contrast to these commitments to equality. . . .”¹

An Introduction *to the* Foundations of Sociology

CHAPTER

01

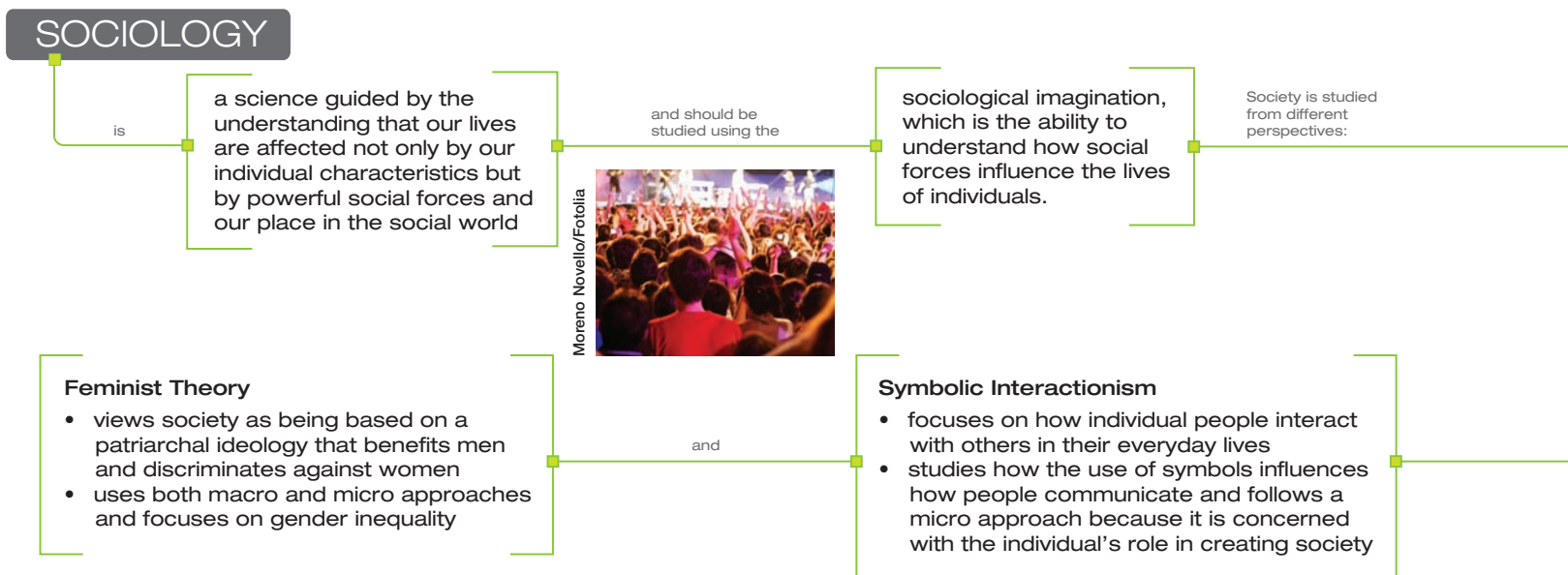
It is shameful that in a country like Canada, there are people who are poor. In *Poverty: Rights, Social Citizenship, and Legal Activism*, the contributing authors take an interdisciplinary perspective on poverty in Canada. **Rather than simply ask why a particular individual is poor, they examine the structural causes of poverty—how society and its distribution of resources are the primary causes of poverty.**



The poor are often viewed as nameless, faceless, voiceless people loitering on street corners or huddled away in decrepit apartments. It's easy for us to turn a blind eye to the problem of poverty if we don't feel a personal connection to the man panhandling on the sidewalk or the woman standing in line at the soup kitchen with her children.

Nobody chooses to be poor, but sometimes circumstances

turn against people. Poverty can be seen anywhere, even on a college campus, as I found out one semester: One day, I saw a student looking through the large garbage bin behind the cafeteria. He found a sandwich, still in its wrapper. As I watched, he quickly opened the wrapper and wolfed down the sandwich. I later learned that this student lived with his mother, who was a drug addict. Often, there was no money for food, and he was forced to rummage in the garbage if he wanted something to eat. Of course, none of this was planned, and most people would agree that it is not his fault. I was left to wonder why in a country as prosperous as Canada there are still young people who live like this.



get the topic: WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Sociology Defined

Most sociologists would agree that **sociology** is a science guided by the basic understanding that our lives are affected not only by our individual characteristics but by powerful social forces and our place in the social world. Sociology is a science because it uses a method based on the collection and analysis of empirical evidence—things that we can observe. Sociologists look at society and at social behavior. **Society**

SOCIOLOGY is a science guided by the understanding that our lives are affected not only by our individual characteristics but by powerful social forces and our place in the social world.

SOCIETY refers to a group of people who live in a defined territory and who share social structures and who interact with each other.

refers to a group of people who live in a defined territory and who share social structures and who interact with each other.

MAKE CONNECTIONS

The Sociology of Driving

Driving is a familiar and poignant example of social forces in action. Think about it. You hop into a 1-ton metal box on wheels and send it hurtling down the pavement at 100km/h! And thousands of others are doing the same thing at the same time! Yet, for the most part, this seemingly bizarre behaviour occurs smoothly and without mishap. Why? Because driving, like all our other public behaviour, is governed by social rules that we have learned and follow without thinking. You have learned to drive on the right side of the road (and to stay there), to stop on red and go on green, to keep a certain distance between your car and other cars (and pedestrians). And the vast majority of others sharing

the road with you are all doing the same thing and behaving in the same way. As a society, we can undertake this dangerous and potentially destructive activity (driving) because there is a certain order and predictability to our behaviour. Each time you drive, you make an unspoken agreement to follow the rules of the road and act in a certain way, and all the other drivers sharing the road with you have made this same agreement. Society as a whole functions in much the same way. We have all made agreements to act in a certain way so that our behaviour is conventional and predictable. This allows us to work together and accomplish feats that would not be possible without a governing structure of rules that guide and motivate us.

We can have a science of sociology because human social behaviour is regular. Most of us do follow the rules (most of the time). Sociologists study the nature of these rules that govern our behaviour and the means by which each and every one of us learn and internalize these rules. Sociologists want to understand the social forces that act upon us.

>>> **CLASS DISCUSSION** When you walked into your classroom, how did you know where to sit? When you go to see a movie, why do you stand in line to buy a ticket? When you are with your friends, how do you act? Think about and discuss other activities that are governed by social rules.

Sociology

Micro—a small-scale perspective that focuses on individuals and small groups
Macro—a large-scale perspective that focuses on the social structure

There are four major sociological theories:



Functionalism

- defines society as a system of interrelated parts
- is a macro orientation because it focuses on larger social structures rather than individuals

Conflict Theory

- views society as an unequal system that brings about conflict and change
- focuses on macro issues and is concerned with inequality as it relates to wealth and power

and

and

Developing a Sociological Imagination

My son recently lost his job at Zellers. He wasn't fired for being lazy, or for stealing merchandise, or for being late. He was laid off because all the Zellers stores in Canada were bought by the larger American department store chain Target. This was an economic decision made at a level far beyond my son's control. But because of that decision, he lost his job. And he was really disappointed.

The American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) asserted that people must understand how outside forces contribute to their own individual situations. In other words, Mills wanted us to develop a **sociological imagination**—the ability to understand how social forces influence the lives of individuals.² At the same time, we also need to understand how individuals can create and change the societies they live in. Developing a sociological imagination helps us understand our place in a complex world. We must grasp both the history and the biography of a situation to generate this imagination. Mills argued that most of us see problems through biography; that is, we focus on our private troubles.³ This **micro**, or small-scale, perspective focuses our

“The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise.” (Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959, p. 6)

attention on the individual. For my son who lost his job at Zellers, this was a private problem. Without a job, he had no money, and he was unable to buy things he needed. In order to fix this private trouble, he had to find another job. However, we must also understand how history and social structure affect the individual. By including this **macro**, or large-scale, perspective we can understand how the social structure also influences individuals.

Peter Berger (1929–), another sociologist, has described the sociological perspective as “seeing the general in the particular.”⁴ Although each individual is unique, sociologists look for patterns in the behavior of individuals. Sociology looks at what many people are doing. We can study a few individuals in order to understand the characteristics of social behaviour and to see social trends. Berger also invited us to “see the

>>> The fact that Target bought all the Zellers stores and closed some of them was a decision made at the level of corporations. The result was that many people, including my son, lost their jobs. Each one of those people faced his or her own private troubles. But to fully understand the situation, we also need to see that each one lost his or her job as a result of wider social forces.



Igor kisselev/Alamy



Michael Neelon/Alamy

Suicide might be seen as an individual decision, but there are many social factors that seem to influence suicide rates. We cannot use these factors to specifically predict who will and will not kill themselves, but we can understand that one's environment influences the rate of suicide in a society. Other factors, such as one's family makeup and the relative size of a group of people born during the same time period, also play a role.⁵

strange in the familiar."⁶ He used the term **debunking** to describe the practice of looking beyond the surface or obvious explanation and seeking out deeper explanations. Sociology challenges us to question the assumptions we have about societies, especially our own.

Émile Durkheim's Theory on Suicide

A famous study that is often used to illustrate the sociological perspective was conducted by Émile Durkheim, one of the first sociologists.⁷ Durkheim studied suicide, but instead of looking for the reasons a particular individual commits suicide, he looked at the social facts. He examined and compared suicide rates in various regions of Europe. What he found was that the regions varied in their suicide rates. He then looked for social factors in those areas that might explain the difference in rates. One of the factors that he found that had an association was religion: Areas that were primarily Catholic had lower suicide rates than those that were Protestant. Durkheim then asked what is it about the Catholic religion that might explain why Catholics are less likely than Protestants to kill themselves. His explanation was that the Catholic religion encourages a greater degree of social interaction relative to the more individualistic character of the Protestant religions. Catholics overall felt a greater sense of connectedness to those around them. Another factor that Durkheim found to be associated was marital status; married people were less likely to commit suicide than single people. Again, the degree of social connectedness seemed to be a common feature.

The important and sociological conclusion of Durkheim's study was that suicide—a seemingly individual act—was in fact more or less likely

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION is the ability to understand how social forces influence the lives of individuals.

MICRO is a small-scale perspective.

MACRO is a large-scale perspective.

DEBUNKING is the practice of looking beyond the surface or obvious explanation and seeking out deeper explanations.

to occur depending on the social characteristics of that individual. While each individual act of suicide is unique, each individual is influenced by their wider social context, and this makes a person more or less likely, even as an individual, to commit suicide.

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE AND SOCIAL FORCES

Sociologists recognize that social factors often influence our personal choices. They provide a context in which we make decisions. Again, consider the act of suicide. Most people believe that this is entirely an individual choice, and ultimately it is. However, certain trends arise in the data on suicides which indicate that some people are at increased risk of taking their own lives.

A person's sex, age, and the province where he or she lives all predict the likelihood of suicide. According to Statistics Canada:

- Studies have found males to be at least four times more likely than females to commit suicide. Males are also more likely to die in their first attempt.
- For both males and females, the suicide rate is highest among those aged 30 to 59.
- Historically, suicide rates in Canada have tended to increase from east to west. However, since 1993, Quebec has had the highest rate of all the provinces.⁸

It is important to note that these factors do not cause individuals to commit suicide *per se*; however, they do indicate groups that are at increased risk of killing themselves. When sociologists examine an issue, such as suicide, poverty, or any other social event, they use their sociological imagination to help consider how social factors influence an individual's choice. How do sociologists use the sociological imagination to study the larger world? Let's examine four important theoretical perspectives and the sociologists who helped develop them.

THINK SOCIOLOGICALLY

Homelessness—Individual Choice vs. Social Factors

Have you ever heard someone argue that people choose to be poor? You might have even made the argument yourself. We may ask: do people become poor because they dropped out of school, or because they are lazy or unmotivated, or because they adopt deviant lifestyles, or because they live in bad situations? Alternatively, we may ask: do people

become poor as a result of public policies that create unjust and inequitable distribution of economic and social resources? By now, you must be starting to realize that society has a powerful influence on each of us. If we want to address the issue of poverty in Canada, we have to realize that there are social causes of poverty. Until we realize this, any solutions that we propose will only touch the surface but will not get to the root causes.

>>> **ACTIVITY** Visit a homeless shelter in your community. Talk to the people there and find out how social factors contributed to their situation. How did they arrive at the shelter? What was their life like before? Write a paragraph describing one of the people you met and analyzing the factors that led to that person's homelessness.



think sociologically: WHAT ARE THE FOUR MAJOR SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES?

Before I ever knew anything about sociology, I had a worldview. Being born in Canada to a middle-class family, my parents' teachings shaped my point of view. So did my friends, my schools, and the media. Had I been born in China, Chad, or Chile, I would likely think differently about the world. How do you view the world? What personal beliefs or ideas do you value most? It might be difficult to respond to these questions, but I bet you have some pretty definitive answers. When sociologists look at society or social behaviour, they do so from a particular perspective. In Canada, most sociologists view the world through four major perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and feminist theory. Each perspective has developed its own theories—descriptions or explanations of how things work.

Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that defines society as a system of interrelated parts. This perspective is a macro approach to sociological study because it focuses on larger social structures rather than individuals. When you think about functionalism, it may be helpful to think about the human body. The body has different parts, and each part has a function in keeping the body running. Society is similar in many ways. It is made up of social institutions—ways of organizing social behaviour. Some examples of social institutions are the government, schools, and the family. Each institution exists because it fulfills some function in society.

Conflict theory is a theoretical perspective that views society as various groups that are in a constant struggle over scarce resources. This constant struggle inevitably results in inequality. Much like functionalism, conflict theory is also a macro approach, as this theory is concerned

with various groups battling for power. Inequality of wealth and power in society is often the focus of modern conflict theory. For example, conflict theorists might examine how the chasm between the rich and the poor affects people's opportunities in our society. It's no surprise that children who come from privileged backgrounds can afford to receive the best educations, participate in organized sports, and take music lessons. Children from poorer families may not get these same opportunities, and this lack of opportunity puts them at a disadvantage.

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on how individual interactions between people influence them and how these interactions can impact society. Symbolic interactionism is primarily a micro approach to sociology because it is concerned with the individual's role in creating society. The use of "symbols," such as words, gestures, body language, and facial expressions, enables people to communicate. Our actions communicate meaning. For example, if you're having a "bad day," what does that mean? One student once told me he had a bad day every time it rained. If that is the case, could such a definition of reality influence how you behave toward others on your job or in the classroom? How might his "bad day" influence the "days" of others? Interactionists constantly seek to understand how small interactions influence the larger society.

Feminist theory has made two important contributions to sociology. First, on a theoretical level, feminist theory contends that most societies are **patriarchal**; that is, they are controlled by and benefit men. The feminist perspective emphasizes the social inequality between men and women. If we are to have true social equality, we must first acknowl-



summersgraphicsinc/Fotolia

>>> Poverty is a social issue, even in a prosperous country like Canada. Why do you think that there are poor people in Canada? How would each of the sociological perspectives look at the issue of poverty?

edge that our social structures create and perpetuate gender inequality. Feminist researchers often use both macro and micro approaches. At the macro level, feminists examine the gendered institutions of the social structure. On the micro level, many feminist researchers choose to study individuals and small groups by using more qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups. The second contribution of feminist theory is in the topics that are studied. Many feminists study issues such as lone-parenthood, domestic violence, or prostitution that have a greater impact on women.

As you have seen, sociologists approach their study of society from either a macro or micro perspective. The macro approach examines larger social groups and institutions and their effects on individuals. The micro approach focuses on small groups and the interactions between individuals. Both seek to understand the process by which people influence society and society affects them.

Sociologists use the different perspectives to analyze similar issues, such as why poverty exists or how children learn about the social world. However, the questions they ask as they analyze these issues differ. The chart below illustrates how functionalists, conflict theorists, symbolic interactionists, and feminists approach the study of society.

Sociologists use these questions to help them build theories about the world. So, is one school of thought better than the others? Not necessarily. In fact, most sociologists have worldviews that are rather eclectic or diverse. They may use each perspective to illuminate different issues or use all four to look comprehensively at a single issue. If you consider Dennis Raphael's work, for example, you'll see that he uses bits and pieces of each perspective to understand poverty. Raphael finds that a society's structures create poverty (functionalism), and people with wealth and power control those structures and are generally abusive to the poorest of the poor (conflict theory). Those who experience poverty often create in themselves self-fulfilling prophecies that help them remain mired in their plight (symbolic interactionism). In Canada, women are more likely than men to be poor. Even if they are working, women are more likely to have a part-time job and to earn less (feminist theory). Raphael uses each of these ideas to create a complete view of why poverty exists in our society.

FUNCTIONALISM is a theoretical perspective that sees society as a system of interrelated parts.

CONFLICT THEORY is a theoretical perspective that views society as various groups that are in a constant struggle over scarce resources.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM is a theoretical perspective that focuses on how people interact with others in their everyday lives.

FEMINIST THEORY is a theoretical perspective that focuses on gender inequalities which are built into the social structure.

PATRIARCHAL refers to a social system that benefits men.

Now that you have a general understanding of each perspective and know what kinds of questions it asks, let's take a closer look at each one.

The Functionalist Perspective

Functionalism, also called structural functionalism, is a macro perspective that focuses on the structure of society and how each part fulfills a function in the system. The main parts of the system are social institutions. Social institutions such as the family, economy, educational system, and political system are critical for society to function properly. According to functionalists, society is relatively stable, and social institutions provide different functions which help maintain this stability. Understanding how social institutions work in a society is of great interest to functionalists. Since institutions are interrelated, each has an impact on the others.

Functionalism suggests that a society's values and norms provide the foundation for the rules and laws that it creates. These norms regulate the relationships among social institutions. Therefore, general agreement on these norms must occur for a society to achieve balance.

On the next few pages, we'll investigate some early functionalists and you can see who these ideas come from. Early theorists like Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim contributed to the growth and development of the functionalist perspective.

COMPARING THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

	Functionalism	Conflict Theory	Symbolic Interactionism	Feminist Theory
Level of Analysis	Macro	Macro	Micro	Macro and Micro
Core Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What keeps society functioning smoothly? • What are the parts of society, and how do they relate to each other? • What are the intended and unintended outcomes of an event? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are wealth and power distributed in society? • How do people with wealth and power keep them? • How are society's resources and opportunities divided? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do people interact with each other? • How does social interaction influence, create, and sustain human relationships? • Do people change their behaviour from one setting to another, and if so, why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does society advantage men and disadvantage women? • What social issues are important to women? • How can social structures be changed to benefit men and women equally?