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KATHLEEN ODELL KORGAN
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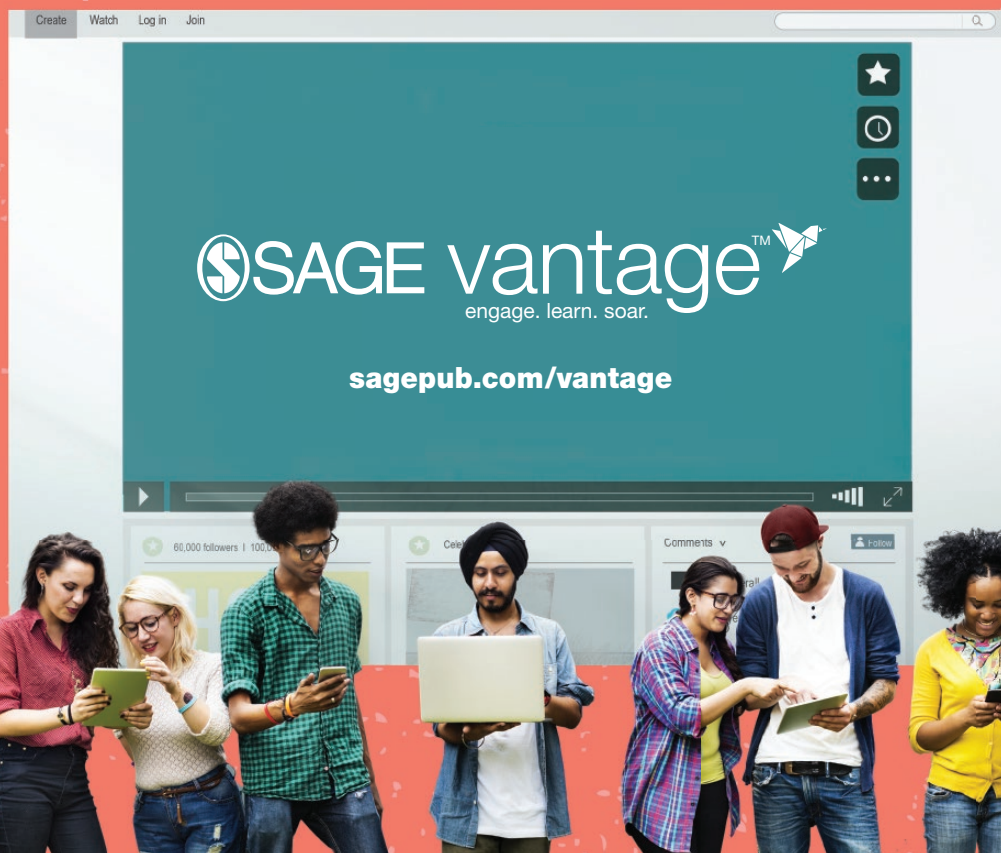
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KATHLEEN ODELL KORGEN

William Paterson University

MAXINE P. ATKINSON

North Carolina State University



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne



FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

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BRIEF CONTENTS

Preface xxvii

About the Authors xxxiii

About the Contributors xxxiv

Chapter 1.	Training Your Sociological Eye	2
	Kathleen Odell Korgen	
Chapter 2.	Understanding Theory	16
	Kathleen S. Lowney	
Chapter 3.	Using Research Methods	36
	Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur and Amanda M. Jungels	
Chapter 4.	Recognizing Culture	56
	David E. Rohall	
Chapter 5.	Understanding Socialization and Interaction	76
	Amy Sodaro	
Chapter 6.	Identifying Deviant Behavior	96
	Rena C. Zito	
Chapter 7.	Confronting Economic Inequality	114
	Sandra Enos	
Chapter 8.	Constructing Gender, Sex, and Sexuality	136
	Maxine P. Atkinson	
Chapter 9.	Recognizing the Importance of Race	160
	Kathleen Odell Korgen	
Chapter 10.	Understanding Institutions: Politics and the Economy	188
	Richard A. Zdan	
Chapter 11.	Understanding Institutions: Family	210
	Carissa Froyum	
Chapter 12.	Understanding Institutions: Education	232
	Melissa S. Fry	
Chapter 13.	Experiencing Health, Illness, and Medical Care	258
	Amy Irby-Shasanmi	
Chapter 14.	Understanding Institutions: Religion	278
	Andrea N. Hunt	
Chapter 15.	Saving the Environment	302
	John Chung-En Liu	
Chapter 16.	Changing Society through Social Movements	324
	Wendy M. Christensen	

Glossary 346

References 353

Index 374

Learning Activities 388

DETAILED CONTENTS

Preface xxvii

About the Authors xxxiii

About the Contributors xxxiv

Chapter 1. Training Your Sociological Eye	2
Kathleen Odell Korgen	
What Is Sociology?	3
Shaping and Being Shaped by Society	3
● How I Got Active in Sociology	4
The Origins and Current Uses of Sociology	4
● Doing Sociology 1.1 How Can Sociology Boost Your Career?	5
Changing How You View the World	5
The Sociological Eye	5
● Doing Sociology 1.2 Showing Off Your Sociological Eye	6
The Sociological Imagination	6
The Fallacy of the Individualist Perspective	7
● Doing Sociology 1.3 Distinguishing Individual and Social Problems	8
Sociology as a Social Science	8
Theoretical Perspectives	8
The Scientific Research Process	9
Differentiating between Good Generalizations and Stereotypes	9
Stereotypes	9
● Doing Sociology 1.4 Stereotypes and Generalizations about College Students	10
Good Generalizations	10
The Obligations of Sociology	10
The Two Core Commitments	11
● Doing Sociology 1.5 with SAGE Stats: Suicide Rates and the Sociological Imagination	12
The Benefits of Sociology	12
● Sociologists in Action: The Clothesline Project, William Edmundson	13
Sociology and Democracy	14
Sociology and Careers	14
Conclusion	14
Review	15
Key Terms	15

Chapter 2. Understanding Theory	16
--	-----------

Kathleen S. Lowney

What Is Theory?	17
Understanding the Structural Functionalist Perspective	17
Durkheim and Types of Societies	17
Social Institutions	17
● How I Got Active in Sociology	18
Manifest Functions	18
Latent Functions	18



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Seeing the Social World Using Structural Functionalism	19
Curbing Violations of Social Norms	19
● Doing Sociology 2.1 Manifest and Latent Functions of Institutions	20
Social Change	20
What Doesn't Structural Functionalism See?	21
Using Structural Functionalism to Analyze the Case of the Meitiv Family	21
Understanding the Conflict Theoretical Perspective	23
Karl Marx and Advanced Capitalism	23
False Consciousness	23
Alienation	24
Karl Marx and Socialism	24
Karl Marx and Communism	24
From Marx to the Conflict Perspective	24
Seeing the Social World Using the Conflict Perspective	25
What Doesn't Conflict See?	25
Theories under the Umbrella of the Conflict Perspective	25
Using the Conflict Perspective to Understand the Meitiv Family	25
● Doing Sociology 2.2 Conflict Theory and Student Athletes	26
Understanding the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective	27
The Social Construction of Reality	27
● Doing Sociology 2.3 Using Dramaturgy Theory to Analyze a Social Event	28
The Looking Glass Self Theory	28
Dramaturgy Theory	28
● Doing Sociology 2.4 Language and Social Construction	29
What Doesn't Symbolic Interaction See?	29
Social Constructionism	29
● Sociologists in Action: Courageous Conversations About Race, Chelsea Marty	30
Using Symbolic Interaction to Understand the Meitiv Family	30
Full Theoretical Circle	31
● Doing Sociology 2.5 with SAGE Stats: Viewing the Same Education Data from Three Different Perspectives	32
Conclusion	33
Review	33
Key Terms	34

Chapter 3. Using Research Methods **36**

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur and Amanda M. Jungels

What Is Research?	37
● How I Got Active in Sociology	38
Why Do We Do Research?	38
Using Research Skills outside the Classroom	39



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● Sociologists in Action: Understanding How Americans Use Price Information in Health Care , David Schleifer	40
● Doing Sociology 3.1 Reflecting on Sociology in Your Career	41
Using Research	41
What Are Data and Where Do We Get Them?	42
Asking Questions	42
Observing and Interacting	43
Looking at Documents	44
Research Ethics	45
What Do We Do with Data?	46
Qualitative Data Analysis	46
Quantitative Data Analysis	46
● Doing Sociology 3.2 Understanding Basic Quantitative Analysis	47
● Doing Sociology 3.3 with SAGE Stats: Using Research Data to Study a Public Health Problem	48
Getting Started Doing Research	48
Sampling and Measurement	49
Roosevelt, Landon, and <i>Literary Digest</i>	51
How Can You Recognize Good (and Bad) Research?	51
● Doing Sociology 3.4 Evaluating Claims in the Media and in Research	52
● Doing Sociology 3.5 Distinguishing Good Research from Bad Research	53
Conclusion	53
Review	54
Key Terms	55

Chapter 4. Recognizing Culture 56

David E. Rohall

Defining Culture	57
Finding Culture	57
● How I Got Active in Sociology	58
Constructing Culture	58
Identifying Elements of Culture	58
● Doing Sociology 4.1 Rings and the Social Construction of Reality	59
Social Norms	59
Status and Roles	60
Values and Beliefs	60
Symbols and Language	62
● Doing Sociology 4.2 Exploring Norms and Symbols in Sports	63
Typology of Societies	64
Hunter-Gatherers	64



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Horticultural/Pastoral Societies	64
Agrarian Societies	64
Industrial and Postindustrial Societies	65
Considering Cultural Variations	66
Subcultures and Multiculturalism	66
Cultural Relativism and Global Culture	67
● Doing Sociology 4.3 Global Culture in the Sociological Eye	69
The Power of Culture	69
Cultural Capital and Social Intelligence	69
● Doing Sociology 4.4 The Differing Power of Imagery	70
Social Intelligence	70
● Doing Sociology 4.5 Assessing Cultural Capital and Social Intelligence	71
Culture and Identity	71
● Doing Sociology 4.6 with SAGE Stats: Spanish-Speaking U.S. Households	72
● Sociologists in Action: Using Public Sociology to Change	
Local Culture, Lyle Foster and Tim Knapp	73
Conclusion	73
Review	74
Key Terms	74

Chapter 5. Understanding Socialization and Interaction **76**

Amy Sodaro

What Is Socialization?	77
Nature versus Nurture	77
● How I Got Active in Sociology	78
Understanding Theories of Socialization	78
Mead's Theory of Childhood Development	78
● Doing Sociology 5.1 Feral Children and Socialization	79
Agents of Socialization	80
Family	80
School	81
● Doing Sociology 5.2 with SAGE Stats: How Many Children Are Being Raised by Grandparents?	82
Peers	83
Media	83
Agents of Socialization for Adults	84
Total Institutions	85
● Doing Sociology 5.3 From Another Planet	86
Gender Socialization	86
● Sociologists in Action: "Helping Women Have a Happy Period," Angelo R. Milordo, Shaney Lara, Peter Falcichio, and Cassandra Sundstrom-Smith	87



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Status, Social Roles, and Identity	87
Identity	88
Groups, Organizations, and Bureaucracies	89
Types of Groups	89
The Power of Groups: Formal Organizations and Bureaucracies	89
Social Interaction	90
Performances and Impression Management	90
● Doing Sociology 5.4 Impression Management on Social Media	91
Regions: Front Stage and Back Stage	91
Ethnomethodology	92
Conclusion	93
Review	93
Key Terms	94

Chapter 6. Identifying Deviant Behavior **96**

Rena C. Zito

Defining Deviance	97
Approaches to Defining Deviance	97
The Statistical Approach	97
Social Norms	97
The Legalistic Approach	97
● How I Got Active in Sociology	98
The Normative Approach	98
Sanctions	98
● Doing Sociology 6.1 Deviance in the Ashley Madison Hack	99
Assumptions about Social Reality and Perspectives on Deviance	99
Relativist Perspective	99
Absolutist Perspective	99
Research Approaches versus Individual Morality	99
● Doing Sociology 6.2 Applying Statistical, Legalistic, and Normative Approaches	100
Conflict/Critical Perspective	100
“Nuts, Sluts, and Perverts” or “Deviant Heroes”?	100
● Doing Sociology 6.3 Deviants or Deviant Heroes?	101
Origins of the Sociology of Deviance	101
Early Perspectives in the Sociology of Deviance and Crime	101
Durkheim’s Sociological Theory of Suicide	102
Durkheim and the Normality of Crime	102
Creating Deviance	103
Moral Entrepreneurship	103
Rule Creators and Rule Enforcers	104



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Creating Public Morality	104
Moral Conversion	104
Moral Panic	104
Medicalization of Deviance	105
Labeling Perspective	106
The Thomas Theorem	107
Primary and Secondary Deviance	107
Official and Informal Labels and Stigmas	107
● Sociologists in Action: Creating a More Just Society for All, Sarah Shannon	108
● Doing Sociology 6.4 The Stigma of Overdose Videos	109
Social Position and Labeling	109
Howard Becker's Typology of Deviance	109
● Doing Sociology 6.5 with SAGE Stats: Which States Incarcerate the Most People?	110
Managing Deviant Identities	110
Techniques of Neutralization	110
Stigma Management	111
Managing Visible Stigmas	112
Managing Invisible Stigmas	112
Conclusion	112
Review	113
Key Terms	113

Chapter 7. Confronting Economic Inequality **114**

Sandra Enos

What Is Economic Inequality?	115
Measuring Inequality	115
Income Inequality	115
● How I Got Active in Sociology	116
Wealth Inequality	117
● Doing Sociology 7.1 Exploring the Concentration of Wealth	118
Meritocracy and the Functions of Inequality	118
● Doing Sociology 7.2 Grade Distributions and Inequality in Educational Motivation	119
Marx and Weber on Inequality	120
Understanding Social Stratification	120
Systems of Stratification	121
Examining the Class System	121
The Upper Class	122
The Middle Class	123
The Working Class and the Poor	123
● Doing Sociology 7.3 Are You in the Middle Class?	124
Culture of Poverty Theory and Policies toward the Poor	124



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Mobility within and across Generations	125
Changes in the Economy	126
Consequences of Inequality	126
Education	127
Housing	127
● Doing Sociology 7.4 Considering the Impact of Neighborhoods on Inequality	128
Life Expectancy	129
Global Inequality	129
Addressing Inequality	129
● Doing Sociology 7.5 with SAGE Stats: How Do We Measure Income Inequality?	132
● Sociologists in Action: Making the World Better through Program Evaluation, Brad Rose	133
Conclusion	134
Review	134
Key Terms	135

Chapter 8. Constructing Gender, Sex, and Sexuality **136**

Maxine P. Atkinson

Defining Sex, Gender, Intersex, and Transgender	137
● How I Got Active in Sociology	138
Using Theory to Understand Gender	138
Structural Functionalist Perspective	138
Conflict Perspectives	138
● Doing Sociology 8.1 Distinguishing Terms	139
Symbolic Interactionist Perspective	139
A More Inclusive Theory: Gender as Social Structure	140
● Doing Sociology 8.2 Which Is Most Helpful?	141
Creating Gender and Sexual Identities, Recognizing Sexualities	141
Starting Gender Socialization at Birth	141
Gender Socialization through Children's Media	142
Learning Gender in School	142
Peers, Gender Socialization, and Sexualities	142
The Media and Gender, Sex, and Sexuality	143
Music, TV, and Movies	143
● Doing Sociology 8.3 Gender and Sexuality Lessons in Marvel Comics	144
News and Advertisements	144
Challenging Stereotypes	145
The Media, Sexuality, and Backlash	145
Gender, Sexuality, and Work	146
The Gender Wage Gap	149



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The Wage Gap and Segregation within Occupations	149
Discrimination and the Wage Gap	150
The Glass Ceiling	151
● Doing Sociology 8.4 Women in Leadership Positions	153
Sexual Harassment	153
Gender and Intimate Relationships	153
● Sociologists in Action: Public Sociology, Barbara J. Risman	154
Romantic Relationships in Historical Context	154
● Doing Sociology 8.5 with SAGE Stats: How Sexually Active Are High School Students?	155
● Doing Sociology 8.6 Romantic Relationships	156
Hooking Up	156
Conclusion	157
Review	157
Key Terms	158

Chapter 9. Recognizing the Importance of Race **160**

Kathleen Odell Korgen

Defining Race and Ethnicity	161
● How I Got Active in Sociology	162
The Social Construction of Race	162
● Doing Sociology 9.1 Sorting People by Race	163
Susie Guillory Phipps and the “One-Drop Rule”	163
The Repercussions of Race	164
Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Discrimination	164
Institutional Discrimination	165
Discrimination by the U.S. Government	165
The Constitution, the Compromise of 1877, and <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	165
Immigration Legislation	166
Why Do People Migrate, What Happens Once They Do, and Who Writes Our History?	167
Assimilation and Conflict Perspectives	167
Power and (Re)Writing History	168
● Doing Sociology 9.2 Maps, History, and Power	169
Racial and Ethnic Inequality Today	169
Housing	169
The Economy	170
Education	171
Criminal Justice System	171
● Doing Sociology 9.3 Race Relations as Seen on Television	173
Health Care	173
Government	173



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Racism and Ethnocentrism Globally	176
● Doing Sociology 9.4 with SAGE Stats: Measuring the Growth of the Asian American Population	177
The Dangers of External Inequality and the Benefits of Diversity	178
Diversity Programs That Work	179
● Doing Sociology 9.5 The Waiting Game	180
Responding (or Not) to Racism and Ethnocentrism Today	181
The Color-Blind Ideology and Racism Evasiveness	182
The Era of Black Lives Matter and the Presidential Election of 2016	182
Ways to Address Racism and Ethnic Discrimination	183
● Sociologists in Action: Teaching White Students about Racism, Meghan Burke	184
● Doing Sociology 9.6 A Refugee Integration Plan for Your Campus	185
Conclusion	185
Review	186
Key Terms	187

Chapter 10. Understanding Institutions: Politics and the Economy **188**

Richard A. Zdan

The State, Power, and Legitimacy	189
● How I Got Active in Sociology	190
Power and Legitimacy	190
Legitimacy and the Right to Punish	190
● Doing Sociology 10.1 Legitimate versus Illegitimate Violence	191
Origins of the State	191
Hobbes's State of Nature and the Social Contract	191
● Doing Sociology 10.2 Writing a Social Contract	192
Forms of Legitimate Domination	192
Traditional Domination	193
Rational-Legal Domination	193
Charismatic Domination	193
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	194
The Routinization of Charisma	194
● Doing Sociology 10.3 Legitimate Domination: 2016	195
Types of Government	195
Monarchy	195
Democracy	195
● Sociologists in Action: Evaluating Government-Funded Programs, Kristin Pitts	196
Oligarchy and Plutocracy	196
The Iron Law of Oligarchy	197
The United States and the Iron Law of Oligarchy	197
Autocracy, Dictatorship, and Totalitarianism	197



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Autocracy and Dictatorships	197
Totalitarianism	198
Theoretical Approaches to Politics	198
Structural Functionalism	198
Pluralism	198
Conflict Theory	198
C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite	199
G. William Domhoff and Class Domination	199
● Doing Sociology 10.4 Medicare for All	200
Politics and the Economy	200
Industrialization	201
Fordism and Post-Fordism	201
Deindustrialization	202
Modern Economic Systems	202
Capitalism	202
Socialism	203
● Doing Sociology 10.5 The United States: A Capitalist Country?	204
Beyond Politics and Economy: Communism and Fascism	204
Communism	204
● Doing Sociology 10.6 with SAGE Stats: Government-Provided Health Care	205
Fascism	205
Conclusion	207
Review	207
Key Terms	208

Chapter 11. Understanding Institutions: Family **210**

Carissa Froyum

What Shapes Families?	211
Socially Constructing Families	211
● How I Got Active in Sociology	212
Changing Families across History	212
● Doing Sociology 11.1 What Is a Family?	213
Early Families	213
Preindustrial U.S. Families	213
Slavery and Families	213
Industrial U.S. Families	213
The 1900s and Emotion-Based U.S. Families	214
Diversifying U.S. Families	215
Making Way for Families of Today	216
● Doing Sociology 11.2 with SAGE Stats: Single Motherhood in America	217



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Understanding Families through Theory	218
Structural Functionalism	218
Conflict Perspective	219
Feminist Perspective	219
Intersectionality	219
Social Exchange Theory	219
The Norm of Reciprocity	220
Families Caring for Each Other	220
● Sociologists in Action: Increasing Access to Healthy Food, Sinikka Elliott	221
Parenting and Social Class	221
● Doing Sociology 11.3 Applying Your Sociological Imagination: Who Took Care of You?	222
Caretaking and Changing Gendered Roles	222
The Sandwich Generation	223
Family Problems	223
Violence and Victimization	223
Breaking Apart and Staying Together	223
Effects of Instability on Children	224
Supporting Children	224
● Doing Sociology 11.4 Examining Family-Friendly Policies for Students on Your Campus	225
How Work and Policy Shape Families	225
Addressing Work and Family Challenges Today	225
Using Sociology to Address Family Issues	226
● Doing Sociology 11.5 Comparing Paid Leave in Twenty-One Countries	227
Conclusion	229
Review	230
Key Terms	230

Chapter 12. Understanding Institutions: Education **232**

Melissa S. Fry

What Is Education as an Institution?	233
Institutionalizing Education	233
● How I Got Active in Sociology	234
Education and Modes of Production	234
Preindustrial Societies	234
Industrial Manufacturing and Large-Scale Agriculture	234
The Postindustrial Knowledge and Service Economy	234
● Doing Sociology 12.1 Examining the Local School Board as an Institution	235
Public Education and the Postindustrial Economy	235
Theorizing Education	235



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● Doing Sociology 12.2 How the Intersection of Biography and History Shapes Educational Experiences	236
The Social Functions of Education	236
Socialization: Cohesion and Control	236
Labor Force Preparation	236
Conflict, Power, and Education	237
Class, Gender, Race, and School Experiences	237
The Curriculum, Ideology, and Inequality	237
● Doing Sociology 12.3 Gender and K–12 Teaching Occupations and Salaries Tracking and Inequality	238
● Doing Sociology 12.4 Applying Sociological Theory to Educational Issues	239
Symbolic Interaction, Socialization, and Cultural Production in Schools	239
Socialization, Socioeconomic Status, and School Success	239
Education and Social Inequality in the United States	240
Class and Family Background	240
Leveling the Playing Field with Early Education	240
Separate and Unequal: Racial and Economic Segregation in Schools	241
Reproducing Inequality within Schools	242
Higher Education	243
Types of Colleges, Student Success, and Tracking	244
Funding for Higher Education	244
Affirmative Action in College Admissions	245
Gender and Education	247
● Doing Sociology 12.5 Racial Representation in Higher Education	248
Global Education and Global Inequality	249
Giving U.S. Students a Global Perspective	249
● Doing Sociology 12.6 The Importance of a Global Perspective for Today’s Workforce?	250
Global Educational Parity Efforts	250
● Sociologists in Action: Supporting Life Chances for Our Most Vulnerable Populations, Gabriella C. Gonzalez	251
Finland: Global Leader in Quality Education	251
Leveling the Playing Field: Public Policy and Education in the United States	252
Pre-K Education	252
The Abecedarian Project	252
K–12 Education	252
● Doing Sociology 12.7 with SAGE Stats: Which Public Schools Have the Most Money to Spend?	253
Charter Schools and Vouchers	253
● Doing Sociology 12.8 Applying Choice Outside of Schools	254
● Doing Sociology 12.9 What Could Improve Public Education?	255
The Future of Public Education and Democracy	255



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Conclusion	256
Review	256
Key Terms	257

Chapter 13. Experiencing Health, Illness, and Medical Care **258**

Amy Irby-Shasanmi

What Does Sociology Have to Do with Health, Illness, and Medical Care?	259
How Sociology Helps Medical Professionals (and Everyone) Understand Health and Illness	259
● How I Got Active in Sociology	260
The Illness Experience	260
● Doing Sociology 13.1 Experiencing Illness	261
The Sick Role and the Impact of Illness on Families	261
Medicalization	262
Medicalization and Marketing	262
● Doing Sociology 13.2 “Longer, Darker, Fuller Lashes”	263
Pros and Cons of Medicalization	263
Explaining Health Disparities and Social Determinants of Health	264
Fundamental Cause Theory	264
● Sociologists in Action: Improving Community Health through Transforming a Park, Tyesha Crawford	265
● Doing Sociology 13.3 Food Insecurity	266
● Doing Sociology 13.4 with SAGE Stats: Measuring the Spread of the Opioid Epidemic	268
Social Distribution of Illness	269
Distributions of Physical Illnesses and Life Expectancy	269
The Distribution of Mental Illnesses	271
● Doing Sociology 13.5 Top Ten Causes of Death	272
The U.S. Health Care System	273
Cost of and Access to Health Care	273
Health Insurance	273
The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act	273
The Underinsured	275
● Doing Sociology 13.6 Medicaid Expansion	276
Conclusion	276
Review	277
Key Terms	277

Chapter 14. Understanding Institutions: Religion **278**

Andrea N. Hunt

Defining Religion Sociologically	279
Religion Is More Than a Private Matter	279



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● How I Got Active in Sociology	280
Religious Pluralism and Secularization	280
Changing Demographics and Pluralism	280
● Doing Sociology 14.1 Clarifying Your Understanding of Religion	281
Secularization	281
● Doing Sociology 14.2 Identifying Common Beliefs and Practices across Religions	282
Sects, Cults, and New Religious Movements	284
Religious Fundamentalism	286
Extreme and Violent Fundamentalism	287
Changing Religious Life in the United States	287
Religious Affiliation and Race	287
Religious Affiliation and Gender	288
● Doing Sociology 14.3 Personal Conceptions of God	289
Religious Affiliation and Sexual Orientation	289
Global Diffusion of Religion	290
Cultural Diffusion	291
● Doing Sociology 14.4 Comparing Religions	292
● Doing Sociology 14.5 with SAGE Stats: Measuring the Growth of Islam in the United States	293
Applying Sociological Theory to Religion	294
Structural Functionalism	294
Conflict Theory	294
Karl Marx	295
Max Weber	295
Symbolic Interaction	295
Religion and Social Issues, Social Change, and Everyday Life	296
Religious Affiliation and Attitudes toward Social Issues	296
Religion and Social Change	296
The Continuing Influence of Religion in Everyday Life	297
● Sociologists in Action: Religion and End-of-Life Care, Heather Grigsby	298
Conclusion	299
Review	299
Key Terms	300

Chapter 15. Saving the Environment **302**

John Chung-En Liu

Facing Our Environmental Challenges	303
● How I Got Active in Sociology	304
The Physical Reality of Environmental Problems	304
● Doing Sociology 15.1 Calculate Your Own Ecological Footprint	305



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How Do Sociologists Study Environmental Issues?	305
Social Construction of Nature	305
American Wilderness	305
● Doing Sociology 15.2 with SAGE Stats: How Much of Our Electricity Comes from Burning Coal?	306
China's Great Leap Forward	307
Constructing Environmental Problems	307
● Doing Sociology 15.3 Human-Nature Photo Contest	308
Environmental Awareness and Concern	308
● Doing Sociology 15.4 Climate Change Campaigner for a Day	310
How Did We Mess Up? Theories of Environmental Change	310
Population and the Environment	310
Production and the Environment	312
Getting Off the Treadmill of Production	312
● Doing Sociology 15.5 The Story of Stuff	313
Ecological Modernization Theory	313
Consumption and the Environment	313
Green Consumption	314
● Doing Sociology 15.6 Greenwashing Product Review	315
Inverted Quarantines	
Who Suffers Most from Environmental Problems?	315
Environmental Racism	316
The Environmental Justice Movement	316
Sacrifice Zones	318
Climate Justice	318
● Sociologists in Action: Creating Engaged Climate Justice Scholarship, Timmons Roberts	319
Social Solutions to Environmental Problems	319
● Doing Sociology 15.7 Environmental Inequalities and Social Solutions	320
Conclusion	320
Review	321
Key Terms	322

Chapter 16. Changing Society through Social Movements **324**

Wendy M. Christensen

What Is a Social Movement?	325
Components of a Social Movement	325
● How I Got Active in Sociology	326
Protests: The Most Visible Part of Social Movements	326
Participating in Social Movements	326



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● Doing Sociology 16.1 Planning Direct Action	327
Power and Inequality Issues in Social Movements	327
Socioeconomic Status and Ability	328
Mobilizing and Organizing	328
Community-Based Organizing	328
Types of Social Movements	328
● Sociologists in Action: Participating in the Movement to End Poverty, Alicia Swords	329
● Doing Sociology 16.2 The Use and Effectiveness of “Slacktivism”	330
Social Movement Theory	331
Conflict Theory	331
Symbolic Interactionist Theory	331
● Doing Sociology 16.3 Framing the Gay Rights Movement	332
Social Movement Framing	332
Identity Based Social Movements	332
The Six Steps of Social Movement Success	333
Identify an Issue	333
The Women’s Movement	333
Form a Group	334
The Civil Rights Movement	334
The Women’s Movement	335
Challenges to Forming a Group	335
Marginalization of Members	336
Cultural Differences	336
Create a Strategy	336
The Civil Rights Movement	336
Mobilize Resources	336
● Doing Sociology 16.4 Media Coverage of Protests	337
The Women’s Movement	337
Organize Actions	337
The Civil Rights Movement	337
Gaining Power and Success	338
The Civil Rights Movement	338
The Women’s Movement	338
Why Social Movements Fail	338
Success Can Bring Backlash: The Marriage Equality Movement	339
Successful Tactics of the Marriage Equality Movement	339
With Success Comes Backlash	340
● Doing Sociology 16.5 with SAGE Stats: Has the Marriage Equality Movement Led to More Same-Sex Marriage?	341
How Can We Create Social Change?	341



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Participatory Action Research	342
Empowerment, Responsibility, and Making Social Change	342
How You Can Help Bring about Social Change	343
Conclusion	344
Review	344
Key Terms	345
Glossary	346
References	353
Index	374
Learning Activities	388

PREFACE

If you, like us, have found yourself searching for activities to bring into your classroom and engage your introductory sociology students, you know why we wrote this book. We knew we couldn't be alone in our quest to get students to do more than read the text—we want them to *do* sociology, to understand and apply the terms and concepts they read about and realize them in the real world. Over the course of writing and refining the manuscript, as well as reading the reviews of instructors excited to see activities many of us have been cobbling together over the years now residing within a textbook, we became even more convinced that our approach is one that offers instructors material for how they want to teach and offers students the foundational content they need in sociology, as well as engaging activities that will help them *do* sociology. The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to the first edition provided further evidence that this is a book that can help all sociology instructors get their students excited about sociology and what they can do with it.

Sociology in Action puts all the tools instructors need to create an active learning course into one student-friendly text. Active learning teaching techniques increase student learning, retention, and engagement with course material, but they also require more creative effort than traditional lectures. No other sociology textbook works to ease this load by providing full coverage of introductory content *and* active learning exercises fully integrated into the text (with clear instructions on how to use and assess them available through the instructor resources). *Sociology in Action* provides instructors of small, medium, large, and online introductory courses with the material they need to create learning experiences for their students, including creative, hands-on, data-analytic, and community learning activities.

A group of gifted instructors who use active learning techniques in their own classrooms has written the book's chapters. The contributors, focusing on their respective areas of expertise, expertly weave together content material, active learning exercises, discussion questions, real-world examples of sociologists in action, and information on careers that use sociology. Together, we have created a book that requires students to *do* sociology as they learn it and creates a bridge between the classroom and the larger social world.

Organization and Features

The clear organizational style of each chapter helps students follow the logic of the text and concentrate on the main ideas presented. Each chapter opens with focal learning questions, and each major section ends with review questions to remind students of the emphasis in the presented material. In addition, the chapters contain an analysis of subject matter from both *major theoretical perspectives* and, where appropriate, *middle-range theories*. Chapters close with conclusions, and end-of-chapter resources include lists of key terms and summaries that address the focal learning questions. The active learning activities and *Consider This* marginal questions throughout each chapter help create a student-centered class that engages student interest.

The book's rich pedagogy supports active learning and engagement throughout each chapter.

- **Learning Questions** start off every chapter, introducing students to the focus of the chapter and preparing them for the material it covers. These questions are tied to the learning objectives provided in the instructor resources. Each main section of the chapter addresses a learning question.
- **Check Your Understanding** questions appear at the end of every major section in a chapter, providing students with an opportunity to pause in their reading and ensure that they comprehend and retain what they've just read.
- **Doing Sociology** activities appear multiple times in each chapter. These active learning exercises enable students to apply the sociological concepts, theories, methods, and so on covered in the text. Each chapter contains a variety of exercises so that instructors can use them in class, online, or as assignments conducted outside of class. Reference the *Doing Sociology* activities and the clear instructions on how to carry them out—and on how they relate to the chapter objectives—in the Activity Guide available through the book's instructor resources. Additional exercises can be found in the digital resources accompanying the text.

- **Consider This** questions are designed to spark deep thinking as well as classroom discussions.
- **Sociologists in Action** boxes feature a student or professional “sociologist in action” doing public sociology related to the material covered in the chapter. This feature provides examples of how sociology can be used to make a positive impact on society.
- **Key Terms** appear in boldface type where they are substantially discussed for the first time and are compiled in a list with page numbers at the end of their respective chapters. Corresponding definitions can be found in the Glossary.
- Every chapter concludes with a **Chapter Summary** that restates the learning questions presented at the start of the chapter and gives answers to them. This provides an important way for students to refresh their understanding of the material and retain what they’ve learned.

In addition, as appropriate, chapters include information on careers that relate to the chapter content. This allows students to recognize, even during their first sociology course, the wide variety of career options a sociology degree provides.

What’s New in the Second Edition

After using *Sociology in Action* ourselves—and hearing from many instructors who also used it—we worked to make it even more useful for instructors and interesting for students. Key changes and additions we made include the following:

- More *Doing Sociology* exercises that take a short time in class.
- Adding *Doing Sociology* exercises that use SAGE Stats to allow students to access and use statistical information created from more than 400,000 government and nongovernment data sets.
- Creating two new chapters: “Experiencing Health, Illness, and Medical Care” and “Understanding Institutions: Politics and the Economy.”
- Using an even more applied and student-friendly approach in our writing.
- Expanding the “Understanding Socialization” chapter to “Understanding Socialization and Interaction,” with a new section on groups, organizations, and bureaucracies.
- Making better connections between theories and the rest of the chapter narratives by using only perspectives and midrange theories that relate directly to the subject matter.
- Adding new *Doing Sociology* exercises, *Consider This* questions, and *Sociologists in Action* features (each now including a discussion question).
- Thoroughly updating all chapters without adding to their length, including new or updated topics (in addition to the new chapters), such as
 - the causes and ramifications of the 2016 election;
 - the latest issues facing the LGBT community, people of color, immigrants and refugees, and the shrinking middle class;
 - student loan debt;
 - class inequality;
 - climate change;
 - sexuality;
 - sexual harassment;
 - power and who writes history;
 - a more thorough explanation of racism and its systemic components;
 - the connections among social position, place and health, and life expectancy; and
 - the relationship between public education and democracy.

Digital Resources

We know how important good resources can be in the teaching of sociology. Our goal is to create resources that both support and enhance the book’s themes and features. SAGE edge offers a robust online environment featuring an impressive array of tools and resources for review, study, and further exploration, keeping both instructors and students on the cutting edge of teaching and learning. SAGE edge content is open access and available on demand. Learning and teaching have never been easier! We gratefully acknowledge Sarah Calabi, Rachel Lovis, Rob Freeland, and Megan Glancy.



Engage, Learn, Soar with **SAGE vantage**, an intuitive digital platform that delivers *Sociology in Action* textbook content in a learning experience carefully designed to ignite student engagement and drive critical thinking. With evidence-based instructional design at the core, **SAGE vantage** creates more time for engaged learning and empowered teaching, keeping the classroom where it belongs—in your hands.

Easy to access across mobile, desktop, and tablet devices, **SAGE vantage** enables students to engage with the material you choose, learn by applying knowledge, and soar with confidence by performing better in your course.

Highlights Include:

- **eReading Experience.** Makes it easy for students to study wherever they are—students can take notes, highlight content, look up definitions, and more!
- **Pedagogical Scaffolding.** Builds on core concepts, moving students from basic understanding to mastery.
- **Confidence Builder.** Offers frequent knowledge checks, applied-learning multimedia tools, and chapter tests with focused feedback to assure students know key concepts.
- **Time-saving Flexibility.** Feeds auto-graded assignments to your gradebook, with real-time insight into student and class performance.
- **Quality Content.** Written by expert authors and teachers, content is not sacrificed for technical features.
- **Honest Value.** Affordable access to easy-to-use, quality learning tools students will appreciate.

Favorite SAGE vantage Features:

- 3-step course setup is so fast you can complete it in minutes!
- Control over assignments, content selection, due dates, and grading empowers you to teach your way.
- Quality content authored by the experts you trust.
- eReading experience makes it easy to learn and study by presenting content in easy-to-digest segments featuring note-taking, highlighting, definition look-up, and more.

- LMS integration provides single sign-on with streamlined grading capabilities and course management tools.
- Auto-graded assignments include:
 - formative knowledge checks for each major section of the text that quickly reinforce what students have read and ensure they stay on track;
 - dynamic, hands-on multimedia activities that tie real world examples and motivate students to read, prepare for class;
 - summative chapter tests that reinforce important themes; and
 - helpful hints and feedback (provided with all assignments) that offer context and explain why an answer is correct or incorrect, allowing students to study more effectively.
- Compelling polling questions bring concepts to life and drive meaningful comprehension and classroom discussion.
- Short-answer questions provide application and reflection opportunities connected to key concepts.
- Instructor reports track student activity and provide analytics so you can adapt instruction as needed.
- A student dashboard offers easy access to grades, so students know exactly where they stand in your course and where they might improve.
- Honest value gives students access to quality content and learning tools at a price they will appreciate.



Our content tailored to your LMS
sagepub.com/coursepacks

The **SAGE coursepack** for *Sociology in Action* makes it easy to import our quality instructor materials and student resources into your school's learning management system (LMS), such as Blackboard, Canvas, Brightspace by D2L, or Moodle. Intuitive and simple to use, **SAGE coursepack** allows you to integrate only the content you need, with minimal effort, and requires no access code. Don't use an LMS platform? You can still access many of the online resources for *Sociology in Action* via the **SAGE edge** site.

Available SAGE content through the coursepack includes:

- Pedagogically robust assessment tools that foster review, practice, and critical thinking and offer a more complete way to measure student engagement, including:
 - Diagnostic chapter quizzes that identify opportunities for improvement, track student progress, and ensure mastery of key learning objectives
 - Test banks built on Bloom's taxonomy that provide a diverse range of test items
 - Activity and quiz options that allow you to choose only the assignments and tests you want
 - Instructions that are given on how to use and integrate the comprehensive assessments and resources provided
 - An Activity Guide that details all activities from the print book, as well as supplementary exercises, the learning objectives they address, and notes to instructors
 - Editable, chapter-specific PowerPoint slides that offer flexibility when creating multimedia lectures, so you don't have to start from scratch but you can customize to your exact needs



<http://edge.sagepub.com/korgen2e>

SAGE edge is a robust online environment featuring an impressive array of tools and resources for review, study, and further exploration, keeping both instructors and students on the cutting edge of teaching and learning. SAGE edge content is open access and available on demand. Learning and teaching has never been easier!

SAGE edge for Students at <http://edge.sagepub.com/korgen2e> provides a personalized approach to help students accomplish their coursework goals in an easy-to-use learning environment.

- Learning objectives reinforce the most important material
- Mobile-friendly flashcards that strengthen understanding of key terms and concepts and make it easy to maximize your study time, anywhere, anytime
- Mobile-friendly practice quizzes that allow you to assess how much you've learned and where you need to focus your attention
- An MCAT Guide that maps chapter content to sociology standards on the MCAT test and

connects you with free online MCAT study-and-review websites.

SAGE edge for Instructors at <http://edge.sagepub.com/korgen2e> supports teaching by making it easy to integrate quality content and create a rich learning environment for students.

- The **Test bank**, built on Bloom's taxonomy (with Bloom's cognitive domain and difficulty level noted for each question), is created specifically for this text.
- **Sample course syllabi** provide suggested models for structuring your course.
- Editable, chapter-specific **PowerPoint® slides** offer complete flexibility for creating a multimedia presentation for the course, so you don't have to start from scratch but can customize to your exact needs.
- **Lecture notes** feature comprehensive chapter outlines and learning objectives.
- A set of all the **graphics from the text**, including all the maps, tables, and figures in PowerPoint and JPG formats, are provided for class presentations.

SAGE Premium Video

Sociology in Action offers premium video, available exclusively in the **SAGE vantage** digital option, produced and curated specifically for this text, to boost comprehension and bolster analysis.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the many people who worked with us on *Sociology in Action*. Our thanks, first and foremost, go to the contributors who wrote the chapters and helped us create an active learning introductory sociology course in one text. Their exceptional ability to use active learning in the classroom has impressed and inspired us. We appreciate their willingness to share what they do so well and to collaborate with us on *Sociology in Action*.

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Rebecca Barrett-Fox, Arkansas State University
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Joslyn Brenton, Ithaca College
Jess Butler, Butler University
Linda Carson, Lander University
Susan Claxton, Georgia Highlands College
Steven Dashiell, Towson University
Jeffrey Debies-Carl, University of New Haven
Richard G. Ellefritz, Oklahoma State University
Sarah Epplen, Minnesota State University, Mankato
Michael W. Feeley, South Suburban College
Lisa George, Portland Community College
Danielle Giffort, St. Louis College of Pharmacy
Laura Fitzwater Gonzales, Pacific Lutheran University
Belisa Gonzalez, Ithaca College
Roderick Graham, Old Dominion University
Wendi Hadd, John Abbott College
Anita Harker, Whatcom Community College
Jodi A. Henderson-Ross, University of Akron–Wayne College
William Housel, Northwestern Louisiana State University
Aaron Howell, Farmingdale State College
Suzanne S. Hudd, Quinnipiac University
Peter Kaufman, State University of New York New Paltz

Michele Lee Kozimor-King, Elizabethtown College
Andrea Krieg, Lewis University
Ashley Lumpkin, John Tyler Community College
Lori Lundell, Purdue University
Elizabeth Lyman, Radford University
Sara F. Mason, University of North Georgia
Naomi McCool, Chaffey College
Cassandra McDade, Tidewater Community College
Stephanie Medley-Rath, Indiana University Kokomo
Marian J. Moore, Owens Community College
Madeline H. Moran, Lehman College, City University of New York
Jonathan Ortiz, Concordia University
Doris Price, Houston Community College
Barbara Prince, Bowling Green State University
Carolyn Read, Copiah Lincoln Junior College
Nicole Rosen, Pennsylvania State Behrend
Matthew Schoene, Albion College
Naomi Simmons, Newberry College
Chelsea Starr, Eastern New Mexico University
Melissa Swauger, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Lori Waite, Tennessee Wesleyan University
Jeremy White, Pikes Peak Community College
Joshua Wimberly, Spring Hill College
Susan Wortmann, Nebraska Wesleyan University
Kassia Wosick, El Camino College
Mariah Jade Zimpfer, Sam Houston State University
John F. Zipp, University of Akron

Second edition reviewers:

Melissa Bamford, The University of Memphis
Terrie A. Becerra, East Central University
Stephanie L. Bradley, Radford University
Janice Crede, College of St. Scholastica
Máel Embser-Herbert, Hamline University
Tabitha Ingle, Georgia State University

Jamie L. Gusrang, Community College of Philadelphia

Kendra Jason, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Joy Kadowaki, University of Dayton

Jeffrey Lentz, University of North Georgia

Ying Ma, Austin Peay State University

Kenjuana McCray, Fayetteville Technical
Community College

Matthew McLeskey, University at Buffalo, SUNY

Lori Peek, University of Colorado Boulder

Edward Colin Ruggero, Community College of
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—Kathleen Odell Korgen and Maxine P. Atkinson

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Kathleen Odell Korgen, PhD, is a professor of sociology at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. Her primary areas of specialization are teaching sociology, racial identity, and race relations. She has received William Paterson University's awards for Excellence in Scholarship/Creative Expression and for Excellence in Teaching.



Maxine P. Atkinson, PhD, is a professor of sociology at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Her primary area of specialization is the scholarship of teaching and learning. She has received the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award and the University of North Carolina Board of Governors' Award for Excellence in Teaching.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur teaches research methods and other sociology courses at Rhode Island College. Her research focuses on the sociology of higher education. Prior publications include *Student Activism and Curricular Change in Higher Education* (2011) and journal

articles on organizational change in higher education, social networks among colleges and universities, and the long-term outcomes of Rhode Island's comprehensive college graduates, as well as on teaching and learning in sociology.



Wendy M. Christensen received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is an associate professor of sociology at William Paterson University in New Jersey. Her research focuses on how inequalities (race, class, and gender) shape political participation.

She has published articles on the political participation of mothers of U.S. military members, as well as the intersections of military recruitment campaigns and race, class, and gender. Her forthcoming book, *Our Families Your Freedom: How Military Mothers Support and Challenge the U.S. War on Terrorism*, examines how mothers of service members negotiate the politics of support through recruitment, deployment, and postdeployment health care. She is currently collecting data for a new research project on community political organizing and voter participation.



Sandra Enos, PhD, serves as an associate professor of sociology at Bryant University. She earned a PhD from the University of Connecticut after a long career in public service. She is the author of *Mothering from the Inside: Parenting in a Women's Prison*

(2001), *Service-Learning and Social Entrepreneurship in Higher Education: A Pedagogy of Social Change* (2015), and chapters in books and articles on women and mass incarceration, the history of child welfare, pedagogy in sociology, and higher education reform.



Carissa Froyum is a professor of sociology at the University of Northern Iowa. Her research focuses on the roles emotions and identity play in reproducing inequalities. She is the coeditor of *Inside Social Life, Creating and Contesting Inequalities* and the forthcoming *Handbook of the*

Sociology of Gender (with Barbara Risman and William Scarborough).



Melissa S. Fry is the director of the Applied Research and Education Center and an associate professor of sociology at Indiana University Southeast. Dr. Fry's research has included work on poverty, education (early childhood through higher education), homelessness, systems

thinking for community development, government contracting with nonprofits, work supports for low-income families, the impact of the coal industry in central Appalachia, and payday lending. Dr. Fry's broad research agenda is to better understand how public policies are both shaped by and, in turn, shape social inequality and how nonprofit organizations manage the tensions among their missions, government contracts, and the interests of private philanthropies in their efforts to build resilient communities. Prior to joining the Indiana University Southeast faculty in 2011, Dr. Fry was a research and policy associate at the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development in Berea, Kentucky.



Andrea N. Hunt, PhD, is an associate professor of sociology at the University of North Alabama. Her teaching focuses on diverse families, race and ethnicity, gender, and social justice. Her research in the scholarship of teaching and learning focuses on gender bias in instructor evaluations,

the role of academic advising in student retention, mentoring undergraduate research, and learning experiences that promote information literacy and cultural competency. Dr. Hunt has facilitated numerous workshops on academic advising for diverse student populations, preparing high school students for college, best practices for online learning, and techniques for teaching about social inequality. Her research has been featured in *Teaching Sociology*, the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, the *Journal of Effective Teaching*, *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, and *Innovative Higher Education*. All of her teaching, research, and service are centered on empowering students and faculty for success.



Amy Irby-Shasanmi is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of West Georgia. Her research focuses on mental health, health disparities, chronic illness, and disabilities. She regularly teaches courses on all of these subjects in her department, as well as Introduction to Social Problems.



Amanda M. Jungels is a senior assistant director for faculty programs and services in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Columbia University. She earned her PhD from the Department of Sociology at Georgia State University, where she was a recipient of the Jacqueline Boles

Teaching Fellowship and Teaching Associate Award. Her current work focuses on faculty and educational development, emphasizing inclusive teaching practices and pedagogy.



John Chung-En Liu is an assistant professor of sociology at Occidental College. He received his PhD in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, holds a joint master's degree in economics and environmental management from Yale University, and has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from National Taiwan University. His main research projects include a wide array of topics about climate change, including the construction of carbon markets, climate change skepticism, and climate change in higher education curriculums. He has research experiences in the United States, the European Union, China, Taiwan, and India.

teaching and learning. She and Dr. Maxine Atkinson wrote *In the Trenches: Teaching and Learning Sociology* (2016) to help sociology teachers discover innovative ways to communicate the discipline we love to students. She has received several teaching awards at her university, from the University System of Georgia, and from the American Sociological Association.



Kathleen S. Lowney was a professor of sociology at Valdosta State University until May 2018, when she retired. Most of her published work falls under three broad research topics: the sociology of new religious movements, especially teen Satanism; media's role in the construction of social

problems claims, such as her article on kudzu as a social problem and her book *Baring Our Souls: TV Talk Shows and the Religion of Recovery* (1999); and the scholarship of teaching and learning. She and Dr. Maxine Atkinson wrote *In the Trenches: Teaching and Learning Sociology* (2016) to help sociology teachers discover innovative ways to communicate the discipline we love to students. She has received several teaching awards at her university, from the University System of Georgia, and from the American Sociological Association.



David E. Rohall is the department head of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Missouri State University. Prior to coming to Missouri State, he received the Distinguished Faculty Lecturer Award in 2014 for his teaching and research

in sociology from Western Illinois University, where he taught for 11 years.



Amy Sodaro is an associate professor of sociology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College/City University of New York. She holds a BA in drama and classics from Tufts University and an MA and a PhD in sociology from the New School for Social Research. Her research

interests include sociology of culture, memory, museums, and gender. She is the author of *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (2018) and a coeditor of *Memory and the Future: Transnational Politics, Ethics and Culture* (2010); *Museums and Sites of Persuasion: Memory, Politics and Human Rights* (forthcoming); and a special issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly*, "At Sea" (2017).



Richard A. Zdan is a member of the sociology faculty at Rider University. His current teaching and research interests are in the areas of political and community sociology and civic engagement. Recently, he spearheaded a revision of the Rider Sociology

Department's introductory course for re-adoption as a part of the university's revised general education core curriculum. He is currently collecting data for a research project on the role played by funeral directors in local communities.



Rena C. Zito is an assistant professor of sociology at Elon University. She received her doctorate in sociology from North Carolina State University. Her research focuses primarily on family processes in the production of crime and delinquency. Specifically, her work uses a

life-course perspective to examine how family structure histories and family formation shape gender processes, adolescent role exits, and law violation.

To all instructors and students who put sociology into action.

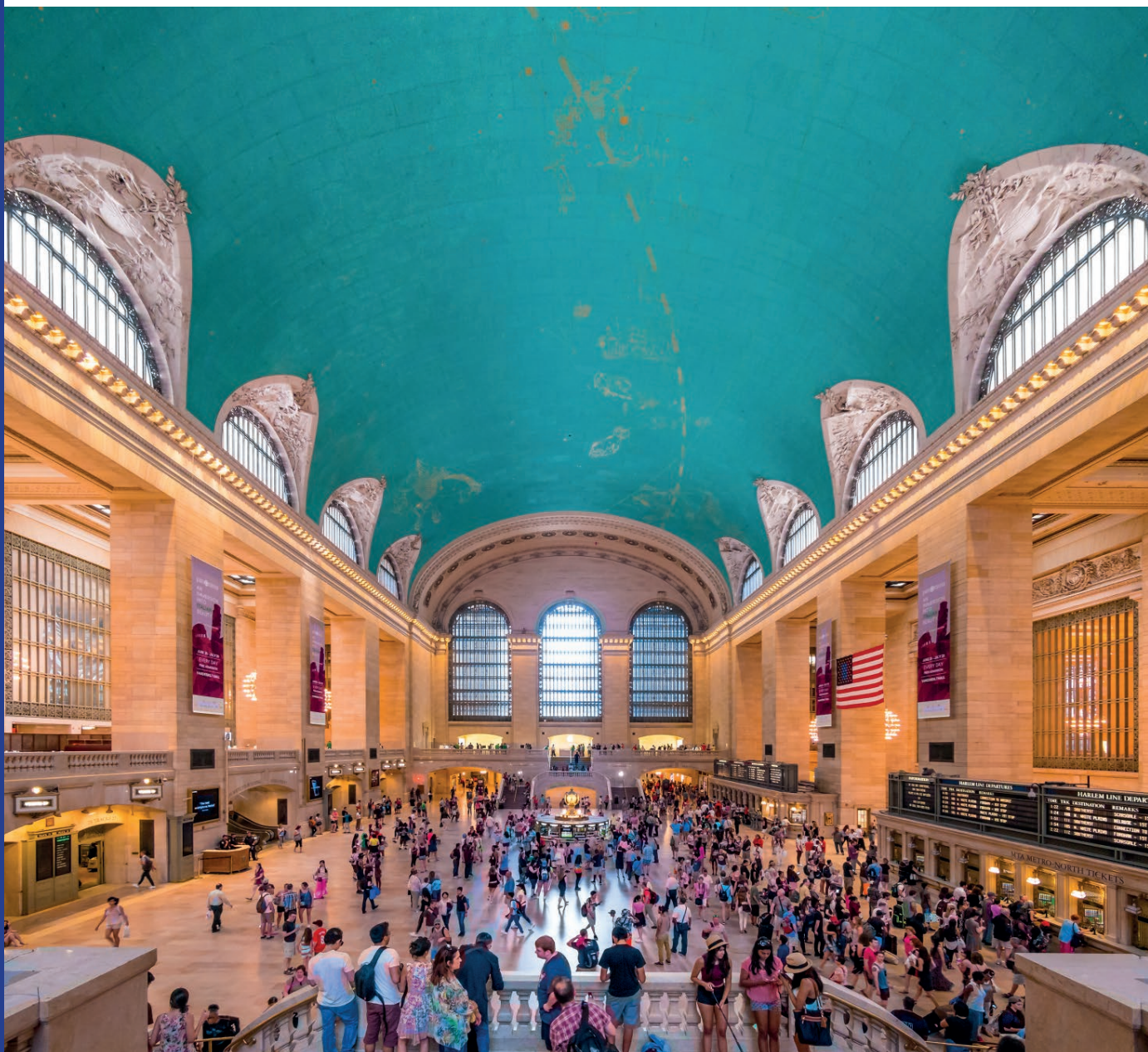
CHAPTER 1

TRAINING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL EYE

Kathleen Odell Korgen

Looking at this picture of Grand Central Station in New York City from a sociological perspective can help us see how people both shape and are shaped by the cities in which they reside.

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LEARNING QUESTIONS

- 1.1 What is sociology?
- 1.2 What do the sociological eye and the sociological imagination allow you to do?
- 1.3 What key aspects of sociology make it a social *science*?
- 1.4 How can you tell the difference between a good generalization and a stereotype?
- 1.5 What are the core commitments of sociology?
- 1.6 How can sociology benefit both individuals and society?

Have you ever wanted to know why more women than men graduate from college today? Why college tuition is so expensive? What you can do to improve your chances of landing a desirable job after college? Why the number of hate groups in the United States has increased by 30 percent since 2000? What types of jobs will be most available when you graduate? Why people vote for certain political candidates (or do not vote at all)? How you can make a positive impact on society? If so, you have chosen the right subject! Sociology can help you answer all these questions—and raise some new ones.

What Is Sociology?

1.1 What is sociology?

So, what is sociology? **Sociology** is the scientific study of society, including how individuals both *shape* and *are shaped by* society. Notice in this definition that people are active beings, shapers of society, but they are also affected by society. It's important to remember that society influences us in myriad ways—how we think, what we notice, what we believe to be true, how we see ourselves, and so on. But it is simultaneously vital to realize that we help shape the society in which we live. This duality is at the heart of sociology and our daily lives—whether we are aware of it or not.

Shaping and Being Shaped by Society

The life of Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Prize winner in history, provides an excellent example of this duality. No one can deny that Malala is an extraordinary

young woman. Her personal bravery and selflessness are awe inspiring. Just nine months after she was shot in the head by the Taliban for publicly promoting education for girls in Pakistan, Malala declared in an address to the United Nations Youth Assembly that “one child, one teacher, one book, and one pen, can change the world” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rNhZu3ttIU>). Her organization, the Malala Fund, has provided the means for many other girls to gain an education. Clearly, Malala has shown the power of an individual to influence society.

Malala, however, just like the rest of us, is a product of her society. Imagine if, instead of growing up in the Swat Valley of Pakistan during the time of the Taliban, she grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey. Her life would have been very different. She would not have been shot by the Taliban, and she would not have created the Malala Fund. Indeed, the Malala raised in New Jersey may not have even been aware that girls in many areas of the world face violence for going to school. Sociology helps us understand



Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head and, later, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work promoting education for girls. Her life helps us see how we both shape and are shaped by our societies.

Nigel Waldron/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images

HOW I GOT ACTIVE IN SOCIOLOGY

KATHLEEN ODELL KORGEN

I slept most of the way through the SOC 101 course I took in college. The professor lectured, and we took notes (or not).

That SOC 101 course was the last sociology class I took until I found a sociology graduate program in social justice and social economy that encouraged sociologists to put sociological tools into action. In that program, I learned that sociology could show me how I can change society. As a researcher, I have worked on issues related to race relations and racial identity, evaluated social justice efforts and

sociology programs, and helped create introductory textbooks that get students to *do* sociology as they learn it.

As a sociology teacher, I want students to know—right away—all that sociology offers them—and society. A major part of my work has been to help students use sociological tools to make a positive impact on society. In my classes, from SOC 101 to Public Sociology and Civic Engagement, students don't just learn about sociology—they become sociologists in action.

the impact of society on us and how we can work with others, as Malala is doing now, to solve the social issues facing our societies.

CONSIDER THIS

How have the time period and the nation in which you live influenced your life? How might your life be different if you lived during a different time period or in another nation?

The Origins and Current Uses of Sociology

Sociology developed out of the need to understand and address social issues. The roots of sociology are based in efforts to understand and to help control the impact of major societal changes. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Europe and the United States, organized people challenged monarchies and the dominance of religion. The Industrial Revolution dramatically changed where people lived and how they worked. Social change occurred everywhere, and philosophers and scientists offered new answers to life's questions. Many began to believe science could help leaders understand and shape society. Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the French philosopher who gave sociology its name, envisioned that sociology would be the “queen science” that could help steer society safely through great changes.

Today, sociologists help us understand and address challenges like economic inequality, environmental racism, sexism, the social dimensions of global climate

change, war, terrorism, and so on. Sociologists work in a variety of settings, including colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations (e.g., environmental groups, public health programs, and community-based organizations), government, marketing, sales, social services, and the human resources departments of businesses and nonprofit organizations. People in every profession benefit from sociological training, and employers value employees with sociological skills.

A survey of hiring managers commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018) reveals that students who study sociology tend to gain precisely the skills employers seek. For example,

- 84 percent look for critical thinking and analytical skills in prospective hires,
- 85 percent noted that they seek employees who are proactive and can provide both ideas and solutions, and
- 87 percent look to hire people who can work well in teams and apply knowledge in real-world settings.

In this course alone, you will have the opportunity to learn *and use* many of these skills. In most sociology undergraduate programs, you can gain and use all of them!

Check Your Understanding

- What is sociology?
- What is the duality at the heart of sociology?
- Out of what need did sociology develop?
- In what types of settings do sociologists work?

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.1

HOW CAN SOCIOLOGY BOOST YOUR CAREER?

In this activity, you will consider the ways sociology can be a benefit in any workplace.

No matter what your major or what you intend to do after graduation, sociology can help you. Sociology is useful in any organization and any professional field. Gaining a sociological perspective will enable you to better understand how society, organizations, and groups work; interact effectively with people of different genders, sexual orientations, ages, races, cultures, and economic classes; make and use connections with other people and organizations; and recognize and address issues of inequality and privilege.

Write your answers to the following questions:

1. What career do you plan on pursuing? If you are not sure yet, think of any profession with which you are familiar (e.g., lawyer, marketing director, police officer, entrepreneur, Wall Street banker, environmental activist, social worker, teacher).
2. How can gaining a sociological perspective help you to succeed in that career?

Changing How You View the World

1.2 What do the sociological eye and the sociological imagination allow you to do?

This sociology course will help you develop your sociological eye and your sociological imagination. Together, they allow you to notice and make sense of social patterns in ways that enable you to understand how society works—and to help influence it.

The Sociological Eye

A **sociological eye** enables you to see what others may not notice. It allows you to peer beneath the surface of a situation and discern social patterns (Collins 1998). For example, there is a woman academic who conducts evaluations of various academic departments every year. Often, she does so as part of a team. She has noticed that whenever she is paired with a man, the clients always look at the man when speaking to them both. As a sociologist, she knows that what she is experiencing is gender bias. In general, both men and women tend to defer to men and pay more attention to them, particularly in business settings.

Once you start paying attention to gender patterns (e.g., who talks more

in classes or meetings, who interrupts whom) or racial patterns (e.g., who eats lunch with whom in the cafeteria, what student organizations tend to attract specific racial groups, who is more likely to be stopped by the police), you won't be able to stop noticing them. Noticing these patterns can make you more aware of how your campus and the larger society work. Once you have this awareness, you can then take steps to change these patterns—if you so choose. The woman we referred to earlier, for example, now often prepares herself to talk more (and more authoritatively) when paired with



You can use your sociological eye to notice racial, gender, and social status patterns in the cafeteria scenes in the classic film *Mean Girls*—and in most real-life cafeterias.

A. F. Archive/Alamy

SHOWING OFF YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL EYE

With a group of classmates or individually, choose an image from a book cover, an ad for a movie or a product in a magazine, or an album cover that depicts a scene that requires a sociological eye to fully comprehend.

After doing so, write your answers to the following questions:

1. What message does this image portray?
2. How does your analysis of the image demonstrate that you have a sociological eye?
3. How might you use your sociological eye to better understand a scene from life on your campus?

Be prepared to share your answers and determine the similarities between yours and your classmates'.

a man and teaches others to make an effort to pay as much attention to women as to men. You will learn more about *why* we tend to pay more attention to men in Chapter 8!

CONSIDER THIS

Why do you think we need a sociological eye to notice some social patterns? Why aren't social patterns obvious to everyone all the time?

The Sociological Imagination

Once you develop your sociological eye, you can also expand your **sociological imagination**, the ability to connect what is happening in your own life and in the lives of other individuals to social patterns in the larger society. In doing so, you can differentiate between a personal problem and a social problem that requires a societal solution. For example, you may be having a difficult time paying for college. This is a challenge for many individuals. You may address it by taking out loans (and more loans), working while going to school, transferring to a more affordable school, and so forth. So far, these are all individual responses to the problem of high tuition. Looking at the problem with a sociological eye, however, can help you see that this is not just a hardship for a few individuals but part of a social pattern. Many college students across the United States face the same issue, and to address it effectively, we need to make changes on the societal, rather than just the individual, level.

As Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show, the cost of college has increased dramatically over the past decade. Consequently, approximately 70 percent of college graduates accept student loans. As students reach the debt limit allowed by federal loan programs (\$31,000 for

dependent students and \$57,500 for independent students), parents have borrowed more money to pay for their children's college education. Debt among associate degree students has also risen, reaching \$18,501 in 2015–2016 (Kantrowitz 2018).

Once you begin to look at the high cost of college as a societal issue, you can investigate its causes. You can then work with other students and families across the nation to press elected officials to develop state and national solutions to this societal problem.

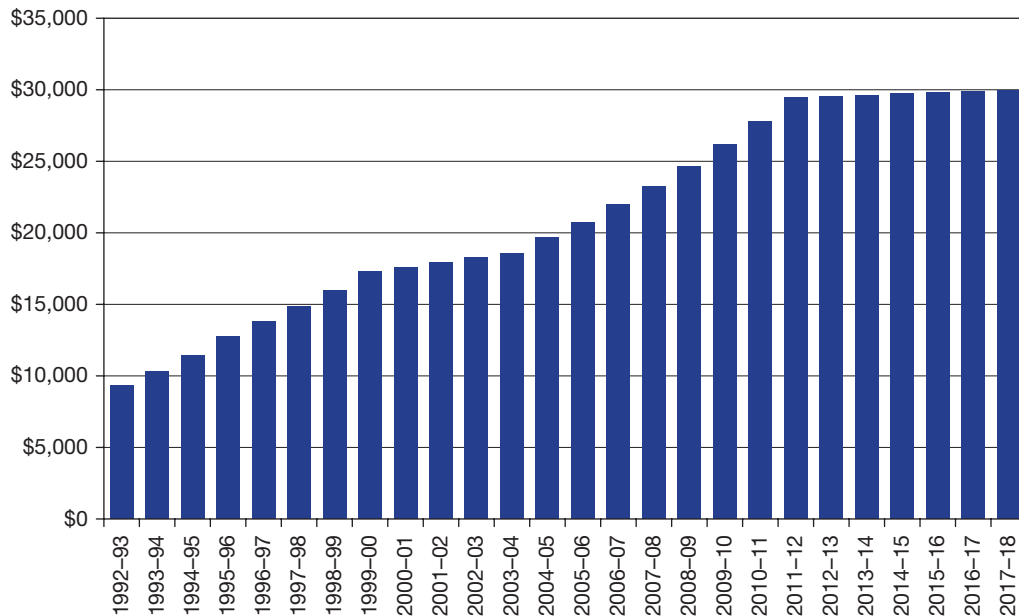
C. Wright Mills (1959, 1) developed the concept of the sociological imagination to describe how our individual lives relate to social forces. The sociological imagination gives us the ability to recognize the relationship between our own biographies and the society in which we live. Mills explained the impact of society on individuals this way:

When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. . . . When wars happen, an insurance salesperson becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar operator; a wife or husband lives alone; a child grows up without a parent. . . . Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Our lives are shaped by the societies in which we live. Yet we can also help shape those societies. If a few thousand people in the United States voted a different way in 2016, Hillary Clinton would have become president. On a more personal level, your experience in this class depends a lot on how your professor chooses to teach it. Your behavior will also influence it. Imagine how different this class will be for everyone if you choose to prepare for each class and actively participate or if you choose to blow off the reading

▼ FIGURE 1.1

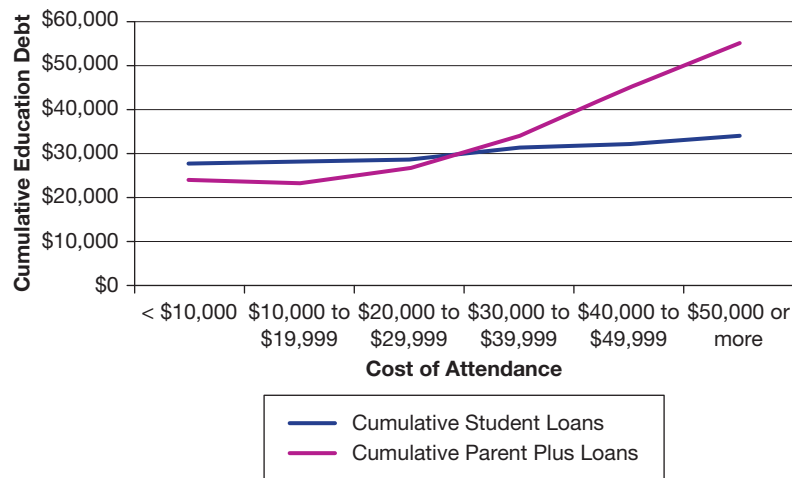
Average Student Loan Debt at Graduation for Bachelor's Degree Recipients



Source: Copyright © 2019 by Saving for College, LLC (savingforcollege.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. (<https://www.savingforcollege.com/article/growth-in-student-loan-debt-at-graduation-slows-as-borrowers-hit-loan-limits>).

▼ FIGURE 1.2

Average Student Loan Debt at Graduation for Bachelor's Degree Recipients, 2015–2016



Source: Copyright © 2019 by Saving for College, LLC (savingforcollege.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. (<https://www.savingforcollege.com/article/growth-in-student-loan-debt-at-graduation-slows-as-borrowers-hit-loan-limits>).

and groan every time one of your classmates says anything. Individuals choose how to behave within their social environments—and those choices affect the environments.

The Fallacy of the Individualist Perspective. We often forget, however, that our choices are limited. In the United States today, the myth that we, as individuals, determine our own lives permeates society. From this *individualist*

perspective, whether we succeed or fail depends primarily on our own efforts. For example, you have probably heard of the saying that in the United States, anyone who works hard enough can “make it.” A sociological eye quickly sees that this individualist perspective is flawed. Some people have fewer hurdles and more opportunities in life than others. For example, take two students with the same level of innate intelligence. Both work hard, but

DOING SOCIOLOGY 1.3

DISTINGUISHING INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In this exercise you will use your sociological imagination to distinguish between an individual problem and a social problem.

Briefly describe, in writing, two major problems a friend or a family member has experienced. Then, answer the following questions:

1. Are they personal problems or social problems?
2. Why do you categorize each the way you did?

Choose one of the social problems (or come up with one, if you did not think of one already) and explain why it should be addressed on the societal, rather than just the individual, level. Be prepared to share your work with your class.

one goes to a school that offers many AP courses, where students are expected and encouraged to apply to selective colleges. The other student goes to a school with few AP courses, where teachers and administrators focus on preventing kids from dropping out of high school rather than on getting them into selective colleges. Chances are, the second student may not even be aware of all the schools to which the first student applies. The two students' chances of "making it" are not the same—no matter how hard they both work.

CONSIDER THIS

How would you address a lack of affordable healthy food for low-income people (a) from an individualist perspective and (b) using your sociological imagination? Which would be more effective for the most people?

The sociological eye gives us the ability to recognize the impact society has on us and how the individualist perspective works to prevent people from noticing that impact. Having a sociological eye, therefore, gives us advantages over those who cannot yet see societal forces and recognize social patterns. Those blind to the influence of society are unknowingly shaped by it. Those with a sociological eye—and therefore a sociological imagination—recognize the impact society has on them *and* how they can work most effectively to shape society.

Check Your Understanding

- What does a sociological eye allow you to do?
- What can you do with a sociological imagination?

- According to C. Wright Mills, what do you need to understand the life of an individual?
- How does the sociological eye help us to see the fallacy of the individualist perspective in the United States?

Sociology as a Social Science

1.3 What key aspects of sociology make it a social science?

Sociology is a social science, a scientific discipline that studies how society works. As social scientists, sociologists follow rules to make sure our research is transparent and replicable and that others can confirm or refute our findings. For example, as we seek to better understand how society operates, sociologists use theories and the scientific research process to formulate research questions and collect and analyze data.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical perspectives are paradigms, or ways of viewing the world. They help us make sense of the social patterns we observe, and they determine the questions we ask. Each perspective has its own foci and asks different questions about the social world. Some ask questions about social order and cohesion (e.g., How do the various parts of society work together?), some ask questions about problems in society (e.g., Why is there inequality?), and some ask questions about the ways we see ourselves in relation to others (e.g., How do our interactions with others influence how we see ourselves?). You will learn more about the most important theoretical perspectives sociologists use in Chapter 2 and about topic-specific (middle-range) theories that fall under their respective umbrellas throughout the book.

The Scientific Research Process

To understand how society operates and to test our perspectives and theories about how society works, sociologists must collect and analyze data. We do so in systematic ways that we clearly describe and offer for critique from other social scientists and the general public. The purpose of sociological research is to constantly learn more about how society works. Doing so in open, systematic ways allows others to replicate our research process and to support our conclusions or reveal flaws in our data-gathering process and findings. Together, we gain a better, scientifically sound understanding of our society.

Sometimes, our findings are unexpected. For example, a sociologist who uses a theoretical lens that focuses on inequality and group conflict may be surprised to learn that a corporation she is studying has a high level of camaraderie and evidence of strong teamwork among workers at all status levels. If our findings consistently diverge from our theoretical explanations, we need to adjust our theories accordingly. Sociologists are in the business of creating useful theories on the basis of good generalizations.

Check Your Understanding

- What makes sociology a social science?
- How do sociologists use theoretical perspectives and theories?
- Why do sociologists collect data in open, systematic ways?

Differentiating between Good Generalizations and Stereotypes

1.4 How can you tell the difference between a good generalization and a stereotype?

Has anyone said to you that “you shouldn’t generalize”? That was probably right after you made some disparaging remark about all the people from a particular town, all the movies starring a particular actor, or all roads in New Jersey. What you were doing (and they were right that you shouldn’t) was stereotyping or making a *bad* generalization. Sociologists generalize all the time as they recognize and point out social patterns in society.



Does this guy look like someone who just wants to crunch numbers all weekend? The movie *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* put a spotlight on some racial stereotypes about Asian Americans.

AF Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

However, we aim to make good generalizations and avoid stereotyping. Good **generalizations** are statements, backed by evidence, used to describe groups of people or things in overall terms, with the understanding that there can always be exceptions.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are predetermined ideas about particular groups of people (e.g., all Irish are drunks, all Asians are good at math) based on hearsay or personal experience and held regardless of contrary evidence. Often used to promote or excuse discriminatory treatment, stereotypes can spark irrational fear or favor. Some may be closer to the truth than others, but none are based on solid evidence. Stereotypes are bad generalizations.

Movies and television shows can both expose and promote stereotypes. For example, in one scene in the film *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, the White, male boss hands Harold, a Korean American, a bunch of his work—so he can start his weekend early. The boss holds a stereotype of Asians that makes him think Harold (and all other Asians) “live for” crunching numbers. Of course, however, movie viewers know that work is the last thing Harold wants to do that weekend. On the other hand, in most movies, East Asian characters tend to be either sidekicks to the White stars or villains. How many shows can you name that feature a young Korean or Chinese American girl as the glasses-wearing, nerdy friend of the main White character (e.g., *Gilmore Girls*, *Gossip Girl*, *Awkward*)?