

scientific method (the)

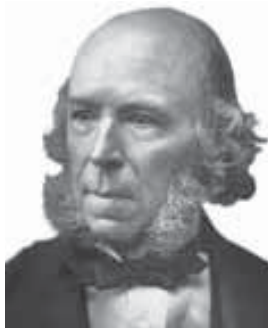
using objective, systematic observations to test theories

positivism the application of the scientific approach to the social world

sociology the scientific study of society and human behavior



Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who is credited as the founder of sociology, began to analyze the bases of the social order. Although he stressed that the scientific method should be applied to the study of society, he did not apply it himself.



Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), sometimes called the second founder of sociology, coined the term “survival of the fittest.” Spencer thought that helping the poor was wrong, that this merely helped the “less fit” survive.

Another impetus for the development of sociology was the success of the natural sciences. Just as tradition was breaking down and people were questioning fundamental aspects of life, **the scientific method**—using objective, systematic observations to test theories—was being tried out in chemistry and physics. Many secrets that had been concealed in nature were being uncovered. With tradition no longer providing the answers to questions about social life, the logical step was to apply the scientific method to these questions. The result was the birth of sociology.

Auguste Comte and Positivism

This idea of applying the scientific method to the social world, known as **positivism**, apparently was first proposed by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). With the philosophical upheaval of the French Revolution still fresh in his mind, Comte left the small town in which he had grown up and moved to Paris. The changes he experienced in this move, combined with those France underwent in the revolution, led Comte to become interested in what holds society together. What creates social order, he wondered, instead of anarchy or chaos? And then, once society does become set on a particular course, what causes it to change?

As Comte considered these questions, he concluded that the right way to answer them was to apply the scientific method to social life. Just as this method had revealed the law of gravity, so, too, it would uncover the laws that underlie society. Comte called this new science **sociology**—“the study of society” (from the Greek *logos*, “study of,” and the Latin *socius*, “companion,” or “being with others”). Comte stressed that this new science not only would discover social principles but also would apply them to social reform. Sociologists would reform the entire society, making it a better place to live.

To Comte, however, applying the scientific method to social life meant practicing what we might call “armchair philosophy”—drawing conclusions from informal observations of social life. He did not do what today’s sociologists would call research, and his conclusions have been abandoned. Nevertheless, Comte’s insistence that we must observe and classify human activities to uncover society’s fundamental laws is well taken. Because he developed this idea and coined the term *sociology*, Comte often is credited with being the founder of sociology.

Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), who grew up in England, is sometimes called the second founder of sociology. Spencer disagreed profoundly with Comte that sociology should guide social reform. Spencer thought that societies evolve from lower (“barbarian”) to higher (“civilized”) forms. As generations pass, the most capable and intelligent (“the fittest”) members of a society survive, while the less capable die out. Thus, over time, societies improve. To help the lower classes is to interfere with this natural process. The fittest members will produce a more advanced society—unless misguided do-gooders get in the way and help the less fit survive.

Spencer called this principle “the survival of the fittest.” Although Spencer coined this phrase, it usually is attributed to his contemporary, Charles Darwin, who proposed that organisms evolve over time as they adapt to their environment. Because they are so similar to Darwin’s ideas about the evolution of organisms, Spencer’s views of the evolution of societies became known as *social Darwinism*.

Spencer’s ideas that charity and helping the poor were wrong offended many. The wealthy industrialists of the time, however, liked these ideas: They saw themselves as “the fittest”—and therefore superior. Spencer’s views also helped them avoid feelings of guilt for living like royalty while people around them went hungry.

Spencer did not conduct scientific studies. Like Comte, he simply developed ideas about society. Spencer gained a wide following in England and the United States, where he was sought after as a speaker, but eventually social Darwinism was discredited.

Karl Marx and Class Conflict

Karl Marx (1818–1883) not only influenced sociology but also left his mark on world history. Marx's influence has been so great that even the *Wall Street Journal*, that staunch advocate of capitalism, has called him one of the three greatest modern thinkers (the other two being Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein).

Like Comte, Marx thought that people should try to change society. Marx, who came to England after being exiled from his native Germany for proposing revolution, believed that the engine of human history is **class conflict**. He said that the **bourgeoisie** (boo-shwa-zee) (the *capitalists*, those who own the means to produce wealth—capital, land, factories, and machines) are locked in conflict with the **proletariat** (the exploited workers, who do not own the means of production). This bitter struggle can end only when members of the working class unite in revolution and throw off their chains of bondage. The result will be a classless society, one free of exploitation, in which people will work according to their abilities and receive goods and services according to their needs (Marx and Engels 1848/1967).

Marxism is not the same as communism. Although Marx supported revolution as the only way that the workers could gain control of society, he did not develop the political system called *communism*. This is a later application of his ideas. Indeed, Marx himself felt disgusted when he heard debates about his insights into social life. After listening to some of the positions attributed to him, he shook his head and said, "I am not a Marxist" (Dobriner 1969b:222; Gitlin 1997:89).

Unlike Comte and Spencer, Marx did not think of himself as a sociologist. He spent years studying in the library of the British Museum in London, where he wrote widely on history, philosophy, and, of course, economics and political science. Because of his insights into the relationship between the social classes, especially the class struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots," many sociologists claim Marx as a significant early sociologist. He also introduced one of the major perspectives in sociology, conflict theory, which is discussed on pages 29–30.



Karl Marx (1818–1883) believed that the roots of human misery lay in class conflict, the exploitation of workers by those who own the means of production. Social change, in the form of the overthrow of the capitalists by the workers (proletariat), was inevitable from Marx's perspective. Although Marx did not consider himself a sociologist, his ideas have influenced many sociologists, particularly conflict theorists.



The French Revolution of 1789 not only overthrew the aristocracy but also upset the entire social order. This extensive change removed the past as a sure guide to the present. The events of this period stimulated Auguste Comte to analyze how societies change. His writings are often taken as the origin of sociology. This engraving depicts the 1794 execution of Maximilien Robespierre, a leader of the Revolution.

class conflict Marx's term for the struggle between capitalists and workers

bourgeoisie Marx's term for capitalists, those who own the means of production

proletariat Marx's term for the exploited class, the mass of workers who do not own the means of production



The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) contributed many important concepts to sociology. His comparison of the suicide rates of several countries revealed an underlying social factor: People are more likely to commit suicide if their ties to others in their communities are weak. Durkheim's identification of the key role of *social integration* in social life remains central to sociology today.

social integration the degree to which members of a group or a society feel united by shared values and other social bonds; also known as social cohesion

Emile Durkheim and Social Integration

The primary professional goal of Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline (Coser 1977). Up to this time, sociology had been viewed as part of history and economics. Durkheim, who grew up in eastern France and was educated in both Germany and France, achieved his goal when he received the first academic appointment in sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1887.

Durkheim also had another goal: to show how social forces affect people's behavior. To accomplish this, he conducted rigorous research. Comparing the suicide rates of several European countries, Durkheim (1897/1966) found that each country had a different suicide rate, and that these rates remained about the same year after year. He also found that different groups within a country had different suicide rates, and that these, too, remained stable from year to year. For example, Protestants, males, and the unmarried killed themselves at a higher rate than did Catholics, Jews, females, and the married. From this, Durkheim drew the insightful conclusion that suicide is not simply a matter of individuals here and there deciding to take their lives for personal reasons. Instead, *social factors underlie suicide*, and this is what keeps a group's rate fairly constant year after year.

Durkheim identified **social integration**, the degree to which people are tied to their social group, as a key social factor in suicide. He concluded that people who have weaker social ties are more likely to commit suicide. This, he said, explains why Protestants, males, and the unmarried have higher suicide rates. This is how it works, Durkheim said: Protestantism encourages greater freedom of thought and action; males are more independent than females; and the unmarried lack the ties and responsibilities that come with marriage. In other words, members of these groups have fewer of the social bonds that keep people from committing suicide. In Durkheim's term, they have less social integration.

Although strong social ties help protect people from suicide, Durkheim noted that in some instances strong bonds encourage suicide. An example is people who, torn apart by grief, kill themselves after their spouse dies. Their own feelings are so integrated with those of their spouse that they prefer death rather than life without the one who gave it meaning.

Despite the many years that have passed since its publication, Durkheim's study is still quoted. His research was so thorough that the principle he uncovered still applies: People who are less socially integrated have higher rates of suicide. Even today, those same groups that Durkheim identified—Protestants, males, and the unmarried—are more likely to kill themselves.



Durkheim believed that modern societies produce feelings of isolation, much of which comes from the division of labor. In contrast, members of traditional societies, who work alongside family and neighbors and participate in similar activities, experience a high degree of *social integration*. The Sudanese women in the photo on the right are building a house.



From Durkheim’s study of suicide, we see the principle that was central in his research: *Human behavior cannot be understood only in individualistic terms; we must always examine the social forces that affect people’s lives.* Suicide, for example, appears at first to be such an intensely individual act that it would seem that psychologists should study it, not sociologists. Yet, as Durkheim illustrated, if we look at human behavior (such as suicide) only in individualistic terms, we miss its *social* basis. For a glimpse of what Durkheim meant, look at Figure 1.1. That African Americans and whites commit suicide in such similar ways indicates something that goes far beyond the individual. Since these patterns are similar year after year, they reflect conditions in society, such as the popularity and accessibility of guns.

Max Weber and the Protestant Ethic

Max Weber (Mahx VAY-ber) (1864–1920), a German sociologist and a contemporary of Durkheim, also held professorships in the new academic discipline of sociology. Like Durkheim and Marx, Weber is one of the most influential of all sociologists, and you will come across his writings and theories in later chapters. Let’s consider an issue Weber raised that remains controversial today.

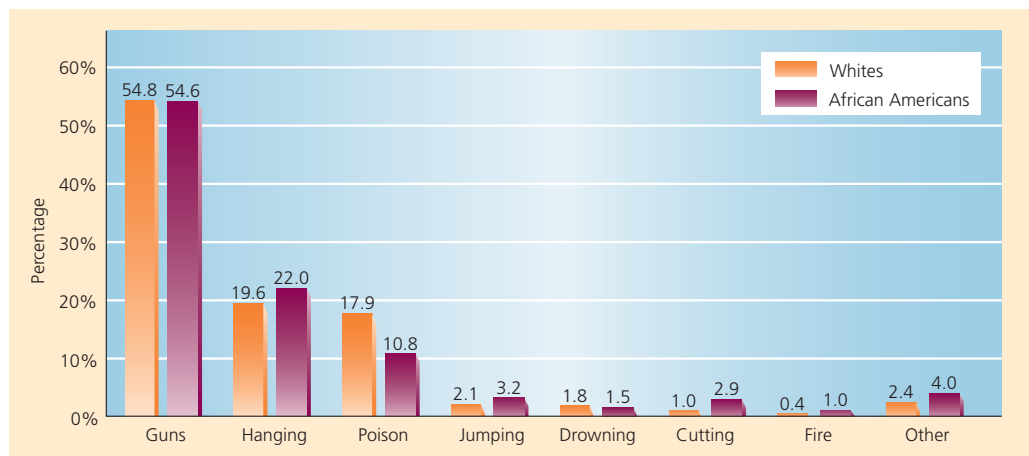


Max Weber (1864–1920) was another early sociologist who left a profound impression on sociology. He used cross-cultural and historical materials to trace the causes of social change and to determine how social groups affect people’s orientations to life.

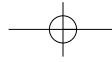
Religion and the Origin of Capitalism Weber disagreed with Marx’s claim that economics is the central force in social change. That role, he said, belongs to religion. Weber (1904/1958) theorized that the Roman Catholic belief system encouraged followers to hold on to traditional ways of life, while the Protestant belief system encouraged its members to embrace change. Protestantism, he said, undermined people’s spiritual security. Roman Catholics believed that because they were church members, they were on the road to heaven. Protestants, however, did not share this belief. Protestants of the Calvinist tradition were told that they wouldn’t know if they were saved until Judgment Day. Uncomfortable with this, they began to look for “signs” that they were in God’s will. Eventually, they concluded that financial success was the major sign that God was on their side. To bring about this “sign” and receive spiritual comfort, they began to live frugal lives, saving their money and investing the surplus in order to make even more. This, said Weber, brought about the birth of capitalism.

Weber called this self-denying approach to life the *Protestant ethic*. He termed the readiness to invest capital in order to make more money the *spirit of capitalism*. To test his theory, Weber compared the extent of capitalism in Roman Catholic and Protestant

Figure 1.1 How Americans Commit Suicide



Note: The source lists no separate totals for Latinos.
 Source: By the author. Based on Centers for Disease Control 2002.



value free the view that a sociologist's personal values or biases should not influence social research

values the standards by which people define what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad, beautiful or ugly

objectivity total neutrality

replication repeating a study in order to test its findings

countries. In line with his theory, he found that capitalism was more likely to flourish in Protestant countries. Weber's conclusion that religion was the key factor in the rise of capitalism was controversial when he made it, and it continues to be debated today (Wade 2007). We'll explore these ideas in more detail in Chapter 7.

Values in Sociological Research

Weber raised another issue that remains controversial among sociologists. He said that sociology should be **value free**. By this, he meant that a sociologist's **values**—beliefs about what is good or worthwhile in life and the way the world ought to be—should not affect his or her research. Weber wanted **objectivity**, total neutrality, to be the hallmark of social research. If values influence research, he said, sociological findings will be biased.

That bias has no place in research is not a matter of debate. All sociologists agree that no one should distort data to make them fit preconceived ideas or personal values. It is equally clear, however, that because sociologists—like everyone else—are members of a particular society at a given point in history, they, too, are infused with values of all sorts. These values inevitably play a role in the topics we choose to research. For example, values are part of the reason that one sociologist chooses to do research on the Mafia, while another turns a sociological eye on kindergarten students.

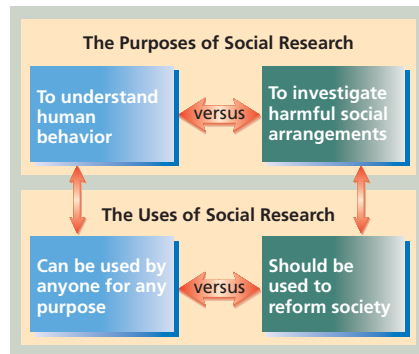
Because values can lead to unintended distortions in how we interpret our findings, sociologists stress the need of **replication**, researchers repeating a study in order to compare their results with the original findings. If an individual's values have distorted research findings, replication by other sociologists should uncover the bias and correct it.

Despite this consensus, however, values remain a hotly debated topic in sociology (Buroway 2007; Clawson et al. 2007). As summarized in Figure 1.2, the disagreement centers on the proper purposes and uses of sociology. Regarding its *purpose*, some sociologists take the position that their goal should be simply to advance understanding of social life. They should gather data on any topic in which they are interested and then use the best theory available to interpret their findings. Others are convinced that sociologists have the responsibility to investigate the social arrangements that harm people—the causes of poverty, crime, racism, war, and other forms of human exploitation.

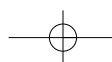
Then there is the disagreement over the *uses* of sociology. Those who say that sociology's purpose is to understand human behavior take the position that there is no specific use for the knowledge gained by social research. This knowledge belongs to both the scientific community and the world, and it can be used by anyone for any purpose. In contrast, those who say that sociologists should focus on investigating harmful social conditions take the position that sociological knowledge should be used to alleviate human suffering and improve society. Some also say that sociologists should spearhead social reform.

Although this debate is more complicated than the argument summarized here—few sociologists take such one-sided views—this sketch does identify its major issues. Perhaps sociologist John Galliher (1991) best expresses today's majority position:

Figure 1.2 The Debate over Values in Sociological Research



Some argue that social scientists, unlike politicians and religious leaders, should merely attempt to describe and explain the events of the world but should never make value judgments based on those observations. Yet a value-free and nonjudgmental social science has no place in a world that has experienced the Holocaust, in a world having had slavery, in a world with the ever-present threat of rape and other sexual assault, in a world with frequent, unpunished crimes in high places, including the production of products known by their manufacturers to cause death and injury as has been true of asbestos products and continues to be true of the cigarette industry, and in a world dying from environmental pollution by these same large multinational corporations.



Verstehen and Social Facts



Weber and Verstehen

Weber also stressed that to understand human behavior, we should use *Verstehen* (vare-shtay-in) (a German word meaning “to understand”). Perhaps the best translation of this term is “to grasp by insight.” By emphasizing *Verstehen*, Weber meant that the best interpreter of human behavior is someone who “has been there,” someone who can understand the feelings and motivations of the people being studied. In short, we must pay attention to what are called **subjective meanings**—how people interpret their situation in life, how they view what they are doing and what is happening to them.

To better understand this term, let’s return to the homeless in our opening vignette. Why were the men so silent? Why were they so unlike the noisy, sometimes boisterous college students who swarm dorms and cafeterias?

Verstehen can help explain this. When I interviewed men in the shelters (and, in other settings, homeless women), they revealed their despair. Because you know—at least on some level—what the human emotion of despair is, you can apply your understanding to their situation. You know that people in despair feel a sense of hopelessness. The future looks bleak, hardly worth plodding toward. Consequently, why is it worth talking about? Who wants to hear another hard-luck story?

By applying *Verstehen*—your understanding of what it means to be human and to face some situation in life—you gain insight into other people’s behavior. In this case, you can understand these men’s silence, their lack of communication in the shelter.

Durkheim and Social Facts

In contrast to Weber’s emphasis on *Verstehen* and subjective meanings, Durkheim stressed what he called **social facts**. By this term, he meant the patterns of behavior that characterize a social group. Examples of social facts in the United States include June being the most popular month for weddings, suicide rates being higher among the elderly, and more births occurring on Tuesdays than on any other day of the week.

Durkheim said that we must use social facts to interpret social facts. In other words, each pattern reflects some condition of society. People all over the country don’t just coincidentally decide to do similar things, whether that is to get married or to commit suicide. If this were the case, in some years, middle-aged people would be the most likely to kill themselves, in other years, young people, and so on. *Patterns that hold true year after year indicate that as thousands and even millions of people make their individual decisions, they are responding to conditions in their society.* It is the job of the sociologist, then, to uncover social facts and to explain them through other social facts. In the following section, let’s look at how the social facts I mentioned—weddings, suicide, and births—are explained by other social facts.

How Social Facts and Verstehen Fit Together

Social facts and *Verstehen* go hand in hand. As a member of U.S. society, you know how June weddings are related to the end of the school year and how this month, now locked in tradition, common sentiment, and advertising, carries its own momentum. As for suicide among the elderly (see Chapter 13), you probably already have a sense of the greater despair that many older Americans feel.

But do you know why more Americans are born on Tuesday than on any other day of the week? One would expect Tuesday to be no more common than any other day, and



Granted their deprivation, it is not surprising that the homeless are not brimming with optimism. This scene at a homeless shelter in Los Angeles, California, is typical, reminiscent of the many meals I ate in soup kitchens with men like this.

Verstehen a German word used by Weber that is perhaps best understood as “to have insight into someone’s situation”

subjective meanings the meanings that people give their own behavior

social facts Durkheim’s term for a group’s patterns of behavior

Cesarean deliveries used to be unusual, a last resort to prevent harm to the mother or to save the baby. Today, these deliveries have become routine in the United States. To understand this change, both social facts and *Verstehen* are useful.



that is how it used to be. But no longer. To understand this change, we need a combination of social facts and *Verstehen*. Four social facts are relevant: First, due to technology, the hospital has become a dominating force in the U.S. medical system. Second, medical technology has made delivery by cesarean section safer. Third, as discussed in Chapter 19 (page 564), doctors have replaced midwives for the delivery of babies. Fourth, medicine in the United States is a business, with profit a major goal. As a result of these social facts, an operation that used to be a last resort for emergencies has become so routine that more than one-fourth (27.5 percent) of all U.S. babies are now delivered in this manner (*Statistical Abstract* 2007:Table 86).

If we add *Verstehen* to these social facts, we gain insight that goes far beyond the cold statistics. We can understand that most mothers-to-be prefer to give birth in a hospital and that, under the influence of physicians at an emotionally charged moment, alternatives appear quite slim. We can also understand that physicians schedule births for a time that is most convenient for them. Tuesday is the day that fits their schedules the best.

Sexism in Early Sociology



Attitudes of the Time

As you may have noticed, all the sociologists we have discussed are men. In the 1800s, sex roles were rigid, with women assigned the roles of wife and mother. In the classic German phrase, women were expected to devote themselves to the four K's: *Kirche, Küchen, Kinder, und Kleider* (church, cooking, children, and clothes). Trying to break out of this mold meant risking severe disapproval.

Few people, male or female, received any education beyond basic reading and writing and a little math. Higher education, for the rare few who received it, was reserved for men. A handful of women from wealthy families, however, did pursue higher education. A few even managed to study sociology, although the sexism so deeply entrenched in the universities stopped them from obtaining advanced degrees or becoming professors. In line with the times, the writings of women were almost entirely ignored. Jane Frohock, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, were little known beyond a small circle. Frances Perkins, a sociologist and the first woman to hold a cabinet position (as Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt), is no longer remembered.

Harriet Martineau and Early Social Research

A classic example is Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), who was born into a wealthy family in England. When Martineau first began to analyze social life, she would hide her writing beneath her sewing when visitors arrived, for writing was “masculine” and sewing “feminine” (Gilman 1911:88). Martineau persisted in her interests, however, and eventually she studied social life in both Great Britain and the United States. In 1837, two or three decades before Durkheim and Weber were born, Martineau published *Society in America*, in which she reported on this new nation’s customs—family, race, gender, politics, and religion. Despite her insightful examination of U.S. life, which is still worth reading today, Martineau’s research met the same fate as the work of other early women sociologists and, until recently, was ignored. Instead, she is known primarily for translating Comte’s ideas into English. The Down-to-Earth Sociology box below features selections from *Society in America*.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Listening to an Early Feminist

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1834, Harriet Martineau, an early feminist sociologist from England, began a fascinating two-year journey around the United States. Traveling by stagecoach, she interviewed people living in poverty, as well as James Madison, the former President of the United States. She spoke with both slaveholders and abolitionists. She also visited prisons and attended sessions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Her observations on the status of U.S. women are taken from this research, published in her 1837 book, *Society in America*.

Concerning women not being allowed to vote:

One of the fundamental principles announced in the Declaration of Independence is that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. How can the political condition of women be reconciled with this?

Governments in the United States have power to tax women who hold property . . . to fine, imprison, and execute them for certain offences. Whence do these governments derive their powers? They are not “just,” as they are not derived from the consent of the women thus governed. . . .

The democratic principle condemns all this as wrong; and requires the equal political representation of all rational beings. Children, idiots, and criminals . . . are the only fair exceptions . . .

Concerning sex, slavery, and relations between white women and men in the South:

[White American women] are all married young . . . and there is ever present an unfortunate servile class of their own sex [female slaves] to serve the purposes of licen-



Interested in social reform, Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) turned to sociology, where she discovered the writings of Comte. She became an advocate for the abolition of slavery, traveled widely, and wrote extensive analyses of social life.

tiousness [as sexual objects for white slaveholders]. . . . [When most] men carry secrets which their wives must be the last to know . . . there is an end to all wholesome confidence and sympathy, and woman sinks to be the ornament of her husband’s house, the domestic manager of his establishment, instead of being his all-sufficient friend. . . . I have seen, with heart-sorrow, the kind politeness, the gallantry, so insufficient to the loving heart, with which the wives of the south are treated by their husbands. . . . I know the tone of conversation which is adopted towards women; different in its topics and its style from that which any man would dream of offering to any other man. I have heard the boast of chivalrous consideration in which women are held throughout their woman’s paradise; and seen something of the anguish of crushed pride, of the conflict of bitter feelings with which such boasts have been listened to by those whose aspirations teach

them the hollowness of the system . . .

Concerning women’s education:

The intellect of woman is confined by an unjustifiable restriction . . . As women have none of the objects in life for which an enlarged education is considered requisite, the education is not given . . . [S]ome things [are] taught which . . . serve to fill up time . . . to improve conversation, and to make women something like companions to their husbands, and able to teach their children somewhat. . . . There is rarely or never a . . . promotion of clear intellectual activity. . . . [A]s long as women are excluded from the objects for which men are trained . . . intellectual activity is dangerous: or, as the phrase is, unfit. Accordingly marriage is the only object left open to woman.

Sociology in North America



Early History: The Tension Between Social Reform and Sociological Analysis

Transplanted to U.S. soil in the late nineteenth century, sociology first took root at the University of Kansas in 1890, at the University of Chicago in 1892, and at Atlanta University (then an all-black school) in 1897. From there, academic specialties in sociology spread throughout North America. The growth was gradual, however. It was not until 1922 that McGill University gave Canada its first department of sociology. Harvard University did not open its department of sociology until 1930, and the University of California at Berkeley did not follow until the 1950s.

Initially, the department at the University of Chicago, which was founded by Albion Small (1854–1926), dominated sociology. (Small also founded the *American Journal of Sociology* and was its editor from 1895 to 1925.) Members of this early sociology department whose ideas continue to influence today's sociologists include Robert E. Park (1864–1944), Ernest Burgess (1886–1966), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Mead developed the symbolic interactionist perspective, which we will examine later.

The situation of women in North America was similar to that of European women, and their contributions to sociology met a similar fate. Among the early women sociologists were Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Isabel Eaton, Sophie Germain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Alice Hamilton, Florence Kelley, Elsie Clews Parsons, and Alice Paul. Denied faculty appointments in sociology, many turned to social activism (Young 1995).

Because some of these women worked with the poor rather than as professors of sociology, many sociologists classify them as social workers. Today's distinction between sociology and social work is fairly clear cut. There is a profession called social work; people train for it, they are hired to do it, and they call themselves social workers. They focus on aiding people in poverty and socially maladjusted members of society. They have jobs in hospitals and schools, and many work in the area of public aid. Others set up private practice and counsel patients. Earlier in the development of sociology, however, there often was little distinction between sociology and social work. This fuzziness lasted for generations, and many departments combined sociology and social work. Some still do.



Jane Addams, 1860–1935, a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace, worked on behalf of poor immigrants. With Ellen G. Starr, she founded Hull-House, a center to help immigrants in Chicago. She was also a leader in women's rights (women's suffrage), as well as the peace movement of World War I.

Jane Addams and Social Reform

Although many North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer, none was as successful as Jane Addams (1860–1935). Like Harriet Martineau, Addams came from a background of wealth and privilege. She attended the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, but dropped out because of illness (Addams 1910/1981). On one of her many trips to Europe, Addams was impressed with work being done to help London's poor. From then on, she worked tirelessly for social justice.

In 1889, Addams cofounded Hull-House, located in Chicago's notorious slums. Hull-House was open to people who needed refuge—to immigrants, the sick, the aged, the poor. Sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago were frequent visitors at Hull-House. With her piercing insights into the social classes, especially the ways in which workers were exploited and how peasant immigrants adjusted to city life, Addams strived to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. She worked with others to win the eight-hour work day and to pass laws against child labor. Her efforts at social reform were so outstanding that in 1931, she was a co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, the only sociologist to win this coveted award.

W. E. B. Du Bois and Race Relations

Confronted by the racism of this period, African American professionals also found life difficult. The most notable example is provided by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), who, after earning a bachelor's degree from Fisk University, became the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard. After completing his education at the Univer-

sity of Berlin, where he attended lectures by Max Weber, Du Bois taught Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University. He was hired by Atlanta University in 1897, and remained there for most of his career (Du Bois 1935/1992).

It is difficult to grasp how racist society was at this time. For example, Du Bois once saw the fingers of a lynching victim displayed in a Georgia butcher shop (Aptheker 1990). Although Du Bois was invited to present a paper at the 1909 meetings of the American Sociological Society, he was too poor to attend, despite his education, faculty position, and accomplishments. When he could afford to attend subsequent meetings, discrimination was so prevalent that restaurants and hotels would not allow him to eat or room with the white sociologists. Later in life, when Du Bois had the money to travel, the U.S. State Department feared that he would criticize the United States and refused to give him a passport (Du Bois 1968).

Each year between 1896 and 1914, Du Bois published a book on relations between African Americans and whites. Of his almost 2,000 writings, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1967) stands out. In this analysis of how African Americans in Philadelphia coped with racism, Du Bois pointed out that some of the more successful African Americans were breaking their ties with other African Americans in order to win acceptance by whites. This, he said, weakened the African American community by depriving it of their influence. One of Du Bois' most elegantly written books, which preserves a picture of race relations immediately after the Civil War, is *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page is taken from this book.

At first, Du Bois was content to collect and interpret objective data. Later, frustrated that racism continued, he turned to social action. Along with Jane Addams and others from Hull-House, Du Bois founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Deegan 1988). Continuing to battle racism both as a sociologist and as a journalist, Du Bois eventually embraced revolutionary Marxism. At age 93, dismayed that so little improvement had been made in race relations, he moved to Ghana, where he is buried (Stark 1989).

Until recently, the work of W. E. B. Du Bois was neglected in sociology, his many contributions unrecognized. As a personal example, during my entire graduate program at Washington University, I was never introduced to Du Bois' books and thought. Today, however, sociologists are rediscovering Du Bois, and he is beginning to receive some long-deserved respect.



W(illiam) E(dward) B(urghardt) Du Bois (1868–1963) spent his lifetime studying relations between African Americans and whites. Like many early North American sociologists, Du Bois combined the role of academic sociologist with that of social reformer. He was also the editor of *Crisis*, an influential journal of the time.



In the 1940s, when this photo was taken, racial segregation was a taken-for-granted fact of life. Although many changes have occurred since then—and since W. E. B. Du Bois analyzed race relations—race-ethnicity remains a significant factor in the lives of Americans.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Early Sociology in North America: Du Bois and Race Relations

THE WRITINGS OF W. E. B. Du Bois, who expressed sociological thought more like an accomplished novelist than a sociologist, have been neglected in sociology. To help remedy this omission, I reprint the following excerpts from pages 66–68 of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In this book, Du Bois analyzes changes that occurred in the social and economic conditions of African Americans during the thirty years following the Civil War.

For two summers, while he was a student at Fisk, Du Bois taught in a segregated school housed in a log hut “way back in the hills” of rural Tennessee. The following excerpts help us understand conditions at that time.

It was a hot morning late in July when the school opened. I trembled when I heard the patter of little feet down the dusty road, and saw the growing row of dark solemn faces and bright eager eyes facing me. . . . There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces shading from a pale cream to deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, the eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster’s blue-black spelling-book. I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvelous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hill. . . .

On Friday nights I often went home with some of the children,—sometimes to Doc Burke’s farm. He was a great, loud, thin Black, ever working, and trying to buy these seventy-five acres of hill and dale where he lived; but people said that he would surely fail and the “white folks would get it all.” His wife was a magnificent Amazon, with saffron face and shiny hair, uncorseted and barefooted, and the children were strong and barefooted. They lived in a one-and-a-half-room cabin in the hollow of the farm near the spring. . . .

Often, to keep the peace, I must go where life was less lovely; for instance, Tildy’s mother was incorrigibly dirty,



In the 1800s, poverty was widespread in the United States. Most people were so poor that they expended their life energies on just getting enough food, fuel, and clothing to survive. Formal education beyond the first several grades was a luxury. This photo depicts the conditions of the people Du Bois worked with.

Reuben’s larder was limited seriously, and herds of untamed insects wandered over the Edginges’ beds. Best of all I loved to go to Josie’s, and sit on the porch, eating peaches, while the mother bustled and talked: how Josie had bought the sewing-machine; how Josie worked at service in winter, but that four dollars a month was “mighty little” wages; how Josie longed to go

away to school, but that it “looked liked” they never could get far enough ahead to let her; how the crops failed and the well was yet unfinished; and, finally, how mean some of the white folks were.

For two summers I lived in this little world. . . . I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages, and, above all, from the sight of the Veil* that hung between us and Opportunity. All this caused us to think some thoughts together; but these, when ripe for speech, were spoken in various languages. Those whose eyes twenty-five and more years had seen “the glory of the coming of the Lord,” saw in every present hindrance or help a dark fatalism bound to bring all things right in His own good time. The mass of those to whom slavery was a dim recollection of childhood found the world a puzzling thing: it asked little of them, and they answered with little, and yet it ridiculed their offering. Such a paradox they could not understand, and therefore sank into listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado.

*“The Veil” is shorthand for the Veil of Race, referring to how race colors all human relations. Du Bois’ hope, as he put it, was that “sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins” (p. 261).

Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: Theory Versus Reform

Like Du Bois, many early North American sociologists combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer. They saw society, or parts of it, as corrupt and in need of reform. During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess

(1921) not only studied crime, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency, and prostitution but also offered suggestions for how to alleviate these social problems.

During the 1940s, the emphasis shifted from social reform to social theory. Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), for example, developed abstract models of society that influenced a generation of sociologists. Parsons’ models of how the parts of society work together harmoniously did nothing to stimulate social activism.

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) deplored the theoretical abstractions of this period, and he urged sociologists to get back to social reform. He warned that an imminent threat to freedom was the coalescing of interests on the part of a group he called the *power elite*—the top leaders of business, politics, and the military. Shortly after Mills’ death came the turbulent late 1960s and 1970s. This precedent-shaking era sparked interest in social activism, and Mills’ ideas became popular among a new generation of sociologists.



C. Wright Mills was a controversial figure in sociology because of his analysis of the role of the power elite in U.S. society. Today, his analysis is taken for granted by many sociologists and members of the public.

The Continuing Tension and the Rise of Applied Sociology

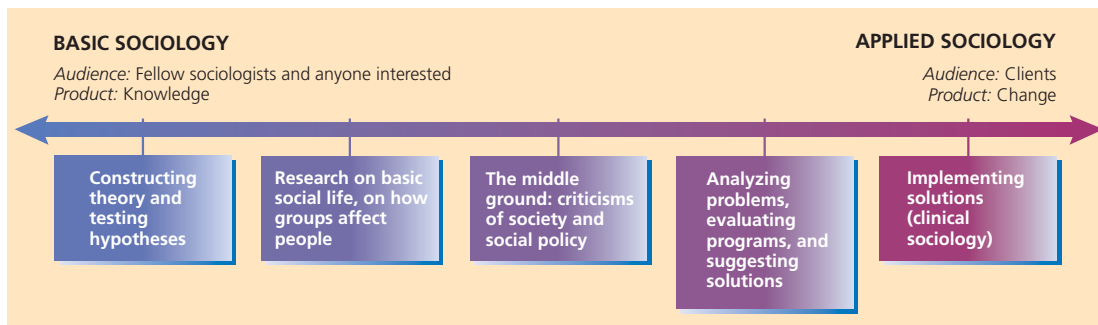
The apparent contradiction of these two aims—analyzing society versus working toward its reform—created a tension in sociology that is still with us today. As we saw in Figure 1.2 on page 14, some sociologists believe that their proper role is to analyze some aspect of society and to publish their findings in sociology journals. This is called **basic** (or **pure**) **sociology**. Others say that basic sociology is not enough: Sociologists have an obligation to use their expertise to try to make society a better place in which to live and to help bring justice to the poor.

Somewhere between these extremes lies **applied sociology**, using sociology to solve problems. (See Figure 1.3, which contrasts basic and applied sociology.) One of the first attempts at applied sociology—and one of the most successful—was just mentioned: the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As illustrated in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, today’s applied sociologists work in a variety of settings. Some work for business firms to solve problems in the workplace. Others investigate social problems such as pornography, rape, environmental pollution, or the spread of AIDS. A new specialty in applied sociology is determining ways to disrupt terrorist groups (Ebner 2005). The Down-to-Earth Sociology box on page 23 presents a startling example of applied sociology. (For another example of applied sociology, see the Cultural Diversity box on page 32.)

basic or pure sociology sociological research whose purpose is to make discoveries about life in human groups, not to make changes in those groups

applied sociology the use of sociology to solve problems—from the micro level of family relationships to the macro level of crime and pollution

Figure 1.3 Comparing Basic and Applied Sociology



Source: By the author. Based on DeMartini 1982.

theory a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work; an explanation of how two or more facts are related to one another

symbolic interactionism a theoretical perspective in which society is viewed as composed of symbols that people use to establish meaning, develop their views of the world, and communicate with one another

Applied sociology is not the same as social reform. It is an application of sociology in some specific setting, not an attempt to rebuild society, as early sociologists envisioned. Consequently, a new tension has emerged in sociology. Sociologists who want the emphasis to be on social reform say that applied sociology doesn't even come close to this. It is an application of sociology, but not an attempt to change society. Those who want the emphasis to remain on discovering knowledge say that when sociology is applied, it is no longer sociology. If sociologists use sociological principles to help teenagers escape from pimps, for example, is it still sociology?

At this point, let's consider how theory fits into sociology.

Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Facts never interpret themselves. To make sense out of life, we use our common sense. That is, to understand our experiences (our "facts"), we place them into a framework of more-or-less related ideas. Sociologists do this, too, but they place

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Careers in Sociology: What Applied Sociologists Do

MOST SOCIOLOGISTS TEACH IN colleges and universities, sharing sociological knowledge with college students, as your instructor is doing with you in this course. Applied sociologists, in contrast, work in a wide variety of areas—from counseling children to studying how diseases are transmitted. Some even make software more "user-friendly." (They study how people use software and give feedback to the programmers who design those products [Guice 1999].) To give you an idea of this variety, let's look over the shoulders of four applied sociologists.

Leslie Green, who does marketing research at Vanderveer Group in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, earned her bachelor's degree in sociology at Shippensburg University. She helps to develop strategies to get doctors to prescribe particular drugs. She sets up the meetings, locates moderators for the discussion groups, and arranges payments to the physicians who participate in the research. "My training in sociology," she says, "helps me in 'people skills.' It helps me to understand the needs of different groups, and to interact with them."

Stanley Capela, whose master's degree is from Fordham University, works as an applied sociologist at HeartShare Human Services in New York City. He evaluates how children's programs—such as ones that focus on housing, AIDS, group homes, and preschool education—actually work, compared with how they are supposed to work. He spots problems and suggests solutions. One of his assignments was to find out why it was taking so long to get children adopted, even though there was a long list of eager adoptive parents.

Capela pinpointed how the paperwork got bogged down as it was routed through the system and suggested ways to improve the flow of paperwork.

Laurie Banks, who received her master's degree in sociology from Fordham University, analyzes statistics for the New York City Health Department. As she examined death certificates, she noticed that a Polish neighborhood had a high rate of stomach cancer. She alerted the Centers for Disease Control, which conducted interviews in the neighborhood. They traced the cause to eating large amounts of sausage. In another case, Banks compared birth certificates with school records. She found that problems at birth—low birth weight, lack of prenatal care, and birth complications—were linked to low reading skills and behavior problems in school.

Daniel Knapp, who earned a doctorate from the University of Oregon, decided to apply sociology by going to the dumps. Moved by the idea that urban wastes should not simply be buried, that they could be recycled and reused, he tested this idea in a small way—by scavenging at the city dump at Berkeley, California. Starting a company called Urban Ore, Knapp did studies on how to recycle urban wastes. He also campaigned successfully for changes in waste disposal laws (Knapp 2005). Knapp became a major founder of the recycling movement in the United States, with a goal of changing human behavior, and his application of sociology continues to influence us all.

From just these few examples, you can catch a glimpse of the variety of work that applied sociologists do. Some work for corporations, some are employed by government and private agencies, and others run their own businesses. You can also see that you don't need a doctorate in order to work as an applied sociologist.