# Chapter 2: What Is Sociology? Sociology as a Revolutionary Response

## 2.1 Chapter Overview



Figure 2.1 Video: Who Can Use The Bathroom? Texas State Representative Senfronia Thompson testifies. As you watch, you might consider how using the bathroom becomes a social problem. Social scientists try to figure out why this might be true. Opening question: How is a theory different from an opinion?

In the video that opens this chapter, we see that something as simple as where to go to the bathroom can be very complicated (figure 2.1). Writing in 1892, Black feminist scholar Anna Julia Cooper noted a dilemma she encountered while traveling by train in the South. When her train stopped at a station, Cooper wrote, "I see two dingy little rooms with 'FOR LADIES' swinging over one and 'FOR COLORED PEOPLE' over the other; while wondering under which head I come" (1892:96). It is this precise dilemma that Black feminist theorists of

intersectionality dealt with 100 years later when they pointed out the law's inability to address the intersection of racial and gender discrimination.

Bathrooms have also emerged as a controversial space more recently with attacks on policies that allow gender expansive individuals to use restrooms that align with their gender identity (Schilt and Westbrook 2015). We can see that then and now something that seems so mundane—bathrooms—can produce rich theoretical insights about **society**, a group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture.

The study of social problems is based in the wider field of **sociology**, the systematic study of society and social interactions to understand individuals, groups, and institutions through data collection and analysis. Sociologists study human interactions from the level of two people talking to systems that span the globe. In this section, we will explore what makes sociology as a science unique. First, we examine how sociology arose as a revolutionary response to changing social conditions. Second, we explore how sociological theories help to understand why our world works the way it does. Finally, we review the research methods and the ethics of using those methods that form the core of social science. We use this framework to help us understand the causes and consequences of social problems throughout the rest of the book.

## 2.1.1 Focusing Questions

The following questions will help us understand how sociology is revolutionary:

1. Why is sociology a revolutionary response to social problems historically and currently?
2. How does sociological theory help us to understand and explain our world?
3. Who are sociologists, particularly scientists who are traditionally ignored?
4. How does the social location of sociologists influence what they see?
5. How do sociologists apply the tools of science to understand society?

Let's start by going back in time!

## Chapter Overview Licenses and Attributions

Figure 2.1. "[Texas State Rep. Gives Powerful Testimony on the History of Bathroom Laws.](#)" ©
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## 2.2 Why is Sociology Revolutionary?

The roots of social inquiry can be traced to many civilizations across time and space. European
and American sociology in particular was a radical response to the significant social disruptions
of the 1700s and 1800s. The focus on using scientific inquiry to understand and solve social
problems arose as an answer to war, famine, and disease, as well as to changes in values,
philosophies, and technology. What were these disruptions, and how did they result in a
revolutionary response? The chart in figure 2.2 begins to tell the story. We'll expand the picture
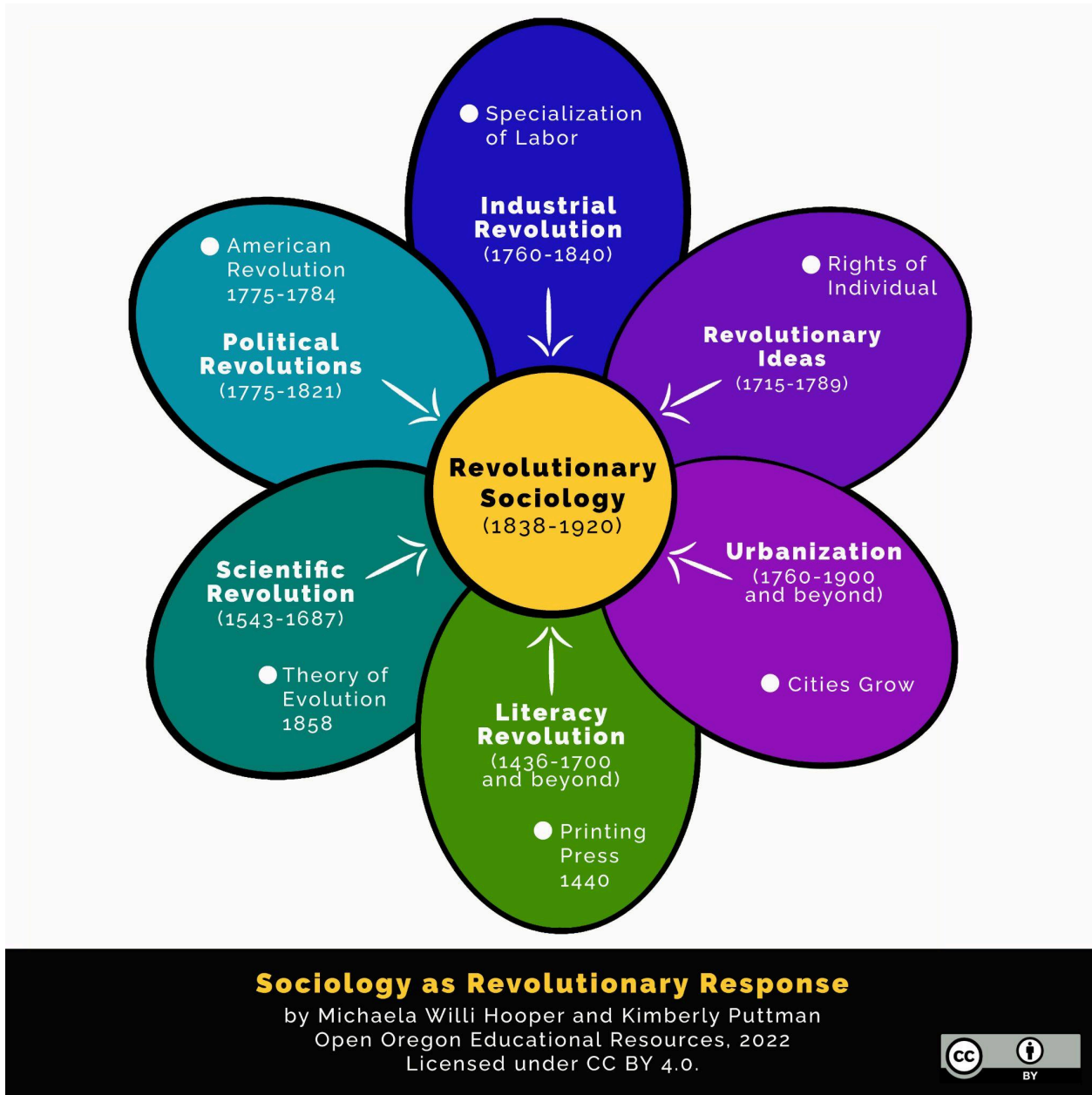section by section.

Figure 2.2 Sociology as a Revolutionary Response,

Image Description: A flower shape with a yellow center that says RevolutionarySociology (1838-1920). There are six petals around the center. One petal says Industrial

Revolution (1760-1840), specialization of labor. Another petal says Revolutionary Ideas (1715-1789), rights of individual. Another says Urbanization (1760-1900 and beyond), cities grow. Another says Literacy Revolution (1463-1700 and beyond), printing press (1440). Another

says Scientific Revolution (1543-1687), theory of evolution (1858). Another says Political Revolutions (1775-1821), American Revolution (1775-1784). Below the flower the title says Sociology as revolutionary response. Creators Michaela Willi Hooper and Kim Puttman are noted along with the CC BY Creative Commons license.

## 2.2.1 Age of Exploration and Colonization (1400–1600)



Figure 2.3 This painting romanticizes the voyage of Christopher Columbus. As you look, please consider who was "found."

People who live in a community ask questions about what it means to live well in groups. Wise people, religious leaders, sages, and scholars have answered them in a variety of ways. Some of the early scholars include Moroccan scientist Iban Battuta, Chinese scholar Du You, and Tunisian sociologist Ibn Khaldun. However, European academic sociology was a radical response to the significant social disruptions of the 1700s and 1800s. But what was disrupted?

In order to answer that question, we need to go back in time to the thirteenth century in Europe, where we see three social forces of politics, religion, and colonization coming together. In

politics, most governments were monarchies. Kings (for the most part) ruled their countries because they were part of royal families. They ruled by "the divine right of kings," the doctrine that God granted the king total control over the country and all the people who lived there.

Similarly, the religion of the day was not only Christian, it was Catholic—specifically the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The Pope was the head of the church, with worldly powers which rivaled monarchs of the time. The Holy Roman Catholic Church maintained its power by means of the Inquisition, a group of policies, practices, and people who tortured and killed people who challenged the "one true faith."

As power centralized in both church and state in Europe, the monarchs were able to pay for worldwide voyages of exploration. One voyage is immortalized in a children's nursery rhyme: "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." We see the voyage of Christopher Columbus in the painting in figure 2.3. As you look, you may want to consider who was "found" during these voyages.

Kings and queens were expecting that the expansion of trade would bring them wealth. Over time, the exploration led to colonization. Major European countries claimed territory in Africa, North America, and South America, shattering the territorial rights of the people who already lived in these areas. Many politicians and business people in Europe began the worldwide slave trade and the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

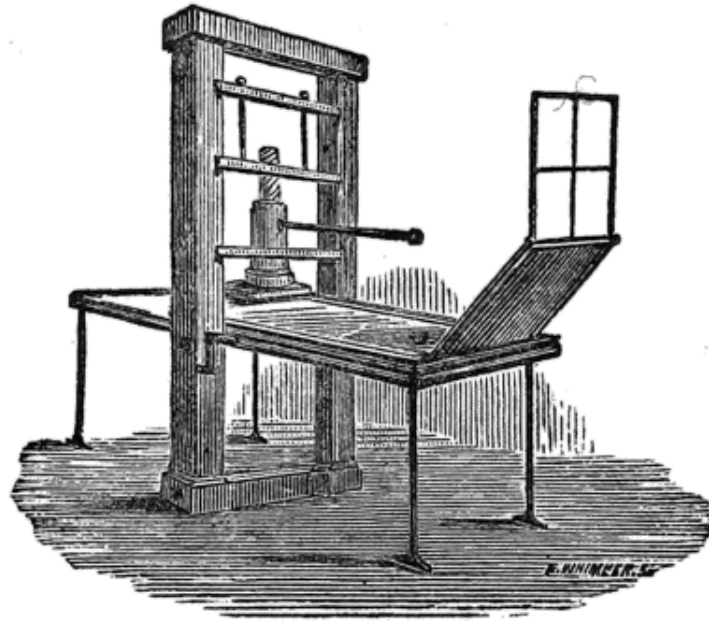## *2.2.2 Scientific Revolution (1543–1687)*

Figure 2.4 Early Press, etching from early typography by William Skeen, 1872

Even though monarchies and the Holy Roman Catholic church remained hegemonic (or dominant) for centuries, two destabilizing forces arose to challenge their power: the expansion of literacy and the bubonic plague.

The first destabilizing force was an increase in literacy, the ability to read and write, in Europe and countries with European trade. Before 1436, books were hand-written and hand-copied which made them very expensive. Only wealthy people could afford books and an education. Although China and Korea had methods of mass production of printed materials before this time, a German man, Johannes Gutenberg, is credited with inventing a modern printing press in Europe. You can see an etching of this press in figure 2.4. The press could make copies of books, pages, and flyers very efficiently. Both the printing presses and the news sheets and books they produced took decades to spread throughout Europe and their colonies. If you are interested in learning more about this revolutionary technology, check out this history blog: Seven Ways the Printing Press Changed the World.

In time, though, literacy itself became a challenge to the complete control of the monarchs and the church. At the time of the invention of the printing press, only 5 percent of Europe's

population could read. By 1700 almost 40 percent of the people could read. Scientists could now share information about their experiments accurately. Ordinary people could share details about what was happening in their town or village, in what could be considered an early version of social media. Regular people, usually White men, could learn for themselves and question the wisdom of their leaders.



Figure 2.5 The plague doctor: The mask's beak was filled with herbs to keep out the plague.

A second destabilizing force was the bubonic plague. This plague, also called the Black Death, swept over Europe between 1346 and 1522 CE. The bubonic plague is an infectious disease caused by a specific type of bacteria called *Yersinia pestis*. This bacterium affects humans and animals and is spread mainly by fleas. Bubonic plague deaths exceeded 25 million people during the fourteenth century—about two-thirds of the population in Europe at the time. You can see an illustration of a plague doctor in figure 2.5. The mask's beak was filled with herbs to keep out the plague.

Rats traveled on ships and brought fleas and plague with them. Most people who got the plague died, with nodes in the armpit, groin, and neck as large as eggs oozing pus and blackened tissue

due to gangrene. A cure for bubonic plague wasn't available. (This disease still exists today but is now treatable with modern antibiotics.)

The Holy Roman Catholic Church could not explain why this disease was killing people. Health practices were not sufficient to stop the spread of the disease. People started looking for other explanations for disease and deeper understandings of the wider world that exploration and colonization were revealing.

These social forces of catastrophic illness and widespread literacy contributed to the Scientific Revolution (1543–1687). In this period, thought leaders used scientific principles to understand the world around them. They would hypothesize about what was true, observe and measure physical phenomena, and come to conclusions about how the world worked. Many of their theories turned out to be incorrect. However, we still agree that the earth moves around the sun, that disease is spread by contagion, and that gravity is a force in the universe that keeps our feet firmly planted on the ground.

During this period, religious leaders challenged the supremacy of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Reformation can be traced back to 1517 when German theologian Martin Luther posted 95 complaints against the institution of the Catholic Church on a church door in Germany. However, this movement of church reform lasted over 100 years. Spiritual descendants of these reformers ultimately became some of the early American colonists in the 1620s and 1630s.

### *2.2.3 Thought Revolution (1715–1789)*



Figure 2.6 Reading in the salon of Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin in 1755, by Anicet Charles Gabriel Lemonnier, c. 1812. Oil on canvas. Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France. Who is missing from this painting?

Together, the Scientific Revolution, the Protestant Reformation, the increase in literacy, the expansion of trade routes, and increased knowledge of the world set the stage for a revolution in thought. This period, often referred to as the Age of Reason or the Enlightenment, provided the philosophical foundations for transformative change (Bristow 2017).

Several of the core beliefs of the Age of Reason contributed to the rise of sociology as a science. Philosophers argued that science and reason could be used to explain the physical and social world. They also asserted that physical and social science could fix the problems of the day. These usually White wealthy men believed that individual people had a right to determine the course of their own lives. Ordinary people could decide what would make them happy. Their ideas about who was a person excluded women, slaves, people who didn't own land, and Indigenous people. Participation in the discussion of these ideas and in the rights of citizenship was limited at the time, but the ideas encouraged revolution. You might notice, for example, that

the painting in figure 2.6 includes mostly White men and only a few women. These philosophers excluded Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other marginalized people.

The philosophers also argued that political leaders and governments only ruled with the consent of the people. The ideas of democracy and individual rights began to create possibilities for revolution. These beliefs were revolutionary because they challenge the idea that God and the King were the source of all truth and all power.

## 2.2.4 Industrial Revolution (1760–1840)

Figure 2.7a and b Buildings like this old mill in Biddleford, Maine are sprinkled throughout New England. Many of the small towns had mills for wool, shoes, cloth and other materials. This particular set of mill buildings, the Pepperell Mill campus is being repurposed as shops, housing galleries and retail space. What might have it been like to work in one of these mills?

These revolutionary ideas transformed the intellectual discoveries from the scientific revolution into technological and economic revolution. During the 1760s, Scottish engineer James Watt created an effective steam engine. His prototype morphed into the steam-powered locomotive, steam-powered looms for weaving cloth, steamships, and (in an alternate reality) steampunk.

Over the century of the Industrial Revolution, the location of work also changed dramatically. Before the Industrial Revolution, most people in Europe lived and worked on farms. By 1900, over 40 percent of the population of Western Europe lived in cities. The factory-produced goods were carried by train and ship around the world. Although the mass production enabled by the Industrial Revolution made goods like cloth and rugs cheaper, factories often had unsafe working

conditions and long hours. Workers, who included men, women, and children, had no way to protest inhumane conditions. These mill buildings exist in large and small towns throughout New England (figure 2.7)

## 2.2.5 Political Revolution (1775–1821)

Figure 2.8 Haitian Revolution

In addition to revolutionary thought and revolutionary economic transformation, the 1700s and 1800s brought political revolution, as listed in figure 2.9. Ordinary people in European and Asian countries rebelled against centuries-old monarchies. Colonies around the world that had been created in the 1600s began to fight for their own independence. Among the many political revolutions of the time, these four revolutions created countries out of colonies, weakened the power of the monarchy, and began a trend of establishing independence. The figure in 2.8 is a depiction of the Haitian Revolution.

| Revolution | Time Period | Core Dispute |
|------------|-------------|--------------|
| American Revolution | 1775–1783 | U.S. severs its colonial relationship with England |

| Revolution | Time Period | Core Dispute |
|---|---|---|
| French Revolution | 1789–1799 | The French monarchy is abolished |
| The Haitian Revolution | 1791–1804 | Toussaint Louverture leads a successful slave rebellion that, establishes Haiti as the first free, Black republic. |
| The Mexican War of Independence | 1810–1821 | American-born Spaniards, including the priest and mestizo Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, rebel against Spanish rule. |

Figure 2.9 Chart of Political Revolutions

The video in figure 2.10 is a visualization of how countries and boundaries have changed over time. Please start watching at minute 16, which begins around 16:00. Pay attention to the period of colonization. As you watch you will see the mostly European invasions of other places, and the growth of colonies. The people who lived in these colonies begin to revolt in the late 1700s. Revolutions and dismantling of formal colonialism continues. This long legacy of invasion and control by foreign powers reverberates in the social problems of today.



Figure 2.10 Video Visualization: The History of the World Every Year

### *2.2.6 Sociology* Is *the Revolutionary Response*

Against the background of philosophical, economic, technological, and political revolution, sociology arose as a revolutionary discipline. Practitioners wanted to understand the causes of social upheaval and use this knowledge to solve social problems. Scholars used scientific principles to understand what was true about our social world, coming up with ideas about how things worked and proposing solutions to societal breakdowns and social problems. Although the findings of early sociologists were sometimes racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist, the application of science to solve human problems was remarkable. Each of the following founders of sociology studied a particular set of social problems. If you click on each name, you can find out more about each person and the contributions they made to the emerging discipline of sociology.



Figure 2.11 The title page of Emile Durkheim's book on suicide

French Jewish sociologist Emile Durkheim studied the social problem of suicide. At that time, the Holy Roman Catholic Church described suicide as a mortal sin against God and the church. People who committed suicide were not allowed to be buried on church grounds. Durkheim proposed several reasons that people decide to commit suicide. He asserted that people commit suicide because connections in their society are breaking down. A person might also commit suicide because their society was too restrictive (figure 2.11).

English social theorist Harriet Martineau studied the social problems of poverty and slavery. Unusually for the time, she was an educated woman. Because she was both White and wealthy she was able to study and research. She traveled to the American south and interviewed people to understand more about gaps between American ideals of freedom and liberty, and the lived reality of slavery. She also examined women's roles, women's rights, and family life as a field of sociological study.

German philosophers Karl Marx and Fredrick Engles studied the social problems of revolution and industrialization. They proposed that revolution was an inevitable outcome of the unequal distribution of wealth between the rich, who owned land and factories, and the poor, who didn't. Marx and Engles, both wealthy German men, were revolutionary thinkers because they followed the money—who had it and who didn't—to explain conflict in society.

German sociologist Max Weber studied the social problems of capitalism and bureaucracy. He agreed with Marx about the importance of the economic inequality driving social disruption. However, he argued economics alone was insufficient to explain revolution. He added the idea that people's beliefs and values contributed to the choices that they made. Most specifically, he said that the value of hard work in Protestantism contributed to the spread of capitalism.

All of these sociologists were taking a revolutionary approach, applying science to understand the problems of their times. Each of them proposed a reason based in logic and science to explain the social problems of their time. In a world that was faced with environmental, economic, and political unrest, these thinkers were revolutionary because they investigated causes and proposed solutions to the suffering of their time.

Let's now look more about what makes sociology a social science: social theory and research methods. The following sections explore core sociological theories and the methods by which sociologists actually do science.

## *Sociology as a Revolutionary Response Licenses and Attributions*

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Figure 2.3 Painting of Christopher Columbus on Santa Maria in 1492 by Emanuel Leutze, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons public domain.

Figure 2.4 Early Press, etching from early Typography by William Skeen 1872, Public domain.

Figure 2.5 The Plague Doctor Costume: The "beak" was filled with herbs to keep out the plague by I. Columbina, ad vivum delineavit, Public domain.

Figure 2.6 Painting In the Salon of Madam Geofrin in 1755 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salon_de_Madame_Geoffrin.jpg Public Domain

Figure 2.7a  Pepperell Mill Complex Mill building in Biddleford, ME. by Markus Jansen licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.7b  Pepperell Mill Complex Mill building in Biddleford, ME. by Valerie McDowell licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.8 Hatian Revolution https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Haitian_revolution.jpg Public Domain

Figure 2.9 Chart of Political Revolutions - by Kimberly Puttman is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.10: Video Visualization: The History of the World Every Year © Drex and Ollie Bye. License Terms: Standard YouTube license.

Figure 2.11 Front Cover of Le Suicide

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## 2.3 What is Social Theory?

Sociologists and other scholarly thinkers use theories to help them understand the social world and how it works. Theories are sets of ideas that explain something. More specifically, a **theory** is a statement that proposes to describe and explain why facts or other social phenomena are related to each other based on observed patterns. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa and Patricia Hill Collins are well-known scholars who created theories that explain racial, ethnic, and gender oppression (figure 2.12).



Figure 2.12 Gloria Anzaldúa (on left) and Patricia Hill Collins (on right) are highly influential theorists in the areas of feminist theory and racial and ethnic studies.

In this section, we discuss historical and contemporary theories and theorists that assist us in thinking deeply about the causes and consequences of social problems, such as racism, poverty, and discrimination based on sexuality and/or gender. Using social theory helps us to get a better understanding of why and how social problems exist. This understanding, in turn, can help us better prevent and address social problems.

### 2.3.1 What Is a Theory?

Social theory helps us put into words the underlying mechanisms that guide society and our social interactions (Lemert 1999). By analyzing society in this way we can better understand the causes and consequences of social problems. For example, Karl Marx's theory of capitalism helps us understand working poverty by outlining the ways profit is generated through worker exploitation. According to Marx ([1867] 2012), the worker is not paid the full value of their

labor. The business owner, or bourgeoisie, takes a percentage of the value created by the worker and keeps it as profit. The bourgeoisie is always looking for ways to decrease worker wages and increase profit, which results in low-wage work and working poverty. By analyzing and critiquing capitalism, Marx explained a hidden part of everyday experience. In this way, theory can be liberating because it allows us to better understand the workings of the social world in which we live.

## 2.3.2 Macro and Micro Level Theories

Theories can be categorized, as either macro or micro, based on the size of the phenomenon they seek to explain. A **macro-level theory** (such as Marx and Engels's critique of capitalism) examines larger social systems and structures, such as the capitalist economy, bureaucracies, and religion. A **micro-level theory** examines the social world in finer detail by discussing social interactions and the understandings individuals make of the social world.

A good example of micro-level theory comes from Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman, who studied one-on-one social interactions and the meanings that emerged from them. Goffman (1963) is famous for having created a theory about **stigma**, the social process whereby individuals that are taken to be different in some way are rejected by the greater society in which they live based on that difference. He explains that stigma is generated when a person possesses an attribute that makes them different and may cause them to be perceived as bad, dangerous, or weak.

Goffman (1963) writes that the person possessing this attribute of stigma "is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). The possession of stigma can introduce tension into everyday social interactions (Bell 2000). Stigma plays the role of a mark that links its bearer to undesirable characteristics, which in turn cause the stigmatized person to experience rejection and isolation (Link et al. 1997). As we will discuss more in Chapter 9, having a diagnosis of mental illness often carries stigma.

Micro-level theory has a long history within sociology. One of the most common micro-level approaches is **symbolic interactionism**, a sociological approach that focuses on the study of one-on-one social interactions and the meanings that emerge from them. Goffman's theories have roots in social theory created in the early twentieth century by George Herbert Mead, an

American philosopher who described how social processes created one's understanding of themself, or their *social self*. According to Mead (1934), the self is not a biological body or an inherent personal quality, but rather the self is an image of oneself generated entirely from experiences in the social world. The social insights offered by Goffman, Mead, and other symbolic-interactionists help us understand how situations come to be defined as "social problems" through the meanings made in social interactions between people. As we know, situations are not automatically defined or understood as problems; we attach meanings and labels to situations that make them social problems.

Many sociology textbooks organize their material around three theoretical frameworks: structural functionalism (often shortened to functionalism), conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism (often shortened to interactionism). These frameworks tend to correspond to theories created by prominent White male scholars of the nineteenth century. Because they are used so regularly within our field, we have offered a summary of each approach in figure 2.13.

While these approaches are useful, the categorization hides the explanatory power of multiple approaches. Feminist, intersectional, decolonial, anti-racist, and other theoretical perspectives provide multifaceted ways of interpreting our social world. Discussions of alternatives to these core theories starts in the next section.

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions | Views of social problems |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Functionalism** | Social stability is necessary for a strong society, and adequate socialization and social integration are necessary for social stability. Society's social institutions perform important functions to help ensure social stability. Slow social change is desirable, but rapid social change threatens social order. | Social problems weaken a society's stability but do not reflect fundamental faults in how the society is structured. Solutions to social problems should take the form of gradual social reform rather than sudden and far-reaching change. Despite their negative effects, social problems often also serve important functions for society. |
| **Conflict theory** | Society is characterized by pervasive inequality based on social class, race, gender, and other factors. Far-reaching social change is needed to reduce or eliminate social inequality and to create an egalitarian society. | Social problems arise from fundamental faults in the structure of a society and both reflect and reinforce inequalities based on social class, race, gender, and other dimensions. |

| | | Successful solutions to social problems must involve far-reaching change in the structure of society. |
|---|---|---|
| **Symbolic interactionism** | People construct their roles as they interact; they do not merely learn the roles that society has set out for them. As this interaction occurs, individuals negotiate their definitions of the situations in which they find themselves and socially construct the reality of these situations. In so doing, they rely heavily on symbols such as words and gestures to reach a shared understanding of their interaction. | Social problems arise from the interaction of individuals. People who engage in socially problematic behaviors often learn these behaviors from other people. Individuals also learn their perceptions of social problems from other people. |

Figure 2.13. Three theoretical sociological perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism

Each of these theorists was responding to social concerns of the time in which they lived, whether they were experiencing social upheaval, war, economic depression or economic stability. As we can see from figure 2.14. Marx, Durkheim and Weber were responding to social forces related to the industrial revolution. Martineau, Cooper, and Wells examined changes in womens's roles related to the industrial revolution, and the American Civil War. Dubois explored the experiences of black people during and after slavery. Addams created services for immigrants before and after WWI. Irwati Karve looked at kinship in India, from an Indian perspective, rather than a British one. Eugene Kinkle Jones created social opportunities for Black people after the Civil War, and beyond.

# Pre-World War II Sociological Thinkers

**Harriet Martineau**
1802-1867, British
sociological methods, status of women
*Society in America (1837)*

**Émile Durkheim**
1858-1917, French
collective consciousness, anomie
*Le Suicide (1897)*

**Jane Addams**
1860-1935, American
FOUNDED HULL HOUSE, SOCIAL REFORMER
*Hull House Papers & Maps (1893)*

**Max Weber**
1864-1920, German
beauracracy, impact of values
*The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)*

**Eugene Kinckle Jones**
1885-1954, American
LEADER OF THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE, ADVOCATE FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES, AND ANTI-SEGREGATION ACTIVIST

**Printing Press** 1440
**First Steam Engine Patent** 1698
**Industrial Revolution** 1760 – 1840
**Civil War** 1861-1865
**Telephone invented** 1876
**Ford Model T launched** 1908
**World War I** 1914-1918
**19th Amendment** 1920
**Great Depression** 1929-1939

**Karl Marx**
1818-1883, German
class conflict
*Communist Manifesto (1848, w/ Frederich Engels)*

**Anna Julia Cooper**
1858-1963, American
black feminism
*A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South (1892)*

**Ida B. Wells**
1862-1931, American
lynching as white supremacy
*Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892)*

**W.E.B. DuBois**
1868-1963, American
the veil, double consciousness
*The Souls of Black Folks (1903)*

**KEY**
ACTION = BLUE ALL CAPS
idea = purple lower-case
Book = Green Title Case Italics

Design by Michaela Willi Hooper & Kim Puttman, Open Oregon Educational Resources. CC BY 4.0

2.14 Key Sociological Thinkers - Industrial Revolution to WWII

Image Description: The title, pre-World War II Sociological Thinkers, is at the top. The center line includes events and movements such as the invention of the printing press (1440), the first steam engine patent (1698), the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), the Civil War (1861-1865), the invention of the telephone (1876), the launch of the Ford Model T (1908), World War I (1914-1918), the 19th amendment (1920), and the Great Depression (1929-1939). On either side are boxes with information about the thinkers, some of whom have headshots next to their information. Harriet Martineau [a woman with light skin, brown hair, and a half smile] lived

from 1802-1867 and was British. She developed sociological methods, studied the status of women, and wrote the book Society in America (1837). Karl Marx [in a black and white photo with a large white beard] lived from 1818-1883 and was German. He developed the idea of class consciousness and wrote The Communist Manifesto in 1848 with Frederich Engels. Emile Durkheim lived from 1858-1917 and was French. He developed the ideas of anomie and collective consciousness and wrote Le Suicide in 1897. Anna Julia Cooper [a woman with dark skin and hair looking directly at the camera] lived from 1858-1963 and was American. She is considered the founder of black feminism and wrote A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South (1892). Jane Addams [a painting of a serious woman with light skin and a dark bun] lived from 1860-1935 and was an American social reformer. She founded Hull House and wrote Hull House Papers and Maps (1893). Ida B. Wells [a smiling woman with dark skin and coiffed dark hair] lived from 1862-1931 and was American. She exposed lynching as white supremacy and wrote Southern Horrors: Lynching Law in All Its Phases (1892). Max Weber lived from 1864 to 1920 and was German. He studied bureaucracy and the impact of values. He wrote The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905). WEB DuBois lived from 1868-1963 and was American. He developed the ideas of double consciousness and the veil. He wrote the Souls of Black Folks in 1903. Eugene Kinckle Jones lived from 1885-1954 and was American. He was a leader of the national urban league, an advocate for black communities, and an anti-segregation activist. At the bottom of the image is a CC BY 4.0 Creative Commons license and a note that the image was designed by Michaela Willi Hooper and Kim Puttman.

### 2.3.3 The Beginnings of Critical Race Theory

Though many of the most recognized classical theorists of sociology came from European White cultural backgrounds during the nineteenth century, plenty of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color were creating social theory and adding to our understanding of social problems. Their voices weren't often recognized or heard as fully as the so-called founding fathers of sociology, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim.

Figure 2.15 W. E. B Du Bois

W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the first sociologists to publish scholarly work that discussed race and racism. In this way, he provided a critical intervention into sociological theory and his writings critiqued the absence of racial analysis from previous social theory. Du Bois was the first Black American to earn a PhD at Harvard, which he did in 1895. He studied economics, history, sociology, and political theory.

One of Du Bois's most influential contributions to sociological theory came from his discussion of *the veil* and *double consciousness*. He writes that the Black American is "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (1903:3). He points out that Black Americans have a double consciousness because they also see themselves through the eyes of White America.
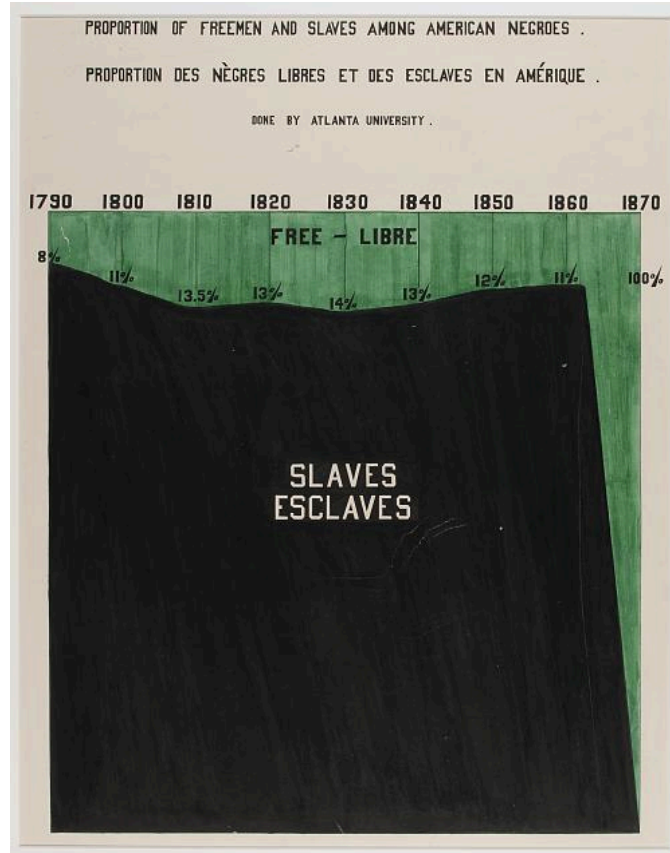
Figure 2.16 Infographic; Du Bois's Proportion of freedmen and slaves among American Negros.

[Figure 2.16 Image Description](#)

Du Bois established the first school of American sociology at Atlanta University. With his team, he also created some of the first data visualizations in American sociology to illustrate the conditions of life for Black Americans. The infographic in figure 2.16 shows the percent of Black slaves and freemen between 1790 and 1870, when slavery was declared illegal. These studies and infographics were part of his groundbreaking sociological analysis of poverty among Black Americans. His words are still quoted today among advocates of racial justice.

Du Bois analysis continues to inform our experiences and conversations around race even today. CNN recorded interviews with Black people and shared them on Twitter. If this experience of race consciousness is new to you, please watch, "[The Moment I Realized I Was Black](#)."

### 2.3.4 Feminism and Intersectionality

Despite the variations between different types of feminist approach, there are four characteristics that are common to the **feminist perspective**:

1. Gender is a central focus or subject matter of the perspective.
2. Gender relations are viewed as a problem: the site of social inequities, strains, and contradictions.
3. Gender relations are sociological and historical in nature and subject to change and progress.
4. Feminism is about an emancipatory commitment to change: the conditions of life that are oppressive for women need to be transformed.

One of the sociological insights that emerged with the feminist perspective in sociology is that "the personal is political." Many of the most immediate and fundamental experiences of social life—from childbirth to who washes the dishes to the experience of sexual violence—had simply been invisible or regarded as unimportant politically or socially.

White British born Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith's development of **standpoint theor**y was a key innovation in sociology that enabled women's experiences and issues to be seen and addressed in a systematic way (Smith 1977). Scientists of the time argued that science was logical and objective. Smith, on the other hand, argued that where you stand, or your point of view, influences what you notice. Women and other marginalized people could see systems of oppression more clearly because they experienced them. She recognized from the consciousness-raising groups initiated by feminists in the 1960s and 1970s that many of the immediate concerns expressed by women about their personal lives were ignored by academics, politicians, and lawers.

Part of the issue was sociology itself. Smith argued that instead of beginning sociological analysis from the abstract point of view of institutions or systems, women's lives could be more effectively examined if one began from the "actualities" of their lived experience in the immediate local settings of "everyday/everynight" life. She asked, "What are the common features of women's everyday lives?"

From this standpoint, Smith observed that women's position in modern society is acutely divided by the experience of dual consciousness. One consciousness was centered in family. Then they had to cross a dividing line as they went out in the world, dealing with work or the institutions of schools, hospitals and governments. Women had to use a second consciousness to navigate this. These institutions didn't see women's real and personal understandings of the world. (Smith 1977).

The standpoint of women is grounded in relationships between people, because they have to care for families. Society however, is organized through "relations of ruling," which translate the substance of actual lived experiences into rules and laws. Power and rule in society, especially the power and rule that limit and shape the lives of women, operate as if there is one objective reality, rather than differences in people's lived experiences. Smith argued that the abstract concepts of sociology, at least in the way that it was taught at the time, only contributed to the problem. This theory, while it seems obvious now, was revolutionary at the time. And, though groundbreaking, it had its limits.

The feminist perspective within social theory has changed throughout the years. From the 1800s until the mid-twentieth century, the central focus or subject matter was differences between women and men. Race and class were generally ignored. Black feminists pointed out that previous forms of feminist theory were mostly concerned with the issues of White middle-class and wealthy women. This was a critical intervention into the perspective of feminist theory.

Early Black feminist theorists built the foundation for the study of feminist intersectionality. Intersectionality, as you read in Chapter 1, is a perspective and a theory that analyzes and interrogates the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social structures of privilege and oppression overlap and work together.

Though the concept of intersectionality emerged from a critique of White feminist theory and activism that ignored the experiences of Black and Indigenous women of color, its roots can be found in the work of Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964) and Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931). In their own ways Cooper and Wells-Barnett brought a sociological consciousness to their response to the Black experience and focused on the toxic interaction between difference and power in U.S. society (Madoo and Niebrugge 1998).

Looking at society through the lenses of race, gender, and class, Cooper and Wells-Barnett, though they worked separately, both created a Black feminist sociology. They both pointed out that "domination rests on emotion, a desire for absolute control" (Madoo and Niebrugge 1998:169). Their point was that societal domination is not just about making a profit or otherwise increasing one's financial status. Rather, there is an emotional factor within societal domination. Cooper (1892) provides an example by noting the extra expense paid by railroad companies of providing a separate car for people of color, as discussed in the beginning of the chapter.

Though Wells-Barnett was a journalist, she made contributions to sociological thought by way of her activism against lynching. She researched and published accounts of lynching that showed the out of control aggression of White Americans towards Blacks (Madoo and Niebrugge 1998). After examining the various excuses used by Southern Whites for their attacks on Blacks, Wells-Barnett ([1895] 2018) wrote that there would be no need for her research, "If the Southern people in defense of their lawlessness, would tell the truth and admit that colored men and women are lynched for almost any offense, from murder to a misdemeanor" (p. 11).

These Black feminist founders of sociological thought planted the seeds for the emergence of influential sociological theory from the 1980s and 1990s, which centered on the experiences of Black and Indigenous women of color. Though the concept of intersectionality is most often attributed to critical race legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, within sociology Patricia Hill Collins (1948–present) is recognized for providing complex and detailed analyses of the concept. Her theorization of the *outsider within* perspective shows how Black women "have a clearer view of oppression than other groups" whose identities are different (1986:20). Collins (1986) details how Black women participate in social systems but not as insiders, given their oppression. Participating in a social system that oppresses them, Black women have a privileged standpoint that offers more information. They can see more clearly how our social structures of race and gender work intersectionally.

Collins's (1986) theory of *interlocking oppressions* points out philosophical foundations that underlie multiple systems of oppression. It is common in sociology to explain inequality in terms of race, class, or gender alone. Either you are Black or White, male or female, young or old, and so on. One group in each dichotomy has more power than the other. With some additional

complexity, sociologists discuss issues of oppression related to race and class or age and gender, for example. Collins argues that these either/or additive approaches missed the point.

Instead, Collins explains that oppression exists as a **matrix of domination** in which society's multiple interlocking levels of domination stem from the social construction of race, class, and gender. Patriarchy and ableism work together to make disabled women and nonbinary people invisible. Systemic racism, homophobia, and classism interlock to oppress poor trans people of color. This Black feminist analysis sees the holistic experience of interlocking and simultaneous oppressions and challenges people to see wholeness instead of difference (Collins 1986).

These same oppositional differences are seen in the work of Chicana theorist and activist Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004). Anzaldúa theorizes the idea of the borderlands, or *la frontera*. The borderlands is a terrain, both literal and imagined, where we live. Living in the borderlands involves the simultaneous occurrence of contradictions. Anzaldua (1987) writes that when you live in the borderlands you are a "forerunner of a new race, half-and-half—both woman and man—neither—a new gender (p. 216). She uses various writing styles including poetry, as well as various languages to write her theory. In this way she challenges the usual, or dominant, way of composing scholarship. Her transitions between languages and dialects were groundbreaking and served to question the dominance of certain languages (English) and ways of speaking ("proper" English).

Together these Black and Indigenous theorists of color advanced scholarly understandings of difference and oppression. Many of them also used nontraditional methods to articulate their ideas, often using personal experience or placing value on emotion. This contrasts with historical ways of doing theory that emphasized objectivity and reason. **Objectivity** refers to the idea of conducting research with no interference by aspects of the researcher's identity or personal beliefs. Contemporary scholars believe it is impossible to ever be completely objective. Another similarity between these theorists is the links they made between composing scholarly work and doing activism out in the world. They worked to bridge the two and to advocate for a reciprocal relationship, so that what was happening out in the world was directly impacting scholarly work.

### 2.3.5 Critical Race Studies

To better understand race and racism, social scientists examine racial power dynamics in the United States and throughout the world. Sociologists have long understood race to be a social construct, meaning that it is a product of social thought rather than a material or biological reality. Yes, people have different levels of melanin in their bodies, but that is as far as any biological notion of race goes. One sociological theory of race describes how race is an on-going, ever-evolving construction with historical and cultural roots (Omi and Winant 1986). The long-lasting economic inequality caused by slavery and systemic racism combines with all of the racial stereotypes circulating in media and popular thought to create our current racial formation.

Racial formation refers to the categories of race that we currently have in this country and all of the meanings popularly attached to them. The racial formation in the United States will look different than in other countries. For example, Brazil has a different set of racial categories and a different way of racially categorizing people. The United States itself has counted race differently in different decades. In 1790, the census counted free White women and men, other free people, and slaves. In 2010, the categories were expanded to include White, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Other, and Hispanic. By 2020, though the categories themselves didn't change much, people could select more than two options. These census changes help us to more accurately reflect our multiracial and diverse population (Marks and Rios-Vargas 2020).

While understanding the socially constructed nature of race is important, American social theorist Joe R. Feagin (2006) criticizes racial formation theory for failing to include an understanding of how slavery generated huge profits for White Americans who then passed that money on to their future generations. Feagin's view of systemic racism insists on understanding the long-lasting impacts of slavery, as well as recognizing White-on-Black oppression as firmly embedded within U.S. society. Feagin (2006) writes, "For a long period now, white oppression of Americans of color has been systemic—that is, it has been manifested in all major societal institutions" (p. xiii).

Another set of theories on race, called critical race theory (CRT)**,** have garnered attention in the media lately, becoming a contentious topic for school boards and parents. **Critical race theory** emerged in the 1980s out of a concern by legal scholars of color that the measures installed by the civil rights movement to alleviate racial injustice were no longer addressing the problem, or never did.

Critical race theorists take a systemic view of racism. They see racism not as a quirk within our society, but as an everyday occurrence within many, if not all, parts of life (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Focusing on the legal sphere, they raise questions about the law's ability to address systemic racial inequality.

The current discussion around critical race theory involves worries by some that it is being taught in public K-12 schools. Some people are concerned that White children are being made to feel guilty for being White. Those with knowledge of critical race theory point out that it is most often taught in law school and would be far too advanced to be found in the K-12 curriculum. Advocates for racial justice affirm the importance of discussing race and racism with children in school settings. If you would like to learn more, check out this blog "[Critical Race Theory: 'Diversity' Is Not the Solution, Dismantling White Supremacy Is.](#)"

## *2.3.6 Queer Theory*

**Queer theory** is an interdisciplinary approach to sexuality and gender studies that identifies Western society's rigid splitting of gender into male and female roles and questions the manner in which we have been taught to think about sexual orientation and gender. By calling their discipline *queer*, scholars reject the effects of labeling; instead, they embraced the word *queer* and reclaimed it for their own purposes. The perspective highlights the need for more flexible and fluid notions of sexuality and gender that allow for change, negotiation, and freedom. One concrete example would be allowing individuals to write in their gender identity on forms or leave it blank.

French social theorist Michel Foucault (1978) traced the history of the concept of sexuality and saw that powerful forces encouraged its development as part of an effort to reveal and eliminate

any deviant forms of sexual expression. Foucault's work on sexuality raises many questions: Why are we asked to identify as a specific sexuality? Wouldn't we be freer if sexuality wasn't categorized (e.g., homosexual/ heterosexual)? Of course, many LGBTQIA+ activists would argue otherwise, given the power in self-identification and advocacy for rights and respect.

Another well-known queer theorist, Judith Butler, also critiqued categorizations, but her objections included gender identities. As with Foucault, she felt these categories were limiting. Butler is recognized among sociologists for developing the theory of the performativity of gender. This theory describes gender as a way of appearing to others, through clothing, nonverbal communication, make-up, etc., instead of an inner feeling or identity. Thus, gender is a matter of learned performance and can be reconstructed (Willchins 2004). This theory opens the doors for us to re-think what we want gender to mean, or for us to do away with the concept of gender altogether and replace it with something else. Theorists who use queer theory strive to question the ways society perceives and experiences sex, gender, and sexuality, creating a new scholarly understanding.

These contemporary sociologists are also responding to core events in their times. The infographic in figure 2.16 locates contemporary theorists related to critical social and economic events. As you review this detail, consider how your perspective might change if you were trying to explain the Vietnam War, or provide theories that would explain the Civil Rights Movement.

## Modern Sociological Thinkers

**Irawati Karve**
1905-1970
kinship structures
*Kinship Organization in India (1953)*

**Erving Goffman**
1922-1982
stigma, symbolic interactionism

**Pierre Bourdieu**
1930-2002
social and cultural capital
*Forms of Capital (1986)*

**Gloria E. Anzaldúa**
1942-2004
la frontera, new tribalism
*Borderlands (1987)*

**Patricia Hill Collins**
1948-
interlocking oppressions, matrix of domination
*Black Feminist Thought (1990)*
INTERSECTIONALITY

**World War II**
1939-1945

**Civil Rights Movement**
1945-1968

**Vietnam War**
1955-1975

**Stonewall Riots**
1969

**Personal Computers**
1977

**Second Wave Feminism**
1960s-1980s

**First Web Browser**
1990

**9/11 Attack**
2001

**First iPhone Released**
2007

**Peter Bergman** and **Thomas Luckman**
1929-2017          1927-2016
social constructivism
*The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (1966)*

**Derrick Bell**
1930-2011
interest convergence
*And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice (1987)*
CRITICAL RACE THEORY

**Angela Davis**
1944-
prison industrial complex, queer rights
*Women, Race, and Class (1981)*
INTERSECTIONALITY

**Judith Butler**
1956-
gender is socially constructed, queer theory
*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)*

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Derrick Bell by DavidShankbone/Wikipedia is CC BY-SA 3.0.
Angela Davis by Columbia GSAPP/Wikipedia is CC BY 2.5.
Gloria Anzaldua via K. Kendall/Flickr is CC BY 2.0.
Patricia Hill Collins by Valter Campanato/Agência Brasil is CC BY 3.0.

**KEY**
idea = purple lower-case
*Book = Green Title Case Italics*
MOVEMENT = BLUE ALL CAPS

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Figure 2.17 Modern Sociologists

Image Description: The title, Modern Sociological Thinkers, is at the top. The center line includes events and movements such as World War II (1939-1945), the Civil Rights Movement (1945-1968), the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Stonewall Riots (1969), Personal Computers (1977), Second Wave Feminism (1960s-1980s), the First Web Browser (1990), September 11, 2001 attacks, and the release of the first iPhone (2007). On either side are boxes with information about the thinkers, some of whom have headshots next to their information. Irawati Karve [a smiling woman with glasses and white hair] lived from 1905-1970. She developed the idea of

kinship structures, and wrote the book Kinship Organization in India (1953). Peter Bergman (1929-2017) and Thomas Luckman (1927-2016) developed the idea of social constructivism and wrote The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (1966). Erving Goffman (1922-1982) developed the ideas of stigma and symbolic interactionism. Derrick Bell (1930-2011) is pictured with dark skin and graying hair. He developed the idea of interest convergence, was part of the Critical Race Theory movement, and wrote And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice (1987). Pierre Bourdieu lived from 1930-2002. He developed the ideas of social and cultural capital and wrote Forms of Capital (1986). Angela Davis was born in 1944. She is pictured as a smiling woman with light curly hair and dark skin. She studied the prison industrial complex and queer rights. She wrote Women, Race, and Class (1981) and was part of the intersectionality movement. Gloria E. Anzaldua (a smiling woman with dark, short hair and large earrings) lived from 1942-2004. She developed the ideas of la frontera and new tribalism. She wrote Borderlands (1987). Patricia Hill Collins was born in 1948. She is pictured as a woman with dark skin and curly, short, white hair speaking passionately into a microphone. She developed the concepts of interlocking oppressions and the matrix of domination. She wrote Black Feminist Thought (1990) and was part of the intersectionality movement. Judith Butler was born in 1956. They are pictured as a person with short, light hair and skin staring directly at the camera. They developed the ideas that gender is socially constructed and queer theory. They wrote Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990).  At the bottom of the image are attributions for the photos that were used, a CC BY-SA 4.0 Creative Commons license, and a note that the image was designed by Michaela Willi Hooper and Kim Puttman.

### 2.3.7 Theories of Interdependence and Complex Systems

As we discussed in Chapter 1, we are interdependent. We need each other to survive and thrive. How do sociologists understand this concept and apply it to understand the social world?

To answer that question, we need to start with our friends, the biologists. Like Simba and the pride in the circle of life as described in *The Lion King*, biologists recognize that all of life is interconnected. They call specific instances of this interdependence, ecosystems. An ecosystem is a geographic area where plants, animals, and other organisms, as well as weather and landscapes, work together to form a bubble of life.

Figure 2.18 Sea Stars and Sea Anemones at Haystack Rock, Oregon. There's no water so the anemones are closed. Each creature depends on the healthy ecosystem.

A tide pool is a tiny ecosystem, like the one shown in figure 2.18. The pool contains seaweed which photosynthesizes and creates oxygen and plant matter. Tiny abalone eat the seaweed. Mussels cling to the rocks filtering the ocean water and eating the small life the water contains. Sea anemones eat plankton and small fish. Sea stars eat the clams and mussels. The whole ecosystem depends on the moon and the tides to be refreshed and restored. If you remove one part, the tiny ecosystem of the tide pool falls apart.

In the mid-1950s social scientists began to apply this idea to human systems also. Russian-born American Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed the ecological systems model to describe the social influences on individual life. The common understanding of poverty at that time was that people were poor because they made bad choices. Bronfenbrenner's model suggested that there were outside influences which contributed to poverty beyond the level of the individual.

This sounds alot like the sociological imagination from Chapter 1, doesn't it? The following two diagrams and the associated video illustrate the concept (figure 2.19 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, and figure 2.20 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory with labels).
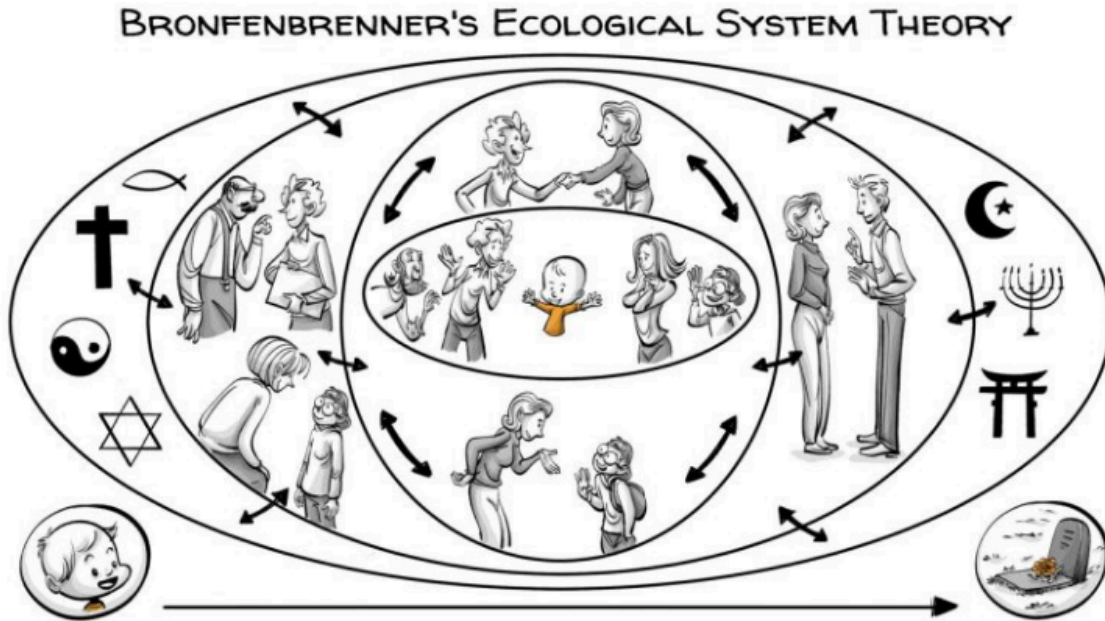


Figure 2.19 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory
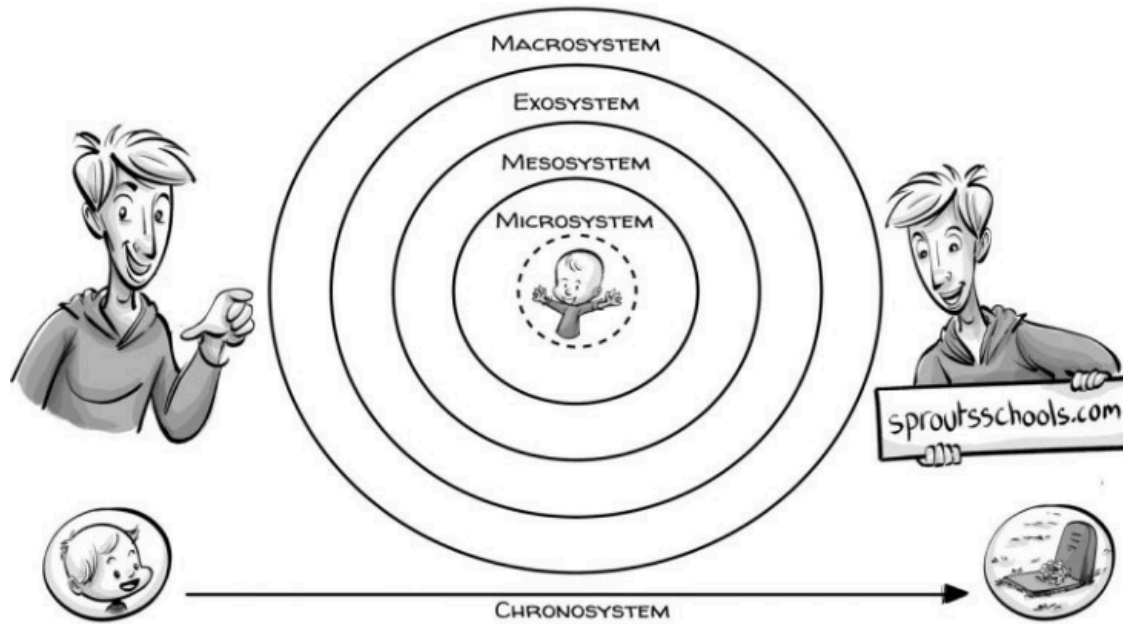
Figure 2.20 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory with labels

In the ecological system theory model, the social world contains layers, each with its own influence on a child. The system moves from the smallest level of the individual child to the microsystem of family, through growing layers until it reaches the macrosystem of institutions and society. The systems also change over the lifetime of the person, as represented by the chronosystem.

This early model of applying ecosystems to human behavior was very effective. As a result of presenting this model to the U.S. Congress, Head Start was created. This program provides free preschool to young children in high-poverty areas. For a more complete story, feel free to watch the video "Ecological System Theory."

Sociologists have built on the social ecosystem model proposed by psychologists. An online search of wide-ranging topics from the root causes of health inequality, increasing economic equity for young Black men or addressing bullying of LGBTQIA+ students will turn up variations of this model.

The labels of all of the circles vary, depending on the problem researchers and activists are trying to describe. However, all of the social ecology models move from the personal and individual out through the layers to systemic or structural causes of social problems.

The model in figure 2.21 is useful in understanding the various levels of society by showing how individual, community and institutional actions are connected. Seeing these levels clearly also helps us see the harm that can happen at each level as well as the healing that is possible. This model, and the table in figure 2.22 that describes it, will be used throughout the book to anchor our discussions where social problems occur in society. The social ecological systems model also helps us link individual agency and collective action as we work to solve interdependent social problems.
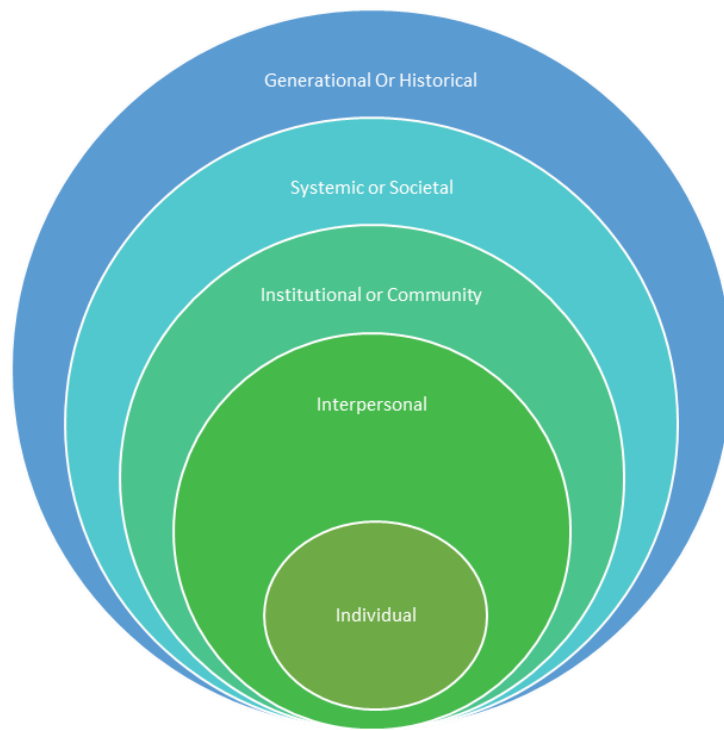


Figure 2.21: Social ecosystem model, also known as social structure

The table in figure 2.21 provides more detail about each level. Don't worry if you don't capture every detail. You will see this illustration often, so you have time to make sense of it.

| Level | Description | Harm | Healing |
|-------|-------------|------|---------|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Individual | This level reflects the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of an individual. | Prejudice, internalized homophobia, or implicit bias may cause harm. | Recognizing unconscious assumptions or internalized hatred may allow healing. |
| Interpersonal | This level reflects interactions between people, in families and in groups. | Microaggressions, name calling, and violence against individuals or groups may cause harm. | Practicing anti-racist behaviors or stepping forward/stepping back to center the experiences of marginalized people may allow healing. |
| Community/Institutions | This level reflects institutions like school, work, church, or government. It can also reflect your neighborhood, city, or state. | Laws, policies, or implementation of those policies may cause harm. | Changes in laws, policies or practices may allow healing. |
| Systemic or Societal | This level reflects structures or culture that surround the institutions. | A hierarchy of groups or pervasive beliefs, attitudes, or actions that one group is superior to another may cause harm. | Focusing on institutionalizing equitable practices and promoting cultural change at all levels of society may allow healing. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Generational or Historical | This level reflects time – the past structures of society or behaviors that are passed from parents to children. | Trauma, oppression, and violence of the past may have caused harm. | Recognizing the historical roots of oppression and repairing the harm, or healing intergenerational trauma may allow healing. |

Figure 2.22 Social ecology and structure: explanatory table

Each of these theoretical approaches explains society with a different lens. Depending on the questions you are asking, one lens may be more useful than another. Similarly, social scientists use different techniques to explore the answers to their questions. In the following sections, we explore these methods, and the ethics related to their use.

## *What Is Social Theory? Licenses and Attributions*

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Figure 2.12 Gloria Anzaldua

Attribution: K. Kendall, CC BY 2.0 , via Wikimedia Commons; Patricia Hill Collins

Attribution: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PatriciaHillCollins.jpg

Figure 2.13. "Social Problems: Continuity and Change" (table) by University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Licence: CC BY-NC-SA

2.14 Key Sociological Thinkers - Industrial Revolution to WWII by Michaela Willi Hooper, and Kimberly Puttman, Open Oregon Educational Resources. License: CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.15 W.E.B Du Bois by James E. Purdy

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:W.E.B._Du_Bois_by_James_E._Purdy,_1907_(cropped).jpg Public Domain

## 2.4 Research Methods for Social Problems

Theories discuss the *why* of particular social problems. They begin to systematically explain, for example, why socioeconomic class is prevalent in industrialized societies, or why implicit bias is so common. But how do sociologists develop the theories in the first place or figure out if the theories are useful? For that, they must observe people interacting, and collect data. The ways in which social scientists collect, analyze, and understand research information are called **research methods.**

However, science isn't the only way to understand the world. You may experience many more ways of knowing. When you consider why you *know* something, this knowledge may be based on different sources or experiences. You may know when the movie starts because a friend told you, or because you looked it up on Google. You may know that rain is currently falling because you feel it on your head. You may know that it is wrong to kill another person because it is a

belief in your religious tradition or part of your own ethical understanding. You may know because you have a gut feeling that a situation is dangerous, or a choice is the right one. You may know that your friend will be late to class because past experience predicts it. Or, instead of the past, you can imagine the future, knowing that eating a hamburger will satisfy your hunger, just by seeing the picture on the menu. Finally, you may know something because the language you use supports you in noticing particular details. For example, how many ways can you describe the water that falls from the sky? People who live in Oregon, for instance, use several distinct words for rainy weather: drizzle, downpour, showers. *Partly cloudy* doesn't change their plans, but they may throw a jacket in the car. In other regions, it may be more useful to describe snow or heat in great detail. The formation of language itself structures how you know something. The table in figure 2.23 organizes these ways of knowing.

| Way of Knowing | Example |
|---|---|
| Emotion | Psychologists define common human emotions as happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger. Knowing that your child is sad may help you to parent better. |
| Faith | Commonly, faith is defined as a belief in God. However, you can also have faith that humans are generally good, or that things will work out OK in the end. |
| Imagination | A social activist proposes a different vision of how people use fossil fuels to power cars. |
| Intuition | Einstein had a flash of insight about how light travels. |
| Language | "They" as a singular pronoun supports the idea that gender can be nonbinary. |
| Memory | By remembering how you studied effectively for the last test, you know how to study for the next test. |
| Reason | You measure the amount of time that students talk in a classroom, and who the teacher calls on to learn about gender bias in the classroom. Reason depends on gathering facts. |
| Sense Perception | When you touch a hot stove, your sense of touch registers HOT! |

Figure 2.23 Ways of Knowing and Examples

Each of these ways of knowing is useful, depending on the circumstances. For example, when my wife and I bought our house, we did research on home prices, home loans, and market value—reason. We talked about what *home* felt like to us—emotion. We walked through houses and pictured what life would look like in a particular house—imagination. Ultimately, when we drove down the cedar and fir-lined driveway, welcomed by the warm light through the window—sense perception—we turned to each other and said, "I hope this house is still for sale," because we both knew we had found our home—intuition.

Of all of these ways of knowing, though, reason allows us to use logic and evidence to draw conclusions about what is true. Reason, as used in science, is unique among all of the ways of knowing because it allows us to propose an idea about how a social situation might work, observe the situation, and find out whether our idea is correct. Sociology is a unique scientific approach to understanding people. Let's explore this more deeply.

As you saw in Chapter 1, sociology is the systematic study of society and social interactions to understand our social world. Although sages, leaders, philosophers, and other wisdom holders have asked what makes a good life throughout human history, sociology applies scientific principles to understanding human behavior.
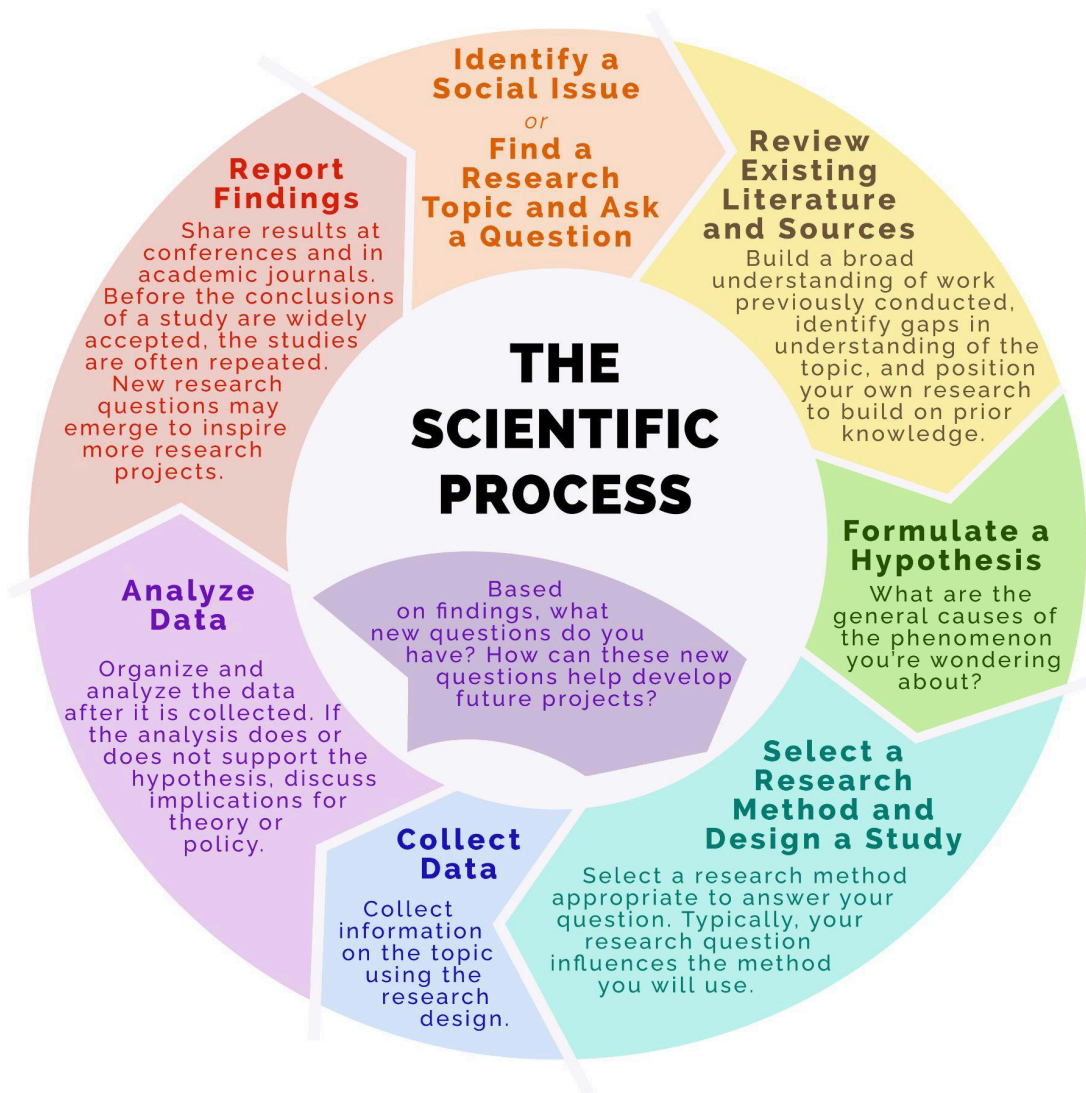
Like anthropologists, psychologists, and other social scientists, sociologists collect and analyze data in order to draw conclusions about human behavior. Although these fields often overlap and complement each other, sociologists focus most on the interaction of people in groups, communities, institutions, and interrelated systems.

More simply, sociologists study society, a group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture. Sociologists study human interactions at the smallest micro unit of how parents and children bond, to the widest macro lens of what causes war throughout recorded history. They explore microaggressions, those small moments of interaction that reinforce prejudice in small but powerful ways. They also study the generationally persistent systems of systemic inequality. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage and the climate crisis worsens, sociologists turn even greater attention to global and planetary systems to understand and explain our interdependence.

### 2.4.1 The Scientific Method

Scientists use shared approaches for figuring out how the social world works. The most common method is known as the **scientific method**, an established scholarly research process that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing a data collection method, gathering data, and drawing conclusions. Often this method is shown as a straight line. Scientists proceed in an orderly fashion, executing one step after the next.

In reality, the scientific method is a circular process rather than a straight line, as shown in figure 2.24. The circle helps us to see that science is driven by curiosity and that learnings at each step move us to the next step, in ongoing loops. This model allows for the creativity and collaboration that is essential in how we actually create new scientific understandings. Let's dive deeper!

THE SCIENTIFIC PROCESS

**Identify a Social Issue** *or* **Find a Research Topic and Ask a Question**

**Review Existing Literature and Sources**
Build a broad understanding of work previously conducted, identify gaps in understanding of the topic, and position your own research to build on prior knowledge.

**Formulate a Hypothesis**
What are the general causes of the phenomenon you're wondering about?

**Select a Research Method and Design a Study**
Select a research method appropriate to answer your question. Typically, your research question influences the method you will use.

**Collect Data**
Collect information on the topic using the research design.

**Analyze Data**
Organize and analyze the data after it is collected. If the analysis does or does not support the hypothesis, discuss implications for theory or policy.

**Report Findings**
Share results at conferences and in academic journals. Before the conclusions of a study are widely accepted, the studies are often repeated. New research questions may emerge to inspire more research projects.

Based on findings, what new questions do you have? How can these new questions help develop future projects?

Figure 2.24 The Scientific method as an ongoing process

Image Description: A circle of arrows around the words Scientific Process. The top arrow says Identify a Social Issue or Find a Research Topic and Ask a Question. This points to the next arrow, which says review existing literature and sources. Build a broad understanding of work previously conducted, identify gaps in understanding of the topic, and position your own research to build on prior knowledge. The next arrow says Formulate a Hypothesis: What are the general causes of the phenomenon you're wondering about? The next arrow says Select a

Research Method and Design a Study: Select a research method appropriate to answer your question. Typically, your research question influences the method you will use. The next arrow says Collect data: Collect information on the topic using the research design. The next arrow says Analyze data: Organize and analyze the data after it is collected. If the analysis does or does not support the hypothesis, discuss implications for theory or policy. From here there is an arrow that goes back to Select a Research Method that says Based on findings, what new questions do you have? How can these new questions help develop future projects? Another arrow from Analyze Data continues the circle and says Report Findings: Share results at conferences and in academic journals. Before the conclusions of a study are widely accepted, the studies are often repeated. New research questions may emerge to inspire more research projects. This arrow points back to the top arrow where we started. There is also an attribution statement saying this image is CC BY 4.0 and created by Jennifer Puentes and Michaela Willi Hooper.

### 2.4.1.1 Step 1: Identify a Social Issue/Find a Research Topic and Ask a Question

The first step of the scientific method is to ask a question, select a problem, and identify the specific area of interest. The topic should be narrow enough to study within a geographic location and time frame. "Are societies capable of sustained happiness?" would be too vague. The question should also be broad enough to be of significance. "What do personal hygiene habits reveal about the values of students at XYZ High School?" would be too narrow. Sociologists strive to frame questions that examine well-defined patterns and relationships.

### 2.4.1.2 Step 2: Review the Literature/Research Existing Sources

The next step researchers undertake is to conduct background research through a literature review, which is a review of any existing similar or related studies. A visit to the library, a thorough online search, and a survey of academic journals will uncover existing research about the topic of study. This step helps researchers gain a broad understanding of work previously conducted, identify gaps in understanding of the topic, and position their own research to build on prior knowledge. Researchers—including student researchers—are responsible for correctly citing existing sources they use in a study or that inform their work. While it is fine to borrow previously published material (as long as it enhances a unique viewpoint), it must be referenced properly.

To study crime, for example, a researcher might also sort through existing data from the court system, police database, and prison information. It's important to examine this information in addition to existing research to determine how these resources might be used to fill holes in existing knowledge. Reviewing existing sources educates researchers and helps refine and improve a research study design.

### 2.4.1.3 Step 3: Formulate a Hypothesis

A **hypothesis** is a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables. In sociology, the hypothesis will often predict how one form of human behavior influences another. For example, a hypothesis might be in the form of an "if, then statement." Let's relate this to our topic of crime: If unemployment increases, then the crime rate will increase.

In scientific research, we formulate hypotheses to include an **independent variable (IV)**, which is the *cause* of the change, and a **dependent variable (DV)**, which is the *effect*, or thing that is changed. In the example above, unemployment is the independent variable and the crime rate is the dependent variable.

In a sociological study, the researcher would establish one form of human behavior as the independent variable and observe the influence it has on a dependent variable. How does gender (the independent variable) affect the rate of income (the dependent variable)? How does one's religion (the independent variable) affect family size (the dependent variable)? How is social class (the dependent variable) affected by level of education (the independent variable)?

| Hypothesis | Independent Variable | Dependent Variable |
|---|---|---|
| The greater the availability of affordable housing, the lower the homeless rate. | Affordable Housing | Homeless Rate |
| The greater the availability of math tutoring, the higher the math grades. | Math Tutoring | Math Grades |
| The greater the factory lighting, the higher the productivity. | Factory Lighting | Productivity |

| The greater the amount of media coverage, the higher the public awareness. | Media Coverage | Public Awareness |
|---|---|---|

Figure 2.25 Examples of dependent and independent variables. Typically, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change in some way.

Taking an example from figure 2.25, a researcher might hypothesize that teaching children proper hygiene (the independent variable) will boost their sense of self-esteem (the dependent variable). Note, however, this hypothesis can also work the other way around. A sociologist might predict that increasing a child's sense of self-esteem (the independent variable) will increase or improve habits of hygiene (now the dependent variable). Identifying the independent and dependent variables is very important. As the hygiene example shows, simply identifying two related topics or variables is not enough. Their prospective relationship must be part of the hypothesis.

### 2.4.1.4 Step 4: Select a Research Method and Design a Study

Researchers select a research method that is appropriate to answer their research question in this step. Surveys, experiments, interviews, ethnography, and content analysis are just a few examples that researchers may use. You will learn more about these and other research methods later in this chapter. Typically your research question influences the type of methods that will be used.

### 2.4.1.5 Step 5: Collect Data

Next the researcher collects data. Depending on the research design (step 4), the researcher will begin the process of collecting information on their research topic. After all the data is gathered, the researcher will be able to systematically organize and analyze the data.

### 2.4.1.6 Step 6: Analyze the Data

After constructing the research design, sociologists collect, tabulate or categorize, and analyze data to formulate conclusions. If the analysis supports the hypothesis, researchers can discuss what this might mean. If the analysis does not support the hypothesis, researchers may consider repeating the study or think of ways to improve their procedure.

Even when results contradict a sociologist's prediction of a study's outcome, the results still contribute to sociological understanding. Sociologists analyze general patterns in response to a study, but they are equally interested in exceptions to patterns. In a study of education, for example, a researcher might predict that high school dropouts have a hard time finding rewarding careers. While many assume that the higher the education, the higher the salary and degree of career happiness, there are certainly exceptions. People with little education have had stunning careers, and people with advanced degrees have had trouble finding work. A sociologist prepares a hypothesis knowing that results may substantiate or contradict it.

### 2.4.1.7 Step 7: Report Findings

Researchers report their results at conferences and in academic journals. These results are then subjected to the scrutiny of other sociologists in the field. Before the conclusions of a study become widely accepted, the studies are often repeated in the same or different environments. In this way, sociological theories and knowledge develop as the relationships between social phenomena are established in broader contexts and different circumstances.

If you still aren't quite sure about how sociologists use the scientific method, you might enjoy this video, "The Scientific Method: Steps, Examples, Tips, and Exercise," which explores why people smile. It also reminds us that people have been using logic and evidence to explore the world for centuries. The video credits Ibn al-Haytham, an eleventh-century Arab Muslim scholar with pioneering the modern scientific method in his study of light and vision (figure 2.26). If the video makes you curious about the science behind why people smile, you might want to check out this current research related to gender and smiling in this article, "Women smile more than men, but differences disappear when they are in the same role, Yale researcher finds."

Figure 2.26 Drawing of Ibn al-Hayatham

You might remember that in Chapter 1, we talked about human society like a forest. We said that individual trees did not exist in isolation. Instead, they were interdependent. They formed a living community. The video in figure 2.27 describes the science behind this knowledge. Please watch at least the first 10 minutes to see if you can discover all the steps of the scientific method that Canadian female scientist Suzanne Simard used in her revolutionary science.

Figure 2.27 Suzanne Simard: How Trees Talk To Each Other [YouTube Link](YouTube Link)

## 2.4.2 Interpretive Framework

You may have noticed that most of the early recognized sociologists in this chapter were White wealthy men. Often, they looked at economics, poverty, and industrialization as their topics. They were committed to using the scientific method. Although women like Harriet Martineau and Jane Addams examined a wide range of social problems and acted on their research, science, even social science, was considered a domain of men. Even in 2020, women are only less than 30% of the STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) workforce in the United States (American Association of University Women 2020).

Feminist scientists challenge this exclusion, and the kinds of science it creates. Feminist scientists argue that women and non-binary people belong everywhere in science.They belong in the laboratories and scientific offices. They belong in deciding what topics to study, so that social problems of gendered violence or maternal health are studied also. They belong as participants in research, so that findings apply to people of all gender identities. They belong in applying the results to doing something about social problems. In other words:

> Feminists have detailed the historically gendered participation in the practice of
> science—the marginalization or exclusion of women from the profession and how their

contributions have disappeared when they have participated. Feminists have also noted how the sciences have been slow to study women's lives, bodies, and experiences. Thus from both the perspectives of the agents—the creators of scientific knowledge—and from the perspectives of the subjects of knowledge—the topics and interests focused on—the sciences often have not served women satisfactorily. (Crasnow 2020)



Figure 2.28 NASA "human computer" Katherine Johnson watches the premiere of *Hidden Figures* after a reception where she was honored along with other members of the segregated West Area Computers division of Langley Research Center.

You may have seen the movie *Hidden Figures* or read the book. In figure 2.28, Katherine Johnson, an African American mathematician, physicist, and space scientist, watches the premiere of the movie. In it, women, particularly Black women, were the computers for NASA, manually calculating all the math needed to launch and orbit rockets. However, politicians and leaders did not recognize their work. Even when they were creating equations and writing reports, women's names didn't go on the title pages.

The practice of science often excludes women and nonbinary people from leadership in research, research topics, and as research subjects. The feminist critque of the traditional scientific method, and other critiques around the process of doing traditional science created space for other frameworks to emerge.

One such framework is the interpretive framework. The **interpretive framework** is an approach that involves detailed understanding of a particular subject through observation or listening to people's stories, not through hypothesis testing. Researchers try to understand social experiences from the point of view of the people who are experiencing them. They interview people or look at blogs, newspapers, or videos to discover what people say is happening, and how the people make sense of things. This in-depth understanding allows the researcher to create a new theory about human activity. The steps are similar to the scientific method, but not the same, as you see in figure 2.29.

| Find a Topic | Design a Study | Collect Data | Code the Data | Analyze the Literature | Evaluate the theory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What do you want to learn more about?<br><br>• Shame?<br>• Resilience?<br>• Wholehearted Living? | What do you ask?<br><br>Who do you ask? | Analyze as you go so, you can ask better questions of participants | Code the interview text, the primary sources.<br><br>How can the information best be categorized? | How do others understand or explain the social phenomenon? | Does it effectively explain or predict the social behavior? |

Figure 2.29. Interpretive framework, Image Description

White American researcher Brene Brown, who you will learn more about in Chapter 3, describes the approach this way:

> In grounded theory we don't start with a problem or a hypothesis or a literature review, we start with a topic. We let the participants define the problem or their main concern about the topic, we develop a theory, and then we see how and where it fits in the literature. (Brown 2022)

In her own research she interviewed people who she considered resilient to understand how shame works. By listening to resilient people, she was able to develop a theory about how people recover from difficult situations in life. If you are interested in seeing her writing for yourself, check out this blog post on addressing social problems with the power of love: "Doubling Down on Love."

Even though both the traditional scientific method and the interpretive framework start with curiosity and questions, the people who practice science using the interpretive framework allow

the data to tell its story. Using this method can lead to insightful and transformative results. You can find things you didn't even know to expect, because you are listening to what the stories say.

## *2.4.3 Quantitative and Qualitative  Research Methods*

In the video you saw in figure 2.20, Suzanne Simard describes the amazing science she does when she researches how trees talk to each other. The methods she uses, with the possible exception of bringing bear spray, don't work very well when you study people. Instead social scientists use a variety of methods that allow them to explain and predict the social world. These research methods define *how* we do social science.

In this section, we examine some of the most common research methods. Research methods are often grouped into two categories: **quantitative research**, data collected in numerical form that can be counted and analyzed using statistics and **qualitative research**, non-numerical, descriptive data that is often subjective and based on what is experienced in a natural setting. These methods seem to contradict each other, but some of the strongest scientific studies combine both approaches. New research methods go beyond the two categories, exploring international and Indigenous knowledge, or doing research for the purpose of taking action.

### 2.4.3.1 Surveys

Do you strongly agree? Agree? Neither agree or disagree? Disagree? Strongly disagree? You've probably completed your fair share of surveys, if you've heard this before. At some point, most people in the United States respond to some type of survey. The 2020 U.S. Census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey intended to gather sociological data. Since 1790, the United States has conducted a survey consisting of six questions to receive demographic data of the residents who live in the United States.

As a research method, a survey collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire or an interview. Surveys are one of the most widely used scientific research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas.

Not all surveys are considered sociological research. Many surveys people commonly encounter focus on identifying marketing needs and strategies rather than testing a hypothesis or contributing to social science knowledge. Questions such as, "How many hot dogs do you eat in a month?" or "Were the staff helpful?" are not usually designed as scientific research. Surveys gather different types of information from people. While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a great method for discovering how people feel, think, and act—or at least how they say they feel, think, and act. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates or reported individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits) or information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

### 2.4.3.2 Experiments

One way researchers test social theories is by conducting an experiment, meaning the researcher investigates relationships to test a hypothesis. This approach closely resembles the scientific method. There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a lab setting, the research can be controlled so that data can be recorded in a limited amount of time. In a natural or field-based experiment, the time it takes to gather the data cannot be controlled but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference or intervention by the researcher. Field-based experiments are often used to evaluate interventions in educational settings and health (Baldassarri and Abascal 2017).

Typically, the sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. Those people are divided into two groups. One is the experimental group and the other is the control group. The experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s) and the control group is not. To test the benefits of tutoring, for example, the sociologist might provide tutoring to the experimental group of students but not to the control group. Then both groups would be tested for differences in performance to see if tutoring had an effect on the experimental group of students. As you can imagine, in a case like this, the researcher would not want to jeopardize the accomplishments of either group of students, so the setting would be

somewhat artificial. The test would not be for a grade reflected on their permanent record as a student, for example.

### 2.4.3.3 Secondary Data Analysis

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through secondary data analysis. Secondary data does not result from firsthand research collected from primary sources. Instead secondary data uses data collected by other researchers or data collected by an agency or organization. Sociologists might study works written by historians, economists, teachers, or early sociologists. They might search through periodicals, newspapers, or magazines, or organizational data from any period in history.

### 2.4.3.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation refers to a style of research where researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context. This method lets researchers experience a specific aspect of social life. A researcher might go to great lengths to get a firsthand look into a trend, institution, or behavior. For instance, a researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, experience homelessness for several weeks, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, these researchers try to blend in seamlessly with the population they study, and they may not disclose their true identity or purpose if they feel it would compromise the results of their research.

At the beginning of a field study, researchers might have a question: "What really goes on in the kitchen of the most popular diner on campus?" or "What is it like to be homeless?" Participant observation is a useful method if the researcher wants to explore a certain environment from the inside. The ethnographer will be alert and open minded to whatever happens, recording all observations accurately. Soon, as patterns emerge, questions will become more specific, and the researcher will be able either make connections to existing theories or develop new theories based on their observations. This approach will guide the researcher in analyzing data and generating results.

### 2.4.3.5 In-depth interviews

Interviews, sometimes referred to as in-depth interviews, are one-on-one conversations with participants designed to gather information about a particular topic. Interviews can take a long time to complete, but they can produce very rich data. In fact, in an interview, a respondent might say something that the researcher had not previously considered, which can help focus the research project. Researchers have to be careful not to use leading questions. You want to avoid leading the respondent into certain kinds of answers by asking questions like, "You really like eating vegetables, don't you?" Instead researchers should allow the respondent to answer freely by asking questions like, "How do you feel about eating vegetables?"

## 2.4.4 International Research

International research is conducted outside of the researcher's own immediate geography and society. This work carries additional challenges considering that researchers often work in regions and cultures different from their own. Researchers need to make special considerations in order to counter their own biases, navigate linguistic challenges and ensure the best cross cultural understanding possible. This webpage shows a map and descriptions of field projects around the world by students at Oxford University's Masters in Development Studies. What are some interesting projects that stand out to you?

For example, in 2021 Jörg Friedrichs at Oxford published his research on Muslim hate crimes in areas of North England where Islam is the majority religion. He studied police data of racial and religious hate crimes in two districts to look for patterns related to the crimes. He related those patterns to the wider context of community relations between Muslims and other groups, and presented his research to hate crime practitioners in police, local government and civil society (Friedrichs 2021).

## 2.4.5 Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous scientists also critique traditional ways of doing science. Often, Western science will break things down into parts to understand what each part does. While that may help understand details, it doesn't give the whole picture of a process or help understand the interdependence in the social and physical world. Also, Western science values intellectual ways of knowing.

Intuition, empathy, and connection are not valued. Robin Wall Kimmer, an Indigenous biologist from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, writes this:

> Native scholar Greg Cajete has written that in indigenous ways of knowing, we understand a thing only when we understand it with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit. I came to understand quite sharply when I began my training as a scientist that science privileges only one, possibly two, of those ways of knowing: mind and body. As a young person wanting to know everything about plants, I did not question this. But it is a whole human being who finds the beautiful path. (Kimmerer 2013)

When we can do science using all of our ways of knowing, our answers become richer. As the world becomes more aware of increases in the environmental crisis, researchers are more often acknowledging the ways that Indigenous peoples care for their ecological surroundings. As Indigenous communities conduct their own fieldwork to identify and document their own knowledge they are able to engage with research as agents of ecological conservation.



Figure 2.30 Conversation with Robin Wall Kimmerer

In the video in Figure 2.30, Kimmerer has a longer conversation about what it means to be American. Starting around minute 55:25 she shares the importance of naming, and how naming

can sometimes shut down learning. Please listen to her words for yourself, and reflect on how the practices she introduces might change your own approach to science.

2.4.6 Community-Based Research and Participatory Action Research

Social problems sociologists and other social scientists often conduct their research so that they can take action. **Action research** is a family of research methodologies that pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time. We see this when the government changes a policy based on data or when a community organization tries a new evidence-based approach for providing services. One of the most visible applications of social problems research is through humanitarian or social action efforts.

### 2.4.6.1 Humanitarian Efforts

One effective example of social action efforts is in the work of Paul Farmer. Farmer was a public health physician, anthropologist, and founder of partners in health. Until his death in 2022, he focused on epidemiological crises in low and middle income countries.

One trend that Farmer championed was the importance of good health and health care as human rights. He contributed to a broader understanding that poor health is a symptom of poverty, violence and inequality (Partners in Health 2009). If you want to learn more, please watch this 3:27-minute PBS "This I Believe" video where he describes this view. What field experiences of Farmer's do you see allowed him to develop this view?

Farmer applied this human rights perspective to pandemics. His book, *Fevers, Feuds and Diamonds: Ebola and the Ravages of History*, looks at the 2014 Ebola crisis, and what we can learn from it to apply to the COVID-19 epidemic. In a PBS Newshour interview he spoke of his work during the Ebola outbreak:

> Early in the Ebola outbreak, almost all of our attention was turned towards clinical services. But we kept on bumping into things we didn't understand and sometimes even our colleagues from Sierra Leone and Liberia didn't understand. And that just triggered an interest in a deeper understanding of the place, the culture, the history. (Public Broadcasting Service 2021).

Farmer shares his experiences both as a medical doctor and a researcher, asking the questions: "Who is most impacted by disease? How might things have been done differently? What can be done now?" His research on Ebola focused on circumstances in West Africa where lack of medical resources and decades of war played a role in the epidemic, and how the epidemic itself, as we experience in the United States with Covid, revealed underlying problems and inequities in society (Public Broadcasting Service 2021). We'll explore topics of health, inequality and interdependence more deeply in Chapter 7.

### 2.4.6.2 Community-Based Action Research

Community-based research takes place in community settings. It involves community members in the design and implementation of research projects. It demonstrates respect for the contributions of success that are made by community partners. Research projects involve collaboration between researchers and community partners, whether the community partners are formally structured community-based organizations or informal groups of individual community members. The aim of this type of research is to benefit the community by achieving social justice through social action and change.

### 2.4.6.3 Participatory Action Research

Community-based research is sometimes called participatory action research (Stringer 2021). In partnership with community organizations, researchers apply their social science research skills to help assess needs, outcomes, and provide data that can be used to improve living conditions. The research is rigorous and often published in professional reports and presented to the board of directors for the organization you are working with. As it sounds, *action research* suggests that we make a plan to implement changes. Often with academic research, we aim to learn more about a population and leave the next steps up to others. This is an important part of the puzzle, as we need to start with knowledge but action research often has the goal of fixing something or at least quickly translating the newly acquired findings into a solution for a social problem.

To learn more about participatory action research, check out this short 4 minute clip for an introduction with Shirah Hassan of Just Practice (figure 2.31):

Figure 2.31 Participatory Action Research with Shirah Hassan, Youtube Link

Community-based action research looks for evidence. As new insights emerge, the researchers adjust the question or the approach. This type of research engages people who have traditionally been referred to as *subjects* as active participants in the research process. The researcher is working with the organization during the whole process and will likely bring in different project design elements based on the needs of the organization. Social scientists can bring more formalized training, but they draw both on existing research/literature and goals of the organization they are working with. Community-based research or participatory research can be thought of as an orientation for research rather than strictly a method. Often a number of different methods are used to collect data. Change can often be one of the main aims of the project, as we will see in the box below.

## *2.4.7 Research Ethics*

How we do science and how we apply our results is more challenging than it might first appear. The American Sociological Association (ASA) is the major professional organization of sociologists in North America. ASA is a great resource for students of sociology as well. The

ASA maintains a **code of ethics**—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. These formal guidelines were established by practitioners in 1905 at John Hopkins University, and revised in 1997. When working with human subjects, these codes of ethics require researchers' to do the following:

1. Maintain objectivity and integrity in research
2. Respect subjects' rights to privacy and dignity
3. Protect subject from personal harm
4. Preserve confidentiality
5. Seek informed consent
6. Acknowledge collaboration and assistance
7. Disclose sources of financial support

## 2.4.8 Unethical Studies

Unfortunately, when these codes of ethics are ignored, it creates an unethical environment for humans being involved in a sociological study. Throughout history, there have been numerous unethical studies, as we'll explore in the following sections.

### 2.4.8.1 The Tuskegee Experiment

This study was conducted 1932 in Macon County, Alabama, and included 600 African American men, including 399 diagnosed with syphilis. The participants were told they were diagnosed with a disease of "bad blood." Penicillin was distributed in the 1940s as the cure for the disease, but unfortunately, the African American men were not given the treatment because the objective of the study was to see "how untreated syphilis would affect the African American male" (Caplan 2007). This study was shut down in 1972, because a reporter wrote that at least 128 people had died from syphillis or related complications (Nix 2020).

### 2.4.8.2 Milgram Experiment

In 1961, psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment at Yale University. Its purpose was to measure the willingness of study subjects to obey an authority figure who instructed them

to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience. People in the role of teacher believed they were administering electric shocks to students who gave incorrect answers to word-pair questions. No matter how concerned they were about administering the progressively more intense shocks, the teachers were told to keep going. The ethical concerns involve the extreme emotional distress faced by the teachers, who believed they were hurting other people. (Vogel 2014). Today this experiment would not be allowed because it would violate the ethical principal of protecting subjects from personal harm.

### 2.4.8.3 Philip Zimbardo and the Stanford prison experiment

In 1971, psychologist Phillip Zimbardo conducted a study involving students from Stanford University. The students were put in the roles of prisoners and guards, and were required to play their assigned role accordingly. The experiment was intended to last two weeks, but it only lasted six days due to the negative outcome and treatment of the "prisoners." Beyond the ethical concerns, the study's validity has been questioned after participants revealed they had been coached to behave in specific ways. Today, this experiment would not be allowed because it would violate a participants right to dignity, and protection from harm.

### 2.4.8.4 Laud Humphreys

In the 1960s, Laud Humphreys conducted an experiment at a restroom in a park known for same-sex sexual encounters. His objective was to understand the diversity of backgrounds and motivations of people seeking same-sex relationships. His ethics were questioned because he misrepresented his identity and intent while observing and questioning the men he interviewed (Nardi 1995). Today this experiment would not be allowed because participants did not provide informed consent, among other issues.

## *Research Methods for Social Problems Licenses and Attributions*

2.4 Research methods for social problems.

Puentes and Gougherty

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BOCrIQ5xDJD1RbVdmS1glMeaKurj4fHgF5hkn2P77-U/edit#heading=h.lc1f68rgruem Slightly summarized

2.4.2 Interpretive Frameworks Puttman - CC-BY-4.0

Figure 2.23 - Ways of Knowing and Examples -Puttman
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Figure 2.24. The Scientific Method by Michaela Willi Hooper and Jennifer Puentes. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.25 Examples of dependent and independent variables. Typically, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change in some way.

Figure 2.26 Drawing of Ibn al-Hayatham

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ibn_al-Haytham,_Sayr_mulhimah_min_al-Sharq_wa-al-Gharb.png Public Domain

Figure 2.27 Suzanne Simard: How Trees Talk To Each Other https://youtu.be/Un2yBgIAxYs

Figure 2.28 NASA "human computer" Katherine Johnson watches the premiere of "Hidden Figures" after a reception where she was honored along with other members of the segregated West Area Computers division of Langley Research Center, on Thursday, Dec. 1, 2016, at the Virginia Air and Space Center in Hampton, VA. "Hidden Figures" stars Taraji P. Henson as Katherine Johnson, the African American mathematician, physicist, and space scientist, who calculated flight trajectories for John Glenn's first orbital flight in 1962.https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hidden_Figures_Premiere_(NHQ201612010035).jpg

Figure 2.29. Interpretive Framework Source - Kim Puttman

Figure 2.30 Conversation with Robin Wall Kimmerer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B6X6uW6g6c

Figure 2.31 Participatory Action Research with Shirah Haasan, Youtube Link

## 2.5 Conclusion

As we come to the end of this chapter you may be feeling a little out of breath. We have covered a span of time that includes centuries, and a breadth of knowledge that covers all levels of human relationships.

We discovered that sociology was and still is a revolutionary response to the study of social problems. Instead of relying on political and religious authorities to tell the truth, scientists find out for themselves. In exploring the problems of the world, sociologists observe carefully, learn deeply and propose complex answers to complicated problems. Their assertions are based on evidence.

We learned that theories are ideas about how the world works. They help us explain and predict patterns in the social world. Each theoretical framework has a unique lens to see the world. The patterns that you see depend on the lens that you use. We added a key model of social structure that will help us locate social problems as we explore them further in this book.

Finally, we explored the tools that social scientists use to explore the world. Like biologists, they use the scientific method in some way to come to conclusions based on evidence. They may use numbers or stories to find the truth, but in either case, they report their results to others. This allows us to understand our world more carefully.

Now that you have some sociological tools and techniques at your fingertips, it's time to use them to explore the social problem of education. Let's go back to school!

### 2.5.1 Review of Key Terms

Link to glossary: 🟩 SOC 206 key terms list.xlsx

**Action Research:** a family of research methodologies that pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time.

**Code of Ethics:** a set of guidelines that the American Sociological Association has established to foster ethical research and professionally responsible scholarship in sociology

**Conflict Theory:** a sociological approach that views society as characterized by pervasive inequality based on social class, race, gender, and other factors

**Critical Race Theory:** emerged in the 1980s out of a concern by legal scholars of color that the measures installed by the Civil Rights Movement to alleviate racial injustice were no longer ameliorating the problem, or never did. This group of scholars took a systemic view of racism. They saw racism not as an aberration within our society, but as an everyday occurrence within many, if not all, facets of life

**Dependent Variable:** the effect of a change in another variable

**Feminist Perspective:** "despite the variations between different types of feminist approach, there are four characteristics that are common to the feminist perspective:

·    Gender is a central focus or subject matter of the perspective.

·    Gender relations are viewed as a problem: the site of social inequities, strains, and contradictions.

·    Gender relations are not immutable: they are sociological and historical in nature, subject to change and progress.

·    Feminism is about an emancipatory commitment to change: the conditions of life that are oppressive for women need to be transformed."

**Hypothesis:** a testable educated guess about predicted outcomes between two or more variables

**Independent Variable:** the cause of the change in another variable

**Interpretive Framework:** a research method that involves detailed understanding of a particular subject through observation, not through hypothesis testing.

**Macro Theory:** a theory which examines larger social systems and structures, such as the capitalist economy, bureaucracies, and religion.

**Matrix of domination:** a matrix of domination sees social structure as having multiple interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of race class and gender.

**Micro Theory:** a theory which examines the social world in finer detail by discussing social interactions and the understandings individuals make of the social world.

**Objectivity:** the unrealistic idea of conducting research with no interference by aspects of the researcher's identity or personal beliefs

**Qualitative Research:** non-numerical, descriptive data that is often subjective and based on what is experienced in a natural setting

**Quantitative Research:** data collected in numerical form that can be counted and analyzed using statistics

**Queer Theory:** an interdisciplinary approach to sexuality and gender studies that identifies Western society's rigid splitting of gender into male and female roles and questions the manner in which we have been taught to think about sexual orientation and gender.

**Scientific method:** an established scholarly research process that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing a data collection method, gathering data, and drawing conclusions

**Society:** a group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture

**Sociology:** the systematic study of society and social interactions to understand individuals, groups, and institutions through data collection and analysis.

**Stigma:** the social process whereby individuals that are taken to be different in some way are rejected by the greater society in with they live based on that difference

**Structural Functional Theory:** a sociological approach which maintains that social stability is necessary for a strong society, and adequate socialization and social integration are necessary for

social stability. Society's social institutions (such as the family or the economy) perform important functions to help ensure social stability.

**Symbolic Interactionist Theory:** a sociological approach that focuses on the study of one-on-one social interactions and the meanings that emerges from them.

**Theory:** a statement that proposes to describe and explain why facts or other social phenomenon are related to each other based on observed patterns.

## 2.5.2 Discussion Questions

1. Why is sociology a revolutionary response to social problems historically and currently?
2. How does sociological theory help us to understand and explain our world?
3. Who are our sociologists, particularly the scholars who are traditionally ignored? How does the social location of sociologists influence what they see?
4. How do sociologists apply the tools of science to understand society?
5. Based on the video on Particpatory Action Research with Shiran Haasan:
   a. What is participatory action research?
   b. What are the benefits of this type of research? Who holds the "power" in this type of research?
   c. When do we see the effects of participatory action research?
   d. What are some ways that elements of this type of research are transferable to other settings? What examples does Shirah Haasan give?

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## Conclusion Licenses and Attributions