

Chapter One: The Sociological Perspective

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the different components of the sociological perspective.
- Understand the origins of sociology.
- Identify the advocates of sociology and understand their theories.
- Map the opposing arguments in the debate about values in sociological research.
- Review the importance of women sociologists in early sociology.
- Describe racism during early sociology.
- Define public sociology. Compare and contrast basic and applied sociology.
- Explore the three major theories used by sociologists.
- Characterize the basic research model and types of research methods used by sociologists.
- Understand the values and ethics of sociological research.

What's New in Henslin's 10th Essentials Edition?

- Topic: Dora the Explorer as applied sociology (p. 14)
- Doing Sociological Research (p. 22)
- A Research Model-eight basic steps (pp. 23-25)
- Research-seven research methods used by sociologists (pp. 24-33)
- Gender in Sociological Research (p. 33)
- Ethics and Values in Sociological Research (pp. 33-35)

Chapter Summary

Sociology offers a perspective, a view of the world. The sociological perspective opens a window onto unfamiliar worlds and offers a fresh look at familiar ones. Sociologists study the broader social contexts that underlie human behavior. These include the social groups that influence human behavior and the larger society that organizes it.

The sociological perspective is an approach to understanding human behavior by placing it within its broader social context. C. Wright Mills referred to the sociological perspective as the intersection of biography (the individual) and history (social factors that influence the individual).

Sociology grew out of the social, political, economic, and technological revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Industrial Revolution, in particular, eroded old traditions and necessitated new ways of perceiving and examining the social world. With the success of the natural sciences serving as a model for the social sciences, sociology emerged in Western Europe as a distinct discipline in the mid-1800s.

Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber were early thinkers in the development of sociology. The idea of applying the scientific method to the social

world, known as positivism, was first proposed by Auguste Comte. Based on this innovation and Comte's effort to apply the scientific method to social life, he is credited as being the founder of sociology. Herbert Spencer, one of the most dominant and influential English sociologists, is often called the "second founder of sociology." Spencer's concept of social Darwinism suggested that societies evolve from primitive to civilized and that the "fittest" societies evolve and survive, while unfit societies become extinct. The ideas of Karl Marx have influenced many sociologists. Marx believed in the notion of class conflict: society is made up of two social classes—the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the proletariat (the exploited workers). These two groups, according to Marx, are natural enemies and he believed that the workers would unite in a revolution to break the chains of their bondage. It was the major professional goal of Emile Durkheim to get sociology recognized as a separate discipline. In addition, his studies of suicide rates led Durkheim to identify the concept of social integration—the degree to which people are tied to their social group. Along with Durkheim and Marx, Max Weber is one of the three most influential of all sociologists. Weber believed religion to be the central force for social change. He is credited with notions of the "Protestant ethic" and "the spirit of capitalism."

Sexism and racism both had their place in early sociology. Jane Addams and Harriet Martineau were female sociologists who fought to have their voices and research on social issues heard. Despite racial difficulties, W. E. B. Du Bois, the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard University, was a social critic and dedicated his life to analyzing and writing about social injustice.

During the 1940s, the emphasis in American sociology shifted from social reform to social theory. "Grand theorists," such as Talcott Parsons, developed detailed, abstract models of how the complex parts of society harmoniously functioned together. Although this helped to legitimize sociology as a "science," it did little to critique, reform, and/or help to change the social injustices in society. C. Wright Mills' influential analysis of "the power elite"—a small group of business, political, and military leaders whose monopoly on power threatens freedom—helped to shift sociology back toward social reform in the 1960s and 1970s.

Many sociologists continue to disagree over the proper uses of social research. Some sociologists practice basic (or pure) sociology, while others practice applied sociology. Whether one practices basic or applied sociology, a primary goal of social research is to separate fact from fiction, while examining the links between what people do and the social settings that help shape their behavior. The current state of sociology encompasses social analysis and social reform, with a growing emphasis on applied sociology—a sort of middle ground that, rather than focusing on large and/or radical social change, uses sociological analysis to help solve problems in a specific setting.

In an effort to pursue a social reform agenda, the American Sociological Association is now promoting "public sociology" with the goal of influencing politicians, public officials, and policy makers.

Central to the study of any science is the development of theory. A theory is a general statement about how parts of the world fit together, relate to one another, and affect each other. Sociologists use three major theories—symbolic interactionism, functional analysis, and conflict

theory—to observe and interpret social contexts, relationships, and realities in distinct ways. Symbolic interactionism analyzes how people use symbols to develop and share their view of the world. Focusing on the micro level, it studies the different ways that individuals and small groups create, disseminate, and/or interpret “reality” through their everyday, face-to-face interactions. Functional analysis examines how the various parts of society work together to fulfill their respective functions and, consequently, create a harmonious society.

Focusing on the macro level, it also looks at how parts of society occasionally dysfunction, negatively affecting other parts of society and, consequently, contributing to a more unstable society. Conflict theory views the social world in terms of competing groups struggling over scarce resources. Also focusing on the macro level, conflict theory examines how groups of people with power maintain and/or impose their power, and how groups of people without power work to acquire power.

To truly understand social life, we must move beyond common sense approaches and learn what is really going on through sociological research. Sociologists use eight basic steps when conducting research, including selecting a topic, defining the problem, reviewing the literature, formulating a hypothesis, choosing a research method, collecting the data, analyzing the results, and sharing the results. To gather data, sociologists use seven research designs—surveys, participant observation, case studies, secondary analysis, analysis of documents, experiments, and unobtrusive measures. Gender issues are also a concern in social research and researchers must take steps to prevent gender issues from biasing their findings.

Ethics are of fundamental concern to sociologists, who are committed to openness, honesty, truth, and protecting their subjects from harm. Sociologists do face value dilemmas, the first being how to make certain that research is objective and not unintentionally distorted by the researchers' values. A second dilemma faced is whether to do research solely to analyze human behavior or with the goal of reforming harmful social arrangements.

Chapter Outline

I. The Sociological Perspective

- A. This perspective is important because it provides a different way of looking at familiar worlds. It allows us to gain a new perception of social life.
- B. This perspective stresses the broader social contexts in which people live by looking at individuals' social location—jobs, income, education, gender, race-ethnicity, and age—and by considering external influences—people's experiences—which are internalized and become part of a person's thinking and motivations. We are able to see the links between what people do and the social settings that shape their behavior.
- C. This perspective enables us to analyze and understand both the forces that contribute to the emergence and growth of a global network and our unique experiences in our own smaller corners of life.

II. Origins of Sociology

- A. Sociology emerged about the middle of the 1800s, when social observers began to use scientific methods to test their ideas. The following four factors led to its development:
 - 1. The social upheaval in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which led to changes in the way people lived their lives
 - 2. The political revolutions in America and France, which encouraged people to rethink their ideas about monarchies, democracies, and social life
 - 3. The success of the natural sciences, which created a desire to apply scientific methods to find answers for the questions being raised about the social world
- B. Auguste Comte coined the term “sociology” and suggested the use of positivism—applying the scientific method to the social world—but he did not utilize this approach himself. Comte believed that this new science should not only discover social principles, but should then apply those principles to social reform.
- C. Herbert Spencer viewed societies as evolutionary, coined the term “the survival of the fittest,” and became known for social Darwinism. Spencer was convinced that no one should intervene in the evolution of society and that attempts at social reform were wrong.
- D. Karl Marx, whose ideas about social classes and class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was the foundation of the conflict perspective, believed that class conflict was the key to human history. Marx believed that the conflict and struggle would end only with a revolution by the working class.
- E. Emile Durkheim played an important role in the development of sociology.
 - 1. One of his primary goals was to get sociology recognized as a separate academic discipline.
 - 2. He was interested in understanding the social forces that influence individual behavior; he studied suicide rates among different groups and concluded that social integration—the degree to which people are tied to their social group—was a key social factor in suicide.
- F. Max Weber was one of the most influential of all sociologists, raising issues that remain controversial even today. Disagreeing with Karl Marx, Weber defined religion as a central force in social change (i.e., Protestantism encourages greater economic development and was the central factor in the rise of capitalism in some countries).
 - 1. The Protestant belief system encouraged its members to embrace change.
 - 2. Protestants sought “signs” that they were in God’s will; financial success became a major sign. The more money they made, the more secure they were about their religious standing.
 - 3. Weber called this behavior the *Protestant ethic*; he called their desire to invest capital in order to make more money the *spirit of capitalism*.

III. Sociology in North America

- A. In the 1800s, the sociology field was dominated by men because rigidly defined social roles prevented most women from pursuing an education.
 - 1. Women were supposed to devote themselves to the four K’s: *Kirche, Küche, Kinder, und Kleider* (church, cooking, children, and clothes).

2. Few people, male or female, attained any education beyond basic reading and writing and a little math. Higher education, for the rare few who received it, was reserved primarily for men. Of the handful of women who did pursue higher education, some became prominent in early sociology.
- B. Harriet Martineau studied social life in both England and the United States. While her extensive and acclaimed research has been largely ignored by the discipline, she is known for her translations of Comte's ideas into English.
- C. African American professionals also faced problems.
 1. W. E. B. Du Bois was the first African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard. He conducted extensive research on black-white relations in the United States, publishing one book a year on this subject for about 20 years.
 2. Despite his accomplishments, he encountered prejudice and discrimination in his professional and personal life. When he attended professional sociologists' meetings, he was not permitted to eat or stay in the same hotels as the white sociologists.
 3. Frustrated at the lack of improvements in race relations, he turned to social action, helping to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) along with Jane Addams and others from Hull-House.
- D. Jane Addams is an example of a sociologist who was able to combine the role of sociologist with that of social reformer.
 1. In 1889, she co-founded Hull-House, a settlement house for the poor, and worked to bridge the gap between the powerful and powerless.
 2. Sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago visited Hull-House frequently.
 3. She is the only sociologist to have won the Nobel Prize for Peace; she was awarded it in 1931.
- E. Many other early North American sociologists worked toward the reform of society. For example, sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess studied many urban problems and offered suggestions on how to alleviate them. By the 1940s, as sociologists became more concerned with establishing sociology as an academic discipline, the emphasis shifted from social reform to social theory.
 1. Talcott Parsons developed abstract models of society to show how the parts of society harmoniously work together.
 2. Countering this development was C. Wright Mills, who urged sociologists to get back to social reform. He saw the emergence of the *power elite* as an imminent threat to freedom.
- F. The debate over what should be the proper goals of sociological analysis—analyzing society vs. reforming society—continues today.
 1. Some sociologists see their proper role as basic sociology—analyzing some aspect of society, with no goal other than gaining knowledge.
 2. Applied sociology is an attempt to go beyond basic sociology by using sociology to solve problems. One of the first attempts at applied sociology was the founding of the NAACP.
 3. Today, applied sociologists work in a variety of settings, from business and high-tech organizations to government and not-for-profit agencies.

4. The American Sociological Association (ASA) is promoting public sociology. The ASA wants the public, especially politicians and policy makers, to apply the sociological understanding of how society works as they develop social policy.

IV. Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- A. Theory is a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work; it is an explanation of how two or more “facts” are related to one another. Sociologists use three different theoretical perspectives to understand social behavior.
- B. Symbolic interactionism views symbols, things to which we attach meaning, as the key to understanding how we view the world and communicate with one another.
 1. Through the use of symbols, people are able to define relationships to others; to coordinate actions with others, thereby making social life possible; and to develop a sense of themselves.
 2. A symbolic interactionist studying divorce would focus on how the changing meanings of marriage, divorce, parenthood, and love have all contributed to the increase in the rate of divorce in U.S. society.
- C. The central idea of functional analysis is that society is a whole unit, made up of interrelated parts that work together.
 1. To understand society, we must look at both structure (how the parts of society fit together to make up the whole) and function (how each part contributes to society).
 2. Robert Merton used the term *function* to refer to the beneficial consequences of people's actions to keep a group in balance, and *dysfunction* to refer to consequences that undermine stability. Functions can be either manifest (actions that are intended) or latent (unintended consequences).
 3. In trying to explain divorce, a functionalist would look at how industrialization and urbanization have undermined the traditional functions of family.
- D. According to conflict theory, society is composed of groups competing for scarce resources.
 1. Karl Marx focused on struggles between the bourgeoisie (the small group of capitalists who own the means of production) and the proletariat (the masses of workers exploited by the capitalists).
 2. Contemporary conflict theorists have expanded this perspective to include conflict in all relations of power and authority.
 3. Just as Marx examined conflict between capitalists and workers, many feminists stress a similar conflict between men and women.
 4. A conflict theorist would explain that divorce is seen as the outcome of the shifting balance of power within a family; as women have gained power and try to address inequalities in their relationships, men resist.
- E. The perspectives differ in their level of analysis. Functionalists and conflict theorists provide macro-level analysis because they examine the large-scale patterns of society. Symbolic interactionists carry out micro-level analysis because they focus on the small-scale patterns of social life.

V. Doing Sociological Research

- A. People make common sense assumptions about the way the world is. To truly understand social life, sociologists choose to move beyond “common sense” and do research.
- B. Scientific research follows eight basic steps.
 - 1. The first step is to select a topic to research.
 - 2. The second step is to define the problem by narrowing the topic.
 - 3. The third step is to review literature to find out what has been published on the problem.
 - 4. The fourth step is formulating a hypothesis—a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions that are based on a theory. A hypothesis predicts a relationship between or among variables—factors that vary, from one person or situation to another. The hypothesis will need operational definitions, precise ways to measure the variables.
 - 5. The fifth step is choosing one of six research methods or designs to gather data.
 - 6. The sixth step is collecting data. One must take care to assure validity—that your operational definitions measure what they are intended to measure—as well as reliability—meaning that if other researchers use your operational definitions, their findings will be consistent with yours.
 - 7. The seventh step is to analyze the results. If a hypothesis has been part of your research, then you will test it during this step.
 - 8. The last step is sharing the results through a written report, which will allow you to present your findings with the scientific community.

VI. Research Methods

- A. There are seven research methods, or designs, that sociologists use. The method chosen depends upon the questions the researcher wants to answer.
 - 1. Surveys can be used to ask individuals a series of questions. Often, a narrowed target population called a *sample* is chosen when using surveys. Random and stratified random samples are both utilized when gathering sample populations to survey. Questions developed for surveys must be neutral and allow respondents, people who answer your questions, to express their own opinions. They can also take the form of closed- and open-ended questions. When asking questions, established rapport—a feeling of trust, with respondents will allow them to feel comfortable sharing personal, sensitive matters.
 - 2. In participant observation, or fieldwork, the researcher participates in a research setting while observing what is happening in that setting.
 - 3. Case studies require researchers to focus on a single event, situation, or individual. The purpose is to understand the dynamics of relationships and power, or even the thinking that motivates people.
 - 4. In secondary analysis, researchers analyze data that others have collected.
 - 5. Documents, or written sources, include books, newspapers, bank records, and immigration records.
 - 6. Experiments are useful for determining cause and effect.
 - 7. Some researchers use unobtrusive measures, observing the behavior of people who are not aware that they are being studied.

VII. Gender in Sociological Research

- A. Because gender is influential in social research, researchers take steps to prevent it from biasing their findings.

VIII. Ethics and Values in Sociological Research

- A. Research ethics require honesty, truth, and openness (sharing findings with the scientific community.) Ethics forbid the falsification of results and condemn plagiarism.
 - 1. Sociologists also take measures to protect their respondents. This is illustrated through the research conducted by Mario Brajuha, who refused to share field notes that he had gathered while working at a restaurant that later burned down. He is applauded for protecting his respondents and their confidential information.
 - 2. Another ethical problem involves what you tell participants about your research. Although it is considered acceptable for sociologists to do covert participant observation (studying some situation without announcing that they are doing research), to deliberately misrepresent oneself is considered unethical.
 - 3. Values—beliefs about what is good or desirable in life and the way the world ought to be—are another controversial issue in sociology.
 - (a) Weber advocated that sociological research should be value free (personal values or biases should not influence social research) and objective (totally neutral).
 - (b) Sociologists agree that objectivity is a proper goal, but they acknowledge that no one can escape values entirely.
 - (c) *Replication* occurs when a study is repeated to see if the same results are found. It is one means to avoid the distortions that values can cause.
 - (d) Although sociologists may agree that research should be objective, the proper purposes and uses of sociology are argued among sociologists, with some taking the position that the proper role of sociology is to advance understanding of social life, while others believe that it is the responsibility of sociologists to explore harmful social arrangements of society.

KEY TERMS

After studying the chapter, review the definition for each of the following terms.

applied sociology: the use of sociology to solve problems (p. 13)

basic sociology: analyzing some aspect of society, with no goal other than gaining knowledge (p. 13)

bourgeoisie: Marx's term for capitalists, those who own the means to produce wealth (p. 6)

case study: exploration in which a researcher focuses on a single event, situation, or individual (p. 29)

class conflict: Marx's term for the struggle between the proletariat (workers) and the bourgeoisie (capitalists) (p. 6)

closed-ended questions: questions followed by a list of possible answers for respondents to choose from (p. 28)

common sense: those things that “everyone knows” are true (p. 22)

conflict theory: a theoretical framework in which society is viewed as composed of groups competing for scarce resources (p. 20)

control group: during an experiment, a group that would stay in a controlled situation, not experiencing variables or change (p. 32)

dependent variable: a variable that might change in an experiment (p. 32)

documents: written sources, including books, newspapers, bank records, and immigration records (p. 30)

experiments: a set of investigative procedures useful for determining cause and effect (p. 32)

experimental group: during an experiment, a group that would experience a variable, or change (p. 32)

functional analysis: a theoretical framework in which society is viewed as composed of various parts, each with a function that, when fulfilled, contributes to society's equilibrium; also known as functionalism and structural functionalism (p. 17)

hypothesis: a statement of what you expect to find according to predictions that are based on a theory (p. 23)

independent variable: something that causes a change in another variable (p. 32)

macro-level analysis: an examination of large-scale patterns of society (p. 21)

micro-level analysis: an examination of small-scale patterns of society (p. 21)

nonverbal interaction: communication without words through gestures, space, or silence (p. 22)

objectivity: value neutrality (p. 35)

operational definitions: precise ways to measure variables (p. 23)

open-ended questions: questions that allow respondents to answer in their own words (p. 28)

participant observation or fieldwork: occurs when researchers participate in a research setting while observing what is happening in that setting (p. 30)

patterns of behavior: recurring characteristics or events (p. 8)

population: a target group that is going to be studied (p. 25)

positivism: the application of the scientific method to the social world (p. 6)

proletariat: Marx's term for the exploited class, the mass of workers who do not own the means of production (p. 6)

public sociology: sociology being used for the public good, especially the sociological perspective (of how things are related to one another) guiding politicians and policy makers (p. 13)

random sample: occurs when everyone in a target population has the same chance of being included in a study (p. 25)

rapprochement: a feeling of trust (p. 28)

reliability: occurs when other researchers use your operational definitions and their findings are consistent with yours (p. 24)

replication: repeating a study to check its findings (p. 35)

research method or research design: the means by which data are collected (p. 24)

respondents: the people who answer research questions (p. 27)

sample: a group of individuals from a target population (p. 25)

scientific method: the use of objective, systematic observations to test theories (p. 5)

secondary analysis: occurs when researchers analyze data that others have collected (p. 30)

social integration: the degree to which people feel a part of social groups (p. 7)

social interaction: what people do when they are in one another's presence (p. 21)

social location: the group memberships that people have because of their location in history and society (p. 4)

society: a term used by sociologists to refer to a group of people who share a culture and a territory (p. 4)

sociological perspective: understanding human behavior by placing it within its broader social context (p. 4)

sociology: the scientific study of society and human behavior (p. 6)

stratified random sample: using strategy, such as random numbers, to select a sample from a group (p. 27)

survey: asking individuals a series of question (p. 25)

symbolic interactionism: symbols, things to which we attach meaning, are the key to understanding how we view the world and communicate with one another (p. 16)

theory: a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work; an explanation of how two or more "facts" are related to one another (p. 15)

unobtrusive measures: observing the behavior of people who are not aware that they are being studied (p. 32)

validity: occurs when operational definitions measure what they are intended to measure (p. 24)

value free: the view that a sociologist's personal values should not influence social research (p. 35)

values: ideas about what is good or worthwhile in life; attitudes about the way the world ought to be (p. 35)

variables: factors that vary, or change (p.23)

KEY PEOPLE

Review the major theoretical contributions or findings of these people.

Jane Addams: Addams was the founder of Hull-House—a settlement house in the immigrant community of Chicago. She invited sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago to visit. In 1931, she was a winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace. (p. 12)

Mario Brajuha: A graduate student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook who conducted participant observation of restaurant workers. When the restaurant burned down from a fire of “suspicious origin,” detectives and those suspected of setting the fire sought to obtain the field notes from Brajuha, but he refused due to the ethical standards of sociologists. (p. 34)

Auguste Comte: Comte is often credited with being the founder of sociology, because he was the first to suggest that the scientific method be applied to the study of the social world. (pp. 6, 17-18)

Charles Horton Cooley: One of the founders of symbolic interactionism, Cooley provided a major theoretical perspective in sociology. (p. 16)

Lewis Coser: Coser pointed out that conflict is likely to develop among people in close relationships because they are connected by a network of responsibilities, power, and rewards. (p. 20)

W. E. B. Du Bois: Du Bois was the first African American to earn a doctorate at Harvard University. For most of his career, he taught sociology at Atlanta University. He was concerned about social injustice, wrote about race relations, and was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). (pp. 10-12)

Emile Durkheim: Durkheim was responsible for getting sociology recognized as a separate discipline. He was interested in studying how individual behavior is shaped by social forces and in finding remedies for social ills. He stressed that sociologists should use social facts—patterns of behavior that reflect some underlying condition of society. (pp. 7-8, 18)

Harriet Martineau: An Englishwoman who extensively analyzed U.S. social customs, Martineau is known primarily for translating Auguste Comte's ideas into English. (p. 9)

Karl Marx: Marx believed that social development grew out of conflict between social classes; under capitalism, this conflict was between the bourgeoisie—those who own the means to produce wealth—and the proletariat—the mass of workers. His work is associated with the conflict perspective. (pp. 6-7, 20)

George Herbert Mead: Mead was one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, a major theoretical perspective in sociology. (p. 16)

Robert Merton: Merton contributed the terms *manifest and latent functions* and *dysfunctions* to the functionalist perspective. (p. 18)

C. Wright Mills: Mills suggested that external influences (a person's experiences) become part of his or her thinking and motivations and explain social behavior. As the emphasis in sociology shifted from social reform to social theory, Mills urged sociologists to get back to their roots. He saw the emergence of the power elite composed of top leaders of business, politics, and the military as an imminent threat to freedom. (pp. 4, 12-13, 22)

William Ogburn: As early as 1933, Ogburn noted that personality was becoming more important in mate selection; this supported the symbolic interactionists' argument that there was a fundamental shift in the symbolic meaning of U.S. marriages. (p. 16)

Talcott Parsons: He developed abstract models of how the parts of society harmoniously work together. (pp. 12-13)

Herbert Spencer: An early sociologist, Spencer believed that societies evolve from barbarian to civilized forms. He was the first to use the expression "the survival of the fittest" to reflect his belief that social evolution depended on the survival of the most capable and intelligent and the extinction of the less capable. His views became known as *social Darwinism*. (pp. 6, 18)

Max Weber: Weber's most important contribution to sociology was his study of the relationship between the emergence of the Protestant belief system and the rise of capitalism. He believed that sociologists should not allow their personal values to affect their social research; objectivity should become the hallmark of sociology. (pp. 8-9, 35)

Discussion Topics to Encourage Student Participation

- Using the symbolic interactionist perspective, have the students evaluate the sociology course and its instructor. Identify the symbols that are a part of the course and the meanings that each student applies to that symbol. Initially, have the students make their own lists that include symbols and meanings and then share them with the class in a group discussion.
- The introduction of sociology as "the study of society" or "the science of man" created a social upheaval in the 1800s that destroyed many traditions and social norms. Among these were challenges to religion and the divine right of kings. During the 1960s, other traditions were being challenged by the feminist perspective such as the family and the role of women. What traditions and social norms in today's society are being challenged in a similar manner?
- Herbert Spencer is credited with developing the "survival of the fittest" concept and the philosophic approach known as social Darwinism. The idea behind this approach was that societies evolve from primitive to civilized and that helping primitive societies interferes with the natural process of either evolving or becoming extinct. As an example, nations like the United States have for decades intervened in sub-Saharan African countries in an attempt to fight AIDS and end poverty with little success. Discuss your thoughts on this subject and whether aid to poor societies actually helps them or simply creates dependency.
- Max Weber believed that the dominant Protestant belief system was the central force in the rise of capitalism. Today's religious landscape looks much different both in the United States and throughout the world. Do you think religion still plays a key role in the continuing development of capitalism? What other factors might be influencing this global trend? What might Weber conclude about what has happened with religion or with capitalism?
- Given the plethora of special-interest groups, have your students discuss whether sociology should extend its role in politics and be added to the list of special-interest groups. Second, have them discuss the following: If an academic discipline, such as sociology, extends its

interest into politics, should politics extend its interests even further into governing academia?

Classroom Activities and Student Projects

- Much can be learned from the application of classical social theory to contemporary life. Assign students (either in groups or individually) one of the early sociologists. Send them to the library for a class period to gather information on that theorist and his or her work. Have the students present this information to the class. Then (as a class, in groups, or individually) ask students to apply these classical theories to issues in contemporary society. Follow this with a discussion of the usefulness of these theories today.
- To understand peoples' behavior, sociologists look at their social location in society. Ask students to identify the corners in life they occupy by describing their jobs, income, education, gender, age, and race-ethnicity. Have them explain how each of these elements influences their self concept and behavior. Then have them select two or three elements to change (for example, gender and race-ethnicity) and describe what differences may exist in their self-concept and behavior if they occupied this social location.
- An issue that remains controversial among sociologists is the degree to which personal values should enter into research efforts. Ask students who support the pro-choice position and students who support the pro-life position to participate in a debate. Try to keep the numbers in each group approximately the same. Have each group research their position and then present their positions to the class. The rest of the class will then critique the presentations based on each group's objectivity. Can people who have a stake in a position objectively research that topic? Regardless of the presence or lack of objectivity, which side of the debate had the most support among students? If the results support the research that younger people hold a more liberal ideology, then the pro-choice team should win the debate because they will also lack objectivity and allow their own attitudes to affect their decisions.
- W. E. B. Du Bois was a forerunner to promoting racial equality. Oddly, even though racism seemed more prominent in those days, Du Bois was able to fund his education and pursue a Ph.D. at Harvard University. He was also able to gain a position at Atlanta University. Ask students to think about and openly debate how a black man was able to fund an education at a prestigious university like Harvard, and study in Berlin, yet, as Henslin states in the textbook, he was too poor to attend an ASA convention in the U.S. If he were alive today, how would Du Bois respond to the current state of race relations, and what would be his reaction to the current N.A.A.C.P.?
- The War on Terrorism that the United States began waging on September 11, 2001 has had its share of advocates and critics. Select a committee of volunteers from the course who will organize opposing presentations, one advocating active military involvement and another opposing the use of force. The presenters may be students who have served in the military, other professors, or community leaders. If possible, the presentations may be made at a time and place that will accommodate more students than a single classroom. Following the

presentations, have the students evaluate the twenty-first century War on Terror based on the three sociological perspectives.

Service Learning Projects and Field Trips

- Invite a representative from one of the major social service agencies in your area to make a presentation to the class. Have the students develop a set of questions they may wish to ask the presenter before they appear in class.
- Have students attend a local conference to observe the field from within the sociological community. Afterward, students could write a reflection on what they experienced and if any particular elements sparked their interest.
- Assign students to choose a film that illustrates one of the three sociological perspectives and to write a brief report on how that film illustrated the perspective. A few examples of the film and the perspective(s) it illustrates include: *Shrek* (symbolic interactionism), *Antz* (functionalism), *Titanic* (the conflict perspective), or *Apollo 13* (a case can be made for this film as illustrating any of the three perspectives). Other films may also be used depending on their subject matter and plot.

Suggested Films

Iron Jawed Angels. HBO Films. 2004, 125 minutes (Video).

This is a film about the American women's suffrage movement during the 1910s. The film follows political activists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns as they use peaceful and effective strategies, tactics, and dialogues to revolutionize the American feminist movement to grant women the right to vote.

The Sociological Perspective. Allyn and Bacon Interactive Video for Introductory Sociology. 1998, 3 minutes (Video).

This is a brief introduction to the sociological perspective that works well to present at the beginning of the lecture on Chapter One.