

CHAPTER

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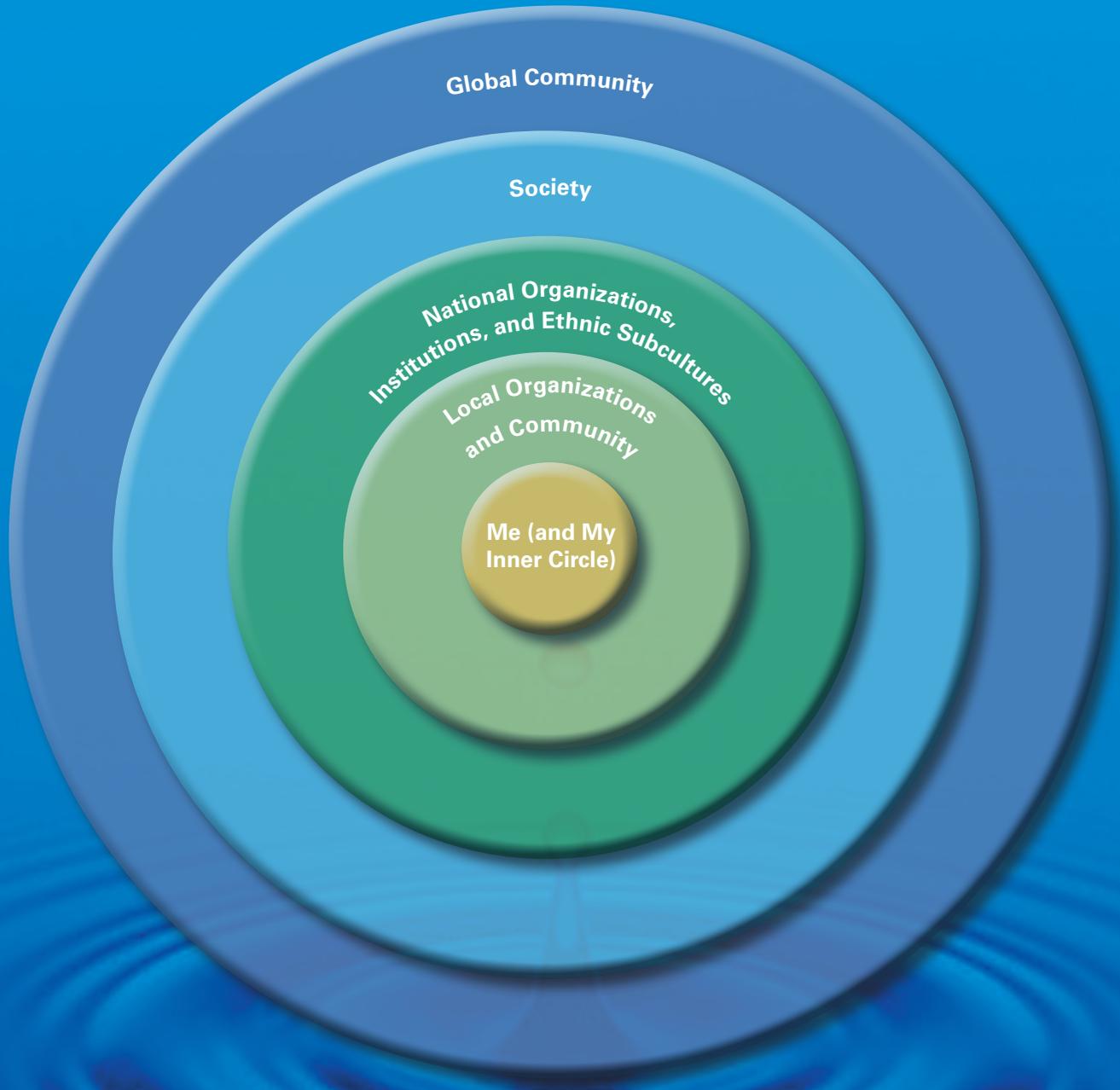
Sociology

A Unique Way to View the World



Sociology involves a transformation in the way one sees the world—learning to recognize the complex connections between our intimate personal lives, large organizations, national structures, and global events.

Our Social World Model



This model illustrates a core idea carried throughout the book—the way in which your own life is shaped by your family, community, society, and world, and how it influences them in return. Understanding this model can make you more aware of your social world and a more knowledgeable and effective person.

Think About It	
Micro: Self and Inner Circle	How can sociology help me understand my own life and my sense of self?
Micro: Local Community	How can sociology help me to be a more effective employee and citizen in my community?
Meso: National Institutions; Complex Organizations; Ethnic Groups	How do sociologists help us understand and even improve our lives in families, classrooms, and health care organizations?
Macro: National Society	How do national loyalty and national policies affect my life?
Macro: Global Community	How might global events impact my life?

What's coming in this chapter?

- What Is Sociology?
- Why Does Sociology Matter?
- The Social World Model

It may win the prize for the strangest place to get a back massage, but according to a recent scientific article, twins experience a lot of back rubs while still in the womb (Weaver 2010). Scientists studied the movement of five pairs of twin fetuses using ultrasonography, a technique

that visualizes internal body structures, and found that by the fourth month of gestation, twin fetuses begin reaching for their “womb-mates.” By 18 weeks, they spend more time touching their neighbors than themselves or the walls of the uterus. Fetuses that have single-womb occupancy also tend to touch the walls of the uterus a good deal to make contact with the mother. Nearly 30% of the movement of twins is directed toward their companions. Movements toward the partner, such as stroking the back of the head, are more sustained and more precise than movements toward themselves, such as touching their own mouths or other facial features. As the authors put it, they are “wired to be social” (Castiello et al. 2010). In short, humans are innately social creatures.

Strange as it may seem, the social world is not merely something that exists outside of us. As the story of the twins illustrates, the social world is also something we carry inside of us. We are part of it, we reflect on it, and we are influenced by it, even when we are alone. The patterns of the social world engulf us in ways both subtle and obvious, with profound implications for how we create order and meaning in our lives. The point is that we need others—and that is where sociology enters.

Sometimes it takes a dramatic and shocking event for us to realize just how deeply embedded we are in a social world that we take for granted. “It couldn’t happen in the United States,” read typical world newspaper accounts. “This is something you see in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East, Central Africa, and other war-torn areas. . . . It’s hard to imagine this happening in the economic center of the United States.” Yet on September 11, 2001, shortly after 9 A.M., a commercial airliner crashed into a New York City skyscraper, followed a short while later by another pummeling into the paired tower. This mighty symbol of financial wealth—the World Trade Center—collapsed. After the dust settled and the rescue crews finished their gruesome work, nearly 3,000 people were dead or unaccounted for. The world as we knew it changed forever that day. This event taught U.S. citizens how integrally connected they are with the international community.

Following the events of September 11, the United States launched its highly publicized War on Terror, and many



Within hours of their birth in October 2010, Jackson and Audrey became highly fussy if the nurses tried to put them in separate bassinets. At one point shortly after birth, both babies were put in a warmer, and Jackson cried until he found Audrey, proceeding to intertwine his arms and legs with hers. Twins, like all humans, are hardwired to be social and in relationships with others.



These signs were put up right after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center by people looking for missing loved ones. The experience of New Yorkers was alarm, fear, grief, and confusion—precisely the emotions that the terrorists sought to create. Terrorism disrupts normal social life and daily routines and undermines security. It provides an effective tool for those with less power.

terrorist strongholds and training camps were destroyed. Still, troubling questions remain unanswered. Why did this extremist act occur? How can such actions be deterred in the future? How do the survivors recover from such a horrific event? Why was this event so completely disorienting to Americans and to the world community? These terrorist acts horrified people because they were unpredictable and unexpected in a normally predictable world. They violated the rules that foster our connections to one another. They also brought attention to the discontent and disconnectedness that lie under the surface in many societies—discontent that can come to the surface and express itself in hateful violence. Such discontent and hostility are likely to continue until the root causes are addressed.

Terrorist acts represent a rejection of the modern civil society we know. The terrorists themselves see their acts as justifiable, but few outside their inner circle can sympathize with their behavior. When terrorist acts occur, we struggle to fit such events into our mental picture of a just, safe, comfortable, and predictable social world. The events of September 11 forced U.S. citizens to realize that, although they may see a great diversity among themselves, people

in other parts of the world view them as all the same. U.S. citizens may also be despised for what they represent—consumerism, individualism, freedom of religion, and tolerance of other views. The United States is a world power, yet its values challenge and threaten the views of many people around the world. For many U.S. citizens, a sense of loyalty to the nation was deeply stirred by the events of 9/11. Patriotism abounded. So, in fact, the nation's people became more connected as a reaction to an act against the United States.

Most of the time, we live with social patterns that we take for granted as routine, ordinary, and expected. These social patterns, or social facts, characterize social groups. The social expectations are external to each individual (unlike motivations or drives), but they still guide (or constrain) our behaviors and thoughts. Without shared expectations between humans about proper patterns of behavior, life would be chaotic. Connections require some basic rules of interaction, and these rules create routine and safe normality in everyday interaction. For the people in and around the World Trade Center, the social rules governing everyday life broke down that awful day.



This chapter examines the social ties that make up our social world, as well as sociology's focus on those connections. We will learn what sociology is and why it is valuable to study it, how sociologists view the social world and what they do, how studying sociology can help us in our everyday life, and how the social world model is used as a framework to understand the topics we will study throughout this book.

What Is Sociology?

According to the American Sociological Association (2009:5),

Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies and how people interact within these contexts. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob; from organized crime to religious traditions; from the divisions of race, gender, and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture.

Sociologists conduct scientific research on social relationships and problems that range from tiny groups of two people to national societies and global social networks.



An athletic team teaches members to interact, cooperate, develop awareness of the power of others, and deal with conflict. Here, children experience ordered interaction in the competitive environment of a football game. What values, skills, attitudes, and assumptions about life and social interaction do you think these young boys are learning?

Unlike the discipline of psychology, which focuses on attributes, motivations, and behaviors of individuals, sociology tends to focus on group patterns. Whereas a psychologist might try to explain behavior by examining the personality traits of individuals, a sociologist would examine the position of different people within the group and how positions influence what individuals do. Sociologists seek to analyze and explain why people interact with others and belong to groups, how groups work, why some groups have more power than other groups, how decisions are made, and how groups deal with conflict and change. From the early beginnings of their discipline (discussed in Chapter 2), sociologists have asked questions about the rules that govern group behavior; about the causes of social problems, such as child abuse, crime, and poverty; and about why nations declare war and kill each other's citizens.

Two persons interacting—*dyads*—are the smallest units sociologists study. Examples of dyads include roommates discussing their classes, a professor and a student going over an assignment, a husband and a wife negotiating their budget, and two children playing. Next in size are small groups consisting of three or more interacting people—a family, a neighborhood or peer group, a classroom, a work group, or a street gang—where most people know each other. Then come increasingly larger groups—organizations such as sports or scouting clubs, neighborhood associations, and local religious congregations. Among the largest groups contained within nations are ethnic groups and national organizations, including economic, educational, religious, health, and political systems. Nations themselves are still larger and can sometimes involve hundreds of millions of people. In the past several decades, social scientists have also pointed to globalization, the process by which the entire world is becoming a single interdependent entity. Of particular interest to sociologists are how these various groups are organized, how they function, why they sometimes conflict, and how they influence one another.

Thinking Sociologically

Identify several dyads, small groups, and large organizations to which you belong. Did you choose to belong, or were you born into membership in the group? How does each group influence decisions you make?

Ideas Underlying Sociology

Most people share certain ideas with others that they all take for granted. For example, the idea that one action can cause something else is a core idea in all science. Sociologists also share several principles that they take for granted about the



social world. These ideas about humans and social life are supported by considerable evidence and considered to be true. Understanding these core principles helps us see how sociologists approach the study of people in groups.

People are social by nature. This means that humans seek contact with other humans, interact with each other, and influence and are influenced by the behaviors of one another. Furthermore, humans need groups to survive. Although a few individuals may become socially isolated as adults, they could not have reached adulthood without sustained interactions with others. The central point here is that we become who we are because other people and groups constantly influence us.

People live much of their lives belonging to social groups. It is in social groups that we interact with family, friends, and work groups; learn to share goals and to cooperate with others; develop identities that are influenced by our group affiliations; obtain power over others—or are relatively powerless; and have conflicts with others over resources. Our individual beliefs and behaviors, our experiences, our observations, and the problems we face are derived from connections to our social groups.

Interaction between the individual and the group is a two-way process in which each influences the other. In our family or on a sports team, we can influence the shape and direction of groups, just as the group provides the rules and establishes the expected behaviors for individuals.

Recurrent social patterns, ordered behavior, shared expectations, and common understandings among people characterize groups. Consider the earlier example of the chaos created by 9/11. This event was so troubling because it was unexpected and out of the normal range of expectations. Normally, a degree of continuity and recurrent behavior is present in human interactions, whether in small groups, large organizations, or society.

The processes of conflict and change are natural and inevitable features of groups and societies. No group can remain unchanged and hope to perpetuate itself. To survive, groups must adapt to changes in the social and physical environment. Yet rapid change often comes at a price. It can lead to conflict within a society—between traditional and new ideas and between groups that have vested interests in particular ways of doing things. Rapid change can give rise to protest activities; changing in a controversial direction or failing to change fast enough can spark conflict, including revolution. The recent Arab Spring demonstrations illustrate the desire for rapid change from long-standing dictatorships, springing from citizens' discontent with corrupt or authoritarian rule. The problem

is finding acceptable replacement governments to take over what has been overthrown.

As you read this book, keep in mind these basic ideas that form the foundation of sociological analysis: People are social; they live and carry out activities largely in groups; interaction influences both individual and group behavior; people share common behavior patterns and expectations; and processes such as change and conflict are always present. In several important ways, sociological understandings provide new lenses for looking at our social world.

Sociology Versus Common Sense

Common sense refers to ideas that are so completely taken for granted that they have never been seriously questioned and seem to be sensible to any reasonable person.



A Palestinian and an Israeli work together. Although their governments are hostile to one another, the people themselves often have very different sentiments toward those on the other side of the divide.



Commonsense interpretations based on personal experience are an important means of processing information and deciding on a course of action. Although all of us hold such ideas and assumptions, that does not mean they are accurate. Sociologists assume human behavior can be studied scientifically; they use scientific methods

to test the accuracy of commonsense beliefs and ideas about human behavior and the social world. Would our commonsense notions about the social world be reinforced or rejected if examined with scientifically gathered information? Many commonsense notions are actually contradictory:

Birds of a feather flock together
Absence makes the heart grow fonder
Look before you leap
You can't teach an old dog new tricks
Above all to thine own self be true
Variety is the spice of life
Two heads are better than one
You can't tell a book by its cover
Haste makes waste
There's no place like home

Source: Eitzen and Zinn (1998).

Opposites attract
Out of sight, out of mind
He who hesitates is lost
It's never too late to learn
When in Rome, do as the Romans do
Never change horses in midstream
If you want something done right, do it yourself
The clothes make the man
Strike while the iron is hot
The grass is always greener on the other side

These are examples of maxims that people use as “absolute” guides to live by. They become substitutes for real analysis of situations. The fact is that all of them are accurate *at some times, in some places, about some things*. Sociological thinking and analysis are about studying the conditions in which maxims such as these hold and do not hold (Eitzen and Zinn 1998).

Human tragedy can result from false commonsense beliefs. For example, the Nazi genocide and the existence of slavery both have their roots in false beliefs about racial superiority. Often citizens interpret news stories through a “commonsense” lens rather than digging deeper for better analysis.

The difference between common sense and sociology is that sociologists test their beliefs by gathering information and analyzing the evidence in a planned, objective, systematic, and replicable (repeatable) scientific way. Indeed, they set up studies to see if they can disprove what they think is true. This is the way science is done. Consider the following examples of commonsense beliefs about the social world and some research findings about these beliefs.

Thinking Sociologically

What are some other commonsense sayings you know that contradict one another? You may also want to take the common sense quiz online at www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed3e. Do some of the answers surprise you? Why?

Social Science Findings and Commonsense Beliefs

Sometimes we hold commonsense beliefs that are a part of common knowledge. However, sometimes these beliefs are disproven by research. Here are some examples:

Belief: Most of the differences in the behaviors of women and men are based on “human nature”; men and women are just plain different from each other. Research shows



The Wodaabe society in Niger in sub-Saharan Africa illustrates that our notions of masculinity and femininity—which common sense tells us are innate and universal—are actually socially defined, variable, and learned. Wodaabe men are known for their heavy use of makeup to be attractive to women.



that biological factors certainly play a part in the behaviors of men and women, but the culture (beliefs, values, rules, and way of life) that people learn as they grow up determines who does what and how biological tendencies are played out. A unique example illustrates this: In the nomadic Wodaabe tribe in Africa, women do most of the heavy work while men adorn themselves with makeup, sip tea, and gossip (Beckwith 1983; Loftsdottir 2004). Each year the group holds a festival where men show their white teeth and the whites of their eyes to attract a marriage partner. Such dramatic variations in behavior of men and women around the world are so great that it is impossible to attribute behavior simply to biology or human nature alone.

Belief: As developing countries modernize, the lives of their female citizens improve. This is generally false. In fact, the status of women in many developed and developing countries is getting worse. Women make up roughly 51% of the world's approximately 7 billion people and account for two thirds of the world's hours at work (National Geographic Society 2011). However, in no country for which data are available do they earn what men earn, and sometimes the figures show women earning less than 50% of men's earnings for similar work. Women hold many unpaid jobs in agriculture, and they own only 1% of the world's property. Furthermore, of the world's 775 million illiterate adults, two thirds are women (World Factbook 2012c). Only 79.7% of the world's women over age 15 can read and write compared to 88.6% of men. Illiteracy rates for women in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East are highest in the world, implying lack of access to education. These are only a few examples of the continuing poor status of women in many countries (World Factbook 2012c). The "commonsense" idea is clearly wrong.

Belief: Given high divorce rates in the United States and Canada, marriages are in serious trouble. The highest divorce rates in the United States are found among those below the average on education and who live in poverty. Those who are middle class or higher tend to have extremely stable marriages (Luscombe 2010; Pew Research Center 2010). Although overall the divorce rate in North America is high, the rate of marriage is also one of the highest in the world. If the fear-of-commitment hypothesis were true, it is unlikely the marriage rate would be so high. Moreover, even those who have been divorced tend to remarry. Despite talk about decline and despite genuine concern about high levels of marital failure, Americans now spend more years of their lives in marriage than at any other time in history. Divorce appears to be seen as rejection of a particular partnership rather than as rejection of marriage itself (Coontz 2011a; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1996). The divorce rate reached a peak in the United States in 1982 and has declined modestly since that time (Newman 2009).



Literacy is a major issue for societies around the globe. These Chinese children are learning to read, but in many developing countries, boys have more access to formal education than girls have. The commonsense notion is that most children in the world, boys and girls, have equal access to education, yet many children, especially girls, do not gain literacy.

As these examples illustrate, many of our commonsense beliefs are challenged by social scientific evidence. On examination, the social world is often more complex than our commonsense understanding of events, which is based on limited evidence. Throughout history, there are examples of beliefs that seemed obvious at one time but have been shown through scientific study to be mistaken. Social scientific research may also confirm some common notions about the social world. For example, the unemployment rate among African Americans in the United States is higher than that among most other groups; women with similar education and jobs earn less income than men with the same education and jobs; excessive consumption of alcohol is associated with high levels of domestic violence; and people tend to marry others who are of a similar social class. The point is that the discipline of sociology provides a method to assess the accuracy of our commonsense assumptions about the social world.

To improve lives of individuals in societies around the world, decision makers must rely on an accurate understanding of the society. Accurate information gleaned from sociological research can be the basis for more rational and just social policies—policies that better meet the needs of all groups in the social world. The sociological perspective, discussed in the following, helps us gain reliable understanding.



The Sociological Imagination

Events in our social world affect our individual lives. If we are unemployed or lack funds for our college education, we may say this is a personal problem. Yet broader social issues are often at the root of our situation. The sociological perspective holds that we can best understand our personal experiences and problems by examining their broader social context—by looking at the big picture.

Individual problems (or private troubles) are rooted in social or public issues (what is happening in the social world outside of one's personal control). C. Wright Mills (1959) called the ability to understand this *complex interactive relationship between micro-level individual experiences and macro-level public issues* the **sociological imagination**. For Mills, many personal experiences can and should be interpreted in the context of large-scale forces in the wider society.

Consider, for example, the personal trauma caused by being laid off from a job. This personal trauma is a common situation in today's economy. The unemployed person often experiences feelings of inadequacy or lack of worth. This, in turn, may produce stress in a marriage or even result in divorce. These conditions not only are deeply troubling to the person most directly affected but also are related to wider political and economic forces in society. The unemployment may be due to corporate downsizing or to a corporation taking operations to another country where labor costs are cheaper and where there are fewer environmental regulations on companies. People may blame themselves or each other for personal troubles such as unemployment or a failed marriage, believing that they did not try hard enough. Often, they do not see the connection between their private lives and larger economic forces beyond their control. They fail to recognize the public issues that create private troubles.

Families also experience stress as partners have, over time, assumed increasing responsibility for their mate's and their children's emotional and physical needs. Until the second half of the 20th century, the community and the extended family unit—aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins—assumed more of that burden. Extended families continue to exist in countries where children settle near their parents, but in modern urban societies, both the sense of community and the connection to the extended family are greatly diminished. There are fewer intimate ties to call on for help and support. Divorce is a very personal condition for those affected, but it can be understood far more clearly when considered in conjunction with the broader social context of economics, urbanization, changing gender roles, lack of external support, and legislated family policies.

As we learn about sociology, we will come to understand how social forces shape individual lives, and this

will help us understand aspects of everyday life we take for granted. In this book, we will investigate how group life influences our behaviors and interactions and why some individuals follow the rules of society and others do not. A major goal is to help us incorporate the sociological perspective into our way of understanding the social world and our place in it. Indeed, the notion of sociological imagination—connecting events from the global and national level to the personal and intimate level of our own lives—is the core organizing theme of this book.

Thinking Sociologically

How does poverty, a war, or a recession cause personal troubles for someone you know? Give examples of situations in which it is not adequate to explain the causes of personal troubles by examining only the personal characteristics of those affected.

Questions Sociologists Ask—and Don't Ask

Sociologists ask questions about human behavior in social groups and organizations—questions that can be studied scientifically. Sociologists, like other scientists, cannot answer certain questions—philosophical questions about the meaning of life, the existence of God, the ethical implications of stem cell research, or the morality of physician-assisted suicide. What sociologists *do* ask are questions about people in social groups and organizations—questions that can be studied scientifically. How people feel about the above issues can be determined (the percentage of people who approve of stem cell research, for example), but sociologists cannot say what are right and wrong answers to such value-driven opinions. What effect does holding certain ideas or adhering to certain ethical standards have on the behavior and attitudes of people? For example, are people more likely to obey rules if they believe that there are consequences for their actions in an afterlife? Sociologists might ask who gets an abortion, why do they do so, and how does society as a whole view abortion? These are matters of fact that a social scientist can explore. However, sociologists avoid making ethical judgments about whether abortion is sometimes acceptable or always wrong. Such a judgment is a question of values, not one that can be answered through scientific analysis. The question about the morality of abortion is very important to many people, but it is based on philosophical or theological rationale, not on sociological findings.



Likewise, what are the circumstances around individuals becoming drunk and drunken behavior? This question is often tied more to social environment than to alcohol itself. Note that a person might be very intoxicated at a fraternity party but behave differently at a wedding reception, where the expectations for behavior are very different. The researcher does not make judgments about whether use of alcohol is good or bad or right or wrong and avoids—as much as possible—opinions regarding responsibility or irresponsibility. The sociologist does, however, observe variations in the use of alcohol in social situations and resulting behaviors. The focus is on facts and on causality.

The Social Sciences: A Comparison

Not so long ago, our views of people and social relationships were based on stereotypes, intuition, superstitions, supernatural explanations, and traditions passed on from one generation to the next. Natural sciences first used the scientific method, a model later adopted by social sciences. Social scientists, including anthropologists, psychologists, economists, cultural geographers, historians, and political scientists, apply the scientific method to study social relationships, to correct misleading and harmful misconceptions about human behaviors, and to guide policy decisions. Consider the following examples of specific studies a social scientist might conduct. These are followed by a brief description of the focus of sociology as a social science.

Consider anthropological studies that focus on garbage, studying what people discard to understand their patterns of life (Bond 2010). Anthropology is closely related to sociology. In fact, the two areas have common historical roots. *Anthropology* is the study of humanity in its broadest context. There are four subfields within anthropology: physical anthropology (which is related to biology), archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology (sometimes called *ethnology*). This last field has the most in common with sociology. Cultural anthropology focuses on the culture, or way of life, of the society being studied, and uses methods appropriate to understanding culture.

A political scientist studies opinion poll results to predict who will win the next election, how various groups of people are likely to vote, or how elected officials will vote on proposed legislation. *Political science* is concerned with government systems and power—how they work, how they are organized,



What is acceptable or unacceptable drinking behavior varies according to the social setting. Binge drinking, losing consciousness, vomiting, or engaging in sexual acts while drunk may be a source of storytelling at a college party but be offensive at a wedding reception. Sociologists study different social settings and how the norms of acceptability vary in each, but they do not make judgments about those behaviors.

forms of government, relations between governments, who holds power and how they obtain it, how power is used, and who is politically active. Political science overlaps with sociology, particularly in the study of political theory and the nature and the uses of power.

After wiring research subjects to a machine that measures their physiological reaction to a violent film



Psychology as a discipline tends to focus on individuals, including such fields as sensation, perception, memory, and thought processes. In this study, the researcher is using specialized equipment and a computer to measure how the eye and the brain work together to help create depth perception.

clip, a psychologist asks them questions about what they were feeling. *Psychology* is the study of individual behavior and mental processes (e.g., sensation, perception, memory, and thought processes). It differs from sociology in that it focuses on individuals, rather than on groups, institutions, and societies as sociology does. Although there are different branches of psychology, most psychologists are concerned with individual motivations, personality attributes, attitudes, perceptions, abnormal behavior, mental disorders, and stages of normal human development.

An economist studies the banking system and market trends, trying to determine what will remedy the global recession. *Economists* analyze economic conditions and explore how people organize, produce, and distribute material goods. They are interested in supply and demand, inflation and taxes, prices and manufacturing output, labor organization, employment levels, and comparisons of industrial and nonindustrial nations.

What these examples of social sciences—sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and economics—have in common is that they study aspects of human behavioral and social life. Social sciences share many common topics, methods, concepts, research findings, and theories, but each has a different focus or perspective on the social world. Each of these social sciences relates to topics studied by sociologists, but sociologists focus on human interaction, groups, and social structure, providing the broadest overview of the social world.

Thinking Sociologically

Consider issues such as the condition of poverty in developing countries or homelessness in North America. What question(s) might different social sciences ask about these problems?

Why Does Sociology Matter?

Sociology is important not only to understand our relationships with other people and because it can inform social policy decisions, but because one can also pursue a career in sociology or use skills developed through sociology in a wide range of career fields.

Why Study Sociology?

The sociological perspective helps us to be more effective as we carry out our roles as significant others, workers, friends, family members, and citizens. For example, an employee who has studied sociology may better understand how to work with groups and how the structure of the workplace affects individual behavior, how to approach problem solving, and how to collect and analyze data. Likewise, a schoolteacher trained in sociology may have a better understanding of classroom management, student motivation, causes of poor student learning that have roots outside the school, and other variables that shape the professional life of teachers and the academic success of students. Consider the example in the next “Sociology in Our Social World,” which explores how each high school clique’s behavior might be quite logical in certain circumstances. *Burnouts and Jocks in a Public High School* explores a social environment very familiar to most of us.

Two ingredients are essential to the study of our social world: a keen ability to observe what is happening in the social world and a desire to find answers to the question of why it is happening. The value of sociology is that it affords us a unique perspective from which to examine the social world, and it provides methods to answer important questions about human interaction, group behavior, and social structure. The practical significance of the sociological perspective is that it

- fosters greater self-awareness, which can lead to opportunities to improve one’s life;
- encourages a more complete understanding of social situations by looking beyond individual explanations to include group analyses of behavior;





Sociology in Our Social World

Burnouts and Jocks in a Public High School



High schools are big organizations made up of smaller friendship networks and cliques; a careful examination can give us insight into the tensions that exist as the groups struggle for resources and power in the school.

Sociologist Penelope Eckert (1989) focused on two categories of students that exist in many high schools in North America: “burnouts” and “jocks.” The burnouts defied authorities, smoked in the restrooms, refused to use their lockers, made a public display of not eating in the school cafeteria, and wore their jackets all day. Their open and public defiance of authority infuriated the jocks—the college prep students who participated in choir, band, student council, and athletics and who held class offices. The burnouts were disgusted with the jocks. In their view, by constantly sucking up to the authorities, the jocks received special privileges and, by playing the goody-two-shoes role, made life much more difficult for the burnouts.

Despite their animosity toward one another, the goal of both groups was to gain more autonomy from the adult authorities who constantly bossed students around. As the burnouts saw things, if the jocks would have even a slight bit of backbone and stand up for the dignity of students as adults, life would be better for everyone. The burnouts believed that school officials

should earn their obedience—not demand it just because they were older and held a certain position. The burnouts maintained their dignity by affirming that they did not recognize bossy adults as authorities. Wearing coats all day was one way to emphasize the idea that “I’m just a visitor in this school.”

The jocks, for their part, became irritated at the burnouts when the latter caused trouble and were beligerent with authorities; then the administration would crack down on everyone, and no one had any freedom. Jocks found that if they did what the adults told them to do—at least while the adults were around—they got a lot more freedom. When the burnouts got defiant, however, the principal got mad and removed everyone’s privileges.

Sociologist Eckert (1989) found that the behavior of both groups was quite logical for their circumstances and ambitions. Expending energy as a class officer or participating in extracurricular activities is a rational behavior for college preparatory students because those leadership roles help students get into the college of their choice.

However, those activities do not help students get a better job in a factory in town. In fact, hanging out at the bowling alley makes far more sense. For the burnouts, having friendship networks and acquaintances in the right places is more important to achieving their goals than a class office listed on their résumé.

Eckert’s (1989) method of gathering information was effective in showing how the internal dynamics of schools—conflicts between student groups—were influenced by outside factors such as working- and upper-middle-class status. Continuing research in this field upholds Eckert’s findings on the importance cliques play in shaping school behavior (Gallup and Hernandez 2005). Like Eckert, Bonnie Barber, Jacquelynne Eccles, and Margaret Stone (2001) followed various friendship cliques starting in 10th grade in a Michigan high school. The jocks in their study were the most integrated to mainstream society in adult life. The burnouts (or criminals, as they are labeled in Barber’s research) were most likely to have been arrested or incarcerated, showing that the propensity to defy authority figures may carry on into adult life.

These studies show that sociological analysis can help us understand some ways that connections between groups—regardless of whether they are in conflict or harmony—shape the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of people living in this complex social world.

- helps people understand and evaluate problems by enabling them to view the world systematically and objectively rather than in strictly emotional or personal terms;
- cultivates an understanding of the many diverse cultural perspectives and how cultural differences are related to behavioral patterns;
- provides a means to assess the impact of social policies;
- reveals the complexities of social life and provides methods of inquiry to study them; and
- provides useful skills in interpersonal relations, critical thinking, data collection and analysis, problem solving, and decision making.

What Do Sociologists Do?

Your first encounter with a sociologist is probably in the classroom. About three quarters of sociologists work in higher education settings, teaching and doing research. However, sociologists are employed in a variety of other settings as well. Table 1.1 illustrates that a significant portion of sociologists work in business, government, and social service agencies (American Sociological Association 2006).

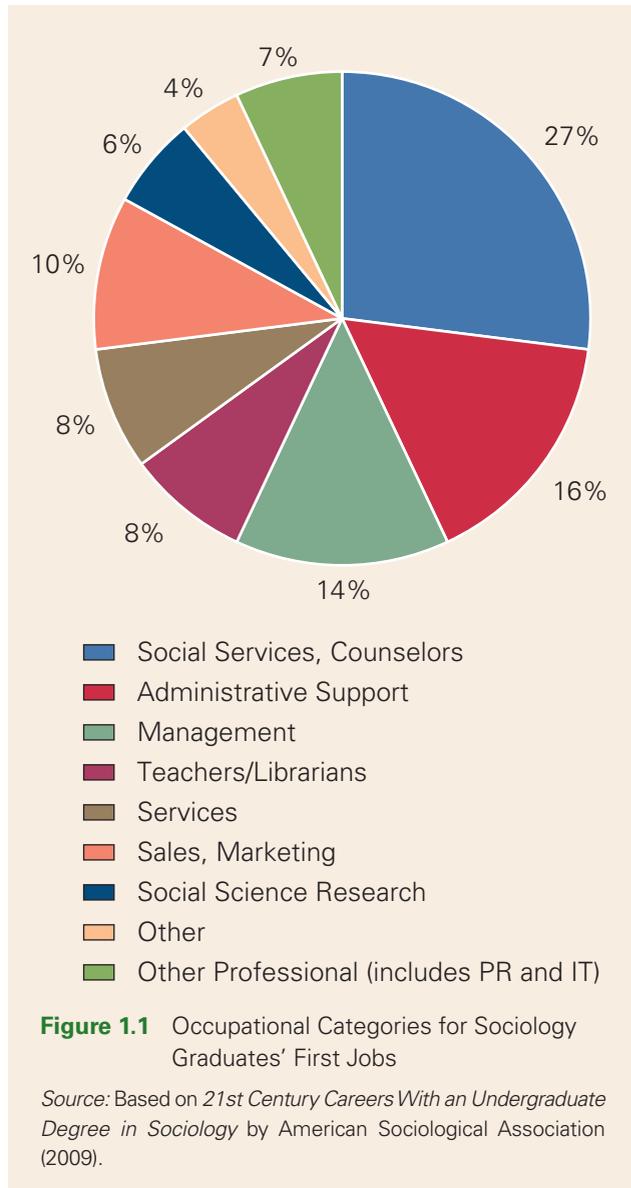
College graduates with a bachelor of arts degree in sociology who seek employment immediately after college are most likely to find their first jobs in social services, administrative assistantships, or some sort of management position. The first jobs of sociology majors are indicated in Figure 1.1. With a master's or a doctorate degree, graduates usually become college teachers, researchers, clinicians, or consultants.

Consider your professor. The duties of professors vary depending on the type of institution and the level of courses offered. In addition to teaching classes, other activities include preparing for classes, preparing and grading exams and assignments, advising students, serving on committees, keeping abreast of new research in the field, and conducting and publishing research studies. This “publish or perish” task is deemed the most important activity for faculty in some universities.

Table 1.1 Where Sociologists Are Employed

Place of Employment	Percentage Employed
College or university	75.5
Government (all positions)	7.1
Private, for-profit business	6.2
Not-for-profit public service organizations	7.6
Self-employed	0.4

Source: American Sociological Association (2006).



Sociologists who work outside of academia, applied sociologists, use their knowledge and research skills to address the needs of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government. In government jobs, they provide data such as population projections for education and health care planning. In social service agencies, such as police departments, they help address causes of deviant behavior, and in health agencies, they may be concerned with doctor-patient interactions. Public and applied sociology are important aspects of the field. The “Sociologists in Action” features you will find throughout the book provide some examples of what one can do with a sociology degree. In addition, at the end of most chapters you will find a section discussing policy examples and implications related to that chapter topic. Table 1.2 provides some ideas of career paths for graduates with a degree in sociology.

Table 1.2 What Can You Do With a Sociology Degree?

Business or Management	Human Services	Education
Market researcher	Social worker	Teacher
Sales manager	Criminologist	Academic research
Customer relations	Gerontologist	Administration
Manufacturing representative	Hospital administrator	School counselor
Banking or loan officer	Charities administrator	Policy analyst
Data processor	Community advocate or organizer	College professor
Attorney		Dean of student life
Research	Government	Public Relations
Population analyst	Policy advisor or administrator	Publisher
Surveyor	Labor relations	Mass communications
Market researcher	Legislator	Advertising
Economic analyst	Census worker	Writer or commentator
Public opinion pollster	International agency representative	Journalist
Interviewer	City planning officer	
Policy researcher	Prison administrator	
Telecommunications researcher	Law enforcement	
	FBI agent	
	Customs agent	

Source: American Sociological Association (2009).

Note: Surveys of college alumni with undergraduate majors in sociology indicate that this field of study prepares people for a broad range of occupations. Notice that some of these jobs require graduate or professional training. For further information, contact your department chair or the American Sociological Association in Washington, D.C., for a copy of *21st Century Careers With an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology*.

Thinking Sociologically

From what you have read so far, how might sociological topics (e.g., social interaction skills and knowledge of how groups work) be useful to you in your anticipated major and career?

What Employers Want

Ask employers what they want in a new hire, and the focus is likely to be on writing, speaking, and analytical skills—especially when the new employee will be faced with complex problems. In addition, acceptance of other cultures, the ability to work effectively in diverse teams, and the ability to gather and interpret quantitative information are key needs. Table 1.3 on page 16 indicates in the left column what employers want from college graduates; the right column indicates the skills and competencies that are part of most sociological training. Compare the two, noting the high levels of overlap.

These competencies show that skills stressed in the sociology curriculum are also those sought by employers: an ability to understand and work with others, research and computer skills, planning and organizing, oral and written communication competency, and critical thinking skills (WorldWideLearn 2007).

We now have a general idea of what sociology is and what sociologists do. It should be apparent that sociology is a broad field of interest; sociologists study all aspects of human social behavior. The next section of this chapter shows how the parts of the social world that sociologists study relate to each other, and it outlines the model you will follow as you continue to learn about sociology.

Thinking Sociologically

Imagine that you are a mayor, legislator, police chief, or government official. You make decisions based on information gathered by social science research rather than on your own intuition or assumptions. What are some advantages to this decision-making method?

Table 1.3 What Employers Want and What Sociology Majors Can Deliver

<i>Employers Who Want Colleges to “Place More Emphasis” on Essential Learning Outcomes</i>		<i>Traits and Knowledge That Are Developed in Most Sociological Training</i>
<i>Knowledge of human culture</i>	<i>% Seeking</i>	<i>Skills and Competencies</i>
1. Global issues	72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knowledge of global issues. ➤ Sensitivity to diversity and differences in cultural values and traditions.
2. The role of the United States in the world	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sociological perspective on the United States and world.
3. Cultural values and traditions— U.S. and global	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Understanding diversity. ➤ Working with others (ability to work toward a common goal).
<i>Intellectual and practical skills</i>	<i>% Seeking</i>	<i>Skills and Competencies</i>
4. Teamwork skills in diverse groups	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Effective leadership skills (ability to take charge and make decisions). ➤ Interpersonal skills (working with diverse coworkers).
5. Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Analytical and research skills. ➤ Organizing thoughts and information. ➤ Planning effectively (ability to design, plan, organize, and implement projects and to be self-motivated).
6. Written and oral communication	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Communication skills (listening, verbal and written communication). ➤ Working with peers. ➤ Effective interaction in group situations.
7. Information literacy	70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knowledge of how to find information one needs—online or in a library.
8. Creativity and innovation	70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Flexibility, adaptability, and multitasking (ability to set priorities, manage multiple tasks, adapt to changing situations, and handle pressure).
9. Complex problem solving	64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ability to conceptualize and solve problems. ➤ Ability to be creative (working toward meeting the organization’s goals).
10. Quantitative reasoning	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Computer and technical literacy (basic understanding of computer hardware and software programs). ➤ Statistical analysis.
<i>Personal and social responsibility</i>	<i>% Seeking</i>	<i>Skills and Competencies</i>
11. Intercultural competence (teamwork in diverse groups)	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Personal values (honesty, flexibility, work ethic, dependability, loyalty, positive attitude, professionalism, self-confidence, willingness to learn). ➤ Working with others Start (ability to work toward a common goal).
12. Intercultural knowledge (global issues)	72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knowledge of global issues.

Source: American Sociological Association (2009), Hansen and Hansen (2003) and WorldWideLearn (2007).

The Social World Model

Think about the different groups you depend on and interact with on a daily basis. You wake up to greet members of your family or your roommate. You go to a larger group—a

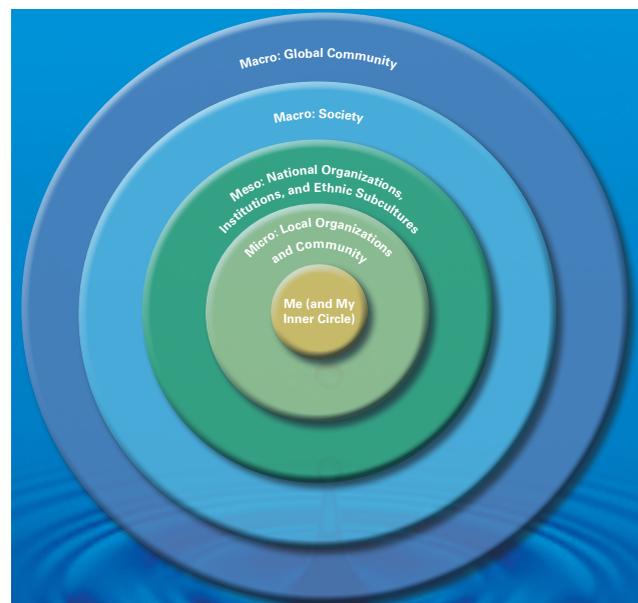
class—that exists within an even larger organization—the college or university. Understanding sociology and comprehending the approach of this book requires a grasp of **levels of analysis**, that is, *social groups from the smallest to the largest*. It may be relatively easy to picture small groups such as a family, a sports team, or a sorority or fraternity.



These men carry the supplies for a new school to be built in their local community—Korphe, Pakistan. The trek of more than 20 miles up mountainous terrain was difficult, but their commitment to neighbors and children of the community made it worthwhile. The project was a local one (micro level), but it also was made possible by an international organization—Central Asia Institute.

It is more difficult to visualize large groups such as corporations—the Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, Eddie Bauer, General Motors Company, or Starbucks—or organizations such as local or state governments. The largest groups include nations or international organizations, such as the sprawling networks of the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Groups of various sizes shape our lives. Sociological analysis involves understanding these groups at various levels of analysis, and the connections between them.

The **social world model** helps us picture *the levels of analysis in our social surroundings as an interconnected series of small groups, organizations, institutions, and societies*. Sometimes, these groups are connected by mutual support and cooperation, but sometimes, there are conflicts and power struggles over access to resources. What we are asking you to do here and throughout this book is to develop a sociological imagination—the basic lens used by sociologists. Picture the social world as connected levels of increasingly larger circles. To understand the units or parts in each circle of the social world model, look at the social world model shown to the right and at the beginning of each chapter.



This social world model will be used throughout our book to illustrate how each topic fits into the big picture—our social world. The social world also has two main parts that occur at each level—social structures and social processes.

Social Structures

Picture the human body, held together by bones and muscles. The units that make up that body include the brain, heart, lungs, and kidneys. In a similar manner, **social units** are *interconnected parts of the social world ranging from small groups to societies*. These connect to make the **social structure**—*the stable patterns of interactions, statuses, roles, and organizations that provide stability for the society and bring order to individuals' lives*. Those social units include dyads, two people such as a husband and wife; small groups like the members of a family; community organizations including schools and faith communities; large-scale organizations such as political parties or state and national governments; and global societies such as the United Nations. All of these social units combine to make up a system that brings order to our lives. Think about these parallels



This refugee mother and child from Mozambique represent the smallest social unit, a dyad. In this case, they are trying to survive with help from larger groups such as the United Nations.

between the structure that holds together the human body and the structure that holds together societies and their parts.

Sometimes, however, the units in the social structure conflict. For example, a religion that teaches that birth control is wrong may conflict with the health care system regarding how to provide care to women. This issue has been in the news lately as many religious organizations have fought against the 2010 Affordable Care Act in the United States, which requires that employers provide birth control to those who wish to receive it.

Social institutions are the largest units that make up every society—*organized, patterned, and enduring sets of social structures that provide guidelines for behavior and help each society meet its basic survival needs*. Think about the idea that all societies have some form of family, education, religion, politics, economics, science, sports, health care, and military. These are the institutions that provide the setting for activities essential to human and societal survival. For example, we cannot survive without an economic institution to provide guidelines and a structure for meeting our basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Likewise, we would never make it to adulthood as functioning members of society without the family, the most basic of all institutions. Most social units you can think of fall under one of these institutions. Like the system of organs that make up our bodies—heart, lungs, kidneys, bladder—all social institutions are interrelated. Just as a change in one part of the body affects all others, a change in one institution affects the others.

The **national society**, one of the largest social units in our model, includes *a population of people, usually living within a specified geographic area, who are connected by common ideas and are subject to a particular political authority*. It also features a social structure with groups and institutions. In addition to having relatively permanent geographic and political boundaries, national societies have one or more languages and a unique way of life. In most cases, national societies involve countries or large regions where the inhabitants share a common identity as members. In certain other instances, such as contemporary Great Britain, a single national society may include several groups of people who consider themselves distinct nationalities (e.g., Welsh, English, Scottish, and Irish within the United Kingdom). Such multicultural societies may or may not be harmonious. Although a national society is one of the largest social units, it is still a subsystem of the interdependent global system.

Thinking Sociologically

Think about how a major conflict or change in your family (micro level) might affect your education, economic situation, or health care. How might change in one national institution such as health care affect change in another institution (such as the family or the economy)?



Social Processes

If social structure is similar to the human body's skeletal structure, social processes are similar to what keeps the body alive—beating heart, lungs processing oxygen, stomach processing nutrients. **Social processes** take place through actions of people in institutions and other social units. The process of socialization teaches individuals how to become productive members of society. It takes place through actions of families, educational systems, religious organizations, and other social units. Socialization is essential for the continuation of any society because it teaches members the thoughts and actions needed to survive in their society. Another process, conflict, occurs between individuals or groups over money, jobs, and other needed resources. The process of change is also a continuous pattern in every social unit; change in one unit affects other units of the social world, often in a chain reaction. For instance, change in the quality of health care can affect the workforce; a beleaguered workforce can affect the economy; instability in the economy can affect families, as breadwinners lose jobs.

Sociologists generally do not judge these social processes as good or bad. Rather, sociologists try to identify, understand, and explain processes that take place within social units. Picture these processes as overlying and penetrating our whole social world, from small groups to societies. Social units would be lifeless without the action brought about by social processes, just as body parts would be lifeless without the processes of electrical impulses shooting from the brain to each organ or the oxygen transmitted by blood coursing through our arteries to sustain each organ.

The Environment of Our Social World

Surrounding each social unit is an **environment**. It includes everything that influences the social unit, such as its physical and organizational surroundings and technological innovations. This does not refer to just our physical environment, but is actually much broader. Each unit has an environment to which it must adjust, just as each individual has a unique environment, including family, friends, and other social units.

Some parts of the environment are more important to the individual or social unit than others. Your local church, synagogue, or mosque is located in a community environment. That religious organization may seem autonomous and independent, but it depends on its national organization for guidelines and support; the local police force to protect the building from vandalism; and the local economy to provide jobs to members so that the members, in turn, can support the organization. If the religious education program is going to train children to understand the scriptures, the local schools are needed to teach the

children to read. A religious group may also be affected by other religious bodies, competing with one another for potential members from the community. These religious groups may work cooperatively—organizing a summer program for children or jointly sponsoring a holy-day celebration—or they may define one another as evil, each trying to stigmatize the other. Moreover, one local religious group may be composed primarily of professional and business people, and another group mostly of laboring people. The religious groups may experience conflict in part because they each serve different socioeconomic constituencies. The point is that to understand a social unit or the human body, we must consider the structure and processes within the unit, as well as the interaction with that unit's surrounding environment. A perfect relationship or complete harmony between the social units is unusual. Social units are often motivated by self-interests and self-preservation, with the result that they compete with other groups and units for resources (time, money, skills, energy of members). Therefore, social units within the society are often in conflict. Whether groups are in conflict or mutually supportive does not change their interrelatedness; units are interdependent. The nature of that interdependence is likely to change over time and can be studied using the scientific method.

Studying the Social World: Levels of Analysis

Picture for a moment your sociology class as a social unit in your social world. Students (individuals) make up the class, the class (a small group) is offered by the sociology department, the sociology department (a large group) is part of the college or university, the university (an organization) is located in a community and follows the practices approved by the social institution (education) of which it is a part, and education is an institution located within a nation. Practices the university follows are determined by a larger accrediting agency that provides guidelines and oversight for institutions. The national society, represented by the national government, is shaped by global events—technological and economic competition between nations, natural disasters, global warming, wars, and terrorist attacks. Such events influence national policies and goals, including policies for the educational system. Thus, global tensions and conflicts may shape the curriculum taught in the local classroom.

Each of these social units—from the smallest (the individual student) to the largest (society and the global system)—is referred to as a level of analysis (see Table 1.4 on page 20). These levels are illustrated in the social world model at the beginning of each chapter, and their relation to that chapter's content is shown through examples in the model.



Advertising

A Social Theory of War



Table 1.4 The Structure of Society and Levels of Analysis

	<i>Level</i>	<i>Parts of Education</i>
Micro-level analysis	Interpersonal	Sociology class; study group cramming for an exam
	Local organizations	University; sociology department
Meso-level analysis	Organizations and institutions	State boards of education; National Education Association
	Ethnic groups within a nation	Islamic madrassas or Jewish yeshiva school systems
Macro-level analysis	Nations	Policy and laws governing education
	Global community	World literacy programs



MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS

A focus on *individual or small-group interaction in specific situations* is called **micro-level analysis**. Micro-level analysis is important because face-to-face interaction forms the basic foundation of all social groups and organizations to which we belong, from families to corporations to societies. We are members of many groups at the micro level.

To understand micro-level analysis, consider the problem of spousal abuse. Why does a person remain in an abusive relationship, knowing that each year thousands of people are killed by their lovers or mates and millions more are severely and repeatedly battered? To answer this, several possible micro-level explanations can be considered. One view is that the abusive partner has convinced this person that she is powerless in the relationship or that she “deserves” the abuse. Therefore, she gives up in despair of ever being able to alter the situation. The abuse is viewed as part of the interaction—of action and reaction—and the partners come to see abuse as what comprises “normal” interaction.

Another explanation for remaining in the abusive relationship is that the person may have been brought up in a family situation where battering was an everyday part of life. However unpleasant and unnatural this may seem to outsiders, it may be seen by the abuser or by the abused as a “normal” and acceptable part of intimate relationships.

Another possibility is that an abused woman may fear that her children will be harmed or that she will be harshly judged by her family or church if she “abandons” her mate. She may have few resources to make leaving the abusive situation possible. To study each of these possible explanations involves analysis at the micro level because each focuses on interpersonal interaction factors rather than on society-wide trends or forces. Meso-level analysis leads to quite different explanations for abuse.



MESO-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Meso-level analysis involves looking at intermediate-sized *units smaller than the nation but larger than the local community or even the region*. This level includes national

institutions (e.g., the economy of a country, the national educational system, or the political system within a country); nationwide organizations (e.g., a political party, a soccer league, or a national women’s rights organization); nationwide corporations (e.g., Ford Motor Company or IBM); and ethnic groups that have an identity as a group (e.g., Jews, Mexican Americans, or the Lakota Sioux in the United States). Organizations, institutions, and ethnic communities are smaller than the nation or global social forces, but they are still beyond the everyday personal experience and control of individuals. They are intermediate in the sense of being too large for members to know everyone in the group, but they are not nation-states. For example, states in the United States, provinces in Canada, prefectures in Japan, or cantons in Switzerland are more accessible and easier to change than the national bureaucracies of countries. Thus, they are meso-level.

In discussing micro-level analysis, we used the example of domestic violence. We must be careful not to “blame the victim”—in this case, the abused person—for getting into an abusive relationship and for failing to act in ways that stop the abuse. To avoid blaming victims for their own suffering, many social scientists look for broader explanations of spousal abuse, such as the social conditions at the meso level of society that cause the problem (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz 2006). When a pattern of behavior in society occurs with increasing frequency, it cannot be understood solely from the point of view of individual cases or micro-level causes. Remember the sociological imagination. For instance, sociological findings show that fluctuations in spousal or child abuse at the micro level are related to levels of unemployment at the meso and macro levels. Frustration resulting in abuse erupts within families when poor economic conditions make it nearly impossible for people to find stable and reliable means of supporting themselves and their families. The message here is that economic issues must be addressed if violence in the home is to be lessened.



MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS

Studying the largest social units in the social world, called **macro-level analysis**, involves looking at *entire nations*,

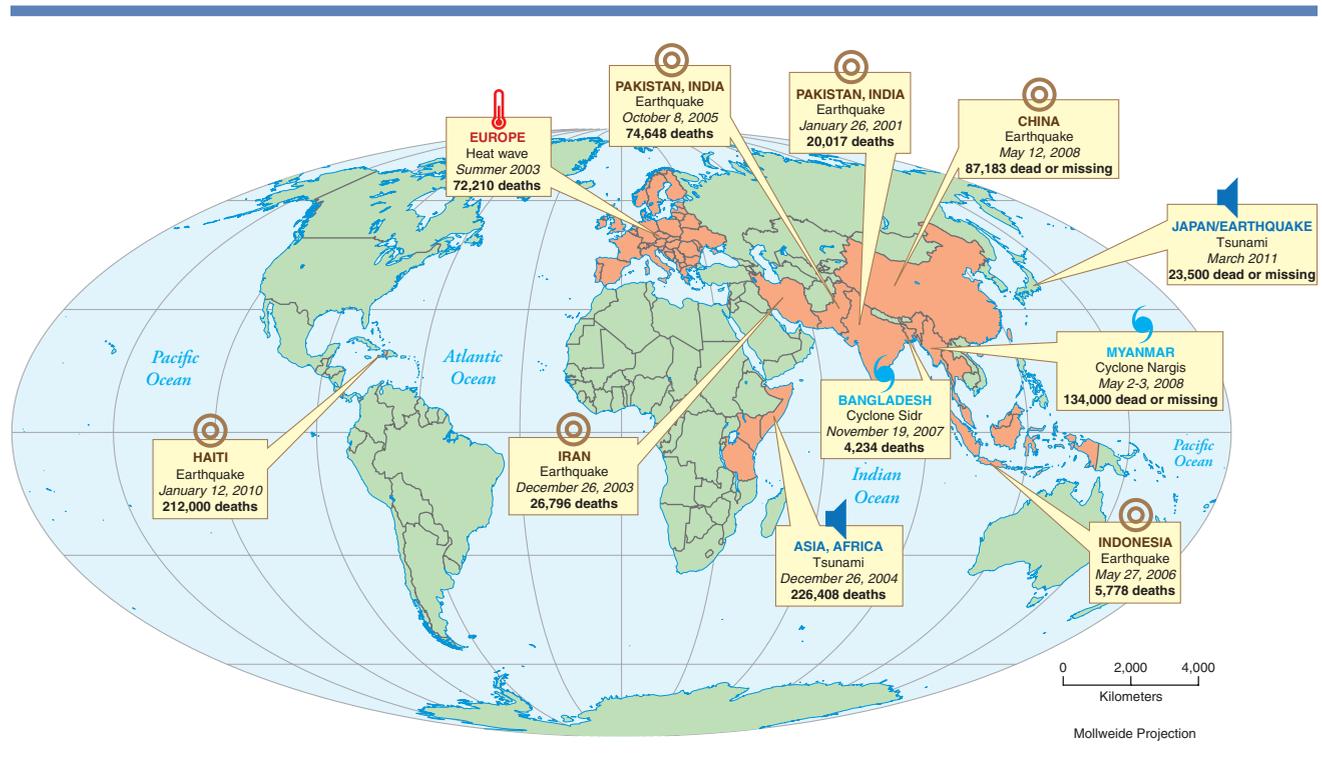


global forces, and international social trends. Macro-level analysis is essential to our understanding of how larger societal forces and global events shape our everyday lives. A natural disaster, such as the 2011 tsunami off the coast of Japan or Hurricane Sandy on the east coast of the United States in 2012, can disrupt both production and supply chains. Because much of our cuisine is now imported from other parts of the world, something as simple as what we are able to put on our family dinner table may be affected by such a global event. Map 1.1 shows some of the most deadly natural disasters of the past few years. Likewise, a political conflict on the other side of the planet can lead to war, which means that a member of your family may be called up to active duty and sent into harm's way more than 7,000 miles from your home. Each member of the family may experience individual stress, have trouble concentrating, and feel ill with worry. The entire globe has become an interdependent social unit. If we are to prosper and thrive in the twenty-first century, we need to understand connections that go beyond our local communities.

Even patterns such as domestic violence, considered as micro- and meso-level issues earlier, can be examined at the macro level. Violence against women (especially rape) occurs at very different rates in different societies, with some societies being completely free of rape and others having a “culture



This photo depicts the damage following the catastrophic earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010. This event not only changed the lives of people in Haiti—one of the poorest countries in the world—but had ripple effects on economic exchange, relief efforts around the globe, and international trade. Those, in turn, can affect the cost of various products such as the foods you put on your table.



Map 1.1 The Deadliest Natural Disasters From January 2001 to April 2013

Source: EM-DAT emergency events database, Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. Map by Anna Versluis.

of rape” (Kristof and WuDunn 2009). Consider the 2013 case of a medical student in India who was gang-raped on a bus and subsequently died, creating an outpouring of concern about abuse of women. The most consistent predictor of violence against women is a macho conception of masculine roles and personality. A society or subgroup within society that teaches males that the finest expression of their masculinity is physical strength and domination is very likely to have battered women (Burn 2011; Lindow 2009). Societies that do not define masculinity in terms of dominance and control are virtually free of domestic violence and rape.

The point is that understanding individual human behavior often requires investigation of larger societal beliefs that support that behavior. Worldwide patterns may tell us something about a social problem and offer new lenses for understanding variables that contribute to a problem. Try the next “Engaging Sociology” activity to test your understanding of levels of analysis and the sociological imagination.

Thinking Sociologically

What factors influenced you to take this sociology class? Micro-level factors might include your advisor, your schedule, and a previous interest in sociology. At the meso and macro levels, what other factors influenced you?

Distinctions between each level of analysis are not always sharply delineated. The micro level shades into the meso level, and the lines between the meso level and the macro level are blurry. Still, it is clear that in some micro-level social units, you know everyone, or at least every member of the social unit is only two degrees of relatedness away. That means every person in the social unit knows someone whom you also know. We also all participate in meso-level social units that are smaller than the nation but can be huge. Millions of people may belong to the same religious denomination or the same political party. We have connections with those people, and our lives are affected by people we do not even know. Consider political activities in the United States and other countries that take place on the Internet. In political campaigns, millions of individuals join organizations such as the Tea Party movement and MoveOn.org. People living thousands of miles from one another were

united financially and in spirit to support Obama-Biden or Romney-Ryan in the 2012 U.S. presidential election. Thus, the meso level is different from the micro level, but both influence us. The macro level is even more removed from the individual, but its impact can change our lives.

The social world model presented in the chapter opening illustrates the interplay of micro-, meso-, and macro-level forces, and Figure 1.2 shows how this micro-to-macro model should be seen as a continuum. In the next “Sociology Around the World” we examine a village in Tunisia to see how macro-level forces influence a meso-level local community and individual micro-level lives.

Thinking Sociologically

Place the groups to which you belong in a hierarchy from micro to meso to macro levels. Note how each social unit and its subunits exist within a larger unit until you reach the level of the entire global community.

The Social World Model and This Book

Throughout this book, the social world model will be used as the framework for understanding the social units, social processes, and surrounding environment. Each social unit and process is taken out, examined, and returned to its place in the interconnected social world model so that you can comprehend the whole social world and its parts, like putting a puzzle together. Look for the model at the beginning of every chapter. You can also expect the micro-, meso-, and macro-level dimensions of issues to be explored throughout the text.

The social world engulfs each of us from the moment of our birth until we die. Throughout our lives, each of us is part of a set of social relationships that provide guidelines for how we interact with others and how we see ourselves. This does not mean that human behavior is strictly determined by our links to the social world. Humans are more than mere puppets whose behavior is programmed by social structure. It does mean, however, that influence between the individual and the larger social world is reciprocal. We are influenced by and we have influence on our social environment. The social world is a human creation, and we can and do change that which we create.

Micro social units **Meso social units** **Macro social units**

Figure 1.2 The Micro-to-Macro Continuum



Vaccinations

Linking Micro, Meso, and Macro



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Engaging Sociology

Micro-Meso-Macro

Look at the list of various groups and other social units below. Identify which group would belong in each level—(1) micro, (2) meso, or (3) macro. The definitions should help you make your decisions, but keep in mind that not all social units fall clearly into one level. Answers are found online at www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed3e.

Micro-level groups: Small, local community social units in which everyone knows everyone or knows someone whom you also know.

Meso-level groups: Social units of intermediate size, usually large enough that many members may never have heard the names of many other members and may have little access to the leaders, yet not so large as to seem distant or the leaders unapproachable. If members do not know a leader themselves, they probably know someone who is friends with the leader.

Macro-level groups: Large social units, usually quite bureaucratic, which operate at a national or a global level. Most members are unlikely to know or have communicated with the leaders personally or know someone who knows them. The “business” of these groups is of international import and implication. A macro-level system is one in which *most* of the members are within at least five degrees of relatedness to each other—that is, they know someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows the person in question.

Engaging with Sociology

Indicate for each item below the correct category: 1, 2, or 3.

1. Micro social units

- _____ Your nuclear family
- _____ The United Nations
- _____ A local chapter of the Lions Club or the Rotary Club
- _____ Your high school baseball team
- _____ India
- _____ NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
- _____ The First Baptist Church in Muncie, Indiana
- _____ The World Bank
- _____ A family reunion
- _____ Google, Inc. (international)
- _____ The Department of Education for the Commonwealth of Kentucky
- _____ The show choir in your local high school
- _____ African Canadians
- _____ The Dineh (Navajo) people

2. Meso social units

- _____ Canada
- _____ The Republican Party in the United States
- _____ The World Court
- _____ A fraternity at your college
- _____ The International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- _____ The Ministry of Education for Spain
- _____ The Roman Catholic Church (with its headquarters at the Vatican in Rome)
- _____ Australia
- _____ The Chi Omega National Sorority
- _____ Boy Scout Troop #3 in Marion, Ohio
- _____ Al-Qaeda (an international alliance of terrorist organizations)
- _____ The provincial government for the Canadian province of Ontario
- _____ The United States of America

3. Macro social units

Most of these fall into clear categories, but some are “on the line,” and one could legitimately place them in more than one group. See how your authors rate these at www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed3e. There is a second exercise online that asks you to apply these categories to identify some connections.



Sociology Around the World

Tunisian Village Meets the Modern World

This is a story of change as macro-level innovations enter a small traditional village. It illustrates how the social units of the social world model and the three levels of analysis enter into sociological analysis. As you read, try to identify both the units and levels of analysis being discussed and the impact of globalization on a community that cannot know what these changes will bring.

The workday began at dawn as usual in the small fishing village on the coast of Tunisia, North Africa. Men prepared their nets and boats for the day, while women prepared breakfast and dressed the young children for school. About 10 A.M., it began—the event that would change this picturesque village forever. Bulldozers arrived first, followed by trench diggers and cement mixers, to begin their overhaul of the village.

Villagers had suspected something was afoot when important-looking officials arrived two months earlier with foreign businessmen, followed by two teams of surveyors. Without their approval, the government had sold land that the village had held communally for generations to the foreigners so they could build a multimillion-dollar hotel and casino. When concerned citizens asked what was happening in their village, they were assured that their way of life would not change. The contractor from the capital city of Tunis said they would still have access to the beach and ocean for fishing. He also promised them many benefits from the hotel project—jobs, help from the government to improve roads and housing, and a higher standard of living.

The contractor had set up camp in a trailer on the beach, and word soon got around that he would be hiring some men for higher hourly wages than they could make in a day or even month of fishing. Rivalries soon developed between friends over who should apply for the limited number of jobs.

As the bulldozers moved in, residents had mixed opinions about the changes taking place in their village and their lives. Some saw the changes as exciting

opportunities for new jobs and recognition of their beautiful village; others viewed the changes as destroying a lifestyle that was all they and generations before them had known.

Today, the village is dwarfed by the huge hotel, and the locals are looked on as quaint curiosities by the European tourists. Fishing has become a secondary source of employment to working in the hotel and casino or selling local crafts and trinkets to souvenir-seeking visitors. Many women are now employed outside the home by the hotel, creating new family structures as grandparents, unemployed men, and other relations take over child-rearing responsibilities.

To understand the changes in this one small village and other communities facing similar change, a sociologist uses the sociological imagination. This involves understanding the global, political, and economic trends that are affecting this village and its inhabitants (macro-level analysis). It requires comprehension of transformation of social institutions within the nation (meso-level analysis). Finally, sociological investigation explores how change impacts the individual Tunisian villagers (micro-level analysis).

To sociologically analyze the process of change, it is important to understand what is going on in this situation. The government officials and the international business representatives negotiated a lucrative deal to benefit both Tunisia and the business corporation. The community and its powerless residents presented few obstacles to the project from the point of view of the government, and in fact, government officials reasoned that villagers could benefit from new jobs. However, economic and family roles of the villagers—how they earned a living and how they raised their children—changed dramatically with the disruption to their traditional ways. The process of change began with the demand of people far from Tunisia for vacation spots in the sun. Ultimately, this process reached the village's local environment, profoundly affecting the village and everyone in it. For this Tunisian village, the old ways are gone forever.

It acts on us, and we act on it. In this sense, social units are not static but are constantly emerging and changing in the course of human action and interaction.

The difficulty for most of us is that we are so caught up in our daily concerns that we fail to see and understand the social forces that are at work in our personal environments. What we need are the conceptual and methodological tools to help us gain a more complete and accurate perspective on the social world. The ideas, theories, methods, and levels of analysis employed by sociologists are the very tools that will help give us that perspective. To use an analogy, each different lens of a camera gives the photographer a unique view of the world. Wide-angle lenses, close-up lenses, telephoto lenses, and special filters each serve a purpose in creating a distinctive picture or frame of the world. No one lens will provide the complete picture. Yet, the combination of images produced by various lenses allows us to examine in detail aspects of the world we might ordinarily overlook. That is what the sociological perspective gives us: a unique set of tools to see the social world with more penetrating clarity. In seeing the social world from a sociological perspective, we are better able to use that knowledge constructively, and we are better able to understand who we are as social beings. Try identifying the levels of analysis in the following “Engaging Sociology.”



Building and staffing of this resort in Tunisia—which is patronized by affluent people from other continents (global)—changed the local economy, the culture, the social structures of family (meso level), and individual lives (micro level) in the local community.

Engaging Sociology

Micro-Meso-Macro: An Application Exercise

Imagine that there has been a major economic downturn (recession) in your local community. Identify three possible events at each level (micro, meso, and macro) that might contribute to the economic troubles in your town.

The micro (local community) level:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The meso (intermediate—state, organizational, or ethnic subculture) level:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The macro (national/global) level:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Social Construction of Reality

Social Units as Product of Human action



The next issue, then, is how we gather data that inform our understanding and influence on the social world. When we say we know something about society, how is it that we

know? What is considered evidence in sociology, and what lens (theory) do we use to interpret the data? These are the central issues of the next chapter.



What Have We Learned?

- *How can sociology help me understand my own life, who I am, and how I relate to others?* A version of this question was posed at the beginning of the chapter. Throughout this book you will find ideas and examples that will help answer these questions and expand on the *sociological imagination*. These ideas will illustrate how sociology can help you communicate more effectively and understand your interactions with others.
- *How do sociologists help us understand and even improve our lives?* Understanding organizations and bureaucracies can make us better family members, more effective citizens, and more adept at getting along with coworkers. As citizens of democracies, we need to understand how to influence our social environments, from city councils, school boards, health care systems, and state legislatures to congressional, presidential, and other governmental organizations.
- *How do national policies and global events influence my life?* As the world changes, we need to be aware of global issues and how they affect us, from our job changes and lost jobs to skills demanded in the 21st century.
- We live in a complex social world with many layers of interaction. If we really want to understand our own lives, we need to comprehend the levels of analysis that affect our lives and the connections between those levels. To do so wisely, we need both objective lenses for viewing this complex social world and accurate, valid information (facts) about the society. As the science of society, sociology can provide both tested empirical data and a broad, analytical perspective, as you will

learn in the next chapter. Here is a summary of points from Chapter 1.

Key Points:

- Humans are, at their very core, social animals—more akin to pack or herd animals than to individualistic cats. (See pp. 6–7.)
- A core concept in sociology is the *sociological imagination*. It requires that we see how our individual lives and personal troubles are shaped by historical and structural events outside of our everyday lives. It also prods us to see how we can influence our society. (See p. 10.)
- Sociology is a social science and, therefore, uses the tools of the sciences to establish credible evidence to understand our social world. As a science, sociology is scientific and objective rather than value laden. (See pp. 11–12.)
- Sociology has pragmatic applications, including those that are essential for the job market. (See pp. 12–16.)
- Sociology focuses on social units or groups, on social structures such as institutions, on social processes that give a social unit its dynamic character, and on their environments. (See pp. 16–19.)
- The social world model is the organizing theme of this book. Using the sociological imagination, we can understand our social world best by clarifying the interconnections between micro, meso, and macro levels of the social system. Each chapter of this book will examine society at these three levels of analysis. (See pp. 19–22.)

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a problem that impacts you personally (e.g., the high cost of tuition, unemployment, divorce) and explain how you would make sense of it differently if you viewed it as (a) a personal problem or (b) a public issue. How do possible solutions to the problem differ depending on how you view it?
2. How can sociology help you become a more informed citizen and better able to understand how government policies impact society?
3. What are three ways the sociological perspective can help you to succeed in college and the workforce?
4. Think of some of the ways the social institutions of government and education interconnect. Why is it in the interest of the government to support higher education? How has government support (or lack of support) impacted your college experience?
5. Imagine you would like to look at reasons behind the college dropout rate in the United States. How might the questions you ask differ based on whether your analysis was on the micro, meso, or macro level? Why?

Contributing to Our Social World: What Can We Do?

At the end of this and all subsequent chapters, you will find suggestions for work, service learning, internships, and volunteering that encourage you to apply the ideas discussed in the chapter. Suggestions for Chapter 1 focus on student organizations for sociology majors and nonmajors.

At the Local Level

- *Student organizations and clubs* enable students to meet other students interested in sociology, carry out group activities, get to know faculty members, and attend presentations by guest speakers. These clubs are usually not limited to sociology majors. If no such organization exists, consider forming one with the help of a faculty member. Sociologists also have an undergraduate honors society, Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD). Visit the AKD website at <http://alphakappadelta.org> to learn more about the society and what it takes to form a chapter.

At the Regional, National, and Global Levels

- *The American Sociological Association (ASA)* is the leading professional organization of sociologists in the United States. Visit the ASA website at www.asanet.org, and take a look around it. You will find many programs and initiatives of special interest to students. If you are interested in becoming a sociologist, be sure to look at the links under the heading “News on the Profession.”

The organization also sponsors an Honors Program at the annual meeting that introduces students to the profession and gives students a heads-up on being successful in sociology and graduate education. For more information go to <http://www.asanet.org/students/honors.cfm>.

- *State and regional sociological associations* are especially student-friendly and feature publications and sessions at their annual meetings specifically for undergraduates. The ASA lists organizations and their website addresses, with direct links to their home pages, at http://www.asanet.org/about/Aligned_Associations.cfm.
- *The International Sociological Association (ISA)* serves sociologists from around the world. Every four years, the organization sponsors a large meeting (Yokohama, Japan, in July 2014). Specialty groups within ISA hold smaller conferences throughout the world during the other years. Check out www.isa-sociology.org.

Visit www.sagepub.com/oswcondensed3e for online activities, sample tests, and other helpful information. Select “Chapter 1: Sociology” for chapter-specific activities.