# SOC 301: SOCIAL PROBLEMS



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# SOC 301:Social Problems (Lugo)

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# Licensing

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 1: An Introduction to Sociology

Sociology is the study of social behavior or society, including its origins, development, organization, networks, and institutions. It is a social science that uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, disorder, and change. Many sociologists aim to conduct research that may be applied directly to social policy and welfare, while others focus primarily on refining the theoretical understanding of social processes. Subject matter ranges from the micro-sociology level of individual agency and interaction to the macro level of systems and the social structure.


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Thumbnail: Inside view of Ruca Che arena in Neuquén, Argentina, during a rock concert. (Public domain; Diegoluciano)

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# 1.1: Introduction



Figure 1.1: Every day, 7.5 million people use the railways around Mumbai, India. The vast majority of them don't know each other, but they share much in common as they move together. (Credit: Rajarshi MITRA/flickr)

## Chapter Outline

1.1 What Is Sociology?
1.2 The History of Sociology
1.3 Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology
1.4 Why Study Sociology?

A busy commuter train station might seem like a very individualized place. Tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of strangers flow through with a singular purpose: to get where they need to go. Whether walking through main doors at a pace of a dozen people each second, or arriving by train hundreds at a time, the station can feel a bit like a balloon being pumped too full. Throngs of people cluster in tight bottlenecks until they burst through corridors and stairways and tunnels to reach the next stage of their journey. In some stations, walking against the crowd can be a tedious, nearly impossible process. And cutting across a river of determined commuters can be almost dangerous. Things are fast, relentless, and necessary.

But are those hundred thousand or half a million or, in the case of Tokyo's Shinjuku station, 3.5 million people really acting individually? It may seem surprising, but even with those numbers, strangers from across cities can synch up on the same schedules, use the same doors, take one leg of the trip together every day before separating into different directions. After just a few months, faces can become familiar, and senses can be tuned. An experienced commuter can tell where another person is going according to their pace and whatever announcement just went out; they may slow up a bit to let the other person pass, or hold a door open just a bit longer than usual, certain that someone will grab the handle behind them. Many regulars don't need to check the schedule board; they sense whether a train is running late or whether a track has changed simply by the movement of the crowd.

And then the customs develop: Which side to walk on, how fast to go, where to stand, how much space to leave between people on the escalator. When you board early, which seat should you take? When you see someone running for the train, do you jam the closing door with your foot? How does the crowd treat people who ask for food or money? What's the risk level in telling someone to be quiet?

Very few of these behaviors are taught. None are written down. But the transit hub, that pocket of constant flow, is an echo of its society. It takes on some aspects of the city and country around it, but its people also form an informal group of their own. Sociologists, as you will learn, may study these people. Sociologists may seek to understand how they feel about their trip, be it proud or annoyed or just plain exhausted. Sociologists might study how length of commute relates to job satisfaction or family relationships. They may study the ways that conditions of a train station affect attitudes about government, or how the difficulty of commuting may lead people to relocate. This understanding isn't just a collection of interesting facts; it can influence government policy and spending decisions, employer interventions, and healthcare practices. The work sociologists do to understand our society, and the work you will do in learning about it, is meaningful to our lives and our futures.

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# 1.2: What Is Sociology?

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain concepts central to sociology.
- Describe how different sociological perspectives have developed.

## What Are Society and Culture?



Figure 1.2: Sociologists learn about society while studying one-to-one and group interactions. (Credit: GlacierNPS/Flickr)

Sociology is the scientific and systematic study of groups and group interactions, societies and social interactions, from small and personal groups to very large groups. A group of people who live in a defined geographic area, who interact with one another, and who share a common culture is what sociologists call a society.

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. Sociologists working from the micro-level study small groups and individual interactions, while those using macro-level analysis look at trends among and between large groups and societies. For example, a micro-level study might look at the accepted rules of conversation in various groups such as among teenagers or business professionals. In contrast, a macro-level analysis might research the ways that language use has changed over time or in social media outlets.

The term culture refers to the group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. Culture encompasses a group's way of life, from routine, everyday interactions to the most important parts of group members' lives. It includes everything produced by a society, including all the social rules.

Sociologists often study culture using the sociological imagination, which pioneer sociologist C. Wright Mills described as an awareness of the relationship between a person's behavior and experience and the wider culture that shaped the person's choices and perceptions. It's a way of seeing our own and other people's behavior in relationship to history and social structure (1959). One illustration of this is a person's decision to marry. In the United States, this choice is heavily influenced by individual feelings. However, the social acceptability of marriage relative to the person's circumstances also plays a part.

Remember, though, that culture is a product of the people in a society. Sociologists take care not to treat the concept of "culture" as though it were alive and real. The error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence is known as reification (Sahn, 2013).

## Studying Patterns: How Sociologists View Society

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns, social forces and influences put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

Consider the changes in U.S. families. The "typical" family in past decades consisted of married parents living in a home with their unmarried children. Today, the percent of unmarried couples, same-sex couples, single-parent and single-adult households is increasing, as well as is the number of expanded households, in which extended family members such as grandparents, cousins, or adult children live together in the family home. While 15 million mothers still make up the majority of single parents, 3.5 million fathers are also raising their children alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Increasingly, single people and cohabitating couples are choosing to raise children outside of marriage through surrogates or adoption.

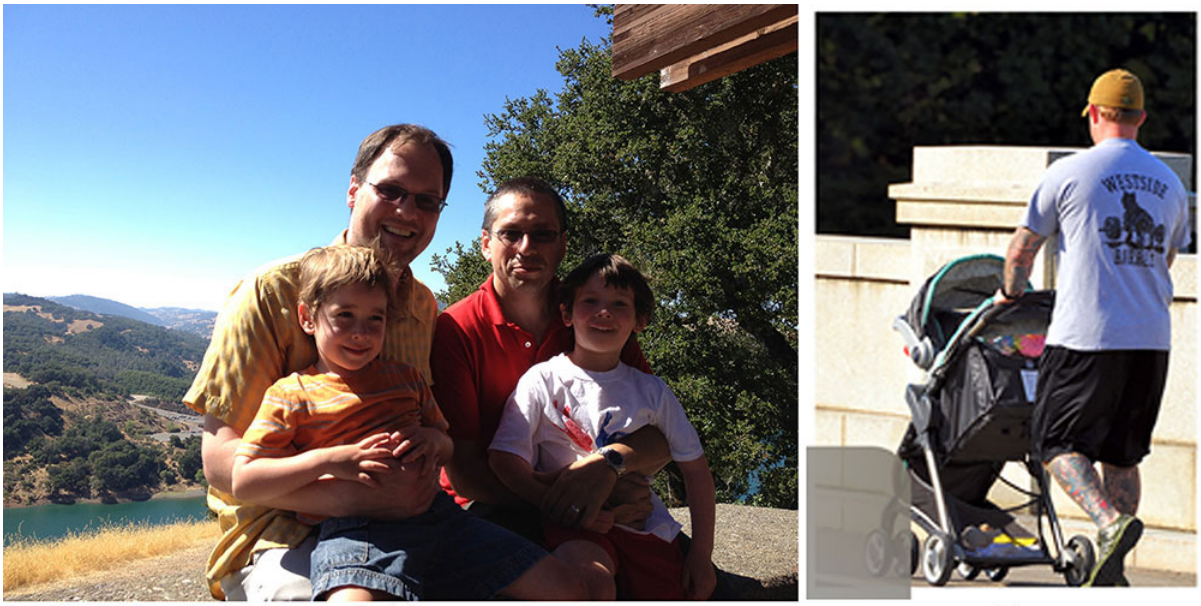



Figure 1.3: Modern U.S. families may be very different in makeup from what was historically typical. (Credit A: Paul Brody/flickr; B: Tony Alter/Wikimedia Commons)

Some sociologists study social facts—the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and cultural rules that govern social life—that may contribute to these changes in the family. Do people in the United States view marriage and family differently over the years? Do they view them differently than Peruvians? Do employment and economic conditions play a role in families? Other sociologists are studying the consequences of these new patterns, such as the ways children influence and are influenced by them and/or the changing needs for education, housing, and healthcare.

Sociologists identify and study patterns related to all kinds of contemporary social issues. The "Stop and Frisk" policy, the emergence of new political factions, how Twitter influences everyday communication—these are all examples of topics that sociologists might explore.

## Studying Part and Whole: How Sociologists View Social Structures

A key component of the sociological perspective is the idea that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior figuration.

Consider religion. While people experience religion in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context as a social institution. For instance, an individual's religious practice may be influenced by what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience (Elias, 1978). In simpler terms, figuration means that as one analyzes the social institutions in a society, the individuals using that institution in any fashion need to be 'figured' in to the analysis.

## Sociology in the Real World: Individual-Society Connections

When sociologist Nathan Kierns spoke to his friend Ashley (a pseudonym) about the move she and her partner had made from an urban center to a small Midwestern town, he was curious about how the social pressures placed on a lesbian couple differed from one community to the other. Ashley said that in the city they had been accustomed to getting looks and hearing comments when she and her partner walked hand in hand. Otherwise, she felt that they were at least being tolerated. There had been little to no outright discrimination.

Things changed when they moved to the small town for her partner’s job. For the first time, Ashley found herself experiencing direct discrimination because of her sexual orientation. Some of it was particularly hurtful. Landlords would not rent to them. Ashley, who is a highly trained professional, had a great deal of difficulty finding a new job.

When Nathan asked Ashley if she and her partner became discouraged or bitter about this new situation, Ashley said that rather than letting it get to them, they decided to do something about it. Ashley approached groups at a local college and several churches in the area. Together they decided to form the town's first Gay-Straight Alliance.

The alliance has worked successfully to educate their community about same-sex couples. It also worked to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination that Ashley and her partner experienced in the town and how those could be eliminated. The alliance has become a strong advocacy group, and it is working to attain equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBTQ individuals.

Kierns observed that this is an excellent example of how negative social forces can result in a positive response from individuals to bring about social change (Kierns, 2011).

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# 1.3: The History of Sociology

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain why sociology emerged when it did
- Describe how sociology became a separate academic discipline



(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)

Figure 1.4: People have been thinking like sociologists long before sociology became a distinct academic discipline: Plato and Aristotle, Confucius, Khaldun, Voltaire, and Mary Wollenscraft set the stage for modern sociology. (Credit: A, B, C, and E Wikimedia Commons; D: publicdomainfiles.com.)

For millennia, people have been fascinated by the relationships between individuals and societies. Many topics studied by ancient philosophers in their desire to describe an ideal society are still studied in modern sociology, including theories of social conflict, economics, social cohesion, and power in a continued attempt to describe an ideal society (Hannoum, 2003). Although we are more familiar with western philosophers like Plato and his student, Aristotle, eastern philosophers also thought about social issues.

Until recently, we have very few texts that are non-religious in nature that theorize about social life. From 4th century through the 19th century, the Catholic Church was the seat of power from today's Turkey in the east to western and northern Europe, including the British Isles. Only monks who were charged with rewriting holy texts by hand and the aristocracy were literate. Moreover, the Church consolidated power. In the year 800, Pope Leo III named Charlemagne, the king of Francia (today's France, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany) emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, giving one individual control over most of Europe. Doing so gave the Catholic Church the power to maintain its own traditions safeguard them from the influence of people practicing other religions. If any social patterns challenged any belief of the Church, those practitioners were massacred, burned at the stake, or labeled heretics. As a result, the records that we have are extremely subjective and do not offer an unbiased view of social practice.

In the 13th century, Ma Tuan-Lin, a Chinese historian, was the first to record, in his seminal encyclopedia titled *General Study of Literary Remains*, the social dynamics underlying and generating historical development.

In the 14th century, the Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) set the foundation for both modern sociology and economics. Khaldun proposed a theory of social conflict and provided a comparison of nomadic and sedentary life, an analysis of political economy, and a study connecting a tribe's social cohesion to its capacity for power (Hannoum, 2003). Khaldun often challenged authorities. As sociologists continue to study and report on social issues and problems, they often find themselves in the center of controversy.

From 1347 to 1522, the bubonic plague ravaged Europe, killing up to 35% of population (Armstrong, 2019). The plague dealt a major blow to the credibility of the Catholic Church. Out of this chaos emerged the the work of Copernicus, Galileo, Leonardo, Newton, Linnaeus, and other philosophers whose work sometimes contradicted church teachings. Events once held to be the product of the divine hand could be analyzed by human reason and observation and could be explained by scientific, testable, and retestable hypotheses. As literacy spread through conquests and colonization, more records and literature became available for sociologists and historians to put social puzzles together.

In the 18th century, Enlightenment philosophers developed general principles that could be used to explain social life. Thinkers such as John Locke, François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire), Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes responded to what they saw as social ills by writing on topics that they hoped would lead to social reform. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) wrote about women's

conditions in society. Like Harriet Martineau and Jane Addams, her works were long ignored by the male academic structure, but since the 1970s, Wollstonecraft has been widely considered the first feminist thinker of consequence. Ideas about economic systems, the family, health and hygiene, national offense and defense, were among the many concerns of social life.

The early 19th century saw great changes with the Industrial Revolution, increased mobility, and new kinds of employment. It was also a period of increased trade, travel, and globalization that exposed many people — for the first time—to societies and cultures other than their own. Millions of people moved into cities and many people turned away from their traditional religious beliefs. Ideas spread rapidly, groups were created, political decisions became public decisions. Among a new generation of philosophers, there were some who believed they could make sense of it all.

## Creating a Discipline: European Theorists



Figure 1.5: Early major European theorists. Top row, left to right: Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, and Herbert Spencer. Bottom row, left to right: Georg Simmel, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons; Julius Cornelius Schaarwächter/Public domain.)

### Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857)

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript (Fauré et al. 1999). In 1838, the term was reintroduced by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). They both thought that social scientists could study society using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also

believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000).

Comte named the scientific study of social patterns positivism. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that revealing the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new "positivist" age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

### Harriet Martineau (1802 – 1876)

Harriet Martineau introduced sociology to English speaking scholars through her translation of Comte's writing from French to English. She was an early analyst of social practices, including economics, social class, religion, suicide, government, and women's rights. Her career began with *Illustrations of Political Economy*, a work educating ordinary people about the principles of economics (Johnson, 2003). She later developed the first systematic methodological international comparisons of social institutions in two of her most famous sociological works: *Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838).

Martineau found the workings of capitalism at odds with the professed moral principles of people in the United States. She pointed out the faults with the free enterprise system in which workers were exploited and impoverished while business owners became wealthy. She further noted that the belief that all are created equal was inconsistent with the lack of women's rights. Much like Mary Wollstonecraft, Martineau was often discounted in her own time because academic sociology was a male-dominated profession.

### Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Karl Marx was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848, he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx's theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed.

Marx rejected Comte's positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers. Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to produce them, had developed in many nations.

Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. Communism is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership: everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism.

While his economic predictions did not materialize in the time frame he predicted, Marx's idea that social conflict leads to change in society is still one of the major theories used in modern sociology.

### Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

In 1873, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer published *The Study of Sociology*, the first book with the term "sociology" in the title. Spencer rejected much of Comte's philosophy as well as Marx's theory of class struggle and his support of communism. Instead, he favored a form of government that allowed market forces to control capitalism. His work influenced many early sociologists including Émile Durkheim (1858–1917). Spencer, using Charles Darwin's work as a comparison said, "This survival of the fittest, which I have here sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr. Darwin has called 'natural selection,' or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life." (Spencer, 1864) The statement is often misinterpreted and adopted by those who believe in the superiority of one race over another.

### Georg Simmel (1858–1918)

Georg Simmel was a German art critic who wrote widely on social and political issues as well. Simmel took an anti-positivism stance and addressed topics such as social conflict, the function of money, individual identity in city life, and the European fear of outsiders (Stapley 2010). Much of his work focused on micro-level theories and analyzed the dynamics of two-person and three-person groups. His work also emphasized individual culture as the creative capacities of individuals (Ritzer and Goodman 2004).

### Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

Émile Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by establishing the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* in 1895. In *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim further laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive state into a capitalist, industrial society. According to Durkheim, people rise to their proper levels in society based on merit.

Durkheim believed that sociologists could study objective social facts (Poggi, 2000). He also believed that through such studies it would be possible to determine if a society was "healthy" or "pathological." Healthy societies were stable while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in social norms.

In 1897, Durkheim attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of his rules of social research when he published a work titled *Suicide*. Durkheim examined suicide statistics in different police districts to research differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. He attributed the differences to socio-religious forces rather than to individual or psychological causes.

### Max Weber (1864–1920)

Prominent sociologist Max Weber established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology including political change in Russia and social forces that affect factory workers. He is known best for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The theory that Weber sets forth in this book is still controversial. Some believe that Weber argued that the beliefs of many Protestants, especially Calvinists, led to the rise of capitalism. Others interpret it as simply claiming that the ideologies of capitalism and Protestantism are complementary.

Weber believed that it was difficult, if not impossible, to use standard scientific methods to accurately predict the behavior of groups as some sociologists hoped to do. Weber argued that the influence of culture on human behavior had to be taken into account. This even applied to the researchers themselves, who should be aware of how their own cultural biases could influence their research. To deal with this problem, Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey introduced the concept of *verstehen*, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking *verstehen*, outside observers of a social world—an entire culture or a small setting—attempt to understand it from an insider's point of view.

In *The Nature of Social Action*, Weber described sociology as striving to "… interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which action proceeds and the effects it produces." He and other like-minded sociologists proposed a philosophy of anti-positivism whereby social researchers would strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. This approach led to some research methods whose aim was not to generalize or predict (traditional in science), but to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of social worlds.

The different approaches to research based on positivism or anti-positivism are often considered the foundation for the differences found today between quantitative sociology and qualitative sociology. Quantitative sociology uses statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants. Researchers analyze data using statistical techniques to see if they can uncover patterns of human behavior. Qualitative sociology seeks to understand human behavior by learning about it through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media).

#### Social Policy and Debate: Should We Raise the Minimum Wage?

During his hard-fought 2020 campaign, President Joe Biden promised Americans that he would raise the federal minimum wage. Opponents of raising the minimum wage argue that some workers would get larger paychecks while others would lose their jobs, and companies would be less likely to hire new workers because of the increased cost of paying them. Biden and other proponents of raising the minimum wage contend that some job loss would be greatly offset by the positive effects on the standard of living of low-wage workers and reducing the income gap between the rich and poor.

Sociologists may consider the minimum wage issue from differing perspectives as well. How much of an impact would a minimum wage raise have for a single mother? Some might study the economic effects, such as her ability to pay bills and keep food on the table. Others might look at how reduced economic stress could improve family relationships. Some sociologists might research the impact on the status of small business owners. These could all be examples of public sociology, a branch of sociology that strives to bring sociological dialogue to public forums. The goals of public sociology are to increase understanding of the social factors that underlie social problems and assist in finding solutions. According to Michael Burawoy (2005), the challenge of public sociology is to engage multiple publics in multiple ways.

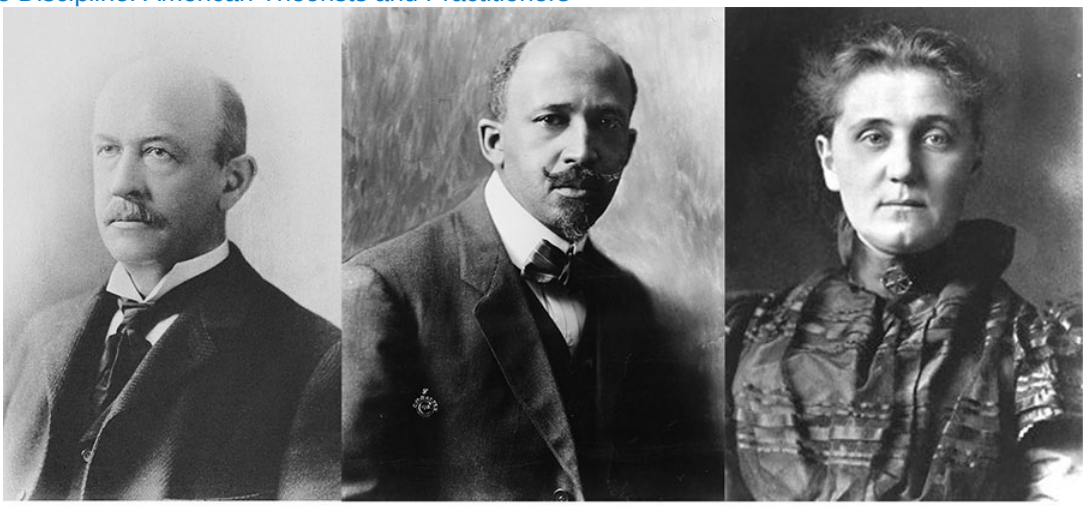



Figure 1.6: From left to right, William Sumner, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Adams. (Credit A, B, and C: Wikimedia Commons.)

In the early 1900s, sociology reached universities in the United States. William Sumner held the first professorship in sociology (Yale University), Franklin Giddings was the first full professor of Sociology (Columbia University), and Albion Small wrote the first sociology textbook. Early American sociologists tested and applied the theories of the Europeans and became leaders in social research. Lester Ward (1841 – 1913) developed social research methods and argued for the use of the scientific method and quantitative data (Chapter 2) to show the effectiveness of policies. In order for sociology to gain respectability in American academia, social researchers understood that they must adopt empirical approaches.

### W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, a Harvard-trained historian, pioneered the use of rigorous empirical methodology into sociology. His groundbreaking 1896-1897 study of the African American community in Philadelphia incorporated hundreds of interviews Du Bois conducted in order to document the familial and employment structures and assess the chief challenges of the community. These new, comprehensive research methods stood in stark contrast to the less scientific practices of the time, which Du Bois critiqued as being similar to doing research as if through the window of a moving car. His scientific approach became highly influential to entire schools of sociological study, and is considered a forerunner to contemporary practices. Additionally, Du Bois' 1899 publication provided empirical evidence to challenge pseudoscientific ideas of biological racism (Morris, 2015; Green & Wortham, 2018), which had been used as justification to oppress people of different races.

Du Bois also played a prominent role in the effort to increase rights for Black people. Concerned at the slow pace of progress and advice from some Black leaders to be more accommodating of racism, Du Bois became a leader in what would later be known as the Niagara Movement. In 1905, he and others drafted a declaration that called for immediate political, economic, and social equality for African Americans. A few years later, he helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served as its director of publications.

### Thorstein Veblen (1857 – 1929)

After a brief stint as an unemployed college graduate, Thorstein Veblen began to study the economy through a social lens, writing about the leisure class, the business class, and other areas that touched on the idea of 'working' itself. He researched the chronically unemployed, the currently unemployed, the working classes, and the impact of technology and business within society. Veblen is known as a co-founder of the branch (or school) of institutional economics.

### Jane Addams (1860-1935)

Jane Addams founded *Hull House*, a center that served needy immigrants through social and educational programs while providing extensive opportunities for sociological research. Founded in Chicago, Addams worked closely with University of Chicago's Chicago School of Sociology. This school of thought places much importance on environment in which relationships and behaviors develop. Research conducted at Hull House informed child labor, immigration, health care, and other areas of public policy.

### Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929)

Charles Horton Cooley posited that individuals compare themselves to others in order to check themselves against social standards and remain part of the group. Calling this idea ‘the looking-glass self,’ Cooley argued that we ‘see’ ourselves by the reactions of others with whom we interact. If someone reacts positively to our behavior, theoretically we will continue that behavior. He wrote substantially on what he saw as the order of life in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902) followed by *Social Organization* in 1909. He was very concerned with the increasing individualism and competitiveness of US society, fearing it would disrupt families as primary groups lost their importance.

### George Herbert Mead (1863–1931)

George Herbert Mead was a philosopher and sociologist whose work focused on the ways in which the mind and the self were developed as a result of social processes (Cronk, n.d.). He argued that how an individual comes to view himself or herself is based to a very large extent on interactions with others. Though Mead adopted Cooley’s concept of ‘looking-glasses,’ Mead felt that an individual’s reaction to a positive or negative reflection depended on who the ‘other’ was. Individuals that had the greatest impact on a person’s life were significant others while generalized others were the organized and generalized attitude of a social group. Mead often shares the title of father of symbolic interactionism with Cooley and Erving Goffman.

### Robert E. Park (1864-1944)

Robert E. Park is best known as the founder of social ecology. Attached to the Chicago School, Park focused on how individuals lived within their environment. One of the first sociologists to focus on ethnic minorities, he wrote on the Belgian oppression of the Congolese. When he returned to the US, he and Ernest Burgess researched the inner city to show that no matter who lived there, social chaos was prevalent. As such, it was not the residents who caused the chaos but the environment.

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# 1.4: Theoretical Perspectives

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Describe the ways that sociological theories are used to explain social institutions.
- Differentiate between functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.




Figure 1.7: Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest rallies. (Credit: David Shankbone/flickr)

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns, and they develop theories to explain why things work as they do. In sociology, a theory is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create a testable proposition, called a hypothesis, about society (Allan 2006).

For example, although suicide is generally considered an individual phenomenon, Émile Durkheim was interested in studying the social factors that affect it. He studied social solidarity, social ties within a group, and hypothesized that differences in suicide rates might be explained by religious differences. Durkheim gathered a large amount of data about Europeans and found that Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics. His work supports the utility of theory in sociological research.

Theories vary in scope depending on the scale of the issues that they are meant to explain. Macro-level theories relate to large-scale issues and large groups of people, while micro-level theories look at very specific relationships between individuals or small groups. Grand theories attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change. Sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Classic sociological theories are still considered important and current, but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them (Calhoun, 2002).

In sociology, a few theories provide broad perspectives that help explain many different aspects of social life, and these are called paradigms. Paradigms are philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them. Three paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking because they provide useful explanations: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Table 1.1 Sociological Theories or Perspectives: Different sociological perspectives enable sociologists to view social issues through a variety of useful lenses.

| Sociological Theories/Paradigms | Level of Analysis | Focus | Analogies | Questions that might be asked |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Structural Functionalism | Macro or Mid | The way each part of society functions together to contribute to the functioning of the whole. | How each organ works to keep your body healthy (or not.) | How does education work to transmit culture? |
| Conflict Theory | Macro | The way inequities and inequalities contribute to social, political, and power differences and how they perpetuate power. | The ones with the most toys wins and they will change the rules to the games to keep winning. | Does education transmit only the values of the most dominant groups? |
| Symbolic Interactionism | Micro | The way one-on-one interactions and communications behave. | What's it mean to be an X? | How do students react to cultural messages in school? |

## Functionalism

Functionalism, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Herbert Spencer, who saw similarities between society and the human body. He argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer, 1898). The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the social institutions, or patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

Émile Durkheim applied Spencer's theory to explain how societies change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim, 1893), and that society is held together by shared values, languages, and symbols. He believed that to study society, a sociologist must look beyond individuals to social facts such as laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashion, and rituals, which all serve to govern social life (Durkheim, 1895). Alfred Radcliff-Brown (1881–1955) defined the function of any recurrent activity as the part it played in social life as a whole, and therefore the contribution it makes to social stability and continuity (Radcliff-Brown 1952). In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain stability, a state called dynamic equilibrium by later sociologists such as Parsons (1961).

Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. . Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. Manifest functions are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while latent functions are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of a college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called dysfunctions. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

## Criticism

One criticism of the structural-functional theory is that it can't adequately explain social change even though the functions are processes. Also problematic is the somewhat circular nature of this theory: repetitive behavior patterns are assumed to have a function, yet we profess to know that they have a function only because they are repeated. Furthermore, dysfunctions may

continue, even though they don't serve a function, which seemingly contradicts the basic premise of the theory. Many sociologists now believe that functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve a useful purpose in some mid-level analyses.

### Big Picture: A Global Culture?



Figure 1.8: Some sociologists see the online world contributing to the creation of an emerging global culture. Are you a part of any global communities? This Indiana rabbi is participating in what was recognized as the longest Zoom meeting, which started in Australia after the Sabbath and proceeded through each of the world's time zones, effectively lasting much longer than a day. (Credit: Chabad Lubavitch/flickr)

Sociologists around the world look closely for signs of what would be an unprecedented event: the emergence of a global culture. In the past, empires such as those that existed in China, Europe, Africa, and Central and South America linked people from many different countries, but those people rarely became part of a common culture. They lived too far from each other, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and traded few goods. Today, increases in communication, travel, and trade have made the world a much smaller place. More and more people are able to communicate with each other instantly—wherever they are located—by telephone, video, and text. They share movies, television shows, music, games, and information over the Internet. Students can study with teachers and pupils from the other side of the globe. Governments find it harder to hide conditions inside their countries from the rest of the world.

Sociologists research many different aspects of this potential global culture. Some explore the dynamics involved in the social interactions of global online communities, such as when members feel a closer kinship to other group members than to people residing in their own countries. Other sociologists study the impact this growing international culture has on smaller, less-powerful local cultures. Yet other researchers explore how international markets and the outsourcing of labor impact social inequalities. Sociology can play a key role in people's abilities to understand the nature of this emerging global culture and how to respond to it.

## Conflict Theory

Conflict theory looks at society as a competition for limited resources. This perspective is a macro-level approach most identified with the writings of German philosopher and economist Karl Marx, who saw society as being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, and

leisure time. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others, and these "winners" use their power and influence to maintain social institutions. The perpetuation of power results in the perpetuation of oppression.

Several theorists suggested variations on this basic theme like Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) who expanded on Marx's ideas by arguing that war and conquest are the bases of civilizations. He believed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving, 2007).

German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) agreed with Marx but also believed that, in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict. Weber noted that different groups were affected differently based on education, race, and gender, and that people's reactions to inequality were moderated by class differences and rates of social mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power. A reader of Marx, Georg Simmel believed that conflict can help integrate and stabilize a society. He said that the intensity of the conflict varies depending on the emotional involvement of the parties, the degree of solidarity within the opposing groups, and the clarity and limited nature of the goals. Simmel also showed that groups work to create internal solidarity, centralize power, and reduce dissent. The stronger the bond, the weaker the discord. Resolving conflicts can reduce tension and hostility and can pave the way for future agreements.

In the 1930s and 1940s, German philosophers, known as the Frankfurt School, developed critical theory as an elaboration on Marxist principles. Critical theory is an expansion of conflict theory and is broader than just sociology, incorporating other social sciences and philosophy. A critical theory is a holistic theory and attempts to address structural issues causing inequality. It must explain what's wrong in current social reality, identify the people who can make changes, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Horkeimer, 1982).

More recently, inequality based on gender or race has been explained in a similar manner and has identified institutionalized power structures that help to maintain inequality between groups. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of feminist theory that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner, 2003). Similarly, critical race theory grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

### Sociology in the Real World: Farming and Locavores: How Sociological Perspectives Might View Food Consumption

The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence. Yet, it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation's food system is at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study.

A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might analyze the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another might study the different functions of processes in food production, from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, by exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might examine the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary Food Inc., which depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in microlevel topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also explore the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

## Criticism

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have

gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

### Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon.

George Herbert Mead is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church. Maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message.

The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922-1982) to develop a technique called dramaturgical analysis. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." He argued that individuals were actors in a play. We switched roles, sometimes minute to minute—for example, from student or daughter to dog walker. Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman, 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

Constructivism is an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. We develop social constructs based on interactions with others, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most within the society. This approach is often used to examine what's defined as deviant within a society. There is no absolute definition of deviance, and different societies have constructed different meanings for deviance, as well as associating different behaviors with deviance.

One situation that illustrates this is what you believe you're to do if you find a wallet in the street. In the United States, turning the wallet in to local authorities would be considered the appropriate action, and to keep the wallet would be seen as deviant. In contrast, many Eastern societies would consider it much more appropriate to keep the wallet and search for the owner yourself. Turning it over to someone else, even the authorities, would be considered deviant behavior.

### Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

### Sociological Theory Today

These three approaches still provide the main foundation of modern sociological theory though they have evolved. Structural-functionalism was a dominant force after World War II and until the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, sociologists began to feel that structural-functionalism did not sufficiently explain the rapid social changes happening in the United States at that time. The women's movement and the Civil Rights movement forced academics to develop approaches to study these emerging social practices.

Conflict theory then gained prominence, with its emphasis on institutionalized social inequality. Critical theory, and the particular aspects of feminist theory and critical race theory, focused on creating social change through the application of sociological principles. The field saw a renewed emphasis on helping ordinary people understand sociology principles, in the form of public sociology.

Gaining prominence in the wake of Mead's work in the 1920s and 1930s, symbolic interactionism declined in influence during the 1960s and 1970s only to be revitalized at the turn of the twenty-first century (Stryker, 1987). Postmodern social theory developed in the 1980s to look at society through an entirely new lens by rejecting previous macro-level attempts to explain social phenomena. Its growth in popularity coincides with the rise of constructivist views of symbolic interactionism.

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# 1.4.1: Sociological Imagination

## Social Structure and the Sociological Imagination

One way sociology achieves a more complete understanding of social reality is through its focus on the importance of the social forces affecting our behavior, attitudes, and life chances. This focus involves an emphasis on social structure, the social patterns through which a society is organized. Social structure can be both horizontal or vertical. Horizontal social structure refers to the social relationships and the social and physical characteristics of communities to which individuals belong. Some people belong to many networks of social relationships, including groups like the PTA and the Boy or Girl Scouts, while other people have fewer such networks. Some people grew up on streets where the houses were crowded together, while other people grew up in areas where the homes were much farther apart. These are examples of the sorts of factors constituting the horizontal social structure that forms such an important part of our social environment and backgrounds.

The other dimension of social structure is vertical. Vertical social structure, more commonly called social inequality, refers to ways in which a society or group ranks people in a hierarchy, with some more "equal" than others. In the United States and most other industrial societies, such things as wealth, power, race and ethnicity, and gender help determine one's social ranking, or position, in the vertical social structure. Some people are at the top of society, while many more are in the middle or at the bottom. People's positions in society's hierarchy in turn often have profound consequences for their attitudes, behaviors, and life chances, both for themselves and for their children.

In recognizing the importance of social structure, sociology stresses that individual problems are often rooted in problems stemming from the horizontal and vertical social structures of society. This key insight informed C. Wright Mills's (1959)Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London, England: Oxford University Press. classic distinction between personal troubles and public issues. *Personal troubles* refer to a problem affecting individuals that the affected person, as well as other members of society, typically blame on the individual's own failings. Examples include such different problems as eating disorders, divorce, and unemployment. *Public issues*, whose source lies in the social structure and culture of a society, refer to a social problem affecting many individuals. Thus problems in society help account for problems that individuals experience. Mills, feeling that many problems ordinarily considered private troubles are best understood as public issues, coined the term sociological imagination to refer to the ability to appreciate the structural basis for individual problems.

To illustrate Mills's viewpoint, let's use our sociological imaginations to understand some important contemporary social problems. We will start with unemployment, which Mills himself discussed. If only a few people were unemployed, Mills wrote, we could reasonably explain their unemployment by saying they were lazy, lacked good work habits, and so forth. If so, their unemployment would be their own personal trouble. But when millions of people are out of work, unemployment is best understood as a public issue because, as Mills (1959, p. 9)Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London, England: Oxford University Press. put it, "the very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals." The growing unemployment rate stemming from the severe economic downturn that began in 2008 provides a telling example of the point Mills was making. Millions of people lost their jobs through no fault of their own. While some individuals are undoubtedly unemployed because they are lazy or lack good work habits, a more structural explanation focusing on lack of opportunity is needed to explain why so many people were out of work as this book went to press. If so, unemployment is best understood as a public issue rather than a personal trouble. The same can be said for the unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2020. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate rose to 13.9 during April, May and June of 2020 (https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/ar...-pandemic.html). Why were so many Americans out of work? Were they just lazy? No, there was a global pandemic which caused many businesses to close during those months of 2020.

Another contemporary problem is crime, which we explore further in Chapter 5. If crime were only a personal trouble, then we could blame crime on the moral failings of individuals, and many explanations of crime do precisely this. But such an approach ignores the fact that crime is a public issue, as structural factors such as inequality and the physical characteristics of communities contribute to high crime rates among certain groups in American society. As an illustration, consider identical twins separated at birth. One twin grows up in a wealthy suburb or rural area, while the other twin grows up in a blighted neighborhood in a poor, urban area. Twenty years later, which twin will be more likely to have a criminal record? You probably answered the twin growing up in the poor, run-down urban neighborhood. If so, you recognize that there is something about growing up in that type of neighborhood that increases the chances of a person becoming prone to crime. That "something" is the structural factors just mentioned. Criminal behavior is a public issue, not just a personal trouble.



Figure 1.8: Although eating disorders often stem from personal problems, they also may reflect a cultural emphasis for women to have slender bodies. © Thinkstock

A final problem we will consider for now is eating disorders. We usually consider a person's eating disorder to be a personal trouble that stems from a lack of control, low self-esteem, or other personal problem. This explanation may be OK as far as it goes, but it does not help us understand why so many people have the personal problems that lead to eating disorders. Perhaps more important, this belief also neglects the larger social and cultural forces that help explain such disorders. For example, most Americans with eating disorders are women, not men. This gender difference forces us to ask what it is about being a woman in American society that makes eating disorders so much more common. To begin to answer this question, we need to look to the standard of beauty for women that emphasizes a slender body (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008).Whitehead, K., & Kurz, T. (2008). Saints, sinners and standards of femininity: Discursive constructions of anorexia nervosa and obesity in women's magazines. *Journal of Gender Studies, 17,* 345–358. If this cultural standard did not exist, far fewer American women would suffer from eating disorders than do now. Even if every girl and woman with an eating disorder were cured, others would take their places unless we could somehow change the cultural standard of female slenderness. To the extent this explanation makes sense, eating disorders are best understood as a public issue, not just as a personal trouble.

Picking up on Mills's argument, William Ryan (1976)Ryan, W. (1976). *Blaming the victim*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. pointed out that Americans typically blame the victim when they think about the reasons for social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and crime. They feel that these problems stem from personal failings of the people suffering them, not from structural problems in the larger society. Using Mills's terms, Americans tend to think of social problems as personal troubles rather than public issues. They thus subscribe to a blaming the victim ideology rather than to a blaming the system belief.

To help us understand a blaming-the-victim ideology, let's consider why poor children in urban areas often learn very little in their schools. A blaming-the-victim approach, according to Ryan, would say that the children's parents do not care about their learning, fail to teach them good study habits, and do not encourage them to take school seriously. This type of explanation may apply to some parents, in Ryan's opinion, but it ignores a much more important reason: the sad shape of America's urban schools, which are decrepit structures housing old textbooks and out-of-date equipment. To improve the schooling of children in urban areas, he wrote, we must improve the schools themselves, and not just try to "improve" the parents.

As this example suggests, a blaming-the-victim approach points to solutions to social problems such as poverty and illiteracy that are very different from those suggested by a more structural approach that "blames the system." If we blame the victim, we would spend our limited dollars to address the personal failings of individuals who suffer from poverty, illiteracy, poor health, eating disorders, and other difficulties. If instead we blame the system, we would focus our attention on the various social conditions (decrepit schools, cultural standards of female beauty, and the like) that account for these difficulties. A sociological perspective suggests that the latter approach is ultimately needed to help us deal successfully with the social problems facing us today.

Sociological Imagination

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# 1.5: Why Study Sociology?

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain why it is worthwhile to study sociology.
- Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world.



Figure 1.9: The research of Kenneth and Mamie Clark helped the Supreme Court decide to end "separate but equal" racial segregation in schools in the United States. (Credit: University of Texas)

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd and was turned away by authorities. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned twenty-one state laws that allowed Black and White people to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were "equal." The decision was nothing short of momentous, not only for education, but for a number of other segregation and discrimination issues that have lasted into this decade. And in that momentous decision, the Supreme Court cited the research of the husband-and-wife team of social scientists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, as evidence that segregation generates in minority students a feeling of inferiority. In the 'doll test,' for example, the Clarks showed children four dolls, two with white skin and yellow hair and two with brown skin and black hair. When asked which doll they preferred, the majority of Black children chose the doll with the light skin doll, and they assigned positive characteristics to it. Most of the Black children discarded the doll with the brown skin—the one that had a closer resemblance to themselves.

When asked to choose the doll that looked like them, many children left the room, started to cry, and/or became depressed. The Clarks' research contributed to the Supreme Court's conclusion that separate but equal was damaging to students, and that separate facilities are unequal.

## Sociology and a Better Society

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms, such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental illnesses or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical disabilities, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The predominant American sociologist, the late Peter L. Berger (1929–2017), in his 1963 book, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as "someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way." He

asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people's lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the "aha" moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

> *[T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger, 1963)*

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

### Sociology in the Workplace

Employers continue to seek people with what are called "transferable skills." This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks.

Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies;
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working;
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys;
- the ability to recognize important differences in people's social, cultural, and economic backgrounds;
- skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas; and
- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama-Huntsville)

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

#### Sociology in the Real World: Social Networking Consequences

You've probably heard a cautionary story that goes something like this: A high school student spent years working hard, engaging in their community, helping others, and generally growing into a positive and promising young adult. During senior year, they start the college application process, and after a couple of interviews and other interactions, things are looking bright at several of their top choices. But when the time arrives for those fateful notifications about acceptance or rejection, the student and their family are shocked to get rejected from all schools but one. Inquiries from family members and guidance counselors had no results. The only news came in the form of a letter three weeks later from the one school that had accepted the student.

"...After an initial investigation, the University has determined that several posts attributed to you violate our policies, and are offensive and troubling..."

The letter's remaining two pages detailed the ongoing investigation and outlined the potential outcomes. But that one statement said it all: The student had posted something offensive on social media, and their prospective colleges had found it.

Two years earlier, at the beginning of sophomore year, the student had posted two comments and a meme that mocked a classmate who had been assaulted at a party. Even thought the student had removed them within a few days, the posts lived on in other forums and on a few friends' pages; there was also the possibility that someone had screen-grabbed them. While social media posts are protected forms of speech in relation to the government, colleges can review them as they evaluate applicants. Employers can do the same, as can romantic partners or even volunteer organizations.

You may believe that a 15-year-old's social media comments should not impact them years later. Or you may feel that someone who jokes about assault may be a risk to commit a similar act or fail to stop or report one. Sociologists may consider all of those assumptions, and may seek answers or information through research to uncover the impacts, risks, tendencies, and outcomes on the different groups involved. For example, a sociologist might work to discover answers to the following questions:

- Is abusive speech or assault less likely to occur at colleges that screen applicants' social media posts?
- Do sensitivity trainings or cultural competency programs have an effect on online speech?
- Do colleges treat all community members equally when they discover someone has posted offensive comments or other content?
- Are algorithms and artificial intelligence used to detect problematic comments biased against certain people or communities?

None of these questions could be answered by a single study or even a group of them. But like the Supreme Court's use of Mamie and Kenneth Clarke's research, college administrators, high school counselors, and technology companies can use the outcomes of research and analysis to make decisions or implement programs.

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# 1.6: Key Terms

**antipositivism** | the view that social researchers should strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values

**conflict theory** | a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

**constructivism** | an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be

**culture** | a group's shared practices, values, and beliefs

**dramaturgical analysis** | a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

**dynamic equilibrium** | a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society work together properly

**dysfunctions** | social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

**figuration** | the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

**function** | the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

**functionalism** | a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

**generalized others** | the organized and generalized attitude of a social group

**grand theories** | an attempt to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

**hypothesis** | a testable proposition

**latent functions** | the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

**macro-level** | a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

**manifest functions** | sought consequences of a social process

**micro-level theories** | the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

**paradigms** | philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

**positivism** | the scientific study of social patterns

**qualitative sociology** | in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or analysis of content sources as the source of its data

**quantitative sociology** | statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants

**reification** | an error of treating an abstract concept as though it has a real, material existence

**significant others** | specific individuals that impact a person's life

**social facts** | the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

**social institutions** | patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs

**social solidarity** | the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

**society** | a group of people who live in a defined geographical area who interact with one another and who share a common culture

**sociological imagination** | the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

**sociology** | the systematic study of society and social interaction

**symbolic interactionism** | a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

**theory** | a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

**verstehen** | a German word that means to understand in a deep way

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# 1.7: Section Summary

### 1.1 What Is Sociology?

Sociology is the systematic and scientific study of society and social interaction. In order to carry out their studies, sociologists identify cultural patterns and social forces and determine how they affect individuals and groups. They also develop ways to apply their findings to the real world.

### 1.2 The History of Sociology

Sociology was developed as an academic and scientific way to study and theorize about the changes to society brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the earliest sociologists thought that societies and individuals' roles in society could be studied using the same scientific methodologies that were used in the natural sciences, while others believed that is was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, and still others debated the value of such predictions. Those perspectives continue to be represented within sociology today.

### 1.3 Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those social interactions. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

### 1.4 Why Study Sociology?

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students' lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

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# 1.9: Crash Course Video- Sociological Theories

Major Sociological Paradigms: Crash Course Sociology #2




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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 2: Understanding Social Problems


2.1: What Is a Social Problem?
2.2: Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems
2.3: Continuity and Change in Social Problems
2.4: Doing Research on Social Problems
2.5: End-of-Chapter Material


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# 2.1: What Is a Social Problem?

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define “social problem.”
2. Explain the objective and subjective components of the definition of a social problem.
3. Understand the social constructionist view of social problems.
4. List the stages of the natural history of social problems.

A social problem is any condition or behavior that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behavior that needs to be addressed. This definition has both an *objective* component and a *subjective* component.

The *objective* component is this: For any condition or behavior to be considered a social problem, it must have negative consequences for large numbers of people, as each chapter of this book discusses. How do we know if a social problem has negative consequences? Reasonable people can and do disagree on whether such consequences exist and, if so, on their extent and seriousness, but ordinarily a body of data accumulates—from work by academic researchers, government agencies, and other sources—that strongly points to extensive and serious consequences. The reasons for these consequences are often hotly debated, and sometimes, as we shall see in certain chapters in this book, sometimes the very existence of these consequences is disputed. A current example is *climate change*: Although the overwhelming majority of climate scientists say that climate change (changes in the earth’s climate due to the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere) is real and serious, fewer than two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) in a 2011 poll said they “think that global warming is happening”(Leiserowitz, et. al., 2011).

This type of dispute points to the *subjective* component of the definition of social problems: There must be a perception that a condition or behavior needs to be addressed for it to be considered a social problem. This component lies at the heart of the social constructionist view of social problems (Rubington & Weinberg, 2010). In this view, many types of negative conditions and behaviors exist. Many of these are considered sufficiently negative to acquire the status of a social problem; some do not receive this consideration and thus do not become a social problem; and some become considered a social problem only if citizens, policymakers, or other parties call attention to the condition or behavior.



Figure 2.1.1: Sometimes disputes occur over whether a particular condition or behavior has negative consequences and is thus a social problem. A current example is climate change: although almost all climate scientists think climate change is real and serious, more than one-third of the American public thinks that climate change is not happening. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

The history of attention given to rape and sexual assault in the United States before and after the 1970s provides an example of this latter situation. These acts of sexual violence against women have probably occurred from the beginning of humanity and certainly were very common in the United States before the 1970s. Although men were sometimes arrested and prosecuted for rape and sexual assault, sexual violence was otherwise ignored by legal policymakers and received little attention in college textbooks and the news media, and many people thought that rape and sexual assault were just something that happened (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993).Allison, J. A., & Wrightsman, L. S. (1993). *Rape: The misunderstood crime*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Thus although sexual violence existed, it was not considered a social problem. When the contemporary women’s movement began in the

late 1970s, it soon focused on rape and sexual assault as serious crimes and as manifestations of women's inequality. Thanks to this focus, rape and sexual assault eventually entered the public consciousness, views of these crimes began to change, and legal policymakers began to give them more attention. In short, sexual violence against women became a social problem.




Before the 1970s, rape and sexual assault certainly existed and were very common, but they were generally ignored and not considered a social problem. When the contemporary women's movement arose during the 1970s, it focused on sexual violence against women and turned this behavior into a social problem. Image courtesy of Women's eNews, http://www.flickr.com/photos/wenews/5167303294/.

The social constructionist view raises an interesting question: When is a social problem a social problem? According to some sociologists who adopt this view, negative conditions and behaviors are *not* a social problem unless they are recognized as such by policymakers, large numbers of lay citizens, or other segments of our society; these sociologists would thus say that rape and sexual assault before the 1970s were not a social problem because our society as a whole paid them little attention. Other sociologists say that negative conditions and behaviors *should be* considered a social problem even if they receive little or no attention; these sociologists would thus say that rape and sexual assault before the 1970s were a social problem.

This type of debate is probably akin to the age-old question: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, is a sound made? As such, it is not easy to answer, but it does reinforce one of the key beliefs of the social constructionist view: Perception matters at least as much as reality, and sometimes more so. In line with this belief, social constructionism emphasizes that citizens, interest groups, policymakers, and other parties often compete to influence popular perceptions of many types of conditions and behaviors. They try to influence news media coverage and popular views of the nature and extent of any negative consequences that may be occurring, the reasons underlying the condition or behavior in question, and possible solutions to the problem.



Sometimes a condition or behavior becomes a social problem even if there is little or no basis for this perception. A historical example involves women in college. During the late 1800s, medical authorities and other experts warned women not to go to college for two reasons: they feared that the stress of college would disrupt women's menstrual cycles, and they thought that women would not do well on exams while they were menstruating. (Unsplash License; Yustinus Tjiuwanda via Unsplash)

Social constructionism's emphasis on perception has a provocative implication: Just as a condition or behavior may not be considered a social problem even if there is strong basis for this perception, so may a condition or behavior be considered a social problem even if there is little or no basis for this perception. The "issue" of women in college provides a historical example of this latter possibility. In the late 1800s, leading physicians and medical researchers in the United States wrote journal articles, textbooks, and newspaper columns in which they warned women not to go to college. The reason? They feared that the stress of college would disrupt women's menstrual cycles, and they also feared that women would not do well in exams during "that time of the month" (Ehrenreich & English, 2005)!Ehrenreich, B., & English, D. (2005). *For her own good: Two centuries of the experts' advice to women* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Anchor Books. We now know better, of course, but the sexist beliefs of these writers turned the idea of women going to college into a social problem and helped to reinforce restrictions by colleges and universities on the admission of women.

In a related dynamic, various parties can distort certain aspects of a social problem that does exist: politicians can give speeches, the news media can use scary headlines and heavy coverage to capture readers' or viewers' interest, businesses can use advertising and influence news coverage. News media coverage of violent crime provides many examples of this dynamic (Robinson, 2011; Surette, 2011).Robinson, M. B. (2011). *Media coverage of crime and criminal justice*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press; Surette, R. (2011). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. The news media overdramatize violent crime, which is far less common than property crime like burglary and larceny, by featuring so many stories about it, and this coverage contributes to public fear of crime. Media stories about violent crime also tend to be more common when the accused offender is black and the victim is white and when the offender is a juvenile. This type of coverage is thought to heighten the public's prejudice toward African Americans and to contribute to negative views about teenagers.

## The Natural History of a Social Problem

We have just discussed some of the difficulties in defining a social problem and the fact that various parties often try to influence public perceptions of social problems. These issues aside, most social problems go through a *natural history* consisting of several stages of their development (Spector & Kitsuse, 2001).Spector, M., & Kitsuse, J. I. (2001). *Constructing social problems*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

### Stage 1: Emergence and Claims Making

A social problem emerges when a social entity (such as a social change group, the news media, or influential politicians) begins to call attention to a condition or behavior that it perceives to be undesirable and in need of remedy. As part of this process, it tries to

influence public perceptions of the problem, the reasons for it, and possible solutions to it. Because the social entity is making claims about all these matters, this aspect of Stage 1 is termed the **claims-making process**. Not all efforts to turn a condition or behavior into a social problem succeed, and if they do not succeed, a social problem does not emerge. Because of the resources they have or do not have, some social entities are more likely than others to succeed at this stage. A few ordinary individuals have little influence in the public sphere, but masses of individuals who engage in protest or other political activity have greater ability to help a social problem emerge. Because politicians have the ear of the news media and other types of influence, their views about social problems are often very influential. Most studies of this stage of a social problem focus on the efforts of social change groups and the larger social movement to which they may belong, as most social problems begin with bottom-up efforts from such groups.




A social problem emerges when a social change group successfully calls attention to a condition or behavior that it considers serious. Protests like the one depicted here have raised the environmental consciousness of Americans and helped put pressure on businesses to be environmentally responsible. Image courtesy of ItzaFineDay, http://www.flickr.com/photos/itzafineday/3085307050/.

### Stage 2: Legitimacy

Once a social group succeeds in turning a condition or behavior into a social problem, it usually tries to persuade the government (local, state, and/or federal) to take some action—spending and policymaking—to address the problem. As part of this effort, it tries to convince the government that its claims about the problem are legitimate—that they make sense and are supported by *empirical* (research-based) evidence. To the extent that the group succeeds in convincing the government of the legitimacy of its claims, government action is that much more likely to occur.

### Stage 3: Renewed Claims Making

Even if government action does occur, social change groups often conclude that the action is too limited in goals or scope to be able to successfully address the social problem. If they reach this conclusion, they often decide to press their demands anew. They do so by reasserting their claims and by criticizing the official response they have received from the government or other established interests, such as big businesses. This stage may involve a fair amount of tension between the social change groups and these targets of their claims.

### Stage 4: Development of Alternative Strategies

Despite the renewed claims making, social change groups often conclude that the government and established interests are not responding adequately to their claims. Although the groups may continue to press their claims, they nonetheless realize that these claims may fail to win an adequate response from established interests. This realization leads them to develop their own strategies for addressing the social problem.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The definition of a social problem has both an objective component and a subjective component. The objective component involves empirical evidence of the negative consequences of a social condition or behavior, while the subjective component involves the perception that the condition or behavior is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed.
- The social constructionist view emphasizes that a condition or behavior does not become a social problem unless there is a perception that it should be considered a social problem.

- The natural history of a social problem consists of four stages: emergence and claims making, legitimacy, renewed claims making, and alternative strategies.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What do you think is the most important social problem facing our nation right now? Explain your answer.
2. Do you agree with the social constructionist view that a negative social condition or behavior is not a social problem unless there is a perception that it should be considered a social problem? Why or why not?

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# 2.2: Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define the sociological imagination.
2. Explain what is meant by the blaming-the-victim belief.
3. Summarize the most important beliefs and assumptions of functionalism and conflict theory.
4. Summarize the most important beliefs and assumptions of symbolic interactionism and exchange theory.

The sociological understanding of social problems rests heavily on the concept of the *sociological imagination*. We discuss this concept in some detail before turning to various theoretical perspectives that provide a further context for understanding social problems.

## The Sociological Imagination

Many individuals experience one or more social problems personally. For example, many people are poor and unemployed, many are in poor health, and many have family problems, drink too much alcohol, or commit crime. When we hear about these individuals, it is easy to think that their problems are theirs alone, and that they and other individuals with the same problems are entirely to blame for their difficulties.

Sociology takes a different approach, as it stresses that individual problems are often rooted in problems stemming from aspects of society itself. This key insight informed C. Wright Mills's (1959) (Mills, 1959) classic distinction between personal troubles and public issues. *Personal troubles* refer to a problem affecting individuals that the affected individual, as well as other members of society, typically blame on the individual's own personal and moral failings. Examples include such different problems as eating disorders, divorce, and unemployment. *Public issues*, whose source lies in the social structure and culture of a society, refer to social problems affecting many individuals. Problems in society thus help account for problems that individuals experience. Mills felt that many problems ordinarily considered private troubles are best understood as public issues, and he coined the term sociological imagination to refer to the ability to appreciate the structural basis for individual problems.

To illustrate Mills's viewpoint, let's use our sociological imaginations to understand some contemporary social problems. We will start with unemployment, which Mills himself discussed. If only a few people were unemployed, Mills wrote, we could reasonably explain their unemployment by saying they were lazy, lacked good work habits, and so forth. If so, their unemployment would be their own personal trouble. But when millions of people are out of work, unemployment is best understood as a public issue because, as Mills (Mills, 1959) put it, "the very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals."



When only a few people are out of work, it is fair to say that their unemployment is their personal trouble. However, when millions of people are out of work, as has been true since the economic downturn began in 2008, this massive unemployment is more accurately viewed as a public issue. As such, its causes lie not in the unemployed individuals but rather in our society's economic and social systems.

Rawle C. Jackman – The line of hope… – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The high US unemployment rate stemming from the severe economic downturn that began in 2008 provides a telling example of the point Mills was making. Millions of people lost their jobs through no fault of their own. While some individuals are undoubtedly unemployed because they are lazy or lack good work habits, a more structural explanation focusing on lack of opportunity is needed to explain why so many people were out of work. If so, unemployment is best understood as a public issue rather than a personal trouble.

Another social problem is eating disorders. We usually consider a person's eating disorder to be a personal trouble that stems from a lack of control, low self-esteem, or another personal problem. This explanation may be OK as far as it goes, but it does not help us understand why so many people have the personal problems that lead to eating disorders. Perhaps more important, this belief also neglects the larger social and cultural forces that help explain such disorders. For example, most Americans with eating disorders are women, not men. This gender difference forces us to ask what it is about being a woman in American society that makes eating disorders so much more common. To begin to answer this question, we need to look to the standard of beauty for women that emphasizes a slender body (Boyd, et. al., 2011). If this cultural standard did not exist, far fewer American women would suffer from eating disorders than do now. Because it does exist, even if every girl and woman with an eating disorder were cured, others would take their places unless we could somehow change this standard. Viewed in this way, eating disorders are best understood as a public issue, not just as a personal trouble.

Picking up on Mills's insights, William Ryan (1976) (Ryan, 1976) pointed out that Americans typically think that social problems such as poverty and unemployment stem from personal failings of the people experiencing these problems, not from structural problems in the larger society. Using Mills's terms, Americans tend to think of social problems as personal troubles rather than public issues. As Ryan put it, they tend to believe in blaming the victim rather than blaming the system.

To help us understand a blaming-the-victim ideology, let's consider why poor children in urban areas often learn very little in their schools. According to Ryan, a blaming-the-victim approach would say the children's parents do not care about their learning, fail to teach them good study habits, and do not encourage them to take school seriously. This type of explanation, he wrote, may apply to some parents, but it ignores a much more important reason: the sad shape of America's urban schools, which, he said, are overcrowded, decrepit structures housing old textbooks and out-of-date equipment. To improve the schooling of children in urban areas, he wrote, we must improve the schools themselves and not just try to "improve" the parents.

As this example suggests, a blaming-the-victim approach points to solutions to social problems such as poverty and illiteracy that are very different from those suggested by a more structural approach that blames the system. If we blame the victim, we would spend our limited dollars to address the personal failings of individuals who suffer from poverty, illiteracy, poor health, eating disorders, and other difficulties. If instead we blame the system, we would focus our attention on the various social conditions (decrepit schools, cultural standards of female beauty, and the like) that account for these difficulties. A sociological understanding suggests that the latter approach is ultimately needed to help us deal successfully with the social problems facing us today.

## Theoretical Perspectives

Three theoretical perspectives guide sociological thinking on social problems: *functionalist* theory, *conflict* theory, and *symbolic interactionist* theory. These perspectives look at the same social problems, but they do so in different ways. Their views taken together offer a fuller understanding of social problems than any of the views can offer alone. Table 1.1 "Theory Snapshot" summarizes the three perspectives.

Table 1.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions | Views of social problems |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions | Views of social problems |
|---|---|---|
| Functionalism | Social stability is necessary for a strong society, and adequate socialization and social integration are necessary for social stability. Society's social institutions perform important functions to help ensure social stability. Slow social change is desirable, but rapid social change threatens social order. | Social problems weaken a society's stability but do not reflect fundamental faults in how the society is structured. Solutions to social problems should take the form of gradual social reform rather than sudden and far-reaching change. Despite their negative effects, social problems often also serve important functions for society. |
| Conflict theory | Society is characterized by pervasive inequality based on social class, race, gender, and other factors. Far-reaching social change is needed to reduce or eliminate social inequality and to create an egalitarian society. | Social problems arise from fundamental faults in the structure of a society and both reflect and reinforce inequalities based on social class, race, gender, and other dimensions. Successful solutions to social problems must involve far-reaching change in the structure of society. |
| Symbolic interactionism | People construct their roles as they interact; they do not merely learn the roles that society has set out for them. As this interaction occurs, individuals negotiate their definitions of the situations in which they find themselves and socially construct the reality of these situations. In so doing, they rely heavily on symbols such as words and gestures to reach a shared understanding of their interaction. | Social problems arise from the interaction of individuals. People who engage in socially problematic behaviors often learn these behaviors from other people. Individuals also learn their perceptions of social problems from other people. |

## Functionalism

Functionalism, also known as the functionalist theory or perspective, arose out of two great revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first was the French Revolution of 1789, whose intense violence and bloody terror shook Europe to its core. The aristocracy throughout Europe feared that revolution would spread to their own lands, and intellectuals feared that social order was crumbling.

The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century reinforced these concerns. Starting first in Europe and then in the United States, the Industrial Revolution led to many changes, including the rise and growth of cities as people left their farms to live near factories. As the cities grew, people lived in increasingly poor, crowded, and decrepit conditions, and crime was rampant. Here was additional evidence, if European intellectuals needed it, of the breakdown of social order.

In response, the intellectuals began to write that a strong society, as exemplified by strong social bonds and rules and effective socialization, was needed to prevent social order from disintegrating. Without a strong society and effective socialization, they warned, social order breaks down, and violence and other signs of social disorder result.

This general framework reached fruition in the writings of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), a French scholar largely responsible for the sociological perspective, as we now know it. Adopting the conservative intellectuals' view of the need for a strong society, Durkheim felt that human beings have desires that result in chaos unless society limits them (Durkheim, 1952). It does so, he wrote, through two related social mechanisms: socialization and social integration. Socialization helps us learn society's rules and the need to cooperate, as people end up generally agreeing on important norms and values, while social integration, or our ties to other people and to social institutions such as religion and the family, helps socialize us and integrate us into society and reinforce our respect for its rules.

Today's functionalist perspective arises out of Durkheim's work and that of other conservative intellectuals of the nineteenth century. It uses the human body as a model for understanding society. In the human body, our various organs and other body parts serve important *functions* for the ongoing health and stability of our body. Our eyes help us see, our ears help us hear, our heart

circulates our blood, and so forth. Just as we can understand the body by describing and understanding the functions that its parts serve for its health and stability, so can we understand society by describing and understanding the functions that its parts—or, more accurately, its social institutions—serve for the ongoing health and stability of society. Thus functionalism emphasizes the importance of social institutions such as the family, religion, and education for producing a stable society.



Émile Durkheim was a founder of sociology and is largely credited with developing the functionalist perspective. (Marxists.org – public domain.)

Similar to the view of the conservative intellectuals from which it grew, functionalism is skeptical of rapid social change and other major social upheaval. The analogy to the human body helps us understand this skepticism. In our bodies, any sudden, rapid change is a sign of danger to our health. If we break a bone in one of our legs, we have trouble walking; if we lose sight in both our eyes, we can no longer see. Slow changes, such as the growth of our hair and our nails, are fine and even normal, but sudden changes like those just described are obviously troublesome. By analogy, sudden and rapid changes in society and its social institutions are troublesome according to the functionalist perspective. If the human body evolved to its present form and functions because these made sense from an evolutionary perspective, so did society evolve to its present form and functions because these made sense. Any sudden change in society thus threatens its stability and future.

As these comments might suggest, functionalism views social problems as arising from society's natural evolution. When a social problem does occur, it might threaten a society's stability, but it does not mean that fundamental flaws in the society exist. Accordingly, gradual social reform should be all that is needed to address the social problem.

Functionalism even suggests that social problems must be functional in some ways for society, because otherwise these problems would not continue. This is certainly a controversial suggestion, but it is true that many social problems do serve important functions for our society. For example, crime is a major social problem, but it is also good for the economy because it creates hundreds of thousands of jobs in law enforcement, courts and corrections, home security, and other sectors of the economy whose major role is to deal with crime. If crime disappeared, many people would be out of work! Similarly, poverty is also a major social problem, but one function that poverty serves is that poor people do jobs that otherwise might not get done because other people would not want to do them (Gans, 1972). Like crime, poverty also provides employment for people across the nation, such as those who work in social service agencies that help poor people.

## Conflict Theory

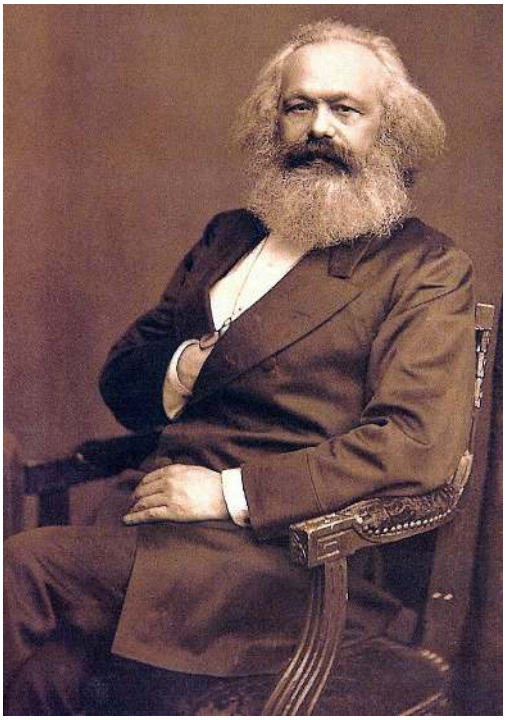
In many ways, conflict theory is the opposite of functionalism but ironically also grew out of the Industrial Revolution, thanks largely to Karl Marx (1818–1883) and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Whereas conservative intellectuals feared the mass violence resulting from industrialization, Marx and Engels deplored the conditions they felt were responsible for the mass violence and the capitalist society they felt was responsible for these conditions. Instead of fearing the breakdown of social order that mass violence represented, they felt that revolutionary violence was needed to eliminate capitalism and the poverty and misery they saw as its inevitable results (Marx, 1906; Marx & Engels, 1962).

According to Marx and Engels, every society is divided into two classes based on the ownership of the means of production (tools, factories, and the like). In a capitalist society, the *bourgeoisie*, or ruling class, owns the means of production, while the *proletariat*, or working class, does not own the means of production and instead is oppressed and exploited by the bourgeoisie. This difference creates an automatic conflict of interests between the two groups. Simply put, the bourgeoisie is interested in maintaining its

position at the top of society, while the proletariat's interest lies in rising up from the bottom and overthrowing the bourgeoisie to create an egalitarian society.

In a capitalist society, Marx and Engels wrote, revolution is inevitable because of structural contradictions arising from the very nature of capitalism. Because profit is the main goal of capitalism, the bourgeoisie's interest lies in maximizing profit. To do so, capitalists try to keep wages as low as possible and to spend as little money as possible on working conditions. This central fact of capitalism, said Marx and Engels, eventually prompts the rise of class consciousness, or an awareness of the reasons for their oppression, among workers. Their class consciousness in turn leads them to revolt against the bourgeoisie to eliminate the oppression and exploitation they suffer.

Marx and Engels' view of conflict arising from unequal positions held by members of society lies at the heart of today's conflict theory. This theory emphasizes that different groups in society have different interests stemming from their different social positions. These different interests in turn lead to different views on important social issues. Some versions of the theory root conflict in divisions based on race and ethnicity, gender, and other such differences, while other versions follow Marx and Engels in seeing conflict arising out of different positions in the economic structure. In general, however, conflict theory emphasizes that the various parts of society contribute to ongoing inequality, whereas functionalist theory, as we have seen, stresses that they contribute to the ongoing stability of society. Thus while functionalist theory emphasizes the benefits of the various parts of society for ongoing social stability, conflict theory favors social change to reduce inequality.



Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels were intense critics of capitalism. Their work inspired the later development of conflict theory in sociology. (Wikimedia Commons – public domain.)

Feminist theory has developed in sociology and other disciplines since the 1970s and for our purposes will be considered a specific application of conflict theory. In this case, the conflict concerns gender inequality rather than the class inequality emphasized by Marx and Engels. Although many variations of feminist theory exist, they all emphasize that society is filled with gender inequality such that women are the subordinate sex in many dimensions of social, political, and economic life (Lorber, 2010). Liberal feminists view gender inequality as arising out of gender differences in socialization, while Marxist feminists say that this inequality is a result of the rise of capitalism, which made women dependent on men for economic support. On the other hand, radical feminists view gender inequality as present in all societies, not just capitalist ones. Several chapters in this book emphasize the perspectives of feminist sociologists and other social scientists.

Conflict theory in its various forms views social problems as arising from society's inherent inequality. Depending on which version of conflict theory is being considered, the inequality contributing to social problems is based on social class, race and ethnicity, gender, or some other dimension of society's hierarchy. Because any of these inequalities represents a fundamental flaw in society, conflict theory assumes that fundamental social change is needed to address society's many social problems.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction. Its roots lie in the work of early 1900s American sociologists, social psychologists, and philosophers who were interested in human consciousness and action. Herbert Blumer (1969) (Blumer, 1969), a sociologist at the University of Chicago, built on their writings to develop symbolic interactionism, a term he coined. Drawing on Blumer's work, symbolic interactionists feel that people do not merely learn the roles that society has set out for them; instead they construct these roles as they interact. As they interact, they negotiate their definitions of the situations in which they find themselves and socially construct the reality of these situations. In doing so, they rely heavily on symbols such as words and gestures to reach a shared understanding of their interaction.



Symbolic interactionism focuses on individuals, such as the people conversing here. Sociologists favoring this approach examine how and why individuals interact and interpret the meanings of their interaction. (Wikimedia Commons – public domain.)

An example is the familiar symbol of shaking hands. In the United States and many other societies, shaking hands is a symbol of greeting and friendship. This simple act indicates that you are a nice, polite person with whom someone should feel comfortable. To reinforce this symbol's importance for understanding a bit of interaction, consider a situation where someone *refuses* to shake hands. This action is usually intended as a sign of dislike or as an insult, and the other person interprets it as such. Their understanding of the situation and subsequent interaction will be very different from those arising from the more typical shaking of hands. As the term *symbolic interactionism* implies, their understanding of this encounter arises from what they do when they interact and from their use and interpretation of the various symbols included in their interaction. According to symbolic interactionists, social order is possible because people learn what various symbols (such as shaking hands) mean and apply these meanings to different kinds of situations. If you visited a society where sticking your right hand out to greet someone was interpreted as a threatening gesture, you would quickly learn the value of common understandings of symbols.

Symbolic interactionism views social problems as arising from the interaction of individuals. This interaction matters in two important respects. First, socially problematic behaviors such as crime and drug use are often learned from our interaction with people who engage in these behaviors; we adopt their attitudes that justify committing these behaviors, and we learn any special techniques that might be needed to commit these behaviors. Second, we also learn our perceptions of a social problem from our interaction with other people, whose perceptions and beliefs influence our own perceptions and beliefs.

Because symbolic interactionism emphasizes the perception of social problems, it is closely aligned with the social constructionist view discussed earlier. Both perspectives emphasize the subjective nature of social problems. By doing so, they remind us that perceptions often matter at least as much as objective reality in determining whether a given condition or behavior rises to the level of a social problem and in the types of possible solutions that various parties might favor for a particular social problem.

## Applying the Three Perspectives



To explain armed robbery, symbolic interactionists focus on how armed robbers decide when and where to rob a victim and on how their interactions with other criminals reinforce their own criminal tendencies. (Geoffrey Fairchild – The Robbery – CC BY 2.0.)

To help you further understand the different views of these three theoretical perspectives, let's see what they would probably say about *armed robbery*, a very serious form of crime, while recognizing that the three perspectives together provide a more comprehensive understanding of armed robbery than any one perspective provides by itself.

A functionalist approach might suggest that armed robbery actually serves positive functions for society, such as the job-creating function mentioned earlier for crime in general. It would still think that efforts should be made to reduce armed robbery, but it would also assume that far-reaching changes in our society would be neither wise nor necessary as part of the effort to reduce crime.

Conflict theory would take a very different approach to understanding armed robbery. It might note that most street criminals are poor and thus emphasize that armed robbery is the result of the despair and frustration of living in poverty and facing a lack of jobs and other opportunities for economic and social success. The roots of street crime, from the perspective of conflict theory, thus lie in society at least as much as they lie in the individuals committing such crime. To reduce armed robbery and other street crime, conflict theory would advocate far-reaching changes in the economic structure of society.

For its part, symbolic interactionism would focus on how armed robbers make such decisions as when and where to rob someone and on how their interactions with other criminals reinforce their own criminal tendencies. It would also investigate how victims of armed robbery behave when confronted by a robber. To reduce armed robbery, it would advocate programs that reduce the opportunities for interaction among potential criminal offenders, for example, after-school programs that keep at-risk youths busy in "conventional" activities so that they have less time to spend with youths who might help them get into trouble.

## Key Takeaways

- According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination involves the ability to recognize that private troubles are rooted in public issues and structural problems.
- Functionalism emphasizes the importance of social institutions for social stability and implies that far-reaching social change will be socially harmful.
- Conflict theory emphasizes social inequality and suggests that far-reaching social change is needed to achieve a just society.
- Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the social meanings and understandings that individuals derive from their social interaction.

## For Your Review

1. Select an example of a "private trouble" and explain how and why it may reflect a structural problem in society.
2. At this point in your study of social problems, which one of the three sociological theoretical perspectives sounds most appealing to you? Why?

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# 2.3: Continuity and Change in Social Problems

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain what is meant by this book's subtitle, "Continuity and Change."
2. List the three sources of changes to social problems.
3. Describe how the United States compares to other democracies regarding the seriousness of social problems.

This book's subtitle, "Continuity and Change," conveys a theme that will guide every chapter's discussion. Social problems are, first of all, *persistent*. They have continued for decades and even centuries, and they show no sign of ending anytime soon. In view of social problems' long history, certainty of continuing for some time to come, and serious consequences, it is easy to feel overwhelmed when reading about them, to think that little can be done about them, and even to become a bit depressed. As a result, it is easy for students to come away from social problems courses with a rather pessimistic, "doom and gloom" outlook (Johnson, 2005).




An important source of change in social problems is protest by a social change group or movement. (M 2 – Fantasia Protest, Castro Theater, 1991 – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

That is why this book stresses the second part of the subtitle, *change*. Although social problems are indeed persistent, it is also true that certain problems are less serious now than in the past. Change is possible. As just one of many examples, consider the conditions that workers face in the United States. As Chapter 12 discusses, many workers today are unemployed, have low wages, or work in substandard and even dangerous workplaces. Yet they are immeasurably better off than a century ago, thanks to the US labor movement that began during the 1870s. Workers now have the eight-hour day, the minimum wage (even if many people think it is too low), the right to strike, and workplaces that are much safer than when the labor movement began. In two more examples, people of color and women have made incredible advances since the 1960s, even if, as Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 discuss, they continue to experience racial and gender inequality, respectively. To repeat: Change is possible.

How does change occur? One source of change in social problems is social science theory and research. Over the decades, theory and research in sociology and the other social sciences have pointed to the reasons for social problems, to potentially successful ways of addressing them, and to actual policies that succeeded in addressing some aspect of a social problem. Accordingly, the discussion in each chapter of this book is based on sound social science theory and research, and each chapter will present examples of how the findings from sociological and other social science research have either contributed to public policy related to the chapter's social problem or have the potential of doing so.

The actions of individuals and groups may also make a difference. Many people have public-service jobs or volunteer in all sorts of activities involving a social problem: they assist at a food pantry, they help clean up a riverbank, and so forth. Others take on a more activist orientation by becoming involved in small social change groups or a larger social movement. Our nation is a better place today because of the labor movement, the Southern civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the environmental movement, and other efforts too numerous to mention. According to Frances Fox Piven (2006),Piven, F. F. (2006). *Challenging authority: How ordinary people change America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. a former president of

the American Sociological Association, it is through such efforts that “ordinary people change America,” as the subtitle of her book on this subject reads.

Sharing this view, anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Change thus is not easy, but it can and does occur. Eleanor Roosevelt (1960, p. 168)Roosevelt, E. (1960). *You learn by living: Eleven keys for a more fulfilling life*. New York, NY: Harper & Row. recognized this when she wrote, “Surely, in the light of history, it is more intelligent to hope rather than to fear, to try rather than not to try. For one thing we know beyond all doubt: Nothing has ever been achieved by the person who says, ‘It can’t be done.’” In the optimistic spirit of these two famous women, we will see examples throughout this book of people making a difference in their jobs, volunteer activities, and involvement in social change efforts.





*Many other democracies rank higher than the United States on poverty, health, and other social indicators. For this reason, the United States may have much to learn from their positive examples.*

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Change also occurs in social problems because policymakers (elected or appointed officials and other individuals) pass laws or enact policies that successfully address a social problem. They often do so only because of the pressure of a social movement, but sometimes they have the vision to act without such pressure. It is also true that many officials fail to take action despite the pressure of a social movement, so those who do take action should be applauded. A recent example involves the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, who made the legalization of same-sex marriage a top priority for his state when he took office in January 2011. After the New York state legislature narrowly approved same-sex marriage six months later, Cuomo's advocacy was widely credited for enabling this to happen (Barbaro, 2011).Barbaro, M. (2011, June 6). Behind NY gay marriage, an unlikely mix of forces. *New York Times*, p. A1.

A final source of change is the lessons learned from other nations' experiences with social problems. Sometimes these lessons for the United States are positive ones, as when another nation has tackled a social problem more successfully than the United States, and sometimes these lessons are negative ones, as when another nation has a more serious problem than the United States and/or has made mistakes in addressing this problem. The United States can learn from the good examples of some other nations, and it can also learn from the bad ones. For this reason, each chapter of this book discusses such examples. In this regard, the United States has much to learn from the experiences of other long-standing democracies like Canada, the nations of Western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. Despite its great wealth, the United States ranks *below* most of its democratic peers on many social indicators, such as poverty, health, and so on (Holland, 2011; Russell, 2011).Holland, J. (2011, June 15). 9 countries that do it better: Why does Europe take better care of its people than America? *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/story/151312/151319_countries_that_do_it_better%151313A_why_does_europe_take_better_care_of_its_people_than_america?page=151311; Russell, J. W. (2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. A major reason for this difference is that other democratic governments are far more proactive, in terms of attention and spending, than the US federal and state governments in helping their citizens. Because the United States has much to learn from their positive example, this book's chapters all discuss policies that enable other democracies to address certain social problems far more successfully than the United States has addressed them.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social problems are persistent, but they have also changed over the years, and many social problems are less serious now than in the past.
- Three sources of change to social problems include social science research, the efforts of citizens acting alone or especially in social change groups, and the experiences of other nations.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Have you participated in any volunteer or other activity involving a social problem? If so, why did you do so? If not, why have you not participated in such an effort?
2. Do you share Eleanor Roosevelt's optimism that social change is possible? Why or why not?

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# 2.4: Doing Research on Social Problems

**Learning Objectives**

1. List the major advantages and disadvantages of surveys, observational studies, and experiments.
2. Explain why scholars who study social problems often rely on existing data.

Sound research is an essential tool for understanding the sources, dynamics, and consequences of social problems and possible solutions to them. This section briefly describes the major ways in which sociologists gather information about social problems. Table 1.2 “Major Sociological Research Methods” summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

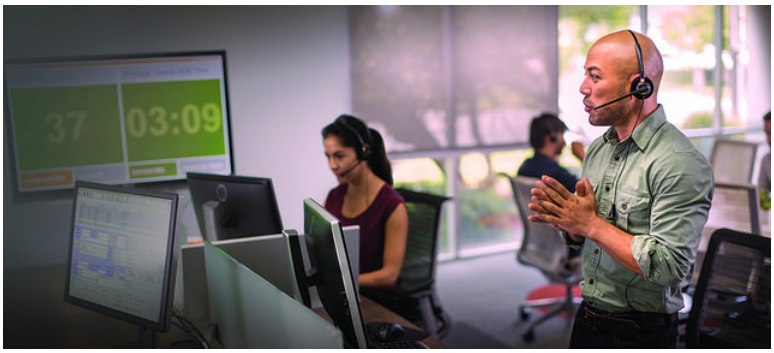
Table 1.2 Major Sociological Research Methods

| Method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| Survey | Many people can be included. If given to a random sample of the population, a survey’s results can be generalized to the population. | Large surveys are expensive and time consuming. Although much information is gathered, this information is relatively superficial. |
| Experiments | If random assignment is used, experiments provide fairly convincing data on cause and effect. | Because experiments do not involve random samples of the population and most often involve college students, their results cannot readily be generalized to the population. |
| Observation (field research) | Observational studies may provide rich, detailed information about the people who are observed. | Because observation studies do not involve random samples of the population, their results cannot readily be generalized to the population. |
| Existing data | Because existing data have already been gathered, the researcher does not have to spend the time and money to gather data. | The data set that is being analyzed may not contain data on all the variables in which a sociologist is interested or may contain data on variables that are not measured in ways the sociologist prefers. |

## Surveys

The *survey* is the most common method by which sociologists gather their data. The Gallup poll is perhaps the most well-known example of a survey and, like all surveys, gathers its data with the help of a questionnaire that is given to a group of respondents. The Gallup poll is an example of a survey conducted by a private organization, but sociologists do their own surveys, as does the government and many organizations in addition to Gallup. Many surveys are administered to respondents who are randomly chosen and thus constitute a random sample. In a random sample, everyone in the population (whether it be the whole US population or just the population of a state or city, all the college students in a state or city or all the students at just one college, etc.) has the same chance of being included in the survey. The beauty of a random sample is that it allows us to generalize the results of the sample to the population from which the sample comes. This means that we can be fairly sure of the behavior and attitudes of the whole US population by knowing the behavior and attitudes of just four hundred people randomly chosen from that population.

Some surveys are *face-to-face* surveys, in which interviewers meet with respondents to ask them questions. This type of survey can yield much information, because interviewers typically will spend at least an hour asking their questions, and a high response rate (the percentage of all people in the sample who agree to be interviewed), which is important to be able to generalize the survey’s results to the entire population. On the downside, this type of survey can be very expensive and time consuming to conduct.




Surveys are very useful for gathering various kinds of information relevant to social problems. Advances in technology have made telephone surveys involving random-digit dialing perhaps the most popular way of conducting a survey. (plantronicsgermany – Encore520 call center man standing – CC BY-ND 2.0.)

Because of these drawbacks, sociologists and other researchers have turned to telephone surveys. Most Gallup polls are conducted over the telephone. Computers do random-digit dialing, which results in a random sample of all telephone numbers being selected. Although the response rate and the number of questions asked are both lower than in face-to-face surveys (people can just hang up the phone at the outset or let their answering machine take the call), the ease and low expense of telephone surveys are making them increasingly popular. Surveys done over the Internet are also becoming more popular, as they can reach many people at very low expense. A major problem with web surveys is that their results cannot necessarily be generalized to the entire population because not everyone has access to the Internet.

Surveys are used in the study of social problems to gather information about the behavior and attitudes of people regarding one or more problems. For example, many surveys ask people about their use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs or about their experiences of being unemployed or in poor health. Many of the chapters in this book will present evidence gathered by surveys carried out by sociologists and other social scientists, various governmental agencies, and private research and public interest firms.

## Experiments

*Experiments* are the primary form of research in the natural and physical sciences, but in the social sciences they are for the most part found only in psychology. Some sociologists still use experiments, however, and they remain a powerful tool of social research.

The major advantage of experiments, whether they are done in the natural and physical sciences or in the social sciences, is that the researcher can be fairly sure of a cause-and-effect relationship because of the way the experiment is set up. Although many different experimental designs exist, the typical experiment consists of an experimental group and a control group, with subjects *randomly assigned* to either group. The researcher does something to the experimental group that is not done to the control group. If the two groups differ later in some variable, then it is safe to say that the condition to which the experimental group was subjected was responsible for the difference that resulted.

Most experiments take place in the laboratory, which for psychologists may be a room with a one-way mirror, but some experiments occur in the field, or in a natural setting (*field experiments*). In Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the early 1980s, sociologists were involved in a much-discussed field experiment sponsored by the federal government. The researchers wanted to see whether arresting men for domestic violence made it less likely that they would commit such violence again. To test this hypothesis, the researchers had police do one of the following after arriving at the scene of a domestic dispute: They either arrested the suspect, separated him from his wife or partner for several hours, or warned him to stop but did not arrest or separate him. The researchers then determined the percentage of men in each group who committed repeated domestic violence during the next six months and found that those who were arrested had the lowest rate of recidivism, or repeat offending (Sherman & Berk, 1984). This finding led many jurisdictions across the United States to adopt a policy of mandatory arrest for domestic violence suspects. However, replications of the Minneapolis experiment in other cities found that arrest sometimes reduced recidivism for domestic violence but also sometimes increased it, depending on which city was being studied and on certain characteristics of the suspects, including whether they were employed at the time of their arrest (Sherman, 1992).

As the Minneapolis study suggests, perhaps the most important problem with experiments is that their results are not *generalizable* beyond the specific subjects studied. The subjects in most psychology experiments, for example, are college students, who obviously are not typical of average Americans: They are younger, more educated, and more likely to be middle class. Despite this problem, experiments in psychology and other social sciences have given us very valuable insights into the sources of attitudes and

behavior. Scholars of social problems are increasingly using field experiments to study the effectiveness of various policies and programs aimed at addressing social problems. We will examine the results of several such experiments in the chapters ahead.

## Observational Studies

*Observational* research, also called *field research*, is a staple of sociology. Sociologists have long gone into the field to observe people and social settings, and the result has been many rich descriptions and analyses of behavior in juvenile gangs, bars, urban street corners, and even whole communities.

Observational studies consist of both participant observation and nonparticipant observation. Their names describe how they differ. In participant observation, the researcher is part of the group that she or he is studying, spends time with the group, and might even live with people in the group. Several classical social problems studies of this type exist, many of them involving people in urban neighborhoods (Liebow, 1967; Liebow, 1993; Whyte, 1943). In nonparticipant observation, the researcher observes a group of people but does not otherwise interact with them. If you went to your local shopping mall to observe, say, whether people walking with children looked happier than people without children, you would be engaging in nonparticipant observation.

Similar to experiments, observational studies cannot automatically be generalized to other settings or members of the population. But in many ways they provide a richer account of people's lives than surveys do, and they remain an important method of research on social problems.

## Existing Data

Sometimes sociologists do not gather their own data but instead analyze *existing data* that someone else has gathered. The US Census Bureau, for example, gathers data on all kinds of areas relevant to the lives of Americans, and many sociologists analyze census data on such social problems as poverty, unemployment, and illness. Sociologists interested in crime and the criminal justice system may analyze data from court records, while medical sociologists often analyze data from patient records at hospitals. Analysis of existing data such as these is called secondary data analysis. Its advantage to sociologists is that someone else has already spent the time and money to gather the data. A disadvantage is that the data set being analyzed may not contain data on all the topics in which a sociologist may be interested or may contain data on topics that are not measured in ways the sociologist might prefer.

## The Scientific Method and Objectivity

This section began by stressing the need for sound research in the study of social problems. But what are the elements of sound research? At a minimum, such research should follow the rules of the *scientific method*. As you probably learned in high school and/or college science classes, these rules—formulating hypotheses, gathering and testing data, drawing conclusions, and so forth—help guarantee that research yields the most accurate and reliable conclusions possible.

An overriding principle of the scientific method is that research should be conducted as *objectively* as possible. Researchers are often passionate about their work, but they must take care not to let the findings they expect and even hope to uncover affect how they do their research. This in turn means that they must not conduct their research in a manner that helps achieve the results they expect to find. Such bias can happen unconsciously, and the scientific method helps reduce the potential for this bias as much as possible.

This potential is arguably greater in the social sciences than in the natural and physical sciences. The political views of chemists and physicists typically do not affect how an experiment is performed and how the outcome of the experiment is interpreted. In contrast, researchers in the social sciences, and perhaps particularly in sociology, often have strong feelings about the topics they are studying. Their social and political beliefs may thus influence how they perform their research on these topics and how they interpret the results of this research. Following the scientific method helps reduce this possible influence.

### Key Takeaways

- The major types of research on social problems include surveys, experiments, observational studies, and the use of existing data.
- Surveys are the most common method, and the results of surveys of random samples may be generalized to the populations from which the samples come.
- Observation studies and existing data are also common methods in social problems research. Observation studies enable the gathering of rich, detailed information, but their results cannot necessarily be generalized beyond the people studied.
- Research on social problems should follow the scientific method to yield the most accurate and objective conclusions possible.

## For Your Review

1. Have you ever been a respondent or subject in any type of sociological or psychological research project? If so, how did it feel to be studied?
2. Which type of social problems research method sounds most interesting to you? Why?

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# 2.5: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Some sociologists favor the social constructionist view that negative social conditions or behaviors are not social problems unless they are generally perceived as a social problem, but other sociologists say that these conditions and behaviors are still social problems even if they are not perceived as such.
2. According to C. Wright Mills, the sociological imagination involves the ability to realize that personal troubles are rooted in problems in the larger social structure. The sociological imagination thus supports a blaming-the-system view over a blaming-the-victim view.
3. Social problems have existed for decades or even centuries, but many of these have also lessened in their seriousness over time, and change in the future is indeed possible.
4. Several theoretical perspectives in sociology exist. Functionalism emphasizes the functions that social institutions serve to ensure the ongoing stability of society, while conflict theory focuses on the conflict among different racial, ethnic, social class, and other groups and emphasizes how social institutions help ensure inequality. Symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals interpret the meanings of the situations in which they find themselves.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 3: Poverty


3.1: The Measurement and Extent of Poverty
3.2: Who the Poor Are- Social Patterns of Poverty
3.3: Explaining Poverty
3.4: The Consequences of Poverty
3.5: Global Poverty
3.6: Reducing Poverty
3.7: End-of-Chapter Material
3.8: Crash Course Video- Social Class and Poverty
3.9: Crash Course Video- Impacts of Social Class


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# 3.1: The Measurement and Extent of Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand how official poverty in the United States is measured.
2. Describe problems in the measurement of official poverty.
3. Describe the extent of official poverty.

When US officials became concerned about poverty during the 1960s, they quickly realized they needed to find out how much poverty we had. To do so, a measure of official poverty, or a poverty line, was needed. A government economist, Mollie Orshanky, first calculated this line in 1963 by multiplying the cost of a very minimal diet by three, as a 1955 government study had determined that the typical American family spent one-third of its income on food. Thus a family whose cash income is lower than three times the cost of a very minimal diet is considered officially poor.

This way of calculating the official poverty line has not changed since 1963. It is thus out of date for many reasons. For example, many expenses, such as heat and electricity, child care, transportation, and health care, now occupy a greater percentage of the typical family's budget than was true in 1963. In addition, this official measure ignores a family's noncash income from benefits such as food stamps and tax credits. As a national measure, the poverty line also fails to take into account regional differences in the cost of living. All these problems make the official measurement of poverty highly suspect. As one poverty expert observes, "The official measure no longer corresponds to reality. It doesn't get either side of the equation right—how much the poor have or how much they need. No one really trusts the data" (DeParle, et. al., 2011). We'll return to this issue shortly.



The measure of official poverty began in 1963 and stipulates that a family whose income is lower than three times the cost of a minimal diet is considered officially poor. This measure has not changed since 1963 even though family expenses have risen greatly in many areas. (Wikimedia Commons – public domain.)

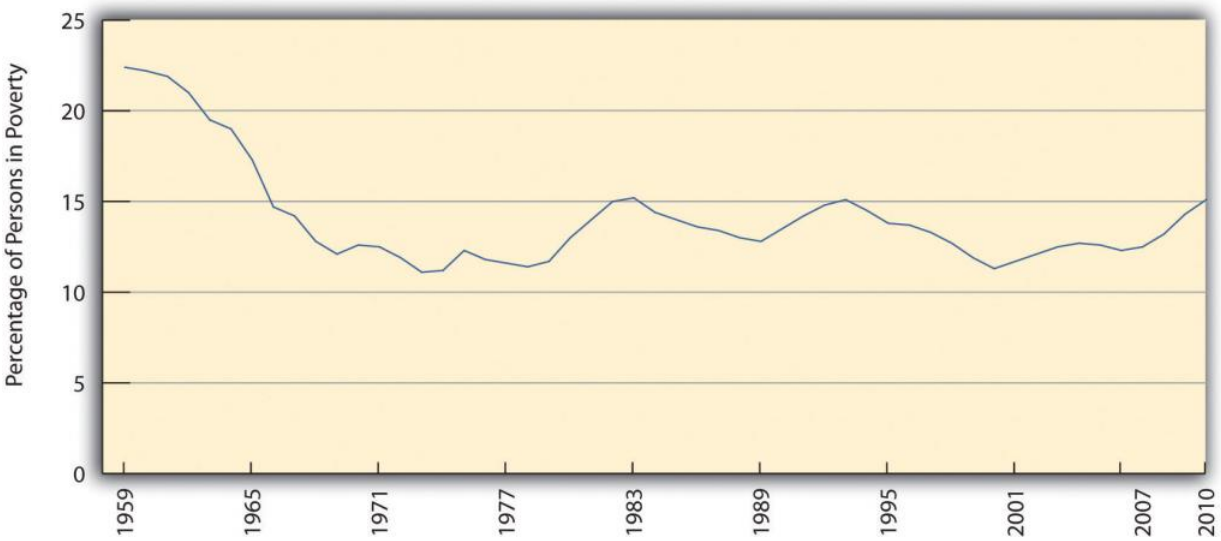
The poverty line is adjusted annually for inflation and takes into account the number of people in a family: The larger the family size, the higher the poverty line. In 2010, the poverty line for a nonfarm family of four (two adults, two children) was $22,213. A four-person family earning even one more dollar than $22,213 in 2010 was *not* officially poor, even though its "extra" income hardly lifted it out of dire economic straits. Poverty experts have calculated a no-frills budget that enables a family to meet its basic needs in food, clothing, shelter, and so forth; this budget is about twice the poverty line. Families with incomes between the poverty line and twice the poverty line (or *twice poverty*) are barely making ends meet, but they are not considered officially poor. When we talk here about the poverty level, then, keep in mind that we are talking only about *official* poverty and that there are many families and individuals living in near poverty who have trouble meeting their basic needs, especially when they face unusually high medical expenses, motor vehicle expenses, or the like. For this reason, many analysts think families need incomes twice as high as the federal poverty level just to get by (Wright, et. al., 2011). They thus use *twice-poverty* data (i.e., family incomes below

twice the poverty line) to provide a more accurate understanding of how many Americans face serious financial difficulties, even if they are not living in official poverty.

## The Extent of Poverty

With this caveat in mind, how many Americans are poor? The US Census Bureau gives us some answers that use the traditional, official measure of poverty developed in 1963. In 2010, 15.1 percent of the US population, or 46.2 million Americans, lived in official poverty (DeNavas-Walt, et. al., 2011). This percentage represented a decline from the early 1990s but was higher than 2000 and even higher than the rate in the late 1960s (see Figure 2.1 “US Poverty, 1959–2010”). If we were winning the war on poverty in the 1960s (notice the sharp drop in the 1960s in Figure 2.1 “US Poverty, 1959–2010”), since then poverty has fought us to a standstill.

Figure 2.1 US Poverty, 1959–2010




Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2011). Historical poverty tables: People. Retrieved from www.census.gov/hhes/www/pover...al/people.html.

Another way of understanding the extent of poverty is to consider episodic poverty, defined by the Census Bureau as being poor for at least two consecutive months in some time period. From 2004 to 2007, the last years for which data are available, almost one-third of the US public, equal to about 95 million people, were poor for at least two consecutive months, although only 2.2 percent were poor for all three years (DeNavas-Walt, et al., 2010). As these figures indicate, people go into and out of poverty, but even those who go out of it do not usually move very far from it. And as we have seen, the majority of Americans can expect to experience poverty or near poverty at some point in their lives.

The problems in the official poverty measure that were noted earlier have led the Census Bureau to develop a *Supplemental Poverty Measure*. This measure takes into account the many family expenses in addition to food; it also takes into account geographic differences in the cost of living, taxes paid and tax credits received, and the provision of food stamps, Medicaid, and certain other kinds of government aid. This new measure yields an estimate of poverty that is higher than the rather simplistic official poverty measure that, as noted earlier, is based solely on the size of a family and the cost of food and the amount of a family’s cash income. According to this new measure, the 2010 poverty rate was 16.0 percent, equal to 49.1 million Americans (Short, 2011). Because the official poverty measure identified 46.2 million people as poor, the new, more accurate measure increased the number of poor people in the United States by almost 3 million. Without the help of Social Security, food stamps, and other federal programs, at least 25 million additional people would be classified as poor (Sherman, 2011). These programs thus are essential in keeping many people above the poverty level, even if they still have trouble making ends meet and even though the poverty rate remains unacceptably high.

A final figure is worth noting. Recall that many poverty experts think that twice-poverty data—the percentage and number of people living in families with incomes below twice the official poverty level—are a better gauge than the official poverty level of the actual extent of poverty, broadly defined, in the United States. Using the twice-poverty threshold, about one-third of the US population, or more than 100 million Americans, live in poverty or near poverty (Pereyra, 2011). Those in near poverty are just one

crisis—losing a job or sustaining a serious illness or injury—away from poverty. Twice-poverty data paint a very discouraging picture.

### Key Takeaways

- The official poverty rate is based on the size of a family and a minimal food budget; this measure underestimates the true extent of poverty.
- The official poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1 percent, equal to more than 46 million Americans.
- About one-third of the US population, or more than 100 million Americans, have incomes no higher than twice the poverty line.

### For Your Review

1. Write a short essay that summarizes the problems by which the official poverty rate is determined.
2. Sit down with some classmates and estimate what a family of four (two parents, two young children) in your area would have to pay annually for food, clothing, shelter, energy, and other necessities of life. What figure do you end up with? How does this sum of money compare with the official poverty line of $22,213 in 2010 for a family of four?

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# 3.2: Who the Poor Are- Social Patterns of Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe racial/ethnic differences in the poverty rate.
2. Discuss how family structure is related to the poverty rate.
3. Explain what poverty and labor force participation data imply about the belief that many poor people lack the motivation to work.

Who are the poor? Although the official poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1 percent, this rate differs by the important sociodemographic characteristics of race/ethnicity, gender, and age, and it also differs by region of the nation and by family structure. The poverty rate differences based on these variables are critical to understanding the nature and social patterning of poverty in the United States. We look at each of these variables in turn with 2010 census data (DeNavas-Walt, et, al., 2011).

## Race/Ethnicity

Here is a quick quiz; please circle the correct answer.

Most poor people in the United States are

1. Black/African American
2. Latino
3. Native American
4. Asian
5. White

What did you circle? If you are like the majority of people who answer a similar question in public opinion surveys, you would have circled *a. Black/African American*. When Americans think about poor people, they tend to picture African Americans (White, 2007). This popular image is thought to reduce the public's sympathy for poor people and to lead them to oppose increased government aid for the poor. The public's views on these matters are, in turn, thought to play a key role in government poverty policy. It is thus essential for the public to have an accurate understanding of the racial/ethnic patterning of poverty.



The most typical poor people in the United States are non-Latino whites. These individuals comprise 42.4 percent of all poor Americans. (Franco Folini – Homeless guys with dogs – CC BY-SA 2.0.)

Unfortunately, the public's racial image of poor people is mistaken, as census data reveal that *the most typical poor person is white (non-Latino)*. To be more precise, 42.4 percent of poor people are white (non-Latino), 28.7 percent are Latino, 23.1 percent are black, and 3.7 percent are Asian (see Figure 2.2 "Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Poor, 2010 (Percentage of Poor Persons

Who Belong to Each Group)"). As these figures show, non-Latino whites certainly comprise the greatest number of the American poor. Turning these percentages into numbers, they account for 19.6 million of the 46.2 million poor Americans.

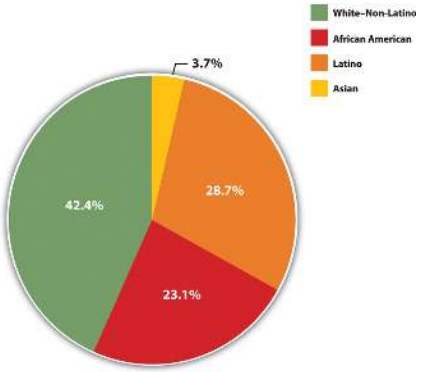



Figure 2.2 Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Poor, 2010 (Percentage of Poor Persons Who Belong to Each Group). Source: Data from DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Report P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

It is also true, though, that race and ethnicity affect the chances of being poor. While only 9.9 percent of non-Latino whites are poor, 27.4 percent of African Americans, 12.1 percent of Asians, and 26.6 percent of Latinos (who may be of any race) are poor (see Figure 2.3 "Race, Ethnicity, and Poverty, 2010 (Percentage of Each Group That Is Poor)"). Thus African Americans and Latinos are almost three times as likely as non-Latino whites to be poor. (Because there are so many non-Latino whites in the United States, the greatest number of poor people are non-Latino white, even if the percentage of whites who are poor is relatively low.) The higher poverty rates of people of color are so striking and important that they have been termed the "colors of poverty" (Lin & Harris, 2008).

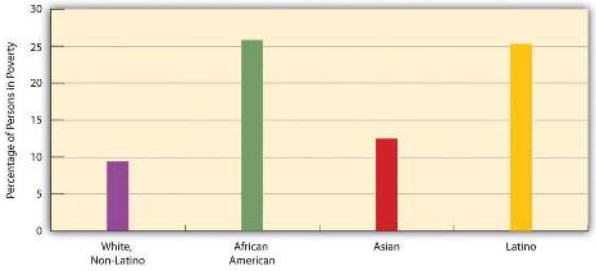



Figure 2.3 Race, Ethnicity, and Poverty, 2010 (Percentage of Each Group That Is Poor) Source: Data from DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Report P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

## Gender

One thing that many women know all too well is that women are more likely than men to be poor. According to the census, 16.2 percent of all females live in poverty, compared to only 14.0 percent of all males. These figures translate to a large gender gap in the actual number of poor people, as 25.2 million women and girls live in poverty, compared to only 21.0 million men and boys, for a difference of 4.2 million people. The high rate of female poverty is called the *feminization of poverty* (Iceland, 2006).Iceland, J. (2006). *Poverty in America: A handbook*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. We will see additional evidence of this pattern when we look at the section on family structure that follows.

## Age

Turning to age, at any one time 22 percent of children under age 18 are poor (amounting to 16.4 million children), a figure that rises to about 39 percent of African American children and 35 percent of Latino children. About 37 percent of all children live in poverty for at least one year before turning 18 (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010).Ratcliffe, C., & McKernan, S.-M. (2010). *Childhood poverty persistence: Facts and consequences*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press. The poverty rate for US children is the highest of all wealthy democracies and in fact is 1.5 to 9 times greater than the corresponding rates in Canada and Western Europe (Mishel, Bernstein, & Shierholz, 2009).Mishel, L., Bernstein, J., & Shierholz, H. (2009). *The state of working America 2008/2009*.

Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. As high as the US childhood poverty rate is, twice-poverty data again paint an even more discouraging picture. Children living in families with incomes below twice the official poverty level are called *low-income children*, and their families are called *low-income families*. Almost 44 percent of American children, or some 32.5 million kids, live in such families (Addy & Wright, 2012).Addy, S., & Wright, V. R. (2012). *Basic facts about low-income children, 2010*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty. Almost two-thirds of African American children and Latino children live in low-income families.




*The poverty rate for US children is the highest in the Western world.*

© *Thinkstock*

At the other end of the age distribution, 9 percent of people aged 65 or older are poor (amounting to about 3.5 million seniors). Turning around these age figures, almost 36 percent of all poor people in the United States are children, and almost 8 percent of the poor are 65 or older. Thus more than 43.4 percent of Americans living in poverty are children or the elderly.

## Region

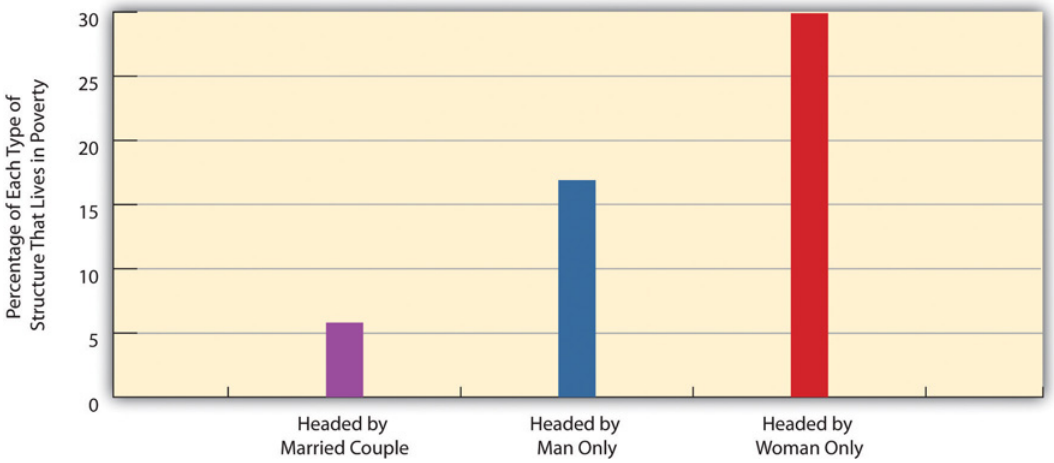
Poverty rates differ around the country. Some states have higher poverty rates than other states, and some counties within a state are poorer than other counties within that state. A basic way of understanding geographical differences in poverty is to examine the poverty rates of the four major regions of the nation. When we do this, the South is the poorest region, with a poverty rate of 16.9 percent. The West is next (15.3 percent), followed by the Midwest (13.9 percent) and then the Northeast (12.8 percent). The South's high poverty rate is thought to be an important reason for the high rate of illnesses and other health problems it experiences compared to the other regions (Ramshaw, 2011).Ramshaw, E. (2011, July 10). Major health problems linked to poverty. *New York Times*, p. A21.

## Family Structure

There are many types of family structures, including a married couple living with their children; an unmarried couple living with one or more children; a household with children headed by only one parent, usually a woman; a household with two adults and no children; and a household with only one adult living alone. Across the nation, poverty rates differ from one type of family structure to another.

Not surprisingly, poverty rates are higher in families with one adult than in those with two adults (because they often are bringing in two incomes), and, in one-adult families, they are higher in families headed by a woman than in those headed by a man (because women generally have lower incomes than men). Of all families headed by just a woman, 31.6 percent live in poverty, compared to only 15.8 percent of families headed by just a man. In contrast, only 6.2 percent of families headed by a married couple live in poverty (see Figure 2.4). The figure for female-headed families provides additional evidence for the feminization of poverty concept introduced earlier.

Figure 2.4 Family Structure and Poverty Rate (Percentage of Each Type of Structure That Lives in Poverty)




*Source: Data from DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010 (Current Population Report P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.*

We saw earlier that 22 percent of American children are poor. This figure varies according to the type of family structure in which the children live. Whereas only 11.6 percent of children residing with married parents live in poverty, 46.9 percent of those living with only their mother live in poverty. This latter figure rises to 53.3 percent for African American children and 57.0 percent for Latino children (US Census Bureau, 2012).US Census Bureau . (2012). *Poverty*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/pov/new02_100.htm. Yet regardless of their race or ethnicity, children living just with their mothers are at particularly great risk of living in poverty.

## Labor Force Status

As this chapter discusses later, many Americans think the poor are lazy and lack the motivation to work and, as is often said, "really could work if they wanted to." However, government data on the poor show that most poor people are, in fact, either working, unemployed but looking for work, or unable to work because of their age or health. Table 2.1 shows the relevant data. We discuss these numbers in some detail because of their importance, so please follow along carefully.

Table 2.1 Poverty and Labor Force Participation, 2010

| | |
|---|---|
| **Total number of poor people** | 46,180,000 |
| Number of poor people under age 18 | 16,401,000 |
| Number of poor people ages 65 and older | 3,521,000 |
| Number of poor people ages 18–64 | 26,258,000 |
| **Number of poor people ages 18–64 who were:** | |
| Working full- or part-time | 9,053,000 |
| Unemployed but looking for work | 3,616,000 |
| Disabled | 4,247,000 |
| In the armed forces | 77,000 |
| Able-bodied but not in the labor force | 9,254,000 |

Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2010). Current population survey (CPS) table creator. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html.

Let's examine this table to see the story it tells. Of the roughly 46.2 million poor people, almost 20 million were either under age 18 or at least 65. Because of their ages, we would not expect them to be working. Of the remaining 26.3 million poor adults ages 18–64, almost 17 million, or about two-thirds, fell into one of these categories: (a) they worked full-time or part-time, (b) they were unemployed but looking for work during a year of very high unemployment due to the nation's faltering economy, (c) they did not work because of a disability, or (d) they were in the armed forces. Subtracting all these adults leaves about 9.3 million able-bodied people ages 18–64.

Doing some arithmetic, we thus see that almost 37 million of the 46.2 million poor people we started with, or 80 percent, with were either working or unemployed but looking for work, too young or too old to work, disabled, or in the armed forces. It would thus be inaccurate to describe the vast majority of the poor as lazy and lacking the motivation to work.

What about the 9.3 million able-bodied poor people who are ages 18–64 but not in the labor force, who compose only 20 percent of the poor to begin with? Most of them were either taking care of small children or elderly parents or other relatives, retired for health reasons, or in school (US Census Bureau, 2012);US Census Bureau. (2012). *Current population survey. 2012 annual social and economic supplement*. Washington, DC: Author. some also left the labor force out of frustration and did not look for work (and thus were not counted officially as unemployed). Taking all these numbers and categories into account, it turns out that the percentage of poor people who "really could work if they wanted to" is rather miniscule, and the common belief that they "really could work if they wanted to" is nothing more than a myth.

## People Making a Difference

Feeding "Motel Kids" Near Disneyland

Just blocks from Disneyland in Anaheim, California, more than 1,000 families live in cheap motels frequently used by drug dealers and prostitutes. Because they cannot afford the deposit for an apartment, the motels are their only alternative to homelessness. As Bruno Serato, a local Italian restaurant owner, observed, "Some people are stuck, they have no money. They need to live in that room. They've lost everything they have. They have no other choice. No choice."

Serato learned about these families back in 2005, when he saw a boy at the local Boys & Girls Club eating a bag of potato chips as his only food for dinner. He was told that the boy lived with his family in a motel and that the Boys & Girls Club had a "motel kids" program that drove children in vans after school to their motels. Although the children got free breakfast and lunch at school, they often went hungry at night. Serato soon began serving pasta dinners to some seventy children at the club every evening, a number that had grown by spring 2011 to almost three hundred children nightly. Serato also pays to have the children transported to the club for their dinners, and he estimates that the food and transportation cost him about $2,000 monthly. His program had served more than 300,000 pasta dinners to motel kids by 2011.

Two of the children who eat Serato's pasta are Carlos and Anthony Gomez, 12, who live in a motel room with the other members of their family. Their father was grateful for the pasta: "I no longer worry as much, about them [coming home] and there being no

food. I know that they eat over there at [the] Boys & Girls Club."

Bruno Serato is merely happy to be helping out. "They're customers," he explains. "My favorite customers" (Toner, 2011).Toner, K. (2011, March 24). Making sure "motel kids" don't go hungry. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/03/24/cnnheroes.serato.motel.kids/index.html.

For more information about Bruno Serato's efforts, visit his charity site at www.thecaterinasclub.org.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although people of color have higher poverty rates than non-Latino whites, the most typical poor person in the United States is non-Latino white.
- The US childhood poverty rate is the highest of all Western democracies.
- Labor force participation data indicate that the belief that poor people lack motivation to work is in fact a myth.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Why do you think the majority of Americans assume poor people lack the motivation to work?
2. Explain to a friend how labor force participation data indicate that it is inaccurate to think that poor people lack the motivation to work.

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# 3.3: Explaining Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the assumptions of the functionalist and conflict views of stratification and of poverty.
2. Explain the focus of symbolic interactionist work on poverty.
3. Understand the difference between the individualist and structural explanations of poverty.

Why does poverty exist, and why and how do poor people end up being poor? The sociological perspectives introduced in Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems" provide some possible answers to these questions through their attempt to explain why American society is *stratified*—that is, why it has a range of wealth ranging from the extremely wealthy to the extremely poor. We review what these perspectives say generally about social stratification (rankings of people based on wealth and other resources a society values) before turning to explanations focusing specifically on poverty.

In general, the functionalist perspective and conflict perspective both try to explain why social stratification exists and endures, while the symbolic interactionist perspective discusses the differences that stratification produces for everyday interaction. Table 2.2 "Theory Snapshot" summarizes these three approaches.

Table 2.2 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | Stratification is necessary to induce people with special intelligence, knowledge, and skills to enter the most important occupations. For this reason, stratification is necessary and inevitable. |
| Conflict theory | Stratification results from lack of opportunity and from discrimination and prejudice against the poor, women, and people of color. It is neither necessary nor inevitable. |
| Symbolic interactionism | Stratification affects people's beliefs, lifestyles, daily interaction, and conceptions of themselves. |

## The Functionalist View

As discussed in Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems", functionalist theory assumes that society's structures and processes exist because they serve important functions for society's stability and continuity. In line with this view, functionalist theorists in sociology assume that stratification exists because it also serves important functions for society. This explanation was developed more than sixty years ago by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (Davis & Moore, 1945) in the form of several logical assumptions that imply stratification is both necessary and inevitable. When applied to American society, their assumptions would be as follows:

1. **Some jobs are more important than other jobs.** For example, the job of a brain surgeon is more important than the job of shoe shining.
2. **Some jobs require more skills and knowledge than other jobs.** To stay with our example, it takes more skills and knowledge to perform brain surgery than to shine shoes.
3. **Relatively few people have the ability to acquire the skills and knowledge that are needed to do these important, highly skilled jobs.** Most of us would be able to do a decent job of shining shoes, but very few of us would be able to become brain surgeons.
4. **To encourage the people with the skills and knowledge to do the important, highly skilled jobs, society must promise them higher incomes or other rewards.** If this is true, some people automatically end up higher in society's ranking system than others, and stratification is thus necessary and inevitable.

To illustrate their assumptions, say we have a society where shining shoes and doing brain surgery both give us incomes of $150,000 per year. (This example is *very* hypothetical, but please keep reading.) If you decide to shine shoes, you can begin making this money at age 16, but if you decide to become a brain surgeon, you will not start making this same amount until about age 35, as you must first go to college and medical school and then acquire several more years of medical training. While you have spent nineteen additional years beyond age 16 getting this education and training and taking out tens of thousands of dollars in student

loans, you could have spent those years shining shoes and making $150,000 a year, or $2.85 million overall. Which job would you choose?



Functional theory argues that the promise of very high incomes is necessary to encourage talented people to pursue important careers such as surgery. If physicians and shoe shiners made the same high income, would enough people decide to become physicians?

Public Domain Images – CC0 public domain.

As this example suggests, many people might not choose to become brain surgeons unless considerable financial and other rewards awaited them. By extension, we might not have enough people filling society's important jobs unless they know they will be similarly rewarded. If this is true, we must have stratification. And if we must have stratification, then that means some people will have much less money than other people. If stratification is inevitable, then, poverty is also inevitable. The functionalist view further implies that if people are poor, it is because they do not have the ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the important, high-paying jobs.

The functionalist view sounds very logical, but a few years after Davis and Moore published their theory, other sociologists pointed out some serious problems in their argument (Tumin, 1953; Wrong, 1959).

First, it is difficult to compare the importance of many types of jobs. For example, which is more important, doing brain surgery or mining coal? Although you might be tempted to answer with brain surgery, if no coal were mined then much of our society could not function. In another example, which job is more important, attorney or professor? (Be careful how you answer this one!)

Second, the functionalist explanation implies that the most important jobs have the highest incomes and the least important jobs the lowest incomes, but many examples, including the ones just mentioned, counter this view. Coal miners make much less money than physicians, and professors, for better or worse, earn much less on the average than lawyers. A professional athlete making millions of dollars a year earns many times the income of the president of the United States, but who is more important to the nation? Elementary school teachers do a very important job in our society, but their salaries are much lower than those of sports agents, advertising executives, and many other people whose jobs are far less essential.

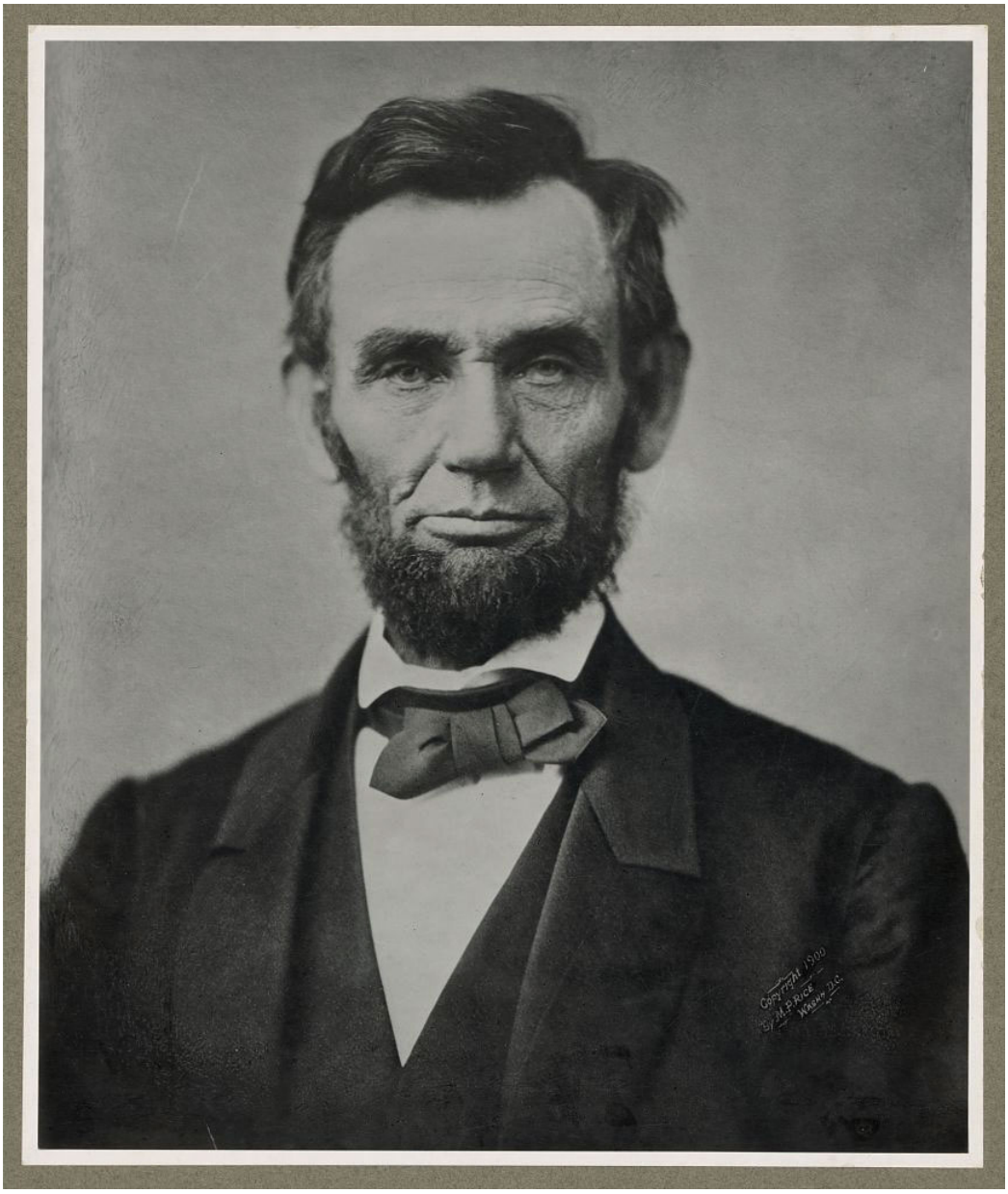
Third, the functionalist view assumes that people move up the economic ladder based on their abilities, skills, knowledge, and, more generally, their merit. This implies that if they do not move up the ladder, they lack the necessary merit. However, this view ignores the fact that much of our stratification stems from lack of equal opportunity. As later chapters in this book discuss, because of their race, ethnicity, gender, and class standing at birth, some people have less opportunity than others to acquire the skills and training they need to fill the types of jobs addressed by the functionalist approach.

Finally, the functionalist explanation might make sense up to a point, but it does not justify the extremes of wealth and poverty found in the United States and other nations. Even if we do have to promise higher incomes to get enough people to become

physicians, does that mean we also need the amount of poverty we have? Do CEOs of corporations really need to make millions of dollars per year to get enough qualified people to become CEOs? Do people take on a position as CEO or other high-paying job at least partly because of the challenge, working conditions, and other positive aspects they offer? The functionalist view does not answer these questions adequately.

One other line of functionalist thinking focuses more directly on poverty than generally on stratification. This particular functionalist view provocatively argues that poverty exists because it serves certain positive functions for our society. These functions include the following: (1) poor people do the work that other people do not want to do; (2) the programs that help poor people provide a lot of jobs for the people employed by the programs; (3) the poor purchase goods, such as day-old bread and used clothing, that other people do not wish to purchase, and thus extend the economic value of these goods; and (4) the poor provide jobs for doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals who may not be competent enough to be employed in positions catering to wealthier patients, clients, students, and so forth (Gans, 1972). Because poverty serves all these functions and more, according to this argument, the middle and upper classes have a vested interested in neglecting poverty to help ensure its continued existence.

## The Conflict View



Because he was born in a log cabin and later became president, Abraham Lincoln's life epitomizes the American Dream, which is the belief that people born into poverty can become successful through hard work. The popularity of this belief leads many Americans to blame poor people for their poverty. (US Library of Congress – public domain.)

Conflict theory's explanation of stratification draws on Karl Marx's view of class societies and incorporates the critique of the functionalist view just discussed. Many different explanations grounded in conflict theory exist, but they all assume that stratification stems from a fundamental conflict between the needs and interests of the powerful, or "haves," in society and those of the weak, or "have-nots" (Kerbo, 2012). The former take advantage of their position at the top of society to stay at the top, even if it means oppressing those at the bottom. At a minimum, they can heavily influence the law, the media, and other institutions in a way that maintains society's class structure.

In general, conflict theory attributes stratification and thus poverty to lack of opportunity from discrimination and prejudice against the poor, women, and people of color. In this regard, it reflects one of the early critiques of the functionalist view that the previous section outlined. To reiterate an earlier point, several of the remaining chapters of this book discuss the various obstacles that make it difficult for the poor, women, and people of color in the United States to move up the socioeconomic ladder and to otherwise enjoy healthy and productive lives.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Consistent with its micro orientation, symbolic interactionism tries to understand stratification and thus poverty by looking at people's interaction and understandings in their daily lives. Unlike the functionalist and conflict views, it does not try to explain why we have stratification in the first place. Rather, it examines the differences that stratification makes for people's lifestyles and their interaction with other people.

Many detailed, insightful sociological books on the lives of the urban and rural poor reflect the symbolic interactionist perspective (Anderson, 1999; C. M. Duncan, 2000; Liebow, 1993; Rank, 1994). These books focus on different people in different places, but they all make very clear that the poor often lead lives of quiet desperation and must find ways of coping with the fact of being poor. In these books, the consequences of poverty discussed later in this chapter acquire a human face, and readers learn in great detail what it is like to live in poverty on a daily basis.

Some classic journalistic accounts by authors not trained in the social sciences also present eloquent descriptions of poor people's lives (Bagdikian, 1964; Harrington, 1962). Writing in this tradition, a newspaper columnist who grew up in poverty recently recalled, "I know the feel of thick calluses on the bottom of shoeless feet. I know the bite of the cold breeze that slithers through a drafty house. I know the weight of constant worry over not having enough to fill a belly or fight an illness…Poverty is brutal, consuming and unforgiving. It strikes at the soul" (Blow, 2011).



Sociological accounts of the poor provide a vivid portrait of what it is like to live in poverty on a daily basis. (Pixabay – CC0 public domain.)

On a more lighthearted note, examples of the symbolic interactionist framework are also seen in the many literary works and films that portray the difficulties that the rich and poor have in interacting on the relatively few occasions when they do interact. For example, in the film *Pretty Woman*, Richard Gere plays a rich businessman who hires a prostitute, played by Julia Roberts, to accompany him to swank parties and other affairs. Roberts has to buy a new wardrobe and learn how to dine and behave in these social settings, and much of the film's humor and poignancy come from her awkwardness in learning the lifestyle of the rich.

## Specific Explanations of Poverty

The functionalist and conflict views focus broadly on social stratification but only indirectly on poverty. When poverty finally attracted national attention during the 1960s, scholars began to try specifically to understand why poor people become poor and remain poor. Two competing explanations developed, with the basic debate turning on whether poverty arises from problems either within the poor themselves or in the society in which they live (Rank, 2011). The first type of explanation follows logically from the functional theory of stratification and may be considered an individualistic explanation. The second type of explanation follows from conflict theory and is a structural explanation that focuses on problems in American society that produce poverty. Table 2.3 "Explanations of Poverty" summarizes these explanations.

Table 2.3 Explanations of Poverty

| Explanation | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Individualistic | Poverty results from the fact that poor people lack the motivation to work and have certain beliefs and values that contribute to their poverty. |
| Structural | Poverty results from problems in society that lead to a lack of opportunity and a lack of jobs. |

It is critical to determine which explanation makes more sense because, as sociologist Theresa C. Davidson (Davidson, 2009) observes, "beliefs about the causes of poverty shape attitudes toward the poor." To be more precise, the particular explanation that people favor affects their view of government efforts to help the poor. Those who attribute poverty to problems in the larger society are much more likely than those who attribute it to deficiencies among the poor to believe that the government should do more to

help the poor (Bradley & Cole, 2002). The explanation for poverty we favor presumably affects the amount of sympathy we have for the poor, and our sympathy, or lack of sympathy, in turn affects our views about the government's role in helping the poor. With this backdrop in mind, what do the individualistic and structural explanations of poverty say?

## Individualistic Explanation

According to the individualistic explanation, the poor have personal problems and deficiencies that are responsible for their poverty. In the past, the poor were thought to be biologically inferior, a view that has not entirely faded, but today the much more common belief is that they lack the ambition and motivation to work hard and to achieve success. According to survey evidence, the majority of Americans share this belief (Davidson, 2009). A more sophisticated version of this type of explanation is called the *culture of poverty* theory (Banfield, 1974; Lewis, 1966; Murray, 2012). According to this theory, the poor generally have beliefs and values that differ from those of the nonpoor and that doom them to continued poverty. For example, they are said to be impulsive and to live for the present rather than the future.

Regardless of which version one might hold, the individualistic explanation is a blaming-the-victim approach (see Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems"). Critics say this explanation ignores discrimination and other problems in American society and exaggerates the degree to which the poor and nonpoor do in fact hold different values (Ehrenreich, 2012; Holland, 2011; Schmidt, 2012). Regarding the latter point, they note that poor employed adults work more hours per week than wealthier adults and that poor parents interviewed in surveys value education for their children at least as much as wealthier parents. These and other similarities in values and beliefs lead critics of the individualistic explanation to conclude that poor people's poverty cannot reasonably be said to result from a culture of poverty.

## Structural Explanation

According to the second, structural explanation, which is a blaming-the-system approach, US poverty stems from problems in American society that lead to a lack of equal opportunity and a lack of jobs. These problems include (a) racial, ethnic, gender, and age discrimination; (b) lack of good schooling and adequate health care; and (c) structural changes in the American economic system, such as the departure of manufacturing companies from American cities in the 1980s and 1990s that led to the loss of thousands of jobs. These problems help create a vicious cycle of poverty in which children of the poor are often fated to end up in poverty or near poverty themselves as adults.

As Rank (Rank, 2011) summarizes this view, "American poverty is largely the result of failings at the economic and political levels, rather than at the individual level…In contrast to [the individualistic] perspective, the basic problem lies in a shortage of viable opportunities for all Americans." Rank points out that the US economy during the past few decades has created more low-paying and part-time jobs and jobs without benefits, meaning that Americans increasingly find themselves in jobs that barely lift them out of poverty, if at all. Sociologist Fred Block and colleagues share this critique of the individualistic perspective: "Most of our policies incorrectly assume that people can avoid or overcome poverty through hard work alone. Yet this assumption ignores the realities of our failing urban schools, increasing employment insecurities, and the lack of affordable housing, health care, and child care. It ignores the fact that the American Dream is rapidly becoming unattainable for an increasing number of Americans, whether employed or not" (Block, et. al., 2006).

Most sociologists favor the structural explanation. As later chapters in this book document, racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of adequate schooling and health care, and other problems make it difficult to rise out of poverty. On the other hand, some ethnographic research supports the individualistic explanation by showing that the poor do have certain values and follow certain practices that augment their plight (Small, et. al., 2010). For example, the poor have higher rates of cigarette smoking (34 percent of people with annual incomes between $6,000 and $11,999 smoke, compared to only 13 percent of those with incomes $90,000 or greater [Goszkowski, 2008]), which helps cause them to have more serious health problems.

Adopting an integrated perspective, some researchers say these values and practices are ultimately the result of poverty itself (Small et, al., 2010). These scholars concede a culture of poverty does exist, but they also say it exists because it helps the poor cope daily with the structural effects of being poor. If these effects lead to a culture of poverty, they add, poverty then becomes self-perpetuating. If poverty is both cultural and structural in origin, these scholars say, efforts to improve the lives of people in the "other America" must involve increased structural opportunities for the poor and changes in some of their values and practices.

### Key Takeaways

- According to the functionalist view, stratification is a necessary and inevitable consequence of the need to use the promise of financial reward to encourage talented people to pursue important jobs and careers.

- According to conflict theory, stratification results from lack of opportunity and discrimination against the poor and people of color.
- According to symbolic interactionism, social class affects how people interact in everyday life and how *they view certain aspects of the social world*.
- The individualistic view attributes poverty to individual failings of poor people themselves, while the structural view attributes poverty to problems in the larger society.

## For Your Review

1. In explaining poverty in the United States, which view, individualist or structural, makes more sense to you? Why?
2. Suppose you could wave a magic wand and invent a society where everyone had about the same income no matter which job he or she performed. Do you think it would be difficult to persuade enough people to become physicians or to pursue other important careers? Explain your answer.

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# 3.4: The Consequences of Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the family and housing problems associated with poverty.
2. Explain how poverty affects health and educational attainment.

Regardless of its causes, poverty has devastating consequences for the people who live in it. Much research conducted and/or analyzed by scholars, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations has documented the effects of poverty (and near poverty) on the lives of the poor (Lindsey, 2009; Moore, et. al., 2009; Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010; Sanders, 2011). Many of these studies focus on childhood poverty, and these studies make it very clear that childhood poverty has lifelong consequences. In general, poor children are more likely to be poor as adults, more likely to drop out of high school, more likely to become a teenaged parent, and more likely to have employment problems. Although only 1 percent of children who are never poor end up being poor as young adults, 32 percent of poor children become poor as young adults (Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010).



Poor children are more likely to have inadequate nutrition and to experience health, behavioral, and cognitive problems. (Kelly Short – Poverty: "Damaged Child," Oklahoma City, OK, USA, 1936. (Colorized). – CC BY-SA 2.0.)

A recent study used government data to follow children born between 1968 and 1975 until they were ages 30 to 37 (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011).Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011, winter). The long reach of early childhood poverty. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 22–27. The researchers compared individuals who lived in poverty in early childhood to those whose families had incomes at least twice the poverty line in early childhood. Compared to the latter group, adults who were poor in early childhood

- had completed two fewer years of schooling on the average;
- had incomes that were less than half of those earned by adults who had wealthier childhoods;
- received $826 more annually in food stamps on the average;
- were almost three times more likely to report being in poor health;
- were twice as likely to have been arrested (males only); and
- were five times as likely to have borne a child (females only).

We discuss some of the major specific consequences of poverty here and will return to them in later chapters.

## Family Problems

The poor are at greater risk for family problems, including divorce and domestic violence. As Chapter 9 explains, a major reason for many of the problems families experience is stress. Even in families that are not poor, running a household can cause stress, children can cause stress, and paying the bills can cause stress. Families that are poor have more stress because of their poverty, and

the ordinary stresses of family life become even more intense in poor families. The various kinds of family problems thus happen more commonly in poor families than in wealthier families. Compounding this situation, when these problems occur, poor families have fewer resources than wealthier families to deal with these problems.

### Children and Our Future

Getting under Children's Skin: The Biological Effects of Childhood Poverty

As the text discusses, childhood poverty often has lifelong consequences. Poor children are more likely to be poor when they become adults, and they are at greater risk for antisocial behavior when young, and for unemployment, criminal behavior, and other problems when they reach adolescence and young adulthood.

According to growing evidence, one reason poverty has these consequences is that it has certain neural effects on poor children that impair their cognitive abilities and thus their behavior and learning potential. As Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson (2011, p. 23)Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011, winter). The long reach of early childhood poverty. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 22–27. observe, "Emerging research in neuroscience and developmental psychology suggests that poverty early in a child's life may be particularly harmful because the astonishingly rapid development of young children's brains leaves them sensitive (and vulnerable) to environmental conditions."

In short, poverty can change the way the brain develops in young children. The major reason for this effect is stress. Children growing up in poverty experience multiple stressful events: neighborhood crime and drug use; divorce, parental conflict, and other family problems, including abuse and neglect by their parents; parental financial problems and unemployment; physical and mental health problems of one or more family members; and so forth. Their great levels of stress in turn affect their bodies in certain harmful ways. As two poverty scholars note, "It's not just that poverty-induced stress is mentally taxing. If it's experienced early enough in childhood, it can in fact get 'under the skin' and change the way in which the body copes with the environment and the way in which the brain develops. These deep, enduring, and sometimes irreversible physiological changes are the very human price of running a high-poverty society" (Grusky & Wimer, 2011, p. 2).Grusky, D., & Wimer, C.(Eds.). (2011, winter). Editors' note. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 2.

One way poverty gets "under children's skin" is as follows (Evans, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 2011).Evans, G. W., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K. (2011, winter). Stressing out the poor: Chronic physiological stress and the income-achievement gap. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 16–21. Poor children's high levels of stress produce unusually high levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and higher levels of blood pressure. Because these high levels impair their neural development, their memory and language development skills suffer. This result in turn affects their behavior and learning potential. For other physiological reasons, high levels of stress also affect the immune system, so that poor children are more likely to develop various illnesses during childhood and to have high blood pressure and other health problems when they grow older, and cause other biological changes that make poor children more likely to end up being obese and to have drug and alcohol problems.

The policy implications of the scientific research on childhood poverty are clear. As public health scholar Jack P. Shonkoff (2011, p. 12)Shonkoff, J. P. (2011, winter). Building a foundation for prosperity on the science of early childhood development. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 10–14. explains, "Viewing this scientific evidence within a biodevelopmental framework points to the particular importance of addressing the needs of our most disadvantaged children at the earliest ages." Duncan and Magnuson (2011, p. 27)Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011, winter). The long reach of early childhood poverty. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 22–27. agree that "greater policy attention should be given to remediating situations involving deep and persistent poverty occurring early in childhood." To reduce poverty's harmful physiological effects on children, Skonkoff advocates efforts to promote strong, stable relationships among all members of poor families; to improve the quality of the home and neighborhood physical environments in which poor children grow; and to improve the nutrition of poor children. Duncan and Magnuson call for more generous income transfers to poor families with young children and note that many European democracies provide many kinds of support to such families. The recent scientific evidence on early childhood poverty underscores the importance of doing everything possible to reduce the harmful effects of poverty during the first few years of life.

## Health, Illness, and Medical Care

The poor are also more likely to have many kinds of health problems, including infant mortality, earlier adulthood mortality, and mental illness, and they are also more likely to receive inadequate medical care. Poor children are more likely to have inadequate nutrition and, partly for this reason, to suffer health, behavioral, and cognitive problems. These problems in turn impair their ability

to do well in school and land stable employment as adults, helping to ensure that poverty will persist across generations. Many poor people are uninsured or underinsured, at least until the US health-care reform legislation of 2010 takes full effect a few years from now, and many have to visit health clinics that are overcrowded and understaffed.

As Chapter 12 discusses, it is unclear how much of poor people's worse health stems from their lack of money and lack of good health care versus their own behavior such as smoking and eating unhealthy diets. Regardless of the exact reasons, however, the fact remains that poor health is a major consequence of poverty. According to recent research, this fact means that poverty is responsible for almost 150,000 deaths annually, a figure about equal to the number of deaths from lung cancer (Bakalar, 2011).Bakalar, N. (2011, July 4). Researchers link deaths to social ills. *New York Times*, p. D5.

## Education

Poor children typically go to rundown schools with inadequate facilities where they receive inadequate schooling. They are much less likely than wealthier children to graduate from high school or to go to college. Their lack of education in turn restricts them and their own children to poverty, once again helping to ensure a vicious cycle of continuing poverty across generations. As Chapter 10 explains, scholars debate whether the poor school performance of poor children stems more from the inadequacy of their schools and schooling versus their own poverty. Regardless of exactly why poor children are more likely to do poorly in school and to have low educational attainment, these educational problems are another major consequence of poverty.

## Housing and Homelessness

The poor are, not surprisingly, more likely to be homeless than the nonpoor but also more likely to live in dilapidated housing and unable to buy their own homes. Many poor families spend more than half their income on rent, and they tend to live in poor neighborhoods that lack job opportunities, good schools, and other features of modern life that wealthier people take for granted. The lack of adequate housing for the poor remains a major national problem. Even worse is outright homelessness. An estimated 1.6 million people, including more than 300,000 children, are homeless at least part of the year (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010).Lee, B., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. ( 2010). The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 501–521.

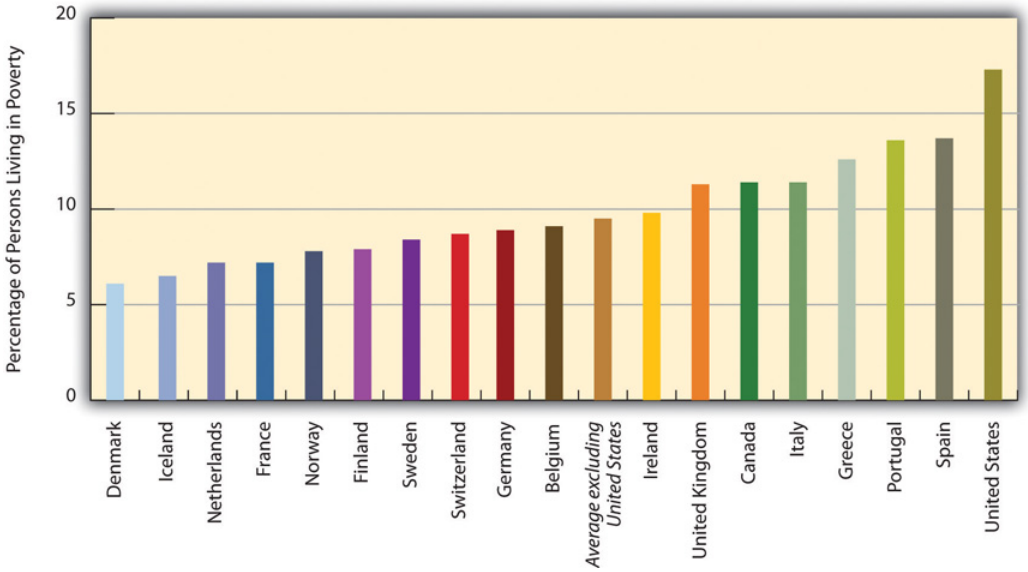
## Crime and Victimization

As Chapter 7 discusses, poor (and near poor) people account for the bulk of our street crime (homicide, robbery, burglary, etc.), and they also account for the bulk of victims of street crime. That chapter will outline several reasons for this dual connection between poverty and street crime, but they include the deep frustration and stress of living in poverty and the fact that many poor people live in high-crime neighborhoods. In such neighborhoods, children are more likely to grow up under the influence of older peers who are already in gangs or otherwise committing crime, and people of any age are more likely to become crime victims. Moreover, because poor and near-poor people are more likely to commit street crime, they also comprise most of the people arrested for street crimes, convicted of street crime, and imprisoned for street crime. Most of the more than 2 million people now in the nation's prisons and jails come from poor or near-poor backgrounds. Criminal behavior and criminal victimization, then, are other major consequences of poverty.

### Lessons from Other Societies

Poverty and Poverty Policy in Other Western Democracies

To compare international poverty rates, scholars commonly use a measure of the percentage of households in a nation that receive less than half of the nation's median household income after taxes and cash transfers from the government. In data from the late 2000s, 17.3 percent of US households lived in poverty as defined by this measure. By comparison, other Western democracies had the rates depicted in the figure that follows. The average poverty rate of the nations in the figure excluding the United States is 9.5 percent. The US rate is thus almost twice as high as the average for all the other democracies.




*This graph illustrates the poverty rates in western democracies (i.e., the percentage of persons living with less than half of the median household income) as of the late 2000s*

*Source: Data from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2011). Society at a glance 2011: OECD social indicators. Retrieved July 23, 2011, from http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/soc_glance-2011-en/06/02/index.html;jsessionid=erdqhbpb203ea.epsilon?contentType=&itemId=/content/chapter/soc_glance-2011-17-en&containerItemId=/content/se.*

Why is there so much more poverty in the United States than in its Western counterparts? Several differences between the United States and the other nations stand out (Brady, 2009; Russell, 2011).Brady, D. (2009). *Rich democracies, poor people: How politics explain poverty*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Russell, J. W. ( 2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. First, other Western nations have higher minimum wages and stronger labor unions than the United States has, and these lead to incomes that help push people above poverty. Second, these other nations spend a much greater proportion of their gross domestic product on social expenditures (income support and social services such as child-care subsidies and housing allowances) than does the United States. As sociologist John Iceland (2006, p. 136)Iceland, J. (2006). *Poverty in America: A handbook*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. notes, “Such countries often invest heavily in both universal benefits, such as maternity leave, child care, and medical care, and in promoting work among [poor] families…The United States, in comparison with other advanced nations, lacks national health insurance, provides less publicly supported housing, and spends less on job training and job creation.” Block and colleagues agree: “These other countries all take a more comprehensive government approach to combating poverty, and they assume that it is caused by economic and structural factors rather than bad behavior” (Block et al., 2006, p. 17).Block, F., Korteweg, A. C., & Woodward, K. (2006). The compassion gap in American poverty policy. *Contexts, 5*(2), 14–20.

The experience of the United Kingdom provides a striking contrast between the effectiveness of the expansive approach used in other wealthy democracies and the inadequacy of the American approach. In 1994, about 30 percent of British children lived in poverty; by 2009, that figure had fallen by more than half to 12 percent. Meanwhile, the US 2009 child poverty rate, was almost 21 percent.

Britain used three strategies to reduce its child poverty rate and to help poor children and their families in other ways. First, it induced more poor parents to work through a series of new measures, including a national minimum wage higher than its US counterpart and various tax savings for low-income workers. Because of these measures, the percentage of single parents who worked rose from 45 percent in 1997 to 57 percent in 2008. Second, Britain increased child welfare benefits regardless of whether a parent worked. Third, it increased paid maternity leave from four months to nine months, implemented two weeks of paid paternity leave, established universal preschool (which both helps children’s cognitive abilities and makes it easier for parents to afford to work), increased child-care aid, and made it possible for parents of young children to adjust their working hours to their parental responsibilities (Waldfogel, 2010).Waldfogel, J. (2010). *Britain’s war on poverty*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. While the British child poverty rate fell dramatically because of these strategies, the US child poverty rate stagnated.

In short, the United States has so much more poverty than other democracies in part because it spends so much less than they do on helping the poor. The United States certainly has the wealth to follow their example, but it has chosen not to do so, and a high poverty rate is the unfortunate result. As the Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman (2006, p. A25)Krugman, P. (2006, December 25). Helping the poor, the British way. *New York Times*, p. A25. summarizes this lesson, "Government truly can be a force for good. Decades of propaganda have conditioned many Americans to assume that government is always incompetent…But the [British experience has] shown that a government that seriously tries to reduce poverty can achieve a lot."

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Poor people are more likely to have several kinds of family problems, including divorce and family conflict.
- Poor people are more likely to have several kinds of health problems.
- Children growing up in poverty are less likely to graduate high school or go to college, and they are more likely to commit street crime.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a brief essay that summarizes the consequences of poverty.
2. Why do you think poor children are more likely to develop health problems?

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# 3.5: Global Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

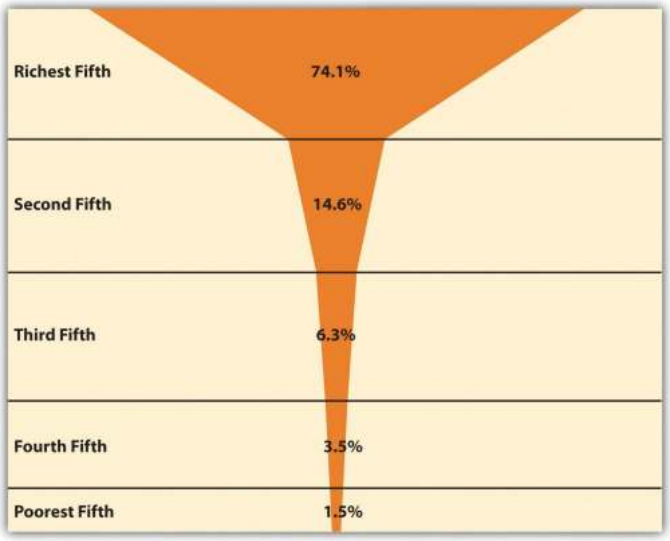
1. Describe where poor nations tend to be located.
2. Explain the difference between the modernization and dependency theories of poverty.
3. List some of the consequences of global poverty.

As serious as poverty is in the United States, poverty in much of the rest of the world is beyond comprehension to the average American. Many of the world's poor live in such desperate circumstances that they would envy the lives of poor Americans. Without at all meaning to minimize the plight of the American poor, this section provides a brief look at the world's poor and at the dimensions of global poverty

## Global Inequality

The world has a few very rich nations and many very poor nations, and there is an enormous gulf between these two extremes. If the world were one nation, its median annual income (at which half of the world's population is below this income and half is above it) would be only $1,700 (Dikhanov, 2005). The richest fifth of the world's population would have three-fourths of the world's entire income, while the poorest fifth of the world's population would have only 1.5 percent of the world's income, and the poorest two-fifths would have only 5.0 percent of the world's income (Dikhanov, 2005). Reflecting this latter fact, these poorest two-fifths, or about 2 billion people, live on less than $2 per day (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). As Figure 2.5 "Global Income Distribution (Percentage of World Income Held by Each Fifth of World Population)" illustrates, this distribution of income resembles a champagne glass.

Figure 2.5 Global Income Distribution (Percentage of World Income Held by Each Fifth of World Population)

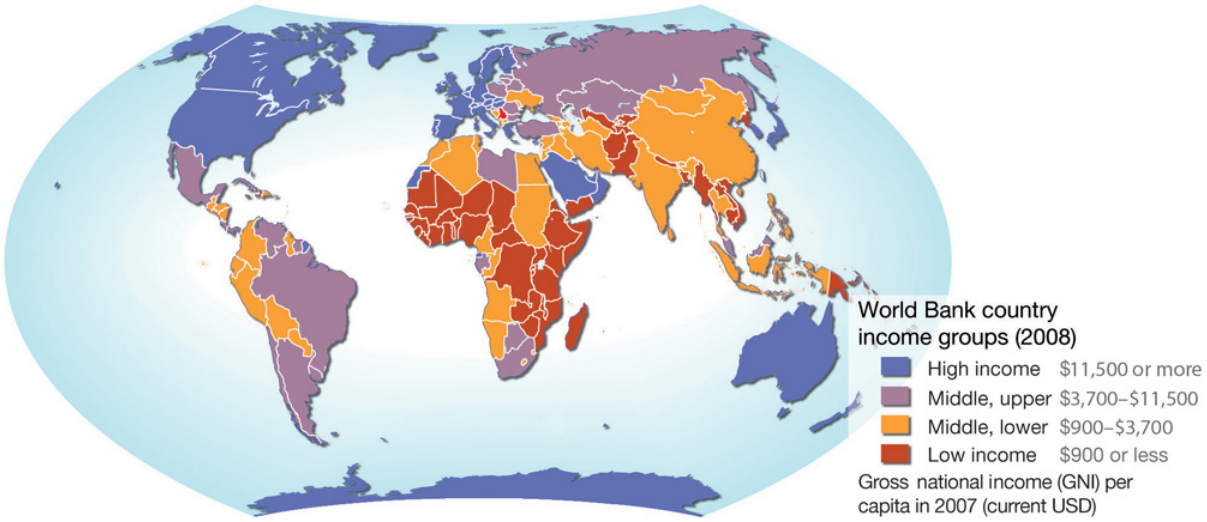



Source: Data from Dikhanov, Y. (2005). Trends in global income distribution, 1970–2000, and scenarios for 2015. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.

To understand global inequality, it is helpful to classify nations into a small number of categories based on their degree of wealth or poverty, their level of industrialization and economic development, and related factors. Over the decades, scholars and international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank have used various classification systems, or typologies. A popular typology today simply ranks nations into groups called *wealthy* (or high-income) nations, *middle-income* nations, and *poor* (or low-income) nations, based on measures such as gross domestic product (**GDP**) per capita (the total value of a nation's goods and services divided by its population). This typology has the advantage of emphasizing the most important variable in global stratification: how much wealth a nation has. At the risk of being somewhat simplistic, the other important differences among the world's nations all stem from their degree of wealth or poverty. Figure 2.6 "Global Stratification Map" depicts these three

categories of nations (with the middle category divided into upper-middle and lower-middle). As should be clear, whether a nation is wealthy, middle income, or poor is heavily related to the continent on which it is found.

Figure 2.6 Global Stratification Map




Source: Adapted from UNEP/GRID-Arendal Maps and Graphics Library. (2009).Country income groups (World Bank classification). Retrieved from http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/coun...classification.

## Measuring Global Poverty



*The World Bank has begun to emphasize vulnerability to poverty. Many people who are not officially poor have a good chance of becoming poor within a year. Strategies to prevent this from happening are a major focus of the World Bank.*

© *Thinkstock*

How do we know which nations are poor? A very common measure of global poverty was developed by the World Bank, an international institution funded by wealthy nations that provides loans, grants, and other aid to help poor and middle-income nations. Each year the World Bank publishes its World Development Report, which provides statistics and other information on the economic and social well-being of the globe's almost two hundred nations. The World Bank puts the official global poverty line (which is considered a measure of extreme poverty) at income under $1.25 per person per day, which amounts to about $456 yearly per person or $1,825 for a family of four. According to this measure, 1.4 billion people, making up more than one-fifth of the world's population and more than one-fourth of the population of developing (poor and middle-income) nations, are poor. This level of poverty rises to 40 percent of South Asia and 51 percent of sub-Saharan Africa (Haughton & Khandker, 2009).Haughton, J., & Khandker, S. R. (2009). *Handbook on poverty and inequality*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

In a new development, the World Bank has begun emphasizing the concept of **vulnerability to poverty**, which refers to a significant probability that people who are not officially poor will become poor within the next year. Determining vulnerability to poverty is important because it enables antipoverty strategies to be aimed at those most at risk for sliding into poverty, with the hope of preventing them from doing so.

Vulnerability to poverty appears widespread; in several developing nations, about one-fourth of the population is always poor, while almost one-third is vulnerable to poverty or is slipping into and out of poverty. In these nations, more than half the population is always or sometimes poor. Haughton and Khandker (2009, p. 246)Haughton, J., & Khandker, S. R. (2009). *Handbook on poverty and inequality*. Washington, DC: World Bank. summarize this situation: "As typically defined, vulnerability to poverty is more widespread than poverty itself. A wide swathe of society risks poverty at some point of time; put another way, in most societies, only a relatively modest portion of society may be considered as economically secure."

## Explaining Global Poverty

Explanations of global poverty parallel those of US poverty in their focus on individualistic versus structural problems. One type of explanation takes an individualistic approach by, in effect, blaming the people in the poorest nations for their own poverty, while a second explanation takes a structural approach in blaming the plight of poor nations on their treatment by the richest ones. Table 2.4 summarizes the two sets of explanations.

Table 2.4 Theory Snapshot

| Theory | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Modernization theory | Wealthy nations became wealthy because early on they were able to develop the necessary beliefs, values, and practices for trade, industrialization, and rapid economic growth to occur. Poor nations remained poor because they failed to develop these beliefs, values, and practices; instead, they continued to follow traditional beliefs and practices that stymied industrial development and modernization. |
| Dependency theory | The poverty of poor nations stems from their colonization by European nations, which exploited the poor nations' resources and either enslaved their populations or used them as cheap labor. The colonized nations were thus unable to develop a professional and business class that would have enabled them to enter the industrial age and to otherwise develop their economies. |

## Modernization Theory

The individualistic explanation is called **modernization theory** (Rostow, 1990).Rostow, W. W. (1990). *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. According to this theory, rich nations became wealthy because early on they were able to develop the "correct" beliefs, values, and practices—in short, the correct culture—for trade, industrialization, and rapid economic growth to occur. These cultural traits include a willingness to work hard,

to abandon tradition in favor of new ways of thinking and doing things, and to adopt a future orientation rather than one focused on maintaining present conditions. Thus Western European nations began to emerge several centuries ago as economic powers because their populations adopted the kinds of values and practices just listed. In contrast, nations in other parts of the world never became wealthy and remain poor today because they never developed the appropriate values and practices. Instead, they continued to follow traditional beliefs and practices that stymied industrial development and modernization.



*According to modernization theory, poor nations are poor because their people never developed values such as an emphasis on hard work.*

*© Thinkstock*

Modernization theory has much in common with the culture of poverty theory discussed earlier. It attributes the poverty of poor nations to their failure to develop the "proper" beliefs, values, and practices necessary for economic success both at the beginning of industrialization during the nineteenth century and in the two centuries that have since transpired. Because modernization theory implies that people in poor nations do not have the talent and ability to improve their lot, it may be considered a functionalist explanation of global inequality.

## Dependency Theory

The structural explanation for global stratification is called **dependency theory**, which may be considered a conflict explanation of global inequality. Not surprisingly, this theory's views sharply challenge modernization theory's assumptions (Packenham, 1992).Packenham, R. A. (1992). *The dependency movement: Scholarship and politics in development studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Whereas modernization theory attributes global stratification to the "wrong" cultural values and practices in poor nations, dependency theory blames global stratification on the exploitation of these nations by wealthy nations. According to this view, poor nations never got the chance to pursue economic growth because early on they were conquered and colonized by European ones. The European nations stole the poor nations' resources and either enslaved their populations or used them as cheap labor. They installed their own governments and often prevented the local populace from getting a good education. As a result, the colonized nations were unable to develop a professional and business class that would have enabled them to enter the industrial age

and to otherwise develop their economies. Along the way, wealthy nations sold their own goods to colonized nations and forced them to run up enormous debt that continues to amount today.

In today's world, huge multinational corporations continue to exploit the labor and resources of the poorest nations, say dependency theorists. These corporations run sweatshops in many nations, in which workers toil in inhumane conditions at extremely low wages (Sluiter, 2009).Sluiter, L. (2009). *Clean clothes: A global movement to end sweatshops*. New York, NY: Pluto Press. Often the corporations work hand-in-hand with corrupt officials in the poor nations to strengthen their economic stake in the countries.

## Comparing the Theories

Which makes more sense, modernization theory or dependency theory? As with many theories, both make sense to some degree, but both have their faults. Modernization theory places too much blame on poor nations for their own poverty and ignores the long history of exploitation of poor nations by rich nations and multinational corporations alike. For its part, dependency theory cannot explain why some of the poorest countries are poor even though they were never European colonies; neither can it explain why some former colonies such as Hong Kong have been able to attain enough economic growth to leave the rank of the poorest nations. Together, both theories help us understand the reasons for global stratification, but most sociologists would probably favor dependency theory because of its emphasis on structural factors in the world's historic and current economy.

## The Lives of the World's Poor

Poor nations are the least industrialized and most agricultural of all the world's countries. They consist primarily of nations in Africa and parts of Asia and constitute roughly half of the world's population. Many of these nations rely heavily on one or two crops, and if weather conditions render a crop unproductive in a particular season, the nations' hungry become even hungrier. By the same token, if economic conditions reduce the price of a crop or other natural resource, the income from exports of these commodities plummets, and these already poor nations become even poorer.





*People in poor nations live in the most miserable conditions possible.*

*© Thinkstock*

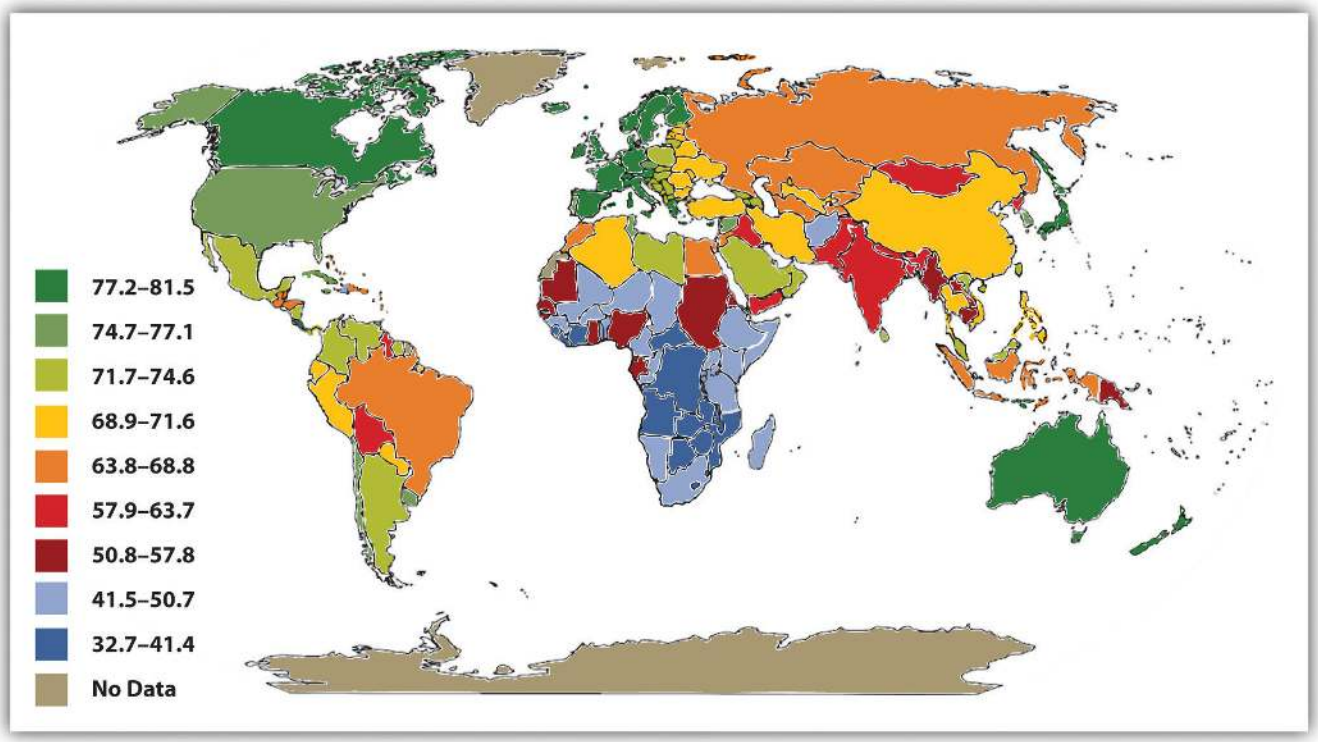
By any standard, the more than 1.4 billion people in poor nations live a desperate existence in the most miserable conditions possible. They suffer from AIDS and other deadly diseases, live on the edge of starvation, and lack indoor plumbing, electricity, and other modern conveniences that most Americans take for granted. Most of us have seen unforgettable photos or video footage of African children with stick-thin limbs and distended stomachs reflecting severe malnutrition.

It would be nice if these images were merely fiction, but unfortunately they are far too real. AIDS, malaria, starvation, and other deadly diseases are common. Many children die before reaching adolescence, and many adults die before reaching what in the richest nations would be considered middle age. Many people in the poorest nations are illiterate, and a college education remains as foreign to them as their way of life would be to us. The images of the world's poor that we see in television news reports or in film documentaries fade quickly from our minds. Meanwhile, millions of people on our planet die every year because they do not have enough to eat, because they lack access to clean water or adequate sanitation, or because they lack access to medicine that is found in every CVS, Rite Aid, and Walgreens in the United States. We now examine some specific dimensions and consequences of global poverty.

## Life Expectancy

When we look around the world, we see that global poverty is literally a matter of life and death. The clearest evidence of this fact comes from data on life expectancy, or the average number of years that a nation's citizens can be expected to live. Life expectancy certainly differs within each nation, with some people dying younger and others dying older, but poverty and related conditions affect a nation's overall life expectancy to a startling degree.

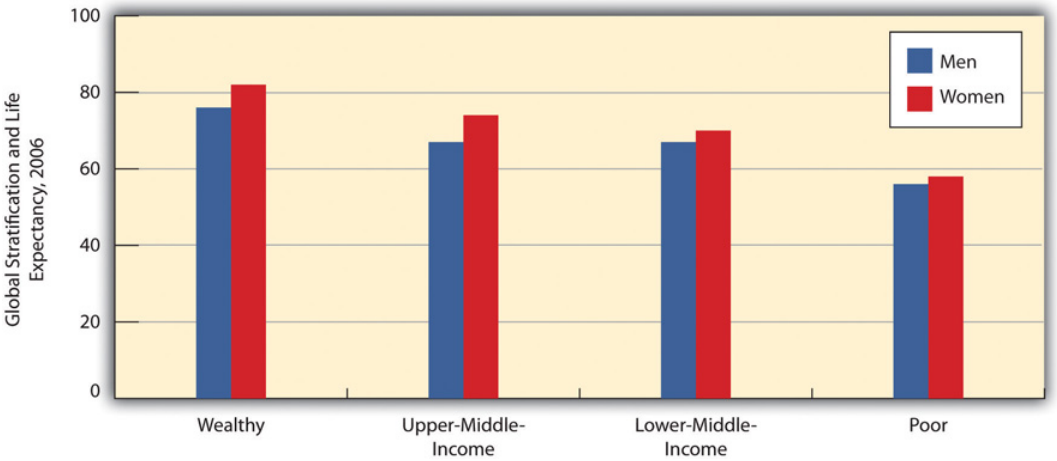
Figure 2.7 Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)




*Source: Adapted from Global Education Project. (2004). Human conditions: World life expectancy map. Retrieved from* [*http://www.theglobaleducationproject.org/earth/human-conditions.php*](http://www.theglobaleducationproject.org/earth/human-conditions.php).

A map of global life expectancy appears in Figure 2.7. Life expectancy is highest in North America, Western Europe, and certain other regions of the world and lowest in Africa and South Asia, where *life expectancy in many nations is some 30 years shorter than in other regions*. Another way of visualizing the relationship between global poverty and life expectancy appears in Figure 2.8, which depicts average life expectancy for wealthy nations, upper-middle-income nations, lower-middle-income nations, and poor nations. Men in wealthy nations can expect to live 76 years on average, compared to only 56 in poor nations; women in wealthy nations can expect to live 82 years, compared to only 58 in poor nations. Life expectancy in poor nations is thus 20 and 24 years lower, respectively, for the two sexes.

Figure 2.8 Global Poverty and Life Expectancy, 2006

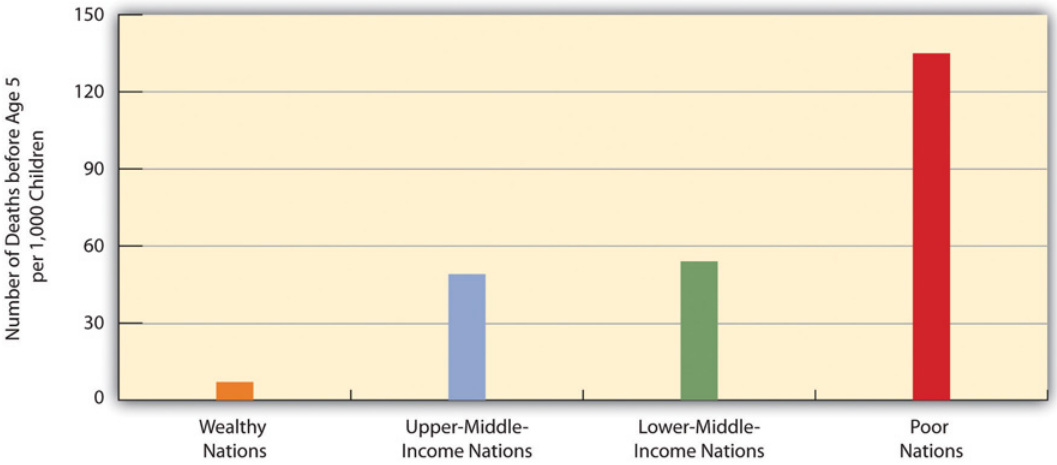



*Source: Data from World Bank. (2009). World development report 2009. Washington, DC: Author.*

## Child Mortality

A key contributor to life expectancy and also a significant consequence of global poverty in its own right is child mortality, the number of children who die before age 5 per 1,000 children. As Figure 2.9 shows, the rate of child mortality in poor nations is 135 per 1,000 children, meaning that 13.5 percent of all children in these nations die before age 5. In a few African nations, child mortality exceeds 200 per 1,000. In contrast, the rate in wealthy nations is only 7 per 1,000. Children in poor nations are thus about 19 times (13.5 ÷ 0.7) more likely to die before age 5 than children in wealthy nations.

Figure 2.9 Global Poverty and Child Mortality, 2006



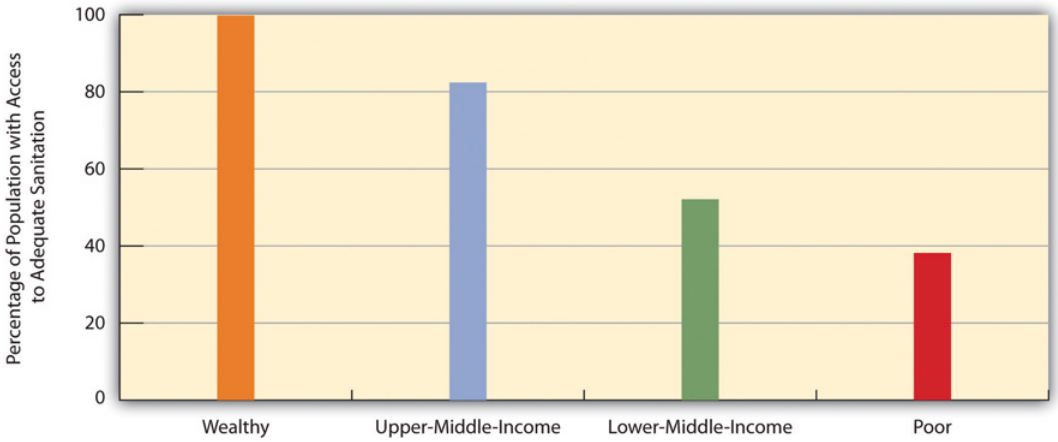

*Source: Data from World Bank. (2009). World development report 2009. Washington, DC: Author.*

## Sanitation and Clean Water

Two other important indicators of a nation's health are access to adequate sanitation (disposal of human waste) and access to clean water. When people lack adequate sanitation and clean water, they are at much greater risk for life-threatening diarrhea, serious infectious diseases such as cholera and typhoid, and parasitic diseases such as schistosomiasis (World Health Organization, 2010).World Health Organization. (2010). Water sanitation and health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/malnutrition/en/. About 2.4 billion people around the world, almost all of them in poor and middle-income nations, do not have adequate sanitation, and more than 2 million, most of them children, die annually from diarrhea. More than 40 million people worldwide, almost all of them again in poor and middle-income nations, suffer from a parasitic infection caused by flatworms.

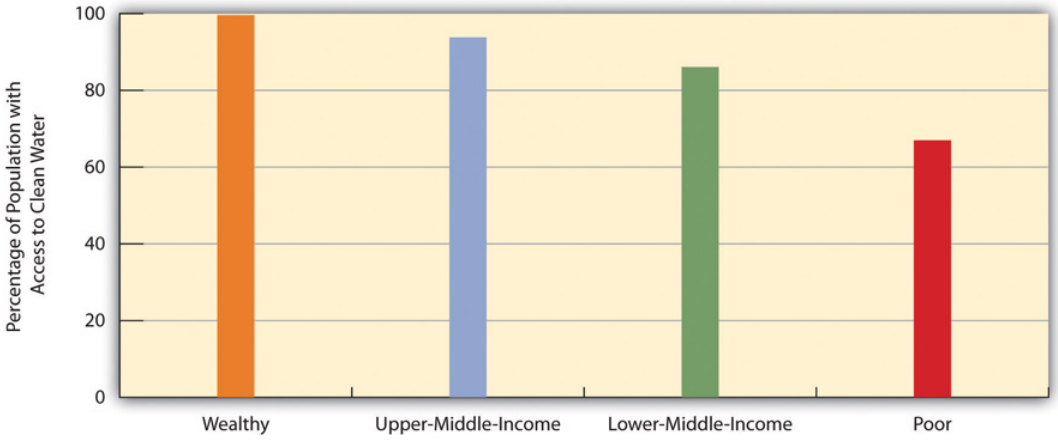
As Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.11 show, access to adequate sanitation and clean water is strongly related to national wealth. Poor nations are much less likely than wealthier nations to have adequate access to both sanitation and clean water. Adequate sanitation is virtually universal in wealthy nations but is available to only 38 percent of people in poor nations. Clean water is also nearly universal in wealthy nations but is available to only 67 percent of people in poor nations.

Figure 2.10 Global Stratification and Access to Adequate Sanitation, 2006




*Source: Data from World Bank. (2010). Health nutrition and population statistics. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do.*

Figure 2.11 Global Stratification and Access to Clean Water, 2006




*Source: Data from World Bank. (2010). Health nutrition and population statistics. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do.*

## Malnutrition



*About one-fifth of the population of poor nations, about 800 million individuals, are malnourished.*

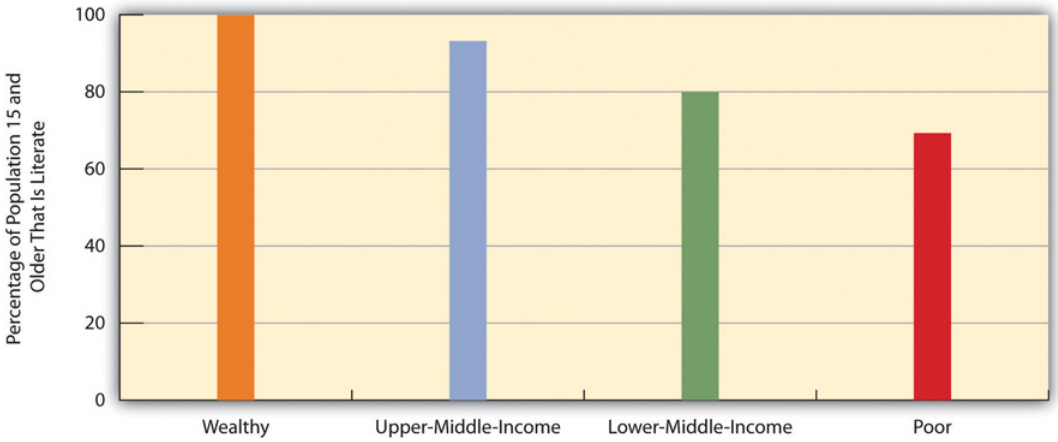
*Image courtesy of Dr. Lyle Conrad at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ID# 6874, http://phil.cdc.gov/phil.*

Another health indicator is malnutrition. This problem is caused by a lack of good food combined with infections and diseases such as diarrhea that sap the body of essential nutrients. About one-fifth of the population of poor nations, or about 800 million individuals, are malnourished; looking just at children, in developing nations more than one-fourth of children under age 5, or about 150 million altogether, are underweight. Half of all these children live in only three nations: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan; almost half the children in these and other South Asian nations are underweight. Children who are malnourished are at much greater risk for fat and muscle loss, brain damage, blindness, and death; perhaps you have seen video footage of children in Africa or South Asia who are so starved that they look like skeletons. Not surprisingly, child malnutrition contributes heavily to the extremely high rates of child mortality that we just examined and is estimated to be responsible for more than 5 million deaths of children annually (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2006; World Health Organization, 2010).United Nations Children's Fund. (2006). *Progress for children: A report card on nutrition*. New York, NY: Author; World Health Organization. (2010). Children's environmental health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/ceh/risks/cehwater2/en/index.html.

## Adult Literacy

Moving from the area of health, a final indicator of human development is adult literacy, the percentage of people 15 and older who can read and write a simple sentence. Once again we see that people in poor and middle-income nations are far worse off (see Figure 2.12). In poor nations, only about 69 percent of adults 15 and older can read and write a simple sentence. The high rate of illiteracy in poor nations not only reflects their poverty but also contributes to it, as people who cannot read and write are obviously at a huge disadvantage in the labor market.

Figure 2.12 Global Poverty and Adult Literacy, 2008




*Source: Data from World Bank. (2010). Health nutrition and population statistics. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do.*

## Applying Social Research

Unintended Consequences of Welfare Reform

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was a major government program to help the poor from the 1930s to the 1960s. Under this program, states allocated federal money to provide cash payments to poor families with children. Although the program was heavily criticized for allegedly providing an incentive to poor mothers both to have more children and to not join the workforce, research studies found little or no basis for this criticism. Still, many politicians and much of the public accepted the criticism as true, and AFDC became so unpopular that it was replaced in 1997 by a new program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which is still a major program today.

TANF is more restrictive in many respects than AFDC was. In particular, it limits the amount of time a poor family can receive federal funds to five years, and allows states to impose a shorter duration for funding, which many have done. In addition, it requires single parents in families receiving TANF funds to work at least thirty hours a week (or twenty hours a week if they have a child under the age of 6) and two parents to work at least thirty-five hours per week combined. In most states, going to school to obtain a degree does not count as the equivalent of working and thus does not make a parent eligible for TANF payments. Only short-term programs or workshops to develop job skills qualify.

Did welfare reform involving TANF work? Many adults formerly on AFDC found jobs, TANF payments nationwide have been much lower than AFDC payments, and many fewer families receive TANF payments than used to receive AFDC payments. All these facts lead many observers to hail TANF as a successful program. However, sociologists and other scholars who study TANF families say the numbers are misleading because poor families have in effect been excluded from TANF funding because of its strict requirements. The reduced payments and lower number of funded families indicate the failure of TANF, they say, not its success.

Several problems explain why TANF has had these unintended consequences. First, many families are poor for many more than five years, and the five-year time limit under TANF means that they receive financial help for only some of the years they live in poverty. Second, because the federal and state governments provide relatively little financial aid for child care, many parents simply cannot afford to work, and if they don't work, they lose their TANF payments. Third, jobs are certainly difficult to find, especially if, as is typical, a poor parent has relatively little education and few job skills, and if parents cannot find a job, they again lose their TANF payments. Fourth, many parents cannot work because they have physical or mental health problems or because they are taking care of a family member or friend with a health problem; these parents, too, become ineligible for TANF payments.

Sociologist Lorna Rivera put a human face to these problems in a study of fifty poor women in Boston, Massachusetts. She lived among them, interviewed them individually, and conducted focus groups. She found that TANF worsened the situation of these women for the reasons just stated, and concluded that welfare reform left these and other poor women "uneducated, underemployed, underpaid, and unable to effectively move themselves and their families forward."

Ironically, some studies suggest that welfare reform impaired the health of black women for several reasons. Many ended up with jobs with long bus commutes and odd hours, leading to sleep deprivation and less time for medical visits. Many of these new

workers also suddenly had to struggle to find affordable day care for their children. These problems are thought to have increased their stress levels and, in turn, harmed their health.

The research by social scientists on the effects of TANF reveals that the United States took a large step backward when it passed welfare reform in the 1990s. Far from reducing poverty, welfare reform only worsened it. This research underscores the need for the United States to develop better strategies for reducing poverty similar to those used by other Western democracies, as discussed in the Note 2.19 "Lessons from Other Societies" box in this chapter.

*Sources:* Blitstein, 2009; Mink, 2008; Parrott & Sherman, 2008; Rivera, 2008Blitstein, R. (2009). Weathering the storm. *Miller-McCune*, *2*(July–August), 48–57; Mink, G. (2008). *TANF reauthorization and opportunity to invest in America's future*. Paper presented to the ADA Economic Policy Committee. Retrieved July 25, 2011, from http://www.adaction.org/pages/issues/all-policy-resolutions/social-amp-domestic/issues-brief-no.-13-welfare-reform.php; Parrott, S., & Sherman, A. (2008). *TANF at 10: Program results are more mixed than often understood*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Rivera, L. (2008). *Laboring to learn: Women's literacy and poverty in the post-welfare era*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People in poor nations live in the worst conditions possible. Deadly diseases are common, and many children die before reaching adolescence.
- According to the modernization theory, rich nations became rich because their peoples possessed certain values, beliefs, and practices that helped them become wealthy. Conversely, poor nations remained poor because their peoples did not possess these values, beliefs, and practices.
- According to the dependency theory, poor nations have remained poor because they have been exploited by rich nations and by multinational corporations.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Considering all the ways in which poor nations fare much worse than wealthy nations, which one seems to you to be the most important problem that poor nations experience? Explain your answer.
2. Which theory of global poverty, modernization or dependency, makes more sense to you? Why?

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# 3.6: Reducing Poverty

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why the United States neglects its poor.
2. List any three potentially promising strategies to reduce US poverty.
3. Describe how to reduce global poverty from a sociological perspective.

As this chapter noted at the outset, the United States greatly reduced poverty during the 1960s through a series of programs and policies that composed the so-called war on poverty. You saw evidence of the success of the war on poverty in Figure 2.1 "US Poverty, 1959–2010", which showed that the poverty rate declined from 22.2 percent in 1960 to a low of 11.1 percent in 1973 before fluctuating from year to year and then rising since 2000. The Note 2.19 "Lessons from Other Societies" box showed that other democracies have much lower poverty rates than the United States because, as many scholars believe, they have better funded and more extensive programs to help their poor (Brady, 2009; Russell, 2011).

The lessons from the 1960s' war on poverty and the experience of other democracies are clear: It is very possible to reduce poverty if, and only if, a nation is willing to fund and implement appropriate programs and policies that address the causes of poverty and that help the poor deal with the immediate and ongoing difficulties they experience.

A major reason that the US poverty rate reached its low in 1973 and never went lower during the past four decades is that the United States retreated from its war on poverty by cutting back on the programs and services it had provided during that good war (Soss, et. al., 2007). Another major reason is that changes in the national economy during the past few decades have meant that well-paying manufacturing jobs have been replaced by low-paying service jobs with fewer benefits (Wilson, 2010). Yet this has also happened in other democracies, and their poverty rates remain lower than the US rate because, unlike the United States, they have continued to try to help their poor rather than neglect them.

Why does the United States neglect its poor? Many scholars attribute this neglect to the fact that many citizens and politicians think the poor are poor because of their own failings. As summarized by sociologist Mark R. Rank (Rank, 2011), these failings include "not working hard enough, failure to acquire sufficient skills, or just making bad decisions." By thus blaming the poor for their fate, citizens and politicians think the poor do not deserve to have the US government help them, and so the government does not help, or at least not nearly as much as other democracies do. We have seen that the facts do not support the myth that the poor lack motivation to work, but that does not lessen the blame given the poor for being poor.

To renew the US effort to help the poor, it is essential that the actual facts about poverty become better known so that a fundamental shift in thinking about poverty and the poor can occur. Rank (Rank, 2011) says that one aspect of this shift must include the recognition, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, that "poverty affects us all" because it costs so many tax dollars to help the poor and because a majority of the public can expect to be poor or near poor at some point in their lives. A second aspect of this shift in thinking, adds Rank, is the recognition (following a blaming-the-system approach) that poverty stems much more from the lack of opportunity, lack of jobs, declining government help for the poor, and other structural failings of American society than from individual failings of the poor themselves. A third aspect of this shift in thinking, he concludes, is that poverty must become seen as a "moral problem" and as "an injustice of a substantial magnitude" (Rank, 2011). As he forcefully argues, "Something is seriously wrong when we find that, in a country with the most abundant resources in the world, there are children without enough to eat, families who cannot afford health care, and people sleeping on the streets for lack of shelter" (Rank, 2011). This situation, he says, must become seen as a "moral outrage" (Rank, 2011).

Sociologist Joe Soss (Soss, 2011) argues that a change in thinking is not enough for a renewed antipoverty effort to occur. What is needed, he says, is political protest and other political activity by the poor and on behalf of the poor. Soss notes that "political conflict and mass mobilization played key roles" in providing the impetus for social-welfare programs in the 1930s and 1960s in the United States, and he adds that the lower poverty rates of Western European democracies "are products of labor movements, unions, and parties that mobilized workers to demand more adequate social supports." These twin histories lead Soss to conclude that the United States will not increase its antipoverty efforts unless a new wave of political activity by and on behalf of the poor arises. As he argues, "History suggests that major antipoverty victories can be achieved. But they won't be achieved by good will and smart ideas alone. They'll be won politically, when people—in poor communities, in advocacy groups, in government, in the academy, and elsewhere—mobilize to advance antipoverty agendas in ways that make politics as usual untenable."

## Antipoverty Programs and Policies



To help reduce poverty, it is essential to help poor parents pay for child care.

Herald Post – Family Child Care – CC BY-NC 2.0.

If a renewed antipoverty effort does occur for whatever reason, what types of programs and policies show promise for effectively reducing poverty? Here a sociological vision is essential. It is easy to understand why the hungry schoolchildren described in the news story that began this chapter might be going without food during a very faltering national economy. Yet a sociological understanding of poverty emphasizes its structural basis in bad times and good times alike. Poverty is rooted in social and economic problems of the larger society rather than in the lack of willpower, laziness, or other moral failings of poor individuals themselves. Individuals born into poverty suffer from a lack of opportunity from their first months up through adulthood, and poverty becomes a self-perpetuating, vicious cycle. To the extent a culture of poverty might exist, it is best seen as a logical and perhaps even inevitable outcome of, and adaptation to, the problem of being poor and not the primary force driving poverty itself.

This sort of understanding suggests that efforts to reduce poverty must address first and foremost the structural basis for poverty while not ignoring certain beliefs and practices of the poor that also make a difference. An extensive literature on poverty policy outlines many types of policies and programs that follow this dual approach (Cancian & Danziger, 2009; Greenberg, et. al., 2007; Iceland, 2006; Lindsey, 2009; Moore et al., 2009; Rank, 2004). If these were fully adopted, funded, and implemented, as they are in many other democracies, they would offer great promise for reducing poverty. As two poverty experts recently wrote, “We are optimistic that poverty can be reduced significantly in the long term if the public and policymakers can muster the political will to pursue a range of promising antipoverty policies” (M. Cancian & S. Danziger, 2009, p. 32).Cancian, M., & Danziger, S. H. (2009). *Changing poverty, changing policies*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. Although a full discussion of these policies is beyond the scope of this chapter, the following measures are commonly cited as holding strong potential for reducing poverty, and they are found in varying degrees in other Western democracies:

1. Adopt a national “full employment” policy for the poor, involving federally funded job training and public works programs, and increase the minimum wage so that individuals working full-time will earn enough to lift their families out of poverty.
2. Increase federal aid for the working poor, including higher earned income credits and child-care subsidies for those with children.
3. Establish well-funded early childhood intervention programs, including home visitations by trained professionals, for poor families.
4. Provide poor families with enough income to enable them to pay for food and housing.
5. Increase the supply of affordable housing.
6. Improve the schools that poor children attend and the schooling they receive and expand early childhood education programs for poor children.
7. Provide better nutrition and health services for poor families with young children.
8. Establish universal health insurance.
9. Increase Pell Grants and other financial aid for higher education.

## Global Poverty

Years of international aid to poor nations have helped them somewhat, but, as this chapter has shown, their situation remains dire. International aid experts acknowledge that efforts to achieve economic growth in poor nations have largely failed, but they disagree why this is so and what alternative strategies may prove more successful (Cohen & Easterly, 2009).Cohen, J., & Easterly, W. (Eds.). (2009). *What works in development? Thinking big and thinking small*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. One very promising trend has been a switch from macro efforts focusing on infrastructure problems and on social institutions, such as the schools, to micro efforts, such as providing cash payments or small loans directly to poor people in poor nations (a practice called *microfinancing*) and giving them bed nets to prevent mosquito bites (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011; Hanlon, Barrientos, & Hulme, 2010; Karlan & Appel, 2011).Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2011). *Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs; Hanlon, J., Barrientos, A., & Hulme, D. (2010). *Just give money to the poor: The development revolution from the global south*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press; Karlan, D., & Appel, J. (2011). *More than good intentions: How a new economics is helping to solve global poverty*. New York, NY: Dutton. However, the evidence on the success of these efforts is mixed (Bennett, 2009; The Economist, 2010).Bennett, D. (2009, September 20). Small change. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/id...fight_poverty/; The Economist. (2010). A better mattress. *The Economist, 394*(8673), 75–76. Much more to help the world's poor certainly needs to be done.

In this regard, sociology's structural approach is in line with dependency theory and suggests that global stratification results from the history of colonialism and from continuing exploitation today of poor nations' resources by wealthy nations and multinational corporations. To the extent such exploitation exists, global poverty will lessen if and only if this exploitation lessens. A sociological approach also emphasizes the role that class, gender, and ethnic inequality play in perpetuating global poverty. For global poverty to be reduced, gender and ethnic inequality must be reduced.

Writers Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2010)Kristoff, N. D., & WuDunn, S. (2010). *Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. emphasize the need to focus efforts to reduce global poverty of women. We have already seen one reason this emphasis makes sense: women are much worse off than men in poor nations in many ways, so helping them is crucial for both economic and humanitarian reasons. An additional reason is especially illuminating: When women in poor nations acquire extra money, they typically spend it on food, clothing, and medicine, essentials for their families. However, when men in poor nations acquire extra money, they often spend it on alcohol, tobacco, and gambling. This gender difference might sound like a stereotype, but it does indicate that aid to women will help in many ways, while aid to men might be less effective and often even wasted.

### Key Takeaways

- According to some sociologists, a change in thinking about poverty and the poor and political action by and on behalf of the poor are necessary for a renewed effort to help poor Americans.
- Potentially successful antipoverty programs and policies to help the US poor include expanding their employment opportunities and providing them much greater amounts of financial and other aid.
- To help people in poor nations, gender and ethnic inequality must be addressed.

### For Your Review

1. Write a brief essay summarizing the changes in thinking that some sociologists argue must occur before a renewed effort to reduce poverty can take place.
2. Write a brief essay summarizing any four policies or programs that could potentially lower US poverty.

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# 3.7: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Poverty statistics are misleading in at least two ways. First, the way that poverty is measured is inadequate for several reasons, and more accurate measures of poverty that have recently been developed suggest that poverty is higher than the official poverty measure indicates. Second, even if people live slightly above the poverty line, they are still living in very difficult circumstances and are having trouble making ends meet.
2. Children, people of color, the South, and single-parent families headed by women have especially high poverty rates. Despite what many Americans think, the most typical poor person is white, and most poor people who are able to work outside the home in fact do work.
3. To explain social stratification and thus poverty, functionalist theory says that stratification is necessary and inevitable because of the need to encourage people with the needed knowledge and skills to decide to pursue the careers that are most important to society. Conflict theory says stratification exists because of discrimination against, and blocked opportunities for, the have-nots of society. Symbolic interactionist theory does not try to explain why stratification and poverty exist, but it does attempt to understand the experience of being poor.
4. The individualistic explanation attributes poverty to individual failings of poor people themselves, while the structuralist explanation attributes poverty to lack of jobs and lack of opportunity in the larger society.
5. Poverty has serious consequences in many respects. Among other problems, poor children are more likely to grow up to be poor, to have health problems, to commit street crime, and to have lower levels of formal education.
6. The nations of the world differ dramatically in wealth and other resources, with the poorest nations being found in Africa and parts of Asia.
7. Global poverty has a devastating impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. Poor nations have much higher rates of mortality and disease and lower rates of literacy.
8. Modernization theory attributes global poverty to the failure of poor nations to develop the necessary beliefs, values, and practices to achieve economic growth, while dependency theory attributes global poverty to the colonization and exploitation by European nations of nations in other parts of the world.
9. A sociological perspective suggests that poverty reduction in the United States and around the world can occur if the structural causes of poverty are successfully addressed.

## Using What You Know

It is December 20, and you have just finished final exams. In two days, you will go home for winter break and are looking forward to a couple weeks of eating, sleeping, and seeing your high school friends. Your smartphone signals that someone has texted you. When you read the message, you see that a friend is asking you to join her in serving a holiday supper on December 23 at a food pantry just a few miles from your campus. If you do that, you will not be able to get home until two days after you had been planning to arrive, and you will miss a big high school “reunion” party set for the night of the twenty-third. What do you decide to do? Why?

## What You Can Do

To help fight poverty and the effects of poverty, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Contribute money to a local, state, or national organization that provides various kinds of aid to the poor.
2. Volunteer at a local food pantry or homeless shelter.
3. Start a canned food or used clothing drive on your campus.
4. Write letters or send e-mails to local, state, and federal officials that encourage them to expand antipoverty programs.

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# 3.8: Crash Course Video- Social Class and Poverty

Social Class & Poverty in the US: Crash Course Sociology #24




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# 3.9: Crash Course Video- Impacts of Social Class

The Impacts of Social Class: Crash Course Sociology #25




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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 4: Race and Ethnicity


4.1: Introduction
4.2: Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups
4.3: Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity
4.4: Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism
4.5: Intergroup Relationships
4.6: Race and Ethnicity in the United States
4.6.1: Racial and Ethnic Inequality- A Historical Prelude
4.7: Key Terms
4.8: Section Summary
4.9: References
4.10: Audio Stories about Race


Thumbnail: Robert De Niro and his wife Grace Hightower are a prominent interracial couple, shown here at the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival (CC BY 3.0; David Shankbone).

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# 4.1: Introduction

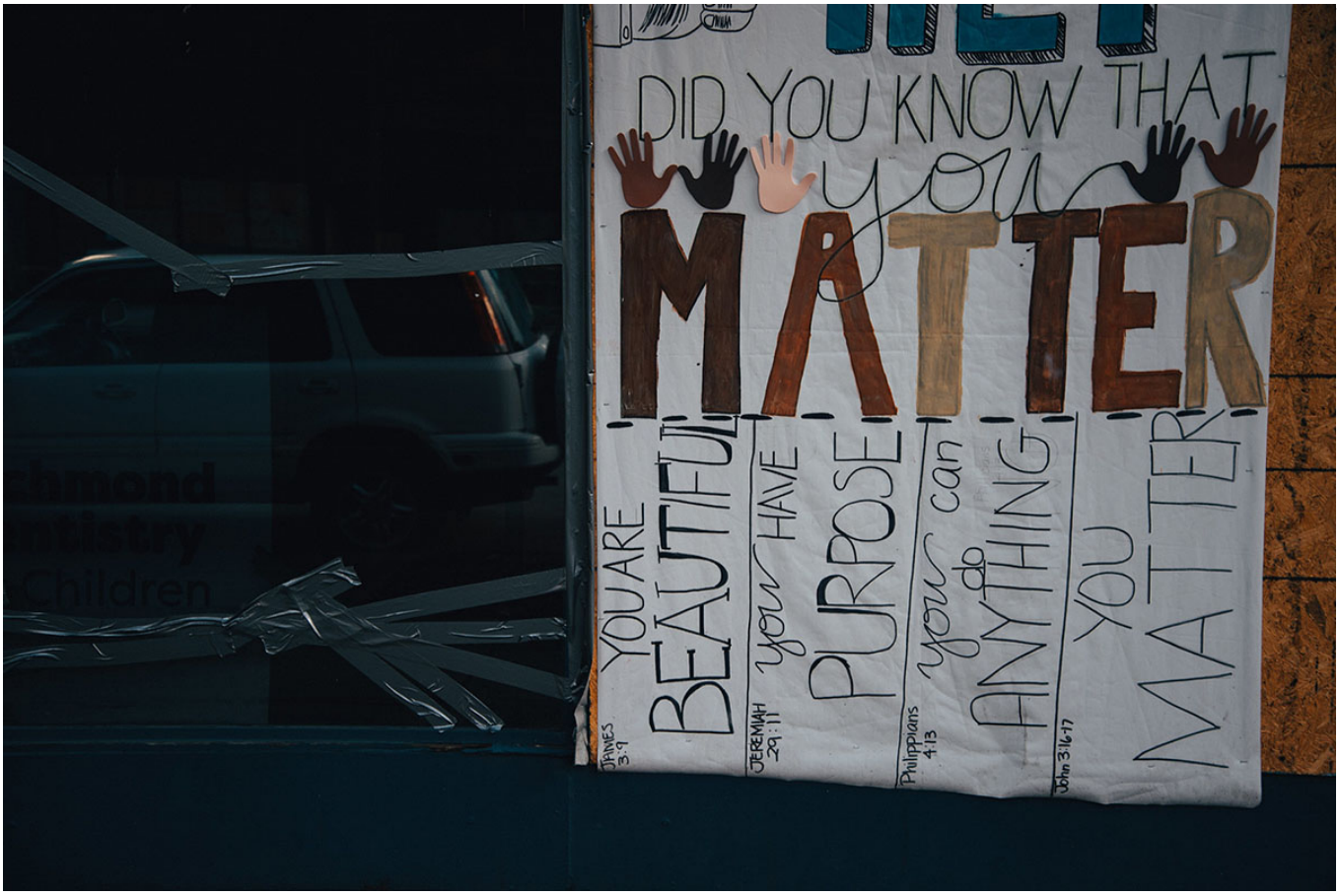



Figure 11.1: The juxtaposition of anger and hope. Over a window broken during protests in Richmond, Virginia, the business owner placed a sign that reads "Did You Know That You Matter. You are beautiful. You have purpose. You can do anything. You matter," and is accompanied with bible verses. (Credit: I threw a guitar a him/flickr)

## Chapter Outline

11.1 Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups
11.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity
11.3 Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism
11.4 Intergroup Relationships
11.5 Race and Ethnicity in the United States

Trayvon Martin was a seventeen-year-old Black teenager. On the evening of February 26, 2012, he was visiting with his father and his father's fiancée in the Sanford, Florida multi-ethnic gated community where his father's fiancée lived. Trayvon went on foot to buy a snack from a nearby convenience store. As he was returning, George Zimmerman, a White Hispanic man and the community's neighborhood watch program coordinator, noticed him. In light of a recent rash of break-ins, Zimmerman called the police to report a person acting suspiciously, which he had done on many other occasions. During the call, Zimmerman said in reference to suspicious people, "[expletive] punks. Those [expletive], they always get away." The 911 operator told Zimmerman not to follow the teen, as was also stated in the police neighborhood watch guidelines that had been provided to Zimmerman. But Zimmerman did follow the teen, and, soon after, they had a physical confrontation. Several people in the community heard yelling, cries for help, and saw two people on the ground. According to Zimmerman, Martin attacked him, and in the ensuing scuffle, Zimmerman shot and killed Martin (CNN Library 2021).

A public outcry followed Martin's death. There were allegations of racial profiling—the use of race alone to determine whether to detain or investigate someone. As part of the initial investigation, Zimmerman was extensively interviewed by police, but was released under Florida's "Stand Your Ground" Law, which indicated police could not arrest him for his actions. About six weeks later, Zimmerman was arrested and charged with second-degree murder by a special prosecutor, Angela Corey, who had been appointed by Florida's governor. In the ensuing trial, he was found not guilty (CNN Library 2021).

The shooting, the public response, and the trial that followed offer a snapshot of the sociology of race. Do you think race played a role in Martin's death? Do you think race had an influence on the initial decision not to arrest Zimmerman, or on his later acquittal? Does society fear Black men, leading to racial profiling at an institutional level?

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# 4.2: Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Understand the difference between race and ethnicity
- Define a majority group (dominant group)
- Define a minority group (subordinate group)

While many students first entering a sociology classroom are accustomed to conflating the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “minority group,” these three terms have distinct meanings for sociologists. The idea of race refers to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant, while ethnicity describes shared culture. And the term "minority groups" describe groups that are subordinate, or that lack power in society regardless of skin color or country of origin. For example, in modern U.S. history, the elderly might be considered a minority group due to a diminished status that results from popular prejudice and discrimination against them. Ten percent of nursing home staff admitted to physically abusing an elderly person in the past year, and 40 percent admitted to committing psychological abuse (World Health Organization 2011). In this chapter we focus on racial and ethnic minorities.

## What Is Race?

A human **race** is a grouping of humankind based on shared physical or social qualities that can vary from one society to another.

Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras, and has eventually become less connected with ancestral and familial ties, and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists developed categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colors, and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions or skin tones, for example.

German physician, zoologist, and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) introduced one of the famous groupings by studying human skulls. Blumenbach divided humans into five races (MacCord 2014):

- Caucasian or White race: people of European, Middle Eastern, and North African origin
- Ethiopian or Black race: people of sub-Saharan Africans origin (sometimes spelled Aethiopian)
- Malayan or Brown race: people of Southeast Asian origin and Pacific Islanders
- Mongolian or Yellow race: people of all East Asian and some Central Asian origin
- American or Red race: people of North American origin or American Indians

Over time, descriptions of race like Blumenbach's have fallen into disuse, and the social construction of race is a more accepted way of understanding racial categories. Social science organizations including the American Association of Anthropologists, the American Sociological Association, and the American Psychological Association have all officially rejected explanations of race like those listed above. Research in this school of thought suggests that race is not biologically identifiable and that previous racial categories were based on pseudoscience; they were often used to justify racist practices (Omi and Winant 1994; Graves 2003). For example, some people used to think that genetics of race determined intelligence. While this idea was mostly put to rest in the later 20th Century, it resurged several times in the past 50 years, including the widely read and cited 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*. Researchers have since provided substantial evidence that refutes a biological-racial basis for intelligence, including the widespread closing of IQ gaps as Black people gained more access to education (Dickens 2006). This research and other confirming studies indicate that any generally lower IQ among a racial group was more about *nurture* than *nature*, to put it into the terms of the Socialization chapter.

While many of the historical considerations of race have been corrected in favor of more accurate and sensitive descriptions, some of the older terms remain. For example, it is generally unacceptable and insulting to refer to Asian people or Native American people with color-based terminology, but it is acceptable to refer to White and Black people in that way. In 2020, a number of publications announced that they would begin capitalizing the names of races, though not everyone used the same approach (Seipel 2020). This practice comes nearly a hundred years after sociologist and leader W.E.B. Du Bois drove newsrooms to capitalize "Negro," the widely used term at the time. And, finally, some members of racial groups (or ethnic groups, which are described below) "reclaim" terms previously used to insult them (Rao 2018). These examples are more evidence of the social construction of race, and our evolving relationships among people and groups.

## What Is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is sometimes used interchangeably with race, but they are very different concepts. Ethnicity is based on shared culture—the practices, norms, values, and beliefs of a group that might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. And as with race, individuals may be identified or self-identify with ethnicities in complex, even contradictory, ways. For example, ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian American, Russian, Jewish, and Serbian might all be groups whose members are predominantly included in the "White" racial category. Ethnicity, like race, continues to be an identification method that individuals and institutions use today—whether through the census, diversity initiatives, nondiscrimination laws, or simply in personal day-to-day relations.

In some cases, ethnicity is incorrectly used as a synonym for national origin, but those constructions are technically different. National origin (itself sometimes confused with nationality) has to do with the geographic and political associations with a person's birthplace or residence. But people from a nation can be of a wide range of ethnicities, often unknown to people outside of the region, which leads to misconceptions. For example, someone in the United States may, with no ill-intent, refer to all Vietnamese people as an ethnic group. But Vietnam is home to 54 formally recognized ethnic groups.

Adding to the complexity: Sometimes, either to build bridges between ethnic groups, promote civil rights, gain recognition, or other reasons, diverse but closely associated ethnic groups may develop a "pan-ethnic" group. For example, the various ethnic groups and national origins of people from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and adjoining nations, who may share cultural, linguistic, or other values, may group themselves together in a collective identity. If they do so, they may not seek to erase their individual ethnicities, but finding the correct description and association can be challenging and depend on context. The large number of people who make up the Asian American community may embrace their collective identity in the context of the United States. However, that embrace may depend on people's ages, and may be expressed differently when speaking to different populations (Park 2008). For example, someone who identifies as Asian American while at home in Houston may not refer to themselves as such when they visit extended family in Japan. In a similar manner, a grouping of people from Mexico, Central America and South America—often referred to as Latinx, Latina, or Latino—may be embraced by some and rejected by others in the group (Martinez 2019).

## What Are Minority Groups?

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a minority group as "any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination." The term minority connotes discrimination, and in its sociological use, the term subordinate group can be used interchangeably with the term minority group, while the term dominant group is often substituted for the group that represents rulers or is in the majority who can access power and privilege in a given society. These definitions correlate to the concept that the dominant group is that which holds the most power in a given society, while subordinate groups are those who lack power compared to the dominant group.

Note that being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group; sometimes larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group. For example, consider apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the Black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the White minority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics: (1) unequal treatment and less power over their lives, (2) distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin color or language, (3) involuntary membership in the group, (4) awareness of subordination, and (5) high rate of in-group marriage. Additional examples of minority groups might include the LGBTQ community, religious practitioners whose faith is not widely practiced where they live, and people with disabilities.

Scapegoat theory, developed initially from Dollard's (1939) Frustration-Aggression theory, suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group. History has shown us many examples of the scapegoating of a subordinate group. An example from the last century is the way Adolf Hitler blamed the Jewish population for Germany's social and economic problems. In the United States, recent immigrants have frequently been the scapegoat for the nation's—or an individual's—woes. Many states have enacted laws to disenfranchise immigrants; these laws are popular because they let the dominant group scapegoat a subordinate group.



Figure 11.2: Golfer Tiger Woods has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage. Individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds are becoming more common. (Credit: familymwr/flickr)

Prior to the twentieth century, racial intermarriage (referred to as miscegenation) was extremely rare, and in many places, illegal. While the sexual subordination of enslaved people did result in children of mixed race, these children were usually considered Black, and therefore, property. There was no concept of multiple racial identities with the possible exception of the Creole. Creole society developed in the port city of New Orleans, where a mixed-race culture grew from French and African inhabitants. Unlike in other parts of the country, “Creoles of color” had greater social, economic, and educational opportunities than most African Americans.

Increasingly during the modern era, the removal of miscegenation laws and a trend toward equal rights and legal protection against racism have steadily reduced the social stigma attached to racial exogamy (exogamy refers to marriage outside a person’s core social unit). It is now common for the children of racially mixed parents to acknowledge and celebrate their various ethnic identities. Golfer Tiger Woods, for instance, has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage; he jokingly refers to his ethnicity as “Cablinasian,” a term he coined to combine several of his ethnic backgrounds. While this is the trend, it is not yet evident in all aspects of our society. For example, the U.S. Census only recently added additional categories for people to identify themselves, such as non-White Hispanic. A growing number of people chose multiple races to describe themselves on the 2020 Census, indicating that individuals have multiple identities.

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# 4.3: Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Describe how major sociological perspectives view race and ethnicity
- Identify examples of culture of prejudice

## Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity

We can examine race and ethnicity through three major sociological perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. As you read through these theories, ask yourself which one makes the most sense and why.

### Functionalism

Functionalism emphasizes that all the elements of society have functions that promote solidarity and maintain order and stability in society. Hence, we can observe people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds interacting harmoniously in a state of social balance. Problems arise when one or more racial or ethnic groups experience inequalities and discriminations. This creates tension and conflict resulting in temporary dysfunction of the social system. For example, the killing of a Black man George Floyd by a White police officer in 2020 stirred up protests demanding racial justice and changes in policing in the United States. To restore the society's pre-disturbed state or to seek a new equilibrium, the police department and various parts of the system require changes and compensatory adjustments.

Another way to apply the functionalist perspective to race and ethnicity is to discuss the way racism can contribute positively to the functioning of society by strengthening bonds between in-group members through the ostracism of out-group members. Consider how a community might increase solidarity by refusing to allow outsiders access. On the other hand, Rose (1951) suggested that dysfunctions associated with racism include the failure to take advantage of talent in the subjugated group, and that society must divert from other purposes the time and effort needed to maintain artificially constructed racial boundaries. Consider how much money, time, and effort went toward maintaining separate and unequal educational systems prior to the civil rights movement.

In the view of functionalism, racial and ethnic inequalities must have served an important function in order to exist as long as they have. This concept, sometimes, can be problematic. How can racism and discrimination contribute positively to society? Nash (1964) focused his argument on the way racism is functional for the dominant group, for example, suggesting that racism morally justifies a racially unequal society. Consider the way slave owners justified slavery in the antebellum South, by suggesting Black people were fundamentally inferior to White and preferred slavery to freedom.

### Interactionism

For symbolic interactionists, race and ethnicity provide strong symbols as sources of identity. In fact, some interactionists propose that the symbols of race, not race itself, are what lead to racism. Famed Interactionist Herbert Blumer (1958) suggested that racial prejudice is formed through interactions between members of the dominant group: Without these interactions, individuals in the dominant group would not hold racist views. These interactions contribute to an abstract picture of the subordinate group that allows the dominant group to support its view of the subordinate group, and thus maintains the status quo. An example of this might be an individual whose beliefs about a particular group are based on images conveyed in popular media, and those are unquestionably believed because the individual has never personally met a member of that group.

Another way to apply the interactionist perspective is to look at how people define their races and the race of others. Some people who claim a White identity have a greater amount of skin pigmentation than some people who claim a Black identity; how did they come to define themselves as Black or White?

### Conflict Theory

Conflict theories are often applied to inequalities of gender, social class, education, race, and ethnicity. A conflict theory perspective of U.S. history would examine the numerous past and current struggles between the White ruling class and racial and ethnic minorities, noting specific conflicts that have arisen when the dominant group perceived a threat from the minority group. In the late nineteenth century, the rising power of Black Americans after the Civil War resulted in draconian Jim Crow laws that severely limited Black political and social power. For example, Vivien Thomas (1910–1985), the Black surgical technician who helped develop the groundbreaking surgical technique that saves the lives of "blue babies" was classified as a janitor for many

years, and paid as such, despite the fact that he was conducting complicated surgical experiments. The years since the Civil War have showed a pattern of attempted disenfranchisement, with gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts aimed at predominantly minority neighborhoods.

### Intersection Theory

Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) further developed intersection theory, originally articulated in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes (Figure 11.4). When we examine race and how it can bring us both advantages and disadvantages, it is important to acknowledge that the way we experience race is shaped, for example, by our gender and class. Multiple layers of disadvantage intersect to create the way we experience race. For example, if we want to understand prejudice, we must understand that the prejudice focused on a White woman because of her gender is very different from the layered prejudice focused on an Asian woman in poverty, who is affected by stereotypes related to being poor, being a woman, and her ethnic status.

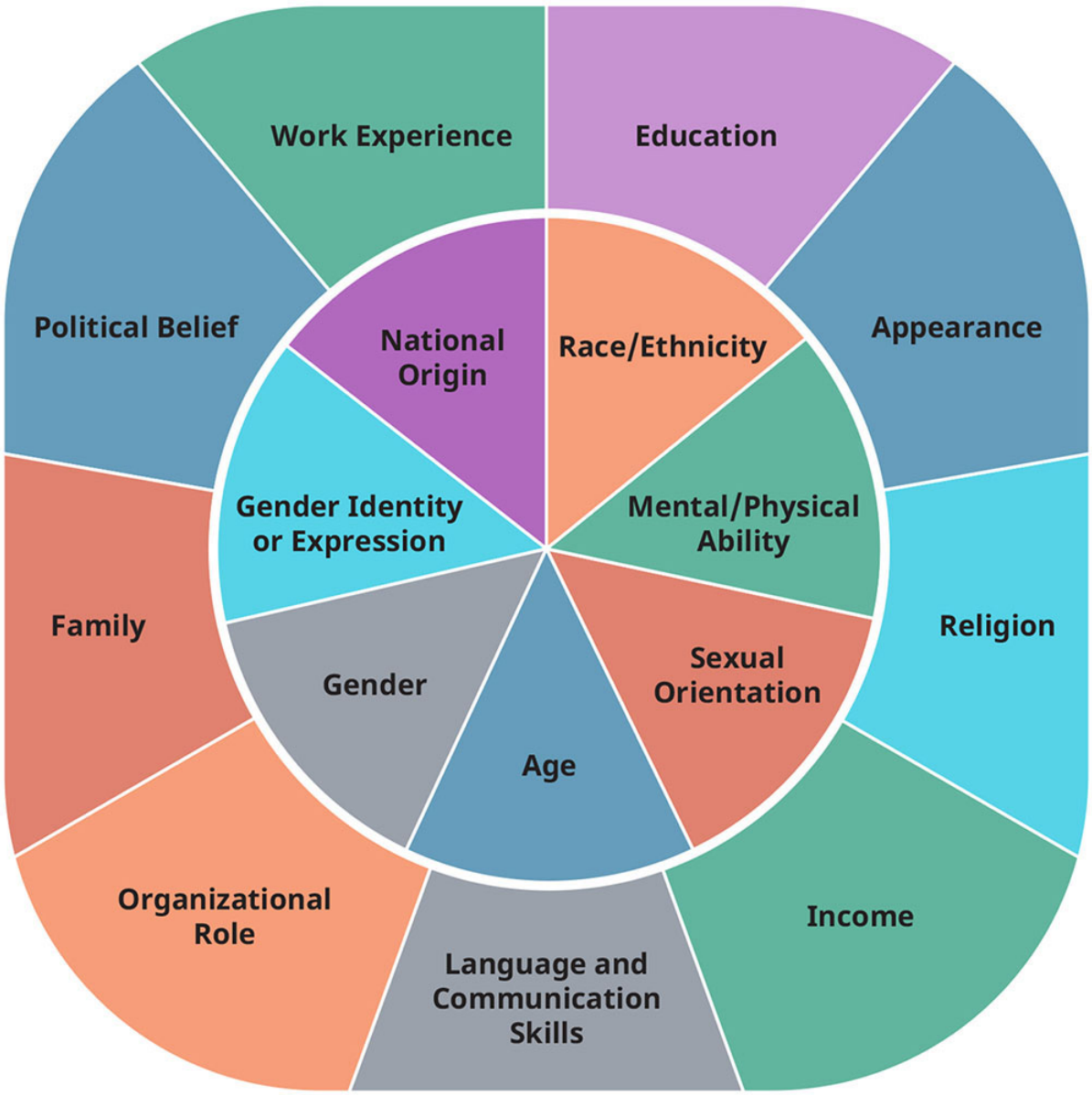



Figure 11.3: Our identities are formed by dozens of factors, sometimes represented in intersection wheels. Consider the subset of identity elements represented here. Generally, the outer ring contains elements that may change relatively often, while the elements in the inner circle are often considered more permanent. (There are certainly exceptions.) How does each contribute to who you are, and how would possible change alter your self-defined identity?

## Culture of Prejudice

Culture of prejudice refers to the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture. We grow up surrounded by images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Consider the casually racist imagery on grocery store shelves or the stereotypes that fill popular movies and advertisements. It is easy to see how someone living in the Northeastern United States, who may know no Mexican Americans personally, might gain a stereotyped impression from such sources as Speedy Gonzalez or Taco Bell's talking Chihuahua. Because we are all exposed to these images and thoughts, it is impossible to know to what extent they have influenced our thought processes.

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# 4.4: Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain the difference between stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism
- Identify different types of discrimination
- View racial tension through a sociological lens

It is important to learn about stereotypes before discussing the terms prejudice, discrimination, and racism that are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation. Stereotypes are oversimplified generalizations about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation—almost any characteristic. They may be positive (usually about one's own group) but are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Where do stereotypes come from? In fact, new stereotypes are rarely created; rather, they are recycled from subordinate groups that have assimilated into society and are reused to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, many stereotypes that are currently used to characterize new immigrants were used earlier in American history to characterize Irish and Eastern European immigrants.

## Prejudice

Prejudice refers to the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes someone holds about a group. A prejudice is not based on personal experience; instead, it is a prejudgment, originating outside actual experience. Recall from the chapter on Crime and Deviance that the criminalization of marijuana was based on anti-immigrant sentiment; proponents used fictional, fear-instilling stories of "reefer madness" and rampant immoral and illegal activities among Spanish-speaking people to justify new laws and harsh treatment of marijuana users. Many people who supported criminalizing marijuana had never met any of the new immigrants who were rumored to use it; the ideas were based in prejudice.

While prejudice is based in beliefs outside of experience, experience can lead people to feel that their prejudice is confirmed or justified. This is a type of confirmation bias. For example, if someone is taught to believe that a certain ethnic group has negative attributes, every negative act committed someone in that group can be seen as confirming the prejudice. Even a minor social offense committed by a member of the ethnic group, like crossing the street outside the crosswalk or talking too loudly on a bus, could confirm the prejudice.

While prejudice often originates outside experience, it isn't instinctive. Prejudice—as well as the stereotypes that lead to it and the discrimination that stems from it—is most often taught and learned. The teaching arrives in many forms, from direct instruction or indoctrination, to observation and socialization. Movies, books, charismatic speakers, and even a desire to impress others can all support the development of prejudices.




Figure 11.4: Stereotypes and prejudices are persistent and apply to almost every category of people. They are also subject to confirmation bias, in which any bit of supporting evidence gives a person more confidence in their belief. For example, if you think older people are bad drivers, every time you see an accident involving an older driver, it's likely to increase your confidence in your stereotype. Even if you hear the statistics that younger drivers cause more accidents than older drivers, the fulfillment of your stereotype is difficult to overcome. (Credit: Chris Freser/flickr)

## Discrimination

While prejudice refers to biased thinking, discrimination consists of actions against a group of people. Discrimination can be based on race, ethnicity, age, religion, health, and other categories. For example, discrimination based on race or ethnicity can take many forms, from unfair housing practices such as redlining to biased hiring systems. Overt discrimination has long been part of U.S. history. In the late nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for business owners to hang signs that read, "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply." And southern Jim Crow laws, with their "Whites Only" signs, exemplified overt discrimination that is not tolerated today.

Discrimination also manifests in different ways. The scenarios above are examples of individual discrimination, but other types exist. Institutional discrimination occurs when a societal system has developed with embedded disenfranchisement of a group, such as the U.S. military's historical nonacceptance of minority sexualities (the "don't ask, don't tell" policy reflected this norm).

While the form and severity of discrimination vary significantly, they are considered forms of oppression. Institutional discrimination can also include the promotion of a group's status, such in the case of privilege, which is the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group.

Most people have some level of privilege, whether it has to do with health, ability, race, or gender. When discussing race, the focus is often on White privilege, which is the societal privilege that benefits White people, or those perceived to be White, over non-White people in some societies, including the United States. Most White people are willing to admit that non-White people live with a set of disadvantages due to the color of their skin. But until they gain a good degree of self-awareness, few people are willing to acknowledge the benefits they themselves receive by being a part of the dominant group. Why not? Some may feel it lessens their accomplishments, others may feel a degree of guilt, and still others may feel that admitting to privilege makes them seem like a bad or mean person. But White (or other dominant) privilege is an institutional condition, not a personal one. It exists whether the person asks for it or not. In fact, a pioneering thinker on the topic, Peggy McIntosh, noted that she didn't recognize privilege because, in fact, it was not based in meanness. Instead, it was an "invisible weightless knapsack full of special provisions" that she didn't ask for, yet from which she still benefitted (McIntosh 1989). As the reference indicates, McIntosh's first major publication about White privilege was released in 1989; many people have only become familiar with the term in recent years.

Prejudice and discrimination can overlap and intersect in many ways. To illustrate, here are four examples of how prejudice and discrimination can occur. Unprejudiced nondiscriminators are open-minded, tolerant, and accepting individuals. Unprejudiced discriminators might be those who unthinkingly practice sexism in their workplace by not considering women or gender nonconforming people for certain positions that have traditionally been held by men. Prejudiced nondiscriminators are those who hold racist beliefs but don't act on them, such as a racist store owner who serves minority customers. Prejudiced discriminators include those who actively make disparaging remarks about others or who perpetuate hate crimes.

## Racism

Racism is a stronger type of prejudice and discrimination used to justify inequalities against individuals by maintaining that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others; it is a set of practices used by a racial dominant group to maximize advantages for itself by disadvantaging racial minority groups. Such practices have affected wealth gap, employment, housing discrimination, government surveillance, incarceration, drug arrests, immigration arrests, infant mortality and much more (Race Forward 2021).

Broadly, individuals belonging to minority groups experience both individual racism and systemic racism during their lifetime. While reading the following some of the common forms of racism, ask yourself, “Am I a part of this racism?” “How can I contribute to stop racism?”

- Individual or Interpersonal Racism refers to prejudice and discrimination executed by individuals consciously and unconsciously that occurs between individuals. Examples include telling a racist joke and believing in the superiority of White people.
- Systemic Racism, also called structural racism or institutional racism, is systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantages racial minority groups. Systemic racism occurs in organizations as discriminatory treatments and unfair policies based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for White people over people of color. For example, a school system where students of color are distributed into underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.
- Racial Profiling is a type of systemic racism that involves the singling out of racial minorities for differential treatment, usually harsher treatment. The disparate treatment of racial minorities by law enforcement officials is a common example of racial profiling in the United States. For example, a study on the Driver's License Privilege to All Minnesota Residents from 2008 to 2010 found that the percentage of Latinos arrested was disproportionally high (Feist 2013). Similarly, the disproportionate number of Black men arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes reflect racial profiling.
- Historical Racism is economic inequality or social disparity caused by past racism. For example, African-Americans have had their opportunities in wealth, education and employment adversely affected due to the mistreatment of their ancestors during the slavery and post-slavery period (Wilson 2012).
- Cultural Racism occurs when the assumption of inferiority of one or more races is built into the culture of a society. For example, the European culture is considered supposedly more mature, evolved and rational than other cultures (Blaut 1992). A study showed that White and Asian American students with high GPAs experience greater social acceptance while Black and Native American students with high GPAs are rejected by their peers (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010).
- Colorism is a form of racism, in which someone believes one type of skin tone is superior or inferior to another within a racial group. For example, if an employer believes a Black employee with a darker skin tone is less capable than a Black employee with lighter skin tone, that is colorism. Studies suggest that darker skinned African Americans experience more discrimination than lighter skinned African Americans (Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Klonoff and Landrine 2000).
- Color-Avoidance Racism (sometimes referred to as "colorblind racism") is an avoidance of racial language by European-Americans that the racism is no longer an issue. The U.S. cultural narrative that typically focuses on individual racism fails to recognize systemic racism. It has arisen since the post-Civil Rights era and supports racism while avoiding any reference to race (Bonilla-Silva (2015).

## How to Be an Antiracist

Almost all mainstream voices in the United States oppose racism. Despite this, racism is prevalent in several forms. For example, when a newspaper uses people's race to identify individuals accused of a crime, it may enhance stereotypes of a certain minority. Another example of racist practices is racial steering, in which real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race.

Racist attitudes and beliefs are often more insidious and harder to pin down than specific racist practices. They become more complex due to implicit bias (also referred to as unconscious bias) which is the process of associating stereotypes or attitudes

towards categories of people without conscious awareness – which can result in unfair actions and decisions that are at odds with one's conscious beliefs about fairness and equality (Osta and Vasquez 2021). For example, in schools we often see "honors" and "gifted" classes quickly filled with White students while the majority of Black and Latino students are placed in the lower track classes. As a result, our mind consciously and unconsciously starts to associate Black and Latino students with being less intelligent, less capable. Osta and Vasquez (2021) argue that placing the student of color into a lower and less rigorous track, we reproduce the inequity and the vicious cycle of structural racism and implicit bias continues.

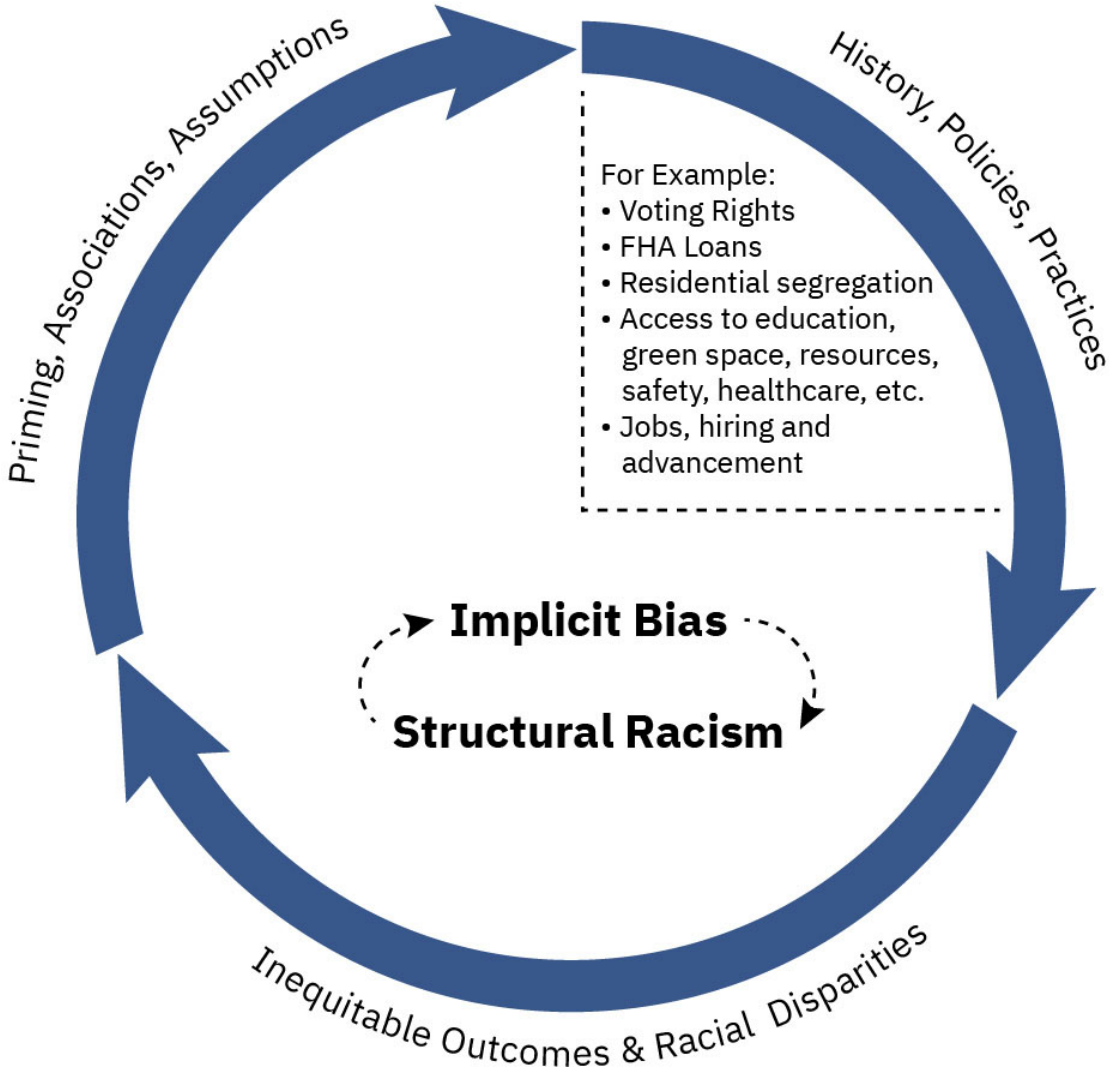



Figure 11.5: Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization (Osta and Vasquez 2021)

If everyone becomes antiracist, breaking the vicious cycle of structural racism and implicit bias may not be far away. To be antiracist is a radical choice in the face of history, requiring a radical reorientation of our consciousness (Kendi 2019). Proponents of anti-racism indicate that we must work collaboratively within ourselves, our institutions, and our networks to challenge racism at local, national and global levels. The practice of anti-racism is everyone's ongoing work that everyone should pursue at least the following (Carter and Snyder 2020):

- Understand and own the racist ideas in which we have been socialized and the racist biases that these ideas have created within each of us.
- Identify racist policies, practices, and procedures and replace them with antiracist policies, practices, and procedures.

Anti-racism need not be confrontational in the sense of engaging in direct arguments with people, feeling terrible about your privilege, or denying your own needs or success. In fact, many people who are a part of a minority acknowledge the need for allies from the dominant group (Melaku 2020). Understanding and owning the racist ideas, and recognizing your own privilege, is a good and brave thing.

We cannot erase racism simply by enacting laws to abolish it, because it is embedded in our complex reality that relates to educational, economic, criminal, political, and other social systems. Importantly, everyone can become antiracist by making conscious choices daily. Being racist or antiracist is not about who you are; it is about what you do (Carter and Snyder 2020).

What does it mean to you to be an "anti-racist"? How do see the recent events or protests in your community, country or somewhere else? Are they making any desired changes?

### Big Picture: Racial Tensions in the United States

The death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014 illustrates racial tensions in the United States as well as the overlap between prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism. On that day, Brown, a young unarmed Black man, was killed by a White police officer named Darren Wilson. During the incident, Wilson directed Brown and his friend to walk on the sidewalk instead of in the street. While eyewitness accounts vary, they agree that an altercation occurred between Wilson and Brown. Wilson's version has him shooting Brown in self-defense after Brown assaulted him, while Dorian Johnson, a friend of Brown also present at the time, claimed that Brown first ran away, then turned with his hands in the air to surrender, after which Wilson shot him repeatedly (Nobles and Bosman 2014). Three autopsies independently confirmed that Brown was shot six times (Lowery and Fears 2014).

The shooting focused attention on a number of race-related tensions in the United States. First, members of the predominantly Black community viewed Brown's death as the result of a White police officer racially profiling a Black man (Nobles and Bosman 2014). In the days after, it was revealed that only three members of the town's fifty-three-member police force were Black (Nobles and Bosman 2014). The national dialogue shifted during the next few weeks, with some commentators pointing to a nationwide sedimentation of racial inequality and identifying redlining in Ferguson as a cause of the unbalanced racial composition in the community, in local political establishments, and in the police force (Bouie 2014). Redlining is the practice of routinely refusing mortgages for households and businesses located in predominately minority communities, while sedimentation of racial inequality describes the intergenerational impact of both practical and legalized racism that limits the abilities of Black people to accumulate wealth.

Ferguson's racial imbalance may explain in part why, even though in 2010 only about 63 percent of its population was Black, in 2013 Black people were detained in 86 percent of stops, 92 percent of searches, and 93 percent of arrests (Missouri Attorney General's Office 2014). In addition, de facto segregation in Ferguson's schools, a race-based wealth gap, urban sprawl, and a Black unemployment rate three times that of the White unemployment rate worsened existing racial tensions in Ferguson while also reflecting nationwide racial inequalities (Bouie 2014).

This situation has not much changed in the United States. After Michael Brown, dozens of unarmed Black people have been shot and killed by police. Studies find no change to the racial disparity in the use of deadly force by police (Belli 2020). Do you think that racial tension can be reduced by stopping police action against racial minorities? What types of policies and practices are important to reduce racial tension? Who are responsible? Why?

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# 4.5: Intergroup Relationships

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain different intergroup relations in terms of their relative levels of tolerance
- Give historical and/or contemporary examples of each type of intergroup relation

Intergroup relations (relationships between different groups of people) range along a spectrum between tolerance and intolerance. The most tolerant form of intergroup relations is pluralism, in which no distinction is made between minority and majority groups, but instead there's equal standing. At the other end of the continuum are amalgamation, expulsion, and even genocide—stark examples of intolerant intergroup relations.

## Pluralism

Pluralism is represented by the ideal of the United States as a "salad bowl": a great mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the flavor of the whole. True pluralism is characterized by mutual respect on the part of all cultures, both dominant and subordinate, creating a multicultural environment of acceptance. In reality, true pluralism is a difficult goal to reach. In the United States, the mutual respect required by pluralism is often missing, and the nation's past model of a melting pot posits a society where cultural differences aren't embraced as much as erased.

## Assimilation

Assimilation describes the process by which a minority individual or group gives up its own identity by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture. In the United States, which has a history of welcoming and absorbing immigrants from different lands, assimilation has been a function of immigration.



Figure 11.6: For many immigrants to the United States, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and a new life. Unfortunately, they often encounter prejudice and discrimination. (Credit: Mark Heard/flickr)

Most people in the United States have immigrant ancestors. In relatively recent history, between 1890 and 1920, the United States became home to around 24 million immigrants. In the decades since then, further waves of immigrants have come to these shores and have eventually been absorbed into U.S. culture, sometimes after facing extended periods of prejudice and discrimination. Assimilation may lead to the loss of the minority group's cultural identity as they become absorbed into the dominant culture, but assimilation has minimal to no impact on the majority group's cultural identity.

Some groups may keep only symbolic gestures of their original ethnicity. For instance, many Irish Americans may celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, many Hindu Americans enjoy a Diwali festival, and many Mexican Americans may celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* (a May 5 acknowledgment of the Mexican victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla). However, for the rest of the year, other aspects of their originating culture may be forgotten.

Assimilation is antithetical to the "salad bowl" created by pluralism; rather than maintaining their own cultural flavor, subordinate cultures give up their own traditions in order to conform to their new environment. Sociologists measure the degree to which immigrants have assimilated to a new culture with four benchmarks: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation, and intermarriage. When faced with racial and ethnic discrimination, it can be difficult for new immigrants to fully

assimilate. Language assimilation, in particular, can be a formidable barrier, limiting employment and educational options and therefore constraining growth in socioeconomic status.

### Amalgamation

Amalgamation is the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group. Amalgamation creates the classic “melting pot” analogy; unlike the “salad bowl,” in which each culture retains its individuality, the “melting pot” ideal sees the combination of cultures that results in a new culture entirely.

Amalgamationin the form of miscegenation is achieved through intermarriage between races. In the United States, antimiscegenation laws, which criminalized interracial marriage, flourished in the South during the Jim Crow era. It wasn’t until 1967’s *Loving v. Virginia* that the last antimiscegenation law was struck from the books, making these laws unconstitutional.

### Genocide

Genocide, the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group, is the most toxic intergroup relationship. Historically, we can see that genocide has included both the intent to exterminate a group and the function of exterminating of a group, intentional or not.

Possibly the most well-known case of genocide is Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in the first part of the twentieth century. Also known as the Holocaust, the explicit goal of Hitler’s “Final Solution” was the eradication of European Jewish people, as well as the destruction of other minority groups such as Catholics, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ people. With forced emigration, concentration camps, and mass executions in gas chambers, Hitler’s Nazi regime was responsible for the deaths of 12 million people, 6 million of whom were Jewish. Hitler’s intent was clear, and the high Jewish death toll certainly indicates that Hitler and his regime committed genocide. But how do we understand genocide that is not so overt and deliberate?

The treatment of the Native Americans by the European colonizers is an example of genocide committed against indigenous people. Some historians estimate that Native American populations dwindled from approximately 12 million people in the year 1500 to barely 237,000 by the year 1900 (Lewy 2004). European settlers coerced American Indians off their own lands, often causing thousands of deaths in forced removals, such as occurred in the Cherokee or Potawatomi Trail of Tears. Settlers also enslaved Native Americans and forced them to give up their religious and cultural practices. But the major cause of Native American death was neither slavery nor war nor forced removal: it was the introduction of European diseases and Native American lack of immunity to them. Smallpox, diphtheria, and measles flourished among indigenous American tribes who had no exposure to the diseases and no ability to fight them. Quite simply, these diseases decimated the tribes. The use of diseases as weapon was most likely unintentional in some cases and intentional in others. For example, during the Seven Years War, the British gave smallpox-infected blankets to the Native tribes in order to "reduce them," and this and similar practices likely continued throughout the centuries-long assault on the Native American people.

Genocide is not a just a historical concept; it is practiced even in the twenty- first century. For example, ethnic and geographic conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan have led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. As part of an ongoing land conflict, the Sudanese government and their state-sponsored Janjaweed militia have led a campaign of killing, forced displacement, and systematic rape of Darfuri people. Although a treaty was signed in 2011, the peace is fragile.

### Expulsion

Expulsion refers to a subordinate group being forced, by a dominant group, to leave a certain area or country. As seen in the examples of the Trail of Tears and the Holocaust, expulsion can be a factor in genocide. However, it can also stand on its own as a destructive group interaction. Expulsion has often occurred historically with an ethnic or racial basis. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in 1942, after the Japanese government’s attack on Pearl Harbor. The Order authorized the establishment of internment camps for anyone with as little as one-eighth Japanese ancestry (i.e., one great-grandparent who was Japanese). Over 120,000 legal Japanese residents and Japanese U.S. citizens, many of them children, were held in these camps for up to four years, despite the fact that there was never any evidence of collusion or espionage. (In fact, many Japanese Americans continued to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States by serving in the U.S. military during the War.) In the 1990s, the U.S. executive branch issued a formal apology for this expulsion; reparation efforts continue today.

### Segregation

Segregation refers to the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions. It is important to distinguish between *de jure* segregation (segregation that is enforced by law) and *de facto* segregation (segregation

that occurs without laws but because of other factors). A stark example of *de jure* segregation is the apartheid movement of South Africa, which existed from 1948 to 1994. Under apartheid, Black South Africans were stripped of their civil rights and forcibly relocated to areas that segregated them physically from their White compatriots. Only after decades of degradation, violent uprisings, and international advocacy was apartheid finally abolished.

*De jure* segregation occurred in the United States for many years after the Civil War. During this time, many former Confederate states passed Jim Crow laws that required segregated facilities for Black and White people. These laws were codified in 1896's landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which stated that "separate but equal" facilities were constitutional. For the next five decades, Black people were subjected to legalized discrimination, forced to live, work, and go to school in separate—but *unequal*—facilities. It wasn't until 1954 and the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that the Supreme Court declared that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," thus ending *de jure* segregation in the United States.




Figure 11.7: In the "Jim Crow" South, it was legal to have "separate but equal" facilities for Black people and White people. (Credit: Library of Congress/Wikimedia Commons)

*De facto* segregation, however, cannot be abolished by any court mandate. Few institutions desegregated as a result of *Brown*; in fact, government and even military intervention was necessary to enforce the ruling, and it took the Civil Rights Act and other laws to formalize the equality. Segregation is still alive and well in the United States, with different racial or ethnic groups often segregated by neighborhood, borough, or parish. Sociologists use segregation indices to measure racial segregation of different races in different areas. The indices employ a scale from zero to 100, where zero is the most integrated and 100 is the least. In the New York metropolitan area, for instance, the Black-White segregation index was seventy-nine for the years 2005–2009. This means that 79 percent of either Black or White people would have to move in order for each neighborhood to have the same racial balance as the whole metro region (Population Studies Center 2010).

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# 4.6: Race and Ethnicity in the United States

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the different experiences of various ethnic groups in the United States
- Apply theories of intergroup relations, race, and ethnicity to different subordinate groups

When colonists came to the New World, they found a land that did not need "discovering" since it was already inhabited. While the first wave of immigrants came from Western Europe, eventually the bulk of people entering North America were from Northern Europe, then Eastern Europe, then Latin America and Asia. And let us not forget the forced immigration of enslaved Africans. Most of these groups underwent a period of disenfranchisement in which they were relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy before they managed (for those who could) to achieve social mobility. Because of this achievement, the U.S. is still a "dream destination" for millions of people living in other countries. Many thousands of people, including children, arrive here every year both documented and undocumented. Most Americans welcome and support new immigrants wholeheartedly. For example, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act introduced in 2001 provides a means for undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children to gain a pathway to permanent legal status. Similarly, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) introduced in 2012 gives young undocumented immigrants a work permit and protection from deportation (Georgetown Law 2021). Today, the U.S. society is multicultural, multiracial and multiethnic that is composed of people from several national origins.

The U.S. Census Bureau collects racial data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB 2016). These data are based on self-identification; generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country that include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as "American Indian" and "White." People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race. OMB requires five minimum categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. The U.S. Census Bureau's QuickFacts as of July 1, 2019 showed that over 328 million people representing various racial groups were living in the U.S. (Table 11.1).

Table 11.1: Percentage of Race and Hispanic Origin Population 2019 (Table courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau)

| Population estimates, July 1, 2019, (V2019) | 328,239,523 |
|---|---|
| **Race and Hispanic Origin** | **Percentage (%)** |
| White alone | 76.3 |
| Black or African American alone | 13.4 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone | 1.3 |
| Asian alone | 5.9 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone | 0.2 |
| Two or More Races | 2.8 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 18.5 |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino | 60.1 |

To clarify the terminology in the table, note that the U.S. Census Bureau defines racial groups as follows:

- White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
- Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and

Vietnam.

- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Information on race is required for many Federal programs and is critical in making policy decisions, particularly for civil rights including racial justice. States use these data to meet legislative redistricting principles. Race data also are used to promote equal employment opportunities and to assess racial disparities in health and environmental risks that demonstrates the extent to which this multiculturality is embraced. The many manifestations of multiculturalism carry significant political repercussions. The sections below will describe how several groups became part of U.S. society, discuss the history of intergroup relations for each faction, and assess each group's status today.

## Native Americans

Native Americans are Indigenous peoples, the only nonimmigrant people in the United States. According to the National Congress of American Indians, Native Americans are "All Native people of the United States and its trust territories (i.e., American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, and American Samoans), as well as persons from Canadian First Nations and Indigenous communities in Mexico and Central and South America who are U.S. residents (NCAI 2020, p. 11)." Native Americans once numbered in the millions but by 2010 made up only 0.9 percent of U.S. populace; see above (U.S. Census 2010). Currently, about 2.9 million people identify themselves as Native American alone, while an additional 2.3 million identify themselves as Native American mixed with another ethnic group (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel 2012).

### Sociology in the Real World: Sports Teams with Native American Names




Figure 11.8: Many Native Americans (and others) believe sports teams with names like the Indians, Braves, and Warriors perpetuate unwelcome stereotypes. The Not Your Mascot protest was one of many directed at the then Washington Redskins, which eventually changed its name. (Credit: Fibonacci Blue/fickr)

The sports world abounds with team names like the Indians, the Warriors, the Braves, and even the Savages and Redskins. These names arise from historically prejudiced views of Native Americans as fierce, brave, and strong: attributes that would be beneficial to a sports team, but are not necessarily beneficial to people in the United States who should be seen as more than that.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has been campaigning against the use of such mascots, asserting that the "warrior savage myth . . . reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture" (NCAI Resolution #TUL-05-087 2005). The campaign has met with limited success. While some teams have changed their names, hundreds of professional, college, and K–12 school teams still have names derived from this stereotype. Another group, American Indian Cultural Support (AICS), is especially concerned with the use of such names at K–12 schools, influencing children when they should be gaining a fuller and more realistic understanding of Native Americans than such stereotypes supply.

After years of pressure and with a wider sense of social justice and cultural sensitivity, the Washington Football Team removed their offensive name before the 2020 season, and the Cleveland Major League Baseball team announced it would change its name after the 2021 season.

What do you think about such names? Should they be allowed or banned? What argument would a symbolic interactionist make on this topic?

## History of Intergroup Relations

Native American culture prior to European settlement is referred to as Pre-Columbian: that is, prior to the coming of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Mistakenly believing that he had landed in the East Indies, Columbus named the indigenous people "Indians," a name that has persisted for centuries despite being a geographical misnomer and one used to blanket hundreds of sovereign tribal nations (NCAI 2020).

The history of intergroup relations between European colonists and Native Americans is a brutal one. As discussed in the section on genocide, the effect of European settlement of the Americans was to nearly destroy the indigenous population. And although Native Americans' lack of immunity to European diseases caused the most deaths, overt mistreatment and massacres of Native Americans by Europeans were devastating as well.

From the first Spanish colonists to the French, English, and Dutch who followed, European settlers took what land they wanted and expanded across the continent at will. If indigenous people tried to retain their stewardship of the land, Europeans fought them off with superior weapons. Europeans' domination of the Americas was indeed a conquest; one scholar points out that Native Americans are the only minority group in the United States whose subordination occurred purely through conquest by the dominant group (Marger 1993).

After the establishment of the United States government, discrimination against Native Americans was codified and formalized in a series of laws intended to subjugate them and keep them from gaining any power. Some of the most impactful laws are as follows:

- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced the relocation of any Native tribes east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river.
- The Indian Appropriation Acts funded further removals and declared that no Indian tribe could be recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with which the U.S. government would have to make treaties. This made it even easier for the U.S. government to take land it wanted.
- The Dawes Act of 1887 reversed the policy of isolating Native Americans on reservations, instead forcing them onto individual properties that were intermingled with White settlers, thereby reducing their capacity for power as a group.

Native American culture was further eroded by the establishment of boarding schools in the late nineteenth century. These schools, run by both Christian missionaries and the United States government, had the express purpose of "civilizing" Native American children and assimilating them into White society. The boarding schools were located off-reservation to ensure that children were separated from their families and culture. Schools forced children to cut their hair, speak English, and practice Christianity. Physical and sexual abuses were rampant for decades; only in 1987 did the Bureau of Indian Affairs issue a policy on sexual abuse in boarding schools. Some scholars argue that many of the problems that Native Americans face today result from almost a century of mistreatment at these boarding schools.

## Current Status

The eradication of Native American culture continued until the 1960s, when Native Americans were able to participate in and benefit from the civil rights movement. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 guaranteed Indian tribes most of the rights of the United States Bill of Rights. New laws like the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 and the Education Assistance Act of the same year recognized tribal governments and gave them more power. Indian boarding schools have dwindled to only a few, and

Native American cultural groups are striving to preserve and maintain old traditions to keep them from being lost forever. Today, Native Americans are citizens of three sovereigns: their tribal nations, the United States, and the state in which they reside (NCAI 2020).

However, Native Americans (some of whom wish to be called American Indians so as to avoid the "savage" connotations of the term "native") still suffer the effects of centuries of degradation. Long-term poverty, inadequate education, cultural dislocation, and high rates of unemployment contribute to Native American populations falling to the bottom of the economic spectrum. Native Americans also suffer disproportionately with lower life expectancies than most groups in the United States.

### African Americans

As discussed in the section on race, the term African American can be a misnomer for many individuals. Many people with dark skin may have their more recent roots in Europe or the Caribbean, seeing themselves as Dominican American or Dutch American, for example. Further, actual immigrants from Africa may feel that they have more of a claim to the term African American than those who are many generations removed from ancestors who originally came to this country.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2019) estimates that at least 13.4 percent of the United States' population is Black.

### How and Why They Came

African Americans are the exemplar minority group in the United States whose ancestors did not come here by choice. A Dutch sea captain brought the first Africans to the Virginia colony of Jamestown in 1619 and sold them as indentured servants. (Indentured servants are people who are committed to work for a certain period of time, typically without formal pay). This was not an uncommon practice for either Black or White people, and indentured servants were in high demand. For the next century, Black and White indentured servants worked side by side. But the growing agricultural economy demanded greater and cheaper labor, and by 1705, Virginia passed the slave codes declaring that any foreign-born non-Christian could be enslaved, and that enslaved people were considered property.

The next 150 years saw the rise of U.S. slavery, with Black Africans being kidnapped from their own lands and shipped to the New World on the trans-Atlantic journey known as the Middle Passage. Once in the Americas, the Black population grew until U.S.-born Black people outnumbered those born in Africa. But colonial (and later, U.S.) slave codes declared that the child of an enslaved person was also an enslaved person, so the slave class was created. By 1808, the slave trade was internal in the United States, with enslaved people being bought and sold across state lines like livestock.

### History of Intergroup Relations

There is no starker illustration of the dominant-subordinate group relationship than that of slavery. In order to justify their severely discriminatory behavior, slaveholders and their supporters viewed Black people as innately inferior. Enslaved people were denied even the most basic rights of citizenship, a crucial factor for slaveholders and their supporters. Slavery poses an excellent example of conflict theory's perspective on race relations; the dominant group needed complete control over the subordinate group in order to maintain its power. Whippings, executions, rapes, and denial of schooling and health care were widely practiced.

Slavery eventually became an issue over which the nation divided into geographically and ideologically distinct factions, leading to the Civil War. And while the abolition of slavery on moral grounds was certainly a catalyst to war, it was not the only driving force. Students of U.S. history will know that the institution of slavery was crucial to the Southern economy, whose production of crops like rice, cotton, and tobacco relied on the virtually limitless and cheap labor that slavery provided. In contrast, the North didn't benefit economically from slavery, resulting in an economic disparity tied to racial/political issues.

A century later, the civil rights movement was characterized by boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides: demonstrations by a subordinate group and their supporters that would no longer willingly submit to domination. The major blow to America's formally institutionalized racism was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act, which is still important today, banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

### Current Status

Although government-sponsored, formalized discrimination against African Americans has been outlawed, true equality does not yet exist. The National Urban League's *2020 Equality Index* reports that Black people's overall equality level with White people has been generally improving. Measuring standards of civic engagement, economics, education, and others, Black people had an equality level of 71 percent in 2010 and had an equality level of 74 percent in 2020. The *Index*, which has been published since 2005, notes a growing trend of increased inequality with White people, especially in the areas of unemployment, insurance

coverage, and incarceration. Black people also trail White people considerably in the areas of economics, health, and education (National Urban League 2020).

To what degree do racism and prejudice contribute to this continued inequality? The answer is complex. 2008 saw the election of this country's first African American president: Barack Obama. Despite being popularly identified as Black, we should note that President Obama is of a mixed background that is equally White, and although all presidents have been publicly mocked at times (Gerald Ford was depicted as a klutz, Bill Clinton as someone who could not control his libido), a startling percentage of the critiques of Obama were based on his race. In a number of other chapters, we discuss racial disparities in healthcare, education, incarceration, and other areas.

Although Black people have come a long way from slavery, the echoes of centuries of disempowerment are still evident.

### Sociology in the Real World: Black People Are Still Seeking Racial Justice




Figure 11.9: This gathering at the site of George Floyd's death took place five days after he was killed. The location, at Chicago Avenue and 38th Street in Minneapolis, became a memorial. (Credit: Fibbonacci Blue/flickr)

In 2020, racial justice movements expanded their protests against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against Black people. Black Lives Matter (BLM), an organization founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, was a core part of the movement to protest the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black victims of police violence. Millions of people from all racial backgrounds participated in the movement directly or indirectly, demanding justice for the victims and their families, redistributing police department funding to drive more holistic and community-driven law enforcement, addressing systemic racism, and introducing new laws to punish police officers who kill innocent people.

The racial justice movement has been able to achieve some these demands. For example, Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved $27 million settlement to the family of George Floyd in March 2021, the largest pre-trial settlement in a wrongful death case ever for the life of a Black person (Shapiro and Lloyd, 2021). $500,000 from the settlement amount is intended to enhance the business district in the area where Floyd died. Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was arrested and murdered in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. Do you think such settlement is adequate to provide justice for the victims, their families and communities affected by the horrific racism? What else should be done more? How can you contribute to bring desired changes?

## Asian Americans

Asian Americans represent a great diversity of cultures and backgrounds. The experience of a Japanese American whose family has been in the United States for three generations will be drastically different from a Laotian American who has only been in the United States for a few years. This section primarily discusses Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants and shows the differences between their experiences. The most recent estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) suggest about 5.9 percent of the population identify themselves as Asian.

### How and Why They Came

The national and ethnic diversity of Asian American immigration history is reflected in the variety of their experiences in joining U.S. society. Asian immigrants have come to the United States in waves, at different times, and for different reasons.

The first Asian immigrants to come to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were Chinese. These immigrants were primarily men whose intention was to work for several years in order to earn incomes to support their families in China. Their main destination was the American West, where the Gold Rush was drawing people with its lure of abundant money. The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was underway at this time, and the Central Pacific section hired thousands of migrant Chinese men to complete the laying of rails across the rugged Sierra Nevada mountain range. Chinese men also engaged in other manual labor like mining and agricultural work. The work was grueling and underpaid, but like many immigrants, they persevered.

Japanese immigration began in the 1880s, on the heels of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Many Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii to participate in the sugar industry; others came to the mainland, especially to California. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Japanese had a strong government that negotiated with the U.S. government to ensure the well-being of their immigrants. Japanese men were able to bring their wives and families to the United States, and were thus able to produce second- and third-generation Japanese Americans more quickly than their Chinese counterparts.

The most recent large-scale Asian immigration came from Korea and Vietnam and largely took place during the second half of the twentieth century. While Korean immigration has been fairly gradual, Vietnamese immigration occurred primarily post-1975, after the fall of Saigon and the establishment of restrictive communist policies in Vietnam. Whereas many Asian immigrants came to the United States to seek better economic opportunities, Vietnamese immigrants came as political refugees, seeking asylum from harsh conditions in their homeland. The Refugee Act of 1980 helped them to find a place to settle in the United States.



Figure 11.10: Thirty-five Vietnamese refugees wait to be taken aboard the amphibious USS *Blue Ridge (LCC-19)*. They are being rescued from a thirty-five-foot fishing boat 350 miles northeast of Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, after spending eight days at sea. (Credit: U.S. Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

## History of Intergroup Relations

Chinese immigration came to an abrupt end with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act was a result of anti-Chinese sentiment burgeoned by a depressed economy and loss of jobs. White workers blamed Chinese migrants for taking jobs, and the passage of the Act meant the number of Chinese workers decreased. Chinese men did not have the funds to return to China or to bring their families to the United States, so they remained physically and culturally segregated in the Chinatowns of large cities. Later legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924, further curtailed Chinese immigration. The Act included the race-based National Origins Act, which was aimed at keeping U.S. ethnic stock as undiluted as possible by reducing "undesirable" immigrants. It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Chinese immigration again increased, and many Chinese families were reunited.

Although Japanese Americans have deep, long-reaching roots in the United States, their history here has not always been smooth. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 was aimed at them and other Asian immigrants, and it prohibited immigrants from owning land. An even uglier action was the Japanese internment camps of World War II, discussed earlier as an illustration of expulsion.

## Current Status

Asian Americans certainly have been subject to their share of racial prejudice, despite the seemingly positive stereotype as the model minority. The model minority stereotype is applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching significant educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without challenging the existing establishment.

This stereotype is typically applied to Asian groups in the United States, and it can result in unrealistic expectations by putting a stigma on members of this group that do not meet the expectations. Stereotyping all Asians as smart and capable can also lead to a lack of much-needed government assistance and to educational and professional discrimination.

### Sociology in the Real World: Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans




Figure 11.11: In response to widespread attacks against Asian people, partly linked to incorrect associations regarding Asian people and the COVID-19 pandemic, groups around the country and world held Stop Asian Hate rallies like this one in Canada. (Credit: GoToVan/flickr)

Asian Americans across the United States experienced a significant increase in hate crimes, harassment and discrimination tied to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Community trackers recorded more than 3,000 anti-Asian attacks nationwide during 2020 in comparison to about 100 such incidents recorded annually in the prior years (Abdollah 2021). Asian American leaders have been urging community members to report any criminal incidents, demanding local law enforcement agencies for greater enforcement of existing hate-crime laws.

Many Asian Americans feel their communities have long been ignored by mainstream politics, media and entertainment although they are considered as a “model minority.” Recently, Asian American journalists are sharing their own stories of discrimination on social media and a growing chorus of federal lawmakers are demanding actions. Do you think you can do something to stop violence against Asian Americans? Can any of your actions not only help Asian Americans but also wider people in the United States?

## White Americans

White Americans are the dominant racial group in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), 76.3 percent of U.S. adults currently identify themselves as White alone. In this section, we will focus on German, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants.

## Why They Came

White ethnic Europeans formed the second and third great waves of immigration, from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. They joined a newly minted United States that was primarily made up of White Protestants from England. While most immigrants came searching for a better life, their experiences were not all the same.

The first major influx of European immigrants came from Germany and Ireland, starting in the 1820s. Germans came both for economic opportunity and to escape political unrest and military conscription, especially after the Revolutions of 1848. Many German immigrants of this period were political refugees: liberals who wanted to escape from an oppressive government. They were well-off enough to make their way inland, and they formed heavily German enclaves in the Midwest that exist to this day.

The Irish immigrants of the same time period were not always as well off financially, especially after the Irish Potato Famine of 1845. Irish immigrants settled mainly in the cities of the East Coast, where they were employed as laborers and where they faced significant discrimination.

German and Irish immigration continued into the late 19th century and earlier 20th century, at which point the numbers for Southern and Eastern European immigrants started growing as well. Italians, mainly from the Southern part of the country, began arriving in large numbers in the 1890s. Eastern European immigrants—people from Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary—started arriving around the same time. Many of these Eastern Europeans were peasants forced into a hardscrabble existence in their native lands; political unrest, land shortages, and crop failures drove them to seek better opportunities in the United States. The Eastern European immigration wave also included Jewish people escaping pogroms (anti-Jewish massacres) of Eastern Europe and the Pale of Settlement in what was then Poland and Russia.

## History of Intergroup Relations

In a broad sense, German immigrants were not victimized to the same degree as many of the other subordinate groups this section discusses. While they may not have been welcomed with open arms, they were able to settle in enclaves and establish roots. A notable exception to this was during the lead up to World War I and through World War II, when anti-German sentiment was virulent.

Irish immigrants, many of whom were very poor, were more of an underclass than the Germans. In Ireland, the English had oppressed the Irish for centuries, eradicating their language and culture and discriminating against their religion (Catholicism). Although the Irish had a larger population than the English, they were a subordinate group. This dynamic reached into the New World, where Anglo-Americans saw Irish immigrants as a race apart: dirty, lacking ambition, and suitable for only the most menial jobs. In fact, Irish immigrants were subject to criticism identical to that with which the dominant group characterized African Americans. By necessity, Irish immigrants formed tight communities segregated from their Anglo neighbors.

The later wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe was also subject to intense discrimination and prejudice. In particular, the dominant group—which now included second- and third-generation Germans and Irish—saw Italian immigrants as the dregs of Europe and worried about the purity of the American race (Myers 2007). Italian immigrants lived in segregated slums in Northeastern cities, and in some cases were even victims of violence and lynching similar to what African Americans endured. They undertook physical labor at lower pay than other workers, often doing the dangerous work that other laborers were reluctant to take on, such as earth moving and construction.

## Current Status

German Americans are the largest group among White ethnic Americans in the country. For many years, German Americans endeavored to maintain a strong cultural identity, but they are now culturally assimilated into the dominant culture.

There are now more Irish Americans in the United States than there are Irish in Ireland. One of the country's largest cultural groups, Irish Americans have slowly achieved acceptance and assimilation into the dominant group.

Myers (2007) states that Italian Americans' cultural assimilation is "almost complete, but with remnants of ethnicity." The presence of "Little Italy" neighborhoods—originally segregated slums where Italians congregated in the nineteenth century—exist today. While tourists flock to the saints' festivals in Little Italies, most Italian Americans have moved to the suburbs at the same rate as

other White groups. Italian Americans also became more accepted after World War II, partly because of other, newer migrating groups and partly because of their significant contribution to the war effort, which saw over 500,000 Italian Americans join the military and fight against the Axis powers, which included Italy itself.

As you will see in the Religion chapter, Jewish people were also a core immigrant group to the United States. They often resided in tight-knit neighborhoods in a similar way to Italian people. Jewish identity is interesting and varied, in that many Jewish people consider themselves as members of a collective ethnic group as well as a religion, and many Jewish people feel connected by their ancestry as well as their religion. In fact, much of the data around the number of Jewish Americans is presented with caveats about different definitions and identifications of what it means to be Jewish (Lipka 2013).

As we have seen, there is no minority group that fits easily in a category or that can be described simply. While sociologists believe that individual experiences can often be understood in light of their social characteristics (such as race, class, or gender), we must balance this perspective with awareness that no two individuals' experiences are alike. Making generalizations can lead to stereotypes and prejudice. The same is true for White ethnic Americans, who come from diverse backgrounds and have had a great variety of experiences.

### Social Policy and Debate: Thinking about White Ethnic Americans: Arab Americans




Figure 11.12: The Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan is the largest mosque, or Islamic religious place of worship, in the United States. Muslim women and girls often wear head coverings, which sometimes makes them a target of harassment. (Credit A: Ryan Ready/flickr; B: U.S. Department of Agriculture/flickr)

The first Arab immigrants came to this country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were predominantly Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian Christians, and they came to escape persecution and to make a better life. These early immigrants and their descendants, who were more likely to think of themselves as Syrian or Lebanese than Arab, represent almost half of the Arab American population today (Myers 2007). Restrictive immigration policies from the 1920s until 1965 curtailed immigration, but Arab immigration since 1965 has been steady. Immigrants from this time period have been more likely to be Muslim and more highly educated, escaping political unrest and looking for better opportunities.

The United States was deeply affected by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and racial profiling has proceeded against Arab Americans since then. Particularly when engaged in air travel, being young and Arab-looking is enough to warrant a special search or detainment. This Islamophobia (irrational fear of or hatred against Muslims) does not show signs of abating. Arab Americans represent all religious practices, despite the stereotype that all Arabic people practice Islam. Geographically, the Arab region comprises the Middle East and parts of North Africa (MENA). People whose ancestry lies in that area or who speak primarily Arabic may consider themselves Arabs.

The U.S. Census has struggled with the issue of Arab identity. The 2020 Census, as in previous years, did not offer a (MENA) category under the question of race. The US government rejected a push by Arab American advocates and organizations to add the new category, meaning that people stemming from the Arab region will be counted as "white" (Harb 2018). Do you think

an addition of MENA category is appropriate to reduce prejudice and discrimination against Arab Americans? What other categories should be added to promote racial justice in the United States?

### Hispanic Americans

The U.S. Census Bureau uses two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data: “Hispanic or Latino” and “Not Hispanic or Latino." Hispanic or Latino is a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Hispanic Americans have a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities.

The segment of the U.S. population that self-identifies as Hispanic in 2019 was recently estimated at 18.5 percent of the total (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, about 75 percent of the respondents who identify as Hispanic report being of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban origin. Remember that the U.S. Census allows people to report as being more than one ethnicity.

Not only are there wide differences among the different origins that make up the Hispanic American population, but there are also different names for the group itself. Hence, there have been some disagreements over whether Hispanic or Latino is the correct term for a group this diverse, and whether it would be better for people to refer to themselves as being of their origin specifically, for example, Mexican American or Dominican American. This section will compare the experiences of Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans.

### How and Why They Came

Mexican Americans form the largest Hispanic subgroup and also the oldest. Mexican migration to the United States started in the early 1900s in response to the need for inexpensive agricultural labor. Mexican migration was often circular; workers would stay for a few years and then go back to Mexico with more money than they could have made in their country of origin. The length of Mexico’s shared border with the United States has made immigration easier than for many other immigrant groups.

Cuban Americans are the second-largest Hispanic subgroup, and their history is quite different from that of Mexican Americans. The main wave of Cuban immigration to the United States started after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 and reached its crest with the Mariel boatlift in 1980. Castro’s Cuban Revolution ushered in an era of communism that continues to this day. To avoid having their assets seized by the government, many wealthy and educated Cubans migrated north, generally to the Miami area.

### History of Intergroup Relations

For several decades, Mexican workers crossed the long border into the United States, both "documented" and "undocumented" to work in the fields that provided produce for the developing United States. Western growers needed a steady supply of labor, and the 1940s and 1950s saw the official federal Bracero Program (*bracero* is Spanish for *strong-arm*) that offered protection to Mexican guest workers. Interestingly, 1954 also saw the enactment of “Operation Wetback,” which deported thousands of illegal Mexican workers. From these examples, we can see the U.S. treatment of immigration from Mexico has been ambivalent at best.

Sociologist Douglas Massey (2006) suggests that although the average standard of living than in Mexico may be lower in the United States, it is not so low as to make permanent migration the goal of most Mexicans. However, the strengthening of the border that began with 1986’s Immigration Reform and Control Act has made one-way migration the rule for most Mexicans. Massey argues that the rise of illegal one-way immigration of Mexicans is a direct outcome of the law that was intended to reduce it.

Cuban Americans, perhaps because of their relative wealth and education level at the time of immigration, have fared better than many immigrants. Further, because they were fleeing a Communist country, they were given refugee status and offered protection and social services. The Cuban Migration Agreement of 1995 has curtailed legal immigration from Cuba, leading many Cubans to try to immigrate illegally by boat. According to a 2009 report from the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. government applies a “wet foot/dry foot” policy toward Cuban immigrants; Cubans who are intercepted while still at sea will be returned to Cuba, while those who reach the shore will be permitted to stay in the United States.

### Current Status

Mexican Americans, especially those who are here undocumented, are at the center of a national debate about immigration. Myers (2007) observes that no other minority group (except the Chinese) has immigrated to the United States in such an environment of legal dispute. He notes that in some years, three times as many Mexican immigrants may have entered the United States undocumented as those who arrived documented. It should be noted that this is due to enormous disparity of economic opportunity on two sides of an open border, not because of any inherent inclination to break laws. In his report, “Measuring Immigrant Assimilation in the United States,” Jacob Vigdor (2008) states that Mexican immigrants experience relatively low rates of

economic and civic assimilation. He further suggests that “the slow rates of economic and civic assimilation set Mexicans apart from other immigrants, and may reflect the fact that the large numbers of Mexican immigrants residing in the United States undocumented have few opportunities to advance themselves along these dimensions.”

By contrast, Cuban Americans are often seen as a model minority group within the larger Hispanic group. Many Cubans had higher socioeconomic status when they arrived in this country, and their anti-Communist agenda has made them welcome refugees to this country. In south Florida, especially, Cuban Americans are active in local politics and professional life. As with Asian Americans, however, being a model minority can mask the issue of powerlessness that these minority groups face in U.S. society.

### Social Policy and Debate: Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070




Figure 11.13: Protesters in Arizona dispute the harsh new anti-immigration law. (Credit: rprathap/flickr)

As both legal and illegal immigrants, and with high population numbers, Mexican Americans are often the target of stereotyping, racism, and discrimination. A harsh example of this is in Arizona, where a stringent immigration law—known as SB 1070 (for Senate Bill 1070)—caused a nationwide controversy. Formally titled "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, the law requires that during a lawful stop, detention, or arrest, Arizona police officers must establish the immigration status of anyone they suspect may be here illegally. The law makes it a crime for individuals to fail to have documents confirming their legal status, and it gives police officers the right to detain people they suspect may be in the country illegally.

To many, the most troublesome aspect of this law is the latitude it affords police officers in terms of whose citizenship they may question. Having “reasonable suspicion that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States” is reason enough to demand immigration papers (Senate Bill 1070 2010). Critics say this law will encourage racial profiling (the illegal practice of law enforcement using race as a basis for suspecting someone of a crime), making it hazardous to be caught “Driving While Brown,” a takeoff on the legal term Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) or the slang reference of “Driving While Black.” Driving While Brown refers to the likelihood of getting pulled over just for being nonWhite.

SB 1070 has been the subject of many lawsuits, from parties as diverse as Arizona police officers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and even the federal government, which is suing on the basis of Arizona contradicting federal immigration laws (ACLU 2011). The future of SB 1070 is uncertain, but many other states have tried or are trying to pass similar measures. Do you think such measures are appropriate?

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# 4.6.1: Racial and Ethnic Inequality- A Historical Prelude

## Racial and Ethnic Inequality: A Historical Prelude

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the targets of nineteenth-century mob violence in US cities.
2. Discuss why the familiar saying "The more things change, the more they stay the same" applies to the history of race and ethnicity in the United States.

Race and ethnicity have torn at the fabric of American society ever since the time of Christopher Columbus, when an estimated 1 million Native Americans populated the eventual United States. By 1900, their numbers had dwindled to about 240,000, as tens of thousands were killed by white settlers and US troops and countless others died from disease contracted from people with European backgrounds. Scholars say this mass killing of Native Americans amounted to genocide (D. A. Brown, 2009).

African Americans also have a history of maltreatment that began during the colonial period, when Africans were forcibly transported from their homelands to be sold as slaves in the Americas. Slavery, of course, continued in the United States until the North's victory in the Civil War ended it. African Americans outside the South were not slaves but were still victims of racial prejudice. During the 1830s, white mobs attacked free African Americans in cities throughout the nation, including Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh. The mob violence stemmed from a "deep-seated racial prejudice…in which whites saw blacks as 'something less than human'" (R. M. Brown, 1975, p. 206) and continued well into the twentieth century, when white mobs attacked African Americans in several cities, with at least seven anti black riots occurring in 1919 that left dozens dead. Meanwhile, an era of Jim Crow racism in the South led to the lynching of thousands of African Americans, segregation in all facets of life, and other kinds of abuses (Litwack, 2009).

### Figure 1: *Lynching*



Figure 4.6.1.1: *Lynching*. During the era of Jim Crow racism in the South, several thousand African Americans were lynched. (Public Domain via Library of Congress)

African Americans were not the only targets of native-born white mobs back then (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 2009). As immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Eastern Europe, Mexico, and Asia flooded into the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they, too, were beaten, denied jobs, and otherwise mistreated. During the 1850s, mobs beat and sometimes killed Catholics in cities such as Baltimore and New Orleans. During the 1870s, whites rioted against Chinese immigrants in cities in California and other states. Hundreds of Mexicans were attacked and/or lynched in California and Texas during this period.

Nazi racism in the 1930s and 1940s helped awaken Americans to the evils of prejudice in their own country. Against this backdrop, a monumental two-volume work by Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal (1944) attracted much attention when it was published. The book, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, documented the various forms of discrimination facing blacks back then. The "dilemma" referred to by the book's title was the conflict between the American democratic ideals of egalitarianism and liberty and justice for all and the harsh reality of prejudice, discrimination, and lack of equal opportunity.

The Kerner Commission's 1968 report reminded the nation that little, if anything, had been done since Myrdal's book to address this conflict. Sociologists and other social scientists have warned since then that the status of people of color has actually been worsening in many ways since this report was issued (Massey, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Evidence of this status appears in the remainder of this chapter.

## Key Takeaways

- US history is filled with violence and other maltreatment against Native Americans, blacks, and immigrants.
- Social scientists warn that the status of people of color has been worsening.

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# 4.7: Key Terms

**amalgamation** | the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group

**antiracist** | a person who opposes racism and acts for racial justice

**assimilation** | the process by which a minority individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant culture

**colorism** | the belief that one type of skin tone is superior or inferior to another within a racial group

**culture of prejudice** | the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture

**discrimination** | prejudiced action against a group of people

**dominant group** | a group of people who have more power in a society than any of the subordinate groups

**ethnicity** | shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion, and more

**expulsion** | the act of a dominant group forcing a subordinate group to leave a certain area or even the country

**genocide** | the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group

**intersection theory** | theory that suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes

**minority group** | any group of people who are singled out from the others for differential and unequal treatment

**model minority** | the stereotype applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching higher educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without protest against the majority establishment

**pluralism** | the ideal of the United States as a "salad bowl:" a mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the "flavor" of the whole

**prejudice** | biased thought based on flawed assumptions about a group of people

**racial profiling** | the use by law enforcement of race alone to determine whether to stop and detain someone

**racial steering** | the act of real estate agents directing prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race

**racism** | a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others

**redlining** | the practice of routinely refusing mortgages for households and business located in predominately minority communities

**scapegoat theory** | a theory that suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group

**sedimentation of racial inequality** | the intergenerational impact of de facto and de jure racism that limits the abilities of Black people to accumulate wealth

**segregation** | the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions

**social construction of race** | the school of thought that race is not biologically identifiable

**stereotypes** | oversimplified ideas about groups of people

**subordinate group** | a group of people who have less power than the dominant group

**systemic racism** | racism embedded in social institutions; also referred to as institutional racism and structural racism

**White privilege** | the societal privilege that benefits White people, or those perceived to be White, over non-White people in some societies, including the United States

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# 4.8: Section Summary

### 11.1 Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups

Race is fundamentally a social construct. Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture and national origin. Minority groups are defined by their lack of power.

### 11.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity

Functionalist views of race study the role dominant and subordinate groups play to create a stable social structure. Conflict theorists examine power disparities and struggles between various racial and ethnic groups. Interactionists see race and ethnicity as important sources of individual identity and social symbolism. The concept of culture of prejudice recognizes that all people are subject to stereotypes that are ingrained in their culture.

### 11.3 Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

Stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Prejudice refers to thoughts and feelings, while discrimination refers to actions. Racism is both prejudice and discrimination due to the belief that one race is inherently superior or inferior to other races. Antiracists fight against the systems of racism by employing antiracist policies and practices in institutions and communities.

### 11.4 Intergroup Relationships

Intergroup relations range from a tolerant approach of pluralism to intolerance as severe as genocide. In pluralism, groups retain their own identity. In assimilation, groups conform to the identity of the dominant group. In amalgamation, groups combine to form a new group identity.

### 11.5 Race and Ethnicity in the United States

The history of the U.S. people contains an infinite variety of experiences that sociologist understand follow patterns. From the indigenous people who first inhabited these lands to the waves of immigrants over the past 500 years, migration is an experience with many shared characteristics. Most groups have experienced various degrees of prejudice and discrimination as they have gone through the process of assimilation.

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# 4.10: Audio Stories about Race

## Season 2, Episode 2: How Race Was Made

For much of human history, people viewed themselves as members of tribes or nations but had no notion of “race.” Today, science deems race biologically meaningless. Who invented race as we know it, and why? By John Biewen, with guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.




View S2, E2 Transcript

## Season 2, Episode 3: Made in America

Chattel slavery in the United States, with its distinctive – and strikingly cruel – laws and structures, took shape over many decades in colonial America. The innovations that built American slavery are inseparable from the construction of Whiteness as we know it today. By John Biewen, with guest Chenjerai Kumanyika.




View S2, E3 Transcript

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 5: Gender Inequality


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# 5.1: Prelude to Gender Inequality

## Social Problems in the News

"$3.2M Awarded in Harassment Suit against Ex-Judge," the headline said. A federal jury in Houston, Texas, awarded $3.2 million to three women, all county employees, who had accused a former judge of sexual harassment. Their suit said the judge had "hugged, groped, kissed and fondled them and had emailed them sexually explicit photographs," according to a news report, and that county officials had ignored the judge's behavior despite their knowledge of it. The judge had resigned his position three years earlier after pleading no contest to several charges of misdemeanor assault related to his physical contact with several women. His only criminal penalty was to pay a fine of less than $3,000.

After the verdict was announced, the plaintiffs' attorney said, "I am very proud of this verdict, and hope it sends a message to all public officials that they are not above the law and should think twice before abusing power." One of the plaintiffs recalled what it was like to have been harassed by the judge: "I felt alone, I felt small, I felt like he was the most powerful man in Brazoria County. I felt like there was nothing I could do. I felt scared." At the same time, she was encouraged by the jury's verdict and the fact that other women had come forward to speak out about the judge's behavior: "You don't have to go through it alone. You can stand up for yourself."

*Sources:* Cisneros, 2011; Tolson, 2011Cisneros, C. (2011, July 15). $3.2M settlement awarded in sexual harassment case. *KTRK-TV*. Retrieved from http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=news/local&id=8253455; Tolson, M. (2011, July 15). $3.2M awarded in harassment suit against ex-judge. *Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved from http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/7655717.html.

Thanks to the contemporary women's rights movement that began in the late 1960s, much has changed for women and men in American society during the past half-century. Still, as this news story about sexual harassment reminds us, much more still needs to be done. Despite tremendous advancements for women since the 1960s, gender inequality persists and manifests itself in many ways. This chapter examines the major forms of gender inequality and the reasons for its existence, and it outlines various steps our society should take to help ensure equality between the sexes. Our discussion begins with a critical look at the concepts of sex and gender.

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# 5.2: Understanding Sex and Gender

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define sex, gender, femininity, and masculinity.
2. Critically assess the evidence on biology, culture and socialization, and gender.
3. Discuss agents of gender socialization.

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are sometimes used interchangeably and do complement each other, they nonetheless refer to different aspects of what it means to be a woman or man in any society.

Sex refers to the anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that are determined at the moment of conception and develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence. Females, of course, have two X chromosomes, while males have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. From this basic genetic difference spring other biological differences. The first to appear are the genitals that boys and girls develop in the womb and that the doctor (or midwife) and parents look for when a baby is born (assuming the baby's sex is not already known from ultrasound or other techniques) so that the momentous announcement, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" can be made. The genitalia are called primary sex characteristics, while the other differences that develop during puberty are called secondary sex characteristics and stem from hormonal differences between the two sexes. Boys generally acquire deeper voices, more body hair, and more muscles from their flowing testosterone. Girls develop breasts and wider hips and begin menstruating as nature prepares them for possible pregnancy and childbirth. For better or worse, these basic biological differences between the sexes affect many people's perceptions of what it means to be female or male, as we next discuss.



Babies are born with anatomical and other biological differences that are determined at the moment of conception. These biological differences define the baby's sex. (Abby Bischoff – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

## Gender as a Social Construction

If sex is a biological concept, then **gender** is a social concept. It refers to the social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their (biological) sex. A related concept, **gender roles**, refers to a society's expectations of people's behavior and attitudes based on whether they are females or males. Understood in this way, gender, like race as discussed in Chapter 3, is a *social construction*. How we think and behave as females and males is not etched in stone by our biology but rather is a result of how society expects us to think and behave based on what sex we are. As we grow up, we learn these expectations as we develop our **gender identity**, or our beliefs about ourselves as females or males.

These expectations are called *femininity* and *masculinity*. **Femininity** refers to the cultural expectations we have of girls and women, while **masculinity** refers to the expectations we have of boys and men. A familiar nursery rhyme nicely summarizes these two sets of traits:

| |
|---|
| What are little boys made of? |
| Snips and snails, |
| And puppy dog tails, |
| That’s what little boys are made of. |
| What are little girls made of? |
| Sugar and spice, |
| And everything nice, |
| That’s what little girls are made of. |

As this rhyme suggests, our traditional notions of femininity and masculinity indicate that we think females and males are fundamentally different from each other. In effect, we think of them as two sides of the same coin of being human. What we traditionally mean by femininity is captured in the adjectives, both positive and negative, we traditionally ascribe to women: gentle, sensitive, nurturing, delicate, graceful, cooperative, decorative, dependent, emotional, passive, and weak. Thus when we say that a girl or woman is very feminine, we have some combination of these traits in mind: she is soft, dainty, pretty, and even a bit flighty. What we traditionally mean by masculinity is captured in the adjectives, again both positive and negative, our society traditionally ascribes to men: strong, assertive, brave, active, independent, intelligent, competitive, insensitive, unemotional, and aggressive. When we say that a boy or man is very masculine, we have some combination of these traits in mind: he is tough, strong, and assertive.

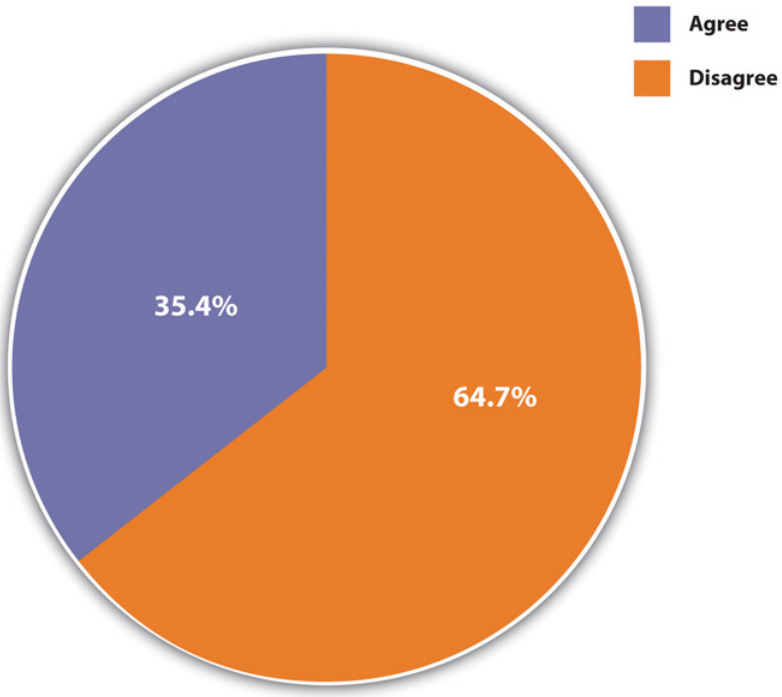
These traits might sound like stereotypes of females and males in today’s society, and to some extent they are, but differences between women and men in attitudes and behavior do in fact exist (Aulette & Wittner, 2011).Aulette, J. R., & Wittner, J. (2011). *Gendered worlds* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. For example, women cry more often than men do. Men are more physically violent than women. Women take care of children more than men do. Women smile more often than men. Men curse and spit more often than women. When women talk with each other, they are more likely to talk about their personal lives than men are when they talk with each other. The two sexes even differ when they hold a cigarette (not that anyone should smoke!). When a woman holds a cigarette, she usually has the palm of her cigarette-holding hand facing upward; when a man holds a cigarette, he usually has his palm facing downward.

## The Development of Gender Differences

What accounts for differences in female and male behavior and attitudes? Do the biological differences between the sexes account for these other differences? Or do these latter differences stem, as most sociologists think, from cultural expectations and from differences in the ways in which the sexes are socialized? These are critical questions, for they ask whether the differences between boys and girls and women and men stem more from biology or from society. If we think behavioral and other differences between the sexes are due primarily to their respective biological makeups, we imply that these differences are inevitable or nearly so and that any attempt to change them goes against biology and will likely fail.

For example, consider the obvious biological fact that women bear and nurse children and men do not. Couple this with the common view that women are also more gentle and nurturing than men, and we end up with a “biological recipe” for women to be the primary caretakers of children. Many people think this means women are therefore much better suited than men to take care of children once they are born, and that the family might be harmed if mothers work outside the home or if fathers are the primary caretakers. Figure 4.1 shows that more than one-third of the public agrees that “it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” To the extent this belief exists, women may not want to work outside the home or, if they choose to do so, they then face difficulties from employers, family, and friends. Conversely, men may not even think about wanting to stay at home and may themselves face difficulties from employees, family, and friends if they want to do so. A belief in a strong biological basis for differences between women and men implies, then, that there is little we can or should do to change these differences. It implies that “anatomy is destiny,” and destiny is, of course, by definition inevitable.

Figure 4.1 Belief That Women Should Stay at Home




*Agreement or disagreement with the statement that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."*

*Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

This implication makes it essential to understand the extent to which gender differences do, in fact, stem from biological differences between the sexes or, instead, stem from cultural and social influences. If biology is paramount, then gender differences are perhaps inevitable and the status quo will remain. If culture and social influences matter much more than biology, then gender differences can change and the status quo may give way. With this backdrop in mind, let's turn to the biological evidence for behavioral and other differences between the sexes and then examine the evidence for their social and cultural roots.

## Biology and Gender

Several biological explanations for gender roles exist, and we discuss two of the most important ones here. One explanation is from the field of evolutionary psychology (Buss, 2012)Buss, D. (2012). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. and argues an evolutionary basis for traditional gender roles.

Scholars advocating this view reason as follows (Thornhill & Gangestad, 2008).Thornhill, R., & Gangestad, S. W. (2008). *The evolutionary biology of human female sexuality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. In prehistoric societies, two major social roles existed (1) hunting or gathering food to relieve hunger, and (2) bearing and nursing children. Because only women could perform the latter role, they were also the primary caretakers for children for several years after birth. And because women were frequently pregnant, their roles as mothers confined them to the home. Meanwhile, men were better suited than women for hunting because they were stronger and quicker than women. In prehistoric societies, then, biology was indeed destiny: For biological reasons, men in effect worked outside the home (hunted), while women stayed at home with their children.

Evolutionary reasons also explain why men are more violent than women. In prehistoric times, men who were more willing to commit violence against and even kill other men would "win out" in the competition for female mates. They thus were more likely than less violent men to produce offspring, who would then carry these males' genetic violent tendencies.

If the human race evolved along these lines, evolutionary psychologists continue, natural selection favored those societies where men were stronger, braver, and more aggressive and where women were more fertile and nurturing. Such traits over the millennia became fairly instinctual, meaning that men's and women's biological natures evolved differently. Men became, by nature, more assertive, daring, and violent than women, and women became, by nature, more gentle, nurturing, and maternal than men. To the extent this is true, these scholars add, traditional gender roles for women and men make sense from an evolutionary standpoint, and attempts to change them go against the sexes' biological natures. This in turn implies that existing gender inequality must continue

because it is rooted in biology. The title of a book presenting the evolutionary psychology argument summarizes this implication: “Biology at Work: Rethinking Sexual Equality” (Browne, 2002).Browne, K. (2002). *Biology at work: Rethinking sexual equality*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.





*According to some evolutionary psychologists, today's gender differences in strength and physical aggression are ultimately rooted in certain evolutionary processes that spanned millennia.*

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Critics challenge the evolutionary explanation on several grounds (Begley, 2009; Fine, 2011).Begley, S. (2009, June 29). Don't blame the caveman. *Newsweek*, 52–62; Fine, C. (2011). *Delusions of gender: The real science behind sex differences*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. First, much greater gender variation in behavior and attitudes existed in prehistoric times than the evolutionary explanation assumes. Second, even if biological differences did influence gender roles in prehistoric times, these differences are largely irrelevant in modern societies, in which, for example, physical strength is not necessary for survival. Third, human environments throughout the millennia have simply been too diverse to permit the simple, straightforward biological development that the evolutionary explanation assumes. Fourth, evolutionary arguments implicitly justify existing gender inequality by implying the need to confine women and men to their traditional roles.

Recent anthropological evidence also challenges the evolutionary argument that men's tendency to commit violence was biologically transmitted. This evidence instead finds that violent men have trouble finding female mates who would want them and that the female mates they find and the children they produce are often killed by rivals to the men (Begley, 2009).Begley, S. (2009, June 29). Don't blame the caveman. *Newsweek*, 52–62.

A second biological explanation for traditional gender roles attributes males' higher levels of aggression to their higher levels of testosterone (Mazur, 2009).Mazur, A. (2009). Testosterone and violence among young men. In A. Walsh & K. M. Beaver (Eds.), *Biosocial criminology: New directions in theory and research* (pp. 190–204). New York, NY: Routledge. Several studies find that males with higher levels of testosterone tend to have higher levels of aggression. However, this correlation does not necessarily mean that their testosterone increased their violence; as has been found in various animal species, it is also possible that their violence increased their testosterone. Because studies of human males cannot for ethical and practical reasons manipulate their testosterone levels, the exact meaning of the results from these testosterone-aggression studies must remain unclear, according to a report by the National Academy of Sciences (Miczek, Mirsky, Carey, DeBold, & Raine, 1994).Miczek, K. A., Mirsky, A. F., Carey, G., DeBold, J., & Raine, A. (1994). An overview of biological influences on violent behavior. In J. Albert, J. Reiss, K. A. Miczek & J. A. Roth (Eds.), *Understanding and preventing violence: Biobehavioral influences* (Vol. 2, pp. 1–20). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Another line of research on the biological basis for sex differences in aggression involves children, including some as young as ages 1 or 2, in various situations (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008).Card, N. A., Stucky, B. D., Sawalani, G. M., & Little, T. D. (2008). Direct and indirect aggression during childhood and adolescence: A meta-analytic review of gender differences, intercorrelations, and relations to maladjustment. *Child Development, 79*(5), 1185–1229. They might be playing with each other, interacting with adults, or writing down solutions to hypothetical scenarios given to them by a researcher. In most of these studies, boys are more physically aggressive in thought or deed than girls, even at a very young age. Other studies are more experimental in nature. In one type of study, a toddler will be playing with a toy, only to have it removed by an adult. Boys typically tend to look angry and try to grab the toy back, while girls tend to just sit there and whimper. Because these gender differences in aggression are found at very young ages, researchers often say they must have some biological basis. However, critics of this line of research counter that even young children have already been socialized along gender lines (Begley, 2009; Fine, 2011),Begley, S. (2009, September 14). Pink brain, blue brain: Claims of sex differences fall apart. *Newsweek*, 28; Fine, C. (2011). *Delusions of gender: The real science behind sex differences*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. a point to which we return later in the chapter. To the extent this is true, gender differences in children's aggression may reflect socialization rather than biology.

In sum, biological evidence for gender differences certainly exists, but its interpretation remains very controversial. It must be weighed against the evidence, to which we next turn, of cultural variations in the experience of gender and of socialization differences by gender. One thing is clear: To the extent we accept biological explanations for gender, we imply that existing gender differences and gender inequality must continue to exist. As sociologist Linda L. Lindsey (2011, p. 52)Lindsey, L. L. (2011). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. notes, "Biological arguments are consistently drawn upon to justify gender inequality and the continued oppression of women." In contrast, cultural and social explanations of gender differences and gender inequality promise some hope for change. Let's examine the evidence for these explanations.

## Culture and Gender

Some of the most compelling evidence against a strong biological determination of gender roles comes from anthropologists, whose work on preindustrial societies demonstrates some striking gender variation from one culture to another. This variation underscores the impact of culture on how females and males think and behave.

Extensive evidence of this impact comes from anthropologist George Murdock (1937),Murdock, G. (1937). Comparative data on the division of labor by sex. *Social Forces, 15*, 551–553. who created the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample of almost two hundred preindustrial societies studied by anthropologists. Murdock found that some tasks in these societies, such as hunting and trapping, are almost always done by men, while other tasks, such as cooking and fetching water, are almost always done by women. These patterns provide evidence for the evolutionary argument presented earlier, as they probably stem from the biological differences between the sexes. Even so, there were at least some societies in which women hunted and in which men cooked and fetched water.



*Anthropological research finds a good deal of variation in gender roles for certain tasks, including planting crops, milking, and generating fires. Other tasks, such as hunting and trapping, are typically done by men while tasks such as cooking and fetching water are typically done by women.*

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More important, Murdock found much greater gender variation in several of the other tasks he studied, including planting crops, milking, and generating fires. Men primarily performed these tasks in some societies, women primarily performed them in other societies, and in still other societies both sexes performed them equally. Murdock's findings illustrate how gender roles differ from one culture to another and imply they are not biologically determined.

Anthropologists continue to investigate cultural differences in gender. Some of their most interesting findings concern gender and sexuality (Brettell & Sargent, 2009).Brettell, C. B., & Sargent, C. F. (Eds.). (2009). *Gender in cross-cultural perspective* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Although all societies distinguish "femaleness" and "maleness," additional gender categories exist in some societies. The Native Americans known as the Mohave, for example, recognize four genders: a woman, a woman who acts like a man, a man, and a man who acts like a woman. In some societies, a third, intermediary gender category is recognized. Anthropologists call this category the *berdache*, who is usually a man who takes on a woman's role. This intermediary category combines aspects of both femininity and masculinity of the society in which it is found and is thus considered an **androgynous** gender. Although some people in this category are born as *intersexed* individuals (formerly known as *hermaphrodites*), meaning they have genitalia of both sexes, many are born biologically as one sex or the other but adopt an androgynous identity.

Anthropologists have found another androgynous gender composed of women warriors in thirty-three Native American groups in North America. Walter L. Williams (1997)Williams, W. L. (1997). Amazons of America: Female gender variance. In C. B. Brettell & C. F. Sargent (Eds.), *Gender in cross-cultural perspective* (2nd ed., pp. 202–213). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. calls these women "amazons" and notes that they dress like men and sometimes even marry women. In some tribes girls exhibit such "masculine" characteristics from childhood, while in others they may be recruited into "amazonhood." In the Kaska Indians, for example, a married couple with too many daughters would select one to "be like a man." When she was about 5 years of age, her parents would begin to dress her like a boy and have her do male tasks. Eventually she would grow up to become a hunter.

The androgynous genders found by anthropologists remind us that gender is a social construction and not just a biological fact. If culture does affect gender roles, socialization is the process through which culture has this effect. What we experience as girls and boys strongly influences how we develop as women and men in terms of behavior and attitudes. To illustrate this important dimension of gender, let's turn to the evidence on socialization.

## Socialization and Gender

**Socialization** is the process whereby individuals learn the culture of their society. Several agents of socialization exist, including the family, peers, schools, the mass media, and religion, and all these institutions help to socialize people into their gender roles and also help them develop their gender identity (Andersen & Hysock, 2011).Andersen, M., & Hysock, D. (2011). *Thinking about women: Sociological perspectives on sex and gender* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

### The Family

Socialization into gender roles begins in infancy, as almost from the moment of birth parents begin to socialize their children as boys or girls without even knowing it (Begley, 2009; Eliot, 2011).Begley, S. (2009, September 14). Pink brain, blue brain: Claims of sex differences fall apart. *Newsweek*, 28; Eliot, L. (2011). *Pink brain, blue brain: How small differences grow into troublesome gaps—and what we can do about it*. London, United Kingdom: Oneworld Publications. Parents commonly describe their infant daughters as pretty, soft, and delicate and their infant sons as strong, active, and alert, even though neutral observers find no such gender differences among infants when they do not know the infants' sex. From infancy on, parents play with and otherwise interact with their daughters and sons differently. They play more roughly with their sons—for example, by throwing them up in the air or by gently wrestling with them—and more quietly with their daughters. When their infant or toddler daughters cry, they warmly comfort them, but they tend to let their sons cry longer and to comfort them less. They give their girls dolls to play with and their boys action figures and toy guns. While these gender differences in socialization are probably smaller now than a generation ago, they certainly continue to exist. Go into a large toy store and you will see pink aisles of dolls and cooking sets and blue aisles of action figures, toy guns, and related items.

### Peers

Peer influences also encourage gender socialization. As they reach school age, children begin to play different games based on their gender. Boys tend to play sports and other competitive team games governed by inflexible rules and relatively large numbers of roles, while girls tend to play smaller, cooperative games such as hopscotch and jumping rope with fewer and more flexible rules. Although girls are much more involved in sports now than a generation ago, these gender differences in their play persist and

continue to reinforce gender roles. For example, boys' games encourage them to be competitive, while girls' games encourage them to become cooperative and trusting. The patterns we see in adult males and females thus have roots in their play as young children (Lindsey, 2011)Lindsey, L. L. (2011). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. (see Note 4.13 "Children and Our Future").

### Children and Our Future

Girls and Boys at Play

The text discusses how the types of games that girls and boys play influence their gender-role socialization. Let's take a closer look at two early sociological studies that provided important evidence for this process.

Janet Lever (1978)Lever, J. (1978). Sex differences in the complexity of children's play and games. *American Sociological Review, 43*, 471–483. studied fifth-grade children in three different communities in Connecticut. She watched them play and otherwise interact in school and also had the children keep diaries of their play and games outside school. Lever found that boys' games were typically more complex than girls' games: The boys' games had a greater number of rules and more specialized roles, and they also involved more individuals playing. She attributed these differences to socialization by parents, teachers, and other adults and argued that the complexity of boys' play and games helped them to be better able than girls to learn important social skills such as dealing with rules and coordinating actions to achieve goals.

A second sociologist, Barrie Thorne (1993),Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. studied fourth- and fifth-graders in California and Michigan. The boys tended to play team sports and other competitive games, while the girls tended to play cooperative games such as jump rope. These differences led Thorne to conclude that gender-role socialization stems not only from practices by adults but also from the children's own activities without adult involvement. When boys and girls interacted, it was often "girls against the boys" in classroom spelling contests and in games such as tag. Thorne concluded that these "us against them" contests helped the children learn that boys and girls are two different and antagonistic sexes. Boys also tended to disrupt girls' games more than the reverse and in this manner both exerted and learned dominance over females. In all these ways, children were not just the passive recipients of gender-role socialization from adults (their teachers), but they also played an active role in ensuring that such socialization occurred.

These two studies were among the first to emphasize the importance of children's play for the gender-based traits and values that girls and boys learn, which in turn affect the choices they make for careers and other matters later in life. The rise in team sports opportunities for girls in the years since Lever and Thorne did their research is a welcome development, but young children continue to play in the ways that Lever and Thorne found. The body of research on gender differences in children's play points to the need for teachers, parents, and other adults to encourage girls and boys alike to have a mixture of both competitive and cooperative games so that both sexes may develop a better balance of values that are now commonly considered to be either feminine or masculine.

## Schools

School is yet another agent of gender socialization. First of all, school playgrounds provide a location for the gender-linked play activities just described to occur. Second, and perhaps more important, teachers at all levels treat their female and male students differently in subtle ways of which they are probably not aware. They tend to call on boys more often to answer questions in class and to praise them more when they give the right answer. They also give boys more feedback about their assignments and other school work (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1994). *Failing at fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's. At all grade levels, many textbooks and other books still portray people in gender-stereotyped ways. It is true that the newer books do less of this than older ones, but the newer books still contain some stereotypes, and the older books are still used in many schools, especially those that cannot afford to buy newer volumes.

## Mass Media

Gender socialization also occurs through the mass media (Renzetti, Curran, & Maier, 2012).Renzetti, C. M., Curran, D. J., & Maier, S. (2012). *Women, men, and society*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. On children's television shows, the major characters are male. On Nickelodeon, for example, the very popular SpongeBob SquarePants is a male, as are his pet snail, Gary; his best friend, Patrick Star; their neighbor, Squidward Tentacles; and SpongeBob's employer, Eugene Crabs. Of the major characters in Bikini Bottom, only Sandy Cheeks is a female. For all its virtues, *Sesame Street* features Bert, Ernie, Cookie Monster, and other male characters. Most of the Muppets are males, and the main female character, Miss Piggy, depicted as vain and jealous, is hardly an admirable female role model. As for adults' prime-time television, more men than women continue to fill more major roles in

weekly shows, despite notable women's roles in shows such as *The Good Wife* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Women are also often portrayed as unintelligent or frivolous individuals who are there more for their looks than for anything else. Television commercials reinforce this image. Cosmetics ads abound, suggesting not only that a major task for women is to look good but also that their sense of self-worth stems from looking good. Other commercials show women becoming ecstatic over achieving a clean floor or sparkling laundry. Judging from the world of television commercials, then, women's chief goals in life are to look good and to have a clean house. At the same time, men's chief goals, judging from many commercials, are to drink beer and drive cars.





*Women's magazines reinforce the view that women need to be slender and wear many cosmetics in order to be considered beautiful.*

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Women's and men's magazines reinforce these gender images (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Milillo, 2008).Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007). *The cult of thinness*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Milillo, D. (2008). Sexuality sells: A content analysis of lesbian and heterosexual women's bodies in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 12*(4), 381–392. Most of the magazines intended for teenaged girls and adult women are filled with pictures of thin, beautiful models; advice on dieting; cosmetics ads; and articles on how to win and please your man. Conversely, the magazines intended for teenaged boys and men are filled with ads and articles on cars and sports, advice on how to succeed in careers and other endeavors, and pictures of thin, beautiful (and sometimes nude) women. These magazine images again suggest that women's chief goals are to look good and to please men and that men's chief goals are to succeed, win over women, and live life in the fast lane.

## Religion

Another agent of socialization, religion, also contributes to traditional gender stereotypes. Many traditional interpretations of the Bible yield the message that women are subservient to men (Tanenbaum, 2009).Tanenbaum, L. (2009). *Taking back God: American women rising up for religious equality*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. This message begins in Genesis, where the first human is Adam, and Eve was made from one of his ribs. The major figures in the rest of the Bible are men, and women are for the most part depicted as wives, mothers, temptresses, and prostitutes; they are praised for their roles as wives and mothers and condemned for their other roles. More generally, women are constantly depicted as the property of men. The Ten Commandments includes a neighbor's wife with his house, ox, and other objects as things not to be coveted (Exodus 20:17), and many biblical passages say explicitly that women belong to men, such as this one from the New Testament: "Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (Ephesians 5:22–24).

Several passages in the Old Testament justify the rape and murder of women and girls. The Koran, the sacred book of Islam, also contains passages asserting the subordinate role of women (Mayer, 2009).Mayer, A. E. (2009). Review of "Women, the Koran and international human rights law: The experience of Pakistan." *Human Rights Quarterly, 31*(4), 1155–1158.

## A Final Word on the Sources of Gender

Scholars in many fields continue to debate the relative importance of biology and of culture and socialization for how we behave and think as girls and boys and as women and men. The biological differences between females and males lead many scholars and no doubt much of the public to assume that masculinity and femininity are to a large degree biologically determined or at least influenced. In contrast, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists tend to view gender as a social construction. Even if biology does matter for gender, they say, the significance of culture and socialization should not be underestimated. To the extent that gender is indeed shaped by society and culture, it is possible to change gender and to help bring about a society where both men and women have more opportunity to achieve their full potential.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sex is a biological concept, while gender is a social concept and refers to the social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their sex.
- Several biological explanations for gender roles exist, but sociologists think culture and socialization are more important sources of gender roles than biology.
- Families, schools, peers, the mass media, and religion are agents of socialization for the development of gender identity and gender roles.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a short essay about one or two events you recall from your childhood that reflected or reinforced your gender socialization.
2. Do you think gender roles are due more to biology or to culture and socialization? Explain your answer.

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# 5.3: Feminism and Sexism

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define feminism, sexism, and patriarchy.
2. Discuss evidence for a decline in sexism.

In the national General Social Survey (GSS), slightly more than one-third of the public agrees with this statement: “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? If you are like the majority of college students, you disagree.

Today a lot of women, and some men, will say, “I’m not a feminist, but…,” and then go on to add that they hold certain beliefs about women’s equality and traditional gender roles that actually fall into a feminist framework. Their reluctance to self-identify as feminists underscores the negative image that feminists and feminism have but also suggests that the actual meaning of feminism may be unclear.

Feminism and sexism are generally two sides of the same coin. Feminism refers to the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities in economic, political, and social life, while sexism refers to a belief in traditional gender role stereotypes and in the inherent inequality between men and women. Sexism thus parallels the concept of racial and ethnic prejudice discussed in Chapter 3 “Racial and Ethnic Inequality”. Women and people of color are both said, for biological and/or cultural reasons, to lack certain qualities for success in today’s world.



Feminism as a social movement began in the United States during the abolitionist period before the Civil War. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (left) and Lucretia Mott (right) were outspoken abolitionists who made connections between slavery and the oppression of women. (The US Library of Congress – public domain; The US Library of Congress – public domain.)

Two feminist movements in US history have greatly advanced the cause of women’s equality and changed views about gender. The first began during the abolitionist period, when abolitionists such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton began to see similarities between slavery and the oppression of women. This new women’s movement focused on many issues but especially the right to vote, which women won in 1920. The second major feminist movement began in the late 1960s, as women active in the Southern civil rights movement turned their attention to women’s rights, and it is still active today. This movement has profoundly changed public thinking and social and economic institutions, but, as we will soon see, much gender inequality remains.

Several varieties of feminism exist. Although they all share the basic idea that women and men should be equal in their opportunities in all spheres of life, they differ in other ways (Hannam, 2012).Hannam, J. (2012). *Feminism*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman. *Liberal feminism* believes that the equality of women can be achieved within our existing society by passing

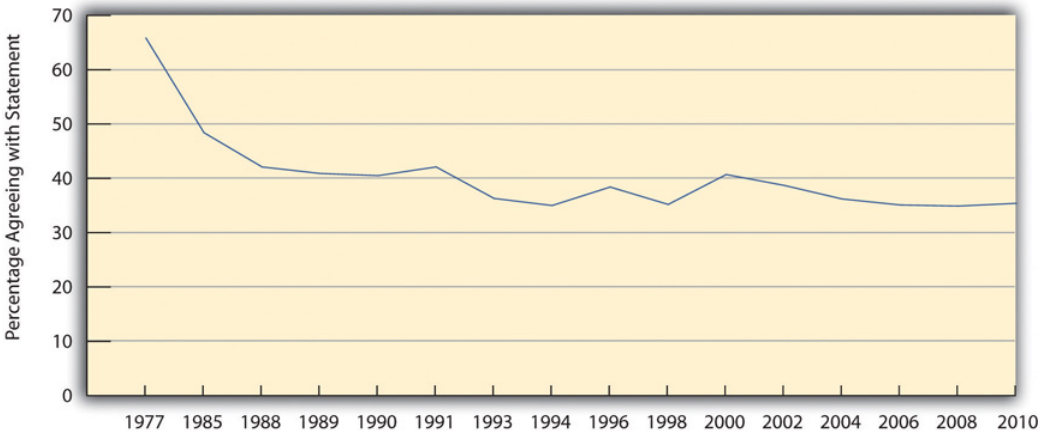
laws and reforming social, economic, and political institutions. In contrast, *socialist feminism* blames capitalism for women's inequality and says that true gender equality can result only if fundamental changes in social institutions, and even a socialist revolution, are achieved. *Radical feminism*, on the other hand, says that **patriarchy** (male domination) lies at the root of women's oppression and that women are oppressed even in noncapitalist societies. Patriarchy itself must be abolished, they say, if women are to become equal to men. Finally, *multicultural feminism* emphasizes that women of color are oppressed not only because of their gender but also because of their race and class. They thus face a triple burden that goes beyond their gender. By focusing their attention on women of color in the United States and other nations, multicultural feminists remind us that the lives of these women differ in many ways from those of the middle-class women who historically have led US feminist movements.

## The Growth of Feminism and the Decline of Sexism

What evidence is there for the impact of the contemporary women's movement on public thinking? The GSS, the Gallup poll, and other national surveys show that the public has moved away from traditional views of gender toward more modern ones. Another way of saying this is that the public has moved from sexism toward feminism.

To illustrate this, let's return to the GSS statement that it is much better for the man to achieve outside the home and for the woman to take care of home and family. Figure 4.2 shows that agreement with this statement dropped sharply during the 1970s and 1980s before leveling off afterward to slightly more than one-third of the public.

Figure 4.2 Change in Acceptance of Traditional Gender Roles in the Family, 1977–2010

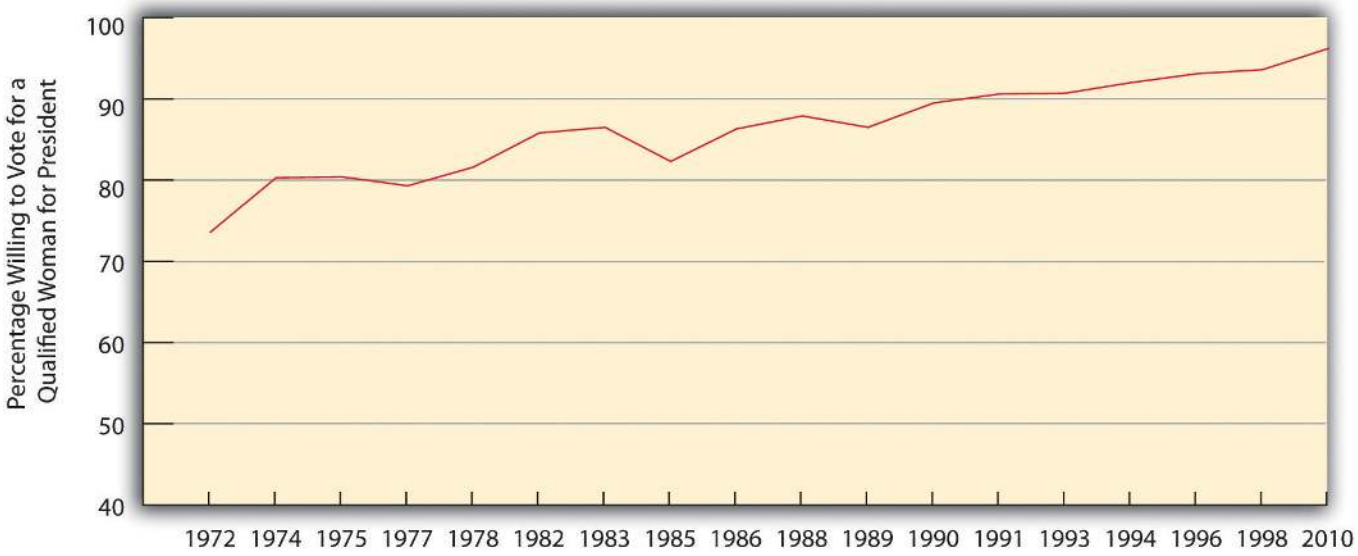



*Percentage agreeing that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."*

*Source: Data from General Social Surveys. (1977–2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

Another GSS question over the years has asked whether respondents would be willing to vote for a qualified woman for president of the United States. As Figure 4.3 illustrates, this percentage rose from 74 percent in the early 1970s to a high of 96.2 percent in 2010. Although we have not yet had a woman president, despite Hillary Rodham Clinton's historic presidential primary campaign in 2007 and 2008 and Sarah Palin's presence on the Republican ticket in 2008, the survey evidence indicates the public is willing to vote for one. As demonstrated by the responses to the survey questions on women's home roles and on a woman president, traditional gender views have indeed declined.

Figure 4.3 Change in Willingness to Vote for a Qualified Woman for President




*Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Feminism refers to the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities in economic, political, and social life, while sexism refers to a belief in traditional gender role stereotypes and in the inherent inequality between men and women.
- Sexist beliefs have declined in the United States since the early 1970s.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?
2. Think about one of your parents or of another adult much older than you. Does this person hold more traditional views about gender than you do? Explain your answer.

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# 5.4: Dimensions of Gender Inequality

**Learning Objectives**

1. Summarize the status of women around the world today.
2. Understand the extent of and reasons for gender inequality in income and the workplace in the United States.
3. Understand the extent of and reasons for sexual harassment.

The primary focus of this chapter is gender inequality in the United States, but it is also important to discuss gender inequality worldwide. While American women are unequal to men in many respects, women's situation throughout much of the world is especially dire. Accordingly, we first examine the global inequality of women before turning our attention to the United States.

## The Global Inequality of Women

The problem of global poverty first discussed in Chapter 2 "Poverty" is especially severe for women. Although, as Chapter 2 "Poverty" noted, more than 1.4 billion people on earth are desperately poor, their ranks include more than their fair share of women, who are estimated to make up 70 percent of the world's poor. Because women tend to be poorer than men worldwide, they are more likely than men to experience all the problems that poverty causes, including malnutrition and disease. But they also suffer additional problems. Some of these problems derive from women's physiological role of childbearing, and some arise from how they are treated simply because they are women.

Let's first look at childbearing. One of the most depressing examples of how global poverty affects women is maternal mortality, or the number of women who die during childbirth for every 100,000 live births. More than 500,000 women die worldwide annually from complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Maternal mortality usually results from one or more of the following: inadequate prenatal nutrition, disease and illness, and inferior obstetrical care, all of which are much more common in poor nations than in wealthy nations. In wealthy nations, the rate of maternal mortality is 14 per 100,000 births, but in poor nations the rate is a distressingly high 590 per 100,000 births, equivalent to almost 6 deaths for every 1,000 births. Women in poor nations are thus forty-two times more likely than those in wealthy nations to die from complications during pregnancy or childbirth (World Bank, 2012).



In India and Pakistan, thousands of new wives every year are murdered in dowry deaths because they have not provided their husbands a suitable amount of money and goods. (Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.)

In addition to these problems, women in poor nations fare worse than men in other ways because of how they are treated as women. One manifestation of this fact is the violence they experience (World Health Organization, 2010).World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. (2010). *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author. About one-third of women worldwide have been raped or beaten, leading Amnesty International (2004) to call violence against women "the greatest human rights scandal of our times." Although violence against women certainly occurs in wealthy nations, it is more common and extreme in poor and middle-

income nations, and in nations where women's inequality (as reflected by criteria such as their labor force participation and their educational attainment) is especially high (Kaya & Cook, 2010). More than half of women in Uganda, for example, have been physically or sexually abused (Amnesty International, 2010). Many young women in India who work outside the home have been raped by male high-school dropouts who think these women lack virtue and should be punished with rape (Polgreen, 2011). In India and Pakistan, thousands of women are killed every year in dowry deaths, in which a new wife is murdered by her husband and/or his relatives if she does not pay the groom money or goods (Kethineni & Srinivasan, 2009). In many countries, young girls routinely have their genitals cut out, often with no anesthesia, in what has been termed *female genital mutilation*, a practice that is thought to affect more than 100 million girls and women across the earth and has been called an act of torture (Kristoff, 2011; Rogo, Subayi, & Toubia, 2007).

Sex trafficking is another major problem in countries like Cambodia, India, Nepal, and Thailand, where young girls are often stolen from their parents and forced to work as prostitutes in what amounts to *sexual slavery*. The number of girls (and sometimes boys) under age 18 who work as sex slaves is thought to reach into the millions and to be larger than the number of African slaves during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kristoff & WuDunn, 2010).

Beyond violence, women in poor nations are less likely than their male counterparts to get a higher education, and girls are less likely than boys to attend primary school. Women are also less likely than men to work in jobs that pay a decent wage and to hold political office. In many poor nations, girls are less likely than boys to receive adequate medical care when they become ill and are more likely than boys to die before age 5. In all these ways, women and girls in poor nations especially suffer.

In stark contrast, women in wealthy democratic nations fare much better than their counterparts in poor nations. In many wealthy democracies, women's status vis-à-vis men is higher than in the United States. The Note 4.23 "Lessons from Other Societies" box discusses this situation further.

### Lessons from Other Societies - Women in the Nordic Nations

The United Nations Development Programme ranks nations on a "gender empowerment measure" of women's involvement in their nation's economy and political life (United Nations Development Programme, 2009).United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *Human development report 2009*. New York, NY: Author. Of the 109 nations included in the measure, Sweden ranks first, followed by Norway, Finland, and Denmark. The remaining Nordic nation, Iceland, ranks eighth. The other nations in the top ten are the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, Germany, and New Zealand. Canada ranks twelfth, and the United States ranks only eighteenth. In trying to understand why the United States ranks this low and what it might be able to do to increase its empowerment of women, the experience of the Nordic nations provides some important lessons.

The Nordic nations rank at the top of the gender empowerment measure largely because they have made a concerted effort to boost women's involvement in the business and political worlds (Sumer, Smithson, Guerreiro, & Granlund, 2008).Sumer, S., Smithson, J., Guerreiro, M. D., & Granlund, L. (2008). Becoming working mothers: Reconciling work and family at three particular workplaces in Norway, the UK, and Portugal. *Community, Work & Family, 11*(4), 365–384. They are all social democratic welfare states characterized by extensive government programs and other efforts to promote full economic and gender equality.

For example, Norway's government provides day care for children and adult care for older or disabled individuals, and it also provides forty-four weeks of paid parental leave after the birth of a child. Parents can also work fewer hours without losing income until their child is 2 years of age. All these provisions mean that women are much more likely than their American counterparts to have the freedom and economic means to work outside the home, and they have taken advantage of this opportunity. As a recent analysis concluded, "It has been extremely important for women that social rights have been extended to cover such things as the caring of young children and elderly, sick and disabled members of society. In the Nordic countries, women have been more successful than elsewhere in combining their dual role as mothers and workers, and social policy arrangements are an integral part of the gender equality policy" (Kangas & Palme, 2009, p. 565).Kangas, O., & Palme, J. (2009). Making social policy work for economic development: The Nordic experience. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *18*(s1), S62–S72.

The lesson for the United States is clear: An important reason for the Nordic nations' high gender empowerment ranking is government policy that enables women to work outside the home if they want to do so. The experience of these nations indicates that greater gender equality might be achieved in the United States if it adopted policies similar to those found in these nations that make it easier for women to join and stay in the labor force.

## Gender Inequality in the United States

We have said that the women's movement changed American life in many ways but that gender inequality persists in the United States. Let's look at examples of such inequality, much of it taking the form of institutional discrimination, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, can occur even if it is not intended to happen. We start with gender inequality in income and the workplace and then move on to a few other spheres of life.

## The Gender Gap in Income

In the last few decades, women have entered the workplace in increasing numbers, partly, and for many women mostly, out of economic necessity, and partly out of desire for the sense of self-worth and other fulfillment that comes with work. In February 2012, 57.9 percent of US women aged 16 or older were in the labor force, compared to only 43.3 percent in 1970; comparable figures for men were 70.3 percent in 2012 and 79.7 percent in 1970 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *2012 employment and earnings online*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/home.htm. Thus while women's labor force participation continues to lag behind men's, this gender gap has narrowed. The figures just cited include women of retirement age. When we just look at younger women, labor force participation is even higher. For example, 74.7 percent of women aged 35–44 were in the labor force in 2011, compared to only 46.8 percent in 1970.

Despite the workplace gains women have made, problems persist. Perhaps the major problem is a gender gap in income. Women have earned less money than men ever since records started being kept (Reskin & Padavic, 2002).Reskin, B., & Padavic, I. (2002). *Women and men at work* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. In the United States in the early 1800s, full-time women workers in agriculture and manufacturing earned less than 38 percent of what men earned. By 1885, they were earning about 50 percent of what men earned in manufacturing jobs. As the 1980s began, full-time women workers' median weekly earnings were about 65 percent of men's. Women have narrowed the gender gap in earnings since then: Their weekly earnings now (2011) are 82.2 percent of men's among full-time workers ages 16 and older (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *2012 employment and earnings online*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/home.htm. Still, this means that for every $10,000 men earn, women earn only about $8,220. To turn that around, for every $10,000 women earn, men earn $12,156. This gap amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime of working.



*Women have earned less money than men ever since records started being kept. Women now earn about 81 percent of what men earn. © Thinkstock*

As Table 4.1 shows, this gender gap exists for all levels of education and even increases with higher levels of education. On the average, women with a bachelor's degree or higher and working full time earn almost $18,000 less per year than their male counterparts.

Table 4.1 Median Annual Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers Aged 25–64 by Educational Attainment, 2010*

| | High school dropout | High school degree | Some college or associate's degree | Bachelor's degree or higher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| * Median weekly earnings × 52 weeks | | | | |

| | High school dropout | High school degree | Some college or associate's degree | Bachelor's degree or higher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 25,272 | 36,920 | 43,940 | 69,160 |
| Women | 20,176 | 28,236 | 33,176 | 51,272 |
| Difference | 5,096 | 8,684 | 10,764 | 17,888 |
| Gender gap (%; women ÷ men) | 79.8 | 76.5 | 75.5 | 74.1 |

* Median weekly earnings × 52 weeks

Source: US Department of Labor. (2011). *Highlights of women's earnings in 2010*. Washington, DC: Author.

What accounts for the gender gap in earnings? A major reason is **sex segregation** in the workplace, which accounts for up to 45 percent of the gender gap (Kelley, 2011; Reskin & Padavic, 2002).Kelley, L. (2011, April 12). Today is equal pay day: Women still earn 77 cents to a man's dollar. *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/rss/1/557442/today_is_equal_pay_day%557443A_women_still_earn_557477_cents_to_a_man%557445C's_dollar/; Reskin, B., & Padavic, I. (2002). *Women and men at work* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. Although women have increased their labor force participation, the workplace remains segregated by gender. Almost half of all women work in a few low-paying clerical and service (e.g., waitressing) jobs, while men work in a much greater variety of jobs, including high-paying ones. Table 4.2 shows that many jobs are composed primarily of women or of men. Part of the reason for this segregation is that socialization affects what jobs young men and women choose to pursue, and part of the reason is that women and men do not want to encounter difficulties they may experience if they took a job traditionally assigned to the other sex. A third reason is that sex-segregated jobs discriminate against applicants who are not the "right" sex for that job. Employers may either consciously refuse to hire someone who is the "wrong" sex for the job or have job requirements (e.g., height requirements) and workplace rules (e.g., working at night) that unintentionally make it more difficult for women to qualify for certain jobs. Although such practices and requirements are now illegal, they still continue. The sex segregation they help create contributes to the continuing gender gap between female and male workers. Occupations dominated by women tend to have lower wages and salaries. Because women are concentrated in low-paying jobs, their earnings are much lower than men's (Reskin & Padavic, 2002).Reskin, B., & Padavic, I. (2002). *Women and men at work* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

This fact raises an important question: Why do women's jobs pay less than men's jobs? Is it because their jobs are not important and require few skills (recalling the functional theory of stratification discussed in Chapter 2)? The evidence indicates otherwise: Women's work is devalued precisely because it is women's work, and women's jobs thus pay less than men's jobs because they are women's jobs (Magnusson, 2009).Magnusson, C. (2009). Gender, occupational prestige, and wages: A test of devaluation theory. *European Sociological Review, 25*(1), 87–101.

Table 4.2 Gender Segregation in the Workplace for Selected Occupations, 2010

| Occupation | Female workers (%) | Male workers (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Preschool and kindergarten teachers | 97.0 | 3.0 |
| Speech-language pathologists | 96.3 | 3.7 |
| Secretaries and administrative assistants | 96.1 | 3.9 |
| Dental hygienists | 95.1 | 4.9 |
| Registered nurses | 91.1 | 8.9 |
| Food servers (waiters/waitresses) | 71.1 | 29.9 |
| Pharmacists | 53.0 | 47.0 |
| Physicians | 32.3 | 67.7 |
| Lawyers | 31.5 | 68.5 |

| Occupation | Female workers (%) | Male workers (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Dentists | 25.5 | 64.5 |
| Computer software engineers | 20.9 | 79.1 |
| Electricians | 1.5 | 98.5 |
| Carpenters | 1.4 | 98.5 |

Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

Studies of **comparable worth** support this argument (Levanon, England, & Allison, 2009).Levanon, A., England, P., & Allison, P. (2009). Occupational feminization and pay: Assessing causal dynamics using 1950–2000 US census data. *Social Forces*, *88*(2), 865–891. Researchers rate various jobs in terms of their requirements and attributes that logically should affect the salaries they offer: the importance of the job, the degree of skill it requires, the level of responsibility it requires, the degree to which the employee must exercise independent judgment, and so forth. They then use these dimensions to determine what salary a job should offer. Some jobs might be better on some dimensions and worse on others but still end up with the same predicted salary if everything evens out.





*Some women's jobs pay less than men's jobs even though their comparable worth is equal to or even higher than the men's jobs. For example, a social worker, depicted here, may earn less money than a probation officer, even though calculations based on comparable worth would predict that a social worker should earn at least as much.*

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When researchers make their calculations, they find that certain women's jobs pay less than men's even though their comparable worth is equal to or even higher than the men's jobs. For example, a social worker may earn less money than a probation officer, even though calculations based on comparable worth would predict that a social worker should earn at least as much. The comparable worth research demonstrates that women's jobs pay less than men's jobs of comparable worth and that the average working family would earn several thousand dollars more annually if pay scales were reevaluated based on comparable worth and women were paid more for their work.

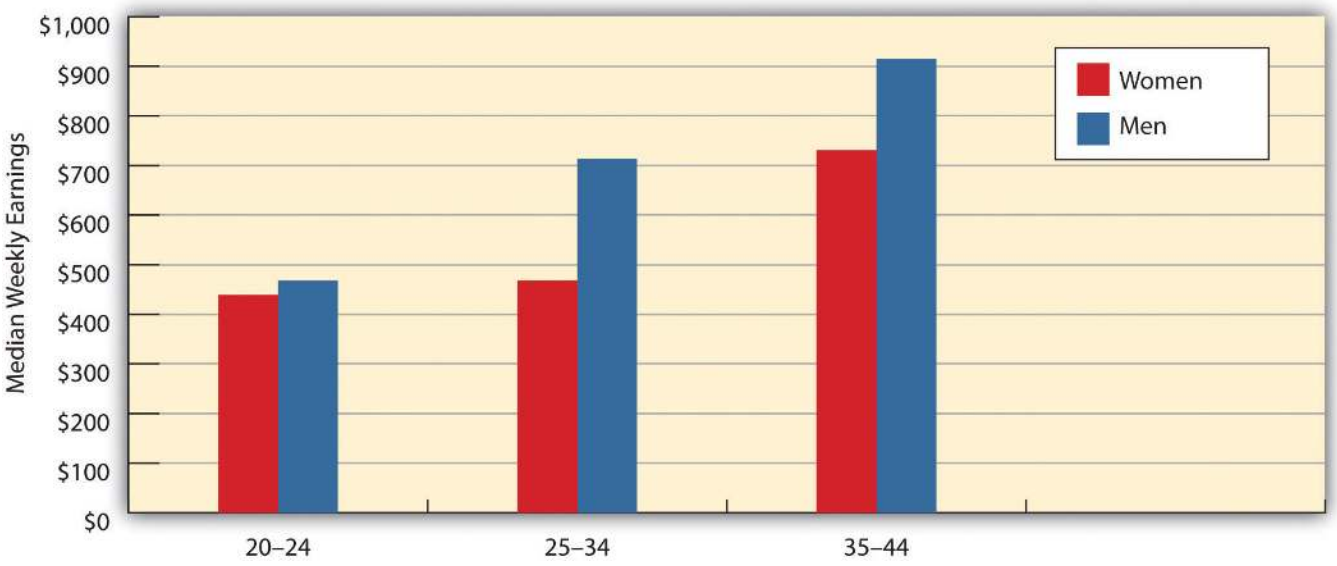
Even when women and men work in the same jobs, women often earn less than men, and men are more likely than women to hold leadership positions in these occupations. Government data provide ready evidence of the lower incomes women receive even in the same occupations. For example, among full-time employees, female marketing and sales managers earn only 66 percent of what their male counterparts earn; female human resource managers earn only 80 percent of what their male counterparts earn; female claims adjusters earn only 77 percent; female accountants earn only 75 percent; female elementary and middle school teachers earn only 91 percent; and even female secretaries and clerical workers earn only 91 percent (US Department of Labor, 2011).US Department of Labor. (2011). *Highlights of women's earnings in 2010*. Washington, DC: US Department of Labor.

One reason for these differences, and for women's lower earnings in general, is their caregiving responsibilities (Chang, 2010).Chang, M. L. (2010). *Shortchanged: Why women have less wealth and what can be done about it*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Women are more likely than men to have the major, and perhaps the sole, responsibility for taking care of children and aging parents or other adults who need care. This responsibility limits their work hours and often prompts them to drop out of the labor force. If women rejoin the labor force after their children start school, or join for the first time, they are already several years behind men who began working at an earlier age. Economics writer David Leonhardt (2010, p. B1)Leonhardt, D. (2010, August 4). A labor market punishing to mothers. *New York Times*, B1. explains this dynamic: "Many more women take time off from work. Many more women work part time at some point in their careers. Many more women can't get to work early or

stay late. And our economy exacts a terribly steep price for any time away from work—in both pay and promotions. People often cannot just pick up where they have left off. Entire career paths are closed off. The hit to earnings is permanent."

We can see evidence of this "hit" when we examine the gender gap in earnings by age. This gap is relatively low for people in their early twenties, when women earn 93.8 percent of what men earn, but rises during the next two decades of age as more and more women bear and raise children (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Gender, Age, and Median Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Employees, 2010




*Source: U.S. Department of Labor. (2011). Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2010. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.*

Still, when variables like number of years on the job, number of hours worked per week, and size of firm are taken into account, gender differences in earnings diminish but do not disappear altogether, and it is very likely that sex discrimination (conscious or unconscious) by employers accounts for much of the remaining disparity.

Some of the sex discrimination in employment reflects the existence of two related phenomena, the **glass ceiling** and the **glass escalator**. Women may be promoted in a job only to find they reach an invisible "glass ceiling" beyond which they cannot get promoted, or they may not get promoted in the first place. In the largest US corporations, women constitute only about 16 percent of the top executives, and women executives are paid much less than their male counterparts (Jenner & Ferguson, 2009).Jenner, L., & Ferguson, R. (2009). *2008 catalyst census of women corporate officers and top earners of the FP500*. New York, NY: Catalyst. Although these disparities stem partly from the fact that women joined the corporate ranks much more recently than men, they also reflect a glass ceiling in the corporate world that prevents qualified women from rising up above a certain level (Hymowitz, 2009).Hymowitz, C. (2009, May 1). For executive women, it can be lonely at the top. *Forbes*. Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com. Men, on the other hand, can often ride a "glass escalator" to the top, even in female occupations. An example is seen in elementary school teaching, where principals typically rise from the ranks of teachers. Although men constitute only about 16 percent of all public elementary school teachers, they account for about 41 percent of all elementary school principals (Aud et al., 2011).Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., & Tahan, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf.



*Women constitute only about 16 percent of the top executives in the largest US corporations, and women executives are paid much less than their male counterparts. These disparities reflect a "glass ceiling" that limits women's opportunities for promotion.*

*© Thinkstock*

Whatever the reasons for the gender gap in income, the fact that women make so much less than men means that female-headed families are especially likely to be poor. In 2010, almost 32 percent of these families lived in poverty, compared to only 6 percent of married-couple families (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011).DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Reports, P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. As noted in Chapter 2, the term *feminization of poverty* refers to the fact that female-headed households are especially likely to be poor. The gendering of poverty in this manner is one of the most significant manifestations of gender inequality in the United States.

## Sexual Harassment

Another workplace problem (including schools) is **sexual harassment**, which, as defined by federal guidelines and legal rulings and statutes, consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is used as a condition of employment or promotion or that interferes with an individual's job performance and creates an intimidating or hostile environment.

Although men can be, and are, sexually harassed, women are more often the targets of sexual harassment. This gender difference exists for at least two reasons, one cultural and one structural. The cultural reason centers on the depiction of women and the socialization of men. As our discussion of the mass media and gender socialization indicated, women are still depicted in our culture as sexual objects that exist for men's pleasure. At the same time, our culture socializes men to be sexually assertive. These two cultural beliefs combine to make men believe that they have the right to make verbal and physical advances to women in the workplace. When these advances fall into the guidelines listed here, they become sexual harassment.



*Sexual harassment in the workplace is a common experience. In surveys of women employees, up to two-thirds of respondents report having been sexually harassed.*

*© Thinkstock*

The second reason that most targets of sexual harassment are women is more structural. Reflecting the gendered nature of the workplace and of the educational system, typically the men doing the harassment are in a position of power over the women they harass. A male boss harasses a female employee, or a male professor harasses a female student or employee. These men realize that subordinate women may find it difficult to resist their advances for fear of reprisals: A female employee may be fired or not promoted, and a female student may receive a bad grade.

How common is sexual harassment? This is difficult to determine, as the men who do the sexual harassment are not about to shout it from the rooftops, and the women who suffer it often keep quiet because of the repercussions just listed. But anonymous surveys of women employees in corporate and other settings commonly find that 40–65 percent of the respondents report being sexually harassed (Rospenda, Richman, & Shannon, 2009).Rospenda, K. M., Richman, J. A., & Shannon, C. A. (2009). Prevalence and mental health correlates of harassment and discrimination in the workplace: Results from a national study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *24*(5), 819–843. In a survey of 4,501 women physicians, 36.9 percent reported being sexually harassed either in medical school or in their practice as physicians (Frank, Brogan, & Schiffman, 1998).Frank, E., Brogan, D., & Schiffman, M. (1998). Prevalence and correlates of harsssment among US women physicians. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *158*(4), 352–358. In studies of college students, almost one-third of women undergraduates and about 40 percent of women graduate students report being sexually harassed by a faculty member (Clodfelter, Turner, Hartman, & Kuhns, 2010).Clodfelter, T. A., Turner, M. G., Hartman, J. L., & Kuhns, J. B. (2010). Sexual harassment victimization during emerging adulthood. *Crime & Delinquency*, *56*(3), 455–481.

Studies of people who have been sexually harassed find that they often experience various psychological problems. The Note 4.29 "Applying Social Research" box discusses this body of research further.

### Applying Social Research

The Long-Term Mental Health Consequences of Sexual Harassment

Despite the fact that sexual harassment is illegal, most women (and men) who are sexually harassed do not bring court action. Two reasons explain their decision not to sue: they fear being fired and/or they worry they will not be believed. But another reason has to do with the mental and emotional consequences of being sexually harassed. These consequences include relationship problems, a loss of self-esteem, fatigue, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, and a feeling of powerlessness. These effects are similar to those for posttraumatic stress disorder and are considered symptoms of what has been termed *sexual harassment trauma syndrome*. This syndrome, and perhaps especially the feeling of powerlessness, are thought to help explain why sexual harassment victims hardly ever bring court action and otherwise often keep quiet. According to law professor Theresa Beiner, the legal system should become more aware of these psychological consequences as it deals with the important question in sexual harassment cases of whether harassment actually occurred. If a woman keeps quiet about the harassment, it is too easy for judges and juries to believe, as happens in rape cases, that the woman originally did not mind the behavior that she now says is harassment.

Should the legal system begin to make better use of social science research on sexual harassment trauma syndrome, a recent study by sociologist Jason N. Houle and colleagues provides important new evidence for legal officials to consider. The authors note two faults in prior sexual harassment research. First, most studies have focused on workers in a single occupation, such as lawyers, or in a single organization, such as a university campus, rather than in a diverse set of occupations and organizations. Second, because most studies have examined workers at only one point in time, they have been unable to study the long-term psychological consequences of sexual harassment.

To correct these deficiencies, Houle et al. analyzed data from a study of 1,010 ninth-graders in St. Paul, Minnesota, that followed them from 1988 to 2004, when they were 30 or 31 years old. The study included measures of the respondents' experience of sexual harassment at several periods over the study's sixteen-year time span (ages 14–18, 19–26, 29–30, and 30–31), their level of psychological depression, and their sociodemographic background. Focusing on depression at ages 30 or 31, the authors found that sexual harassment at ages 14–18 did not affect the chances of depression at ages 30–31, but that sexual harassment during any of the other three age periods *did* increase the chances of depression at ages 30–31. These results held true for both women and men who had been harassed. The authors concluded that the "effects of harassment are indeed lasting, as harassment experiences early in the career were associated with heightened depressive symptoms nearly 10 years later."

In finding long-term effects of sexual harassment on women and men in a variety of occupations and organizational settings, Houle et al.'s study made an important contribution to our understanding of the psychological consequences of sexual harassment. Its findings underscore the need for workplaces and campuses to do everything possible to eliminate this illegal and harmful behavior and perhaps will prove useful in sexual harassment lawsuits.

*Sources:* Beiner, 2005; Houle, Staff, Mortimer, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2011; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007Beiner, T. (2005). *Gender myths v. working realities: Using social science to reformulate sexual harassment law*. New York, NY: New York University Press; Houle, J. N., Staff, J., Mortimer, J. T., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2011). The impact of sexual harassment on depressive symptoms during the early occupational career. *Society and Mental Health, 1*, 89–105; Willness, C. R., Steel, P., & Lee, K. (2007). A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment. *Personnel Psychology, 60*, 127–162.

## Women of Color: A Triple Burden

Earlier we mentioned multicultural feminism, which stresses that women of color face difficulties for three reasons: their gender, their race, and, often, their social class, which is frequently near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. They thus face a *triple burden* that manifests itself in many ways.

For example, women of color experience extra income inequality. Earlier we discussed the gender gap in earnings, with women earning 82.2 percent of what men earn, but women of color face both a gender gap *and* a racial/ethnic gap. Table 4.3 depicts this double gap for full-time workers. We see a racial/ethnic gap among both women and men, as African Americans and Latinos of either gender earn less than whites. We also see a gender gap between men and women, as women earn less than men within any race/ethnicity. These two gaps combine to produce an especially high gap between African American and Latina women and white men: African American women earn only about 70 percent of what white men earn, and Latina women earn only about 60 percent of what white men earn.

Table 4.3 The Race/Ethnicity and Gender Gap in Annual Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 2010*

| | Annual earnings ($) | Percentage of white male earnings |
|---|---|---|
| **Men** | | |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 44,200 | — |
| Black | 32,916 | 74.5 |
| Latino | 26,416 | 59.8 |
| **Women** | | |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 35,568 | 80.5 |
| Black | 30,784 | 69.7 |
| Latina | 26,416 | 59.8 |
| * Median weekly earnings × 52 weeks | | |

Source: US Department of Labor. (2011). *Highlights of women's earnings in 2010*. Washington, DC: Author.

These differences in income mean that African American and Latina women are poorer than white women. We noted earlier that almost 32 percent of all female-headed families are poor. This figure masks race/ethnic differences among such families: 24.8 percent of families headed by non-Latina white women are poor, compared to 41.0 percent of families headed by African American women and also 44.5 percent of families headed by Latina women (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011).DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Reports, P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. While white women are poorer than white men, African American and Latina women are clearly poorer than white women.

## Household Inequality

Gender inequality occurs within families and households. We will talk more about this aspect of family life in Chapter 10, but briefly discuss here one significant dimension of gender-based household inequality: housework. Someone has to do housework, and that someone is usually a woman. It takes many hours a week to clean the bathrooms, cook, shop in the grocery store, vacuum, and do everything else that needs to be done. The research evidence indicates that women married to or living with men spend two to three times as many hours per week on housework as men spend (Gupta & Ash, 2008).Gupta, S., & Ash, M. (2008). Whose money, whose time? A nonparametric approach to modeling time spent on housework in the United States. *Feminist Economics, 14*(1), 93–120. This disparity holds true even when women work outside the home, leading sociologist Arlie Hochschild

(Hochschild, 1989)Hochschild, A. (1989). *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home*. New York, NY: Viking. to observe in a widely cited book that women engage in a "second shift" of unpaid work when they come home from their paying job.

The good news is that gender differences in housework time are smaller than a generation ago. The bad news is that a large gender difference remains. As one study summarized the evidence on this issue, "Women invest significantly more hours in household labor than do men despite the narrowing of gender differences in recent years" (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000, p. 196).Bianchi, S. M., Milkie, M. A., Sayer, L. C., & Robinson, J. P. (2000). Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces*, *79*(1), 191–228. In the realm of household work, then, gender inequality persists.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Among full-time workers, women earn about 79.4 percent of men's earnings. This gender gap in earnings stems from several factors, including sex segregation in the workplace and the lower wages and salaries found in occupations that involve mostly women.
- Sexual harassment results partly from women's subordinate status in the workplace and may involve up to two-thirds of women employees.
- Women of color may face a "triple burden" of difficulties based on their gender, their race/ethnicity, and their social class.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you think it is fair for occupations dominated by women to have lower wages and salaries than those dominated by men? Explain your answer.
2. If you know a woman who works in a male-dominated occupation, interview her about any difficulties she might be experiencing as a result of being in this sort of situation.

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# 5.5: Violence against Women- Rape and Sexual Assault

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the extent of rape and sexual assault.
2. Explain why rape and sexual assault occur.

Susan Griffin (1971, p. 26) began a classic essay on rape in 1971 with this startling statement: “I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age I, like most women, have thought of rape as a part of my natural environment—something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning. I never asked why men raped; I simply thought it one of the many mysteries of human nature.”

When we consider interpersonal violence of all kinds—homicide, assault, robbery, and rape and sexual assault—men are more likely than women to be victims of violence. While true, this fact obscures another fact: Women are far more likely than men to be raped and sexually assaulted. They are also much more likely to be portrayed as victims of pornographic violence on the Internet and in videos, magazines, and other outlets. Finally, women are more likely than men to be victims of *domestic violence*, or violence between spouses and others with intimate relationships. The gendered nature of these acts against women distinguishes them from the violence men suffer. Violence is directed against men not because they are men per se, but because of anger, jealousy, and the sociological reasons discussed in Chapter 8 “Crime and Criminal Justice”’s treatment of deviance and crime. But rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, and pornographic violence are directed against women precisely because they are women. These acts are thus an extreme manifestation of the gender inequality women face in other areas of life. We discuss rape and sexual assault here but will leave domestic violence for Chapter 10 “The Changing Family” and pornography for Chapter 9 “Sexual Behavior”.

## The Extent and Context of Rape and Sexual Assault

Our knowledge about the extent and context of rape and reasons for it comes from three sources: the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), both discussed in Chapter 8 “Crime and Criminal Justice”, and surveys of and interviews with women and men conducted by academic researchers. From these sources we have a fairly good if not perfect idea of how much rape occurs, the context in which it occurs, and the reasons for it. What do we know?




Up to one-third of US women experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, at least once in their lives.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

According to the UCR, which are compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from police reports, 88,767 reported rapes (including attempts, and defined as forced sexual intercourse) occurred in the United States in 2010 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Because women often do not tell police they were raped, the NCVS, which involves survey interviews of thousands of people nationwide, probably yields a better estimate of rape; the NCVS also measures sexual assaults in addition to rape, while the UCR measures only rape. According to the NCVS, 188,380 rapes and sexual assaults occurred in 2010 (Truman, 2011). Other research indicates that up to one-third of US women will experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, at least once in their lives (Barkan, 2012). A study of a random sample of 420 Toronto women involving intensive interviews yielded an even higher figure: Two-thirds said they had experienced at least one rape or sexual assault, including attempts. The researchers, Melanie Randall and Lori Haskell (1995, p. 22), concluded that "it is more common than not for a woman to have an experience of sexual assault during their lifetime."

Studies of college students also find a high amount of rape and sexual assault. About 20–30 percent of women students in anonymous surveys report being raped or sexually assaulted (including attempts), usually by a male student they knew beforehand (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006). Thus at a campus of 10,000 students of whom 5,000 are women, about 1,000–1,500 women will be raped or sexually assaulted over a period of four years, or about 10 per week in a four-year academic calendar. The Note 4.33 "People Making a Difference" box describes what one group of college students did to help reduce rape and sexual assault at their campus.

### People Making a Difference - College Students Protest against Sexual Violence

Dickinson College is a small liberal-arts campus in the small town of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. But in the fight against sexual violence, it loomed huge in March 2011, when up to 150 students conducted a nonviolent occupation of the college's administrative building for three days to protest rape and sexual assault on their campus. While they read, ate, and slept inside the building, more than 250 other students held rallies outside, with the total number of protesters easily exceeding one-tenth of Dickinson's student enrollment. The protesters held signs that said "Stop the silence, our safety is more important than your reputation" and "I value my body, you should value my rights." One student told a reporter, "This is a pervasive problem. Almost every student will tell you they know somebody who's experienced sexual violence or have experienced it themselves."

Feeling that college officials had not done enough to help protect Dickinson's women students, the students occupying the administrative building called on the college to set up an improved emergency system for reporting sexual assaults, to revamp its judicial system's treatment of sexual assault cases, to create a sexual violence prevention program, and to develop a new sexual misconduct policy.

Rather than having police or security guards take the students from the administrative building and even arrest them, Dickinson officials negotiated with the students and finally agreed to their demands. Upon hearing this good news, the occupying students left the building on a Saturday morning, suffering from a lack of sleep and showers but cheered that they had won their demands. A college public relations official applauded the protesters, saying they "have indelibly left their mark on the college. We're all very proud of them." On this small campus in a small town in Pennsylvania, a few hundred college students had made a difference.

*Sources:* Jerving, 2011; Pitz, 2011Jerving, S. (2011, March 4). Pennsylvania students protest against sexual violence and administrators respond. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/159037/pennsylvania-students-protests-against-sexual-violence-and-administrators-respond; Pitz, M. (2011, March 6). Dickinson College to change sexual assault policy after sit-in. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Retrieved from http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11065/1130102-1130454.stm

The public image of rape is of the proverbial stranger attacking a woman in an alleyway. While such rapes do occur, most rapes actually happen between people who know each other. A wide body of research finds that 60–80 percent of all rapes and sexual assaults are committed by someone the woman knows, including husbands, ex-husbands, boyfriends, and ex-boyfriends, and only 20–35 percent by strangers (Barkan, 2012).Barkan, S. E. (2012). *Criminology: A sociological understanding* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. A woman is thus two to four times more likely to be raped by someone she knows than by a stranger.

In 2011, sexual assaults of hotel housekeepers made major headlines after the head of the International Monetary Fund was arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting a hotel housekeeper in New York City; the charges were later dropped because the prosecution worried about the housekeeper's credibility despite forensic evidence supporting her claim. Still, in the wake of the arrest, news stories reported that hotel housekeepers sometimes encounter male guests who commit sexual assault, make explicit comments, or expose themselves. A hotel security expert said in one news story, "These problems happen with some regularity. They're not rare, but they're not common either." A housekeeper recalled in the same story an incident when she was vacuuming when a male guest appeared: "[He] reached to try to kiss me behind my ear. I dropped my vacuum, and then he grabbed my body at the waist, and he was holding me close. It was very scary." She ran out of the room when the guest let her leave but did not call the police. A hotel workers union official said housekeepers often refused to report sexual assault and other incidents to the police because they were afraid they would not be believed or that they would get fired if they did so (Greenhouse, 2011, p. B1).Greenhouse, S. (2011, May 21). Sexual affronts a known hotel hazard. *New York Times*, p. B1.

## Explaining Rape and Sexual Assault

Sociological explanations of rape fall into cultural and structural categories similar to those presented earlier for sexual harassment. Various "rape myths" in our culture support the absurd notion that women somehow enjoy being raped, want to be raped, or are "asking for it" (Franiuk, Seefelt, & Vandello, 2008).Franiuk, R., Seefelt, J., & Vandello, J. (2008). Prevalence of rape myths in headlines and their effects on attitudes toward rape. *Sex Roles*, *58*(11/12), 790–801. One of the most famous scenes in movie history occurs in the classic film *Gone with the Wind*, when Rhett Butler carries a struggling Scarlett O'Hara up the stairs. She is struggling because she does not want to have sex with him. The next scene shows Scarlett waking up the next morning with a

satisfied, loving look on her face. The not-so-subtle message is that she enjoyed being raped (or, to be more charitable to the film, was just playing hard to get).

A related cultural belief is that women somehow ask or deserve to be raped by the way they dress or behave. If she dresses attractively or walks into a bar by herself, she wants to have sex, and if a rape occurs, well, then, what did she expect? In the award-winning film *The Accused*, based on a true story, actress Jodie Foster plays a woman who was raped by several men on top of a pool table in a bar. The film recounts how members of the public questioned why she was in the bar by herself if she did not want to have sex and blamed her for being raped.

A third cultural belief is that a man who is sexually active with a lot of women is a stud and thus someone admired by his male peers. Although this belief is less common in this day of AIDS and other STDs, it is still with us. A man with multiple sex partners continues to be the source of envy among many of his peers. At a minimum, men are still the ones who have to "make the first move" and then continue making more moves. There is a thin line between being sexually assertive and sexually aggressive (Kassing, Beesley, & Frey, 2005).Kassing, L. R., Beesley, D., & Frey, L. L. (2005). Gender role conflict, homophobia, age, and education as predictors of male rape myth acceptance. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *27*(4), 311–328.

These three cultural beliefs—that women enjoy being forced to have sex, that they ask or deserve to be raped, and that men should be sexually assertive or even aggressive—combine to produce a cultural recipe for rape. Although most men do not rape, the cultural beliefs and myths just described help account for the rapes that do occur. Recognizing this, the contemporary women's movement began attacking these myths back in the 1970s, and the public is much more conscious of the true nature of rape than a generation ago. That said, much of the public still accepts these cultural beliefs and myths, and prosecutors continue to find it difficult to win jury convictions in rape trials unless the woman who was raped had suffered visible injuries, had not known the man who raped her, and/or was not dressed attractively (Levine, 2006).Levine, K. L. (2006). The intimacy discount: Prosecutorial discretion, privacy, and equality in the statuory rape caseload. *Emory Law Journal*, *55*(4), 691–749.

Structural explanations for rape emphasize the power differences between women and men similar to those outlined earlier for sexual harassment. In societies that are male dominated, rape and other violence against women is a likely outcome, as they allow men to demonstrate and maintain their power over women. Supporting this view, studies of preindustrial societies and of the fifty states of the United States find that rape is more common in societies where women have less economic and political power (Baron & Straus, 1989; Sanday, 1981).Baron, L., & Straus, M. A. (1989). *Four theories of rape in American society: A state-level analysis*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Sanday, P. R. (1981). The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-Cultural Study. *Journal of Social Issues*, *37*, 5–27. Poverty is also a predictor of rape; although rape in the United States transcends social class boundaries, it does seem more common among poorer segments of the population than among wealthier segments, as is true for other types of violence (Truman & Rand, 2010).Truman, J. L., & Rand, M. R. (2010). *Criminal victimization, 2009*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Scholars think the higher rape rates among the poor stem from poor men trying to prove their "masculinity" by taking out their economic frustration on women (Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006).Martin, K., Vieraitis, L. M., & Britto, S. (2006). Gender equality and women's absolute status: A test of the feminist models of rape. *Violence Against Women*, *12*, 321–339.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Up to one-third of US women experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, in their lifetime.
- Rape and sexual assault result from a combination of structural and cultural factors. In states and nations where women are more unequal, rape rates tend to be higher.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What evidence and reasoning indicate that rape and sexual assault are not just the result of psychological problems affecting the men who engage in these crimes?
2. Write a brief essay in which you critically evaluate the cultural beliefs that contribute to rape and sexual assault.

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# 5.6: The Benefits and Costs of Being Male

**Learning Objectives**

1. List some of the benefits of being male.
2. List some of the costs of being male.

Most of the discussion so far has been about women, and with good reason: In a sexist society such as our own, women are the subordinate, unequal sex. But *gender* means more than *female*, and a few comments about men are in order.

## Benefits

We have already discussed gender differences in occupations and incomes that favor men over women. In a patriarchal society, men have more wealth than women and more influence in the political and economic worlds more generally.

Men profit in other ways as well. In Chapter 3 "Racial and Ethnic Inequality", we talked about white privilege, or the advantages that whites automatically have in a racist society whether or not they realize they have these advantages. Many scholars also talk about male privilege, or the advantages that males automatically have in a patriarchal society whether or not they realize they have these advantages (McIntosh, 2007).

A few examples illustrate male privilege. Men can usually walk anywhere they want or go into any bar they want without having to worry about being raped or sexually harassed. Susan Griffin was able to write "I have never been free of the fear of rape" because she was a woman; it is no exaggeration to say that few men could write the same thing and mean it. Although some men are sexually harassed, most men can work at any job they want without having to worry about sexual harassment. Men can walk down the street without having strangers make crude remarks about their looks, dress, and sexual behavior. Men can ride the subway system in large cities without having strangers grope them, flash them, or rub their bodies against them. Men can apply for most jobs without worrying about being rejected because of their gender, or, if hired, not being promoted because of their gender. We could go on with many other examples, but the fact remains that in a patriarchal society, men automatically have advantages just because they are men, even if race/ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation affect the degree to which they are able to enjoy these advantages.

## Costs

Yet it is also true that men pay a price for living in a patriarchy. Without trying to claim that men have it as bad as women, scholars are increasingly pointing to the problems men face in a society that promotes male domination and traditional standards of masculinity such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and toughness (Kimmel & Messner, 2010). Socialization into masculinity is thought to underlie many of the emotional problems men experience, which stem from a combination of their emotional inexpressiveness and reluctance to admit to, and seek help for, various personal problems (Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Sometimes these emotional problems build up and explode, as mass shootings by males at schools and elsewhere indicate, or express themselves in other ways. Compared to girls, for example, boys are much more likely to be diagnosed with emotional disorders, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorder, and they are also more likely to commit suicide and to drop out of high school.

Men experience other problems that put themselves at a disadvantage compared to women. They commit much more violence than women do and, apart from rape and sexual assault, also suffer a much higher rate of violent victimization. They die earlier than women and are injured more often. Because men are less involved than women in child rearing, they also miss out on the joy of parenting that women are much more likely to experience.

Growing recognition of the problems males experience because of their socialization into masculinity has led to increased concern over what is happening to American boys. Citing the strong linkage between masculinity and violence, some writers urge parents to raise their sons differently in order to help our society reduce its violent behavior (Corbett, 2011). In all these respects, boys and men—and our nation as a whole—are paying a very real price for being male in a patriarchal society.

### Key Takeaways

- In a patriarchal society, males automatically have certain advantages, including a general freedom from fear of being raped and sexually assaulted and from experiencing job discrimination on the basis of their gender.
- Men also suffer certain disadvantages from being male, including higher rates of injury, violence, and death and a lower likelihood of experiencing the joy that parenting often brings.

## For Your Review

1. What do you think is the most important advantage, privilege, or benefit that men enjoy in the United States? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think is the most significant cost or disadvantage that men experience? Again, explain your answer.

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# 5.7: Reducing Gender Inequality

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe any three policies or programs that should help reduce gender inequality.
2. Discuss possible ways of reducing rape and sexual assault.

Gender inequality is found in varying degrees in most societies around the world, and the United States is no exception. Just as racial/ethnic stereotyping and prejudice underlie racial/ethnic inequality (see Chapter 3 "Racial and Ethnic Inequality"), so do stereotypes and false beliefs underlie gender inequality. Although these stereotypes and beliefs have weakened considerably since the 1970s thanks in large part to the contemporary women's movement, they obviously persist and hamper efforts to achieve full gender equality.

A sociological perspective reminds us that gender inequality stems from a complex mixture of cultural and structural factors that must be addressed if gender inequality is to be reduced further than it already has been since the 1970s. Despite changes during this period, children are still socialized from birth into traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, and gender-based stereotyping incorporating these notions still continues. Although people should certainly be free to pursue whatever family and career responsibilities they desire, socialization and stereotyping still combine to limit the ability of girls and boys and women and men alike to imagine less traditional possibilities. Meanwhile, structural obstacles in the workplace and elsewhere continue to keep women in a subordinate social and economic status relative to men.

To reduce gender inequality, then, a sociological perspective suggests various policies and measures to address the cultural and structural factors that help produce gender inequality. These steps might include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Reduce socialization by parents and other adults of girls and boys into traditional gender roles.
2. Confront gender stereotyping by the popular and news media.
3. Increase public consciousness of the reasons for, extent of, and consequences of rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.
4. Increase enforcement of existing laws against gender-based employment discrimination and against sexual harassment.
5. Increase funding of rape-crisis centers and other services for girls and women who have been raped and/or sexually assaulted.
6. Increase government funding of high-quality day-care options to enable parents, and especially mothers, to work outside the home if they so desire, and to do so without fear that their finances or their children's well-being will be compromised.
7. Increase mentorship and other efforts to boost the number of women in traditionally male occupations and in positions of political leadership.

As we consider how best to reduce gender inequality, the impact of the contemporary women's movement must be neither forgotten nor underestimated. Since it began in the late 1960s, the women's movement has generated important advances for women in almost every sphere of life. Brave women (and some men) challenged the status quo by calling attention to gender inequality in the workplace, education, and elsewhere, and they brought rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and domestic violence into the national consciousness. For gender inequality to continue to be reduced, it is essential that a strong women's movement continue to remind us of the sexism that still persists in American society and the rest of the world.

## Reducing Rape and Sexual Assault

As we have seen, gender inequality also manifests itself in the form of violence against women. A sociological perspective tells us that cultural myths and economic and gender inequality help lead to rape, and that the rape problem goes far beyond a few psychopathic men who rape women. A sociological perspective thus tells us that our society cannot just stop at doing something about these men. Instead it must make more far-reaching changes by changing people's beliefs about rape and by making every effort to reduce poverty and to empower women. This last task is especially important, for, as Randall and Haskell (1995, p. 22) observed, a sociological perspective on rape "means calling into question the organization of sexual inequality in our society."

Aside from this fundamental change, other remedies, such as additional and better funded rape-crisis centers, would help women who experience rape and sexual assault. Yet even here women of color face an additional barrier. Because the antirape movement was begun by white, middle-class feminists, the rape-crisis centers they founded tended to be near where they live, such as college campuses, and not in the areas where women of color live, such as inner cities and Native American reservations. This meant that

women of color who experienced sexual violence lacked the kinds of help available to their white, middle-class counterparts (Matthews, 1989), and despite some progress, this is still true today.

## Key Takeaways

- Certain government efforts, including increased financial support for child care, should help reduce gender inequality.
- If gender inequality lessens, rape and sexual assault should decrease as well.

## For Your Review

1. To reduce gender inequality, do you think efforts should focus more on changing socialization practices or on changing policies in the workplace and schools? Explain your answer.
2. How hopeful are you that rape and sexual assault will decrease significantly in your lifetime?

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# 5.8: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. *Sex* is a concept that refers to biological differences between females and males, while *gender* is a concept that refers to a society's expectations of how females and males should think and behave.
2. In understanding gender differences, scholars continue to debate the value of biological explanations. Biological explanations are provocative but ultimately imply that gender differences are inevitable and that the status quo must be maintained. In contrast, cultural and socialization explanations imply some hope for changing gender roles and for reducing gender inequality.
3. Many studies emphasize that socialization leads children in the United States to adopt the gender roles associated with femininity and masculinity. Parents view and interact with their daughters and sons differently, and children continue to learn their gender roles from their peers, schools, the mass media, and religion.
4. Feminism refers to the belief that women should be equal to men. With feminism defined in this way, many more people hold feminist beliefs than might be willing to admit to it.
5. Gender inequality in the workplace is manifested through the gender gap in earnings and through sexual harassment. Women earn only about 80 percent of what men earn. Several reasons account for this gap, including sex segregation in the workplace, women's caring roles, the devaluing of women's work, and outright sex discrimination by employers. Sexual harassment against women is quite common and stems from cultural beliefs about women's and men's roles and structural differences in the workplace in power between women and men.
6. Women of color experience a triple burden based on their gender, race/ethnicity, and social class. Even though white women earn less money and are poorer than white men, women of color earn less money and are poorer than white women.
7. Violence against women is another manifestation of gender inequality. Research shows that up to one-third of US women will be raped or sexually assaulted and that about 70–80 percent of their assailants will be men they know.
8. In a patriarchal society men enjoy privileges just for being male, whether or not they recognize these privileges. At the same time, men also experience disadvantages, including violent behavior and victimization and higher rates of certain emotional problems than those experienced by women.

## Using What You Know

A friend of yours is working twenty hours per week in a local restaurant during the academic year to earn money for her tuition. She tells you that her manager has pressured her to go out on a date with him and has hinted she could be fired if she refuses. Your friend likes working there otherwise and makes good tips, but she is now dreading having to go to work. With the tight job market, she fears not being able to find other work if she quits, and she's afraid of being fired or not believed if she complains to state authorities. She asks you what she should do. What do you tell her?

## What You Can Do

To help reduce gender inequality, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Contribute money to a local, state, or national organization that provides treatment to adolescent girls with drug, alcohol, or other problems.
2. Volunteer at a rape crisis center or for a rape hotline.
3. Start or join a group on your campus that focuses on gender issues.
4. Start or join a group on your campus or in the local community that focuses on getting middle-school girls more interested in math and the sciences.

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# 5.9: Video- What Would You Do?

Mom argues with child over gender appropriate toys | What Would You Do




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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 6: Sexual Orientation and Inequality


6.1: Understanding Sexual Orientation
6.2: Public Attitudes about Sexual Orientation
6.3: Inequality Based on Sexual Orientation
6.4: Improving the Lives of the LGBT Community
6.5: End-of-Chapter Material
6.6: Videos- What Would You Do?


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# 6.1: Understanding Sexual Orientation

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. Describe what percentage of the US population is estimated to be LGBT.
3. Summarize the history of sexual orientation.
4. Evaluate the possible reasons for sexual orientation.

Sexual orientation refers to a person's preference for sexual relationships with individuals of the other sex (*heterosexuality*), one's own sex (*homosexuality*), or both sexes (*bisexuality*). The term also increasingly refers to *transgender* (also *transgendered*) individuals, those whose behavior, appearance, and/or gender identity (the personal conception of oneself as female, male, both, or neither) departs from conventional norms. Transgendered individuals include *transvestites* (those who dress in the clothing of the opposite sex) and *transsexuals* (those whose gender identity differs from their physiological sex and who sometimes undergo a sex change). A *transgender woman* is a person who was born biologically as a male and becomes a woman, while a *transgender man* is a person who was born biologically as a woman and becomes a man. As you almost certainly know, *gay* is the common term now used for any homosexual individual; *gay men* or *gays* is the common term used for homosexual men, while *lesbian* is the common term used for homosexual women. All the types of social orientation just outlined are often collectively referred to by the shorthand *LGBT* (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender). As you almost certainly also know, the term *straight* is used today as a synonym for heterosexual.

## Counting Sexual Orientation

We will probably never know precisely how many people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. One problem is conceptual. For example, what does it mean to be gay or lesbian? Does one need to actually have sexual relations with a same-sex partner to be considered gay? What if someone is attracted to same-sex partners but does not actually engage in sex with such persons? What if someone identifies as heterosexual but engages in homosexual sex for money (as in certain forms of prostitution) or for power and influence (as in much prison sex)? These conceptual problems make it difficult to determine the extent of homosexuality (Gates, 2011).



It is difficult for several reasons to know exactly how many people are LGBT. (thaths – A gay couple watching the parade – CC BY-NC 2.0.)

A second problem is empirical. Even if we can settle on a definition of homosexuality, how do we then determine how many people fit this definition? For better or worse, our best evidence of the number of gays and lesbians in the United States comes from surveys that ask random samples of Americans various questions about their sexuality. Although these are anonymous surveys, some individuals may be reluctant to disclose their sexual activity and thoughts to an interviewer. Still, scholars think that estimates from these surveys are fairly accurate but also that they probably underestimate by at least a small amount the number of gays and lesbians.

During the 1940s and 1950s, sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey carried out the first notable attempt to estimate the number of gays and lesbians (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). His project interviewed more than 11,000 white women and men about their sexual experiences, thoughts, and attractions, with each subject answering hundreds of questions. While most individuals had experiences and feelings that were exclusively heterosexual, a significant number had experiences and feelings that were either exclusively homosexual or both heterosexual and homosexual in varying degrees. These findings led Kinsey to reject the popular idea back then that a person is necessarily either heterosexual or homosexual (or straight or gay, to use the common modern terms). As he wrote, "It is a characteristic of the human mind that tries to dichotomize in its classification of phenomena…Sexual behavior is either normal or abnormal, socially acceptable or unacceptable, heterosexual or homosexual; and many persons do not want to believe that there are gradations in these matters from one to the other extreme" (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 469). Perhaps Kinsey's most significant and controversial finding was that gradations did, in fact, exist between being exclusively heterosexual on the one hand and exclusively homosexual on the other hand. To reflect these gradations, he developed the well-known *Kinsey Scale*, which ranks individuals on a continuum ranging from 0 (exclusively heterosexual) to 6 (exclusively homosexual).

In terms of specific numbers, Kinsey found that (a) 37 percent of males and 13 percent of females had had at least one same-sex experience; (b) 10 percent of males had mostly homosexual experiences between the ages of 16 and 55, while up to 6 percent of females had mostly homosexual experiences between the ages of 20 and 35; (c) 4 percent of males were exclusively homosexual after adolescence began, compared to 1–3 percent of females; and (d) 46 percent of males either had engaged in both heterosexual and homosexual experiences or had been attracted to persons of both sexes, compared to 14 percent of females.



An estimated 3.8 percent of the US adult population identifies as LGBT. This figure amounts to about 9 million people. (Nathan Rupert – Crazy fun loving lesbian couple – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

More recent research updates Kinsey's early findings and, more important, uses nationally representative samples of Americans (which Kinsey did not use). In general, this research suggests that Kinsey overstated the numbers of Americans who have had same-sex experiences and/or attractions. A widely cited survey carried out in the early 1990s by researchers at the University of Chicago found that 2.8 percent of men and 1.4 percent of women self-identified as gay/lesbian or bisexual, with greater percentages reporting having had sexual relations with same-sex partners or being attracted to same-sex persons (see Table 5.1 "Prevalence of Homosexuality in the United States"). In the 2010 General Social Survey (GSS), 1.8 percent of men and 3.3 percent of women self-identified as gay/lesbian or bisexual. In the 2006–2008 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) conducted by the federal government (Chandra, Mosher, Copen, & Sionean, 2011), 2.8 percent of men self-identified as gay or bisexual, compared to 4.6 percent of women (ages 18–44 for both sexes).

Table 5.1 Prevalence of Homosexuality in the United States

| Activity, attraction, or identity | Men (%) | Women (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Find same-sex sexual relations appealing | 4.5 | 5.6 |
| Attracted to people of same sex | 6.2 | 4.4 |
| Identify as gay or bisexual | 2.8 | 1.4 |
| At least one sex partner of same sex during past year among those sexually active | 2.7 | 1.3 |
| At least one sex partner of same sex since turning 18 | 4.9 | 4.1 |

Source: Data from Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

These are all a lot of numbers, but demographer Gary J. Gates (2011) drew on the most recent national survey evidence to come up with the following estimates for adults 18 and older:

- 3.5 percent of Americans identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 0.3 percent are transgender; these figures add up to 3.8 percent of Americans, or 9 million people, who are LGBT.
- 3.4 percent of women and 3.6 percent of men identify as LGB.
- 66.7 percent of LGB women identify as bisexual, and 33.3 percent identify as lesbian; 33.3 percent of LGB men identify as bisexual, and 66.7 percent identify as gay. LGB women are thus twice as likely as LGB men to identify as bisexual.
- 8.2 percent of Americans, or 19 million people, have engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, with women twice as likely as men to have done so.
- 11 percent of Americans, or 25.6 million people, report having some same-sex sexual attraction, with women twice as likely as men to report such attraction.

The overall picture from these estimates is clear: Self-identified LGBT people comprise only a small percentage of the US population, but they amount to about 9 million adults and undoubtedly a significant number of adolescents. In addition, the total number of people who, regardless of their sexual orientation, have had a same-sex experience is probably at least 19 million, and the number who have had same-sex attraction is probably at least 25 million.

## Sexual Orientation in Historical Perspective

Based on what is known about homosexuality in past societies, it should be no surprise that so many people in the United States identify as gay/lesbian or have had same-sex experiences. This historical record is clear: Homosexuality has existed since ancient times and in some societies has been rather common or at least fully accepted as a normal form of sexual expression.

In the great city of Athens in ancient Greece, male homosexuality (to be more precise, sexual relations between a man and a teenaged boy and, less often, between a man and a man) was not only approved but even encouraged. According to classical scholar K. J. Dover (1989, p. 12), Athenian society "certainly regarded strong homosexual desire and emotion as normal," in part because it also generally "entertained a low opinion of the intellectual capacity and staying-power of women." Louis Crompton (2003, p. 2), who wrote perhaps the definitive history of homosexuality, agrees that male homosexuality in ancient Greece was common and notes that "in Greek history and literature…the abundance of accounts of homosexual love overwhelms the investigator." He adds,

Greek lyric poets sing of male love from almost the earliest fragments down to the end of classical times…Vase-painters portray scores of homoerotic scenes, hundreds of inscriptions celebrate the love of boys, and such affairs enter into the lives of a long catalogue of famous Greek statesmen, warriors, artists, and authors. Though it has often been assumed that the love of males was a fashion confined to a small intellectual elite during the age of Plato, in fact it was pervasive throughout all levels of Greek society and held an honored place in Greek culture for more than a thousand years, that is, from before 600 B.C.E. to about 400 C.E.

Male homosexuality in ancient Rome was also common and accepted as normal sexuality, but it took a different form from than in ancient Greece. Ancient Romans disapproved of sexual relations between a man and a freeborn male youth, but they approved of relations between a slave master and his youthful male slave. Sexual activity of this type was common. As Crompton (2003, p. 80)

wryly notes, “Opportunities were ample for Roman masters” because slaves comprised about 40 percent of the population of ancient Rome. However, these “opportunities” are best regarded as violent domination by slave masters over their slaves.

By the time Rome fell in 476 CE, Europe had become a Christian continent. Influenced by several passages in the Bible that condemn homosexuality, Europeans considered homosexuality a sin, and their governments outlawed same-sex relations. If discovered, male homosexuals (or any men suspected of homosexuality) were vulnerable to execution for the next fourteen centuries, and many did lose their lives. During the Middle Ages, gay men and lesbians were stoned, burned at the stake, hanged, or beheaded, and otherwise abused and mistreated. Crompton (2003, p. 539) calls these atrocities a “routine of terror” and a “kaleidoscope of horrors.” Hitler’s persecution of gay men several centuries after the Middle Ages ended had ample precedent in European history.

In contrast to the European treatment of gay men and lesbians, China and Japan from ancient times onward viewed homosexuality much more positively in what Crompton (2003, p. 215) calls an “unselfconscious acceptance of same-sex relations.” He adds that male love in Japan during the 1500s was “a national tradition—one the Japanese thought natural and meritorious” (Crompton, 2003, p. 412) and very much part of the *samurai* (military nobility) culture of preindustrial Japan. In China, both male and female homosexuality were seen as normal and even healthy sexual outlets. Because Confucianism, the major Chinese religion when the Common Era began, considered women inferior, it considered male friendships very important and thus may have unwittingly promoted same-sex relations among men. Various artistic and written records indicate that male homosexuality was fairly common in China over the centuries, although the exact numbers can never be known. When China began trading and otherwise communicating with Europe during the Ming dynasty, its tolerance for homosexuality shocked and disgusted Catholic missionaries and other Europeans. Some European clergy and scientists even blamed earthquakes and other natural disasters in China on this tolerance.

In addition to this body of work by historians, anthropologists have also studied same-sex relations in small, traditional societies. In many of these societies, homosexuality is both common and accepted as normal sexual behavior. In one overview of seventy-six societies, the authors found that almost two-thirds regarded homosexuality as “normal and socially acceptable for certain members of the community” (Ford & Beach, 1951, p. 130). Among the Azande of East Africa, for example, young warriors live with each other and are not allowed to marry. During this time, they often have sex with younger boys. Among the Sambia of New Guinea, young males live separately from females and have same-sex relations for at least a decade. It is felt that the boys would be less masculine if they continued to live with their mothers and that the semen of older males helps young boys become strong and fierce (Edgerton, 1976).

This brief historical and anthropological overview provides ready evidence of what was said at its outset: Homosexuality has existed since ancient times and in some societies has been rather common or at least fully accepted as a normal form of sexual expression. Although Western society, influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, has largely condemned homosexuality since Western civilization began some 2,000 years ago, the great civilizations of ancient Greece and ancient China and Japan until the industrial age approved of homosexuality. In these civilizations, male homosexuality was fairly common, and female homosexuality was far from unknown. Same-sex relations are also fairly common in many of the societies that anthropologists have studied. Although Western societies have long considered homosexuality sinful and unnatural and more generally have viewed it very negatively, the historical and anthropological record demonstrates that same-sex relationships are far from rare. They thus must objectively be regarded as normal expressions of sexuality.

In fact, some of the most famous individuals in Western political, literary, and artistic history certainly or probably engaged in same-sex relations, either sometimes or exclusively: Alexander the Great, Hans Christian Andersen, Marie Antoinette, Aristotle, Sir Francis Bacon, James Baldwin, Leonard Bernstein, Lord Byron, Julius Caesar, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick the Great, Leonardo de Vinci, Herman Melville, Michelangelo, Plato, Cole Porter, Richard the Lionhearted, Eleanor Roosevelt, Socrates, Gertrude Stein, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Tennessee Williams, Oscar Wilde, and Virginia Woolf, to name just a few. Regardless or perhaps in some cases because of their sexuality, they all made great contributions to the societies in which they lived.

## Explaining Sexual Orientation

We have seen that it is difficult to determine the number of people who are gay/lesbian or bisexual. It is even more difficult to determine why some people have these sexual orientations while most do not, and scholars disagree on the “causes” of sexual orientation (Engle, McFalls, Gallagher, & Curtis, 2006; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007). Determining the origins of sexual orientation is not just an academic exercise. When people believe that the roots of homosexuality are biological or

that gays otherwise do not choose to be gay, they are more likely to have positive or at least tolerant views of same-sex behavior. When they believe that homosexuality is instead merely a personal choice, they are more likely to disapprove of it (Sheldon et al., 2007). For this reason if for no other, it is important to know why some people are gay or bisexual while most are not.

Studies of the origins of sexual orientation focus mostly on biological factors and on social and cultural factors, and a healthy scholarly debate exists on the relative importance of these two sets of factors.

## Biological Factors

Research points to certain genetic and other biological roots of sexual orientation but is by no means conclusive. One line of research concerns genetics. Although no "gay gene" has been discovered, studies of identical twins find they are more likely to have the same sexual orientation (gay or straight) than would be expected from chance alone (Kendler, Thornton, Gilman, & Kessler, 2000; Santtila et al., 2008). Because identical twins have the same DNA, this similarity suggests, but does not prove, a genetic basis for sexual orientation. Keep in mind, however, that any physical or behavioral trait that is *totally* due to genetics should show up in both twins or in neither twin. Because many identical twins do *not* have the same sexual orientation, this dissimilarity suggests that genetics are far from the only cause of sexual orientation, to the extent they cause it at all. Several methodological problems also cast doubt on findings from many of these twin studies. A recent review concluded that the case for a genetic cause of sexual orientation is far from proven: "Findings from genetic studies of homosexuality in humans have been confusing—contradictory at worst and tantalizing at best—with no clear, strong, compelling



Despite scholarly speculation, sexual orientation does not appear to be affected by the level of prenatal hormones. (il-young ko – pregnant – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

Another line of research concerns brain anatomy, as some studies find differences in the size and structure of the hypothalamus, which controls many bodily functions, in the brains of gays versus the brains of straights (Allen & Gorski, 1992). However, other studies find no such differences (Lasco, Jordan, Edgar, Petito, & Byne, 2002). Complicating matters further, because sexual behavior can affect the hypothalamus (Breedlove, 1997), it is difficult to determine whether any differences that might be found reflect the influence of the hypothalamus on sexual orientation, or instead the influence of sexual orientation on the hypothalamus (Sheldon et al., 2007).

A third line of biological research concerns hormonal balance in the womb, with scientists speculating that the level of prenatal androgen affects which sexual orientation develops. Because prenatal androgen levels cannot be measured, studies typically measure it only indirectly in the bodies of gays and straights by comparing the lengths of certain fingers and bones that are thought to be related to prenatal androgen. Some of these studies suggest that gay men had lower levels of prenatal androgen than straight men and that lesbians had higher levels of prenatal androgen than straight women, but other studies find no evidence of this connection (Martin & Nguyen, 2004; Mustanski, Chivers, & Bailey, 2002). A recent review concluded that the results of the hormone studies are "often inconsistent" and that "the notion that non-heterosexual preferences may reflect [deviations from normal prenatal hormonal levels] is not supported by the available data" (Rahman, 2005, p. 1057).

## Social and Cultural Factors

Sociologists usually emphasize the importance of socialization over biology for the learning of many forms of human behavior. In this view, humans are born with "blank slates" and thereafter shaped by their society and culture, and children are shaped by their parents, teachers, peers, and other aspects of their immediate social environment while they are growing up.

Given this standard sociological position, one might think that sociologists generally believe that people are gay or straight not because of their biology but because they learn to be gay or straight from their society, culture, and immediate social environment. This, in fact, was a common belief of sociologists about a generation ago (Engle et al., 2006). In a 1988 review article, two sociologists concluded that "evidence that homosexuality is a social construction [learned from society and culture] is far more powerful than the evidence for a widespread organic [biological] predisposition toward homosexual desire" (Risman & Schwartz, 1988, p. 143). The most popular introductory sociology text of the era similarly declared, "Many people, including some homosexuals, believe that gays and lesbians are simply 'born that way.' But since we know that even heterosexuals are not 'born that way,' this explanation seems unlikely…Homosexuality, like any other sexual behavior ranging from oral sex to sadomasochism to the pursuit of brunettes, is learned" (Robertson, 1987, p. 243).

However, sociologists' views of the origins of sexual orientation have apparently changed since these passages were written. In a recent national survey of a random sample of sociologists, 22 percent said male homosexuality results from biological factors, 38 percent said it results from both biological and environmental (learning) factors, and 39 percent said it results from environmental factors (Engle et al., 2006). Thus 60 percent (= 22 + 38) thought that biology totally or partly explains male homosexuality, almost certainly a much higher figure than would have been found a generation ago had a similar survey been done.

In this regard, it is important to note that 77 percent (= 38 + 39) of the sociologists still feel that environmental factors, or socialization, matter as well. Scholars who hold this view believe that sexual orientation is partly or totally learned from one's society, culture, and immediate social environment. In this way of thinking, we learn "messages" from all these influences about whether it is OK or not OK to be sexually attracted to someone from our own sex and/or to someone from the opposite sex. If we grow up with positive messages about same-sex attraction, we are more likely to acquire this attraction. If we grow up with negative messages about same-sex attraction, we are less likely to acquire it and more likely to have heterosexual desire.

It is difficult to do the necessary type of research to test whether socialization matters in this way, but the historical and cross-cultural evidence discussed earlier provides at least some support for this process. Homosexuality was generally accepted in ancient Greece, ancient China, and ancient Japan, and it also seemed rather common in those societies. The same connection holds true in many of the societies that anthropologists have studied. In contrast, homosexuality was condemned in Europe from the very early part of the first millennium CE, and it seems to have been rather rare (although it is very possible that many gays hid their sexual orientation for fear of persecution and death).

So where does this leave us? What are the origins of sexual orientation? The most honest answer is that we do not yet know its origins. As we have seen, many scholars attribute sexual orientation to still unknown biological factor(s) over which individuals have no control, just as individuals do not decide whether they are left-handed or right-handed. Supporting this view, many gays say they realized they were gay during adolescence, just as straights would say they realized they were straight during their own adolescence; moreover, evidence (from toy, play, and clothing preferences) of future sexual orientation even appears during childhood (Rieger, Linsenmeier, Bailey, & Gygax, 2008). Other scholars say that sexual orientation is at least partly influenced by cultural norms, so that individuals are more likely to identify as gay or straight and be attracted to their same sex or opposite sex depending on the cultural views of sexual orientation into which they are socialized as they grow up. At best, perhaps all we can say is that sexual orientation stems from a complex mix of biological and cultural factors that remain to be determined.

The official stance of the American Psychological Association (APA) is in line with this view. According to the APA, "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation" (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 2).

Although the exact origins of sexual orientation remain unknown, the APA's last statement is perhaps the most important conclusion from research on this issue: Most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation. Because, as mentioned earlier, people are more likely to approve of or tolerate homosexuality when they believe it is not a choice, efforts to

educate the public about this research conclusion should help the public become more accepting of LGBT behavior and individuals.

## Key Takeaways

- An estimated 3.8 percent, or 9 million, Americans identify as LGBT.
- Homosexuality seems to have been fairly common and very much accepted in some ancient societies as well as in many societies studied by anthropologists.
- Scholars continue to debate the extent to which sexual orientation stems more from biological factors or from social and cultural factors and the extent to which sexual orientation is a choice or not a choice.

## For Your Review

1. Do you think sexual orientation is a choice, or not? Explain your answer.
2. Write an essay that describes how your middle school and high school friends talked about sexual orientation generally and homosexuality specifically.

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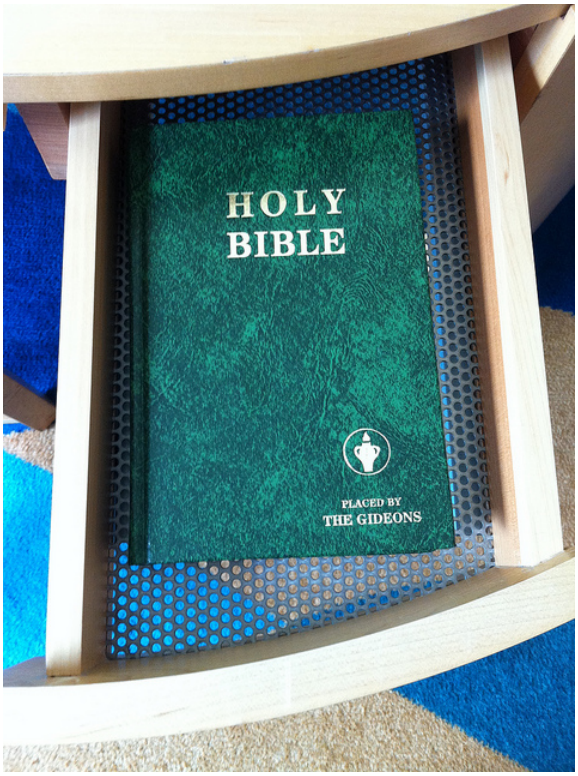
# 6.2: Public Attitudes about Sexual Orientation

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand the extent and correlates of heterosexism.
2. Understand the nature of public opinion on other issues related to sexual orientation.
3. Describe how views about LGBT issues have changed since a few decades ago.

As noted earlier, views about gays and lesbians have certainly been very negative over the centuries in the areas of the world, such as Europe and the Americas, that mostly follow the Judeo-Christian tradition. There is no question that the Bible condemns homosexuality, with perhaps the most quoted Biblical passages in this regard found in Leviticus:

- "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable" (Leviticus 18:22).
- "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads" (Leviticus 20:13).




The Bible contains several passages that appear to condemn homosexuality. (Sean MacEntee – Bible – CC BY 2.0)

The important question, though, is to what extent these passages should be interpreted literally. Certainly very few people today believe that male homosexuals should be executed, despite what Leviticus 20:13 declares. Still, many people who condemn homosexuality cite passages like Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 as reasons for their negative views.

This is not a theology text, but it is appropriate to mention briefly two points that many religious scholars make about what the Bible says about homosexuality (Helminiak, 2000; Via & Gagnon, 2003).Helminiak, D. A. (2000). *What the Bible really says about homosexuality*. Tajique, NM: Alamo Square Press; Via, D. O., & Gagnon, R. A. J. (2003). *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two views*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. First, English translations of the Bible's antigay passages may distort their original meanings, and various contextual studies of the Bible suggest that these passages did not, in fact, make blanket condemnations about homosexuality.

Second, and perhaps more important, most people "pick and choose" what they decide to believe from the Bible and what they decide not to believe. Although the Bible is a great source of inspiration for many people, most individuals are inconsistent when it comes to choosing which Biblical beliefs to believe and about which beliefs not to believe. For example, if someone chooses to disapprove of homosexuality because the Bible condemns it, why does this person not also choose to believe that gay men should

be executed, which is precisely what Leviticus 20:13 dictates? Further, the Bible calls for many practices and specifies many penalties that even very devout people do not follow or believe. For example, most people except for devout Jews do not keep kosher, even though the Bible says that everyone should do this, and most people certainly do not believe people who commit adultery, engage in premarital sex, or work on the Sabbath should be executed, even though the Bible says that such people should be executed. Citing the inconsistency with which most people follow Biblical commands, many religious scholars say it is inappropriate to base public views about homosexuality on what the Bible says about it.

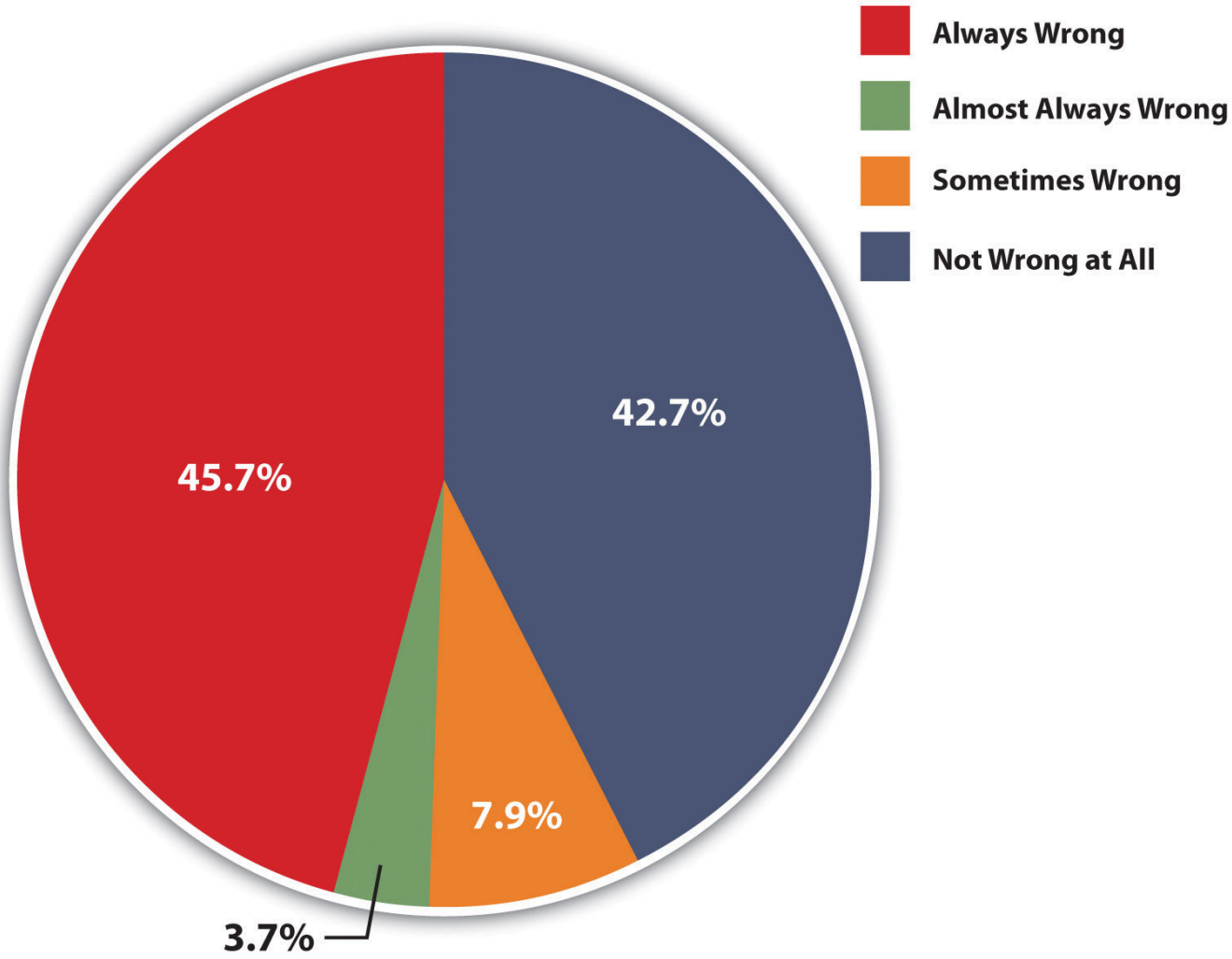
We now turn our attention to social science evidence on views about LGBT behavior and individuals. We first look at negative attitudes and then discuss a few other views.

## The Extent of Heterosexism in the United States

We saw in earlier chapters that *racism* refers to negative views about, and practices toward, people of color, and that *sexism* refers to negative views about, and practices toward, women. **Heterosexism** is the analogous term for negative views about, and discriminatory practices toward, LGBT individuals and their sexual behavior.

There are many types of negative views about LGBT and thus many ways to measure heterosexism. The General Social Survey (GSS), given regularly to a national sample of US residents, asks whether respondents think that "sexual relations between two adults of the same sex" are always wrong, almost always wrong, sometimes wrong, or not wrong at all. In 2010, almost 46 percent of respondents said same-sex relations are "always wrong," and 43 percent responded they are "not wrong at all" (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Opinion about "Sexual Relations between Two Adults of the Same Sex," 2010

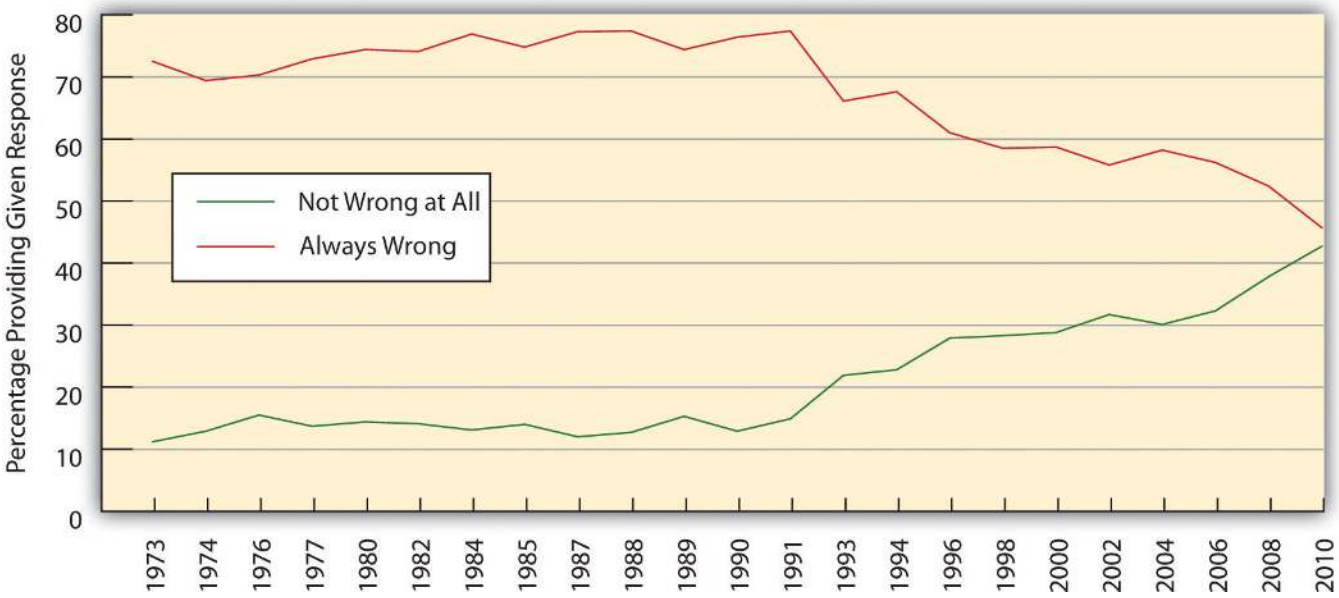



*Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

As another way of measuring heterosexism, the Gallup poll asks whether “gay or lesbian relations” are “morally acceptable or morally wrong” (Gallup, 2011).Gallup. (2011). Gay and lesbian rights. *Gallup*. Retrieved September 4, 2011, from http://www.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx. In 2011, 56 percent of Gallup respondents answered “morally acceptable,” while 39 percent replied “morally wrong.”

Although Figure 5.1 shows that 57.3 percent of Americans (= 45.7 + 3.7 + 7.9) think that same-sex relations are at least sometimes wrong, public views regarding LGBT have notably become more positive over the past few decades. We can see evidence of this trend in Figure 5.2, which shows that the percentage of GSS respondents who say same-sex relations are “always wrong” has dropped considerably since the GSS first asked this question in 1973, while the percentage who respond “not wrong at all” has risen considerably, with both these changes occurring since the early 1990s.

Figure 5.2 Changes in Opinion about “Sexual Relations between Two Adults of the Same Sex,” 1973–2010




*Source: Data from General Social Surveys. (1973–2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

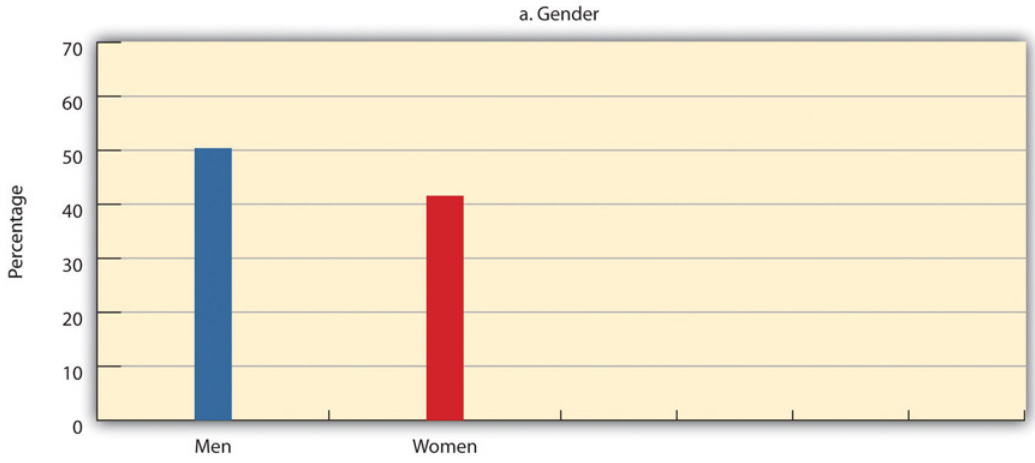
Trends in Gallup data confirm that public views regarding homosexuality have become more positive in recent times. Recall that 56 percent of Gallup respondents in 2011 called same-sex relations “morally acceptable,” while 39 percent replied “morally wrong.” Ten years earlier, these percentages were 40 percent and 53 percent, respectively, representing a marked shift in public opinion in just a decade.

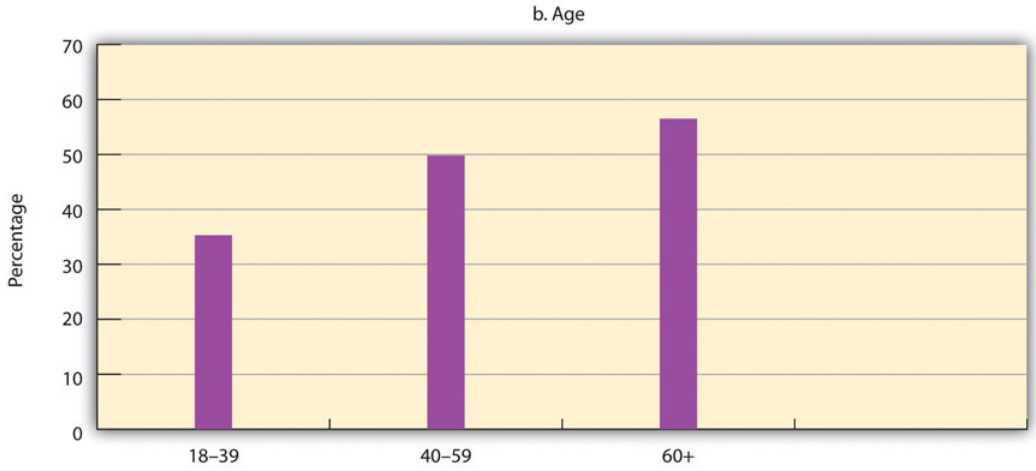
## Correlates of Heterosexism

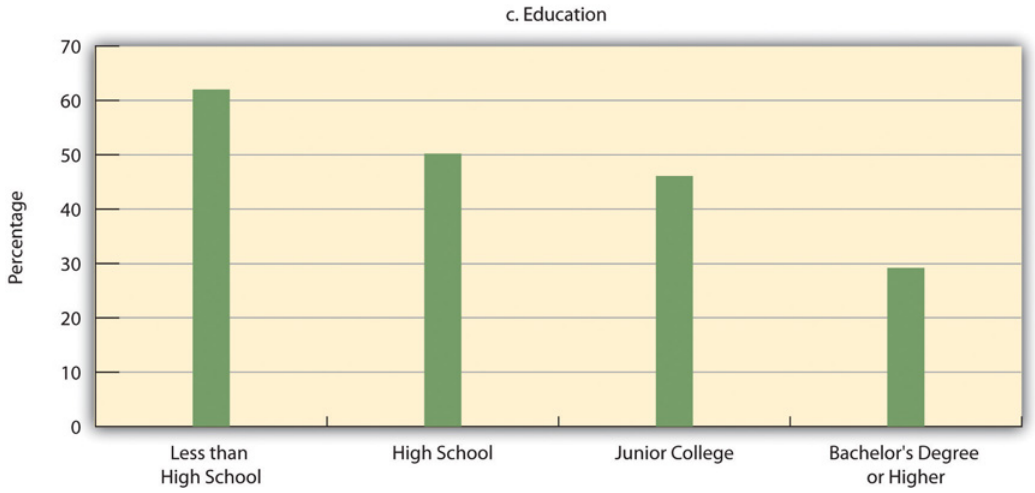
Scholars have investigated the sociodemographic factors that predict heterosexist attitudes. Reflecting the sociological axiom that our social backgrounds influence our attitudes and behavior, several aspects of our social backgrounds influence views about gays and lesbians. Among the most influential of these factors are gender, age, education, region of residence, and religion. We can illustrate each of these influences with the GSS question on whether same-sex relations are wrong, using the response “always wrong” as a measure of heterosexism.

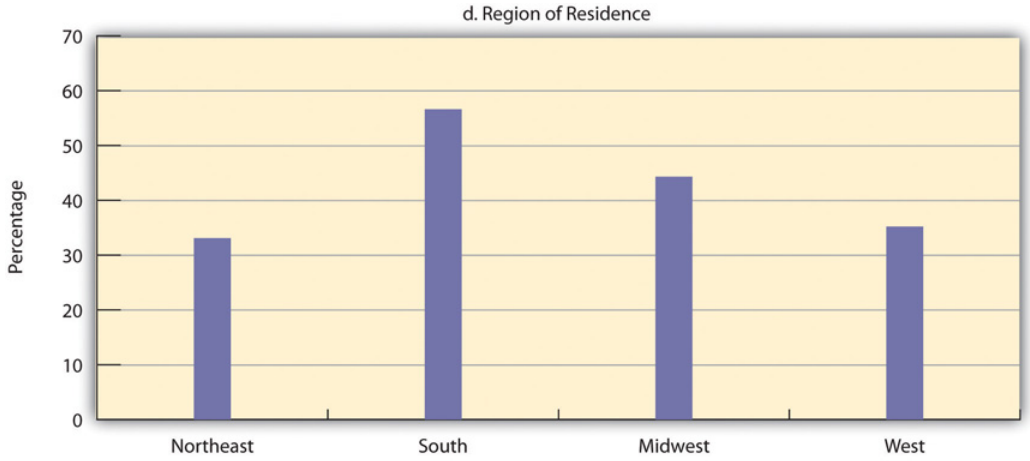
- **Gender.** Men are somewhat more heterosexist than women (see part **a** of Figure 5.3).
- **Age.** Older people are considerably more heterosexist than younger people (see part **b** of Figure 5.3).
- **Education.** Less educated people are considerably more heterosexist than more educated people (see part **c** of Figure 5.3).
- **Region of residence.** Southerners are more heterosexist than non-Southerners (see part **d** ofFigure 5.3).
- **Religion.** Religious people are considerably more heterosexist than less religious people (see part **e** of Figure 5.3).

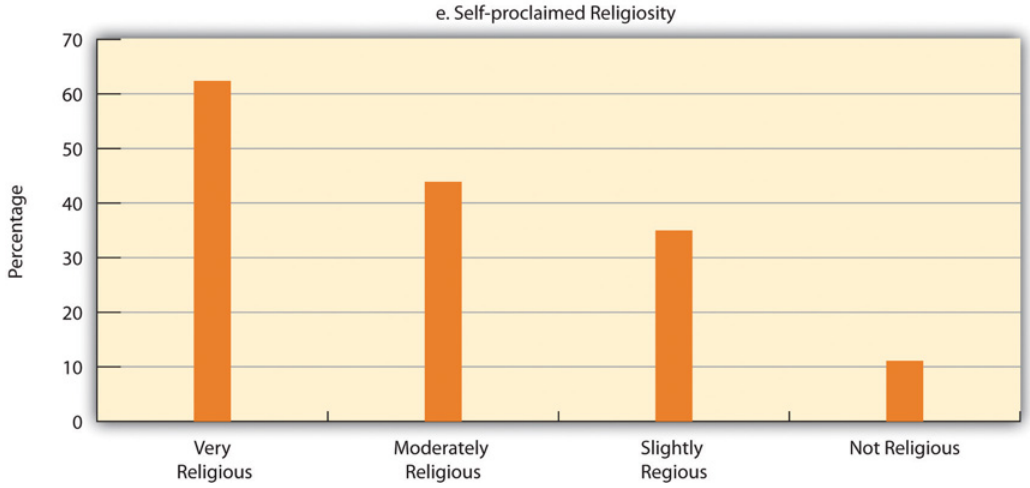
Figure 5.3 Correlates of Heterosexism (Percentage Saying That Same-Sex Relations Are “Always Wrong”)


a. Gender
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Men
Women


b. Age
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
18–39
40–59
60+


c. Education
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Less than High School
High School
Junior College
Bachelor's Degree or Higher




*Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from [http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10](http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10).*



*Because young people are especially likely to be accepting of homosexuality, attitudes about LGBT issues should continue to improve as the older population passes away.*

*© Thinkstock*

The age difference in heterosexism is perhaps particularly interesting. Many studies find that young people—those younger than 30—are especially accepting of homosexuality and of same-sex marriage. As older people, who have more negative views, pass away, it is likely that public opinion as a whole will become more accepting of homosexuality and issues related to it. Scholars think this trend will further the legalization of same-sex marriage and the establishment of other laws and policies that will reduce the discrimination and inequality that the LGBT community experiences (Gelman, Lax, & Phillips, 2010).Gelman, A., Lax, J., & Phillips, J. (2010, August 22). Over time, a gay marriage groundswell. *New York Times*, p. WK3.

## Opinion on the Origins of Sexual Orientation

Earlier we discussed scholarly research on the origins of sexual orientation. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the US public is rather split over the issue of whether sexual orientation is in-born or instead the result of environmental factors, and also over the closely related issue of whether it is something people are able to choose. A 2011 Gallup poll asked, "In your view, is being gay or lesbian something a person is born with, or due to factors such as upbringing and environment?" (Jones, 2011).Jones, Jeffrey M. (2011). Support for legal gay relations hits new high. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/147785/Support-Legal-Gay-Relations-Hits-New-High.aspx. Forty percent of respondents replied that sexual orientation is in-born, while 42 percent said it stems from upbringing and/or environment. The 40 percent in-born figure represented a sharp increase from the 13 percent figure that Gallup obtained when it first asked this question in 1977. A 2010 CBS News poll, asked, "Do you think being homosexual is something people choose to be, or do you think it is something they cannot change?" (CBS News, 2010).CBS News. (2010, June 9). CBS News poll: Views of gays and lesbians. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/poll_gays_lesbians_060910.pdf. About 36 percent of respondents replied that homosexuality is a choice, while 51 percent said it is something that cannot be changed, with the remainder saying they did not know or providing

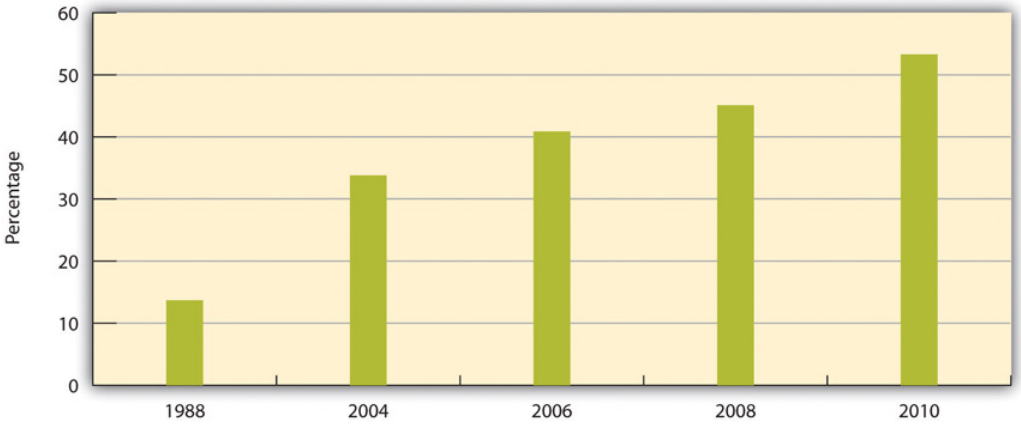
no answer. The 51 percent “cannot change” figure represented an increase from the 43 percent figure that CBS News obtained when it first asked this question in 1993.

## Other Views

The next section discusses several issues that demonstrate inequality based on sexual orientation. Because these issues are so controversial, public opinion polls have included many questions about them. We examine public views on some of these issues in this section.

A first issue is same-sex marriage. The 2010 GSS asked whether respondents agree that “homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another”: 53.3 percent of respondents who expressed an opinion agreed with this statement, and 46.7 percent disagreed, indicating a slight majority in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage (SDA, 2010).SDA. (2010). GSS 1972–2010 cumulative datafile. Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10. In 2011, an ABC News/Washington Post poll asked about same-sex marriage in a slightly different way: “Do you think it should be legal or illegal for gay and lesbian couples to get married?” A majority, 51 percent, of respondents replied “legal,” and 45 percent replied “illegal” (Langer, 2011).Langer, Gary. (2011). Support for gay marriage reaches a milestone. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/support-gay-marriage-reaches-milestone-half-americans-support/story?id=13159608#.T66_kp9YtQp. Although only bare majorities now favor legalizing same-sex marriage, public views on this issue have become much more positive in recent years. We can see dramatic evidence of this trend in Figure 5.4, which shows that the percentage agreeing with the GSS question on the right of same-sex couples to marry has risen considerably during the past quarter-century.

Figure 5.4 Changes in Opinion about Same-Sex Marriage, 1988–2010 (Percentage Agreeing That Same-Sex Couples Should Have the Right to Marry; Those Expressing No Opinion Excluded from Analysis)




*Source: Data from General Social Surveys. (1988–2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.*

In a related topic, public opinion about same-sex couples as parents has also become more favorable in recent years. In 2007, 50 percent of the public said that the increasing number of same-sex couples raising children was “a bad thing” for society. By 2011, this figure had declined to 35 percent, a remarkable decrease in just four years (Pew Research Center, 2011).Pew Research Center. (2011). 35%—Disapprove of gay and lesbian couples raising children. Retrieved from http://pewresearch.org/databank/dailynumber/?NumberID=1253.

A second LGBT issue that has aroused public debate involves the right of gays and lesbians to serve in the military, which we discuss further later in this chapter. A 2010 ABC News/Washington Post poll asked whether “gays and lesbians who do not publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military” (Mokrzycki, 2010).Mokrzycki, Mike. (2010). Support for gays in the military crosses ideological, party lines. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/poll-support-gays-military-crosses-ideological-party-lines/story?id=9811516#.T67A659YtQo. About 83 percent of respondents replied they “should be allowed,” up considerably from the 63 percent figure that this poll obtained when it first asked this question in 1993 (Saad, 2008).Saad, Lydia. (2008). Americans evenly divided on morality of homosexuality. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/108115/americans-evenly-divided-morality-homosexuality.aspx.

A third issue involves the right of gays and lesbians to be free from job discrimination based on their sexual orientation, as federal law does *not* prohibit such discrimination. A 2008 Gallup poll asked whether “homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities.” About 89 percent of respondents replied that there “should be” such rights, and only 8 percent said

there “should not be” such rights. The 89 percent figure represented a large increase from the 56 percent figure that Gallup obtained in 1977 when Gallup first asked this question.

## Two Brief Conclusions on Public Attitudes

We have had limited space to discuss public views on LGBT topics, but two brief conclusions are apparent from the discussion. First, although the public remains sharply divided on various LGBT issues and much of the public remains heterosexist, views about LGBT behavior and certain rights of the LGBT community have become markedly more positive in recent decades. This trend matches what we saw in earlier chapters regarding views concerning people of color and women. The United States has without question become less racist, less sexist, and less heterosexist since the 1970s.

Second, certain aspects of people’s sociodemographic backgrounds influence the extent to which they do, or do not, hold heterosexist attitudes. This conclusion is not surprising, as sociology has long since demonstrated that social backgrounds influence many types of attitudes and behaviors, but the influence we saw earlier of sociodemographic factors on heterosexism was striking nonetheless. These factors would no doubt also be relevant for understanding differences in views on other LGBT issues. As you think about your own views, perhaps you can recognize why you might hold these views based on your gender, age, education, and other aspects of your social background.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Views about LGBT behavior have improved markedly since a generation ago. More than half the US public now supports same-sex marriage.
- Males, older people, the less educated, Southerners, and the more religious exhibit higher levels of heterosexism than their counterparts.

### FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Reread this section and indicate how you would have responded to every survey question discussed in the section. Drawing on the discussion of correlates of heterosexism, explain how knowing about these correlates helps you understand why you hold your own views.
2. Why do you think public opinion about LGBT behavior and issues has become more positive during the past few decades?

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# 6.3: Inequality Based on Sexual Orientation

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand the behavioral, psychological, and health effects of bullying and other mistreatment of the LGBT community.
2. Evaluate the arguments for and against same-sex marriage.
3. Provide three examples of heterosexual privilege.

Until just a decade ago, individuals who engaged in consensual same-sex relations could be arrested in many states for violating so-called sodomy laws. The US Supreme Court, which had upheld such laws in 1986, finally outlawed them in 2003 in *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 US 558, by a 6–3 vote. The majority opinion of the court declared that individuals have a constitutional right under the Fourteenth Amendment to engage in consensual, private sexual activity.



Until the Supreme Court's *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling just a decade ago, individuals who engaged in consensual same-sex relations could be arrested in many states. (philippe leroyer – Kiss In (08) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

Despite this landmark ruling, the LGBT community continues to experience many types of problems. In this regard, sexual orientation is a significant source of social inequality, just as race/ethnicity, gender, and social class are sources of social inequality. We examine manifestations of inequality based on sexual orientation in this section.

## Bullying and Violence

The news story that began this chapter concerned the reported beatings of two gay men. Bullying and violence against adolescents and adults thought or known to be gay or lesbian constitute perhaps the most serious manifestation of inequality based on sexual orientation. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2011),Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). *Crime in the United States, 2010*. Washington, DC: Author. 1,277 hate crimes (violence and/or property destruction) against gays and lesbians occurred in 2010, although this number is very likely an underestimate because many hate crime victims do not report their victimization to the police. An estimated 25 percent of gay men have been physically or sexually assaulted because of their sexual orientation (Egan, 2010),Egan, P. J. (2010, spring). Within reach: Reducing LGBT inequality in the age of Obama. *Pathways: A Magazine on Poverty, Inequality, and Social Policy*, 22–25. and some have been murdered. Matthew Shepard was one of these victims. He was a student at the University of Wyoming in October 1998 when he was kidnapped by two young men who tortured him, tied him to a fence, and left him to die. When found almost a day later, he was in a coma, and he died a few days later. Shepard's murder prompted headlines around the country and is credited with winning public sympathy for the problems experienced by the LGBT community (Loffreda, 2001).Loffreda, B. (2001). *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and politics in the aftermath of anti-gay murder*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Gay teenagers and straight teenagers thought to be gay are very often the targets of taunting, bullying, physical assault, and other abuse in schools and elsewhere (Denizet-Lewis, 2009).Denizet-Lewis, B. (2009, September 27). Coming out in middle school. *New York Times Magazine*, p. MM36ff. Survey evidence indicates that 85 percent of LGBT students report being verbally harassed at school, and 40 percent report being verbally harassed; 72 percent report hearing antigay slurs frequently or often at school; 61

percent feel unsafe at school, with 30 percent missing at least one day of school in the past month for fear of their safety; and 17 percent are physically assaulted to the point they need medical attention (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Diaz, E. M., & Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2010). *The 2009 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

The bullying, violence, and other mistreatment experienced by gay teens have significant educational and mental health effects. The most serious consequence is suicide, as a series of suicides by gay teens in fall 2010 reminded the nation. During that period, three male teenagers in California, Indiana, and Texas killed themselves after reportedly being victims of antigay bullying, and a male college student also killed himself after his roommate broadcast a live video of the student making out with another male (Talbot, 2010).Talbot, M. (2010, October 25). Pride and prejudice. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com.

In other effects, LGBT teens are much more likely than their straight peers to skip school; to do poorly in their studies; to drop out of school; and to experience depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Mental Health America, 2011).Mental Health America. (2011). Bullying and gay youth. Retrieved from http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=CA866DCF-1372-4D20-C8EB26EEB30B9982. These mental health problems tend to last at least into their twenties (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011).Russell, S. T., Ryan, C., Toomey, R. B., Diaz, R. M., & Sanchez, J. (2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescent school victimization: implications for young adult health and adjustment. *Journal of School Health, 81*(5), 223–230. According to a 2011 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), LGBT teens are also much more likely to engage in risky and/or unhealthy behaviors such as using tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, having unprotected sex, and even not using a seatbelt (Kann et al., 2011).Kann, L., Olsen, E. O. M., McManus, T., Kinchen, S., Chyen, D., Harris, W. A., et al. (2011). Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12—Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Selected Sites, United States, 2001–2009. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 60*(June 10), 1–133. Commenting on the report, a CDC official said, "This report should be a wake-up call. We are very concerned that these students face such dramatic disparities for so many different health risks" (Melnick, 2011).Melnick, M. (2011, June 6). CDC: Why gay and bisexual teens are more likely to risk their health. *Time*. Retrieved from http://healthland.time.com/2011/2006/2006/cdc-gay-and-bisexual-teens-are-more-likely-to-risk-their-health/.

Ironically, despite the bullying and other mistreatment that LBGT teens receive at school, they are much more likely to be disciplined for misconduct than straight students accused of similar misconduct. This disparity is greater for girls than for boys. The reasons for the disparity remain unknown but may stem from unconscious bias against gays and lesbians by school officials. As a scholar in educational psychology observed, "To me, it is saying there is some kind of internal bias that adults are not aware of that is impacting the punishment of this group" (St. George, 2010).St. George, D. (2010, December 6). Gay and lesbian teens are punished more at school, by police, study says. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/06/AR2010120600035.html.



*This candlelight vigil honored the memory of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, who was tortured, tied, to a fence, and left to die in Wyoming in 1998. He was in a coma when he was found and died a few days later.*

*Image courtesy of Elvert Barnes, http://www.flickr.com/photos/perspective/15010502/.*

## Children and Our Future

The Homeless Status of LGBT Teens

Many LGBT teens are taunted, bullied, and otherwise mistreated at school. As the text discusses, this mistreatment affects their school performance and psychological well-being, and some even drop out of school as a result. We often think of the home as a haven from the realities of life, but the lives of many gay teens are often no better at home. If they come out (disclose their sexual orientation) to their parents, one or both parents often reject them. Sometimes they kick their teen out of the home, and sometimes the teen leaves because the home environment has become intolerable. Regardless of the reason, a large number of LGBT teens become homeless. They may be living in the streets, but they may also be living with a friend, at a homeless shelter, or at some other venue. But the bottom line is that they are not living at home with a parent.

The actual number of homeless LGBT teens will probably never be known, but a study in Massachusetts of more than 6,300 high school students was the first to estimate the prevalence of their homelessness using a representative sample. The study found that 25 percent of gay or lesbian teens and 15 percent of bisexual teens are homeless in the state, compared to only 3 percent of heterosexual teens. Fewer than 5 percent of the students in the study identified themselves as LGB, but they accounted for 19 percent of all the homeless students who were surveyed. Regardless of their sexual orientation, some homeless teens live with a parent or guardian, but the study found that homeless LGBT teens were more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to be living without a parent.

Being homeless adds to the problems that many LGBT teens already experience. Regardless of sexual orientation, homeless people of all ages are at greater risk for victimization by robbers and other offenders, hunger, substance abuse, and mental health problems.

The study noted that LGBT teen homelessness may be higher in other states because attitudes about LGBT status are more favorable in Massachusetts than in many other states. Because the study was administered to high school students, it may have

undercounted LGBT teens, who are more likely to be absent from school.

These methodological limitations should not obscure the central message of the study as summarized by one of its authors: “The high risk of homelessness among sexual minority teens is a serious problem requiring immediate attention. These teens face enormous risks and all types of obstacles to succeeding in school and are in need of a great deal of assistance.”

*Sources:* Connolly, 2011; Corliss, Goodenow, Nichols, & Austin, 2011Connolly, C. (2011, July 21). 1 in 4 gay/lesbian high school students are homeless. *EurekaAlert*. Retrieved September 8, 2011, from http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2011-07/chb-1i4072111.php; Corliss, H. L., Goodenow, C. S., Nichols, L., & Austin, S. B. (2011). High burden of homelessness among sexual-minority adolescents: Findings from a representative Massachusetts high school sample. *American Journal of Public Health, 101*, 1683–1689.

## Employment Discrimination

Federal law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, nationality, sex, or religion. Notice that this list does *not* include sexual orientation. It is entirely legal under federal law for employers to refuse to hire LGBT individuals or those perceived as LGBT, to fire an employee who is openly LGBT or perceived as LGBT, or to refuse to promote such an employee. Twenty-one states do prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, but that leaves twenty-nine states that do not prohibit such discrimination. Employers in these states are entirely free to refuse to hire, fire, or refuse to promote LGBT people (openly LGBT or perceived as LGBT) as they see fit. In addition, only fifteen states prohibit employment discrimination based on gender identity (transgender), which leaves thirty-five states in which employers may practice such discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2011).Human Rights Campaign. (2011). Laws: Employment non-discrimination act. Retrieved September 5, 2011, from http://www.hrc.org/.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would prohibit job discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, has been proposed in Congress but has not come close to passing. In response to the absence of legal protection for LGBT employees, many companies have instituted their own policies. As of March 2011, 87 percent of the *Fortune* 500 companies, the largest 500 corporations in the United States, had policies prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination, and 46 percent had policies prohibiting gender identity discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2011).Human Rights Campaign. (2011). Laws: Employment non-discrimination act. Retrieved September 5, 2011, from http://www.hrc.org/.

National survey evidence shows that many LGBT people have, in fact, experienced workplace discrimination (Sears & Mallory, 2011).Sears, B., & Mallory, C. (2011). *Documented evidence of employment discrimination & its effects on LGBT people*. Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute. In the 2008 GSS, 27.1 percent of LGB respondents said they had been verbally harassed at work during the past five years, and 7.1 percent said they had been either fired or not hired during the same period (SDA, 2008).SDA. (2008). GSS 1972–2010 cumulative datafile. Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10. In other surveys that are not based on nationally representative samples, the percentage of LGB respondents who report workplace harassment or discrimination exceeds the GSS’s figures. Not surprisingly, more than one-third of LGB employees say they conceal their sexual orientation in their workplace. Transgender people appear to experience more employment problems than LGB people, as 78 percent of transgender respondents in one study reported some form of workplace harassment or discrimination. Scholars have also conducted field experiments in which they send out resumes or job applicants to prospective employers. The resumes are identical except that some mention the applicant is LGB, while the others do not indicate sexual orientation. The job applicants similarly either say they are LGB or do not say this. The LGB resumes and applicants are less likely than their non-LGB counterparts to receive a positive response from prospective employers.

LGBT people who experience workplace harassment and discrimination suffer in other ways as well (Sears & Mallory, 2011).Sears, B., & Mallory, C. (2011). *Documented evidence of employment discrimination & its effects on LGBT people*. Los Angeles, LA: Williams Institute. Compared to LGBT employees who do not experience these problems, they are more likely to have various mental health issues, to be less satisfied with their jobs, and to have more absences from work.

### Applying Social Research

How Well Do the Children of Same-Sex Couples Fare?

Many opponents of same-sex marriage claim that children are better off if they are raised by both a mother and a father and that children of same-sex couples fare worse as a result. As the National Organization for Marriage (National Organization for Marriage, 2011)National Organization for Marriage. (2011). Same-sex marriage: Answering the toughest questions. Retrieved September 8, 2011, from

http://www.nationformarriage.org/site/c.omL2KeN0LzH/b.4475595/k.566A/Marriage_Talking_Points.htm. states, “Two men might each be a good father, but neither can be a mom. The ideal for children is the love of their own mom and dad. No same-sex couple can provide that.”

Addressing this contention, social scientists have studied the children of same-sex couples and compared them to the children of heterosexual parents. Although it is difficult to have random, representative samples of same-sex couples’ children, a growing number of studies find that these children fare at least as well psychologically and in other respects as heterosexual couples’ children.

Perhaps the most notable published paper in this area appeared in the *American Sociological Review*, the preeminent sociology journal, in 2001. The authors, Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz, reviewed almost two dozen studies that had been done of same-sex couples’ children. All these studies yielded the central conclusion that the psychological well-being of these children is no worse than that of heterosexual couples’ children. As the authors summarized this conclusion and its policy implications, “Because every relevant study to date shows that parental sexual orientation per se has no measurable effect on the quality of parent-child relationships or on children’s mental health or social adjustment, there is no evidentiary basis for considering parental sexual orientation in decisions about children’s ‘best interest.’”

Biblarz and Stacey returned to this issue in a 2010 article in the Journal of Marriage and the Family, the preeminent journal in its field. This time they reviewed almost three dozen studies published since 1990 that compared the children of same-sex couples (most of them lesbian parents) to those of heterosexual couples. They again found that the psychological well-being and social adjustment of same-sex couples’ children was at least as high as those of heterosexual couples’ children, and they even found some evidence that children of lesbian couples fare better in some respects than those of heterosexual couples. Although the authors acknowledged that two parents are generally better for children than one parent, they concluded that the sexual orientation of the parents makes no difference overall. As they summarized the body of research on this issue: “Research consistently has demonstrated that despite prejudice and discrimination children raised by lesbians develop as well as their peers. Across the standard panoply of measures, studies find far more similarities than differences among children with lesbian and heterosexual parents, and the rare differences mainly favor the former.”

This body of research, then, contributes in important ways to the national debate on same-sex marriage. If children of same-sex couples indeed fare well, as the available evidence indicates, concern about these children’s welfare should play no part in this debate.

## Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage has been one of the most controversial social issues in recent years. Nearly 650,000 same-sex couples live together in the United States (Gates, 2012).Gates, G. J. (2012). Same-Sex Couples in Census 2010: Race and Ethnicity. *Williams Institute*. Retrieved May 29, 2012, from http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-CouplesRaceEthnicity-April-2012.pdf. Many of them would like to marry, but most are not permitted by law to marry. In May 2012, President Obama endorsed same-sex marriage.





*The issue of same-sex marriage has aroused much controversy in recent years. As of June 2012, same-sex couples could marry in only seven states and the District of Columbia.*

*© Thinkstock*

We saw earlier that a narrow margin of Americans now favors the right of same-sex couples to marry, and that public opinion in favor of same-sex marriage has increased greatly in recent times. As of June 2012, same-sex marriage was legal in seven states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington) and the District of Columbia. Nine other states permitted same-sex couples to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, which provide some or many of the various legal benefits that married spouses enjoy. In the remaining thirty-five states, same-sex couples may not legally

marry or form civil unions or domestic partnerships. The federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), passed in 1996 (and under legal dispute at the time of this writing), prohibits federal recognition of same-sex marriage. This means that even when same-sex couples legally marry because their state allows them to, they do not enjoy the various federal tax, inheritance, and other benefits that married couples enjoy. Most of the states that do not allow same-sex marriage also have laws that prohibit recognition of same-sex marriages performed in the states that allow them.

**Arguments against same-sex marriage.** Opponents of same-sex marriage make at least three central points (Emrich, 2009; National Organization for Marriage, 2011).Emrich, B. (2009, September 2). Same-sex marriage would be harmful to society. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from http://bangordailynews.com/2009/2009/2001/opinion/samesex-marriage-would-be-harmful-to-society/; National Organization for Marriage. (2011). Marriage talking points. Retrieved September 5, 2011, from http://www.nationformarriage.org/site/c.omL2KeN0LzH/b.4475595/k.566A/Marriage_Talking_Points.htm. First, and in no particular order, marriage is intended to procreate the species, and same-sex couples cannot reproduce. Second, the children that same-sex couples do have through adoption or artificial means experience various psychological problems because their parents are gay or lesbian and/or because they do not have both a father and a mother. Third, allowing gays and lesbians to marry would undermine the institution of marriage.

**Arguments for same-sex marriage.** In reply, proponents of same-sex marriage make their own points (Barkan, Marks, & Milardo, 2009; Human Rights Campaign, 2009).Barkan, S., Marks, S., & Milardo, R. (2009, September 22). Same-sex couples are families, too. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from http://www.bangordailynews.com/detail/121751.html; Human Rights Campaign. (2009). *Answers to questions about marriage equality*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign. First, many heterosexual couples are allowed to marry even though they will not have children, either because they are not able to have them, because they do not wish to have them, or because they are beyond childbearing age. Second, studies show that children of same-sex couples are at least as psychologically healthy as the children of opposite-sex couples (see Note 5.12 "Children and Our Future"). Third, there is no evidence that legalizing same-sex marriage has weakened the institution of marriage in the few states and other nations that have legalized it (see Note 5.14 "Lessons from Other Societies").

## Lessons from Other Societies

Same-Sex Marriage in the Netherlands

At the time of this writing, same-sex marriage was legal in ten nations: Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, and Sweden. All these nations have legalized it since 2001, when the Netherlands became the first country to do so. Because more than a decade has passed since this notable event, it is informative to examine how, if at all, legalization has affected the lives of gays and lesbians and the institution of marriage itself in the Netherlands.

One thing is clear: There is no evidence that the institution of marriage in the Netherlands has in any respect become weaker because same-sex couples have been allowed to marry since 2001. Heterosexual couples continue to marry, and the institution appears at least as strong as it was before 2001. It also seems clear that same-sex marriages are working and that same-sex married couples' unions are accepted as normal features of contemporary Dutch life. As Vera Bergkamp, a gay rights leader in the Netherlands said, "Gay marriage is Holland's best export because we have shown that it is possible."

In an interesting development, same-sex couples have not exactly rushed to marry. There was an initial spurt in 2001, and many such couples have married since. However, the Dutch government estimates that only 20 percent of same-sex couples have married compared to 80 percent of heterosexual couples.

Three reasons may account for this disparity. First, there is less pressure from family and friends for same-sex couples to marry than for heterosexual couples to marry. As Bergkamp put it, "For heterosexuals, it's normal when you're in a steady relationship for more than a year, that a lot of people start asking, 'well when are you getting married?' With two women or two men you don't get that yet." Second, fewer same-sex couples than heterosexual couples decide to marry in order to have children. Third, gays and lesbians in the Netherlands are thought to be somewhat more individualistic than their heterosexual counterparts.

The same-sex couples who have married in the Netherlands seem happy to have done so, at least according to anecdotal evidence. As one same-sex spouse reflected on her marriage, "It was a huge step. For me it was incredible…I'd been to my brother's wedding and my sister's wedding and their spouses were welcomed into the family. Now finally I was able to have my family take my partner in. The moment we got married there was a switch, she was now one of us."

The experience of the Netherlands is mirrored in the other nine nations that have legalized same-sex marriage. Legalization seems to be working from all accounts, and the institution of marriage seems to be thriving at least as well as in other nations. As the first

openly gay member of the Dutch parliament who played a key role in legalization wryly described its outcome, “Heterosexual couples did not turn away from the institution of marriage, and nor did the world isolate my country. After the Netherlands acted, civilization as we know it didn’t end.” As the United States continues to debate same-sex marriage, it has much to learn from the Netherlands and the other nations that have legalized this form of marriage.

*Sources:* Ames, 2011; Badgett, 2009; Dittrich, 2011Ames, P. (2011, April 20). Dutch gays don’t take advantage of opportunity to marry. *GlobalPost*. Retrieved from http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/benelux/110419/netherlands-gay-rights-same-sex-marriage; Badgett, M. V. L. (2009). *When gay people get married: What happens when societies legalize same-sex marriage*. New York, NY: New York University Press; Dittrich, B. O. (2011, April 17). Gay marriage’s diamond anniversary: After the Netherlands acted, civilization as we know it didn’t end. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/17/opinion/la-oe-dittrich-gay-marriage-20110417.

Although the children of same-sex couples fare at least as well as those of heterosexual couples, it is still difficult in many states for same-sex couples to adopt a child. Two states at the time of this writing, Mississippi and Utah, prohibit adoptions by same-sex couples, but half of the other states make it very difficult for these adoptions to occur (Tavernise, 2011).Tavernise, S. (2011, July 14). Adoptions rise by same-sex couples, despite legal barriers. *New York Times* , p. A11. For example, in some states social workers are required to prefer married heterosexual couples over same-sex couples in adoption decisions. Moreover, several states require that a couple must be married to be adopted; in these states, a single gay or lesbian may adopt, but not a same-sex couple. Still, adoptions by same-sex couples have become more numerous in recent years because of the number of children waiting for adoption and because public opinion about gays and lesbians has become more favorable.

## Costs of the Illegality of Same-Sex Marriage

Marriage provides many legal rights, benefits, and responsibilities for the two spouses. Because same-sex couples are not allowed to marry in most states and, even if they do marry, are currently denied federal recognition of their marriage, they suffer materially in numerous ways. In fact, there are more than 1,000 federal rights that heterosexual married couples receive that no married same-sex couple is allowed to receive (Shell, 2011).Shell, A. (2011, July 22). Legal gay marriage doesn’t end money headaches. *USA Today*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/money/perfi/index.

We have space here to list only a few of the many costs that the illegality of same-sex marriage imposes on same-sex couples who cannot marry and on the same-sex couples whose marriages are not federally recognized (Human Rights Campaign, 2009):Human Rights Campaign. (2009). *Answers to questions about marriage equality*. Washington, DC: Author.

- Spouses have visitation rights if one of them is hospitalized as well as the right to make medical decisions if one spouse is unable to do so; same-sex couples do not have these visitation rights.
- Same-sex couples cannot file joint federal tax returns or joint state tax returns (in the states that do not recognize same-sex marriage), potentially costing each couple thousands of dollars every year in taxes they would not have to pay if they were able to file jointly.
- Spouses receive Social Security survivor benefits averaging more than $5,500 annually when a spouse dies; same-sex couples do not receive these benefits.
- Many employers who provide health insurance coverage for the spouse of an employee do not provide this coverage for a same-sex partner; when they do provide this coverage, the employee must pay taxes on the value of the coverage.
- When a spouse dies, the surviving spouse inherits the deceased spouse’s property without paying estate taxes; the surviving partner of a same-sex couple must pay estate taxes.

Notice that many of these costs are economic. It is difficult to estimate the exact economic costs of the illegality of same-sex marriage, but one analysis estimated that these costs can range from $41,000 to as much as $467,000 over the lifetime of a same-sex couple, depending on their income, state of residence, and many other factors (Bernard & Leber, 2009).Bernard, T. S., & Leber, R. (2009, October 3). The high price of being a gay couple. *New York Times*, p. A1.

## Military Service

LGBT individuals traditionally were not permitted to serve in the US military. If they remained in the closet (hid evidence of their sexual orientation), of course, they could serve with impunity, but many gays and lesbians in the military were given dishonorable discharges when their sexual orientation was discovered. Those who successfully remained in the closet lived under continual fear that their sexual orientation would become known and they would be ousted from the military.

As a presidential candidate in 1992, Bill Clinton said he would end the ban on LGBT people in the military. After his election, his intention to do so was met with fierce opposition by military leaders, much of the Congress, and considerable public opinion. As a compromise, in 1993 the government established the so-called don't-ask, don't-tell (DADT) policy. DADT protected members of the military from being asked about their sexual orientation, but it also stipulated that they would be discharged from the military if they made statements or engaged in behavior that indicated an LGBT orientation. Because DADT continued the military ban on LGBT people, proponents of allowing them to serve in the military opposed the policy and continued to call for the elimination of any restrictions regarding sexual orientation for military service.

In response to a lawsuit, a federal judge in 2010 ruled that DADT was unconstitutional. Meanwhile, Barack Obama had also called for the repeal of DADT, both as a presidential candidate and then as president. In late 2010, Congress passed legislation repealing DADT, and President Obama signed the legislation, which took effect in September 2011. Official discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military has thus ended, and they may now serve openly in the nation's armed forces. It remains to be seen, however, whether they will be able to serve without facing negative experiences such as verbal and physical abuse.

## Physical and Mental Health

It is well known that HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) racked the LGBT community beginning in the 1980s. Many gays and lesbians eventually died from AIDS-related complications, and HIV and AIDS remain serious illnesses for gays and straights alike. An estimated 1.2 million Americans now have HIV, and about 35,000 have AIDS. Almost 50,000 Americans are diagnosed with HIV annually, and more than half of these new cases are men who have had sex with other men. Fortunately, HIV can now be controlled fairly well by appropriate medical treatment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Basic information about HIV and AIDS. Retrieved Septembr 6, 2011, from http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/basic/index.htm.

It is less well known that LGBT adults have higher rates than straight adults of other physical health problems and also of mental health problems (Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2011; Institute of Medicine, 2011).Frost, D. M., Lehavot, K., & Meyer, I. H. (2011). *Minority stress and physical health among sexual minorities*. Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute; Institute of Medicine. (2011). *The health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people: Building a foundation for better understanding*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. These problems are thought to stem from the stress that the LGBT community experiences from living in a society in which they frequently encounter verbal and physical harassment, job discrimination, a need for some to conceal their sexual identity, and lack of equal treatment arising from the illegality of same-sex marriage. We saw earlier that LGBT secondary school students experience various kinds of educational and mental health issues because of the mistreatment they encounter. By the time LGBT individuals reach their adult years, the various stressors they have experienced at least since adolescence have begun to take a toll on their physical and mental health.



*The stress of being LGBT in a society that disapproves of this sexual orientation is thought to account for the greater likelihood of LGBT people to have physical and mental health problems.*

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Because stress is thought to compromise immune systems, LGBT individuals on the average have lower immune functioning and lower perceived physical health than straight individuals. Because stress impairs mental health, they are also more likely to have higher rates of depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, and other psychiatric and psychological problems, including a tendency to attempt suicide (Sears & Mallory, 2011).Sears, B., & Mallory, C. (2011). *Documented evidence of employment discrimination & its effects on LGBT people*. Los Angeles, LA: Williams Institute. Among all LGBT individuals, those who have experienced greater levels of stress related to their sexual orientation have higher levels of physical and mental health problems than those who have experienced lower levels of stress. It is important to keep in mind that these various physical and mental health problems do not stem from an LGBT sexual orientation in and of itself, but rather from the experience of living as an LGBT individual in a *homophobic* (disliking LGBT behavior and individuals) society.

Despite the health problems that LGBT people experience, medical students do not learn very much about these problems. A recent survey of medical school deans found that one-third of medical schools provide no clinical training about these health issues, and that students in the medical schools that do provide training still receive only an average of five hours of training (Obedin-Maliver et al., 2011).Obedin-Maliver, J., Goldsmith, E. S., Stewart, L., White, W., Tran, E., Brenman, S., et al. (2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender–related content in undergraduate medical education. *JAMA*, *306*(9), 971–977. The senior author of the study commented on its findings, “It’s great that a lot of schools are starting to teach these topics. But the conversation needs to go deeper. We heard from the deans that a lot of these important LGBT health topics are completely off the radar screens of many medical schools” (White, 2011).White, T. (2011). LGBT health issues not being taught at medical schools, Stanford study finds. *EurekaAlert*. Retrieved September 7, 2011, from http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2011-09/sumc-lhi083111.php.

## Heterosexual Privilege

In earlier chapters, we discussed the related concepts of *white privilege* and *male privilege*. To recall, simply because they are white, whites can go through their daily lives without worrying about or experiencing the many kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle negative events that people of color experience. Moreover, simply because they are male, men can go through their daily lives without worrying about or experiencing the many kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle negative events that women experience. Whether or not they are conscious of it, therefore, whites and men are automatically privileged compared to people of color and women, respectively.

An analogous concept exists in the study of sexual orientation and inequality. This concept is **heterosexual privilege**, which refers to the many advantages that heterosexuals (or people perceived as heterosexuals) enjoy simply because their sexual orientation is not LGBT. There are many such advantages, and we have space to list only a few:

- Heterosexuals can be out day or night or at school or workplaces without fearing that they will be verbally harassed or physically attacked because of their sexuality or that they will hear jokes about their sexuality.
- Heterosexuals do not have to worry about not being hired for a job, about being fired, or not being promoted because of their sexuality.
- Heterosexuals can legally marry everywhere in the United States and receive all the federal, state, and other benefits that married couples receive.
- Heterosexuals can express a reasonable amount of affection (holding hands, kissing, etc.) in public without fearing negative reactions from onlookers.
- Heterosexuals do not have to worry about being asked why they prefer opposite-sex relations, being criticized for choosing their sexual orientation, or being urged to change their sexual orientation.
- Heterosexual parents do not have to worry about anyone questioning their fitness as parents because of their sexuality.
- Heterosexuals do not have to feel the need to conceal their sexual orientation.
- Heterosexuals do not have to worry about being accused of trying to "push" their sexuality onto other people.

### People Making a Difference

Improving the Family Lives of LGBT Youth

Many organizations and agencies around the country aim to improve the lives of LGBT teens. One of them is the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) at San Francisco State University, which focuses on the family problems that LGBT teens often experience. According to its website, FAP is "the only community research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to decrease major health and related risks for [LGBT] youth, such as suicide, substance abuse, HIV and homelessness—in the context of their families. We use a research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, socially and religiously diverse families decrease rejection and increase support for their LGBT children."

To accomplish its mission, FAP engages in two types of activities: research and family support services. In the research area, FAP has published some pioneering studies of the effects of school victimization and of family rejection and acceptance on the physical and mental health of LGBT teens during their adolescence and into their early adulthood. In the family support services area, FAP provides confidential advice, information, and counseling to families with one or more LGBT children or adolescents, and it also has produced various educational materials for these families and for professionals who deal with LGBT issues. At the time of this writing, FAP was producing several documentary videos featuring LGBT youth talking about their family situations and other aspects of their lives. Its support services and written materials are available in English, Spanish, and Cantonese.

Through its pioneering efforts, the Family Acceptance Project is one of many organizations making a difference in the lives of LGBT youth. For further information about FAP, visit http://familyproject.sfsu.edu.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Bullying, taunting, and violence are significant problems for the LGBT community.
- LGBT people are at greater risk for behavioral and physical and mental health problems because of the many negative experiences they encounter.
- Federal law does not protect LGBT individuals from employment discrimination.
- The children of same-sex couples fare at least as well as children of heterosexual couples.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you know anyone who has ever been bullied and taunted for being LGBT or for being perceived as LGBT? If so, describe what happened.
2. Write a brief essay in which you summarize the debate over same-sex marriage, provide your own view, and justify your view.

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# 6.4: Improving the Lives of the LGBT Community

**Learning Objective**

1. Understand which measures show promise of reducing inequality based on sexual orientation.

The inequality arising from sexual orientation stems from long-standing and deep-rooted prejudice against nonheterosexual attraction and behavior and against the many people whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual. We have seen in this chapter that attitudes about and related to same-sex sexuality have become markedly more positive since a generation ago. Reflecting this trend, the number of openly gay elected officials and candidates for office has increased greatly since a generation ago, and the sexual orientation of candidates appears to be a nonissue in many areas of the nation (Page, 2011). In a 2011 Gallup poll, two-thirds of Americans said they would vote for a gay candidate for president, up from only one-fourth of Americans in 1978 (Page, 2011). Also in 2011, the US Senate confirmed the nomination of the first openly gay man for a federal judgeship (Milbank, 2011). To paraphrase the slogan of a nationwide campaign aimed at helping gay teens deal with bullying and other mistreatment, it is getting better.

Much of this improvement must be credited to the gay rights movement that is popularly thought to have begun in June 1969 in New York City after police raided a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn and arrested several people inside. A crowd of several hundred people gathered and rioted in protest that night and the next night. The gay rights movement had begun.

Despite the advances this movement has made and despite the improvement in public attitudes about LGBT issues, we have seen in this chapter that LGBT people continue to experience many types of inequality and other problems. As with inequality based on race and/or ethnicity, social class, and gender, there is much work still to be done to reduce inequality based on sexual orientation.

For such inequality to be reduced, it is certainly essential that heterosexuals do everything possible in their daily lives to avoid any form of mistreatment of LGBT individuals and to treat them as they would treat any heterosexual. Beyond this, certain other measures should help address LGBT inequality. These measures might include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Parents should make clear to their children that all sexual orientations are equally valid. Parents whose child happens to be LGBT should love that child at least as much as they would love a heterosexual child.
2. School programs should continue and strengthen their efforts to provide students a positive environment in regard to sexual orientation and to educate them about LGBT issues. Bullying and other harassment of LGBT students must not be tolerated. In 2011, California became the first state to require the teaching of gay and lesbian history; other states should follow this example.
3. Federal law should prohibit employment discrimination against LGBT people, and same-sex marriages should become legal throughout the United States. In the meantime, new legislation should provide same-sex couples the same rights, responsibilities, and benefits that heterosexual married couples have.
4. Police should continue to educate themselves about LGBT issues and should strengthen their efforts to ensure that physical attacks on LGBT people are treated at least as seriously as attacks on heterosexual people are treated.

### Key Takeaways

- Although the gay rights movement has made significant advances, many types of inequality based on sexual orientation continue to exist.
- Several measures should be begun or continued to reduce inequality based on sexual orientation.

### For Your Review

1. Is there a gay rights advocacy group on your campus? If so, what is your opinion of it?
2. How do you think parents should react if their teenaged daughter or son comes out to them? Explain your answer.

## References

Milbank, D. (2011, July 18). In a “quiet moment,” gay judge makes history. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/.

Page, S. (2011, July 20). Gay candidates gain acceptance. *USA Today*. Retrieved from www.usatoday.com/news/politics/index.

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# 6.5: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Sexual orientation refers to a person's preference for sexual relationships with individuals of the other sex, one's own sex, or both sexes. The term also increasingly refers to *transgender* individuals, whose behavior, appearance, and/or gender identity departs from conventional norms.
2. According to national survey evidence, almost 4 percent of American adults identify as LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender), a figure equivalent to 9 million adults. Almost 20 million have engaged in same-sex relations.
3. Male homosexuality in ancient Greece and Rome seems to have been accepted and rather common, but Europe, the Americas, and other areas influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition have long viewed homosexuality very negatively. In many societies studied by anthropologists, homosexuality is rather common and considered a normal form of sexuality.
4. Scholars continue to debate whether sexual orientation is more the result of biological factors or social and cultural factors. Related to this debate, the public is fairly split over the issue of whether sexual orientation is a choice or something over which people have no control.
5. Heterosexism in the United States is higher among men than among women, among older people than younger people, among the less educated than among the more highly educated, among Southerners than among non-Southerners, and among more religious people than among less religious people. Levels of heterosexism have declined markedly since a generation ago.
6. Sexual orientation is a significant source of inequality. LGBT individuals experience bullying, taunting, and violence; they may experience employment discrimination; and they are not allowed to marry in most states. Because of the stress of living as LGBT, they are at greater risk than heterosexuals for several types of physical and mental health problems.

## Using What You Know

You're working in a medium-sized office and generally like your coworkers. However, occasionally you hear them make jokes about gays and lesbians. You never laugh at these jokes, but neither have you ever said anything critical about them. Your conscience is bothering you, but you also know that if you tell your supervisor or coworkers that their joking makes you feel uncomfortable, they may get angry with you and even stop talking to you. What do you decide to do?

## What You Can Do

To help reduce inequality based on sexual orientation, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Start or join an LGBT advocacy group on your campus.
2. Write a letter to the editor in favor of same-sex marriage.
3. Urge your US Senators and Representative to pass legislation prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
4. Work for a social service agency in your local community that focuses on the needs of LGBT teens.

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# 6.6: Videos- What Would You Do?

Gay Adoption | What Would You Do? | WWYD




Video produced by ABC News, all rights reserved. It is not openly licensed but freely available to all.

## Another Video: Parents are "Gay Bashed"

This video was also produced by the "What Would You Do?" series and demonstrates public attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ Community: Parents Are "Gay Bashed" In Front of Their Children

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 7: Aging and Ageism


7.1: The Concept and Experience of Aging
7.2: Perspectives on Aging
7.3: Life Expectancy and the Graying of Society
7.4: Biological and Psychological Aspects of Aging
7.5: Problems Facing Older Americans
7.6: Reducing Ageism and Helping Older Americans
7.7: End-of-Chapter Material


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# 7.1: The Concept and Experience of Aging

**Learning Objectives**

1. Define social gerontology.
2. Distinguish biological aging, psychological aging, and social aging.

Here is why you should want to know about aging and the problems older people face: *You will be old someday*. At least you will be old if you do not die prematurely from an accident, cancer, a heart attack, some other medical problem, murder, or suicide. Although we do not often think about aging when we are in our late teens and early twenties, one of our major goals in life is to become old. By studying age and aging and becoming familiar with some of the problems facing the elderly now and in the future, we are really studying something about ourselves and a stage in the life course we all hope to reach.



Because we all want to live into old age, the study of age and aging helps us understand something about ourselves and a stage in the life course we all hope to reach. (Carl Nenzén Lovén – Grandpa – CC BY 2.0.)

The study of aging is so important and popular that it has its own name, **gerontology**. *Social gerontology* is the study of the social aspects of aging (Novak, 2012).Novak, M. (2012). *Issues in aging* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. The scholars who study aging are called *gerontologists*. The people they study go by several names, most commonly “older people,” “elders,” and “the elderly.” The latter term is usually reserved for those 65 or older, while “older people” and “elders” often include people in their fifties as well as those 60 or older.

## Dimensions of Aging

Age and aging have four dimensions. The dimension most of us think of is **chronological age**, defined as the number of years since someone was born. A second dimension is **biological aging**, which refers to the physical changes that “slow us down” as we get into our middle and older years. For example, our arteries might clog up, or problems with our lungs might make it more difficult for us to breathe. A third dimension, **psychological aging**, refers to the psychological changes, including those involving mental functioning and personality, that occur as we age. Gerontologists emphasize that chronological age is not always the same thing as biological or psychological age. Some people who are 65, for example, can look and act much younger than some who are 50.

The fourth dimension of aging is social. **Social aging** refers to changes in a person’s roles and relationships, both within their networks of relatives and friends and in formal organizations such as the workplace and houses of worship. Although social aging

can differ from one individual to another, it is also profoundly influenced by the *perception* of aging that is part of a society's culture. If a society views aging positively, the social aging experienced by individuals in that society will be more positive and enjoyable than in a society that views aging negatively. As we shall see, though, the perception of aging in the United States is not very positive, with important consequences for our older citizens.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The study of the elderly and aging helps us understand problems in a state of the life course we all hope to reach.
- Biological aging refers to the physical changes that accompany the aging process, while psychological aging refers to the psychological changes that occur.
- Social aging refers to the changes in a person's roles and relationships as the person ages.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Think about an older person whom you know. To what extent has this person experienced psychological aging? To what extent has this person experienced social aging?
2. The text states that the perception of aging in the United States is not very positive. What do you think accounts for this?

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# 7.2: Perspectives on Aging

**Learning Objectives**

1. State the assumptions of disengagement, activity, and conflict theories of aging.
2. Critically assess these three theories.

Recall that social aging refers to changes in people's roles and relationships in a society as they age. Social gerontologists have tried to explain how and why the aging process in the United States and other societies occurs. Their various explanations, summarized in Table 6.1 "Theory Snapshot", help us understand patterns of social aging. They fall roughly into either the functionalist, social interactionist, or conflict approaches discussed in Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems".

Table 6.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Disengagement theory | To enable younger people to assume important roles, a society must encourage its older people to disengage from their previous roles and to take on roles more appropriate to their physical and mental decline. This theory is considered a functionalist explanation of the aging process. |
| Activity theory | Older people benefit themselves and their society if they continue to be active. Their positive perceptions of the aging process are crucial to their ability to remain active. This theory is considered an interactionist explanation of the aging process. |
| Conflict theory | Older people experience age-based prejudice and discrimination. Inequalities among the aged exist along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class. This theory falls into the more general conflict theory of society. |

One of the first explanations was called disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961). This approach assumed that all societies must find ways for older people's authority to give way to younger people. A society thus encourages its elderly to disengage from their previous roles and to take on roles more appropriate to their physical and mental decline. In this way, a society effects a smooth transition of its elderly into a new, more sedentary lifestyle and ensures that their previous roles will be undertaken by a younger generation that is presumably more able to carry out these roles. Because disengagement theory assumes that social aging preserves a society's stability and that a society needs to ensure that disengagement occurs, it is often considered a functionalist explanation of the aging process.

A critical problem with this theory was that it assumes that older people are no longer capable of adequately performing their previous roles. However, older people in many societies continue to perform their previous roles quite well. In fact, society may suffer if its elderly do disengage, as it loses their insight and wisdom. It is also true that many elders cannot afford to disengage from their previous roles; if they leave their jobs, they are also leaving needed sources of income, as the opening news story discussed, and if they leave their jobs and other roles, they also reduce their social interaction and the benefits it brings.

Today most social gerontologists prefer activity theory, which assumes that older people benefit both themselves and their society if they remain active and try to continue to perform the roles they had before they aged (Choi & Kim, 2011). As they perform their roles, their perception of the situations they are in is crucial to their perception of their aging and thus to their self-esteem and other aspects of their psychological well-being. Because activity theory focuses on the individual and her or his perception of the aging process, it is often considered a social interactionist explanation of social aging.

One criticism of activity theory is that it overestimates the ability of the elderly to maintain their level of activity: Although some elders can remain active, others cannot. Another criticism is that activity theory is too much of an individualistic approach, as it overlooks the barriers many societies place to successful aging. Some elders are less able to remain active because of their poverty, gender, and social class, as these and other structural conditions may adversely affect their physical and mental health. Activity theory overlooks these conditions.

Explanations of aging grounded in conflict theory put these conditions at the forefront of their analyses. A conflict theory of aging, then, emphasizes the impact of ageism, or negative views about old age and prejudice and discrimination against the elderly (Novak, 2012). According to this view, older workers are devalued because they are no longer economically productive and because their higher salaries (because of their job seniority), health benefits, and other costs drive down capitalist profits. Conflict theory also emphasizes inequality among the aged along gender, race/ethnicity, and social class lines. Reflecting these inequalities in the larger society, some elders are quite wealthy, but others are very poor.

One criticism of conflict theory is that it blames ageism on modern, capitalist economies. However, negative views of the elderly also exist to some extent in modern, socialist societies and in preindustrial societies. Capitalism may make these views more negative, but such views can exist even in societies that are not capitalistic.

### Key Takeaways

- Disengagement theory assumes that all societies must find ways for older people's authority to give way to younger people. A society thus encourages its elderly to disengage from their previous roles and to take on roles more appropriate to their physical and mental decline.
- Activity theory assumes that older people will benefit both themselves and their society if they remain active and try to continue to perform the roles they had before they aged.

### For Your Review

1. Which theory of aging—disengagement theory, activity theory, or conflict theory—makes the most sense to you? Why?

## References

Choi, N. G., & Kim, J. (2011). The effect of time volunteering and charitable donations in later life on psychological wellbeing. *Ageing & Society, 31*(4), 590–610.

Cumming, E., & Henry, W. E. (1961). *Growing old: The process of disengagement*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Novak, M. (2012). *Issues in aging* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

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# 7.3: Life Expectancy and the Graying of Society

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the differences in life expectancy around the world.
2. List the potential problems associated with the growing proportion of older individuals in poor nations.
3. Explain the evidence for inequality in US life expectancy.

When we look historically and cross-culturally, we see that *old age* is a relative term, since few people in preindustrial times or in poor countries today reach the age range that most Americans would consider to be old, say 65 or older. When we compare contemporary societies, we find that life expectancy, or the average age to which people can be expected to live, varies dramatically across the world. As Figure 6.1 "Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)" illustrates, life expectancy in North America, most of Europe, and Australia averages 75 years or more, while life expectancy in most of Africa averages less than 60 years (Population Reference Bureau, 2011).

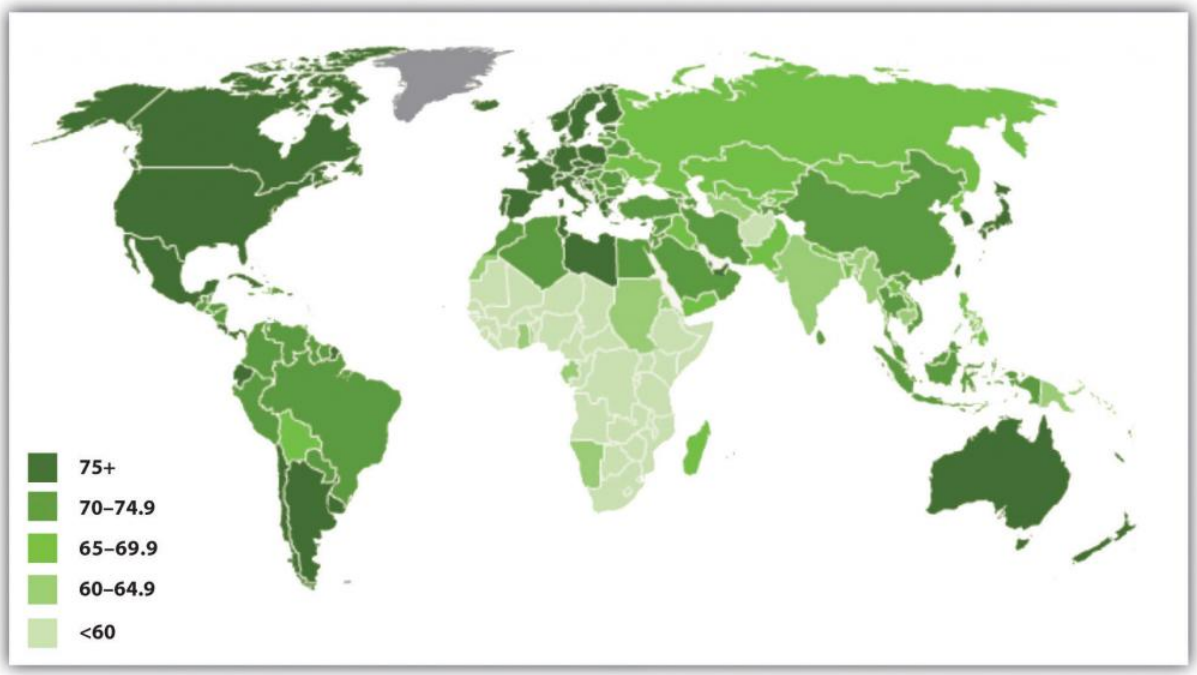
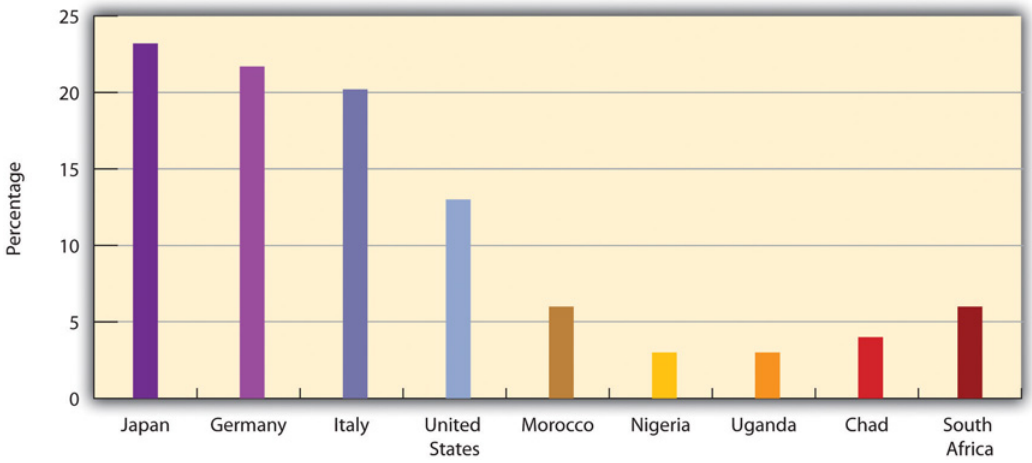



Figure 6.1 Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years). Source: Adapted from Population Reference Bureau. (2011). The world at 7 billion: World population data sheet: Life expectancy. Retrieved from http://www.prb.org/publications/data...x#/map/lifeexp.

What accounts for these large disparities? The major factor is the wealth or poverty of a nation, as the wealthiest nations have much longer life expectancies than the poorest ones. This is true because, as Chapter 2 noted, the poorest nations by definition have little money and few other resources. They suffer from hunger, AIDS, and other diseases, and they lack indoor plumbing and other modern conveniences found in almost every home in the wealthiest nations. As a result, they have high rates of infant and childhood mortality, and many people who make it past childhood die prematurely from disease, starvation, and other problems.

These differences mean that few people in these societies reach the age of 65 that Western nations commonly mark as the beginning of old age. Figure 6.2 depicts the percentage of each nation's population that is 65 or older. Not surprisingly, the nations of Africa have very low numbers of people 65 or older. In Uganda, for example, only 3 percent of the population is at least 65, compared to 13 percent of Americans and 20–21 percent of Germans and Italians.

Figure 6.2 Percentage of Population Aged 65 or Older, 2011




*Source: Adapted from Population Reference Bureau. (2011). 2011 world population data sheet. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf.*

Despite these international disparities, life expectancy overall has been increasing around the world. It was only 46 years worldwide in the early 1950s but was 69 in 2009 and is expected to reach about 75 by 2050 (Population Reference Bureau, 2011).Population Reference Bureau. (2011). *2011 world population data sheet*. Washington, DC: Author. This means that the number of people 65 or older is growing rapidly; they are expected to reach almost 1.5 billion worldwide by 2050, three times their number today and five times their number just twenty years ago (United Nations Population Division, 2011).United Nations Population Division. (2011). *World population prospects: The 2010 revision*. New York, NY: Author. Despite international differences in life expectancy and the elderly percentage of the population, the world as a whole is decidedly "graying," with important implications for the cost and quality of elder care and other issues.



*Older people now constitute 15 percent of the combined population of wealthy nations, but they will account for 26 percent by 2050.*

*© Thinkstock*

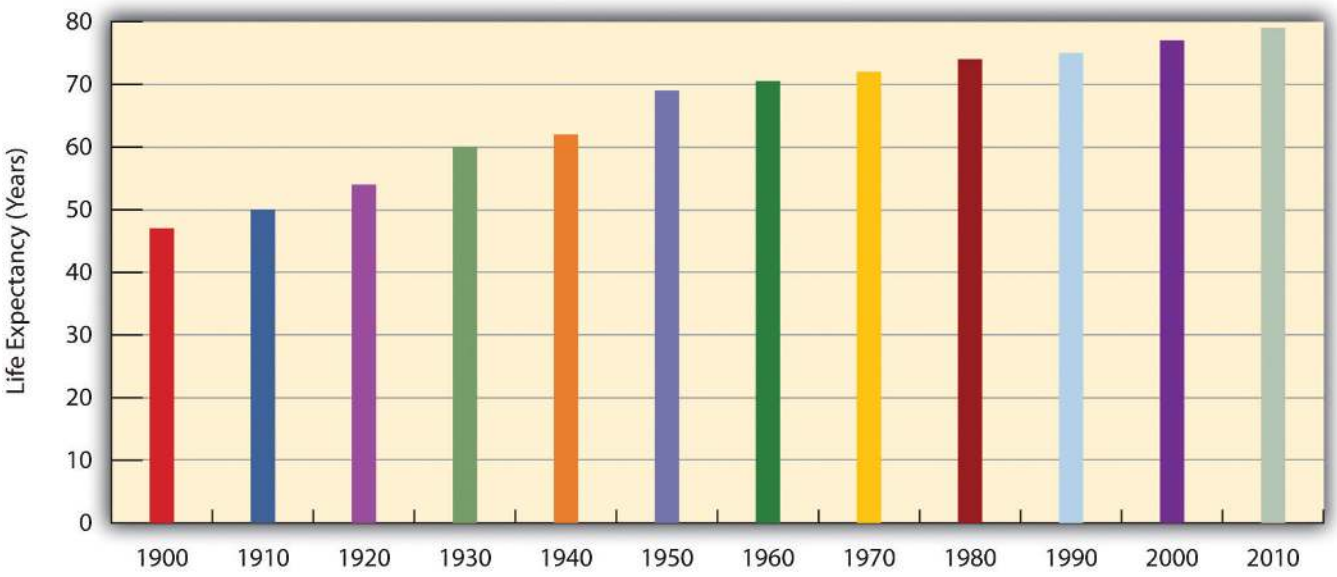
As life expectancy rises in poor nations, these nations will experience special problems (Hayutin, 2007).Hayutin, A. M. (2007). Graying of the global population. *Public Policy & Aging Report*, *17*(4), 12–17. One problem will involve paying for the increased health care that older people in these nations will require. Because these nations are so poor, they will face even greater problems than the industrial world in paying for such care and for other programs and services their older citizens will need. Another problem stems from the fact that many poor nations are beginning or continuing to industrialize and urbanize. As they do so, traditional family patterns, including respect for the elderly and the continuation of their roles and influence, may weaken. One

reason for this is that urban families have smaller dwelling units in which to accommodate their elderly relatives and lack any land onto which they can build new housing. Families in poor nations will thus find it increasingly difficult to accommodate their elders.

## Life Expectancy in the United States

Life expectancy has been increasing in the United States along with the rest of the world (see Figure 6.3). It rose rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century and has increased steadily since then. From a low of 47.3 years in 1900, it rose to about 71 years in 1970 and 77 years in 2000 and to more than 78 years in 2010. Americans born in 2010 will thus be expected to live about 31 years longer than those born a century earlier.

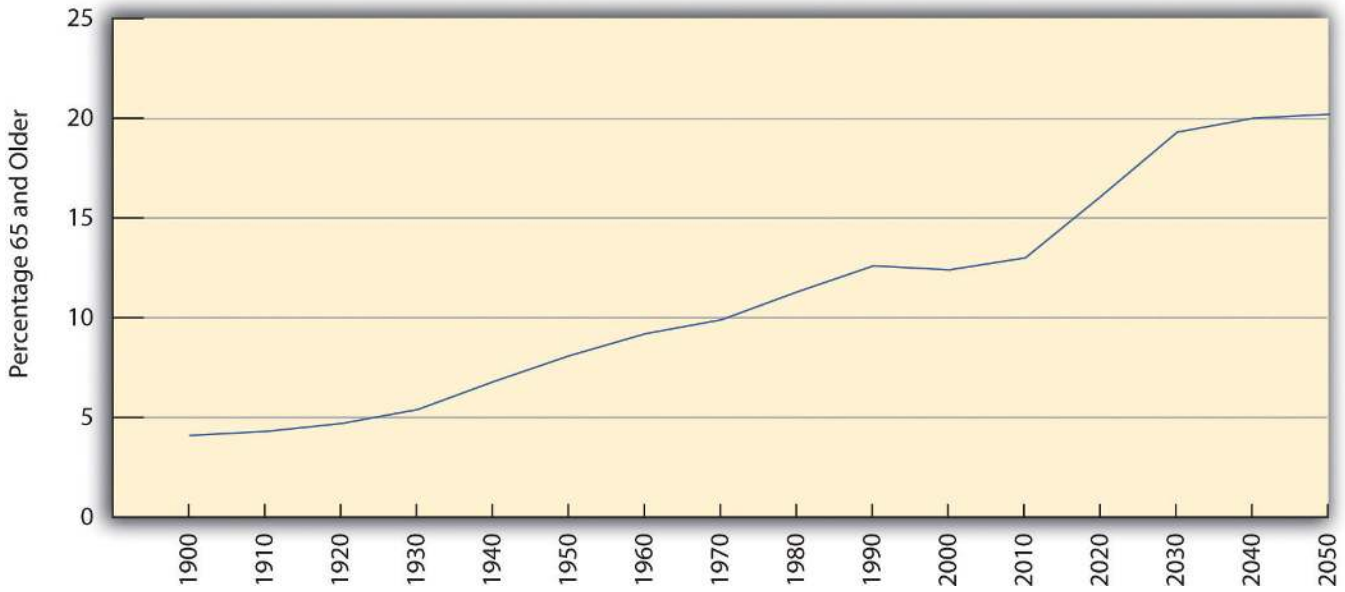
Figure 6.3 Changes in US Life Expectancy at Birth, 1900–2010




*Sources: Data from Arias, E. (2010). United States life tables, 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports, 58(21), 1–40.*

During the next few decades, the numbers of the elderly will increase rapidly thanks to the large baby boom generation born after World War II (from 1946 to 1964) that is now entering its mid-sixties. Figure 6.4 shows the rapid rise of older Americans (65 or older) as a percentage of the population that is expected to occur. Elders numbered about 3.1 million in 1900 (4.1 percent of the population), number about 40 million today, and are expected to reach 89 million by 2050 (20.2 percent of the population). The large increase in older Americans overall has been called the *graying of America* and will have important repercussions for elderly care and other aspects of old age in the United States, as we discuss later.

Figure 6.4 Past and Projected Percentage of US Population Aged 65 or Older, 1900–2050




*Source: Data from Administration on Aging. (n.d.). Projected future growth of the older population by age: 1900–2050. Retrieved from [http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/future_growth/future_growth.aspx](http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/future_growth/future_growth.aspx).*

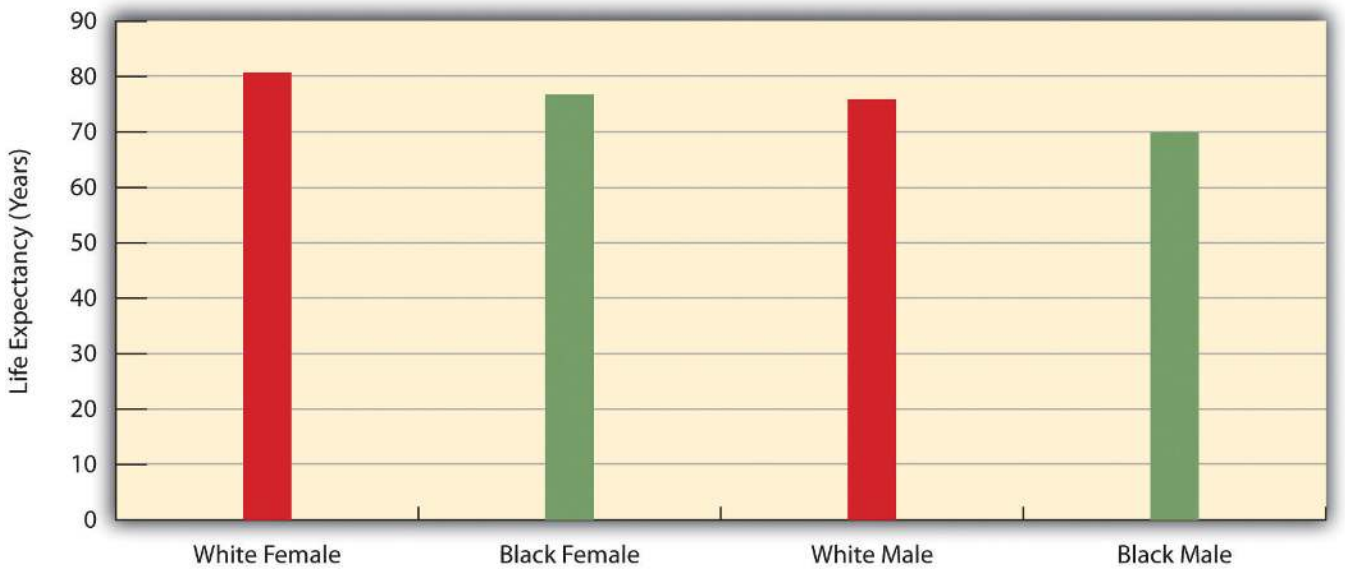
## Inequality in Life Expectancy

We have seen that inequality in life expectancy exists around the world, with life expectancy lower in poor nations than in wealthy nations. Inequality in life expectancy also exists *within* a given society along gender, race/ethnicity, and social class lines.

For gender, the inequality is in favor of women, who for both biological and social reasons outlive men across the globe. In the United States, for example, girls born in 2007 could expect to live 80.4 years on the average, but boys only 75.4 years.

In most countries, race and ethnicity combine with social class to produce longer life expectancies for the (wealthier) dominant race, which in the Western world is almost always white. The United States again reflects this international phenomenon: Whites born in 2007 could expect to live 78.4 years on the average, but African Americans only 73.6 years. In fact, gender and race combine in the United States to put African American males at a particular disadvantage, as they can expect to live only 70.0 years (see Figure 6.5). The average African American male will die almost 11 years earlier than the average white woman.

Figure 6.5 Sex, Race, and Life Expectancy for US Residents Born in 2007



*Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics, US Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). Health, United States, 2010, with special feature on death and dying. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus10.pdf.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Life expectancy differs widely around the world and is much higher in wealthy nations than in poor nations.
- Life expectancy has also been increasing around the world, including in the United States, and the increasing number of older people in the decades ahead will pose several serious challenges.
- Inequality in life expectancy exists within a given society along gender, race/ethnicity, and social class lines.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. As our nation and the world both "gray," what do you think is the most important problem that will stem from the increasing number of older people?
2. Write a short essay in which you discuss the problems that an elderly person you know, perhaps a grandparent, has experienced related to being older.

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# 7.4: Biological and Psychological Aspects of Aging

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe any four biological changes associated with aging.
2. List any three steps that individuals can try to undertake to achieve successful aging.

Like many other societies, the United States has a mixed view of aging and older people. While we generally appreciate our elderly, we have a culture oriented toward youth, as evidenced by the abundance of television characters in their twenties and lack of those in their older years. As individuals, we do our best not to look old, as the many ads for wrinkle creams and products to darken gray hair attest. Moreover, when we think of the elderly, negative images often come to mind. We often think of someone who has been slowed by age both physically and mentally. She or he may have trouble walking up steps, picking up heavy grocery bags, standing up straight, or remembering recent events. The term *senile* often comes to mind, and phrases like "doddering old fool," "geezer," and other disparaging remarks sprinkle our language when we talk about them. Meanwhile, despite some improvement, the elderly are often portrayed in stereotypical ways on television and in movies (Lee, Carpenter, & Meyers, 2007).

How true is this negative image? What do we know of physical and psychological changes among the elderly? How much of what we think we know about aging and the elderly is a myth, and how much is reality? Gerontologists have paid special attention to answering these questions (Novak, 2012).

Biological changes certainly occur as we age. The first signs are probably in our appearance. Our hair begins to turn gray, our (male) hairlines recede, and a few wrinkles set in. The internal changes that often accompany aging are more consequential, among them being that (a) fat replaces lean body mass, and many people gain weight; (b) bone and muscle loss occur; (c) lungs lose their ability to take in air, and our respiratory efficiency declines; (d) the functions of the cardiovascular and renal (kidney) systems decline; (e) the number of brain cells declines, as does brain mass overall; and (f) vision and hearing decline. Cognitive and psychological changes also occur. Learning and memory begin declining after people reach their seventies; depression and other mental and/or emotional disorders can set in; and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, can occur.



Because our society values youthfulness, many people try to do their best not to look old. (FoundryParkInn – Men's Facial – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

All these conditions yield statistics such as follows: about half of people 65 or older have arthritis or high blood pressure; almost one-fifth have coronary heart disease; more than one-fifth have diabetes; and about 60 percent of women in their seventies have osteoporosis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & The Merck Company Foundation, 2007; Crawthorne, 2008).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & The Merck Company Foundation. (2007). *The state of aging and health in America 2007*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: Merck Company Foundation; Crawthorne, A. (2008). *Elderly poverty: The challenge before us*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Still, the nature and extent of all these changes vary widely among older people. Some individuals are frail at 65, while others remain vigorous well into their seventies and beyond. People can be “old” at 60 or even 50, while others can be “young” at 80. Many elders are no longer able to work, but others remain in the labor force. All in all, then, most older people do not fit the doddering image myth and can still live a satisfying and productive life (Rowe et al., 2010).Rowe, J. W., Berkman, L. F., Binstock, R., Boersch-Supan, A., Cacioppo, J., Carsternsen, L., et al. (2010). Policies and politics for an aging America. *Contexts, 9*(1), 22–27.

## Enhancing Vitality for Successful Aging

To what extent are the effects of biological and psychological aging the inevitable results of chronological aging? Gerontologists are still trying to understand what causes these effects, and their explanations center on such things as a declining immune system, the slowing of cellular replication, and other processes that need not concern us here.

One thing is clear: We can all take several steps to help us age better, because what we do as we enter our older years matters much more than genetics (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & The Merck Company Foundation, 2007; Crawthorne, 2008).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, & The Merck Company Foundation. (2007). *The state of aging and health in America 2007*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: Merck Company Foundation; Crawthorne, A. (2008). *Elderly poverty: The challenge before us*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. To the extent this is true, the effects of biological and psychological aging are not necessarily inevitable, and “successful aging” is possible. The steps highlighted in the gerontological literature are by now almost a cliché, but regular exercise, good nutrition, and stress reduction stand at the top of most gerontologists’ recommendations for continued vitality in later life. In fact, Americans live about ten years less than an average set of genes should let them live because they do not exercise enough and because they eat inadequate diets.

Research by social gerontologists suggests at least two additional steps older people can take if they want “successful aging.” The first is involvement in informal, personal networks of friends, neighbors, and relatives. The importance of such networks is one of the most thoroughly documented in the social gerontological literature (Binstock & George, 2006)Binstock, R. H., & George, L. K. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (6th ed.). Boston: Academic Press. (see Note 6.23 "Applying Social Research"). Networks enhance successful aging for at least two reasons. First, they provide practical support, such as help buying groceries and visiting the doctor, to the elderly who need it. Second, they help older people maintain their self-esteem, meet their desire for friendships, and satisfy other emotional needs.

### Children and Our Future

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

An increasing number of grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Almost 6 million children, or about 8 percent of all children, live in a household headed by a grandparent, up from 4.5 million in 2000. Grandparents are the sole caregiver for almost 3 million of these children because the child’s parents are absent for several reasons: The parents may have died, they may be in jail or prison or have been unable to deal with substance abuse, a child may have been removed from a parent because of parental abuse, or a child may have been abandoned.

In the remaining households where a parent is present, grandparents (usually the grandmother) are still the primary caregivers or at least play a major role in raising the child; the same is true of many grandparents who live near their grown child’s home. In today’s faltering economy, many grandparents are also helping their children out with the expenses of raising their grandchild and running a home. As a family expert with AARP explained, “Grandparents have become the family safety net, and I don’t see that changing any time soon. While they will continue to enjoy their traditional roles, including spending on gifts for grandchildren, I see them increasingly paying for the extras that parents are struggling to keep up with—sports, camps, tutoring or other educational needs, such as music lessons.”

Estella Hyde, 65, and her husband live near Erie, Pennsylvania. They began raising their granddaughter, who started college in fall 2011, when she was one-year-old after her mother said she did not want to raise her. Ms. Hyde called for more government assistance for people in her situation: “It never happens in a happy situation where a son or daughter comes and says, ‘I need you to raise a child for me.’ We were very lucky, we were able to financially take care of her and support her. But many grandparent caregivers need other sources of assistance.”

Many grandparents consider the caregiving and financial support they provide for a grandchild to be both a joy and a privilege. But as their numbers grow, many such grandparents are also finding their involvement to also be somewhat of a physical and/or

financial burden. As their numbers continue to grow, it will be important for the federal and state governments to provide them the assistance that Estella Hyde advocated.

*Sources:* Whitley & Kelley, 2007; Yen, 2011Whitley, D. M., & Kelley, S. J. (2007). *Grandparents raising grandchildren: A call to action*. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families; Yen, H. (2011, August 25). Grandparents play a bigger role in child-rearing. *Associated Press*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/26/grandparents-play-a-bigge_n_937945.html.

A second step for successful aging suggested by scholarly research is religious involvement (Moberg, 2008),Moberg, D. O. (2008). Spirituality and aging: Research and implications. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, *20*, 95–134. which enhances psychological well-being for at least two reasons. As people worship in a congregation, they interact with other congregants and, as just noted, enhance their social support networks. Moreover, as they practice their religious faith, they reduce their stress and can cope better with personal troubles. For both these reasons, attendance at religious services and the practice of prayer are thought to enhance psychological well-being among older people. Some elders cannot attend religious services regularly because they have health problems or are no longer able to drive a car. But prayer and other private devotional activities remain significant for many of them. To the extent that religion makes a difference for elders' well-being, health-care facilities and congregations should do what they can to enable older adults to attend religious services and to otherwise practice their religious faith.

## Applying Social Research

Friendships and Successful Aging

As the text discusses, social networks improve the lives of older Americans by providing both practical and emotional support. Early research on social networks and aging focused more on relatives than on friends. Rebecca G. Adams, former president of the Southern Sociological Society, was one of the first sociologists to emphasize the role that friends can also play in the lives of the elderly. She interviewed seventy older women who lived in a Chicago suburb and asked them many questions about the extent and quality of their friendships.

In one of her most important findings, Adams discovered that the women reported receiving more help from friends than other researchers had assumed was the case. The women were somewhat reluctant to ask friends for help but did so when family members were not available and when they would not overly inconvenience the friends whom they asked for help. Adams also found that "secondary" friendships—those involving friends that a woman spent time with but with whom she was not especially close—were more likely than "primary" friendships (very close friendships) to contribute to her interviewees' psychological well-being, as these friendships enabled the women to meet new people, to become involved in new activities, and thus to be engaged with the larger society. This finding led Adams to conclude that one should not underestimate how important friends are to older people, particularly to the elderly without family. Friends are an important source of companionship and possibly a more important source of service support than most of the current literature suggests.

Adams also asked the women about their friendships with men. The seventy women she interviewed reported 670 friendships, of which only 3.6 percent were with men. (About 91 percent were with other women, and 6 percent were with couples.) Although prior research had assumed that the number of these friendships is small because there are so few unmarried elderly men compared to the number of unmarried elderly women, Adams discovered from her interviews some additional reasons. Her respondents interpreted *any* friendship with a man as a courting or romantic friendship, which they thought would be viewed negatively by their children and by their peers. Adopting a traditional gender-role orientation, they also expected any man they might marry to be able to protect them physically and financially. Yet they also realized that any elderly man they might know would be very likely unable to do so. For all these reasons, they shied away from friendships with men.

Work by Adams and other social scientists on the friendships and other aspects of the social support systems for older Americans has contributed greatly to our understanding of the components of successful aging. Practically speaking, it points to the need for programs and other activities to make it easier for the elderly to develop and maintain friendships with both sexes to improve their ability to meet both their practical and emotional needs.

*Sources:* Adams, 1985, 1986; Roscow, 1967Adams, R. G. (1985). People would talk: Normative barriers to cross-sex friendships for elderly women. *The Gerontologist*, *25*, 605–611; Adams, R. G. (1986). Secondary friendship networks and psychological well-being among elderly women. *Activities, Adaptation, and Aging*, *8*, 59–72.; Roscow, I. (1967). *Social integration of the aged*. New York, NY: Free Press.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Certain biological, cognitive, and psychological changes occur as people age. These changes reinforce the negative view of the elderly, but this view nonetheless reflects stereotypes and myths about aging and the elderly.
- Regular exercise, good nutrition, stress reduction, involvement in personal networks, and religious involvement all enhance successful aging.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you think the negative view of older people that is often found in our society is an unfair stereotype, or do you think there is actually some truth to this stereotype? Explain your answer.
2. Referring back to Chapter 1's discussion of Émile Durkheim, how does research that documents the importance of personal networks for successful aging reflect Durkheim's insights?

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# 7.5: Problems Facing Older Americans

**Learning Objectives**

1. Present a brief sociodemographic profile of the US elderly.
2. Discuss the several problems experienced by the US elderly.
3. Describe how the social attitudes of older Americans generally differ from those of younger Americans.

We now turn our attention to older people in the United States. We first sketch a demographic profile of our elderly and then examine some of the problems they face because of their age and because of ageism.

## Who Are the Elderly?

Table 6.2 "Demographic Composition of the Elderly, 2010" presents the demographic composition of Americans aged 65 or older. Slightly more than half the elderly are 65–74 years of age, and about 57 percent are female, reflecting males' shorter life spans as discussed earlier. About 80 percent of the elderly are non-Latino whites, compared to about 66 percent in the population as a whole; 8.6 percent are African American, compared to about 13 percent of the population; and 7.0 percent are Latino, compared to 15 percent of the population. The greater proportion of whites among the elderly and lower proportions of African Americans and Latinos reflects these groups' life expectancy differences discussed earlier and also their differences in birth rates.

Table 6.2 Demographic Composition of the Elderly, 2010

| | |
|---|---|
| **Age** | |
| 65–74 years | 52.3% |
| 75–84 years | 33.4% |
| 85 years and over | 14.3% |
| **Gender** | |
| Female | 56.9% |
| Male | 43.1% |
| **Race and/or ethnicity*** | |
| White, non-Latino | 80.1% |
| African American | 8.6% |
| Latino | 7.0% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3.5% |
| Amer. Ind., Esk., Aleut. | 0.6% |
| Two or more races | 0.7% |
| **Living in poverty** | 9.0% |
| **Marital status** | |
| Married | 57.6% |
| Widowed | 28.1% |
| Divorced | 10.0% |
| Never married | 4.3% |
| **Years of school completed** | |
| 0–8 years | 10.2% |
| 1–3 years of high school | 10.3% |

* 2009 data

| | |
|---|---|
| High school graduate | 36.4% |
| 1–3 years of college | 20.6% |
| College graduate | 22.5% |
| **Labor force participation** | |
| Employed | 16.2% |
| Unemployed | 1.2% |
| Not in labor force | 82.6% |
| **Household income*** | |
| Under $15,000 | 18.8% |
| $15,000–$24,999 | 20.7% |
| $25,000–$34,999 | 15.4% |
| $35,000–49,999 | 15.1% |
| $50,000–$74,999 | 14.2% |
| $75,000–$99,999 | 6.5% |
| $100,000 and over | 9.4% |
| * 2009 data | |

Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from www.census.gov/compendia/statab.



The lower proportions of African Americans and Latinos among the elderly partly reflect these groups' lower life expectancies. (Evgeni Zotov – Grandparents – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

The percentage of elders living in poverty is 9.0, compared to 15.1 percent of the entire population. Although most elders have fixed incomes, the fact that their family size is usually one or two means that they are less likely than younger people to live in poverty. In fact, today's elderly are financially much better off than their grandparents were, thanks to Social Security, Medicare (the federal health insurance program for older Americans), pensions, and their own assets. We will revisit the health and financial security of elders a little later.

Turning to education, about 22 percent of the elderly are college graduates, compared to about 29 percent of the population as a whole. This difference reflects the fact that few people went to college when today's elderly were in their late teens and early twenties. However, it is still true that today's elders are better educated than any previous generation of elders. Future generations of the elderly will be even better educated than those now.

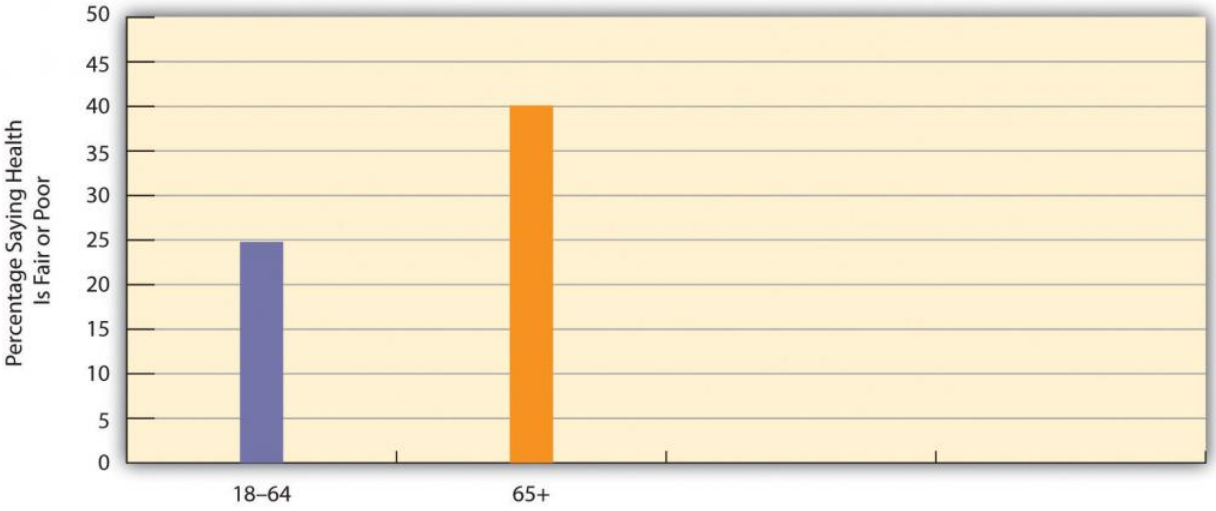
While most elders are retired and no longer in the labor force, about 16 percent do continue to work (see Table 6.2 "Demographic Composition of the Elderly, 2010"). These seniors tend to be in good health and to find their jobs psychologically satisfying. Compared to younger workers, they miss fewer days of work for health or other reasons and are less likely to quit their jobs for other opportunities (Sears, 2009).

Although we emphasized earlier that many older Americans do not fit the negative image with which they are portrayed, it is still true that they face special problems because of their age and life circumstances and because of ageism. We discuss some of these here.

## Physical and Mental Health

Perhaps the problem that comes most readily to mind is health, or, to be more precise, poor health. It is true that many older people remain in good health and are fully able to function mentally and physically (Rowe et al., 2010). Still, the biological and psychological effects of aging do lead to greater physical and mental health problems among the elderly than in younger age groups, as we briefly discussed earlier. These problems are reflected in responses to the General Social Survey (GSS) question, "Would you say your own health, in general, is excellent, good, fair, or poor?" Figure 6.6 "Age and Self-Reported Health" shows that the elderly are more likely than the nonelderly to report that their health is only fair or poor.

Figure 6.6 Age and Self-Reported Health




Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.

The elderly's perception of their own health is supported by government estimates of chronic health conditions for older Americans. Of all people aged 65 or older not living in a nursing home or other institution, almost 50 percent have arthritis, 56 percent have high blood pressure, 32 percent have heart disease, 35 percent have hearing loss, 18 percent have vision problems, and 19 percent have diabetes (these numbers add up to more than 100 percent as people may have several health conditions) (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2010). These rates are much higher than those for younger age groups.

The elderly also suffer from dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, which affects almost 13 percent of people 65 or older (Alzheimer's Association, 2009). Another mental health problem is depression, which affects almost 15 percent of people 65 or older. Because of mental or physical disability, about two-thirds of all people 65 or older need help with at least one "daily living" activity, such as preparing a meal (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2010).

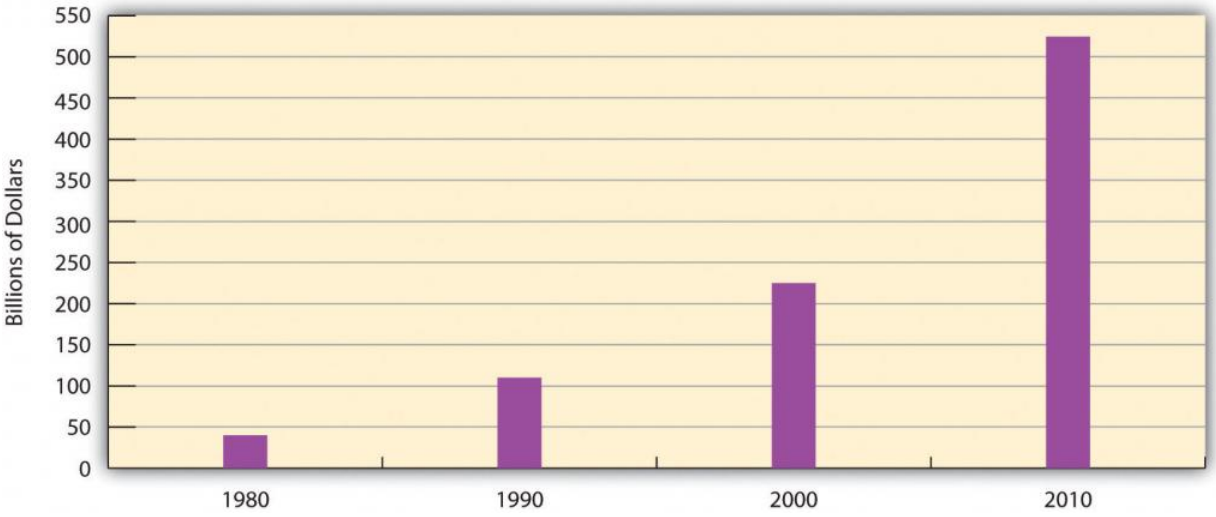


Older people visit the doctor and hospital more often than younger people. Partly for this reason, adequate health care for the elderly is of major importance. (Ted Van Pelt – The Coopers – CC BY 2.0.)

If the elderly have more health problems, then adequate care for them is of major importance. They visit the doctor and hospital more often than their middle-aged counterparts. Medicare covers about one-half of their health-care costs; this is a substantial amount of coverage but still forces many seniors to pay thousands of dollars annually themselves. Some physicians and other health-care providers do not accept Medicare "assignment," meaning that the patient must pay an even higher amount. Moreover, Medicare pays little or nothing for long-term care in nursing homes and other institutions and for mental health services. All these factors mean that older Americans can still face high medical expenses or at least pay high premiums for private health insurance.

In addition, Medicare costs have risen rapidly along with other health-care costs. Medicare expenditures soared from about $37 billion in 1980 to more than $500 billion today (see Figure 6.7 "Medicare Expenditures, 1980–2010"). As the population continues to age and as health-care costs continue to rise, Medicare expenses will continue to rise as well, making it increasingly difficult to find the money to finance Medicare.

Figure 6.7 Medicare Expenditures, 1980–2010




Source: Data from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. (n.d.). National health expenditure data. Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov.

## Nursing Home Care

While most older Americans live by themselves or with their families, a small minority live in group settings. A growing type of group setting is the *continuous care retirement community*, a setting of private rooms, apartments, and/or condominiums that offers medical and practical care to those who need it. In some such communities, residents eat their meals together, while in others they

cook for themselves. Usually these communities offer above-average recreational facilities and can be very expensive, as some require a lifetime contract or at least monthly fees that can run into the thousands of dollars.



*Nursing homes are often understaffed to save costs and are also generally not subject to outside inspection. These conditions help contribute to the neglect of nursing home residents.*

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For elders who need high-level medical care or practical support, nursing homes are the primary option. About 16,100 nursing homes exist, and 3.9 percent of Americans 65 or older live in them (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2010).Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. (2010). *Older Americans 2010: Key indicators of well-being*. Washington, DC: US Goverment Printing Office. About three-fourths of all nursing home residents are women. Almost all residents receive assistance in bathing and showering, 80 percent receive help in using the bathroom, and one-third receive help in eating.

As noted earlier, Medicare does not pay for long-term institutional care for most older Americans. Because nursing home care costs at least $70,000 yearly, residents can quickly use up all their assets and then, ironically, become eligible for payments from *Medicaid*, the federal insurance program for people with low incomes.

If one problem of nursing homes is their expense, another problem is the quality of care they provide. Because their residents are typically in poor physical and/or mental health, their care must be the best possible, as they can do little to help themselves if their care is substandard. As more people enter nursing homes in the years ahead, the quality of nursing home care will become even more important. Yet there is much evidence that nursing home care is often substandard and is replete with neglect and abuse (DeHart, Webb, & Cornman, 2009).DeHart, D., Webb, J., & Cornman, C. (2009). Prevention of elder mistreatment in nursing homes: Competencies for direct-care staff. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, *21*(4), 360–378.

## Financial Security and Employment

Earlier we noted that the elderly are less likely than younger age groups to live in poverty and that their financial status is much better than that of previous generations of older people. One reason for this is Social Security: If Social Security did not exist, the poverty rate of the elderly would be 45 percent, or five times higher than the actual rate (Kerby, 2012).Kerby, S. (2012). *Debunking poverty myths and racial stereotypes*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Without Social Security, then, nearly half of all people 65 or older would be living in official poverty, and this rate would be even much higher for older women and older persons of color. However, this brief summary of their economic well-being obscures some underlying problems (Carr, 2010; Crawthorne, 2008).Carr, D. (2010). Golden years? Poverty among older Americans. *Contexts*, *9*(1), 62–63; Crawthorne, A. (2008). *Elderly poverty: The challenge before us*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

First, recall Chapter 2's discussion of *episodic poverty*, which refers to the drifting of many people into and out of poverty as their jobs and other circumstances change. Once they become poor, older people are more likely than younger ones to *stay* poor, as younger people have more job and other opportunities to move out of poverty. Recall also that the official poverty rate obscures the fact that many people live just above it and are "near poor." This is especially true of the elderly, who, if hit by large medical bills or other expenses, can hardly afford to pay them.

Second, the extent of older Americans' poverty varies by sociodemographic factors and is much worse for some groups than for others (Carr, 2010).Carr, D. (2010). Golden years? Poverty among older Americans. *Contexts*, *9*(1), 62–63. Older women, for example, are more likely than older men to live in poverty for at least two reasons. Because women earn less than men and are more likely to take time off from work during their careers, they have lower monthly Social Security benefits than men and smaller pensions from their employers. As well, women outlive men and thus use up their savings. Racial and ethnic disparities also exist among the elderly, reflecting poverty disparities in the entire population, as older people of color are much more likely than older whites to live in poverty (Carr, 2010).Carr, D. (2010). Golden years? Poverty among older Americans. *Contexts*, *9*(1), 62–63. Among women 65 and older, 9 percent of whites live in poverty, compared to 27 percent of African Americans, 12 percent of Asians, and 21 percent of Hispanics.



*Older women are more likely than older men to live in poverty.*

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Third, monthly Social Security benefits are tied to people's earnings before retirement; the higher the earnings, the higher the monthly benefit. Thus a paradox occurs: People who earn low wages will get lower Social Security benefits after they retire, even though they need *higher* benefits to make up for their lower earnings. In this manner, the income inequality that exists before retirement continues to exist after it.

This paradox reflects a wider problem involving Social Security. However helpful it might be in aiding older Americans, the aid it provides lags far behind comparable programs in other wealthy Western nations (see Note 6.27 "Lessons from Other Societies"). Social Security payments are low enough that almost one-third of the elderly who receive no other income assistance live in official poverty. For all these reasons, Social Security is certainly beneficial for many older Americans, but it remains inadequate compared to what other nations provide.

## Lessons from Other Societies

### Aging Policy and Programs in the Netherlands and Sweden

A few years ago, AARP assessed quality-of-life issues for older people and the larger society in sixteen wealthy democracies (the nations of North America and Western Europe, along with Australia and Japan). Each nation was rated (on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest score) on seventeen criteria, including life expectancy, health care for the elderly, pension coverage, and age-discrimination laws. Of the sixteen nations, the Netherlands ranked first, with a total score of 64, while Italy ranked last, with a score of 48; the United States was thirteenth, with a score of 50. Despite its immense wealth, then, the United States lagged behind most other democracies. Because a "perfect" score would have been 85 (17 × 5), even the Netherlands fell short of an ideal quality of life as measured by the AARP indicators.

Why did the United States not rank higher? The experience of the Netherlands and Sweden, both of which have longer life expectancies than the United States, points to some possible answers. In the Netherlands, everyone at age 65 receives a full pension that does not depend on how much money they earned while they were working, and everyone thus gets the same amount. This amount is larger than the average American gets, because Social Security does depend on earnings and many people earned fairly low amounts during their working years. As a result, Dutch elderly are much less likely than their American counterparts to be poor. The Dutch elderly (and also the nonelderly) have generous government insurance for medical problems and for nursing home care; this financial help is much higher than older Americans obtain through Medicare.

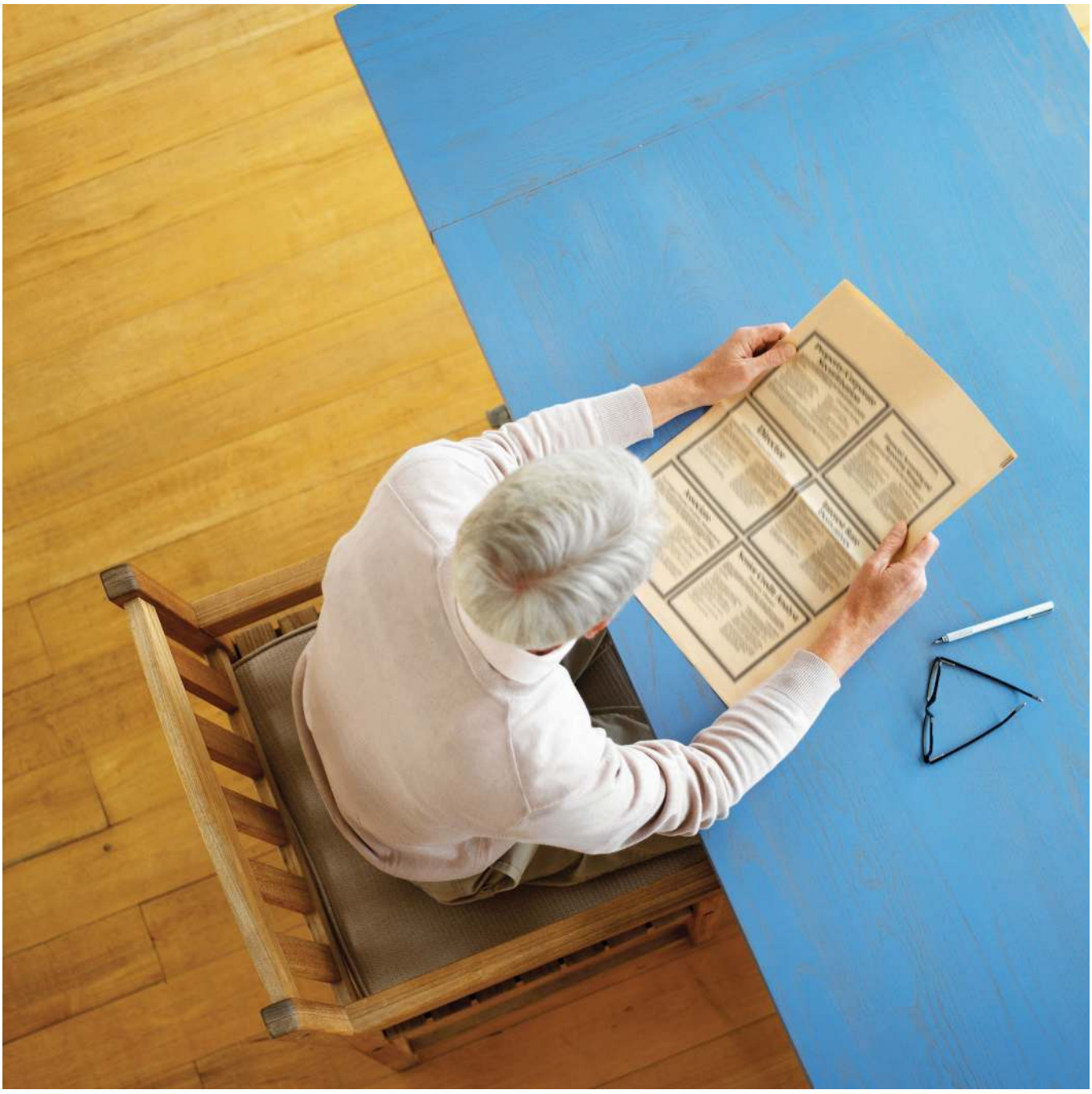
As one example, the AARP article mentioned an elderly Dutch woman who had cancer surgery and thirty-two chemotherapy treatments, for which she paid nothing. In the United States, the chemotherapy treatments would have cost at least $30,000. Medicare would have covered only 80 percent of this amount, leaving a patient to pay $6,000.

The Netherlands also helps its elderly in other ways. One example is that about one-fourth of that nation's elderly receive regular government-subsidized home visits by health-care professionals and/or housekeepers; this practice enables the elderly to remain independent and avoid having to enter a nursing home. In another example, the elderly also receive seven days of free riding on the nation's rail system.

Sweden has a home-care visitation program that is similar to the Netherlands' program. Many elderly are visited twice a day by a care assistant who helps them bathe and dress in the morning and go to bed at night. The care assistant also regularly cleans their residence and takes them out for exercise. The Swedish government pays about 80 percent of the costs of this assistance and subsidizes the remaining cost for elderly who cannot afford it. Like the Netherlands' program, Sweden's program helps the elderly to remain independent and live at home rather than enter a nursing institution.

Compared to the United States, then, other democracies generally provide their elderly less expensive or free health care, greater financial support during their retirement, and home visits by health-care professionals and other assistants. In these and other ways, these other governments encourage "active aging." Adoption of similar policies in the United States would improve the lives of older Americans and perhaps prolong their life spans.

*Sources:* Edwards, 2004; Hartlapp & Schmid, 2008; Ney, 2005Edwards, M. (2007). As Good As It Gets: What Country Takes the Best Care of Its Older Citizens? In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), *Solutions to Social Problems: Lessons from Other Societies* (4th ed., pp. 76–85). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.; Hartlapp, M., & Schmid, G. (2008). Labour market policy for "active ageing" in Europe: Expanding the options for retirement transitions. *Journal of Social Policy, 37*(3), 409–431; Ney, S. (2005). Active aging policy in Europe: Between path dependency and path departure. *Ageing International, 30*, 325–342.



*Older people who want to work may have trouble finding employment because of age discrimination and other factors.*

*© Thinkstock*

## Workplace Ageism

Older Americans also face problems in employment. Recall that about 16 percent of seniors remain employed. Other elders may wish to work but are retired or unemployed because several obstacles make it difficult for them to find jobs. First, many workplaces do not permit the part-time working arrangements that many seniors favor. Second, and as the opening news story indicated, the rise in high-tech jobs means that older workers would need to be retrained for many of today's jobs, and few retraining programs exist. Third, although federal law prohibits age discrimination in employment, it exists anyway, as employers do not think older people are "up to" the job, even though the evidence indicates they are good, productive workers (Berger, 2009; Roscigno, 2010).Berger, E. D. (2009). Managing age discrimination: An examination of the techniques used when seeking

employment. *The Gerontologist, 49*(3), 317–332; Roscigno, V. J. (2010). Ageism in the American workplace. *Contexts, 9*(1), 16–21. Finally, earnings above a certain level reduce Social Security benefits before full retirement age, leading some older people to avoid working at all or to at least limit their hours. All these obstacles lead seniors to drop out of the labor force or to remain unemployed (Gallo, Brand, Teng, Leo-Summers, & Byers, 2009).Gallo, W. T., Brand, J. E., Teng, H.-M., Leo-Summers, L., & Byers, A. L. (2009). Differential impact of involuntary job loss on physical disability among older workers: Does predisposition matter? *Research on Aging, 31*(3), 345–360.

Age discrimination in the workplace merits some further discussion. According to sociologist Vincent J. Roscigno (2010),Roscigno, V. J. (2010). Ageism in the American workplace. *Contexts, 9*(1), 16–21. survey evidence suggests that more than half of older workers have experienced or observed age discrimination in the workplace, and more than 80 percent of older workers have experienced or observed jokes, disrespect, or other prejudicial comments about old age. Roscigno notes that workplace ageism receives little news media attention and has also been neglected by social scientists. This is so despite the related facts that ageism in the workplace is common and that the older people who experience this discrimination suffer financial loss and emotional problems. Roscigno (2010, p. 17)Roscigno, V. J. (2010). Ageism in the American workplace. *Contexts, 9*(1), 16–21. interviewed several victims of age discrimination and later wrote, “Many conveyed fear of defaulting on mortgages or being unable to pay for their children’s college after being pushed out of their jobs. Others expressed anger and insecurity over the loss of affordable health insurance or pension benefits…Just as prevalent and somewhat surprising to me in these discussions were the less-tangible, yet deeper social-psychological and emotional costs that social science research has established for racial discrimination or sexual harassment, for instance, but are only now being considered in relation to older workers.”

One of the people Roscigno interviewed was a maintenance worker who was laid off after more than two decades of working for his employer. This worker was both hurt and angry. “They now don’t want to pay me my pension,” he said. “I was a good worker for them and always did everything they asked. I went out of my way to help train people and make everything run smoothly, so everybody was happy and it was a good place to work. And now this is what I get, like I never really mattered to them. It’s just not right” (Roscigno, 2010, p. 17).Roscigno, V. J. (2010). Ageism in the American workplace. *Contexts*, *9*(1), 16–21.

## Bereavement and Social Isolation

“We all need someone we can lean on,” as a famous Rolling Stones song goes. Most older Americans do have adequate social support networks, which, as we saw earlier, are important for their well-being. However, a significant minority of elders live alone and do not see friends and relatives as often as they wish. Bereavement takes a toll, as elders who might have been married for many years suddenly find themselves living alone. Here a gender difference again exists. Because women outlive men and are generally younger than their husbands, they are three times more likely than men (42 percent compared to 13 percent) to be widowed and thus much more likely to live alone (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Living Arrangements of Noninstitutionalized Older Americans, 2010

| | Men (%) | Women (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Living alone | 19 | 41 |
| Living with spouse | 70 | 37 |
| Other arrangement | 11 | 21 |

Source: Data from Administration on Aging. (2011). A profile of older Americans: 2011. Retrieved from http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/aging_statistics/Profile/2011/docs/2011profile.pdf.

Many elders have at least one adult child living within driving distance, and such children are an invaluable resource. At the same time, however, some elders have no children, because either they have outlived their children or they never had any. As baby boomers begin reaching their older years, more of them will have no children because they were more likely than previous generations to not marry and/or to not have children if they did marry. Baby boomers thus face a relative lack of children to help them when they enter their “old-old” years (Leland, 2010).Leland, J. (2010, April 25). A graying population, a graying work force. *New York Times*, p. A14.

Bereavement is always a difficult experience, but because so many elders lose a spouse, it is a particular problem in their lives. The grief that usually follows bereavement can last several years and, if it becomes extreme, can involve anxiety, depression, guilt, loneliness, and other problems. Of all these problems, loneliness is perhaps the most common and the most difficult to overcome.

## Elder Abuse

Some seniors fall prey to their own relatives who commit **elder abuse** against them. Such abuse involves one or more of the following: physical or sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse, neglect of care, or financial exploitation (Novak, 2012).Novak, M. (2012). *Issues in aging* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. Accurate data are hard to come by since few elders report their abuse, but estimates say that at least 10 percent of older Americans have suffered at least one form of abuse, amounting to hundreds of thousands of cases annually. However, few of these cases come to the attention of the police or other authorities (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2010).National Center on Elder Abuse. (2010). *Why should I care about elder abuse?* Washington, DC: Author.

Although we may never know the actual extent of elder abuse, it poses a serious health problem for the elders who are physically, sexually, and/or psychologically abused or neglected, and it may even raise their chances of dying. One study of more than 2,800 elders found that those who were abused or neglected were three times more likely than those who were not mistreated to die during the next thirteen years. This difference was found even after injury and chronic illness were taken into account (Horn, 1998).Horn, D. (1998, August 17). Bad news on elder abuse. *Time*, p. 82.

A major reason for elder abuse seems to be stress. The adult children and other relatives who care for elders often find it an exhausting, emotionally trying experience, especially if the person they are helping needs extensive help with daily activities. Faced with this stress, elders' caregivers can easily snap and take out their frustrations with physical violence, emotional abuse, or neglect of care.

## Senior Power: Older Americans as a Political Force

Older Americans often hold strong views on issues that affect them directly, such as Medicare and Social Security. In turn, politicians often work to win the older vote and shape their political stances accordingly.




*During the past few decades, older people have become more active politically on their own behalf.*

*© Thinkstock*

To help address all the problems discussed in the preceding pages, several organizations have been established since the 1980s to act as interest groups in the political arena on behalf of older Americans (Walker, 2006).Walker, A. (2006). Aging and politics: An international perspective. In R. H. Binstock & L. K. George (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (6th ed., pp. 338–358). New York, NY: Academic Press. One of the most influential groups is the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), which is open to people 50 or older. AARP provides travel and other discounts to its members and lobbies Congress and other groups extensively on elderly issues. Its membership numbers about 40 million, or 40 percent of the over-50 population. Some critics say AARP focuses too much on its largely middle-class membership's self-interests instead of working for more far-reaching economic changes that might benefit the older poor; others say its efforts on Medicare, Social Security, and other issues do benefit

the elderly from all walks of life. This controversy aside, AARP is an influential force in the political arena because of its numbers and resources.

A very different type of political organization of the elderly was the Gray Panthers, founded by the late Maggie Kuhn in 1970 (Kuhn, Long, & Quinn, 1991).Kuhn, M., Long, C., & Quinn, L. (1991). *No stone unturned: The life and times of Maggie Kuhn*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. Although this group has been less newsworthy since Kuhn's death in 1995, at its height it had some eighty-five local chapters across the nation and 70,000 members and supporters. A more activist organization than AARP and other lobbying groups for the elderly, the Gray Panthers took more liberal stances. For example, it urged the establishment of a national health-care service and programs to increase affordable housing for the elderly.

As older Americans have engaged the political process on their own behalf, critics have charged that programs for the elderly are too costly to the nation, that the elderly are better off than groups like AARP claim, and that new programs for the elderly will take even more money from younger generations and leave them insufficient funds for their own retirement many years from now. Their criticism, which began during the 1980s, is termed the **generational equity** argument (Williamson, McNamara, & Howling, 2003).Williamson, J. B., McNamara, T. K., & Howling, S. A. (2003). Generational equity, generational interdependence, and the framing of the debate over social security reform. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, *30*(3), 3–14.

Advocates for the elderly say the generational equity critics exaggerate the financial well-being of older Americans and neglect the fact that many older Americans, especially women and those of color, are poor or near poor and thus need additional government aid. Anything we can do now to help the aged, they continue, will also help future generations of the elderly. As Lenard W. Kaye (1994, p. 346)Kaye, L. W. (1994). Generational equity: Pitting young against old. In J. Robert B. Enright (Ed.), *Perspectives in social gerontology* (pp. 343–347). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. observed in an early critique of the generational equity movement, "In the long run, all of us can expect to live into extended old age, barring an unexpected fatal illness or accident. To do injustice to our current generation of elders, by means of policy change, can only come back to haunt us as each and every one of us—children, young families, and working people—move toward the latter stages of the life course."

## People Making a Difference

College Students Helping Senior Citizens

After Hurricane Irene swept up the East Coast in August 2011, many towns and cities faced severe flooding. One of these towns was Cranford, New Jersey, just southwest of Newark. Streets and hundreds of homes flooded, and many residents' belongings were ruined.

Union County College, which has campuses in Cranford and a few other towns, came to Cranford residents' aid. As the college president explained in late August, "Many of the town's residents are senior citizens. Even though the fall term won't begin until Sept. 1, we've still got a number of strong men and women on campus to help residents clear out their basements and help move whatever people needed moved."

Led by the dean of college life, a dozen or so students went house-to-house on a Cranford street that experienced the worst flooding to aid the town's senior citizens and younger ones as well. The dean later recalled, "Everyone we met was just so happy to see us there helping out. Sometimes they had plenty of work for us. Other times, they just smiled and said they were glad to know we cared."

A news report summarized the impact of the students' assistance: "In the coming weeks and months, Cranford residents will be able to recover what their town lost to Irene. But they may never forget the damage Irene caused, nor are they likely to forget how Union County College's students came to help them in their time of need." At a time of crisis, the staff and students of Union County College in the small town of Cranford, New Jersey, made a big difference in the lives of Cranford's senior citizens and younger residents alike.

Source: Cranford Chronicle, 2011Cranford Chronicle. (2011, August 31). County College students help Cranford residents cleanup. *Cranford Chronicle*. Retrieved from http://www.nj.com/cranford/index.ssf/2011/2008/county_college_students_help_c.html.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The US elderly experience several health problems, including arthritis, high blood pressure, heart disease, hearing loss, vision problems, diabetes, and dementia.
- Nursing home care in the United States is very expensive and often substandard; neglect and abuse of nursing home residents is fairly common.
- Despite help from Social Security, many older Americans face problems of financial security.

- It is difficult to determine the actual extent of elder abuse, but elder abuse often has serious consequences for the health and lives of older Americans.
- During the last few decades, older Americans have been active in the political process on their own behalf and today are an important political force in the United States.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What do you think is the worst or most serious problem facing the US elderly? Explain your answer.
2. The text suggests that the lives of the US elderly would be improved if the United States were to adopt some of the policies and practices that other nations have for their elderly. Explain why you agree or disagree with this suggestion.

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# 7.6: Reducing Ageism and Helping Older Americans

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand the contradictory impulses that make it difficult to predict the future for older Americans.
2. Discuss any two programs or policies that should help address some of the problems facing older Americans.

We have seen some contradictory impulses that make it difficult to predict the status of older Americans in the decades ahead. On the one hand, the large number of baby boomers will combine with increasing longevity to swell the ranks of the elderly; this process has already begun and will accelerate during the coming years. The inevitable jump in the size of the aged population may strain Social Security, Medicare, and other programs for the aged. On the other hand, the baby boomer generation will reach its old age as a much better educated and more healthy and wealthy group than any previous generation. It will likely participate in the labor force, politics, and other arenas more than previous generations of elders and, as has been true for some time, exert a good deal of influence on national political and cultural affairs.

Although this sounds like a rosier picture, several concerns remain. Despite the relative affluence of the baby boomers, segments of the group, especially among women and people of color, remain mired in poverty, and these segments will continue to be once they reach their older years. Moreover, the relative health of the baby boomers means that they will outlive previous generations of the aged. Yet as more of them reach the ranks of the "old-old," they will become frailer and require care from health-care professionals and organizations and from social support networks. As noted earlier, some may not have children and will be in even more need of help.

Although older Americans fare much better than their counterparts in poor nations, they fare not nearly as well as their counterparts in other wealthy democracies, which generally provide many more extensive and better-funded programs and services for their elderly. Older Americans also continue to confront stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes that add to the burden many of them already face from the biological process of aging.

A sociological understanding of aging and ageism reminds us that many of the problems that older Americans face are ultimately rooted not in their chronological age but rather in the stereotypes about them and in the lack of adequate social programs like those found throughout other Western nations. This understanding also reminds us that the older Americans who face the most severe problems of health, health care, and financial security are women and people of color and that their more severe problems reflect the many inequalities they have experienced throughout the life course, long before they reached their older years. These inequalities accumulate over the years to leave them especially vulnerable when they finally arrive into their sixties.

With this understanding, it becomes clear that efforts to improve the lives of older Americans must focus on providing them with more numerous and more extensive social services and programming of many kinds and on reducing the stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes that many Americans hold of older people. Possibilities involving improved social services and programming might be drawn from the example provided by other Western nations and include the following (Rowe et al., 2010; Uhlenberg, 2009):

1. An expansion of Social Security to provide a much more comfortable life for all older Americans, regardless of their earnings history, and thus regardless of their gender and race/ethnicity.
2. An expansion of Medicare and other health aid for older Americans to match the level of health-care assistance provided by many other Western nations. In one particular area that needs attention, Medicare pays for nursing home care only after nursing home patients use up most of their own assets, leaving a patient's spouse with severe financial problems. Other Western nations pay for nursing home care from the outset, and the United States should adopt this practice.
3. The establishment of more flexible work hours, job-sharing arrangements, and other policies that would enhance the ability of older people to work part-time or full-time.
4. Increase paid and volunteer opportunities for older adults to help take care of young children and adolescents, especially those who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged, in schools and other settings, creating a win-win situation for both the older adults and the children.
5. As with stereotypical and prejudicial views based on gender and on race/ethnicity, greater educational efforts should be launched to reduce stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes based on aging. Like sexism and racism, ageism has no place in a nation like the United States, which has historically promised equality and equal opportunity for all.

Beyond all these measures, aging scholars emphasize the need to help *future* older populations by investing in younger people. As a group of several scholars has noted, “Many of the key determinants of successful aging are cumulative, occurring throughout the lifetime and, importantly, starting in early childhood. The people who will turn 65 between 2050 and 2070 have already been born. If we want to promote their health and well-being into old age, we need to begin now, when they are infants and children. Childhood and early adolescent experiences leave a footprint for many functions in older age. Failing to invest in education and health throughout childhood and young adulthood is short-sighted” (Rowe et al., 2010, p. 24).

### Key Takeaways

- Although the number of older Americans will be increasing in the years ahead, the baby boomers who are now reaching old age will be better educated and wealthier than older Americans of past generations.
- Efforts to help older Americans would benefit from relying on the models practiced by other Western democracies.

### For Your Review

1. What do you think is the most important action the United States should take to help older Americans?
2. Does it make sense for the United States to follow the example of other democracies as it tries to help older Americans, or is the United States different enough from these nations that it does not make sense to do so? Explain your answer.

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# 7.7: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Gerontology is the study of aging. Gerontologists study the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of aging. Social gerontologists focus on social aging and distinguish several dimensions of aging, which refers to changes in people's roles and relationships as they age.
2. The perception and experience of aging vary from one society to another and within a given society over time.
3. Sociological explanations of aging include disengagement theory, activity theory, and conflict theory. Disengagement theory emphasizes the need of society to disengage its elders from their previous roles to pave the way for a younger and presumably more able generation to take over those roles. In contrast, activity theory assumes that elders need to remain active to enhance their physical and mental health. Conflict theory emphasizes ageism, or discrimination and prejudice against the elderly, and the structural barriers society poses to elders' economic and other aspects of overall well-being.
4. Life expectancy differs dramatically around the world and within the United States, where it's lower for men and lower for people of color. Because life expectancy has increased, people are living longer, resulting in a "graying of society." In the United States, the imminent entrance of the baby boom generation into its older years will further fuel a large rise in the number of older Americans. This graying of society may strain traditional economic and medical programs for their care and affect views of aging and the elderly.
5. Although aging involves several physiological and psychological changes, negative stereotypes of aging and the elderly exaggerate the extent and impact of these changes. Proper exercise, nutrition, and stress reduction can minimize the effects of aging, as can religious involvement and informal social support networks.
6. As a diverse group, older Americans differ greatly in terms of wealth and poverty, education, health, and other dimensions. They face several problems because of their age, including illness and disability, financial security, employment obstacles, and elder abuse. For several reasons, older Americans generally hold more conservative views on social and moral issues. At the same time, groups working on behalf of older Americans in the political arena have succeeded in bringing elder issues to the attention of public officials and political parties.
7. As the ranks of older Americans swell in the years ahead, elders will be better educated and wealthier than their predecessors, but their sheer numbers may impose considerable strain on social institutions. Already there are signs of perceived conflict between the needs of the elderly and those of younger generations. However, advocates for older Americans believe that efforts to help elders now will in the long run help younger Americans when they finally reach their old age.

## Using What You Know

It is about twenty years from now, and a close friend of yours is facing a difficult decision. Her mother is in failing health and might have the onset of dementia. It has become increasingly apparent that she can no longer live alone, and your friend is trying to decide whether to have her mother come live with her, to arrange for in-home care for her, or to place her into residential care. What advice do you give to your friend?

## What You Can Do

To help reduce inequality based on aging and ageism and the problems facing older people, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer at a senior citizens' center, residential care facility, or nursing home.
2. Write a letter to the editor about media stereotypes about older people.
3. Start a group on your campus to educate students about the problems facing senior citizens.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 8: The Changing Family


8.1: Overview of the Family
8.2: Sociological Perspectives on the Family
8.3: Changes and Problems in American Families
8.4: Families in the Future
8.5: End-of-Chapter Material


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# 8.1: Overview of the Family

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe why many children throughout history have not lived in a nuclear family.
2. Understand the status of the nuclear family in the United States since the colonial period.
3. Describe the major marriage and family arrangements in the United States today.

A family is a group of two or more people who are related by blood, marriage, adoption, or a mutual commitment and who care for one another. Defined in this way, the family is universal or nearly universal: Some form of the family has existed in every society, or nearly every society, that we know about (Starbuck, 2010). Yet it is also true that many types of families have existed, and the cross-cultural and historical record indicates that these different forms of the family can all "work": They provide practical and emotional support for their members and they socialize their children.

It is important to keep this last statement in mind, because Americans until the last few decades thought of only one type of family, and that is the nuclear family: A married heterosexual couple and their young children living by themselves under one roof. The nuclear family has existed in most societies with which scholars are familiar. An extended family, which consists of parents, their children, and other relatives, has a nuclear family at its core and was quite common in prehistoric societies. Many *one-parent* families begin as (two-parent) nuclear families that dissolve upon divorce or separation or, more rarely, the death of one of the parents. In recent decades, one-parent families have become more common in the United States because of divorce and births out of wedlock, but they were actually very common throughout most of human history because many spouses died early in life and because many babies were born out of wedlock.




Although the nuclear family is a common family arrangement today, historically many children lived with only one parent because spouses died early and many babies were born out of wedlock. (Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.)

Although many prehistoric societies featured nuclear families, a few societies studied by anthropologists have not had them. In these societies, a father does not live with a woman after she has his child and sees them either irregularly or not at all. Despite the absence of a father and the lack of a nuclear family, this type of family arrangement seems to have worked well in these societies. In particular, children are cared for and grow up to be productive members of their societies (Smith, 1996).Smith, R. T. (1996). *The matrifocal family: Power, pluralism, and politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

These examples do not invalidate the fact that nuclear families are almost universal. But they do indicate that the functions of the nuclear family can be achieved through other family arrangements. If that is true, perhaps the oft-cited concern over the "breakdown" of the 1950s-style nuclear family in modern America is at least somewhat undeserved. As indicated by the examples just given, children can and do thrive without two parents. To say this is meant neither to extol divorce, births out of wedlock, and fatherless families nor to minimize the problems they may involve. Rather, it is meant simply to indicate that the nuclear family is not the only viable form of family organization (Seccombe, 2012).Seccombe, K. (2012). *Families and their social worlds* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

In fact, although nuclear families remain the norm in most societies, in practice they are something of a historical rarity: Until about a century ago, many spouses died by their mid-forties, and many babies were born out of wedlock. In medieval Europe, for example, people died early from disease, malnutrition, and other problems. One consequence of early mortality was that many children could expect to outlive at least one of their parents and thus essentially were raised in one-parent families or in stepfamilies (Gottlieb, 1993).Gottlieb, B. (1993). *The family in the Western world from the black death to the industrial age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

During the American colonial period, different family types abounded, and the nuclear family was by no means the only type (Coontz, 1995).Coontz, S. (1995, summer). The way we weren't: The myth and reality of the "traditional" family. *National Forum: The Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, 11–14. Nomadic Native American groups had relatively small nuclear families, while nonnomadic groups had larger extended families. Because nuclear families among African Americans slaves were difficult to achieve, slaves adapted by developing extended families, adopting orphans, and taking in other people not related by blood or marriage. Many European parents of colonial children died because average life expectancy was only 45 years. The one-third to one-half of children who outlived at least one of their parents lived in stepfamilies or with just their surviving parent. Mothers were so busy working the land and doing other tasks that they devoted relatively little time to child care, which instead was entrusted to older children or servants.

Moving much forward in US history, an important change in American families occurred during the 1940s after World War II ended. As men came home after serving in the military in Europe and Japan, books, magazines, and newspapers exhorted women to have babies, and babies they did have: People got married at younger ages and the birth rate soared, resulting in the now famous *baby boom generation*. Meanwhile, divorce rates dropped. The national economy thrived as auto and other factory jobs multiplied, and many families for the first time could dream of owning their own homes. Suburbs sprang up, and many families moved to them. Many families during the 1950s did indeed fit the *Leave It to Beaver* model of the breadwinner-homemaker suburban nuclear family. Following the Depression of the 1930s and the war of the 1940s, the 1950s seemed an almost idyllic decade.

Even so, less than 60 percent of American children during the 1950s lived in breadwinner-homemaker nuclear families. Moreover, many lived in poverty, as the poverty rate then was almost twice as high as it is today. Teenage pregnancy rates were about twice as high as today. Although not publicized back then, alcoholism and violence in families were common. Historians have found that many women in this era were unhappy with their homemaker roles, Mrs. Cleaver (Beaver's mother) to the contrary, suffering from what Betty Friedan (1963)Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. famously called the "feminine mystique."

During the 1960s and 1970s, women began to enter the labor force. They did so to increase their families' incomes and to achieve greater self-fulfillment. More than 60 percent of married women with children under 6 years of age are now in the labor force, compared to less than 19 percent in 1960. At about the same time, divorce rates increased for several reasons that we examine later in this chapter. Changes in the American family had begun, and along with them various controversies and problems.

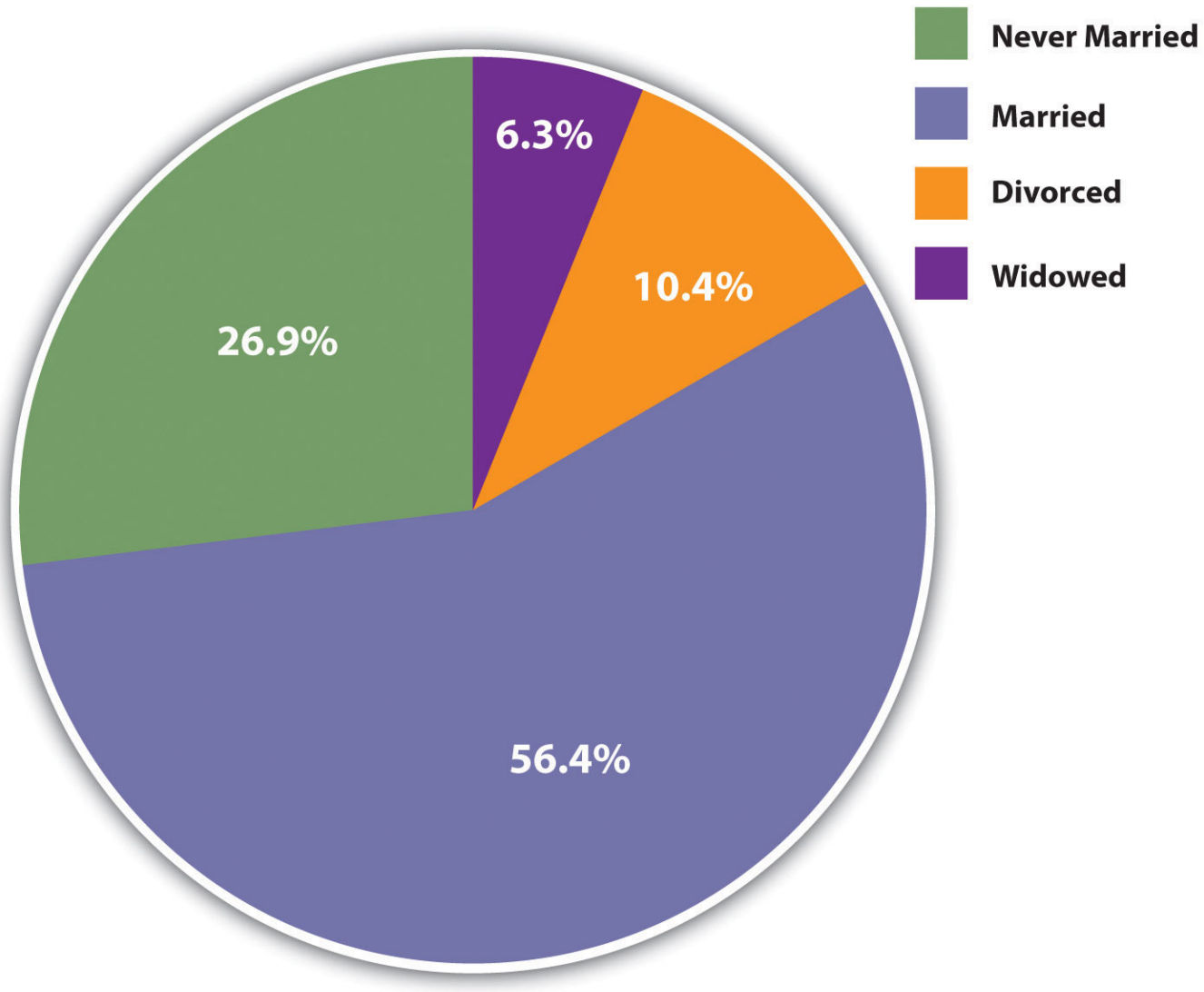
## Marriage and the Family in the United States Today

In the United States today, marriage remains an important institution. Only about 27 percent of all adults (18 or older) have never been married, 56 percent are currently married, 10 percent are divorced, and 6 percent are widowed (see Figure 10.1). Thus 72 percent of American adults have been married, whether or not they are currently married. Because more than half of the never-married people are under 30, it is fair to say that many of them will be getting married sometime in the future. When we look just at people aged 45–54, about 87 percent are currently married or had been married at some point in their lives. In a 2010 poll, only 5 percent of Americans under age 30 said they did not want to get married (Luscombe, 2010).Luscombe, B. (2010, November 18). Who needs marriage? A changing institution. *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2032116,2032100.html. These figures all indicate that marriage continues to be an important ideal in American life, even if not all marriages succeed. As one sociologist has said, "Getting married is a way to

show family and friends that you have a successful personal life. It's like the ultimate merit badge" (Luscombe, 2010).Luscombe, B. (2010, November 18). Who needs marriage? A changing institution. *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2032116,2032100.html.

Although marriage remains an important institution, two recent trends do suggest that its importance is declining for some segments of the population (Cohn, Passel, Wang, & Livingston, 2011).Cohn, D., Passel J., Wang, W., & Livingston, G. (2011). *Barely half of US adults are married—a record low*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. First, although 71 percent of adults have been married, this figure represents a drop from 85 percent in 1960. Second, education greatly affects whether we marry and stay married, and marriage is less common among people without a college degree.

Figure 10.1 Marital Status of the US Population 18 Years of Age or Older, 2010




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

Recent figures provide striking evidence of this relationship. Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of college graduates are currently married, compared to less than half (47 percent) of high school graduates and high school dropouts combined. People with no more than a high school degree are less likely than college graduates to marry at all, and they are more likely to get divorced, as we shall discuss again later, if they do marry.

This difference in marriage rates worsens the financial situation that people with lower education already face. As one observer noted, "As marriage increasingly becomes a phenomenon of the better-off and better-educated, the incomes of two-earner married

couples diverge more from those of struggling single adults" (Marcus, 2011).Marcus, R. (2011, December 18). The marriage gap presents a real cost. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-marriage-gap-presents-a-real-cost/2011/12/16/gIQAz24DzO_story.html?hpid=z3. One of the many consequences of this education gap in marriage is that the children of one-parent households are less likely than those of two-parent households to graduate high school and to attend college. In this manner, a parent's low education helps to perpetuate low education among the parent's children.

## The United States Compared to Other Democracies

In several ways, the United States differs from other Western democracies in its view of marriage and in its behavior involving marriage and other intimate relationships (Cherlin, 2010; Hull, Meier, & Ortyl, 2012).Cherlin, A. J. (2010). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York, NY: Vintage; Hull, K. E., Meier, A., & Ortyl, T. (2012). The changing landscape of love and marriage. In D. Hartmann & C. Uggen (Eds.), *The contexts reader* (2nd ed., pp. 56–63). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. First, Americans place more emphasis than their Western counterparts on the ideal of romantic love as a basis for marriage and other intimate relationships and on the cultural importance of marriage. Second, the United States has higher rates of marriage than other Western nations. Third, the United States also has higher rates of divorce than other Western nations; for example, 42 percent of American marriages end in divorce after fifteen years, compared to only 8 percent in Italy and Spain. Fourth, Americans are much more likely than other Western citizens to remarry once they are divorced, to cohabit in short-term relationships, and, in general, to move from one intimate relationship to another, a practice called *serial monogamy*. This practice leads to instability that can have negative impacts on any children that may be involved and also on the adults involved.



*Americans place more emphasis than Europeans on the ideal of romantic love as the basis for marriage. This emphasis helps account for why the United States has a higher divorce rate than many European nations.*

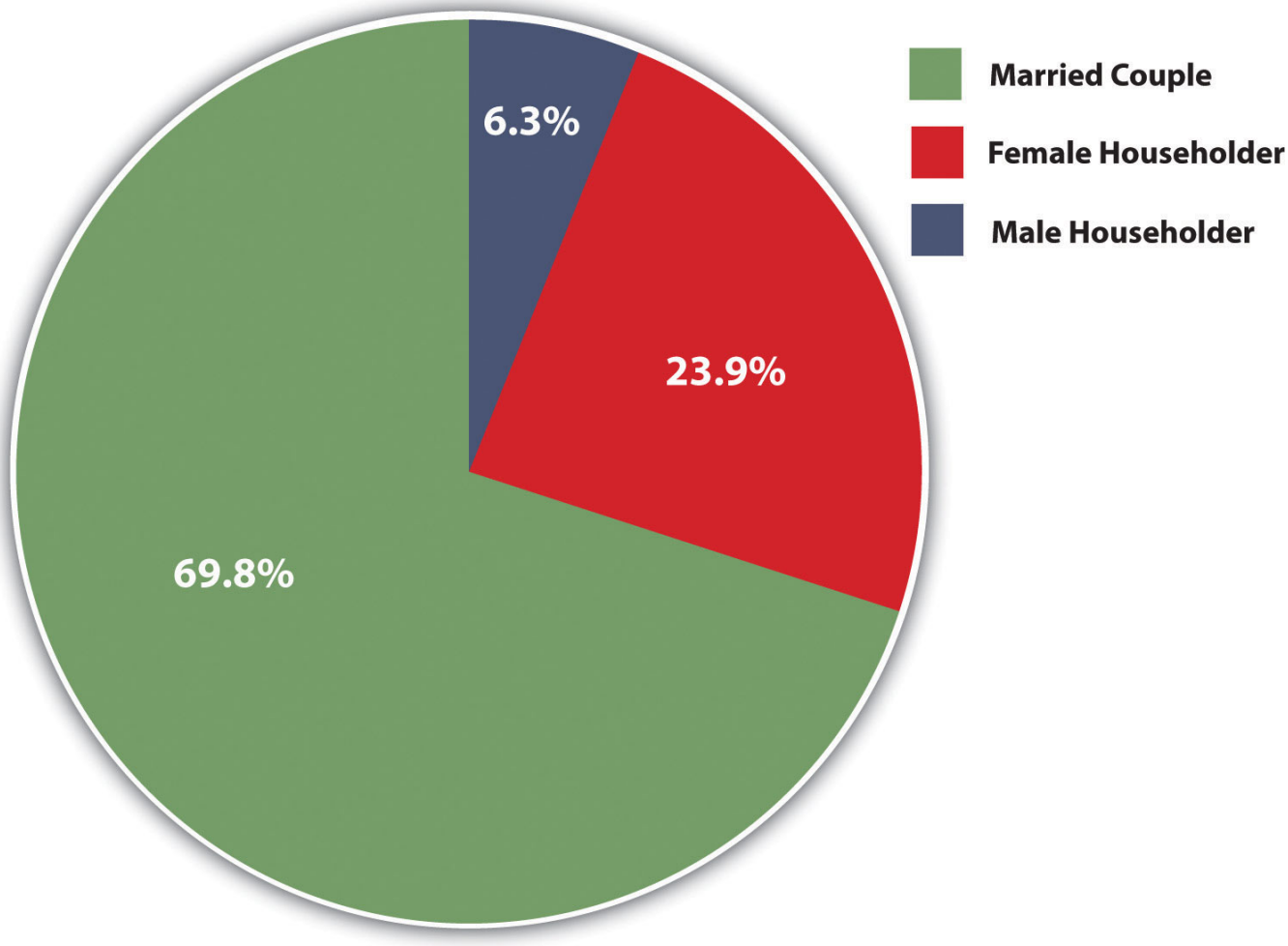
*© Thinkstock*

The US emphasis on romantic love helps account for its high rates of marriage, divorce, and serial monogamy. It leads people to want to be in an intimate relationship, marital or cohabiting. Then when couples get married because they are in love, many quickly find that passionate romantic love can quickly fade; because their expectations of romantic love were so high, they become more disenchanted once this happens and unhappy in their marriage. As sociologist Andrew J. Cherlin (2010, p. 4)Cherlin, A. J. (2010). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York, NY: Vintage observes, "Americans are conflicted about lifelong marriage: they value the stability and security of marriage, but they tend to believe that individuals who are unhappy with their marriages should be allowed to end them." Still, the ideal of romantic love persists even after divorce, leading to remarriage and/or other intimate relationships.

## Children and Families

The United States has about 36 million families with children under 18. About 70 percent of these are married-couple families, while 30 percent (up from about 14 percent in the 1950s) are one-parent families. Most of these latter families are headed by the mother (see Figure 10.2).

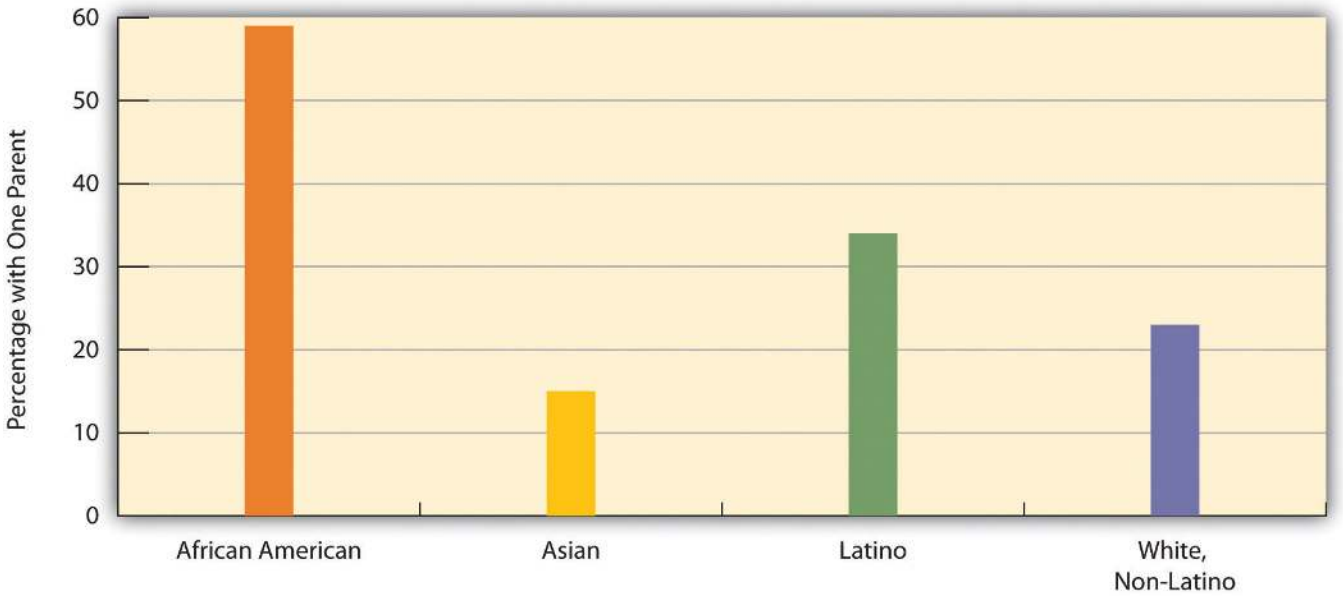
Figure 10.2 Family Households with Children under 18 Years of Age, 2010




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

The proportion of families with children under 18 that have only one parent varies significantly by race and ethnicity: Latino and African American families are more likely than white and Asian American households to have only one parent (see Figure 10.3). Similarly, whereas 30 percent of all children do not live with both their biological parents, this figure, too, varies by race and ethnicity: about 61 percent of African American children, 15 percent of Asian children, 33 percent of Latino children, and 23 percent of non-Latino white children.

Figure 10.3 Race, Ethnicity, and Percentage of Family Groups with Only One Parent, 2010




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

We will discuss several other issues affecting children later in this chapter. But before we move on, it is worth noting that children, despite all the joy and fulfillment they so often bring to parents, also tend to reduce parents' emotional well-being. As a recent review summarized the evidence, "Parents in the United States experience depression and emotional distress more often than their childless adult counterparts. Parents of young children report far more depression, emotional distress and other negative emotions than non-parents, and parents of grown children have no better well-being than adults who never had children" (Simon, 2008, p. 41).Simon, R. W. (2008). The joys of parenthood, reconsidered. *Contexts*, *7*(2), 40–45.

Children have these effects because raising them can be both stressful and expensive. Depending on household income, the average child costs parents between $134,000 and $270,000 from birth until age 18. College education obviously can cost tens of thousands of dollars beyond that. Robin W. Simon (2008)Simon, R. W. (2008). The joys of parenthood, reconsidered. *Contexts*, *7*(2), 40–45. argues that American parents' stress would be reduced if the government provided better and more affordable day care and after-school options, flexible work schedules, and tax credits for various parenting costs. She also thinks that the expectations Americans have of the joy of parenthood are unrealistically positive and that parental stress would be reduced if expectations became more realistic.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although the nuclear family has been very common, many children throughout history have not lived in a nuclear family, in part because a parent would die at an early age.
- Most Americans eventually marry. This fact means that marriage remains an important ideal in American life, even if not all marriages succeed.
- About 30 percent of children live with only one parent, almost always their mother.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a brief essay in which you describe the advantages and disadvantages of the 1950s-type nuclear family in which the father works outside the home and the mother stays at home.
2. The text notes that most people eventually marry. In view of the fact that so many marriages end in divorce, why do you think that so many people continue to marry?
3. Some of the children who live only with their mothers were born out of wedlock. Do you think the parents should have married for the sake of their child? Why or why not?

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# 8.2: Sociological Perspectives on the Family

**Learning Objective**

1. Summarize understandings of the family as presented by functional, conflict, and social interactionist theories.

Sociological views on today's families and their problems generally fall into the functional, conflict, and social interactionist approaches introduced in Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems". Let's review these views, which are summarized in Table 10.1 "Theory Snapshot".

Table 10.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | The family performs several essential functions for society. It socializes children, it provides emotional and practical support for its members, it helps regulate sexual activity and sexual reproduction, and it provides its members with a social identity. Family problems stem from sudden or far-reaching changes in the family's structure or processes; these problems threaten the family's stability and weaken society. |
| Conflict theory | The family contributes to social inequality by reinforcing economic inequality and by reinforcing patriarchy. Family problems stem from economic inequality and from patriarchal ideology. The family can also be a source of conflict, including physical violence and emotional cruelty, for its own members. |
| Symbolic interactionism | The interaction of family members and intimate couples involves shared understandings of their situations. Wives and husbands have different styles of communication, and social class affects the expectations that spouses have of their marriages and of each other. Family problems stem from different understandings and expectations that spouses have of their marriage. |

## Social Functions of the Family

Recall that the functional perspective emphasizes that social institutions perform several important functions to help preserve social stability and otherwise keep a society working. A functional understanding of the family thus stresses the ways in which the family as a social institution helps make society possible. As such, the family performs several important functions.

First, the family is the primary unit for *socializing children*. No society is possible without adequate socialization of its young. In most societies, the family is the major unit in which socialization happens. Parents, siblings, and, if the family is extended rather than nuclear, other relatives all help socialize children from the time they are born.



One of the most important functions of the family is the socialization of children. In most societies the family is the major unit through which socialization occurs.

Colleen Kelly – Kids Playing Monopoly Chicago – CC BY 2.0.

Second, the family is ideally a major source of *practical and emotional support* for its members. It provides them food, clothing, shelter, and other essentials, and it also provides them love, comfort, and help in times of emotional distress, and other types of support.

Third, the family helps *regulate sexual activity and sexual reproduction*. All societies have norms governing with whom and how often a person should have sex. The family is the major unit for teaching these norms and the major unit through which sexual reproduction occurs. One reason for this is to ensure that infants have adequate emotional and practical care when they are born.

Fourth, the family provides its members with a *social identity*. Children are born into their parents' social class, race and ethnicity, religion, and so forth. Some children have advantages throughout life because of the social identity they acquire from their parents, while others face many obstacles because the social class or race/ethnicity into which they are born is at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Beyond discussing the family's functions, the functional perspective on the family maintains that sudden or far-reaching changes in conventional family structure and processes threaten the family's stability and thus that of society. For example, most sociology and marriage-and-family textbooks during the 1950s maintained that the male breadwinner–female homemaker nuclear family was the best arrangement for children, as it provided for a family's economic and child-rearing needs. Any shift in this arrangement, they warned, would harm children and, by extension, the family as a social institution and even society itself. Textbooks no longer contain this warning, but many conservative observers continue to worry about the impact on children of working mothers and one-parent families. We return to their concerns shortly.

## The Family and Conflict

Conflict theorists agree that the family serves the important functions just listed, but they also point to problems within the family that the functional perspective minimizes or overlooks altogether.

First, the family as a social institution contributes to social inequality. Because families pass along their wealth to their children, and because families differ greatly in the amount of wealth they have, the family helps reinforce existing inequality. As it developed through the centuries, and especially during industrialization, the family also became more and more of a patriarchal unit (since men made money working in factories while women stayed home), helping to reinforce men's status at the top of the social hierarchy.

Second, the family can also be a source of conflict for its own members. Although the functional perspective assumes the family provides its members emotional comfort and support, many families do just the opposite and are far from the harmonious, happy groups depicted in the 1950s television shows. Instead, they argue, shout, and use emotional cruelty and physical violence. We return to family violence later in this chapter.

The conflict perspective emphasizes that many of the problems we see in today's families stem from economic inequality and from patriarchy. The problems that many families experience reflect the fact that they live in poverty or near poverty. Money does not always bring happiness, but a dire lack of money produces stress and other difficulties that impair a family's functioning and relationships. The Note 10.9 "Applying Social Research" box discusses other ways in which social class influences the family.

Conflict within a family also stems from patriarchy. Husbands usually earn more money than wives, and many men continue to feel that they are the head of their families. When women resist this old-fashioned notion, spousal conflict occurs.

### Applying Social Research

Social Class and the Family

A growing amount of social science research documents social class differences in how well a family functions: the quality of its relationships and the cognitive, psychological, and social development of its children. This focus reflects the fact that what happens during the first months and years of life may have profound effects on how well a newborn prospers during childhood, adolescence, and beyond. To the extent this is true, the social class differences that have been found have troublesome implications.

According to sociologist Frank E. Furstenberg Jr., "steep differences exist across social classes" in mothers' prenatal experiences, such as the quality of their diet and health care, as well as in the health care that their infants receive. As a result, he says, "children

enter the world endowed unequally." This inequality worsens after they are born for several reasons.

First, low-income families are much more likely to experience *negative events*, such as death, poor health, unemployment, divorce, and criminal victimization. When these negative events do occur, says Furstenberg, "social class affects a family's ability to cushion their blow…Life is simply harder and more brutish at the bottom." These negative events produce great amounts of stress; as Chapter 2 discussed, this stress in turn causes children to experience various developmental problems.

Second, low-income parents are much less likely to read and speak regularly to their infants and young children, who thus are slower to develop cognitive and reading skills; this problem in turn impairs their school performance when they enter elementary school.

Third, low-income parents are also less able to expose their children to cultural experiences (e.g., museum visits) outside the home, to develop their talents in the arts and other areas, and to otherwise be involved in the many nonschool activities that are important for a child's development. In contrast, wealthier parents keep their children very busy in these activities in a pattern that sociologist Annette Lareau calls *concerted cultivation*. These children's involvement in these activities provides them various life skills that help enhance their performance in school and later in the workplace.

Fourth, low-income children grow up in low-income neighborhoods, which often have inadequate schools and many other problems, including toxins such as lead paint, that impair a child's development. In contrast, says Furstenberg, children from wealthier families "are very likely to attend better schools and live in better neighborhoods. It is as if the playing field for families is tilted in ways that are barely visible to the naked eye."

Fifth, low-income families are less able to afford to send a child to college, and they are more likely to lack the social contacts that wealthier parents can use to help their child get a good job after college.

For all these reasons, social class profoundly shapes how children fare from conception through early adulthood and beyond. Because this body of research documents many negative consequences of living in a low-income family, it reinforces the need for wide-ranging efforts to help such families.

*Sources:* Bandy, Andrews, & Moore, 2012; Furstenberg, 2010; Lareau, 2010Bandy, T., Andrews, K.M., & Moore, K.A. (2012). *Disadvantaged families and child outcomes: The importance of emotional support for mothers*. Washington, DC: Child Trends; Furstenberg, F. E., Jr. (2010). Diverging development: The not-so-invisible hand of social class in the United States. In B. J. Risman (Ed.), *Families as they really are* (pp. 276–294). New York, NY: W. W. Norton; Lareau, A. (2010). Unequal childhoods: Inequalities in the rhythms of daily life. In B. J. Risman (Ed.), *Families as they really are* (pp. 295–298). New York: W. W. Norton.

## Families and Social Interaction

Social interactionist perspectives on the family examine how family members and intimate couples interact on a daily basis and arrive at shared understandings of their situations. Studies grounded in social interactionism give us a keen understanding of how and why families operate the way they do.

Some studies, for example, focus on how husbands and wives communicate and the degree to which they communicate successfully (Tannen, 2001).Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York, NY: Quill. A classic study by Mirra Komarovsky (1964)Komarovsky, M. (1964). *Blue-collar marriage*. New York, NY: Random House. found that wives in blue-collar marriages liked to talk with their husbands about problems they were having, while husbands tended to be quiet when problems occurred. Such gender differences are less common in middle-class families, where men are better educated and more emotionally expressive than their working-class counterparts, but gender differences in communication still exist in these families. Another classic study by Lillian Rubin (1976)Rubin, L. B. (1976). *Worlds of pain: Life in the working-class family*. New York, NY: Basic Books. found that wives in middle-class families say that ideal husbands are ones who communicate well and share their feelings, while wives in working-class families are more apt to say that ideal husbands are ones who do not drink too much and who go to work every day.

According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, family problems often stem from the different understandings, perceptions, and expectations that spouses have of their marriage and of their family. When these differences become too extreme and the spouses cannot reconcile their disagreements, spousal conflict and possibly divorce may occur (Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006).Kaufman, G., & Taniguchi, H. (2006). Gender and marital happiness in later life. *Journal of Family Issues*, *27*(6), 735–757.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The family ideally serves several functions for society. It socializes children, provides practical and emotional support for its members, regulates sexual reproduction, and provides its members with a social identity.
- Reflecting conflict theory's emphases, the family may also produce several problems. In particular, it may contribute for several reasons to social inequality, and it may subject its members to violence, arguments, and other forms of conflict.
- Social interactionist understandings of the family emphasize how family members interact on a daily basis. In this regard, several studies find that husbands and wives communicate differently in certain ways that sometimes impede effective communication.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. As you think how best to understand the family, do you favor the views and assumptions of functional theory, conflict theory, or social interactionist theory? Explain your answer.
2. Do you think the family continues to serve the function of regulating sexual behavior and sexual reproduction? Why or why not?

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# 8.3: Changes and Problems in American Families

**Learning Objectives**

1. Discuss why the US divorce rate rose during the 1960s and 1970s and summarize the major individual-level factors accounting for divorce today.
2. Describe the effects of divorce for spouses and children.
3. Summarize the evidence on how children fare when their mothers work outside the home.
4. Describe the extent of family violence and explain why it occurs.

American families have undergone many changes since the 1950s. Scholars, politicians, and the public have strong and often conflicting views on the reasons for these changes and on their consequences. We now look at some of the most important issues affecting US families through the lens of the latest social scientific evidence. Because Chapter 5 on sexual orientation and inequality discussed same-sex marriage and families, please refer back to that chapter for material on this very important topic.



According to the census, roughly 6 million opposite-sex couples are currently cohabiting in the United States. The average cohabitation lasts less than two years. (Amit Gupta – CC BY-NC 2.0.)

## Cohabitation

Some people who are not currently married nonetheless **cohabit**, or live together, with someone of the opposite sex in a romantic relationship. The census reports that about 6 million opposite-sex couples are currently cohabiting; these couples constitute about 10 percent of all opposite-sex couples (married plus unmarried) who live together. The average cohabitation lasts less than two years and ends when the couple either splits up or gets married; about half of cohabiting couples do marry, and half split up. More than half of people in their twenties and thirties have cohabited, and roughly one-fourth of this age group is currently cohabiting (Brown, 2005).Brown, S. L. (2005). How cohabitation is reshaping American families. *Contexts*, *4*(3), 33–37. Roughly 55 percent of cohabiting couples have no biological children, about 45 percent live with a biological child of one of the partners, and 21 percent live with their own biological child. (These figures add to more than 100 percent because many couples live with their own child and a child of a partner.) About 5 percent of children live with biological parents who are cohabiting.

Interestingly, many studies find that married couples who have cohabited with each other before getting married are *more* likely to divorce than married couples who did not cohabit (Jose, O'Leary, & Moyer, 2010).Jose, A., O'Leary, K. D., & Moyer, A. (2010). Does premarital cohabitation predict subsequent marital stability and marital quality? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, *72*(1), 105–116. As sociologist Susan L Brown (2005, p. 34)Brown, S. L. (2005). How cohabitation is reshaping American families. *Contexts*, *4*(3), 33–37. notes, this apparent consequence is ironic: "The primary reason people cohabit is to test their relationship's viability for marriage. Sorting out bad relationships through cohabitation is how many people think they can avoid divorce. Yet living together before marriage actually increases a couple's risk of divorce." Two reasons may account for this result. First, cohabitation may change the relationship between a couple and increase the chance they will divorce if they get married anyway. Second, individuals who are willing to live together without being married may not be very committed to the idea of marriage and thus may be more willing to divorce if they are unhappy in their eventual marriage.

Recent research compares the psychological well-being of cohabiting and married adults and also the behavior of children whose biological parent or parents are cohabiting rather than married (Apel & Kaukinen, 2008; Brown, 2005).Apel, R., & Kaukinen, C. (2008). On the relationship between family structure and antisocial behavior: Parental cohabitation and blended households. *Criminology*, *46*(1), 35–70; Brown, S. L. (2005). How cohabitation is reshaping American families. *Contexts*, *4*(3), 33–37. On

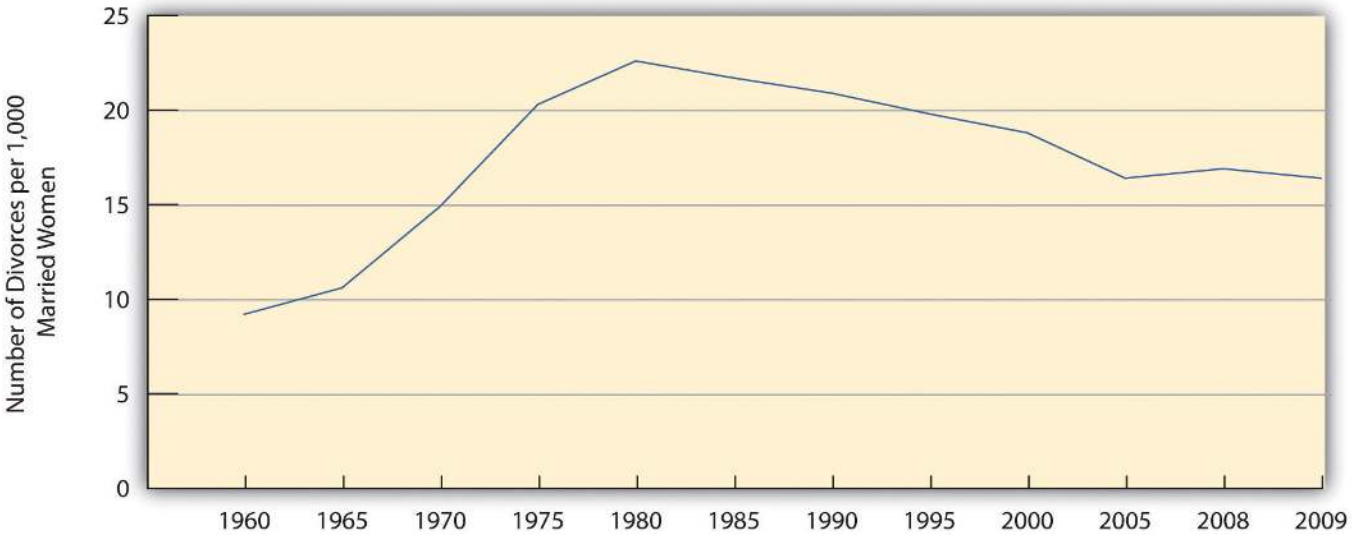
average, married adults are happier and otherwise have greater psychological well-being than cohabiting adults, while the latter, in turn, fare better psychologically than adults not living with anyone. Research has not yet clarified the reasons for these differences, but it seems that people with the greatest psychological and economic well-being are most likely to marry. If this is true, it is not the state of being married per se that accounts for the difference in well-being between married and cohabiting couples, but rather the extent of well-being that affects decisions to marry or not marry. Another difference between cohabitation and marriage concerns relationship violence. Among young adults (aged 18–28), this type of violence is more common among cohabiting couples than among married or dating couples. The reasons for this difference remain unknown but may again reflect differences in the types of people who choose to cohabit (Brown & Bulanda, 2008).Brown, S. L., & Bulanda, J. R. (2008). Relationship violence in young adulthood: A comparison of daters, cohabitors, and marrieds. *Social Science Research, 37*(1), 73–87.

The children of cohabiting parents tend to exhibit lower well-being of various types than those of married parents: They are more likely to engage in delinquency and other antisocial behavior, and they have lower academic performance and worse emotional adjustment. The reasons for these differences remain to be clarified but may again stem from the types of people who choose to cohabit rather than marry.

## Divorce and Single-Parent Households

The US divorce rate has risen since the early 1900s, with several peaks and valleys, and is now the highest in the industrial world. It rose sharply during the Great Depression and World War II, probably because of the economic distress of the former and the family disruption caused by the latter, and fell sharply after the war as the economy thrived and as marriage and family were proclaimed as patriotic ideals. It dropped a bit more during the 1950s before rising sharply through the 1960s and 1970s (Cherlin, 2009).Cherlin, A. J. (2009). The origins of the ambivalent acceptance of divorce. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 71*(2), 226–229. The divorce rate has since declined somewhat (see Figure 10.4) and today is only slightly higher than its peak at the end of World War II. Still, the best estimates say that 40–50 percent of all new marriages will one day end in divorce (Teachman, 2008).Teachman, J. (2008). Complex life course patterns and the risk of divorce in second marriages. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 70*(2), 294–305. The surprising announcement in June 2010 of the separation of former vice president Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, was a poignant reminder that divorce is a common outcome of many marriages.

Figure 10.4 Number of Divorces per 1,000 Married Women Aged 15 or Older, 1960–2009




*Source: Data from Wilcox, W. B. (Ed.). (2010). The state of our unions, 2010: Marriage in America. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project.*

## Reasons for Divorce

We cannot be certain about why the divorce rate rose so much during the 1960s and 1970s, but we can rule out two oft-cited causes. First, there is little reason to believe that marriages became any less happy during this period. We do not have good data to compare marriages then and now, but the best guess is that marital satisfaction did not decline after the 1950s ended. What did change was that people after the 1950s became more willing to seek divorces in marriages that were already unhappy.

Second, although the contemporary women's movement is sometimes blamed for the divorce rate by making women think marriage is an oppressive institution, the trends in Figure 10.4 suggest this blame is misplaced. The women's movement emerged in the late 1960s and was capturing headlines by the early 1970s. Although the divorce rate obviously rose after that time, it also started rising several years *before* the women's movement emerged and captured headlines. If the divorce rate began rising before the women's movement started, it is illogical to blame the women's movement. Instead, other structural and cultural forces must have been at work, just as they were at other times in the last century, as just noted, when the divorce rate rose and fell.

Why, then, did divorce increase during the 1960s and 1970s? One reason is the increasing economic independence of women. As women entered the labor force in the 1960s and 1970s, they became more economically independent of their husbands, even if their jobs typically paid less than their husbands' jobs. When women in unhappy marriages do become more economically independent, they are more able to afford to get divorced than when they have to rely entirely on their husbands' earnings (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998).Hiedemann, B., Suhomlinova, O., & O'Rand, A. M. (1998). Economic independence, economic status, and empty nest in midlife marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60*, 219–231. When both spouses work outside the home, moreover, it is more difficult to juggle the many demands of family life, and family life can be more stressful. Such stress can reduce marital happiness and make divorce more likely. Spouses may also have less time for each other when both are working outside the home, making it more difficult to deal with problems they may be having.



*Disapproval of divorce has declined since the 1950s, and divorce is now considered a normal if unfortunate part of life.*

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It is also true that disapproval of divorce has declined since the 1950s, even if negative views of it still remain (Cherlin, 2009).Cherlin, A. J. (2009). The origins of the ambivalent acceptance of divorce. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 71*(2), 226–229. Not too long ago, divorce was considered a terrible thing; now it is considered a normal if unfortunate part of life. We no longer say

a bad marriage should continue for the sake of the children. When New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller ran for president in the early 1960s, the fact that he had been divorced hurt his popularity, but when California Governor Ronald Reagan ran for president less than two decades later, the fact that he had been divorced was hardly noted. Many presidential candidates and other politicians today have been divorced. But is the growing acceptability of divorce a cause of the rising divorce rate, or is it the result of the rising divorce rate? Or is it both a cause and a result? This important causal order question is difficult to resolve.

Another reason divorce rose during the 1960s and 1970s may be that divorces became easier to obtain legally. In the past, most states required couples to prove that one or both had committed actions such as mental cruelty, adultery, or other such behaviors in order to get divorced. Today almost all states have no-fault divorce laws that allow a couple to divorce if they say their marriage has failed from irreconcilable differences. Because divorce has become easier and less expensive to obtain, more divorces occur. But are no-fault divorce laws a cause or result of the post-1950s rise in the divorce rate? The divorce rate increase preceded the establishment of most states' no-fault laws, but it is probably also true that the laws helped make additional divorces more possible. Thus no-fault divorce laws are probably one reason for the rising divorce rate after the 1950s, but only one reason (Kneip & Bauer, 2009).Kneip, T., & Bauer, G. (2009). Did unilateral divorce laws raise divorce rates in Western Europe? *Journal of Marriage & Family, 71*(3), 592–607.

We have just looked at possible reasons for divorce rate trends, but we can also examine the reasons why certain marriages are more or less likely to end in divorce within a given time period. Although, as noted earlier, 40–50 percent of all new marriages will probably end in divorce, it is also true that some marriages are more likely to end than others. Family scholars identify several correlates of divorce (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006; Wilcox, 2010).Clarke-Stewart, A., & Brentano, C. (2006). *Divorce: Causes and consequences*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Wilcox, W. B. (Ed.). (2010). *The state of our unions 2010: Marriage in America*. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project. An important one is age at marriage: Teenagers who get married are much more likely to get divorced than people who marry well into their twenties or beyond, partly because they have financial difficulties and are not yet emotionally mature. A second correlate of divorce is social class: People who are poor and have less formal education at the time of their marriage are much more likely to get divorced than people who begin their marriages in economic comfort and with higher levels of education.

## Effects of Divorce and Single-Parent Households

Much research exists on the effects of divorce on spouses and their children, and scholars often disagree on what these effects are. One thing is clear: Divorce plunges many women into poverty or near-poverty (Gadalla, 2008; Wilcox, 2010).Gadalla, T. M. (2008). Gender differences in poverty rates after marital dissolution: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 49*(3/4), 225–238; Wilcox, W. B. (Ed.). (2010). *The state of our unions 2010: Marriage in America*. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project. Many have been working only part time or not at all outside the home, and divorce takes away their husband's economic support. Even women working full time often have trouble making ends meet, because many are in low-paying jobs. One-parent families headed by a woman for any reason are much poorer ($32,031 in 2010 median annual income) than those headed by a man ($49,718). Meanwhile, the median income of married-couple families is much higher ($72,751). Almost 32 percent of all single-parent families headed by women are officially poor, compared to only about 16 percent of single-parent families headed by men and 6 percent of married-couple families (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011).DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Reports, P60-239). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

Although the economic consequences of divorce seem clear, what are the psychological consequences for husbands, wives, and their children? Are they better off if a divorce occurs, worse off, or about the same?

## Effects on Spouses

The research evidence for spouses is very conflicting. Many studies find that divorced spouses are, on average, less happy and have poorer mental health after their divorce, but some studies find that happiness and mental health often improve after divorce (Cherlin, 2009; Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009).Cherlin, A. J. (2009). The origins of the ambivalent acceptance of divorce. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 71*(2), 226–229; Waite, L. J., Luo, Y., & Lewin, A. C. (2009). Marital happiness and marital stability: Consequences for psychological well-being. *Social Science Research, 38*(1), 201–212. The postdivorce time period that is studied may affect what results are found: For some people psychological well-being may decline in the immediate aftermath of a divorce, given how difficult the divorce process often is, but rise over the next few years. The contentiousness of the marriage also matters. Some marriages ending in divorce have been filled with hostility, conflict, and sometimes violence, while other marriages ending in divorce have not been very contentious at all, even if they have failed. Individuals seem to fare better psychologically after ending

a very contentious marriage but fare worse after ending a less contentious marriage (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007).Amato, P. R., & Hohmann-Marriott, B. (2007). A comparison of high- and low-distress marriages that end in divorce. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 69*(3), 621–638.

## Effects on Children

What about the children? Parents used to stay together "for the sake of the children," thinking that divorce would cause their children more harm than good. Studies of this issue generally find that children in divorced families are indeed more likely, on average, to do worse in school, to use drugs and alcohol and suffer other behavioral problems, and to experience emotional distress and other psychological problems (Wilcox, 2010).Wilcox, W. B. (Ed.). (2010). *The state of our unions 2010: Marriage in America*. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project. The trauma of the divorce and the difficulties that single parents encounter in caring for and disciplining children are thought to account for these effects.

However, two considerations suggest that children of divorce may fare worse for reasons other than divorce trauma and the resulting single-parent situation. First, most children whose parents divorce end up living with their mothers. As we just noted, many divorced women and their children live in poverty or near poverty. To the extent that these children fare worse in many ways, their mothers' low incomes may be a contributing factor. Studies of this issue find that divorced mothers' low incomes do, in fact, help explain some of the difficulties that their children experience (Demo & Fine, 2010).Demo, D. H., & Fine, M. A. (2010). *Beyond the average divorce*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Divorce trauma and single-parenthood still matter for children's well-being in many of these studies, but the worsened financial situation of divorced women and their children also makes a difference.

Second, it is possible that children do worse after a divorce because of the parental conflict that led to the divorce, not because of the divorce itself. It is well known that the quality of the relationship between a child's parents affects the child's behavior and emotional well-being (Moore, Kinghorn, & Bandy, 2011).Moore, K. A., Kinghorn, A., & Bandy, T. (2011). *Parental relationship quality and child outcomes across subgroups*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. This fact raises the possibility that children may fare better if their parents end a troubled marriage than if their parents stay married. Recent studies have investigated this issue, and their findings generally mirror the evidence for spouses just cited: Children generally fare better if their parents end a highly contentious marriage, but they fare worse if their parents end a marriage that has not been highly contentious (Hull et al., 2012).Hull, K. E., Meier, A., & Ortyl, T. (2012). The changing landscape of love and marriage. In D. Hartmann & C. Uggen (Eds.), *The contexts reader* (2nd ed., pp. 56–63). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. As one researcher summarizes this new body of research, "All these new studies have discovered the same thing: The average impact of divorce in society at large is to neither increase nor decrease the behavior problems of children. They suggest that divorce, in and of itself, is not the cause of the elevated behavior problems we see in children of divorce" (Li, 2010, p. 174).Li, J.-C. A. (2010). Briefing paper: The impact of divorce on children's behavior problems. In B. J. Risman (Ed.), *Families as they really are* (pp. 173–177). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. Commenting on divorces from highly contentious marriages, sociologist Virginia E. Rutter (2010, p. 169)Rutter, V. E. (2010). The case for divorce. In B. J. Risman (Ed.), *Families as they really are* (pp. 159–169). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. bluntly concludes, "There are times and situations when divorce is beneficial to the people who divorce and to their children."

## Fathers and Children

Recall that most children whose parents are not married, either because they divorced or because they never were married, live with their mothers. Another factor that affects how children in these situations fare is the closeness of the child-father relationship. Whether or not children live with their fathers, they fare better in many respects when they have an emotionally close relationship with their fathers. This type of relationship is certainly more possible when they live with their fathers, and this is a reason that children who live with both their parents fare better on average than children who live only with their mother. However, some children who do live with their fathers are less close to them than some children who live apart from their fathers.

Recent research by sociologist Alan Booth and colleagues (Booth, Scott, & King, 2010)Booth, A., Scott, M. E., & King, V. (2010). Father residence and adolescent problem behavior: Are youth always better off in two-parent families? *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(5), 585–605. found that the former children fare worse than the latter children. As Booth et al. (2010, p. 600)Booth, A., Scott, M. E., & King, V. (2010). Father residence and adolescent problem behavior: Are youth always better off in two-parent families? *Journal of Family Issues*, *31*(5), 585–605. summarize this result, "We find that adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms than adolescents who live with a father with whom they are not close. It appears that adolescents benefit more from a close bond to a nonresident father than a weak bond to a resident father." To the extent this is true, they add, "youth are not always better off in two-parent families." In fact, children who

are not close to a father with whom they live have lower self-esteem than children who are not close to a father with whom they do not live. Overall, though, children fare best when they live with fathers with whom they have a close relationship: “It does not appear that strong affection alone can overcome the problems associated with father absence from the child’s residence.”

## Marriage and Well-Being

Is marriage good for people? This is the flip side of the question we have just addressed on whether divorce is bad for people. Are people better off if they get married? Or are they better off if they stay single?

In 1972, sociologist Jessie Bernard (1972)Bernard, J. (1972). *The future of marriage*. New York, NY: Bantam. famously said that every marriage includes a “her marriage” and a “his marriage.” By this she meant that husbands and wives view and define their marriages differently. When spouses from the same marriage are interviewed, they disagree on such things as how often they should have sex, how often they actually do have sex, and who does various household tasks. Women do most of the housework and child care, while men are freer to work and do other things outside the home. Citing various studies, she said that marriage is better for men than for women. Married women, she said, have poorer mental health than unmarried women, while married men have better mental health than unmarried men. In short, she said that marriage was good for men but bad for women.





*Married people are generally happier than unmarried people and score higher on other measures of psychological well-being.*

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Critics later said that Bernard misinterpreted her data on women and that married women are also better off than unmarried women (Glenn, 1997).Glenn, N. D. (1997). A Critique of twenty family and marriage and the family textbooks. *Family Relations*, *46*, 197–208. Recent research generally finds that marriage does benefit both sexes: Married people, women and men alike, are generally happier than unmarried people (whether never married, divorced, or widowed), score better on other measures of psychological well-being, are physically healthier, have better sex lives, and have lower death rates (Waite et al., 2009; Wilcox, 2010).Waite, L. J., Luo, Y., & Lewin, A. C. (2009). Marital happiness and marital stability: Consequences for psychological well-being. *Social Science Research*, *38*(1), 201–212; Wilcox, W. B. (Ed.). (2010). *The state of our unions 2010: Marriage in America*. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project. There is even evidence that marriage helps keep men from committing crime (Theobald & Farrington, 2011)!Theobald, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2011). Why do the crime-reducing effects of marriage vary with age? *British Journal of Criminology*, *51*(1), 136–158. Marriage has these benefits for several reasons, including the emotional and practical support spouses give each other, their greater financial resources compared to those of unmarried people, and the sense of obligation they have toward each other.

Three issues qualify the general conclusion that marriage is beneficial (Frech & Williams, 2007).Frech, A., & Williams, K. (2007). Depression and the psychological benefits of entering marriage. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *48*, 149–163. First, it would be more accurate to say that good marriages are beneficial, because bad marriages certainly are not, and stressful marriages can impair physical and mental health (Parker-Pope, 2010).Parker-Pope, T. (2010, April 18). Is marriage good for your health? *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, p. MM46. Second, although marriage is generally beneficial, its benefits seem greater for older adults than for younger adults, for whites than for African Americans, and for individuals who were psychologically depressed before marriage than for those who were not depressed. Third, psychologically happy and healthy people may be the ones who get married in the first place and are less apt to get divorced once they do marry. If so, marriage does not promote psychological well-being; rather, psychological well-being promotes marriage. Research testing this *selectivity hypothesis* finds that both processes occur: Psychologically healthy people are more apt to get and stay married, but marriage also promotes psychological well-being.

## Working Mothers and Day Care

As noted earlier, women are now much more likely to be working outside the home than a few decades ago. This is true for both married and unmarried women and also for women with and without children. As women have entered the labor force, the question of who takes care of the children has prompted much debate and controversy. Many observers say young children suffer if they do

not have a parent, implicitly their mother, taking care of them full-time until they start school and being there every day when they get home from school. The public is divided on the issue of more mothers working outside the home: 21 percent say this trend is “a good thing for society”; 37 percent say it is “a bad thing for society”; and 46 percent say it “doesn’t make much difference” (Morin, 2010).Morin, R. (2010). *The public renders a split verdict on changes in family structure*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. What does research say about how young children fare if their mothers work? (Notice that no one seems to worry that fathers work!)

Early studies compared the degree of attachment shown to their mothers by children in day care and that shown by children who stay at home with their mothers. In one type of study, children were put in a laboratory room with their mothers and observed as the mothers left and returned. The day-care kids usually treated their mothers’ departure and returning casually and acted as if they did not care that their mothers were leaving or returning. In contrast the stay-at-home kids acted very upset when their mothers left and seemed much happier and even relieved when they returned. Several researchers concluded that these findings indicated that day-care children lacked sufficient emotional attachment to their mothers (Schwartz, 1983).Schwartz, P. (1983). Length of day-care attendance and attachment behavior in eighteen-month-old infants. *Child Development*, *54*, 1073–1078. However, other researchers reached a very different conclusion: The day-care children’s apparent nonchalance when their mothers left and returned simply reflected the fact that they always saw her leave and return every day when they went to day care. The lack of concern over her behavior showed only that they were more independent and self-confident than the stay-at-home children, who were fearful when their mothers left, and not that they were less attached to their mothers (Coontz, 1997).Coontz, S. (1997). *The way we really are: Coming to terms with America’s changing families*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

More recent research has compared stay-at-home children and day-care children starting with infancy, with some of the most notable studies using data from a large study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a branch of the National Institutes of Health (Rabin, 2008).Rabin, R. C. (2008, September 15). A consensus about day care: Quality counts. *New York Times*, p. A1. This research finds that day-care children exhibit better cognitive skills (reading and arithmetic) than stay-at-home children but are also slightly more likely to engage in aggressive behavior that is well within the normal range of children’s behavior. This research has also yielded two other conclusions. First, the quality of parenting and other factors such as parent’s education and income matter much more for children’s cognitive and social development than whether or not they are in day care. Second, to the extent that day care is beneficial for children, it is high-quality day care that is beneficial, as low-quality day care can be harmful.




*Children in day care exhibit better cognitive skills than stay-at-home children but are also slightly more likely to engage in aggressive behavior that is within the normal range of children's behavior.*

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This latter conclusion is an important finding, because many day-care settings in the United States are not high quality. Unfortunately, many parents who use day care cannot afford high-quality care, which can cost hundreds of dollars monthly. This problem reflects the fact that the United States lags far behind other Western democracies in providing subsidies for day care (see Note 10.21 "Lessons from Other Societies" later in this chapter). Because working women are certainly here to stay and because high-quality day care seems at least as good for children as full-time care by a parent, it is essential that the United States make good day care available and affordable.

Affordable child care is especially essential for low-income parents. After the United States plunged into economic recession in 2008, many states reduced their subsidies for child care. As a result, many low-income parents who wanted to continue working or to start a job could not afford to do so because child care can be very expensive: For a family living below the poverty line, child care comprises one-third of the family budget on the average. As the head of a California organization that advocates for working parents explained, "You can't expect a family with young children to get on their feet and get jobs without child care" (Goodman, 2010, p. A1).Goodman, P. S. (2010, May 24). Cuts to child care subsidy thwart more job seekers. *New York Times*, p. A1.

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Marriages and Families

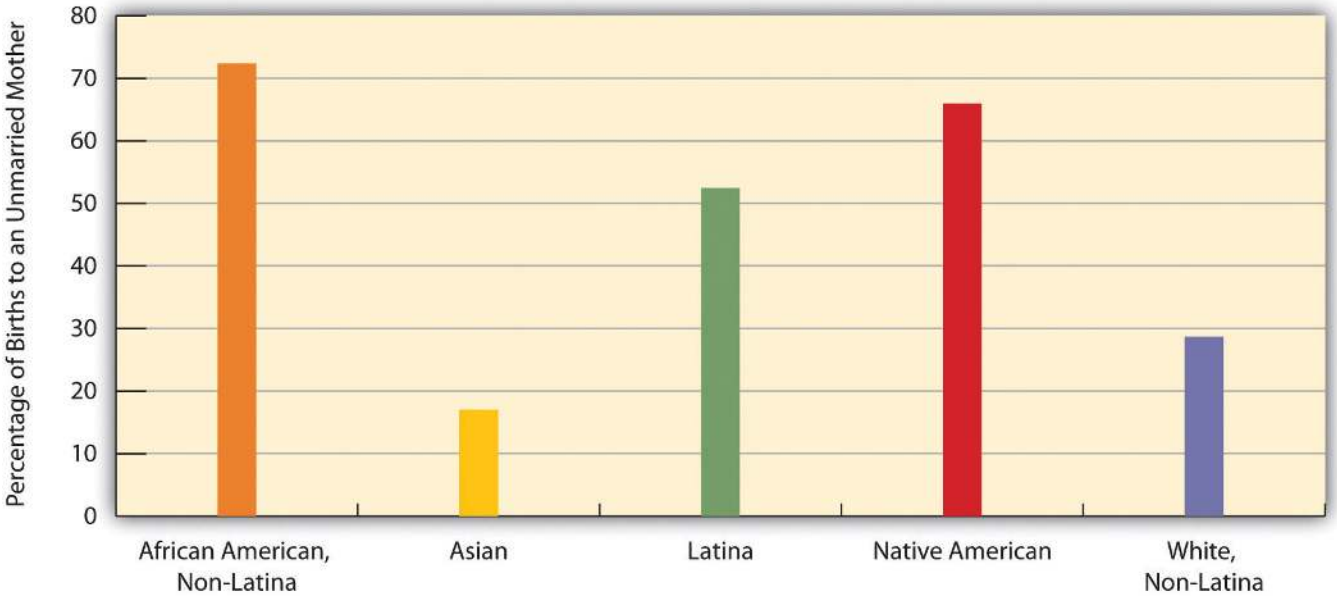
Marriages and families in the United States exhibit a fair amount of racial and ethnic diversity, as we saw earlier in this chapter. Children are more likely to live with only one parent among Latino and especially African American families than among white and Asian American families. Moreover, African American, Latino, and Native American children and their families are especially likely to live in poverty. As a result, they are at much greater risk for the many problems that children in poverty experience (see Chapter 2).

Beyond these cold facts lie other racial and ethnic differences in family life (Wright, Mindel, Tran, & Habenstein, 2012).Wright, R. H., Jr., Mindel, C. H., Tran, T. V., & Habenstein, R. W. (Eds.). (2012). *Ethnic families in America: Patterns and variations* (5th

ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. Studies of Latino and Asian American families find they have especially strong family bonds and loyalty. Extended families in both groups and among Native Americans are common, and these extended families have proven a valuable shield against the problems all three groups face because of their race/ethnicity and poverty.

The status of the African American family has been the source of much controversy for several decades. Perhaps the major reason for this controversy is the large number of African American children living in single-parent households: Whereas 41 percent of all births are to unmarried women (up from 28 percent in 1990), such births account for 72 percent of all births to African American women (see Figure 10.5).

Figure 10.5 Percentage of Births to Unmarried Mothers, by Race/Ethnicity 2010




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

Many scholars attribute the high number of fatherless families among African Americans to the forcible separation of families during slavery and to the fact that so many young black males today are unemployed, in prison or jail, or facing other problems (Patterson, 1998).Patterson, O. (1998). *Rituals of blood: Consequences of slavery in two American centuries*. Washington, DC: Civitas/CounterPoint. Some observers say this high number of fatherless families in turn contributes to African Americans' poverty, crime, and other problems (Haskins, 2009).Haskins, R. (2009). Moynihan was right: Now what? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *621*, 281–314. But other observers argue that this blame is misplaced to at least some extent. Extended families and strong female-headed households in the African American community, they say, have compensated for the absence of fathers (Willie & Reddick, 2010).Willie, C. V., & Reddick, R. J. (2010). *A new look at black families* (6th ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. The problems African Americans face, they add, stem to a large degree from their experience of racism, segregated neighborhoods, lack of job opportunities, and other structural difficulties (Sampson, 2009).Sampson, R. J. (2009). Racial stratification and the durable tangle of neighborhood inequality. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *621*, 260–280. Even if fatherless families contribute to these problems, these scholars say, these other factors play a larger role.

## Family Violence

Although family violence has received much attention since the 1970s, families were violent long before scholars began studying family violence and the public began hearing about it. We can divide family violence into two types: violence against intimates (spouses, live-in partners, boyfriends, or girlfriends) and violence against children. (Violence against elders also occurs and was discussed in Chapter 6.)

## Violence against Intimates

Intimates commit violence against each other in many ways: they can hit with their fists, slap with an open hand, throw an object, push or shove, or use or threaten to use a weapon. When all these acts and others are combined, we find that much **intimate violence** occurs. While we can never be certain of the exact number of intimates who are attacked, the US Department of Justice estimates from its National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) that about 509,000 acts of violence (2010 data) are committed annually by one intimate against another intimate; 80 percent of these acts are committed by men against women (Truman, 2011).Truman, J. L. (2011). *Criminal victimization, 2010*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Another national survey about a decade ago found that 22 percent of US women had been physically assaulted by a spouse or partner at some point in their lives (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (1998). *Prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women: Findings from the national violence against women survey*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice. This figure, if still true, translates to more than 20 million women today. A national survey of Canadian women found that 29 percent had been attacked by a spouse or partner (Randall & Haskell, 1995).Randall, M., & Haskell, L. (1995). Sexual violence in women's lives: Findings from the Women's Safety Project, a community-based survey. *Violence Against Women, 1*, 6–31. Taken together, these different figures all indicate that intimate partner violence is very common and affects millions of people.



*According to some estimates, about one-fifth of US women have been assaulted by a spouse or partner at least once in their lives.*

*© Thinkstock*

Some observers claim that husbands are just as likely as wives to be beaten by a spouse, and there is evidence that husbands experience an act of violence from their wives about as often as wives do from their husbands. Yet this "gender equivalence"

argument has been roundly criticized. Although women do commit violence against husbands and boyfriends, their violence is less serious (e.g., a slap compared to using a fist) and usually in self-defense to their husbands' violence. And although some studies find an equal number of violent acts committed by husbands and wives, other studies find much more violence committed by husbands (Johnson, 2006).Johnson, M. P. (2006). Conflict and control: Gender symmetry and asymmetry in domestic violence. *Violence Against Women, 12*, 1003–1018.

Why do men hit their wives, partners, and girlfriends? As with rape (see Chapter 4), sociologists answer this question by citing both structural and cultural factors. Structurally, women are the subordinate gender in a patriarchal society and, as such, are more likely to be victims of violence, whether it is rape or intimate violence. Intimate violence is more common in poor families, and economic inequality thus may lead men to take out their frustration over their poverty on their wives and girlfriends (Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006).Martin, K., Vieraitis, L. M., & Britto, S. (2006). Gender equality and women's absolute status: A test of the feminist models of rape. *Violence Against Women, 12*, 321–339.

Cultural myths also help explain why men hit their wives and girlfriends (Gosselin, 2010).Gosselin, D. K. (2010). *Heavy hands: An introduction to the crimes of family violence* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Many men continue to believe that their wives should not only love and honor them but also obey them, as the traditional marriage vow says. If they view their wives in this way, it becomes that much easier to hit them. In another myth, many people ask why women do not leave home if the hitting they suffer is really that bad; the implication is that the hitting cannot be that bad because they do not leave home. This reasoning ignores the fact that many women *do* try to leave home, which often angers their husbands and ironically puts the women more at risk for being hit, or they do not leave home because they have nowhere to go (Kim & Gray, 2008).Kim, J., & Gray, K. A. (2008). Leave or stay? Battered women's decision after intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(10), 1465–1482. As the news story that began this chapter discussed, battered women's shelters are still few in number and can accommodate a woman and her children for only two or three weeks. Many battered women also have little money of their own and simply cannot afford to leave home. The belief that battering cannot be that bad if women hit by their husbands do not leave home ignores all these factors and is thus a myth that reinforces spousal violence against women. (See Note 10.15 "People Making a Difference" for a profile of the woman who started the first women's shelter.)

### People Making a Difference

The Founder of the First Battered Women's Shelter

Sandra Ramos deserves our thanks because she founded the first known shelter for battered women in North America back in the late 1970s.

Her life changed one night in 1970 when she was only 28 years old and working as a waitress at a jazz club. One night a woman from her church in New Jersey came to her home seeking refuge from a man who was abusing her. Ramos took in the woman and her children and soon did the same with other abused women and their children. Within a few months, twenty-two women and children were living inside her house. "It was kind of chaotic," recalls Maria, 47, the oldest of Ramos's three children. "It was a small house; we didn't have a lot of room. But she reaches out to people she sees suffering. She does everything in her power to help them."

When authorities threatened to arrest Ramos if she did not remove all these people from her home, she conducted sit-ins and engaged in other actions to call attention to the women's plight. She eventually won county funding to start the first women's shelter.

Today Ramos leads a New Jersey nonprofit organization, Strengthen Our Sisters, that operates several shelters and halfway houses for battered women. Her first shelter and these later ones have housed thousands of women and children since the late 1970s, and at any one time today they house about 180 women and their children.

One woman whom Ramos helped was Geraldine Wright, who was born in the Dominican Republic. Wright says she owes Ramos a great debt. "Sandy makes you feel like, OK, you're going through this, but it's going to get better," she says. "One of the best things I did for myself and my children was come to the shelter. She helped me feel strong, which I usually wasn't. She helped me get a job here at the shelter so that I could find a place and pay the rent."

Since that first woman knocked on her door in 1970, Sandra Ramos has worked unceasingly for the rights and welfare of abused women. She has fittingly been called "one of the nation's most well-known and tireless advocates on behalf of battered women." For more than forty years, Sandra Ramos has made a considerable difference.

*Source:* Llorente, 2009Llorente, E. (2009). Strengthening her sisters. Retrieved November 2, 2011, from http://www.aarp.org/giving-back/volunteering/info-10-2009/strengthening_her_sisters.html.

## Child Abuse

**Child abuse** takes many forms. Children can be physically or sexually assaulted, and they may also suffer from emotional abuse and practical neglect. Whatever form it takes, child abuse is a serious national problem.

It is especially difficult to know how much child abuse occurs. Infants obviously cannot talk, and toddlers and older children who are abused usually do not tell anyone about the abuse. They might not define it as abuse, they might be scared to tell on their parents, they might blame themselves for being abused, or they might not know whom they could talk to about their abuse. Whatever the reason, they usually remain silent, thus making it very difficult to know how much abuse takes place.





*Government data estimate that about 800,000 children are abused or neglected each year. Because most children do not report their abuse or neglect, the actual number is probably much higher.*

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Using information from child protective agencies throughout the country, the US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that almost 800,000 children (2008 data) are victims of child abuse and neglect annually (Administration on Children Youth and Families, 2010).Administration on Children Youth and Families. (2010). *Child maltreatment 2008*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. This figure includes some 122,000 cases of physical abuse; 69,000 cases of sexual abuse; 539,000 cases of neglect; 55,000 cases of psychological maltreatment; and 17,000 cases of medical neglect. The total figure represents about 1 percent of all children under the age of 18. Obviously this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many cases of child abuse never become known. A 1994 Gallup poll asked adult respondents about physical abuse they suffered as children. Twelve percent said they had been abused (punched, kicked, or choked), yielding an estimate of 23 million adults in the United States who were physically abused as children (D. W. Moore, 1994).Moore, D. W. (1994, May). One in seven Americans victim of child abuse. *The Gallup Poll Monthly*, 18–22. Some studies estimate that about 25 percent of girls and 10 percent of boys are sexually abused at least once before turning 18 (Garbarino, 1989).Garbarino, J. (1989). The incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment. In L. Ohlin & M. Tonry (Eds.), *Family violence* (Vol. 11, pp. 219–261). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. In a study of a random sample of women in Toronto, Canada, 42 percent said they had been sexually abused before turning 16 (Randall & Haskell, 1995).Randall, M., & Haskell, L. (1995). Sexual violence in women's lives: Findings from the Women's Safety Project, a community-based survey. *Violence Against Women, 1*, 6–31. Whatever the true figure is, most child abuse is committed by parents, stepparents, and other people the children know, not by strangers.

## Children and Our Future

Is Spanking a Good Idea?

As the text discusses, spanking underlies many episodes of child abuse. Nonetheless, many Americans approve of spanking. In the 2010 General Social Survey, 69 percent of respondents agreed that "it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard, spanking." Reflecting this "spare the rod and spoil the child" belief, most parents have spanked their children. National survey evidence finds that two-thirds of parents of toddlers ages 19–35 months have spanked their child at least once, and one-fourth spank their child sometimes or often.

The reason that many people approve of spanking and that many parents spank is clear: They believe that spanking will teach a child a lesson and improve a child's behavior and/or attitude. However, most child and parenting experts believe the opposite is true. When children are spanked, they say, and especially when they are spanked regularly, they are more likely to misbehave as a result. If so, spanking ironically produces the opposite result from what a parent intends.

Spanking has this effect for several reasons. First, it teaches children that they should behave to avoid being punished. This lesson makes children more likely to misbehave if they think they will not get caught, as they'd not learn to behave for its own sake. Second, spanking also teaches children that it is OK to hit someone to solve an interpersonal dispute and even to hit someone if you love her or him, because that is what spanking is all about. Third, children who are spanked may come to resent their parents and thus be more likely to misbehave because their bond with their parents weakens.

This harmful effect of spanking is especially likely when spanking is frequent. As Alan Kazin, a former president of the American Psychological Association (APA) explains, "Corporal punishment has really serious side effects. Children who are hit become more aggressive." When spanking is rare, this effect may or may not occur, according to research on this issue, but this research also finds that other forms of discipline are as effective as a rare spanking in teaching a child to behave. This fact leads Kazin to say that even rare spanking should be avoided. "It suppresses [misbehavior] momentarily. But you haven't really changed its probability of occurring. Physical punishment is not needed to change behavior. It's just not needed."

*Sources:* Berlin et al., 2009; Harder, 2007; Park, 2010; Regalado, Sareen, Inkelas, Wissow, & Halfon, 2004Berlin, L. J., Ispa, J. M., Fine, M. A., Malone, P. S., Brooks-Gunn, J., Brady-Smith, C., et al. (2009). Correlates and consequences of spanking and verbal punishment for low-income white, African American, and Mexican American toddlers. *Child Development, 80*(5), 1403–1420; Harder, B. (2007, February 19). Spanking: When parents lift their hands. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/19/health/he-spanking19; Park, A. (2010). The long-term effects of spanking. *Time International (Atlantic Edition), 175*(18), 95–95; Regalado, M., Sareen, H., Inkelas, M., Wissow, L. S., & Halfon, N. (2004). Parents' discipline of young children: Results from the national survey of early childhood health. *Pediatrics, 113*, 1952–1958.

Why does child abuse occur? Structurally speaking, children are another powerless group and, as such, are easy targets of violence. Moreover, the best evidence indicates that child abuse is more common in poorer families. The stress these families suffer from their poverty is thought to be a major reason for the child abuse occurring within them (Gosselin, 2010).Gosselin, D. K. (2010). *Heavy hands: An introduction to the crimes of family violence* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. As with spousal violence, then, economic inequality is partly to blame for child abuse. Cultural values and practices also matter. In a nation where spanking is common, it is inevitable that physical child abuse will occur, because there is a very thin line between a hard spanking and physical abuse: Not everyone defines a good, hard spanking in the same way. As two family violence scholars once noted, "Although most physical punishment [of children] does not turn into physical abuse, most physical abuse begins as ordinary physical punishment" (Wauchope & Straus, 1990, p. 147).Wauchope, B., & Straus, M. A. (1990). Physical punishment and physical abuse of American children: Incidence rates by age, gender, and occupational class. In M. A. Straus & R. J. Gelles (Eds.), *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families* (pp. 133–148). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books. (See Note 10.17 "Children and Our Future" for a further discussion of spanking.)

Abused children are much more likely than children who are not abused to end up with various developmental, psychological, and behavioral problems throughout their life course. In particular, they are more likely to be aggressive, to use alcohol and other drugs, to be anxious and depressed, and to get divorced if they marry (Trickett, Noll, & Putnam, 2011).Trickett, P. K., Noll, J. G., & Putnam, F. W. (2011). The impact of sexual abuse on female development: Lessons from a multigenerational, longitudinal research study. *Development and Psychopathology, 23*(2), 453–476.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The divorce rate rose for several reasons during the 1960s and 1970s but has generally leveled off since then.
- Divorce often lowers the psychological well-being of spouses and their children, but the consequences of divorce also depend on the level of contention in the marriage that has ended.
- Despite continuing controversy over the welfare of children whose mothers work outside the home, research indicates that children in high-quality day care fare better in cognitive development than those who stay at home.
- Violence between intimates is fairly common and stems from gender inequality, income inequality, and several cultural myths that minimize the harm that intimate violence causes.
- At least 800,000 children are abused or neglected each year in the United States. Because most abused children do not report the abuse, the number of cases of abuse and neglect is undoubtedly much higher.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Think of someone you know (either yourself, a relative, or a friend) whose parents are divorced. Write a brief essay in which you discuss how the divorce affected this person.
2. Do you think it is ever acceptable for a spouse to slap or hit another spouse? Why or why not?

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# 8.4: Families in the Future

**Learning Objective**

1. Understand the implications of social science theory and research for how to address family problems.

As perhaps our most important social institution, the family seems to arouse strong passions from almost everyone. Sociological theory and research, along with research from the other social sciences, have important implications for how our society should address the various family issues discussed in this chapter.

One set of implications concerns the many children and families living in poverty. The households in which they live are mostly headed by women, and the majority of these households are the result of divorce. The programs and policies outlined in Chapter 2 "Poverty" are certainly relevant for any efforts to help these families. These efforts include, but are not limited to, increased government financial support, subsidies for child care, vocational training and financial aid for schooling for women who wish to return to the labor force or to increase their wages, early childhood visitation and intervention programs, and increases in programs providing nutrition and medical care to poor women and their children (Cherlin, 2009). In all these efforts, the United States has much to learn from the nations of Western Europe (see Note 10.21 "Lessons from Other Societies").

### Lessons from Other Societies

Putting Families First: Helping Families in Western Europe

- >The nations of Western Europe make a much greater effort than the United States to help families with young children. According to sociologist James W. Russell, these nations believe that taking care of their children is a communal responsibility because "society as a whole benefits from having children adequately reared. Children grow up to take over the responsibilities of maintaining the survival of the society. They will also be available to provide needed services to both their own parents and aging adults who did not raise their own children. An aging adult who did not have children may need the services of a younger doctor who was raised by someone else." In contrast, says Russell, the United States tends to believe that families need to be self-reliant and should not expect very much help from the government. This difference in philosophy leads Western European nations to provide much more support than the United States for families with young children.
- >This support takes several forms whose nature and extent vary among the Western European nations. Most of the nations, for example, provide at least four months of *paid* maternity leave after the birth of a child; in contrast, the United States guarantees only three months of *unpaid* leave, and only for employees who work for companies that employ at least fifty people. Many European nations also provide paid parental leave after the maternity leave benefits expire; the Untied States does not provide this benefit. In Sweden, parents share 450 days of paid leave to care for a new child.
- >In another striking difference from the United States, all European nations have a family allowance program, which provides cash payments to parents for every child they have after their first child. The intent here is to not only help these families, but also to encourage them to have children to help counter declining birth rates in Europe.
- >A third very important difference is that European nations provide free or heavily subsidized child care of generally high quality to enable parents to work outside the home. For example, France provides free child care for children ages 2–6 and pays 75 percent of the cost of child care for children under 2.
- >In these and other ways, the nations of Western Europe help their families with young children and thus their societies as a whole. The United States has much to learn from their example.
- >*Sources:* Russell, 2011; Shahmehri, 2007

Another issue and set of implications from social science research concern family violence. To the extent that much violence against intimates and children is rooted in the frustration and stress accompanying poverty, efforts that reduce poverty will also reduce family violence. And to the extent that gender inequality helps explain violence against women, continuing and strengthening efforts to reduce gender inequality should also reduce violence against intimates, as most of this violence is directed by men against women. Further, if, as many scholars believe, the violent nature of masculinity helps account for violence men commit against their wives and girlfriends, then efforts to change male gender-role socialization should also help.

Turning to child abuse, because so much child abuse remains unknown to child protective authorities, it is difficult to reduce its seriousness and extent. However, certain steps might still help. Because child abuse seems more common among poorer families,

then efforts that reduce poverty should also reduce child abuse. The home visitation programs that help poor children also help reduce child abuse. Although, as noted earlier, approval of spanking is deeply rooted in our culture, a national educational campaign to warn about the dangers of spanking, including its promotion of children's misbehavior, may eventually reduce the use of spanking and thus the incidence of child physical abuse.

Divorce is a final issue for which research by sociologists and other scholars is relevant. Much evidence suggests that divorce from low-conflict marriages has negative consequences for spouses and children, and some evidence suggests that these consequences arise not from the divorce itself but rather from the conflict preceding the divorce and the poverty into which many newly single-parent households are plunged. There is also evidence that spouses and children fare better after a divorce from a highly contentious marriage. Efforts to help preserve marriages should certainly continue, but these efforts should proceed cautiously or not proceed at all for the marriages that are highly contentious. To the extent that marital conflict partly arises from financial difficulties, once again government efforts that help reduce poverty should also help preserve marriages.

### Key Takeaways

- Efforts to help children and families living in poverty or near poverty should be expanded.
- Efforts to help preserve marriages should proceed cautiously or not at all for highly contentious marriages.

### For Your Review

1. Why do you think the United States lags behind other democracies in efforts to help families?
2. What do you think is the single most important policy or action that our government should take to help America's families?

## References

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Russell, J. W. (2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Shahmehri, B. (2007). More than welcome: Families come first in Sweden. In J. H. Skolnick & E. Currie (Eds.), *Crisis in American institutions* (13th ed., pp. 204–209). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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# 8.5: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. As a social institution, the family is a universal or near-universal phenomenon. Yet historical and cross-cultural records indicate that many types of families and family arrangements exist now and have existed in the past. Although the nuclear family has been the norm in many societies, in practice its use has been less common than many people think. Many societies have favored extended families, and in early times children could expect, because of the death of a parent or births out of wedlock, to live at least some part of their childhood with only one parent.
2. Almost one-third of American children live in one-parent families; this percentage varies by race and ethnicity. Some research finds that parents experience more stress and lower psychological well-being than nonparents.
3. Sociological perspectives on the family fall into the more general functional, conflict, and social interactionist approaches guiding sociological thought. Functional theory emphasizes the several functions that families serve for society, including the socialization of children and the economic and practical support of family members. Conflict theory emphasizes the ways in which nuclear families contribute to ongoing gender, class, and race inequality, while social interactionist approaches examine family communication and interaction to make sense of family life.
4. Scholars continue to debate the consequences of divorce and single-parent households for women, men, and their children. Several studies find that divorce and single parenting in and of themselves do not have the dire consequences for children that many observers assume. The low income of single-parent households, and not the absence of a second parent, seems to account for many of the problems that children in such households do experience. Women and children seem to fare better when a highly contentious marriage ends.
5. Despite ongoing concern over the effect on children of day care instead of full-time care by one parent, recent research finds that children in high-quality day care are not worse off than their stay-at-home counterparts. Some studies find that day-care children are more independent and self-confident than children who stay at home and that they perform better on various tests of cognitive ability.
6. Racial and ethnic diversity marks American family life. Controversy also continues to exist over the high number of fatherless families in the African American community. Many observers blame many of the problems African Americans face on their comparative lack of two-parent households, but other observers say this blame is misplaced.
7. Family violence affects millions of spouses and children yearly. Structural and cultural factors help account for the high amount of intimate violence and child abuse. Despite claims to the contrary, the best evidence indicates that women are much more at risk than men for violence by spouses and partners.

## Using What You Know

You're working for a medium-sized corporation and have become friendly with one of your coworkers, Susan. One day she shows up at work with some bruises on the right side of her face. She looks upset, and when you ask her what happened, Susan replies that she slipped on the stairs at home and took a nasty fall. You suspect that her husband hit her and that she's not telling the truth about how she got hurt. What, if anything, do you say or do?

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the family problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer at a day-care center.
2. Volunteer at a battered women's shelter.
3. Start or join a group on your campus that addresses dating violence.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 9: Schools and Education


9.1: An Overview of Education in the United States
9.2: Sociological Perspectives on Education
9.3: Issues and Problems in Elementary and Secondary Education
9.4: Issues and Problems in Higher Education
9.5: Improving Schools and Education
9.6: End-of-Chapter Material


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# 9.1: An Overview of Education in the United States

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why compulsory education arose during the nineteenth century.
2. Summarize social class, gender, and racial and ethnic differences in educational attainment.
3. Describe the impact that education has on income.
4. Explain how the US education system ranks internationally.

Education is the social institution through which a society teaches its members the skills, knowledge, norms, and values they need to learn to become good, productive members of their society. As this definition makes clear, education is an important part of socialization. Education is both *formal* and *informal*. Formal education is often referred to as *schooling*, and as this term implies, it occurs in schools under teachers, principals, and other specially trained professionals. Informal education may occur almost anywhere, but for young children it has traditionally occurred primarily in the home, with their parents as their instructors. Day care has become an increasingly popular venue in industrial societies for young children's instruction, and education from the early years of life is thus more formal than it used to be.

Education in early America was only rarely formal. During the colonial period, the Puritans in what is now Massachusetts required parents to teach their children to read and also required larger towns to have an elementary school, where children learned reading, writing, and religion. In general, though, schooling was not required in the colonies, and only about 10 percent of colonial children, usually just the wealthiest, went to school, although others became apprentices (Urban & Wagoner, 2008).

To help unify the nation after the Revolutionary War, textbooks were written to standardize spelling and pronunciation and to instill patriotism and religious beliefs in students. At the same time, these textbooks included negative stereotypes of Native Americans and certain immigrant groups. The children going to school continued primarily to be those from wealthy families. By the mid-1800s, a call for free, compulsory education had begun, and compulsory education became widespread by the end of the century. This was an important development, as children from all social classes could now receive a free, formal education. Compulsory education was intended to further national unity and to teach immigrants "American" values. It also arose because of industrialization, as an industrial economy demanded reading, writing, and math skills much more than an agricultural economy had.

Free, compulsory education, of course, applied only to primary and secondary schools. Until the mid-1900s, very few people went to college, and those who did typically came from fairly wealthy families. After World War II, however, college enrollments soared, and today more people are attending college than ever before, even though college attendance is still related to social class, as we shall discuss shortly.

An important theme emerges from this brief history: Until very recently in the record of history, formal schooling was restricted to wealthy males. This means that boys who were not white and rich were excluded from formal schooling, as were virtually all girls, whose education was supposed to take place informally at home. Today, as we will see, race, ethnicity, social class, and, to some extent, gender continue to affect both educational achievement and the amount of learning occurring in schools.



In colonial America, only about 10 percent of children went to school, and these children tended to come from wealthy families. After the Revolutionary War, new textbooks helped standardize spelling and pronunciation and promote patriotism and religious beliefs, but these textbooks also included negative stereotypes of Native Americans. (Wikimedia Commons – public domain.)

## Education in the United States Today

Education in the United States is a massive social institution involving millions of people and billions of dollars. More than 75 million people, almost one-fourth of the US population, attend school at all levels. This number includes 40 million in grades pre-K through eighth grade, 16 million in high school, and 20 million in college (including graduate and professional school). They attend some 132,000 elementary and secondary schools and about 4,200 two-year and four-year colleges and universities and are taught by about 4.8 million teachers and professors (US Census Bureau, 2012).US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

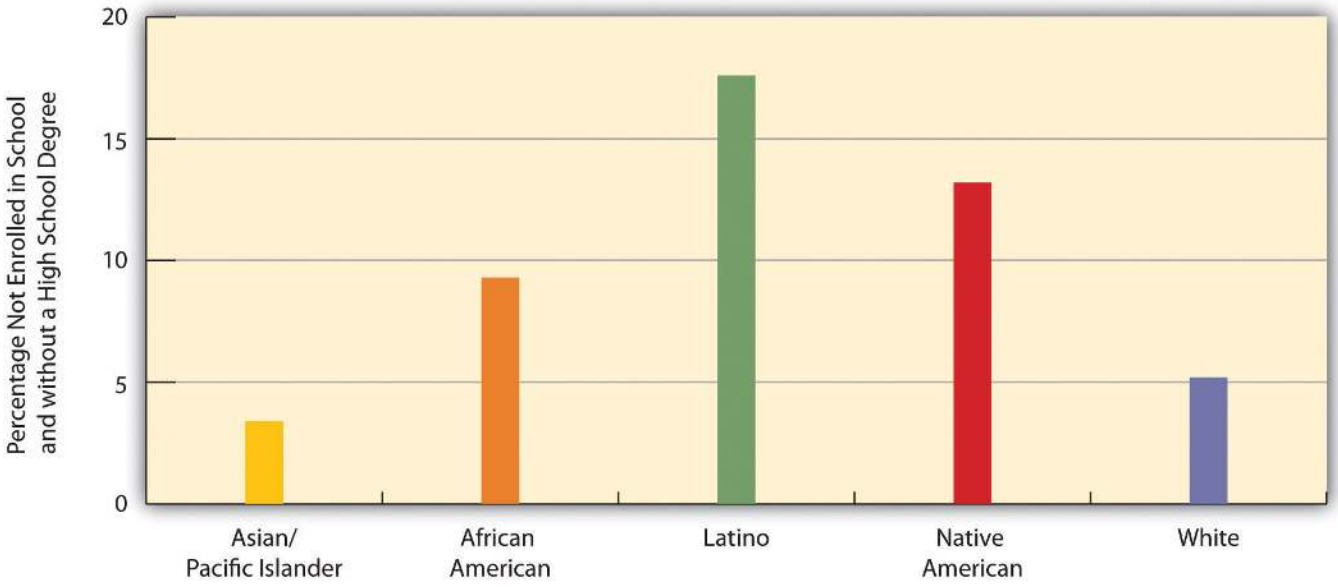
## Correlates of Educational Attainment

About 65 percent of US high school graduates enroll in college the following fall. This is a very high figure by international standards, as college in many other industrial nations is reserved for the very small percentage of the population who pass rigorous entrance exams. They are the best of the brightest in their nations, whereas higher education in the United States is open to all who graduate high school. Even though that is true, our chances of achieving a college degree are greatly determined at birth, as social class and race and ethnicity substantially affect who goes to college. They affect whether students drop out of high school, in which case they do not go on to college; they affect the chances of getting good grades in school and good scores on college entrance exams; they affect whether a family can afford to send its children to college; and they affect the chances of staying in college and obtaining a degree versus dropping out. For all these reasons, **educational attainment**—how far one gets in school—depends heavily on family income and race/ethnicity (Tavernise, 2012).Tavernise, S. (2012, February 10). Education gap grows between rich and poor, studies say. *New York Times*, p. A1. Family income, in fact, makes a much larger difference in educational attainment than it did during the 1960s.

## Family Income and Race/Ethnicity

Government data readily show the effects of family income and race/ethnicity on educational attainment. Let's first look at how race and ethnicity affect the likelihood of dropping out of high school. Figure 11.1 shows the percentage of people ages 16–24 who are not enrolled in school and who have not received a high school degree. The dropout rate is highest for Latinos and Native Americans and lowest for Asians and whites.

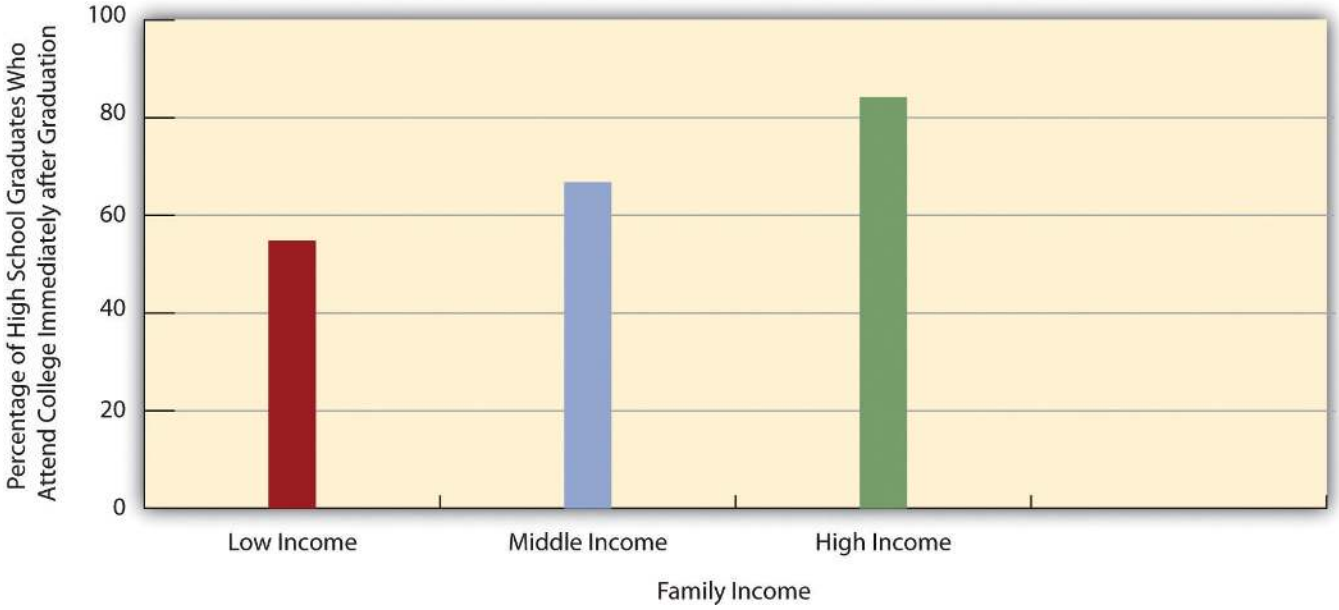
Figure 11.1 Race, Ethnicity, and High School Dropout Rate, Persons Ages 16–24, 2009 (Percentage Not Enrolled in School and without a High School Degree)




*Source: Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., et al. (2011). The condition of education 2011. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.*

Now let's look at how family income affects the likelihood of attending college, a second benchmark of educational attainment. Figure 11.2 shows the relationship between family income and the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in college immediately following graduation: Students from families in the highest income bracket are more likely than those in the lowest bracket to attend college. This "income gap" in college entry has become larger in recent decades (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011).Bailey, M. J., & Dynarski, S. (2011). *Gains and gaps: Changing inequality in US college entry and completion*. Ann Arbor, MI: Population Studies Center.

Figure 11.2 Family Income and Percentage of High School Graduates Who Attend College Immediately after Graduation, 2009

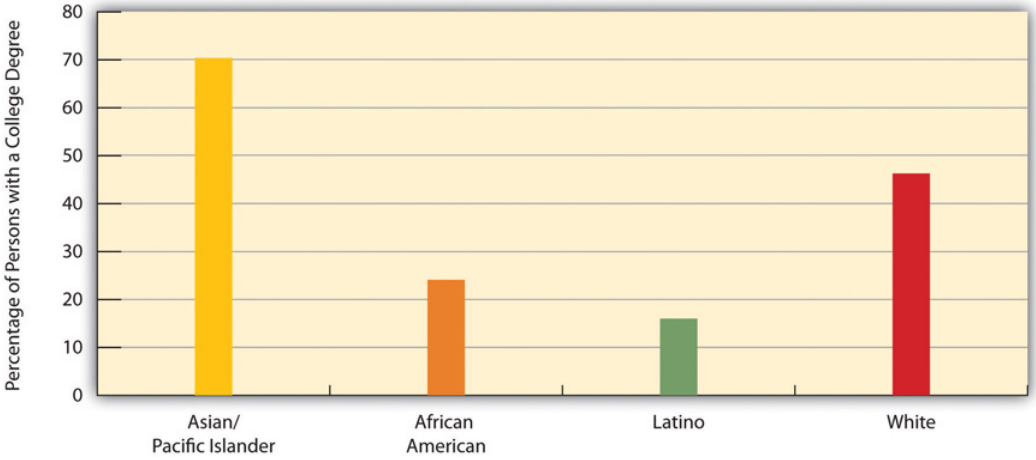



*Source: Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., et al. (2011). The condition of education 2011. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.*

Finally, let's examine how race and ethnicity affect the likelihood of obtaining a college degree, a third benchmark of educational attainment. Figure 11.3 shows the relationship between race/ethnicity and the percentage of persons 25 or older who have a

bachelor's or master's degree. This relationship is quite strong, with African Americans and Latinos least likely to have a degree, and whites and especially Asians/Pacific Islanders most likely to have a degree.

Figure 11.3 Race, Ethnicity, and Percentage of Persons Ages 25 or Older with a Four-Year College Degree, 2010




*Source: Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., et al. (2011). The condition of education 2011. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.*

## Explaining the Racial/Ethnic Gap in Educational Attainment

Why do African Americans and Latinos have lower educational attainment? Four factors are commonly cited: (a) the underfunded and otherwise inadequate schools that children in both groups often attend; (b) the higher poverty of their families and lower education of their parents that often leave children ill prepared for school even before they enter kindergarten; (c) racial discrimination; and (d) the fact that African American and Latino families are especially likely to live in very poor neighborhoods (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2012). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall; Yeung, W.-J. J., & Pfeiffer, K. M. (2009). The black-white test score gap and early home environment. *Social Science Research*, *38*(2), 412–437.

The last two factors, racial discrimination and residence in high-poverty neighborhoods, need additional explanation. At least three forms of racial discrimination impair educational attainment (Mickelson, 2003).Mickelson, R. A. (2003). When are racial disparities in education the result of racial discrimination? A social science perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 105, pp. 1052–1086. The first form involves tracking. As we discuss later, students tracked into vocational or general curricula tend to learn less and have lower educational attainment than those tracked into a faster-learning, academic curriculum. Because students of color are more likely to be tracked "down" rather than "up," their school performance and educational attainment suffer.

The second form of racial discrimination involves school discipline. As we also discuss later, students of color are more likely than white students to be suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined for similar types of misbehavior. Because such discipline again reduces school performance and educational attainment, this form of discrimination helps explain the lower attainment of African American and Latino students.

The third form involves teachers' expectations of students. As our later discussion of the symbolic interactionist perspective on education examines further, teachers' expectations of students affect how much students learn. Research finds that teachers have lower expectations for their African American and Latino students, and that these expectations help to lower how much these students learn.

Turning to residence in high-poverty neighborhoods, it may be apparent that poor neighborhoods have lower educational attainment because they have inadequate schools, but poor neighborhoods matter for reasons beyond their schools' quality (Kirk & Sampson, 2011; Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011).Kirk, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (2011). Crime and the production of safe schools. In G. J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity?: Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 397–418). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; Wodtke, G. T., Harding, D. J., & Elwert, F. (2011). Neighborhood effects in temporal perspective: The impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage on high school graduation. *American Sociological Review, 76*(5), 713–736. First, because many adults in these neighborhoods are high school dropouts and/or unemployed, children in these neighborhoods lack adult role models for educational attainment. Second, poor neighborhoods tend

to be racially and ethnically segregated. Latino children in these neighborhoods are less likely to speak English well because they lack native English-speaking friends, and African American children are more likely to speak “black English” than conventional English; both language problems impede school success.

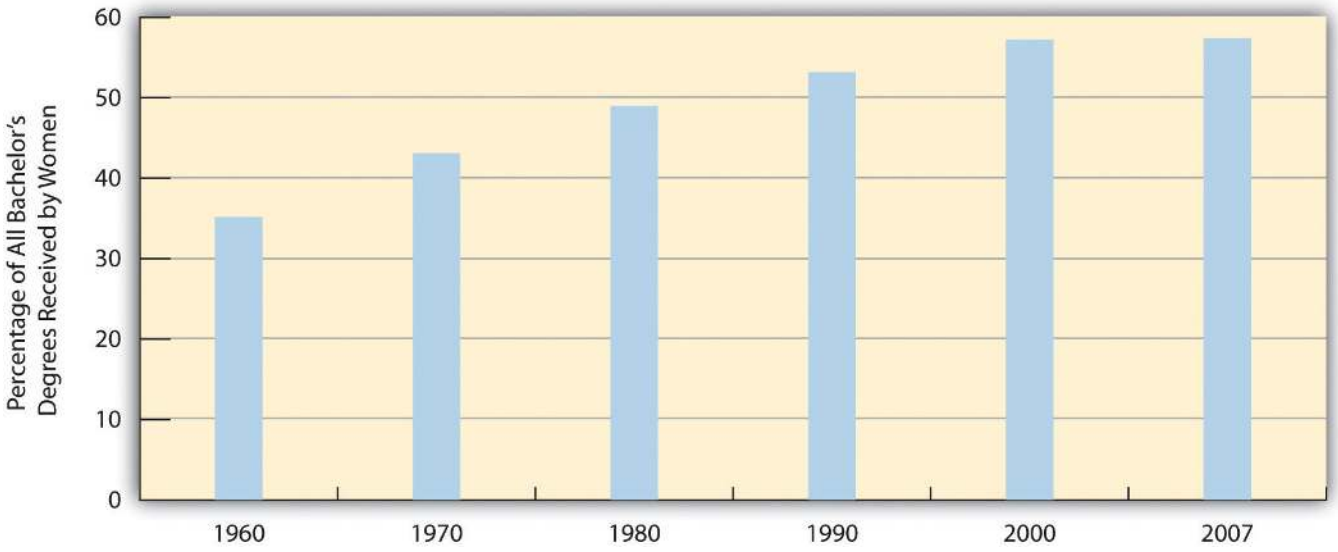
Third, poor neighborhoods have higher rates of violence and other deviant behaviors than wealthier neighborhoods. Children in these neighborhoods thus are more likely to experience high levels of stress, to engage in these behaviors themselves (which reduces their attention and commitment to their schooling), and to be victims of violence (which increases their stress and can impair their neurological development). Crime in these neighborhoods also tends to reduce teacher commitment and parental involvement in their children’s schooling. Finally, poor neighborhoods are more likely to have environmental problems such as air pollution and toxic levels of lead paint; these problems lead to asthma and other health problems among children (as well as adults), which impairs the children’s ability to learn and do well in school.

For all these reasons, then, children in poor neighborhoods are at much greater risk for lower educational attainment. As a recent study of this risk concluded, “Sustained exposure to disadvantaged neighborhoods…throughout the entire childhood life course has a devastating impact on the chances of graduating from high school” (Wodtke et al., 2011, p. 731).Wodtke, G. T., Harding, D. J., & Elwert, F. (2011). Neighborhood effects in temporal perspective: The impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage on high school graduation. *American Sociological Review, 76*(5), 713–736. If these neighborhoods are not improved, the study continued, “concentrated neighborhood poverty will likely continue to hamper the development of future generations of children” (Wodtke et al., 2011, p. 733).Wodtke, G. T., Harding, D. J., & Elwert, F. (2011). Neighborhood effects in temporal perspective: The impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage on high school graduation. *American Sociological Review, 76*(5), 713–736.

## Gender

Gender also affects educational attainment. If we do not take age into account, slightly more men than women have a college degree: 30.3 percent of men and 29.6 percent of women. This difference reflects the fact that women were less likely than men in earlier generations to go to college. But today there is a gender difference in the other direction: Women now earn more than 57 percent of all bachelor’s degrees, up from just 35 percent in 1960 (see Figure 11.4). This difference reflects the fact that females are more likely than males to graduate high school, to attend college after high school graduation, and to obtain a degree after starting college (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011).Bailey, M. J., & Dynarski, S. (2011). *Gains and gaps: Changing inequality in US college entry and completion*. Ann Arbor, MI: Population Studies Center.

Figure 11.4 Percentage of All Bachelor’s Degrees Received by Women, 1960–2009




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

## Impact of Education on Income



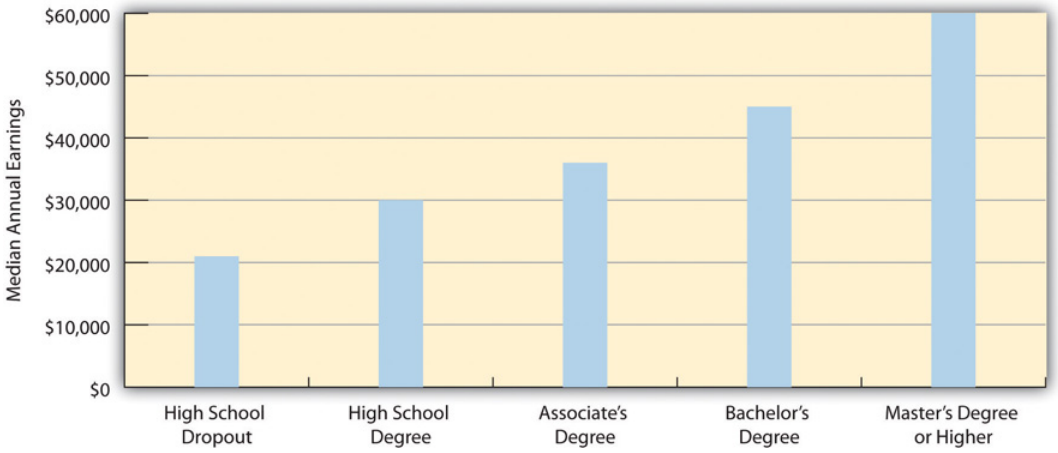
*On the average, college graduates have much higher annual earnings than high school graduates. How much does this consequence affect why you decided to go to college?*

*© Thinkstock*

Have you ever applied for a job that required a high school degree? Are you going to college in part because you realize you will need a college degree for a higher-paying job? As these questions imply, the United States is a **credential society** (Collins, 1979).Collins, R. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. New York, NY: Academic Press. This means at least two things. First, a high school or college degree (or beyond) indicates that a person has acquired the needed knowledge and skills for various jobs. Second, a degree at some level is a requirement for most jobs. As you know full well, a college degree today is a virtual requirement for a decent-paying job. The ante has been upped considerably over the years: In earlier generations, a high school degree, if even that, was all that was needed, if only because so few people graduated from high school to begin with. With so many people graduating from high school today, a high school degree is not worth as much. Then too, today's society increasingly requires skills and knowledge that only a college education brings.

A credential society also means that people with more formal education achieve higher incomes. Annual earnings are indeed much higher for people with more education (see Figure 11.5). As earlier chapters indicated, gender and race/ethnicity affect the payoff we get from our education, but education itself still makes a huge difference for our incomes.

Figure 11.5 Educational Attainment and Median Annual Earnings, Ages 25–34, 2009




*Source: Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., et al. (2011). The condition of education 2011. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.*

## Impact of Education on Mortality

Beyond income, education also affects at what age people tend to die. Simply put, people with higher levels of education tend to die later in life, and those with lower levels tend to die earlier (Miech, Pampel, Kim, & Rogers, 2011).Miech, R., Pampel, F., Kim, J., & Rogers, R. G. (2011). Education and mortality: The role of widening and narrowing disparities. *American Sociological Review, 76*, 913–934. The reasons for this disparity are complex, but two reasons stand out. First, more highly educated people are less likely to smoke and engage in other unhealthy activities, and they are more likely to exercise and to engage in other healthy activities and also to eat healthy diets. Second, they have better access to high-quality health care.

## How the US Education System Compares Internationally

The United States has many of the top colleges and universities and secondary schools in the world, and many of the top professors and teachers. In these respects, the US education system is “the best of systems.” But in other respects, it is “the worst of systems.” When we compare educational attainment in the United States to that in the world’s other democracies, the United States lags behind its international peers.

Differences in the educational systems of the world’s democracies make exact comparisons difficult, but one basic measure of educational attainment is the percentage of a nation’s population that has graduated high school. A widely cited comparison involves the industrial nations that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Of the twenty-eight nations for which OECD has high school graduation data, the United States ranks only twenty-first, with a graduation rate of 76 percent (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). How many students finish secondary education? Retrieved November 10, 2011, from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/3/48630687.pdf. In contrast, several nations, including Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom have graduation rates of at least 90 percent. If we limit the comparison to the OECD nations that compose the world’s wealthy democracies (see Chapter 2) to which the United States is most appropriately compared, the United States ranks only thirteenth out of sixteen such nations.

OECD also collects and publishes data on proficiency in mathematics, reading, and science among 15-year-olds in its member nations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2010). *PISA 2009 results: What students know and can do—Student performance in reading, mathematics and science* (Vol. 1). Paris, France: Author. In reading and science, the United States ranks only at the average for all OECD nations, while the US score for mathematics ranks below the OECD average. Compared to their counterparts in other industrial nations, then, American 15-year-olds are only average or below average for these three important areas of study. Taking into account high school graduation rates and these proficiency rankings, the United States is far from the world leader in the quality of education. The Note 11.8 "Lessons from Other Societies" box examines what the United States might learn from the sterling example of Finland’s education system.

### Lessons from Other Societies

Successful Schooling in Finland

Finland is widely regarded as having perhaps the top elementary and secondary education system in the world. Its model of education offers several important lessons for US education. As a recent analysis of Finland’s schools put it, “The country’s achievements in education have other nations doing their homework.”

To understand the lessons to be learned from Finland, we should go back several decades to the 1970s, when Finland’s education system was below par, with its students scoring below the international average in mathematics and science. Moreover, urban schools in Finland outranked rural schools, and wealthy students performed much better than low-income students. Today, Finnish students rank at the top in international testing, and low-income students do almost as well as wealthy students.

Finland’s education system ranks so highly today because it took several measures to improve its education system. First, and perhaps most important, Finland raised teachers’ salaries, required all teachers to have a three-year master’s degree, and paid all costs, including a living stipend, for the graduate education needed to achieve this degree. These changes helped to greatly increase the number of teachers, especially the number of highly qualified teachers, and Finland now has more teachers for every 1,000 residents than does the United States. Unlike the United States, teaching is considered a highly prestigious profession in Finland, and the application process to become a teacher is very competitive. The college graduates who apply for one of Finland’s eight graduate programs in teaching typically rank in the top 10 percent of their class, and only 5–15 percent of their applications are accepted. A leading Finnish educator observed, “It’s more difficult getting into teacher education than law or medicine.” In

contrast, US students who become teachers tend to have lower SAT scores than those who enter other professions, they only need a four-year degree, and their average salaries are lower than other professionals with a similar level of education.

Second, Finland revamped its curriculum to emphasize critical thinking skills, reduced the importance of scores on standardized tests and then eliminated standardized testing altogether, and eliminated academic tracking before tenth grade. Unlike the United States, Finland no longer ranks students, teachers, or schools according to scores on standardized tests because these tests are no longer given.

Third, Finland built many more schools to enable the average school to have fewer students. Today the typical school has fewer than three hundred students, and class sizes are smaller than those found in the United States.

Fourth, Finland increased funding of its schools so that its schools are now well maintained and well equipped. Whereas many US schools are decrepit, Finnish schools are decidedly in good repair.

Finally, Finland provided free medical and dental care for children and their families and expanded other types of social services, including three years of paid maternity leave and subsidized day care, as the country realized that children's health and home environment play critical roles in their educational achievement.

These and other changes helped propel Finland's education system to a leading position among the world's industrial nations. As the United States ponders how best to improve its own education system, it may have much to learn from Finland's approach to how children should learn.

*Sources:* Abrams, 2011; Anderson, 2011; Eggers & Calegari, 2011; Hancock, 2011; Ravitch, 2012; Sahlberg, 2011Abrams, S. E. (2011, January 28). The children must play: What the United States could learn from Finland about education reform. *The New Republic*. Retrieved from http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/82329/education-reform-Finland-US; Anderson, J. (2011, December 13). From Finland, an intriguing school-reform model. *New York Times*, p. A33; Eggers, D., & Calegari, N. C. (2011, May 1). The high cost of low teacher salaries. *New York Times*, p. WK12; Hancock, L. (2011, September). Why are Finland's schools successful? *Smithsonian*. Retrieved from http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/Why-Are-Finlands-Schools-Successful.html?c=y&story=fullstory; Ravitch, D. (2012, March 8). Schools we can envy. *The New York Review of Books*. Retrieved from http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/mar/08/schools-we-can-envy/; Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Until very recently in the record of history, formal schooling was restricted to wealthy males.
- Students from low-income backgrounds tend to have lower educational attainment than students from wealthier backgrounds.
- African Americans and Latinos tend to have lower educational attainment than non-Latino whites and Asians.
- Gender influences educational attainment in a complex fashion; older women have lower educational attainment than older men, but younger women have greater educational attainment than younger men.
- The United States ranks behind many other industrial nations in the quality of the education its citizens receive.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you think the government should take steps to try to reduce racial and ethnic differences in education, or do you think it should take a hands-off approach? Explain your answer.
2. Should the government require that children receive a formal education, as it now does, or should it be up to parents to decide whether their children should receive a formal education? Explain your answer.

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# 9.2: Sociological Perspectives on Education

**Learning Objectives**

1. List the major functions of education.
2. Explain the problems that conflict theory sees in education.
3. Describe how symbolic interactionism understands education.

The major sociological perspectives on education fall nicely into the functional, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). Table 11.1 “Theory Snapshot” summarizes what these approaches say.

Table 11.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | Education serves several functions for society. These include (a) socialization, (b) social integration, (c) social placement, and (d) social and cultural innovation. Latent functions include child care, the establishment of peer relationships, and lowering unemployment by keeping high school students out of the full-time labor force. Problems in the educational institution harm society because all these functions cannot be completely fulfilled. |
| Conflict theory | Education promotes social inequality through the use of tracking and standardized testing and the impact of its “hidden curriculum.” Schools differ widely in their funding and learning conditions, and this type of inequality leads to learning disparities that reinforce social inequality. |
| Symbolic interactionism | This perspective focuses on social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. Specific research finds that social interaction in schools affects the development of gender roles and that teachers’ expectations of pupils’ intellectual abilities affect how much pupils learn. Certain educational problems have their basis in social interaction and expectations. |

## The Functions of Education

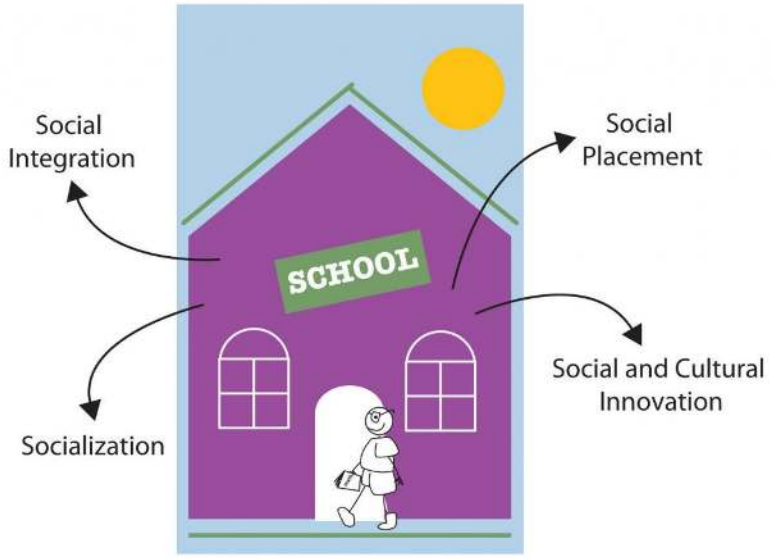
Functional theory stresses the functions that education serves in fulfilling a society’s various needs. Perhaps the most important function of education is *socialization*. If children are to learn the norms, values, and skills they need to function in society, then education is a primary vehicle for such learning. Schools teach the three Rs (reading, ’riting, ’rithmetic), as we all know, but they also teach many of the society’s norms and values. In the United States, these norms and values include respect for authority, patriotism (remember the Pledge of Allegiance?), punctuality, and competition (for grades and sports victories).

A second function of education is *social integration*. For a society to work, functionalists say, people must subscribe to a common set of beliefs and values. As we saw, the development of such common views was a goal of the system of free, compulsory education that developed in the nineteenth century. Thousands of immigrant children in the United States today are learning English, US history, and other subjects that help prepare them for the workforce and integrate them into American life.

A third function of education is *social placement*. Beginning in grade school, students are identified by teachers and other school officials either as bright and motivated or as less bright and even educationally challenged. Depending on how they are identified, children are taught at the level that is thought to suit them best. In this way, they are presumably prepared for their later station in life. Whether this process works as well as it should is an important issue, and we explore it further when we discuss school tracking later in this chapter.

*Social and cultural innovation* is a fourth function of education. Our scientists cannot make important scientific discoveries and our artists and thinkers cannot come up with great works of art, poetry, and prose unless they have first been educated in the many subjects they need to know for their chosen path.

Figure 11.6 The Functions of Education




Education also involves several *latent* functions, functions that are by-products of going to school and receiving an education rather than a direct effect of the education itself. One of these is *child care*: Once a child starts kindergarten and then first grade, for several hours a day the child is taken care of for free. The *establishment of peer relationships* is another latent function of schooling. Most of us met many of our friends while we were in school at whatever grade level, and some of those friendships endure the rest of our lives. A final latent function of education is that it *keeps millions of high school students out of the full-time labor force*. This fact keeps the unemployment rate lower than it would be if they were in the labor force.

Because education serves so many manifest and latent functions for society, problems in schooling ultimately harm society. For education to serve its many functions, various kinds of reforms are needed to make our schools and the process of education as effective as possible.

## Education and Inequality

Conflict theory does not dispute the functions just described. However, it does give some of them a different slant by emphasizing how education also perpetuates social inequality (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). One example of this process involves the function of social placement. When most schools begin tracking their students in grade school, the students thought by their teachers to be bright are placed in the faster tracks (especially in reading and arithmetic), while the slower students are placed in the slower tracks; in high school, three common tracks are the college track, vocational track, and general track.

Such *tracking* does have its advantages; it helps ensure that bright students learn as much as their abilities allow them, and it helps ensure that slower students are not taught over their heads. But conflict theorists say that tracking also helps perpetuate social inequality by *locking* students into faster and lower tracks. Worse yet, several studies show that students' social class and race and ethnicity affect the track into which they are placed, even though their intellectual abilities and potential should be the only things that matter: White, middle-class students are more likely to be tracked "up," while poorer students and students of color are more likely to be tracked "down." Once they are tracked, students learn more if they are tracked up and less if they are tracked down. The latter tend to lose self-esteem and begin to think they have little academic ability and thus do worse in school because they were tracked down. In this way, tracking is thought to be good for those tracked up and bad for those tracked down. Conflict theorists thus say that tracking perpetuates social inequality based on social class and race and ethnicity (Ansalone, 2010).

Conflict theorists add that standardized tests are culturally biased and thus also help perpetuate social inequality (Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008). According to this criticism, these tests favor white, middle-class students whose socioeconomic status and other aspects of their backgrounds have afforded them various experiences that help them answer questions on the tests.

A third critique of conflict theory involves the quality of schools. As we will see later in this chapter, US schools differ mightily in their resources, learning conditions, and other aspects, all of which affect how much students can learn in them. Simply put, schools are unequal, and their very inequality helps perpetuate inequality in the larger society. Children going to the worst schools

in urban areas face many more obstacles to their learning than those going to well-funded schools in suburban areas. Their lack of learning helps ensure they remain trapped in poverty and its related problems.

In a fourth critique, conflict theorists say that schooling teaches a hidden curriculum, by which they mean a set of values and beliefs that support the status quo, including the existing social hierarchy (Booher-Jennings, 2008). Although no one plots this behind closed doors, our schoolchildren learn patriotic values and respect for authority from the books they read and from various classroom activities.

A final critique is historical and concerns the rise of free, compulsory education during the nineteenth century (Cole, 2008). Because compulsory schooling began in part to prevent immigrants' values from corrupting "American" values, conflict theorists see its origins as smacking of *ethnocentrism* (the belief that one's own group is superior to another group). They also criticize its intention to teach workers the skills they needed for the new industrial economy. Because most workers were very poor in this economy, these critics say, compulsory education served the interests of the upper/capitalist class much more than it served the interests of workers.

## Symbolic Interactionism and School Behavior

Symbolic interactionist studies of education examine social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. These studies help us understand what happens in the schools themselves, but they also help us understand how what occurs in school is relevant for the larger society. Some studies, for example, show how children's playground activities reinforce gender-role socialization. Girls tend to play more cooperative games, while boys play more competitive sports (Thorne, 1993) (see Chapter 4 "Gender Inequality").

### Applying Social Research

Assessing the Impact of Small Class Size

- Do elementary school students fare better if their classes have fewer students rather than more students? It is not easy to answer this important question, because any differences found between students in small classes and those in larger classes might not necessarily reflect class size. Rather, they may reflect other factors. For example, perhaps the most motivated, educated parents ask that their child be placed in a smaller class and that their school goes along with this request. Perhaps teachers with more experience favor smaller classes and are able to have their principals assign them to these classes, while new teachers are assigned larger classes. These and other possibilities mean that any differences found between the two class sizes might reflect the qualities and skills of students and/or teachers in these classes, and not class size itself.
- For this reason, the ideal study of class size would involve *random assignment* of both students and teachers to classes of different size. (Recall that Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems" discusses the benefits of random assignment.) Fortunately, a notable study of this type exists.
- The study, named Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio), began in Tennessee in 1985 and involved 79 public schools and 11,600 students and 1,330 teachers who were all randomly assigned to either a smaller class (13–17 students) or a larger class (22–25 students). The random assignment began when the students entered kindergarten and lasted through third grade; in fourth grade, the experiment ended, and all the students were placed into the larger class size. The students are now in their early thirties, and many aspects of their educational and personal lives have been followed since the study began.
- Some of the more notable findings of this multiyear study include the following:
  - While in grades K–3, students in the smaller classes had higher average scores on standardized tests.
  - Students who had been in the smaller classes continued to have higher average test scores in grades 4–7.
  - Students who had been in the smaller classes were more likely to complete high school and also to attend college.
  - Students who had been in the smaller classes were less likely to be arrested during adolescence.
  - Students who had been in the smaller classes were more likely in their twenties to be married and to live in wealthier neighborhoods.
  - White girls who had been in the smaller classes were less likely to have a teenage birth than white girls who had been in the larger classes.
- Why did small class size have these benefits? Two reasons seem likely. First, in a smaller class, there are fewer students to disrupt the class by talking, fighting, or otherwise taking up the teacher's time. More learning can thus occur in smaller classes. Second, kindergarten teachers are better able to teach noncognitive skills (cooperating, listening, sitting still) in

smaller classes, and these skills can have an impact many years later.
- Regardless of the reasons, it was the experimental design of Project STAR that enabled its findings to be attributed to class size rather than to other factors. Because small class size does seem to help in many ways, the United States should try to reduce class size in order to improve student performance and later life outcomes.
- *Sources:* Chetty et al., 2011; Schanzenbach, 2006

Another body of research shows that teachers' views about students can affect how much the students learn. When teachers think students are smart, they tend to spend more time with these students, to call on them, and to praise them when they give the right answer. Not surprisingly, these students learn more because of their teachers' behavior. But when teachers think students are less bright, they tend to spend less time with these students and to act in a way that leads them to learn less. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) conducted a classic study of this phenomenon. They tested a group of students at the beginning of the school year and told their teachers which students were bright and which were not. They then tested the students again at the end of the school year. Not surprisingly, the bright students had learned more during the year than the less bright ones. But it turned out that the researchers had randomly decided which students would be designated bright and less bright. Because the "bright" students learned more during the school year without actually being brighter at the beginning, their teachers' behavior must have been the reason. In fact, their teachers did spend more time with them and praised them more often than was true for the "less bright" students. This process helps us understand why tracking is bad for the students tracked down.



Figure 9.2.1: Research guided by the symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that teachers' expectations may influence how much their students learn. When teachers expect little of their students, their students tend to learn less. ijiwaru jimbo – Pre-school colour pack – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Other research in the symbolic interactionist tradition focuses on how teachers treat girls and boys. Many studies find that teachers call on and praise boys more often (Jones & Dindia, 2004). Teachers do not do this consciously, but their behavior nonetheless sends an implicit message to girls that math and science are not for them and that they are not suited to do well in these subjects. This body of research has stimulated efforts to educate teachers about the ways in which they may unwittingly send these messages and about strategies they could use to promote greater interest and achievement by girls in math and science (Battey, Kafai, Nixon, & Kao, 2007).

## Key Takeaways

- According to the functional perspective, education helps socialize children and prepare them for their eventual entrance into the larger society as adults.
- The conflict perspective emphasizes that education reinforces inequality in the larger society.
- The symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on social interaction in the classroom, on school playgrounds, and at other school-related venues. Social interaction contributes to gender-role socialization, and teachers' expectations may affect their students' performance.

## For Your Review

1. Review how the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives understand and explain education. Which of these three approaches do you most prefer? Why?

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# 9.3: Issues and Problems in Elementary and Secondary Education

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe how schooling in the United States helps perpetuate social inequality.
2. Explain the difference between de jure segregation and de facto segregation.
3. Summarize the evidence on the effectiveness of single-sex education.
4. Describe the extent of school violence and the controversy over zero-tolerance policies.
5. Discuss how and why social inequality in the larger society manifests itself in higher education.

The *elementary* (K–8) and *secondary* (9–12) education system today faces many issues and problems of interest not just to educators and families but also to sociologists and other social scientists. We cannot discuss all these issues here, but we will highlight some of the most interesting and important.

## Schools and Inequality

Earlier we mentioned that schools differ greatly in their funding, their conditions, and other aspects. Noted author and education critic Jonathan Kozol refers to these differences as "savage inequalities," to quote the title of one of his books (Kozol, 1991). Kozol's concern over inequality in the schools stemmed from his experience as a young teacher in a public elementary school in a Boston inner-city neighborhood in the 1960s. Kozol was shocked to see that his school was literally falling apart. The building itself was decrepit, with plaster falling off the walls and bathrooms and other facilities substandard. Classes were large, and the school was so overcrowded that Kozol's fourth-grade class had to meet in an auditorium, which it shared with another class, the school choir, and, for a time, a group of students practicing for the Christmas play. Kozol's observations led to the writing of his first award-winning book, *Death at an Early Age* (Kozol, 1967).

Kozol (1991) later traveled around the United States and systematically compared public schools in several cities' inner-city neighborhoods to those in the cities' suburbs. Everywhere he went, he found great discrepancies in school spending and in the quality of instruction. In schools in Camden, New Jersey, for example, spending per pupil was less than half the amount spent in the nearby, much wealthier town of Princeton. Chicago and New York City schools spent only about half the amount that some of the schools in nearby suburbs spent.

These numbers were reflected in other differences Kozol found when he visited city and suburban schools. In East St. Louis, Illinois, where most of the residents are poor and almost all are African American, schools had to shut down once because of sewage backups. The high school's science labs were thirty to fifty years out of date when Kozol visited them; the biology lab had no dissecting kits. A history teacher had 110 students but only twenty-six textbooks, some of which were missing their first one hundred pages. At one of the city's junior high schools, many window frames lacked any glass, and the hallways were dark because light bulbs were missing or not working. Visitors could smell urinals one hundred feet from the bathroom.

Contrast these conditions with those Kozol observed in suburban schools. A high school in a Chicago suburb had seven gyms and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Students there could take classes in seven foreign languages. A suburban New Jersey high school offered fourteen AP courses, fencing, golf, ice hockey, and lacrosse, and the school district there had ten music teachers and an extensive music program.

From his observations, Kozol concluded that the United States is shortchanging its children in poor rural and urban areas. As we saw in Chapter 2 "Poverty", poor children start out in life with many strikes against them. The schools they attend compound their problems and help ensure that the American ideal of equal opportunity for all remains just that—an ideal—rather than a reality. As Kozol (1991, p. 233) observed, "All our children ought to be allowed a stake in the enormous richness of America. Whether they were born to poor white Appalachians or to wealthy Texans, to poor black people in the Bronx or to rich people in Manhasset or Winnetka, they are all quite wonderful and innocent when they are small. We soil them needlessly."

Although the book in which Kozol reported these conditions was published more than twenty years ago, ample evidence (including the news story about Baltimore's schools that began this chapter) shows these conditions persist today. A recent news report discussed public schools in Washington, DC. More than 75 percent of the schools in the city had a leaking roof at the time the report was published, and 87 percent had electrical problems, some of which involved shocks or sparks. Most of the schools' cafeterias—85 percent—had health violations, including peeling paint near food and rodent and roach infestation. Thousands of requests for building repairs, including 1,100 labeled "urgent" or "dangerous," had been waiting more than a year to be addressed.

More than one-third of the schools had a mouse infestation, and in one elementary school, there were so many mice that the students gave them names and drew their pictures. An official with the city's school system said, "I don't know if anybody knows the magnitude of problems at D.C. public schools. It's mind-boggling" (Keating & Haynes, 2007).

Large funding differences in the nation's schools also endure. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for example, annual per-pupil expenditure was $10,878 in 2010; in nearby suburban Lower Merion Township, it was $21,110, or 95 percent higher than Philadelphia's expenditure (Federal Education Budget Project, 2012).

Teacher salaries are related to these funding differences. Salaries in urban schools in low-income neighborhoods are markedly lower than those in schools in wealthier neighborhoods (Dillon, 2011). As a result, teachers at the low-income schools tend to be inexperienced teachers just out of college. All things equal, they are less likely than their counterparts at wealthier schools to be effective teachers.



Figure 9.3.1: Jonathan Kozol has written movingly of "savage inequalities" in American schools arising from large differences in their funding and in the condition of their physical facilities. Thomas Hawk – El Paso High School – CC BY-NC 2.0; Nitram242 – Detroit School – CC BY 2.0.

## People Making a Difference

Teaching Young Students about Science and Conservation

Since 1999, the Ocean Discovery Institute (ODI) has taught more than 40,000 public school students in a low-income San Diego neighborhood about the ocean and the environment. Most of the students are Latino, and a growing number are recent immigrants from Southeast Asia and East Africa. By learning about ocean science, the students also learn something about geology, physics, and other sciences. ODI's program has grown over the years, and it now services more than 5,000 students annually in ten schools. To accomplish its mission, ODI engages in several kinds of activities.

- First, ODI instructors teach hands-on marine science activities to students in grades 3–6. They also consult closely with the schools' teachers about the science curriculum taught in the schools.
- Second, ODI runs an after-school program in which they provide marine science–based lessons as well as academic, social, and college-entry support to approximately sixty students in grades 6–12.
- Third, ODI takes about twenty high school students every summer to the Sea of Cortez in Baja California, Mexico, for an intensive five-week research experience at a field research station. Before they do so, they are trained for several weeks in laboratory and field research procedures, and they also learn how to swim and snorkel. After they arrive at the field research station, they divide into three research teams; each team works on a different project under the guidance of ODI instructors and university and government scientists. A recent project, which won an award from the World Wildlife Fund, has focused on reducing the number of sea turtles that are accidentally caught in fishing nets.

The instruction provided by ODI has changed the lives of many students. Perhaps most notably, about 80 percent of the students who have participated in the after-school or summer program have attended a four-year college or university (with almost all declaring a major in one of the sciences), compared to less than one-third of students in their schools who have not participated in these programs. One summer program student, whose parents were deported by the government, recalls the

experience fondly: “I have learned to become independent, and I pushed myself to try new things. Now I know I can overcome barriers and take chances…I am prepared to overcome challenges and follow my dreams.”

In 2011, ODI was one of three organizations that received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring. Several ODI officials and students traveled to the White House to take part in various events and accept the award from President Obama. As this award attests, the Ocean Discovery Institute is making a striking difference in the lives of low-income San Diego students. For further information, visit http://www.oceandiscoveryinstitute.org. (Full disclosure: The author’s son works for ODI.)

*Source:* Ocean Discovery Institute, 2011

## School Segregation

A related issue to school inequality is school racial segregation. Before 1954, schools in the South were racially segregated by law (**de jure segregation**). Communities and states had laws that dictated which schools white children attended and which schools African American children attended. Schools were either all white or all African American, and, inevitably, white schools were much better funded than African American schools. Then in 1954, the US Supreme Court outlawed *de jure* school segregation in its famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Southern school districts fought this decision with legal machinations, and *de jure* school segregation did not really end in the South until the civil rights movement won its major victories a decade later.

Meanwhile, northern schools were also segregated; decades after the *Brown* decision, they have become even more segregated. School segregation in the North stemmed, both then and now, not from the law but from neighborhood residential patterns. Because children usually go to schools near their homes, if adjacent neighborhoods are all white or all African American, then the schools for these neighborhoods will also be all white or all African American, or mostly so. This type of segregation is called **de facto segregation**.



*Many children today attend schools that are racially segregated because of neighborhood residential patterns.*

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Today many children continue to go to schools that are segregated because of neighborhood residential patterns, a situation that Kozol (2005)Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown. calls "apartheid schooling." About 40 percent of African American and Latino children attend schools that are very segregated (at least 90 percent of their students are of color); this level of segregation is higher than it was four decades ago. Although such segregation is legal, it still results in schools that are all African American and/or all Latino and that suffer severely from lack of funding, poor physical facilities, and poorly paid teachers (Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, & Kucsera, 2011).Orfield, G., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Kucsera, J. (2011). *Divided we fail: Segregated and unequal schools in the Southland*. Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project.

During the 1960s and 1970s, states, municipalities, and federal courts tried to reduce de facto segregation by busing urban African American children to suburban white schools and, less often, by busing white suburban children to African American urban schools. Busing inflamed passions as perhaps few other issues did during those decades (Lukas, 1985).Lukas, J. A. (1985). *Common ground: A turbulent decade in the lives of three American families*. New York, NY: Knopf. White parents opposed it because they did not want their children bused to urban schools, where, they feared, the children would be unsafe and receive an inferior education. The racial prejudice that many white parents shared heightened their concerns over these issues. African American parents were more likely to see the need for busing, but they, too, wondered about its merits, especially because it was their children who were bused most often and faced racial hostility when they entered formerly all-white schools.

As one possible solution to reduce school segregation, some cities have established *magnet schools*, schools for high-achieving students of all races to which the students and their families apply for admission (Vopat, 2011).Vopat, M. C. (2011). Magnet schools, innate talent, and social justice. *Theory and Research in Education*, *9*, 59–72. Although these schools do help some students whose families are poor and of color, their impact on school segregation has been minimal because the number of magnet schools is low and because they are open only to the very best students who, by definition, are also few in number. Some critics also say that magnet schools siphon needed resources from public school systems and that their reliance on standardized tests makes it difficult for African American and Latino students to gain admission.

## School Choice: Education Vouchers and Charter Schools

Children who attend a public school ordinarily attend the school that is designated for the neighborhood in which they live, and they and their parents normally have little choice in the matter. One of the most popular but also controversial components of the school reform movement today is **school choice**, in which parents and their children, primarily from low-income families in urban areas, receive public funds to attend a school different from their neighborhood's school. School choice has two components. The first component involves *education vouchers*, which parents can use as tuition at private or parochial (religious) schools. The second component involves **charter schools**, which are public schools (because public funds pay for students' tuition) built and operated by for-profit companies. Students normally apply for admission to these schools; sometimes they are accepted based on their merit and potential, and sometimes they are accepted by lottery. Both components have strong advocates and fierce critics. We examine each component in turn.

## Education Vouchers

Advocates of school choice programs involving education vouchers say they give low-income families an option for high-quality education they otherwise would be unable to afford. These programs, the advocates add, also help improve the public schools by forcing them to compete for students with their private and parochial counterparts. In order to keep a large number of parents from using vouchers to send their children to the latter schools, public schools have to upgrade their facilities, improve their instruction, and undertake other steps to make their brand of education an attractive alternative. In this way, school choice advocates argue, vouchers have a "competitive impact" that forces public schools to make themselves more attractive to prospective students (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011).National Conference of State Legislatures. (2011). Publicly funded school voucher programs. Retrieved January 2, 2012, from http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=12942.

Critics of school choice programs say they harm the public schools by decreasing their enrollments and therefore their funding. Public schools do not have the money now to compete with private and parochial ones, nor will they have the money to compete with them if vouchers become more widespread. Critics also worry that voucher programs will lead to a "brain drain" of the most academically motivated children and families from low-income schools (Crone, 2011).Crone, J. A. (2011). *How can we solve our social problems?* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Because school choice programs and school voucher systems are still relatively new, scholars have not yet had time to assess whether they improve their students' academic achievement. Some studies do find small improvements, but methodological

problems make it difficult to reach any firm conclusions at this point (DeLuca & Dayton, 2009).DeLuca, S., & Dayton, E. (2009). Switching social contexts: The effects of housing mobility and school choice programs on youth outcomes. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35*(1), 457–491. Although there is also little research on the impact of school choice programs on funding and other aspects of public school systems, some evidence does indicate a negative impact. In Milwaukee, for example, enrollment decline from the use of vouchers cost the school system $26 million in state aid during the 1990s, forcing a rise in property taxes to replace the lost funds. Because the students who left the Milwaukee school system came from most of its 157 public schools, only a few left any one school, diluting the voucher system's competitive impact. Thus although school choice programs may give some families alternatives to public schools, they might not have the competitive impact on public schools that their advocates claim, and they may cost public school systems state aid (Cooper, 1999).Cooper, K. J. (1999, June 25). Under vouchers, status quo rules. *The Washington Post*, p. A3.

## Charter Schools

About 5,000 charter schools operate across the nation, with about 3 percent of American children attending them. Charter schools and their proponents claim that students fare better in these schools than in conventional public schools because of the charter schools' rigorous teaching methods, strong expectations for good behavior, small classrooms, and other advantages (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2012).National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2012). Why charter schools? Retrieved January 11, 2012, from http://www.publiccharters.org/About-Charter-Schools/Why-Charter-Schools003F.aspx.

Critics say charter schools incur the same problems that education vouchers incur: They take some of the brightest students from a city's conventional public schools and lead to lower funding for these schools (Ravitch, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2012).Ravitch, D. (2010, March 8). Why I changed my mnd about school reform. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704869304575109443305343962.html; Rosenfeld, L. (2012, March 16). How charter schools can hurt. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/17/opinion/how-charter-schools-can-hurt.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y. Critics also cite research findings that charter schools do not in fact deliver the strong academic performance claimed by their advocates. For example, a study that compared test scores at charter schools in sixteen states with those at public schools found that the charter schools did worse overall: 17 percent of charter schools had better scores than public schools, 46 percent had scores similar to those of public schools, and 37 percent had lower scores (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009).Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2009). *Multiple choice: Charter school performance in 16 states*. Stanford, CA: Author.

Even when charter school test scores are higher, there is the methodological problem that students are not randomly assigned to attend a charter school (Basile, 2010).Basile, M. (2010). *False impression: How a widely cited study vastly overstates the benefits of charter schools*. New York, NY: Century Foundation. It is thus possible that the students and parents who apply to charter schools are more highly motivated than those who do not. If so, the higher test scores found in some charter schools may reflect the motivation of the students attending these schools, and not necessarily the schools' teaching methods. It is also true that charter schools do not usually enroll students who know little English (because their parents are immigrants) and students with disabilities or other problems. All such students often face difficulties in doing well in school. This is yet another possible reason that a small number of charter schools outperform public schools. Despite the popularity of charter schools, then, the academic case for them remains to be proven.

## Single-Sex Schools and Classes

Before the late 1960s and early 1970s, many colleges and universities, including several highly selective campuses, were single-sex institutions. Since that time, almost all the male colleges and many of the female colleges have gone coed. A few women's colleges still remain, as their administrators and alumnae say that women can achieve much more in a women's college than in a coed institution. The issue of single-sex institutions has been more muted at the secondary school level, as most public schools have been coeducational since the advent of free, compulsory education during the nineteenth century. However, several private schools were single-sex ones from their outset, and many of these remain today. Still, the trend throughout the educational world was toward coeducation.



*Single-sex schools and classes have become more popular for several reasons. The research so far indicates that single-sex education may be beneficial in certain respects for the students experiencing it.*

*© Thinkstock*

Since the 1990s, however, some education specialists have argued that single-sex secondary schools, or at least single-sex classes, might make sense for girls or for boys. In response, single-sex classes and single-sex schools have arisen in at least seventeen US cities. The argument for single-sex learning for girls rests on the same reasons advanced by advocates for women's colleges: Girls can do better academically, and perhaps especially in math and science classes, when they are by themselves. The argument for boys rests on a different set of reasons (National Association for Single Sex Public Education, 2011).National Association for Single Sex Public Education. (2011). Advantages for boys. Retrieved January 2, 2012, from http://www.singlesexschools.org/advantages-forboys.htm. Boys in classes with girls are more likely to act "macho" and thus to engage in disruptive behavior; in single-sex classes, boys thus behave better and are more committed to their studies. They also feel freer to exhibit an interest in music, the arts, and other subjects not usually thought of as "macho" topics. Furthermore, because the best students in coed schools are often girls, many boys tend to devalue academic success in coed settings and are more likely to value it in single-sex settings. Finally, in a boys-only setting, teachers can use examples and certain teaching techniques that boys may find especially interesting, such as the use of snakes to teach biology. To the extent that single-sex education may benefit boys for any of these reasons, these benefits are often thought to be highest for boys from families living in poverty or near poverty.

What does the research evidence say about single-sex schooling's benefits? A review of several dozen studies concluded that the results of single-sex schooling are mixed overall but that there are slightly more favorable outcomes for single-sex schools compared to coeducational schools (US Department of Education, 2005).US Department of Education. (2005). *Single-sex versus secondary schooling: A systematic review*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. However, the review noted that methodological problems limited the value of the studies it examined. For example, none of the studies involved random assignment of students to single-sex or coeducational schooling. Further, all the studies involved high school students and a majority involved students in Catholic schools. This limited scope prompted the call for additional studies of younger students and those in public schools.

Another review of the research evidence was more critical of single-sex schooling (Halpern et al., 2011).Halpern, D. F., Eliot, L., Bigler, R. S., Fabes, R. A., Hanish, L. D., Hyde, J., et al. (2011). The pseudoscience of single-sex schooling. *Science*, *333*, 1706–1707. This review concluded that such schooling does not benefit girls or boys and in fact does them harm by reinforcing gender-role stereotypes. Boys in all-boy classes become more aggressive, the review said, and girls in all-girl classes become more feminine. The review also argued that single-sex schooling is based on a faulty, outdated understanding of how girls and boys learn and function. Drawing on this review and other evidence, two critics of single-sex education recently concluded, "So there is a veritable mountain of evidence, growing every day, that the single-sex classroom is not a magic bullet to save American education. And scant evidence that it heightens the academic achievement of girls and boys" (Barnett & Rivers, 2012).Barnett, R. C., &

Rivers, C. (2012, February 17). Why science doesn't support single-sex classes. *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/17/21barnett.h31.html?tkn=XNPFPP3DSaPBokSRePilYv9tz%2FsDy4SQ5jGa&cmp=ENL -EU-VIEWS1.

### Children and Our Future

The Importance of Preschool and Summer Learning Programs for Low-Income Children

The first few years of life are absolutely critical for a child's neurological and cognitive development. What happens, or doesn't happen, before ages 5 and 6 can have lifelong consequences for a child's educational attainment, adolescent behavior, and adult employment and family life. However, as this chapter and previous chapters emphasize, low-income children face many kinds of obstacles during this critical phase of their lives. Among other problems, their families are often filled with stressful life events that impair their physical and mental health and neurological development, and their parents read and talk to them much less on the average than wealthier parents do. These difficulties in turn lower their school performance and educational attainment, with negative repercussions continuing into adulthood.

To counteract these problems and enhance low-income children's ability to do well in school, two types of programs have been repeatedly shown to be very helpful and even essential. The first is *preschool*, a general term for semiformal early learning programs that take place roughly between ages 3 and 5. As the name of the famous Head Start program implies, preschool is meant to help prepare low-income children for kindergarten and beyond. Depending on the program, preschool involves group instruction and play for children, developmental and health screening, and other components. Many European nations have high-quality preschool programs that are free or heavily subsidized, but these programs are, by comparison, much less prevalent in the United States and often more costly for parents.

Preschool in the United States has been shown to have positive benefits that extend well into adulthood. For example, children who participate in Head Start and certain other programs are more likely years later to graduate high school and attend college. They also tend to have higher salaries in their twenties, and they are less likely to engage in delinquency and crime.

The second program involves summer learning. Educators have discovered that summer is an important time for children's learning. During the summer, children from middle-class and wealthier families tend to read books, attend summer camp and/or engage in other group activities, and travel with their parents. When they return to school in September, their reading and math skills are higher than when the summer began. In contrast, low-income children are much less likely to have these types of summer experiences, and those who benefitted from school lunch programs during the academic year often go hungry. As a result, their reading and math skills are *lower* when they return to school than when the summer began.

In response to this discovery, many summer learning programs have been established. They generally last from four to eight weeks and are held at schools, campgrounds, community centers, or other locations. Although these programs are still relatively new and not yet thoroughly studied, a recent review concluded that they "can be effective and are likely to have positive impacts when they engage students in learning activities that are hands-on, enjoyable, and have real-world applications."

Preschool programs help children in the short and long term, and summer programs appear to have the same potential. Their expansion in the United States would benefit many aspects of American society. Because their economic benefits outweigh their economic costs, they are a "no-brainer" for comprehensive social reform efforts.

*Sources:* Child Trends, 2011; Downey & Gibbs, 2012; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2003; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, & White, 2011; Terzian & Moore, 2009Child Trends. (2011). *Research-based responses to key questions about the 2010 Head Start impact study*. Washington, DC: Author; Downey, D. B., & Gibbs, B. G. (2012). How schools really matter. In D. Hartmann & C. Uggen (Eds.), *The Contexts Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 80–86). New York, NY: W. W. Norton; Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2003). *Longer-term effects of Head Start*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation; Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Ou, S.-R., Arteaga, I. A., & White, B. A. B. (2011, July 15). School-based early childhood education and age-28 well-being: Effects by timing, dosage, and subgroups. *Science*, 360–364; Terzian, M., & Moore, K. A. (2009). *What works for summer learning programs for low-income children and youth: Preliminary lessons from experimental evaluations of social interventions*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

## School Violence

The issue of school violence won major headlines during the 1990s, when many children, teachers, and other individuals died in the nation's schools. From 1992 until 1999, 248 students, teachers, and other people died from violent acts (including suicide) on school property, during travel to and from school, or at a school-related event, for an average of about thirty-five violent deaths per year (Zuckoff, 1999).Zuckoff, M. (1999, May 21). Fear is spread around nation. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Several of these deaths occurred in mass shootings. In just a few examples, in December 1997, a student in a Kentucky high school shot and killed three students in a before-school prayer group. In March 1998, two middle school students in Arkansas pulled a fire alarm to evacuate their school and then shot and killed four students and one teacher as they emerged. Two months later, an Oregon high school student killed his parents and then went to his school cafeteria, where he killed two students and wounded twenty-two others. Against this backdrop, the infamous April 1999 school shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two students murdered twelve other students and one teacher before killing themselves, seemed like the last straw. Within days, school after school across the nation installed metal detectors, located police at building entrances and in hallways, and began questioning or suspending students joking about committing violence. People everywhere wondered why the schools were becoming so violent and what could be done about it. A newspaper headline summarized their concern: “fear is spread around nation” (Zuckoff, 1999).Zuckoff, M. (1999, May 21). Fear is spread around nation. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Fortunately, school violence has declined since the 1990s, with fewer students and other people dying in the nation’s schools or being physically attacked. As this trend indicates, the risk of school violence should not be exaggerated: Statistically speaking, schools are very safe, especially in regard to fatal violence. Two kinds of statistics illustrate this point. First, less than 1 percent of all homicides involving school-aged children take place in or near school; virtually all children’s homicides occur in or near a child’s home. Second, an average of seventeen students are killed at school yearly; because about 56 million students attend US elementary and secondary schools, the chances are less than one in 3 million that a student will be killed at school. The annual rate of other serious school violence (rape and sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery) is only three crimes per one hundred students; although this is still three too many, it does indicate that 97 percent of students do not suffer these crimes (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2010).National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2010). *Understanding school violence fact sheet*. Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.




*Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, depicted here, killed thirteen people at Columbine High School in 1999 before killing themselves. Their massacre led people across the nation to question why violence was occurring in the schools and to wonder what could be done to reduce it.*

*Image courtesy of Columbine High School, http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eric_harris_dylan_klebold.jpg.*

## Bullying

Bullying is another problem in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools and is often considered a specific type of school violence. However, bullying can take many forms, such as taunting, that do not involve the use or threat of physical violence. As

such, we consider bullying here as a separate problem while acknowledging its close relation to school violence.

First it will be helpful to define **bullying**. A common definition in the research literature is that bullying involves "physical and verbal attacks and harassment directed at a victim(s) by one student or a group of students over an extensive period of time" (Moon, Hwang, & McCluskey, 2011).Moon, B., Hwang, H.-W., & McCluskey, J. D. (2011). Causes of school bullying: Empirical test of a general theory of crime, differential association theory, and general strain theory. *Crime & Delinquency*, *57*, 849–877. Another definition is also helpful: "The use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten or embarrass another person on purpose" (St. George, 2011).St. George, D. (2011, September 5). Bullying linked to lower school achievement. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/bullying-linked-to-lower-school-achievement/2011/09/01/gIQArmQw4J_story.html. As these definitions suggest, bullying can be *physical* in nature (violence such as shoving and punching), *verbal* (teasing, taunting, and name calling), and *social* (spreading rumors, breaking up friendships, deliberately excluding someone from an activity). An additional form of bullying that has emerged in the last decade or so is **cyberbullying**. As its name implies, cyberbullying involves the use of the Internet, cell phones and smartphones, and other digital technologies to bully others (e.g., rumors can be spread via Facebook) (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).US Department of Health and Human Services. (2012). What is bullying? Retrieved January 5, 2012, from http://www.stopbullying.gov/topics/what_is_bullying/index.html.

Bullying is a serious problem for at least two reasons. First, bullying is a common occurrence. About one-third of students report being victimized by some form of bullying during the school year; this rate of victimization is much higher than the 3 percent rate of victimization for school violence mentioned in the previous section (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2010).National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2010). *Understanding school violence fact sheet*. Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Second, bullying can have serious consequences (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).Adams, F. D., & Lawrence, G. J. (2011). Bullying victims: The effects last into college. *American Secondary Education*, *40*(1), 4–13. Students who are bullied often experience psychological problems that can last into adulthood; these problems include anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleeplessness, and suicidal thoughts. Their physical health may also suffer. Their school performance (grades, attendance, and participation in school activities) may also decline. In addition, bullying victims sometimes respond by lashing out in violence; many of the mass school shootings of the 1990s were committed by male students who had been bullied.

A tragic example of bullying's effects occurred in September 2011, when a 14-year-old boy in western New York, Jamey Rodemeyer, killed himself after being bullied by classmates because he was gay. Much of the bullying involved homophobic taunts on a social media site Jamey used, including comments such as "JAMIE IS STUPID, GAY, FAT ANND UGLY. HE MUST DIE!" and "I wouldn't care if you died. No one would. So just do it: It would make everyone WAY more happier!" A week before he died, Jamey wrote on his site, "I always say how bullied I am, but no one listens. What do I have to do so people will listen to me?" (Tan, 2011).Tan, S. (2011, September 20). Teenager struggled with bullying before taking his life. *The Buffalo News*. Retrieved from http://www.buffalonews.com/city/schools/article563538.ece.

## School Discipline and Racial Discrimination

To reduce school violence and bullying, many school districts have adopted strict policies that specify harsh punishments. A common policy involves *zero-tolerance* for weapons; this type of policy calls for automatic suspension or expulsion of a student who has anything resembling a weapon for any reason. However, this policy is often applied too rigidly. In one example, a 6–year-old boy in Delaware excitedly took his new camping utensil—a combination of knife, fork, and spoon—from Cub Scouts to school to use at lunch. He was suspended for having a knife and ordered to spend forty-five days in reform school. His mother said her son certainly posed no threat to anyone at school, but school officials replied that their policy had to be strictly enforced because it is difficult to determine who actually poses a threat from who does not (Urbina, 2009).Urbina, I. (2009, October 11). It's a fork, it's a spoon, it's a…weapon? *New York Times*, p. A1. In another case, a ninth grader took a knife and cigarette lighter away from a student who had used them to threaten a fellow classmate. The ninth grader was suspended for the rest of the school year for possessing a weapon, even though he had them only because he was protecting his classmate. According to a news story about this case, the school's reaction was "vigilance to a fault" (Walker, 2010, p. A12).Walker, A. (2010, January 23). Vigilance to a fault. *The Boston Globe*, p. A12.

Zero-tolerance or other very strict policies are also in place in many schools for offenses such as drug use and possession, fighting, and classroom disruption. However well intended these policies may be, the research evidence suggests that they are ineffective in deterring the behavior they are meant to prevent, and may even be counterproductive. As one review of this evidence puts it, "It is

not clear that zero tolerance policies are succeeding in improving school safety. In fact, some evidence…suggests that these policies actually may have an adverse effect on student academic and behavioral outcomes" (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011, p. 1).Boccanfuso, C., & Kuhfeld, M. (2011). *Multiple responses, promising results: Evidence-based, nonpunitive alternatives to zero tolerance*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. When students are suspended, their grades may suffer, and their commitment to schooling may lower; these problems in turn increase their likelihood of engaging in delinquency. The expelled students find it difficult to get back into a school and eventually achieve a high school degree. Their behavior, too, may become more unlawful as a result, and they also are more likely to face unemployment and low-paying jobs. Zero-tolerance school discipline thus seems to do much more harm than good.

In addition to deterrence, another reason for the adoption of strict discipline policies has been to avoid the racial discrimination that occurs when school officials have discretion in deciding which students should be suspended or expelled (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063–1089). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. In school districts with such discretion, African American students with weapons or "near weapons" (such as a small penknife) are more likely than white students with the same objects to be punished in this manner. However, a growing body of research finds that African American and Latino students are still more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled for similar misbehaviors (having a weapon, fighting, cursing a teacher, etc.) even in school districts with very strict discipline (Welch & Payne, 2010; Lewin, 2012).Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems*, *57*(1), 25–48; Lewin, T. (2012, March 6). Black students face more discipline, study suggests. *New York Times*, p. A11. School discipline, then, is often racially discriminatory.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Schools in America are unequal: They differ greatly in the extent of their funding, in the quality of their physical facilities, and in other respects. Jonathan Kozol calls these differences "savage inequalities."
- Single-sex education at the secondary level has become more popular. Preliminary evidence indicates that this form of education may be beneficial for several reasons, but more evidence on this issue is needed.
- Although school violence has declined since the 1990s, it continues to concern many Americans. Bullying at school is a common problem and can lead to more serious violence by the children who are bullied.
- School choice programs are popular but also controversial. Charter schools on the average do no better than public schools, and sometimes worse.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. If you were the principal of a middle school, would you favor or oppose single-sex classes? Explain your answer.
2. Do you favor or oppose school vouchers? Why?

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# 9.4: Issues and Problems in Higher Education

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why certain college students flounder.
2. Describe what is meant by legacy admissions and summarize the criticism of this policy.
3. List any two factors that affect college and university graduation rates.
4. Describe the extent of physical and sexual violence on the nation's campuses.

The issues and problems discussed so far in this chapter concern elementary and secondary schools in view of their critical importance for tens of millions of children and for the nation's social and economic well-being. However, higher education has its own issues and problems. Once again, we do not have space to discuss all these matters, but we will examine some of the most interesting and important. (Recall that Chapter 7 "Alcohol and Other Drugs" discussed alcohol abuse on campus, a very significant higher education problem.)

## Cost

Perhaps the most important issue is that higher education, at least at four-year institutions, is quite expensive and can cost tens of thousands of dollars per year. This figure varies by the type of college or university, as private institutions cost much more than public institutions (for in-state students). According to the College Board (2012), only 44 percent of all students attend a four-year institution whose annual tuition and fees amount to less than $9,000. That means that more than half of students attend an institution whose annual tuition and fees are $9,000 or more; this cost averages more than $28,500 at private colleges and universities and exceeds $36,000 at many of these institutions. Tuition and fees average $8,244 at public four-year institutions. Room and board expenses for on-campus students at four-year institutions range from about $8,000 to $14,000, and books and supplies average at least an additional $1,168 for students who do not have the opportunity to read free or low-cost textbooks such as this one.




Higher education can cost students and their parents tens of thousands of dollars per year. This expense prevents many students from going to college and puts many students and parents into considerable debt. (GotCredit – Student Loans – CC BY 2.0.)

Combining these figures, students at the least expensive four-year institutions might have bills that total $17,000 to $20,000 annually, and those at the most expensive private institutions have bills that exceed $50,000. Scholarships and other financial aid reduce these costs for many students. Private institutions actually collect only about 67 percent of their published tuition and fees because of the aid they hand out, and public institutions collect only about 82 percent (Stripling, 2010). However, many students who receive aid may still have bills totaling thousands of dollars annually and graduate with huge loans to repay. At two-year public institutions, annual tuition and fees average almost $3,000; these colleges are more affordable but nonetheless can be very costly for their students and their families.

In view of all these figures, it should come as no surprise that many students graduate in debt. Of all the college students who graduated in 2010, roughly two-thirds had to take out loans to pay for their various expenses. These students graduated with an average debt of $25,250 (Pope, 2011), which can certainly take many years to pay off.

## Floundering Students

Although college is often said to be the best time of one's life, many students have difficulties during their college years. These students are called *floundering students*. Homesickness during the first semester on campus is common, but a number of students have difficulties beyond homesickness. According to psychiatry professor David Leibow, who has studied troubled students, many floundering students mistakenly believe that they are the only ones who are floundering, and many fail to tell their parents or friends about their problems (Golden, 2010). The major cause of floundering, says Leibow, is academic difficulties; other causes include homesickness, relationship problems, family problems including family conflict and the serious illness or death of a family member, personal illness, and financial difficulties.

An estimated 10 percent of students annually seek psychological counseling on their college campus, primarily for depression, anxiety, and relationship problems (Epstein, 2010). About one-third of college students overall have sought counseling by the time they graduate or leave school for other reasons, and 7 percent say they have considered suicide before or after entering college (Sieben, 2011). Many students who seek counseling are given medications to treat their symptoms. Leibow says these medications are often helpful but worries that they are overprescribed. Three reasons underlie his concern. First, although the students given these medications may have problems, often the problems are a normal part of growing into adulthood and not serious enough to justify medication. Second, some of these medications can have serious side effects. Third, students who take medications may be less motivated to address the underlying reasons for their problems.

## Social Class and Race in Admissions

We saw earlier in this chapter that African American, Latino, and low-income students are less likely to attend college. And when low-income students do attend college, they are much more likely to attend lower-ranking institutions than very selective campuses. At the very top colleges and universities, 74 percent of new students come from the wealthiest one-fourth of US households, and only 3 percent come from the poorest one-fourth of households (Krugman, 2012).

These facts raise important questions about the lack of diversity in college admissions and campus life. Chapter 3 "Racial and Ethnic Inequality" discussed the debate over racially based affirmative action in higher education. Reflecting this debate, some states have passed laws prohibiting the use of race and ethnicity in admissions to public colleges and universities. One such state was California, where voters approved this type of prohibition in 1996. During the first year after this ban took effect, the number of African American and Latino students admitted to the University of California system dropped by about 25 percent and by 50 percent at the system's two most selective campuses in Berkeley and Los Angeles (UCLA). According to the head of the University of California system, "If we had affirmative action as one of our tools, we'd do somewhat better for Hispanics, and we'd probably do significantly better for African-Americans" (Pérez-Peña, 2012).



Although colleges and universities are making a greater effort to attract and retain low-income students and students of color, these students remain greatly underrepresented at institutions of higher education. (Bart Everson – Students – CC BY 2.0.)

In three states with bans on affirmative action, California, Florida, and Texas, public universities automatically admit the top students in every high school. Because many of their high schools are predominantly African American or Latino, this strategy has helped counter their bans on affirmative action. However, because many more high schools in these states are mostly Latino rather than African American, the strategy has proven more beneficial for Latino admissions than for African American admissions (Pérez-Peña, 2012).

Partly because affirmative action is so controversial, attention has begun to focus on the low numbers of low-income students at many colleges and universities, and especially at the more selective institutions as ranked by *US News & World Report* and other sources. Many education scholars and policymakers feel that increasing the number of low-income students would not only help these students but also increase campus diversity along the lines of socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity (since students of color are more likely to be from low-income backgrounds). Efforts to increase the number of low-income students, these experts add, would avoid the controversy that has surrounded affirmative action.

In response to this new attention to social class, colleges and universities have begun to increase their efforts to attract and retain low-income students, which a recent news report called "one of the most underrepresented minority groups at many four-year colleges" (Schmidt, 2010). The dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard University summarized these efforts as follows: "I honestly cannot think of any admissions person I know who is not looking—as sort of a major criteria [*sic*] of how well their year went—at how well they did in attracting people of different economic backgrounds" (Schmidt, 2010).

As part of their strategy to attract and retain low-income students, Harvard and other selective institutions are now providing financial aid to cover all or most of the students' expenses. Despite these efforts, however, the US higher education system has become more stratified by social class in recent decades: The richest students now occupy a greater percentage of the enrollment at the most selective institutions than in the past, while the poorest students occupy a greater percentage of the enrollment at the least selective four-year institutions and at community colleges (Schmidt, 2010).

## Legacy Admissions

At highly selective colleges and universities, the policy of legacy admissions makes it easier for certain wealthy students to gain admission. Under this policy, students who are daughters or sons (or other relatives) of graduates of the institution are given preference in admissions. Because their parents are very likely to be wealthy, a legacy admissions policy in effect amounts to what critics call "affirmative action for the rich" (Kahlenberg, 2010). According to recent research, being a child of an alumna or alumnus of one of these institutions increases one's chances of admission by forty-five percentage points (Kahlenberg, 2011). Thus if a nonlegacy applicant with certain qualifications would ordinarily have a 40 percent chance of being admitted, a legacy applicant with the same qualifications would have an 85 percent chance of being admitted. Critics say legacy admissions give an unfair advantage to wealthy students and use up valuable spots that should go to more qualified students from more varied socioeconomic backgrounds. As one critic puts it, "It's fundamentally unfair because it's a preference that advantages the already advantaged. It has nothing to do with the individual merit of the applicant" (Lewin, 2010, p. A12).

## Graduation Rates

For the sake of students and of their colleges and universities, it is important that as many students as possible go on to earn their diplomas. However, only 57 percent of students at four-year institutions graduate within six years. This figure varies by type of institution. At the highly selective private institutions, 80–90 percent or more of students typically graduate within six years, while at many public institutions, the graduate rate is about 50 percent. Academic and financial difficulties and other problems explain why so many students fail to graduate (Gonzalez, 2010).Gonzalez, J. (2010, August 9). Reports highlight disparities in graduation rates among white and minority students. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Reports-Highlight-Disparities/123857.

The 57 percent overall rate masks a racial/ethnic difference in graduation rates: While 60 percent of white students graduate within six years, only 49 percent of Latino students and 40 percent of African American students graduate. At some institutions, the graduation rates of Latino and African American students match those of whites, thanks in large part to exceptional efforts by these institutions to help students of color. As one expert on this issue explains, "What colleges do for students of color powerfully impacts the futures of these young people and that of our nation" (Gonzalez, 2010).Gonzalez, J. (2010, August 9). Reports highlight disparities in graduation rates among white and minority students. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Reports-Highlight-Disparities/123857. Another expert placed this issue into a larger context: "For both moral and economic reasons, colleges need to ensure that their institutions work better for all the students they serve" (Stephens,

2010).Stephens, L. (2010). *Reports reveal colleges with the biggest, smallest gaps in minority graduation rates in the US*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

In this regard, it is important to note that the graduation rate of low-income students from four-year institutions is much lower than the graduation rate of wealthier students (Luhby, 2011).Luhby, T. (2011, November 28). College graduation rates: Income really matters. *CNN Money*. Retrieved from http://money.cnn.com/2011/11/21/news/economy/income_college/index.htm. In fact, students with high test scores and low-income parents are less likely to graduate than students with low test scores and high-income parents (Krugman, 2012).Krugman, P. (2012, January 9). America's unlevel field. *New York Times*, p. A19.

Low-income students drop out at higher rates because of academic and financial difficulties and family problems. Their academic and financial difficulties are intertwined. Low-income students often have to work many hours per week during the academic year to be able to pay their bills. Because their work schedules reduce the time they have for studying, their grades may suffer. This general problem has been made worse by cutbacks in federal grants to low-income students that began during the 1980s. These cutbacks forced low-income students to rely increasingly on loans, which have to be repaid. This fact leads some to work more hours during the academic year to limit the loans they must take out, and their increased work schedule again may affect their grades.

Low-income students face additional difficulties beyond the financial (Berg, 2010).Berg, G. A. (2010). *Low-income students and the perpetuation of inequality: Higher education in America*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. Their writing and comprehension skills upon entering college are often weaker than those of wealthier students. If they are first-generation college students (meaning that neither parent went to college), they often have problems adjusting to campus life and living amid students from much more advantaged backgrounds.

## Campus Violence

Earlier we discussed violence in the elementary and secondary schools. Violence can also happen on college and university campuses, although shootings are very rare. However, three recent examples illustrate that students and faculty are not immune from gun violence. In April 2012, a former student lined up and then shot and killed seven people and wounded three others at Oikos University in Oakland, California. In February 2010, Amy Bishop, a biology professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville who had recently been denied tenure, allegedly shot and killed three faculty at a department meeting and wounded three others. Almost three years earlier, a student at Virginia Tech went on a shooting rampage and killed thirty-two students and faculty before killing himself.

Other types of violence are more common on the nation's campuses. Chapter 4 noted that an estimated 20–30 percent of women students have been raped or sexually assaulted (including attempts), usually by a male student who was an acquaintance, friend, or intimate partner. Beyond rape and sexual assault, students are also sometimes assaulted or robbed. Federal victimization data show that about 6 percent of college students are victims of at least one act of all these types of violence annually (Baum & Klaus, 2005).Baum, K., & Klaus, P. (2005). *Violent victimization of college students, 1995–2002*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Because there are about 20 million students in college, this 6 percent figure translates to about 1.2 million annual violent victimizations at US colleges and universities. It is important to note that the 6 percent rate masks a significant gender difference: 8 percent of male students experience at least one act of violence annually, compared to about 4 percent of female students. Male students are thus twice as likely as female students to be victimized by violence. For just rape and sexual assault, though, female students are much more likely than male students to be victimized.

Many colleges and universities have been accused of not taking rape and sexual assault seriously in what one news report called a "struggle for justice" for campus rape victims (Lipka, 2011; Shapiro, 2010).Lipka, S. (2011, March 20). Colleges face conflicting pressures in dealing with cases of sexual assault. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Face-Conflicting/126818/; Shapiro, J. (2010, February 24). Campus rape victims: A struggle for justice. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124001493. This criticism takes two forms. First, campuses ignore many reports of rape and sexual assault altogether. Second, they hand out weak or no discipline in cases when they do heed reports. One student's account of her university's lack of follow-up to her alleged rape illustrates this criticism. "It was as if they were going above and beyond to ensure nothing would be done in my case," the woman later recalled. "I felt extremely disappointed to know that the institution in charge of ensuring my safety did not recognize the massive distress the sexual assault caused me. Furthermore, I was disappointed that when I sought justice through their system, I was treated with hostility and disrespect. I was clearly not believed, and was often blamed for what had happened" (Webley,

2011).Webley, K. (2011, April 18). It’s not just Yale: Are colleges doing enough to combat sexual violence? *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2065849-2065841,2065800.html.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The cost of higher education and other problems make it difficult for low-income students and students of color to enter college and to stay in college once admitted.
- Many college students have academic and personal problems that lead them to flounder and to seek psychological counseling.
- Many campuses continue to lack racial and social class diversity, and affirmative action remains very controversial.
- Physical and sexual violence is a general problem on the nation’s campuses. At least one-fifth of college women are raped or sexually assaulted.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. If you were the director of admissions at a university, what steps would you take to increase the number of applications from low-income students?
2. Do you think alcohol use is to blame for most campus violence, or are there other important factors at work? Explain your answer.

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# 9.5: Improving Schools and Education

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand how helpful good schooling can be to improve the lives of low-income children.
2. Discuss the importance of good teachers.
3. List any three strategies that will improve the education of low-income students.

This concluding section focuses mostly on elementary and secondary education, given its critical importance for young people's development. As we consider how to improve the nation's schools, and especially how to improve outcomes for low-income students and students of color, we need to keep in mind an important consideration: Good schooling can make an important difference for these students, and good teachers can greatly help low-income students (Chetty et al., 2011). However, a large body of research demonstrates that students' family and neighborhood backgrounds actually matter much more than the quality of schooling for their school performance (Downey & Gibbs, 2012; Ladd & Fiske, 2011). Good schooling, then, can only go so far in overcoming the many strikes that low-income students and those of color have against them even before they enter kindergarten and the problems they continue to experience thereafter. As one education writer observes,

> Let's be realistic: Teachers aren't miracle workers. There's only so much they can do to address problems that troubled students bring to class every day, including neglect, abuse, and unaddressed medical and mental health issues. The obvious and subtle ways that poverty inhibits a child's ability to learn—from hearing, visual and dental problems to higher asthma rates to diminished verbal interaction in the home—have been well-documented.
> So let's seek to improve the state of families. Attacking schools and teachers makes everyone feel like a reformer, but the problems begin long before a child steps through the schoolhouse door. (Farhi, 2011)

## Teachers and School Reform

This understanding of low-income students' school performance has important implications for school-reform efforts. For example, if good schooling cannot ordinarily be expected to have a large impact on poor students' lives, this fact calls into question certain aspects of the "No Child Left Behind" movement of the last decade. This movement, begun by the federal government, uses students' scores on standardized tests to assess the quality of their schools. Perhaps inevitably, the subsequent growth in standardized testing has meant that teachers' performance ratings have become increasingly tied to their students' standardized test scores. However, because students' test scores reflect their socioeconomic backgrounds and other nonschool factors much more than the quality of their schooling, these scores are not a good measure of teachers' performance. As one education specialist summarizes this situation, "Of all the goals of the education reform movement, none is more elusive than developing an objective model to assess teachers. Studies have shown that over time, test scores do not provide a consistent means of separating good from bad instructors. Test scores are an inadequate proxy for quality because too many factors outside the teachers' control can influence student performance from year to year—or even from classroom to classroom during the same year" (Russell, 2011, p. WK12).

## The Need for More General Social Reform

The importance of students' family and neighborhood backgrounds has a significant implication beyond the issue of teacher assessment: To improve low-income students' school performance, our society must address the problems of poverty and racial/ethnic inequality. As two sociologists argue this point, "If we are serious about improving American children's school performance, we will need to take a broader view of education policy. In addition to school reform, we must also aim to improve children's lives where they spend the vast majority of their time—with their families and in their neighborhoods" (Downey and Gibbs, 2012, p. 85). Chapter 2 "Poverty" and Chapter 3 "Racial and Ethnic Inequality" discussed strategies to reduce poverty and racial/ethnic inequality; these strategies would also help improve the school performance of low-income students and those of color.

## A School Reform Agenda

Despite the need to address poverty and racial inequality, it remains true that schools with decaying buildings, uncommitted teachers, and other problems cannot be expected to produce students with even adequate levels of academic achievement. It is thus critical, says poverty expert Mark Robert Rank (2004, p. 208), to do everything possible to provide a quality education to the nation's poor children: "To deny children the fundamental right to a decent education is both morally wrong and bad social policy.

It flies in the face of the American concept of equality of opportunity…Countless studies have documented the immediate and lingering effects of disparate educational outcomes on later life. Improving public education for low-income children is absolutely essential."

In short, good schools and good teachers do matter. In particular, good elementary- and middle-school teachers have been shown to have a lifelong impact on their students: students with good teachers are more likely years later to have lower teenage pregnancy rates and higher college attendance rates, and they are also more likely to have higher salaries in adulthood (Lowrey, 2012).

Education experts urge several measures to improve the nation's schools and the education of American children (Madland & Bunker, 2011; Rokosa, 2011; Rothstein, 2010; Smerdon & Borman, 2009). These measures include the following:

- Have smaller schools and smaller classrooms.
- Provide more funding for schools, especially those in low-income neighborhoods.
- Repair decaying school buildings.
- Increase teachers' pay to attract more highly qualified applicants.
- Hold teachers more accountable for their students' learning, while recognizing the obstacles that teachers of low-income students must overcome.
- Expand early childhood (preschool) education.

On the national level, these steps will cost billions of dollars, but this expenditure promises to have a significant payoff by saving money in the long run and reducing crime, health problems, and other social ills.

As the United States tries to improve its schools, it is also important to attend to the emotional and physical health needs of low-income children (Lowe, 2011). Because of the many problems these children experience in their families and neighborhoods, including alcohol and drug abuse, hunger, illness, marital conflict, and violence, their emotional and physical health may often suffer. They cannot be expected to do well in school unless they are in good health in both respects. For this reason, many schools are now partnering with community health organizations and other agencies to address the emotional and physical health needs of schoolchildren, often by establishing well-staffed and well-equipped health centers inside the schools. Another effort involves recess (yes, recess!), as evidence indicates that children are healthier and better behaved if they go out for recess for a sufficient amount of time.

In a related issue, it is also important for the nation to try to improve parenting skills if it hopes to improve the educational performance and attainment of low-income students (Roksa & Potter, 2011). As Chapter 10 "The Changing Family" discussed, low-income parents are less likely to read and talk with their young children, and this problem impairs their children's cognitive and neurological development. Home visits and other efforts by professionals to encourage parents of infants and toddlers to engage in these activities regularly hold potential for improving their children's ability to learn and do well in school.

School violence and bullying are two other problems that must also be addressed. Several of the steps just outlined should reduce school violence, but other measures should also help. One example involves antibullying programs, which include regular parent meetings, strengthened playground supervision, and appropriate discipline when warranted. Research indicates that these programs reduce bullying by 20–23 percent on the average (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). Any reduction in bullying should in turn help reduce the likelihood of school massacres like Columbine, because, as noted earlier, many of the students committing these massacres had been humiliated and bullied by other students. More generally, because the roots of school violence are also similar to the roots of youth violence outside the schools, measures that reduce youth violence should also reduce school violence. As discussed in previous chapters, such measures include early childhood prevention programs for youths at risk for developmental and behavioral problems, parenting training programs, and policies that provide income and jobs for families living in poverty.

At the level of higher education, our discussion highlighted the fact that social inequality in the larger society also plays out in colleges and universities. The higher dropout rates for low-income students and for students of color in turn contribute to more social inequality. Colleges and universities need to do everything possible to admit these students and then to help them once they are admitted, as they face many obstacles and difficulties that white students from more advantaged backgrounds are much less likely to encounter.

### Key Takeaways

- Good schooling can be very helpful for low-income students, but these students' socioeconomic backgrounds have more impact than schooling on their futures.
- For this reason, more general social reform must accompany effective school reform.
- Several strategies, including smaller classes and better-paid teachers, will help improve the learning of low-income students.

## For Your Review

1. Write a short essay in which you outline what a school's superintendent might do to improve the learning of the school district's elementary school students.
2. Why do you think the United States has not more vigorously pursued the school reform agenda outlined in this section?

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# 9.6: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Education is both formal and informal. Formal education occurs in schools under specially trained teachers, while informal education takes place primarily in the home, with parents as instructors.
2. In the early nineteenth century in the United States, a movement for free, compulsory education began. Reasons for interest in such education included the perceived needs to unify the country, to “Americanize” immigrants, and to give members of the working class the skills, knowledge, and discipline they needed to be productive workers.
3. In the United States, social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all affect educational attainment. Poor people end up with less schooling than middle- and upper-class people, and African Americans and Latinos have lower educational attainment than whites and Asian Americans. Although women had less schooling than men in the past, today they are more likely to graduate from high school and to attend college.
4. Education in the United States has a significant impact on two areas. One is income: the higher the education, the higher the income. The second is attitudes: the higher the education, the greater the tolerance for nontraditional behaviors and viewpoints.
5. Sociological perspectives on education fall into the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches discussed in earlier chapters. Functional theory stresses the functions education serves for society, including socialization, social placement, social integration, and social and cultural innovation. Conflict theory stresses that education perpetuates and reinforces existing social inequality for several reasons, including the use of tracking and inequality in schooling between rich and poor communities. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the social interaction that’s part of schooling and calls attention to the ways in which the treatment of students as smart or dull can affect how much they end up learning.
6. Several issues and problems affect education in the United States today. Many schools are decrepit and lack sufficient books and equipment, and many are also segregated by race and ethnicity. Increasing interest in school choice has led to controversy over whether the government should provide aid to parents to send their children to private and parochial schools. Additional controversy surrounds the issue of single-sex schools for girls. Finally, school violence is an issue of continuing concern; however, the vast majority of schools are very safe for their students, teachers, and other personnel. Bullying is more common, with about one-third of students bullied every year.
7. At the level of higher education, students of color and those from low-income backgrounds are less likely to attend college at all, and if they do attend, they are less likely to graduate.

## Using What You Know

You are the principal of a middle school in a poor urban neighborhood. Your classrooms lack basic supplies, your roof often leaks, and an ominous odor often arises from your school’s water system. You have appealed many times to the school district for additional funds to deal with all these problems, but these funds have not been provided. What, if anything, do you do next?

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the education problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer to tutor students at a local school or after-school program.
2. If your college or university has low numbers of low-income students, establish a student group to encourage your school to admit more such students.
3. Start or join a group on your campus to call attention to the need for responsible alcohol use, as drinking is associated with much campus violence.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 10: Work and the Economy


10.1: Overview of the Economy
10.2: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy
10.3: Problems in Work and the Economy
10.4: Improving Work and the Economy
10.5: End-of-Chapter Material


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# 10.1: Overview of the Economy

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the three sectors of the economy.
2. Distinguish the two major economic systems in the world today.
3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of capitalism and socialism.

When we hear the term *economy*, it is usually in the context of how the economy "is doing": Is inflation soaring or under control? Is the economy growing or shrinking? Is unemployment rising, declining, or remaining stable? Are new college graduates finding jobs easily or not? All these questions concern the economy, but sociologists define economy more broadly as the social institution that organizes the production, distribution, and consumption of a society's goods and services. Defined in this way, the economy touches us all. Keep in mind that the economy is not the same as *government*, which is the social institution through which power is distributed and exercised. Economy and government are social institutions that are certainly intertwined, but conceptually they are distinct.

The economy is composed of three sectors. The primary sector is the part of the economy that takes and uses raw materials directly from the natural environment. Its activities include agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining. The secondary sector of the economy transforms raw materials into finished products and is essentially the manufacturing industry. Finally, the tertiary sector is the part of the economy that provides services rather than products; its activities include clerical work, health care, teaching, and information technology services.



Clerical work and other occupations that provide services rather than products constitute the tertiary sector in the economy. (Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.)

Societies differ in many ways, but they all have to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. How this happens depends on which sectors of the economy are most important. This latter variable in turn depends heavily on the level of a society's development. Generally speaking, the less developed a society's economy, the more important its primary sector; the more developed a society's economy, the more important its tertiary sector. As societies developed economically over the centuries, the primary sector became less important and the tertiary sector became more important. The primary sector was certainly the only sector in the hunting-and-gathering societies that existed thousands of years ago, while the tertiary sector dominates much of the economy in today's wealthiest democracies.

## Types of Economic Systems

The two major economic systems in modern societies are capitalism and socialism. In practice, no one society is purely capitalist or socialist, so it is helpful to think of capitalism and socialism as lying on opposite ends of a continuum. Societies' economies mix

elements of both capitalism and socialism but do so in varying degrees, so that some societies lean toward the capitalist end of the continuum, while other societies lean toward the socialist end. For example, the United States is a capitalist nation, but the government still regulates many industries to varying degrees. The industries usually would prefer less regulation, while their critics usually prefer more regulation. The degree of such regulation was the point of controversy after the failure of banks and other financial institutions in 2008 and 2009. Let's see how capitalism and socialism differ.

## Capitalism

**Capitalism** is an economic system in which the means of production are privately owned. By *means of production*, we mean everything—land, tools, technology, and so forth—that is needed to produce goods and services. As outlined by famed Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723–1790), widely considered the founder of modern economics, the most important goal of capitalism is the pursuit of personal profit (Smith, 1776/1910).Smith, A. (1910). *The wealth of nations*. (Original work published 1776). London, United Kingdom: University Paperbacks. As individuals seek to maximize their own wealth, society as a whole is said to benefit. Goods get produced, services are rendered, people pay for the goods and services they need and desire, and the economy and society as a whole prosper.






*One important hallmark of capitalism is competition for profit. This competition is thought to help ensure the best products at the lowest prices, as companies will ordinarily try to keep their prices as low as possible to attract buyers and maximize their sales.*

*© Thinkstock*

As people pursue personal profit under capitalism, they compete with each other for the greatest profits. Businesses try to attract more demand for their products in many ways, including lowering prices, creating better products, and advertising how wonderful their products are. In capitalist theory, such competition helps ensure the best products at the lowest prices, again benefiting society as a whole. Such competition also helps ensure that no single party controls an entire market. According to Smith, the competition that characterizes capitalism should be left to operate on its own, free of government intervention or control. For this reason, capitalism is often referred to as *laissez-faire* (French for "leave alone") capitalism, and terms to describe capitalism include the *free-enterprise system* and the *free market*.

The hallmarks of capitalism, then, are private ownership of the means of production, the pursuit of profit, competition for profit, and the lack of government intervention in this competition.

## Socialism

The features of socialism are the opposite of those just listed for capitalism and were spelled out most famously by Karl Marx. **Socialism** is an economic system in which the means of production are collectively owned, usually by the government. Whereas the United States has several airlines that are owned by airline corporations, a socialist society might have one government-owned airline.

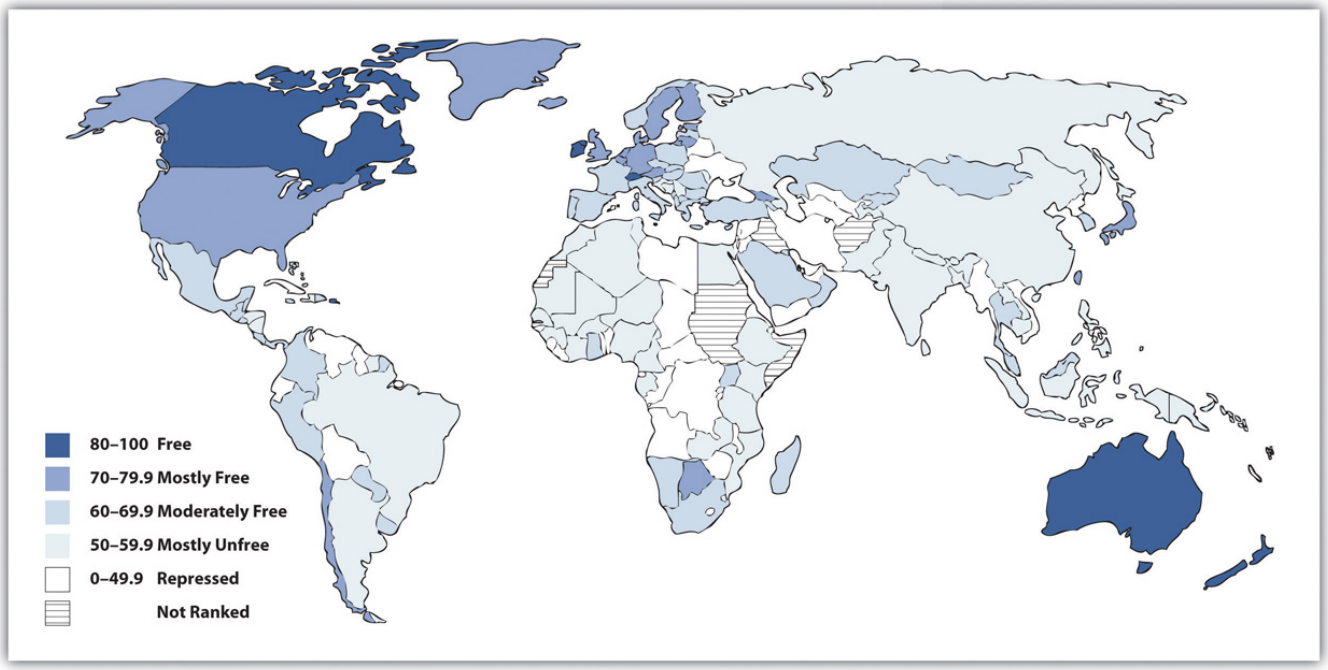
The most important goal of socialism is not the pursuit of personal profit but rather work for the collective good: The needs of society are considered more important than the needs of the individual. Because of this view, individuals do not compete with each other for profit; instead they work together for the good of everyone. If under capitalism the government is supposed to let the economy alone, under socialism the government controls the economy.

The ideal outcome of socialism, said Marx, would be a truly classless or *communist* society. In such a society all members are equal, and stratification does not exist. Obviously Marx's vision of a communist society was never fulfilled, and nations that called themselves communist departed drastically from his vision of communism.

Recall that societies can be ranked on a continuum ranging from mostly capitalist to mostly socialist. At one end of the continuum, we have societies characterized by a relatively free market, and at the other end we have those characterized by strict government

regulation of the economy. Figure 12.1 depicts the nations of the world along this continuum. Capitalist nations are found primarily in North America and Western Europe but also exist in other parts of the world.

Figure 12.1 Capitalism and Socialism across the Globe




*Source: Adapted from The Heritage Foundation. (2010). Distribution of economic freedom. Retrieved from http://www.heritage.org/index/pdf/2010/Index2010_map.pdf.*

## Comparing Capitalism and Socialism

People have debated the relative merits of capitalism and socialism at least since the time of Marx (Bowles, 2012; Cohen, 2009).Bowles, P. (2012). *Capitalism*. New York, NY: Longman; Cohen, G. A. (2009). *Why not socialism?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Compared to socialism, capitalism has several advantages. It produces greater economic growth and productivity, at least in part because it provides more incentives (i.e., profit) for economic innovation. It also is often characterized by greater political freedom in the form of civil rights and liberties. As an economic system, capitalism seems to lend itself to personal freedom: Because its hallmarks include the private ownership of the means of production and the individual pursuit of profit, there is much more emphasis in capitalist societies on the needs and desires of the individual and less emphasis on the need for government intervention in economic and social affairs.

Yet capitalism also has its drawbacks. There is much more economic inequality in capitalism than in socialism. Although capitalism produces economic growth, not all segments of capitalism share this growth equally, and there is a much greater difference between the rich and poor than under socialism. People can become very rich in capitalist nations, but they can also remain quite poor.

Another possible drawback depends on whether you prefer competition or cooperation. It is often said that important values in the United States include competition and individualism, both of which arguably reflect this nation's capitalist system. Children in the United States are raised with more of an individual orientation than children in socialist societies, who learn that the needs of their society are more important than the needs of the individual. Whereas US children learn to compete with each other for good grades, success in sports, and other goals, children in socialist societies learn to cooperate to achieve tasks.

More generally, capitalism is said by its critics to encourage selfish and even greedy behavior: If individuals try to maximize their profit, they do so at the expense of others. In competition, someone has to lose. A company's ultimate aim, and one that is generally lauded, is to maximize its profits by driving another company out of the market altogether. If so, that company succeeds even if some other party is hurting. The small mom-and-pop grocery stores, drugstores, and hardware stores are almost a thing of the past,

as big-box stores open their doors and drive their competition out of business. To its critics, then, capitalism encourages harmful behavior, and there are many losers in capitalism. Yet it is precisely this type of behavior that is taught in business schools.

As a business columnist recently summarized these problems of capitalism,

Why does one have to be a Democrat or a liberal to complain bout the way business gets done? Like most Americans, I am OK with the notion that free-market capitalism produces winners and losers. What I don't like is that it also produces liars, cheaters, swindlers, self-dealing narcissists, overleveraged idiots and reckless egomaniacs out to abuse their economic power and take unfair advantage of hard-working people.

I don't complain about fraud, abuse and folly because I am antibusiness or anticapitalist…What free-market capitalism hasn't yet figured out is what to do with all its losers. At this point in the economic cycle, they are piling up like used tires: debt-sacked college kids who can't get jobs, foreclosed homeowners, failed small-business owners, pink-slipped employees, [and] millions suddenly ejected from the middle class. (Lewis, 2012, p. C3)Lewis, A. (2012, January 14–15). Occupy Mitt Romney! *Bangor Daily News*, p. C3.

## Democratic Socialism





*The economies of Denmark, pictured here, and several other Western European nations feature a combination of capitalism and socialism that is called democratic socialism. In these economies, the government owns important industries, but private property and political freedom remain widespread.*

© *Thinkstock*

Some nations combine elements of both capitalism and socialism and are called *social democracies*, while their combination of capitalism and socialism is called **democratic socialism**. In these nations, which include Denmark, Sweden, and several other Western European nations, the government owns several important industries, but much property remains in private hands, and political freedom is widespread. The governments in these nations have extensive programs to help the poor and other people in need. Although these nations have high tax rates to help finance their social programs, their experience indicates it is very possible to combine the best features of capitalism and socialism while avoiding their faults (Russell, 2011)Russell, J. W. (2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. (see Note 12.10 "Lessons from Other Societies").

## Lessons from Other Societies

Democratic Socialism in Scandinavia

The five Scandinavian nations, also called the Nordic nations, are Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. These nations differ in many ways, but they also share many similarities. In particular, they are all social democracies, as their governments own important industries while their citizens enjoy much political freedom. Each nation has the three branches of government with which most people are familiar—executive, judicial, and legislative—and each nation has a national parliament to which people are elected by proportional representation.

Social democracies like the Scandinavian nations are often called controlled capitalist market economies. The word *controlled* here conveys the idea that their governments either own industries or heavily regulate industries they do not own. A key feature of these social democracies' economies is that inequality in wealth and income is not generally tolerated. Employers, employees, and political officials are accustomed to working closely to ensure that poverty and its related problems are addressed as much as possible and in as cooperative a manner as possible.

Underlying this so-called *social welfare model* is a commitment to *universalism*. All citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status or family situation, receive various services, such as child care and universal health care, that are free or heavily subsidized.

To support this massive provision of benefits, the Scandinavian nations have very high taxes that their citizens generally accept as normal and necessary.

The Scandinavian nations rank at or near the top in international comparisons of health, education, economic well-being, and other measures of quality of life. The Scandinavian experience of social democracy teaches us that it is very possible to have a political and economic model that combines the best features of capitalism and socialism while retaining the political freedom that citizens expect in a democracy.

*Sources:* Russell, 2011; Sejersted, 2011Russell, J. W. (2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield; Sejersted, F. (2011). *The age of social democracy: Norway and Sweden in the twentieth century* (R. Daly, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## The US Labor Force

We now turn from a general discussion of economic systems to some basic facts on the labor force in the world's leading capitalist nation, the United States. The **civilian labor force** in the United States consists of all noninstitutionalized civilians 16 years of age or older who work for pay or are looking for work. The civilian labor force (hereafter *labor force*) consists of about 154 million people, or almost two-thirds of the population, including about 71 percent of men and 58 percent of women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *2012 employment and earnings online*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/home.htm.

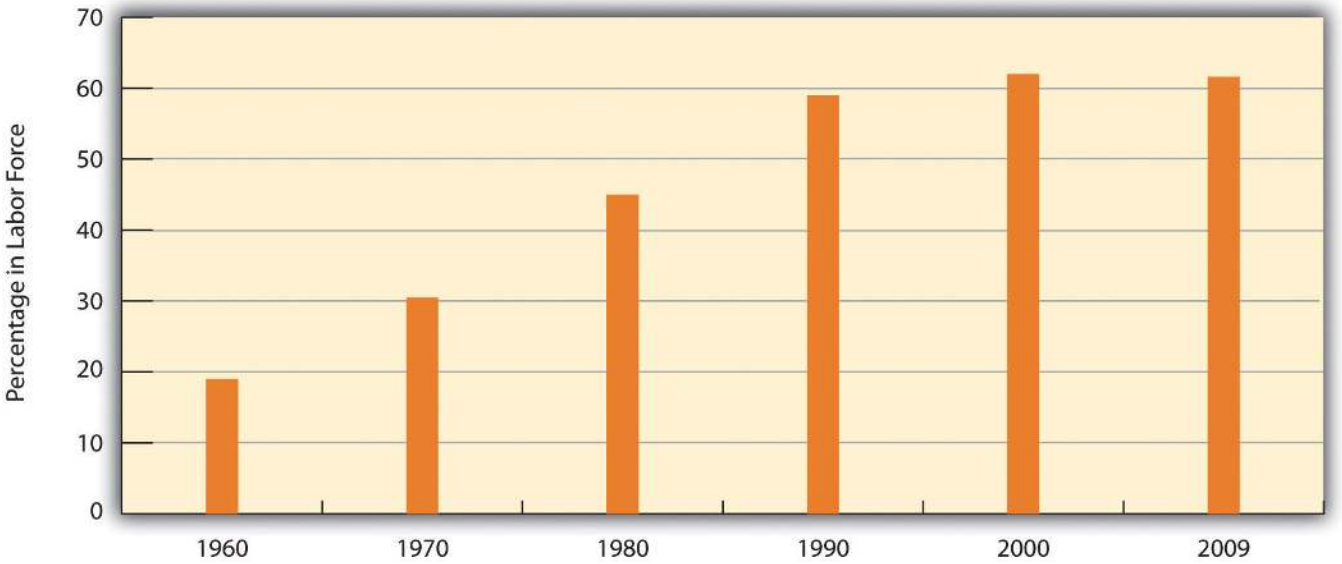
Of those who are currently employed, approximately 2.4 million people work in the agricultural sector, and a much larger number, 138 million, work in nonagricultural industries. Of the latter number, 109 million work in private industry, 21 million work in government, and almost 9 million are self-employed. Most of the currently employed work full-time, but more than 26 million work only part-time. Of this number, 69 percent work part-time for noneconomic reasons; for example, they have childcare or other family obligations, or they are in school. Another 31 percent work part-time for economic reasons: They are unable to find a full-time job, or they may have lost a full-time job because of the faltering economy.

Approximately 87 million Americans ages 16 and older are not in the labor force. Of this number, 93 percent do not desire a job. Most of these individuals are retired, disabled, or taking care of children and/or other family members. Of the 7 percent who would like a job but are still not in the labor force, most have dropped out of the labor force (stopped looking for a job) because they have become discouraged after previously looking for work but not finding a job.

Some 5 percent of currently employed people have two or more jobs at any one time. This percentage translates to about 7 million individuals. It varies slightly by gender: 5.3 percent of employed women have at least two jobs, compared to 4.7 percent of employed men.

Chapter 4 noted that women's labor force participation soared during the last few decades. This general increase is even steeper for married women with children under 6 years of age: In 2009, almost 62 percent of such women were in the labor force, compared to less than 19 percent in 1960 (US Census Bureau, 2012),US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab. a threefold difference (see Figure 12.2).

Figure 12.2 Labor Force Participation Rate of Married Women with Children Younger than 6 Years of Age, 1960–2007




*Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The economy is the social institution that organizes the production, distribution, and consumption of a society's goods and services. It consists of three sectors: the primary sector, the secondary sector, and the tertiary sector.
- The two major economic systems in modern societies are capitalism and socialism. In practice, most societies have economies that mix elements of both systems but that lean toward one end of the capitalism–socialism continuum.
- Social democracies combine elements of both capitalism and socialism. They have achieved high economic growth while maintaining political freedom and personal liberty.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. In what ways might capitalism be a better economic system than socialism? In what ways might socialism be a better economic system than capitalism?
2. Write a brief essay in which you discuss the values capitalism and socialism seem to develop among the people who live under either type of economic system.

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# 10.2: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy

**Learning Objectives**

1. List any two functions of work and the economy as emphasized by functionalism.
2. Summarize conflict theory's critique of work and the economy.
3. Explain the overall approach of symbolic interactionism to understanding work and the economy.

The three sociological perspectives examined in earlier chapters continue to offer insights that help us understand the economy, including the nature of work on which any economy rests. Table 12.1 "Theory Snapshot" summarizes these insights.

Table 12.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | Work and the economy serve several functions for society. The economy makes society possible by providing the goods and services it needs. Work gives people an income and also provides them some self-fulfillment and part of their identity. |
| Conflict theory | Control of the economy enables the economic elite to maintain their position at the top of society and to keep those at the bottom in their place. Work is often alienating, and the workplace is often a site for sexual harassment and other problems. |
| Symbolic interactionism | This perspective focuses on social interaction in the workplace, on how employees respond to problems in their workplaces, and on how they perceive the work they do. |

## Functionalism

Recall that the functionalist perspective highlights the many functions that social institutions serve for society. Accordingly, this perspective paints a positive picture of work and the economy by pointing to their many benefits.

The economy's major function is also an absolutely essential function: the provision of goods and services. Because the economy provides the goods and services that any society needs, the economy makes a society possible. As we saw earlier, capitalist and socialist societies provide goods and services in different ways, and each type of economy has its advantages and disadvantages. Regardless of the relative merits of capitalism and socialism, however, both a capitalist economy and socialist economy make possible the societies in which they are found.

Many high school students have summer jobs or after-school jobs. Whether or not they go to college, most people work for pay once they reach adulthood. Some work full-time until they retire, some alternate full-time work and part-time work, and some may start out with a job but drop out of the labor force to raise their children. Regardless of these various work patterns, the most important function that most people derive from working is their paycheck. Simply put, work provides the income that most people need for food, clothing, shelter, and other essential needs in today's society.

But work has important, nonmaterial functions beyond helping us pay the bills. Many people consider their job part of their overall identity, just as the college students reading this book consider being a student as part of their current identity. As we enter adulthood, we are not just a spouse, partner, parent, or child of our parents; we are also an accountant, banker, claims adjuster, day care worker, elementary school teacher, financial consultant, garage door installer, and so forth. The job we have helps provide us with a sense of who we are, or, to put it another way, a sense of our identity.

Especially if we enjoy our jobs, work can also give us a sense of self-fulfillment, self-confidence, and self-esteem. These psychological effects combine to form yet another important function of work.




An important function of work is that it provides a context for coworker friendships. Many people have friends whom they met in their workplaces or through their work. (Wonderlane – Co-workers laughing at Fat Smitty's – CC BY 2.0.)

A third function is friendships. Many people have friends and acquaintances whom they met at their workplaces or at least through their work (McGuire, 2007). Coworkers discuss all kinds of topics with each other, including personal matters, sports, and political affairs, and they often will invite other coworkers over to their homes or go out with them to a movie or a restaurant. These friendships are yet another benefit that work often provides.

The nonmaterial benefits that work provides for many people are important and should not be discounted. Although this is speculative, many wealthy people no longer need to work but continue to work because of these nonmaterial benefits. National survey data support the importance of work's nonmaterial benefits in this regard. In the 2010 General Social Survey (GSS), respondents in the labor force were asked, "If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work or would you stop working?" More than two-thirds (68.7 percent) of these respondents replied that they would indeed continue working.

## Conflict Theory

Conflict theory's views of work and the economy largely derive from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels during the nineteenth century. As Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems" discussed, Marx and Engels sharply criticized capitalism as an economic system that inherently oppresses workers. In their view, the *bourgeoisie*, or ruling class, owns the means of production, while the *proletariat*, or working class, does not own the means of production. The bourgeoisie uses its wealth, power, and influence to oppress and exploit the proletariat.

Although today's conflict theorists are not necessarily Marxists, they nonetheless criticize many aspects of capitalism, and the earlier discussion of the disadvantages of capitalism reflects their views. They also criticize how large companies treat their workers. As just one example, they call attention to the fact that many companies maintain dangerous workplaces that result in injury, illness, and/or death for tens of thousands of workers annually. We return to this particular problem later in this chapter.

Conflict theorists also point out that the workplace is a setting for sexual harassment, which was discussed in Chapter 4 "Gender Inequality". Although work can and does bring the many benefits assumed by functionalist theory, work can also be a source of great distress for the hundreds of thousands of women and men who are sexually harassed every year.

Marx also wrote that work in a capitalist society is inherently alienating. This is so, he said, because workers do not design the products they build, because factory work (which was the dominant mode of production in Marx's time) involves boring and repetitive tasks, and because workers are treated by their employers as mere commodities to be hired and fired at will. Reflecting Marx's views, conflict theory today also points to the alienating nature of work.

Following up on this concern, social scientists have tried to determine the extent of worker alienation and job satisfaction, as well as the correlates of these two attitudes (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2012). They generally find that American workers like their jobs much more than Marx anticipated but also that the extent to which they like their jobs depends on the income their jobs bring, the degree of autonomy they enjoy in their jobs, and other factors. In the 2010 GSS, 88 percent of respondents said they are "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the work they do, and only 12 percent said they were dissatisfied. This latter figure is probably much

lower than Marx would have predicted for a capitalist society like the United States. One possible reason for this low amount of job dissatisfaction, and one that Marx did not foresee, is the number of workplace friendships as described earlier. Such friendships can lead workers to like their jobs more than they otherwise would and help overcome the alienation they might feel without the friendships.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Recall that symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction. In line with this "micro" focus, many scholars have generated rich descriptions of how certain workplaces' behaviors and understandings are "negotiated" and of how certain kinds of workers view aspects of their work and interpret the meaning of their work. Numerous studies of this type exist of police officers, prostitutes, attorneys, nurses and physicians, teachers, and a variety of other occupations. Most of these studies are based on intensive interviews of people in these occupations. Taken together, they provide a sensitive portrait of why people enter these various jobs and careers, what they like and dislike about their jobs, how they interact with other people in their workplaces, and a host of other issues.



Studies of police officers' behavior and perceptions provide an excellent example of the symbolic interactionist understanding of work. According to Jonathan Rubinstein, an important goal of officers is to maintain the respect of other officers. (West Midlands Police – Day 4 – PCSOs on Patrol in Birmingham – CC BY-SA 2.0.)

A classic study of the workplace grounded in the symbolic interactionist tradition was sociologist Joan Emerson's (1970) study of gynecological exams. At the time Emerson wrote her study, most gynecologists were men. Because they are necessarily viewing and touching their women patients' genitals, they have to ensure their patients do not think their doctor is behaving in a sexual manner. For this to happen, Emerson wrote, (male) gynecologists take pains to appear as medical professionals rather than as men interested in having sex or aroused by what they were seeing and feeling. In this way, they "define the situation" as a professional encounter rather than as a sexual encounter.

Male gynecologists use several strategies to appear as professionals, according to Emerson. For example, they have a (female) nurse present during the exam to help the patient feel comfortable. They also certainly avoid saying anything that might suggest they are sexually aroused. More generally, gynecologists and nurses always act in a nonchalant, matter-of-fact manner, which sends the patient an implicit message: "In the medical world the pelvic area is like any other part of the body; its private and sexual connotations are left behind when you enter the hospital" (Emerson, 1970, p. 78). In all these ways, gynecological exams are defined only as medical encounters, and patients are helped to feel as comfortable as possible under rather uncomfortable circumstances.

In another classic study grounded in the symbolic interactionist tradition, Jonathan Rubinstein (1993) spent a year riding around and otherwise interacting with police officers in Philadelphia. He later wrote compellingly about police officers' constant fear for their safety, about how they try to control suspects and other threatening people without drawing their guns, about how they interact with each other and with their superiors, and many other matters. In one passage, he wrote about how officers (he interviewed police*men*) try to win and keep the respect of other officers: "A patrolman must learn to avoid any appearance or incompetency if he hopes to maintain the respect of his colleagues. Every man must go to considerable lengths to cover up any weakness or error

that might reflect poorly on his competence" (Rubinstein, 1993, p. 105). Thus officers learn to record dispatchers' information promptly and accurately, and they avoid remarks that question the competence of other officers.

## Key Takeaways

- Functionalism emphasizes the importance of the economy for any society, and the income and self-fulfillment that work often provides.
- Conflict theory highlights the control of the economy by the economic elite, the alienation of work, and various problems in the workplace.
- Symbolic interactionism focuses on interaction in the workplace and how workers perceive many aspects of their work and workplace interaction.

## For Your Review

1. Which of the three major sociological approaches to understanding work and the economy do you most prefer? Why?
2. Write a brief essay in which you use a symbolic interactionist approach to understand some aspect of a job you have held or hold now.

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# 10.3: Problems in Work and the Economy

**Learning Objectives**

1. Outline recent trends in jobs and wages.
2. Discuss the effects of unemployment.
3. Summarize the problems associated with increasing economic inequality.

The economy and the quality and quantity of work certainly affect the lives of all Americans. At the same time, work and the economy give rise to many kinds of problems that also affect millions of Americans. This section examines several of these problems.

## The Loss of Jobs and Wages

Because the American economy greatly weakened as the nation went into a deep recession in late 2007, it should come as no surprise that millions of jobs have been lost during the past half-decade and that wages have declined for many Americans. Yet long before the recession began, certain ominous trends in the American economy were evident. These trends involved a general loss of jobs in many sectors of the American economy and stagnating wages.

These trends partly reflected the fact that the United States has joined other industrial nations in moving into a *postindustrial* economy. In a postindustrial economy, information technology and service jobs replace the machines and manufacturing jobs that are hallmarks of an industrial economy. If physical prowess and skill with one's hands were prerequisites for many industrial jobs, mental prowess and communication skills are prerequisites for postindustrial jobs.

This move to a postindustrial economy has been a mixed blessing for many Americans. The information age has obvious benefits too numerous to mention, but there has also been a cost to the many workers whom postindustrialization and the globalization of the economy have left behind. Since the 1980s, many manufacturing companies moved their plants from US cities to sites in the developing world in Asia and elsewhere, a problem called capital flight. Along with the faltering economy, these trends have helped fuel a loss of 5.5 million manufacturing jobs from the American economy since 2000 (Hall, 2011).

A related problem is outsourcing, in which US companies hire workers overseas for customer care, billing services, and other jobs that Americans used to do. China, India, and the Philippines, which have skilled workforces relatively fluent in English, are the primary nations to which US companies outsource their work. According to projections, some 3.4 million jobs will have been lost by 2015 because of outsourcing (Levine, 2012). Many call centers employ workers in India, and when you call up a computer company or some other business for technical help, you might very well talk with an Indian. Because these call centers have cost Americans jobs and also because Americans and Indians often have trouble understanding each other's accents, outsourcing has been very controversial since it became popular in the early 2000s.




Many American jobs have been lost because of outsourcing to other countries. (Paul Keller – wanted – CC BY 2.0.)

All these problems reflect a more general shift in the United States from goods-producing jobs to service jobs. Although some of these service jobs, such as many in the financial and computer industries, are high paying, many are in low-wage occupations, such as restaurant and clerical work, that pay less than the goods-producing jobs they replaced. Partly as a result, the average hourly wage (in 2009 dollars) in the United States for workers (excluding managers and supervisors) rose by only one dollar from $17.46 in 1979 to $18.63 in 2009. This change represented an increase of just 0.2 percent per year during that three-decade span, as workers' wages have essentially stagnated during the last three decades (Economic Policy Institute, 2012).

Wage changes in recent years also depend on what social class someone is in. While the average compensation of chief executive officers (CEOs) of large corporations grew by 167 percent from 1989 to 2007, the average compensation of the typical worker grew by only 10 percent (Mishel, Bernstein, & Shierholz, 2009). Another way of understanding this disparity is perhaps more striking. In 1965, the average compensation of CEOs was twenty-four times greater than that of the typical worker; in 2009, their compensation was 185 times greater than that of the typical worker (Economic Policy Institute, 2012). These figures reflect growing economic inequality in the United States, a problem we further examine later in this chapter.

## The Decline of Labor Unions

One of the most important developments accompanying industrialization in the nineteenth century was the rise of labor unions and their conflict with management over wages and working conditions (Dubofsky & Dulles, 2010). The pay that workers received was quite low, and the conditions in which they worked were often miserable. The typical employee worked at least ten hours a day for six or seven days a week, with almost no overtime pay and no paid vacations or holidays. To improve wages and working conditions, many labor unions were founded after the Civil War, only to meet determined opposition from companies, the government, and the courts. Companies told each other which workers were suspected of being union members, and these workers were then prevented from getting jobs. Strikers were often arrested for violating laws prohibiting strikes. When juries began finding them not guilty, employers turned to asking judges for injunctions that prohibited strikes. Workers who then went on strike were held in contempt of court by the judge as juries were kept out of the process.




From the 1870s through the 1930s, labor unions fought companies over issues such as low wages and substandard working conditions. (DonkeyHotey – together We Bargain – CC BY 2.0.)

Labor strife also marked the Great Depression, when masses of people blamed business leaders for their economic plight. Huge sit-ins and other labor protests occurred at auto plants in Detroit. In response, the Congress passed several laws that gave workers a minimum wage, the right to join unions, a maximum-hour workweek, and other rights that Americans now take for granted.

Today labor unions have lost some of their influence, especially as postindustrialization has supplanted the industrial economy and as the United States has lost much of its manufacturing base. Four decades ago, about one-fourth of all private-sector nonagricultural workers belonged to labor unions. By 1985 this figure had dropped to 14.6 percent, and today it stands at only 7.2 percent (Hirsch & Macpherson, 2011). In response, labor unions have intensified their efforts to increase their membership, only to find that US labor laws are filled with loopholes that allow companies to prevent their workers from forming a union. For example, after a company's workers vote to join a union, companies can appeal the vote, and it can take several years for courts to order the company to recognize the union. In the meantime, the low wages, substandard working conditions, and other factors that motivated workers to want to join a union are allowed to continue.

Just as the growth of unions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to raise workers' wages, the decline of unions has lowered wages. Two reasons explain this decline (Mishel et al., 2009). First, union workers earn about 14 percent more than nonunion workers (controlling for experience, education, occupation, and other factors), a phenomenon known as the *union wage premium*. Because fewer workers are now in unions than four decades ago, they are less likely to benefit from this premium. Second, as unions have declined, there has been less pressure on nonunion employers to raise their wages to match union wages.

Because the union wage premium is greater for African Americans and Latinos than for whites, the wage decline caused by the decline of unions has probably been steeper for those two groups than for whites. It is also true that union workers are more likely than nonunion workers to be covered by employer-paid health insurance and also to have lower health premiums and deductibles. The decline of unions has thus meant that the average worker today is less likely to have employer-paid health insurance and, if they do, more likely to have higher premiums and deductibles.

## Unemployment

Unemployment is a fact of life. There will always be people laid off or fired, who voluntarily quit their jobs, or who just graduated school and are still looking for work. But most unemployed people are involuntarily unemployed, and for them the financial and psychological consequences can be devastating, as we saw in the news story that began this chapter.

Unemployment rates rise and fall with the economy, and the national unemployment rate was as high as 10.2 percent in October 2009 amid the Great Recession that began almost two years earlier. It was still 8.3 percent in February 2012, amounting to almost 13 million people. But whether unemployment is high or low, it always varies by race and ethnicity, with African American and Latino unemployment rates much higher than the white rate (see Figure 12.3 "Race, Ethnicity, and Unemployment Rate, February 2012"). Unemployment is also higher for younger people than for older people. In February 2012, 23.8 percent of all teenagers in the labor force (aged 16–19) were unemployed, a figure three times higher than that for adults. The unemployment rate for African Americans in this age group was a very high 34.7 percent, twice as high as the 21.3 percent figure for whites in this age group (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

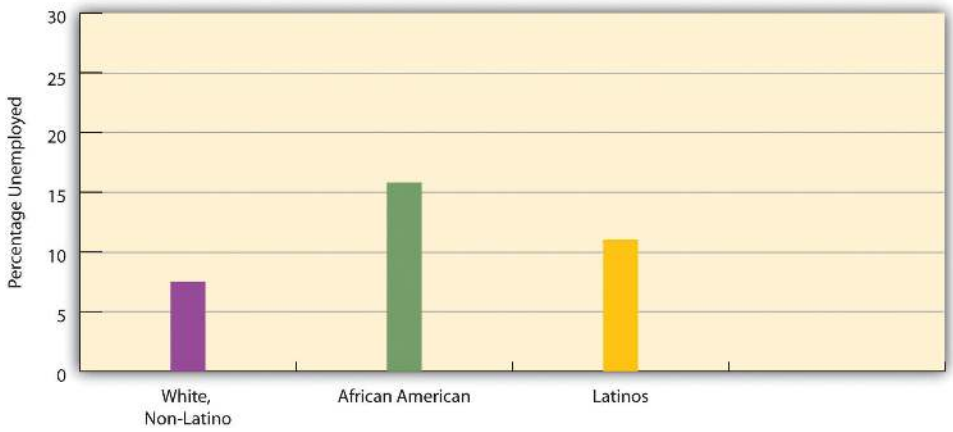



Figure 12.3 Race, Ethnicity, and Unemployment Rate, February 2012 Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012). Employment & earnings online. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/home.htm.

Unemployment figures are misleading in an important respect, as they do not include people who are *underemployed*. Underemployment includes the unemployed and also two other types of people: (a) those who are working part-time but who want to work full-time—the so-called *marginally attached*, and (b) those who have stopped looking for work because they have not been able to find a job. Many economists think that underemployment provides a more accurate measure than unemployment of the number of people with employment problems.

For example, in December 2011, when the unemployment rate was 8.5 percent and 13 million people were officially unemployed, the underemployment rate was 15.2 percent, equal to 23.8 million people (Shierholz, 2012). These figures are almost twice as high as the official unemployment figures. Reflecting the racial/ethnic disparity in unemployment, 24.4 percent of African American workers and 22.3 percent of Latino workers were underemployed, compared to only 12.5 percent of white workers. Reflecting on the great amount of underemployment during the Great Recession, one economist commented, "When you combine the long-term unemployed with those who are dropping out and those who are working part time because they can't find anything else, it is just far beyond anything we've seen in the job market since the 1930s" (Herbert, 2010, p. A25).

We have just seen that unemployment rises when the economy falters and that race and ethnicity affect the probability of being unemployed. These two facts provide evidence supporting the *sociological imagination* (see Chapter 1 "Understanding Social Problems"). As C. Wright Mills (1959) emphasized in his original discussion of this concept, unemployment is best viewed more as a public issue than as a personal trouble. When so many people are unemployed during an economic recession and when there is such striking evidence of higher unemployment rates among the persons of color who have the least opportunity for the education and training needed to obtain and keep a job, it is evident that high unemployment rates reflect a public issue rather than just a collection of public troubles.

Several kinds of problems make it difficult for people of color to be hired into jobs and thus contribute to the racial/ethnic disparity in unemployment. The Para 12.142 box discusses these problems.

### Applying Social Research

Race, Ethnicity, and Employment

As the text discusses, people of color are more likely than whites to be unemployed or underemployed. While a relative lack of education helps explain these higher rates for people of color, other kinds of problems are also apparent.

One problem is racial discrimination on the part of employers, regardless of how conscious employers are of their discriminatory behavior. Chapter 4 recounted a study by sociologist Devah Pager (2003),Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology, 108*, 937–975. who had young white and African American men apply independently in person for various jobs in Milwaukee. These men wore the same type of clothing and reported similar levels of education and other qualifications. Some said they had a criminal record, while others said they had not committed any crimes. In striking evidence of racial discrimination in hiring, African American applicants *without* a criminal record were hired at the same low rate as white applicants *with* a criminal record.

Pager and sociologists Bruce Western and Bart Bonikowski also investigated racial discrimination in another field experiment in New York City (Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009).Pager, D., Bonikowski, B., & Western, B. (2009). Discrimination in a low-wage labor market: A field experiment. *American Sociological Review, 74*(5), 777–799. They had white, African American, and Latino "testers," all of them "well-spoken, clean-cut young men" (p. 781), apply in person to low-level service jobs (e.g., retail sales and delivery drivers) requiring no more than a high school education; all the testers had similar (hypothetical) qualifications. Almost one-third (31 percent) of white testers received a call back or job offer, compared to only 25.2 percent of Latino testers and 15.2 percent of African American testers. The researchers concluded that their findings "add to a large research program demonstrating the continuing contribution of discrimination to racial inequality in the post-civil rights era" (p. 794).

Other kinds of evidence also reveal racial discrimination in hiring. Two scholars sent job applications in response to help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003).Bertrand, M., & Mullainathan, S. (2003). *Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination* (Working Paper No. 9873). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://papers.nber.org/papers/w9873.pdf. They randomly assigned the applications to feature either a "white-sounding" name (e.g., Emily or Greg) or an "African American–sounding" name (e.g., Jamal and Lakisha). White names received 50 percent more callbacks than African American names for job interviews.

Racial differences in access to the informal networks that are often so important in finding a job also contribute to the racial/ethnic disparity in employment. In a study using data from a nationwide survey of a random sample of Americans, sociologist Steve McDonald and colleagues found that people of color and women are less likely than white males to receive informal word of vacant, high-level supervisory positions (McDonald, Nan, & Ao, 2009).McDonald, S., Nan, L., & Ao, D. (2009). Networks of opportunity: Gender, race, and job leads. *Social Problems*, *56*(3), 385–402.

As these studies indicate, research by sociologists and other social scientists reveals that race and ethnicity continue to make a difference in employment prospects for Americans. This body of research reveals clear evidence of discrimination, conscious or unconscious, in hiring and also of racial/ethnic differences in access to the informal networks that are often so important for hiring. By uncovering this evidence, these studies underscore the need to address discrimination, access to informal networks, and other factors that contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in employment.

## The Impact of Unemployment

Although the news article that began this chapter gave us a moving account of unemployed people at food banks, survey data also provide harsh evidence of the social and psychological effects of being unemployed. In July 2010, the Pew Research Center issued a report based on a survey of 810 adults who were currently unemployed or had been unemployed since the Great Recession began in December 2007 and 1,093 people who had never been unemployed during the recession (Morin & Kochhar, 2010).Morin, R., & Kochhar, R. (2010). *Lost income, lost friends—and loss of self-respect: The impact of long-term unemployment*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. The report's title, *Lost Income, Lost Friends—and Loss of Self-Respect*, summarized its major findings.

Of those who had been unemployed for at least six months (*long-term unemployment*), 44 percent said that the recession had caused "major changes" in their lives, versus only 20 percent of those who had never been unemployed. More than half of the long-term unemployed said their family income had declined, and more than 40 percent said that their family relations had been strained and that they had lost contact with close friends. In another finding, 38 percent said they had "lost some self-respect" from being unemployed. One-third said they were finding it difficult to pay their rent or mortgage, compared to only 16 percent of those who had never been unemployed during the recession. Half had borrowed money from family or friends to pay bills, versus only 18 percent of the never unemployed. Of all the people who had been unemployed, almost half had experienced sleep difficulties, and 5 percent had experienced drug or alcohol problems. All these numbers paint a distressing picture of the social and psychological impact of unemployment during the Great Recession that began in late 2007.



Unemployment lines were all too common in recent years. Long-term unemployment often causes various social and psychological difficulties. Image courtesy of Michael Raphael at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=29783.

Unemployment also has a significant impact on children whose parent or parents are unemployed. The box discusses this impact.

Note

The Hidden Casualties of Unemployment

As unemployment soared in the wake of the Great Recession that began in 2007, many more children lived in a household where a parent had become unemployed. By early 2010, 11 percent of American children, or 8.1 million children overall, had an unemployed parent. Just slightly more than two years earlier, this number had been much smaller, 4.8 million. In just over two years, then, the number of children with an unemployed parent grew by two-thirds.

After their parents became unemployed, these children began to suffer various psychological effects. One news report summarized this psychological impact as follows: “For many families across the country, the greatest damage inflicted by this recession has not necessarily been financial, but emotional and psychological. Children, especially, have become hidden casualties, often absorbing more than their parents are fully aware of. Several academic studies have linked parental job loss—especially that of fathers—to adverse impacts in areas like school performance and self-esteem.”

The emotional and psychological effects for children occur for at least two reasons. First, unemployed parents tend to experience extra stress and to become withdrawn. Second, married parents and unmarried partners often experience interpersonal conflict when one of them becomes unemployed. Both of these consequences of unemployment in turn affect children in a household where at least one parent is unemployed.

Children have suffered in other ways from the rise in unemployment. More children have become homeless as their households fell into poverty. In addition, children of an unemployed parent are more likely to repeat a grade or, if they are adolescents, to drop out of school. Child abuse has probably also increased in families where a parent became unemployed.

In view of all these consequences for the children of the unemployed, the United States should do everything possible to put parents and other adults back to work and to help the children of unemployed parents deal with the devastating effects of the Great Recession.

*Sources:* Lovell & Isaacs, 2010; Luo, 2009Lovell, P., & Isaacs, J. B. (2010). *Families of the recession: Unemployed parents & their children*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution; Luo, M. (2009, November 12). Job woes exacting a toll on family life. *New York Times*, p. A1.

## Corporations

One of the most important but controversial features of modern capitalism is the **corporation**, a formal organization that has a legal existence, including the right to sign contracts, that is separate from that of its members.

Adam Smith, the founder of capitalism, envisioned that individuals would own the means of production and compete for profit, and this is the model the United States followed in its early stage of industrialization. After the Civil War, however, corporations quickly replaced individuals and their families as the owners of the means of production and as the competitors for profit. As corporations grew following the Civil War, they quickly tried to control their markets by, for example, buying up competitors and driving others out of business. To do so, they engaged in bribery, kickbacks, and complex financial schemes of dubious ethics. They also established factories and other workplaces with squalid conditions. Their shady financial practices won their chief executives the name “robber barons” and led the federal government to pass the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 designed to prohibit restraint of trade that raised prices (Hillstrom & Hillstrom, 2005).Hillstrom, K., & Hillstrom, L. C. (Eds.). (2005). *The industrial revolution in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.



Corporations such as Exxon dominate the US economy. They employ thousands of workers, and their assets total many trillions of dollars. Image courtesy of David Shankbone, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1251_Avenue_of_the_Americas.JPG.

More than a century later, corporations have increased in both number and size. Although several million US corporations exist, most are fairly small. Each of the largest five hundred, however, has an annual revenue exceeding $4.3 billion (2011 data) and employs thousands of workers. Their total assets run into the trillions of dollars (Fortune, 2011).Fortune. (2011). Fortune 500. Retrieved January 14, 2012, from money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2011/full_list. It is no exaggeration to say they control the nation's economy, as together they produce most of the US private sector output, employ millions of people, and have revenues equal to most of the US gross domestic product. In many ways, the size and influence of corporations stifle the competition that is one of the hallmarks of capitalism. For example, several markets, including that for breakfast cereals, are controlled by four or fewer corporations. This control reduces competition because it reduces the number of products and competitors, and it thus raises prices to the public (Parenti, 2011).Parenti, M. (2011). *Democracy for the few* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The last few decades have seen the proliferation and rise of the **multinational corporation**, a corporation with headquarters in one nation but with factories and other operations in many other nations (Wettstein, 2009).Wettstein, F. (2009). *Multinational corporations and global justice: Human rights obligations of a quasi-governmental institution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books. Multinational corporations centered in the United States and their foreign affiliates have more than $17 trillion in assets and employ more than 31 million people (US Census Bureau, 2012).US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from www.census.gov/compendia/statab. The assets of the largest multinational corporations exceed those of many of the world's nations. Often their foreign operations are in poor nations, whose low wages make them attractive sites for multinational corporation expansion. Many multinational employees in these nations work in sweatshops at very low pay and amid substandard living conditions. Critics of this practice say multinationals not only mistreat workers in poor nations but also exploit these nations' natural resources. In contrast, defenders of the practice say multinationals are bringing jobs to poor nations and helping them achieve economic growth. As this debate illustrates, the dominance of multinational corporations will certainly continue to spark controversy.

As we first discussed in Chapter 8, another controversial aspect of corporations is the white-collar crime in which they engage (Rosoff, Pontell, & Tillman, 2010).Rosoff, S. M., Pontell, H. N., & Tillman, R. (2010). *Profit without honor: White collar crime and the looting of America* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Price fixing by corporations costs the US public some $60 billion annually (Simon, 2008).Simon, D. R. (2008). *Elite deviance* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. Workplace-related illnesses and injuries that could have been prevented if companies had safe workplaces kill about 50,000 workers each year (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, 2011).American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. (2011). *Death on the job: The toll of neglect*. Washington, DC: Author. An estimated 10,000 US residents die annually from unsafe products, including contaminated food (Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2010; Young, 2010).US

Consumer Product Safety Commission. (2010, April 15). *2010 annual report to the president and the Congress*. Washington, DC: Author; Young, S. (2010, April 15). E. coli cases down in 2009, CDC says. *CNN Health*. Retrieved from articles.cnn.com/2010-04-15/health/foodborne.illness.cdc_1_foodnet-cases-of-e-coli-hemolytic-uremic-syndrome?_s=_PM:HEALTH. All in all, corporate lawbreaking and neglect probably result in almost 100,000 deaths annually and cost the public more than $400 billion (Barkan, 2012).Barkan, S. E. (2012). *Criminology: A sociological understanding* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

In sum, corporations are the dominant actors in today's economy. They provide most of our products and many of our services and employ millions of people. It is impossible to imagine a modern industrial system without corporations. Yet they often stifle competition, break the law, and, according to their critics, exploit people and natural resources in developing nations.

## Economic Inequality

In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement gave national attention to economic inequality by emphasizing the differences between the "1%" and the "99%." Proclaiming "We are the 99%," they decried the concentration of wealth in the richest of the rich and the growing inequality of the last few decades. (See Note 12.24 "People Making a Difference".) The issue of economic inequality merits further attention here.

### People Making a Difference

Occupy Wall Street

Before 2011, economic inequality in the United States certainly existed and in fact had increased greatly since the 1970s. However, although economic inequality was a topic of concern to social scientists, it was not a topic of concern to the general news media. Because the news media generally ignored economic inequality, it was also not a topic of concern to the general public.

That all changed beginning on September 17, 2011, when hundreds of people calling themselves "Occupy Wall Street" marched through the financial district in New York City before dozens encamped overnight and for weeks to come. Occupy Wall Street took these actions to protest the role of major banks and corporations in the economic collapse of 2007 and 2008 and to call attention to their dominance over the political process. Within weeks, similar Occupy encampments had spread to more than one hundred cities in the United States and hundreds more across the globe. "We are the 99%," they said again and again, as "occupy" became a verb heard repeatedly throughout the United States.

By winter, almost all Occupy encampments had ended either because of legal crackdowns or because of the weather conditions. By that time, however, the Occupy protesters had won news media attention everywhere. In a December 2011 poll by the Pew Research Center, 44 percent of Americans supported the Occupy Wall Street movement, while 35 percent opposed it. Almost half (48 percent) said they agreed with the concerns raised by the movement, compared to 30 percent who said they disagreed with these concerns. In the same poll, 61 percent said the US economic system "unfairly favors the wealthy," while 36 percent said it was fair to all Americans. In a related area, 77 percent said "there is too much power in the hands of a few rich people and corporations." In all these items, there was a notable difference by political party preference. For example, 91 percent of Democrats agreed that a few rich people and corporations have too much power, compared to 80 percent of Independents and only 53 percent of Republicans.

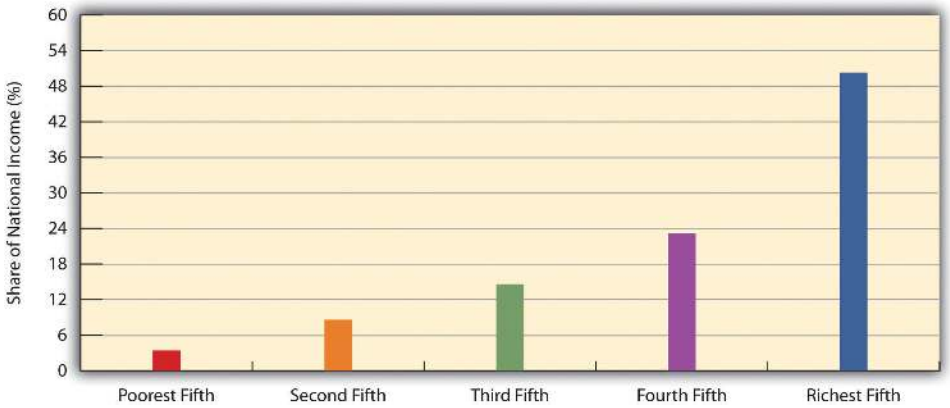
Regardless of these political differences, Occupy Wall Street succeeded in bringing economic inequality and related issues into the national limelight. In just a few short months in 2011, it made a momentous difference.

*Sources:* Pew Research Center, 2011; vanden Heuvel, 2012Pew Research Center. (2011, December 15). Frustration with congress could hurt republican incumbents. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/12-15-11%20Congress%20and%20Economy%20release.pdf; vanden Heuvel, K. (2012, January 26) The occupy effect. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/165883/occupy-effect?rel=emailNation.

Let's start by defining **economic inequality**, which refers to the extent of the economic difference between the rich and the poor. Because most societies are stratified, there will always be some people who are richer or poorer than others, but the key question is *how much* richer or poorer they are. When the gap between them is large, we say that much economic inequality exists; when the gap between them is small, we say that relatively little economic inequality exists.

Considered in this light, the United States has a very large degree of economic inequality. A common way to examine inequality is to rank the nation's families by income from lowest to highest and then to divide this distribution into *fifths*. Thus we have the

poorest fifth of the nation's families (or the 20 percent of families with the lowest family incomes), a second fifth with somewhat higher incomes, and so on until we reach the richest fifth of families, or the 20 percent with the highest incomes. We then can see what percentage each fifth has of the nation's *entire* income. Figure 12.4 shows such a calculation for the United States. The poorest fifth enjoys only 3.3 percent of the nation's income, while the richest fifth enjoys 50.2 percent. Another way of saying this is that the richest 20 percent of the population have as much income as the remaining 80 percent of the population.




Share of National Income Going to Income Fifths, 2010. Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

This degree of inequality is the largest in the industrialized world. Figure 12.5 compares the inequality among several industrialized nations by dividing the median income of households in the ninetieth percentile (meaning they have more income than 90 percent of all households) by the median income of households in the tenth percentile (meaning they have more income than only 10 percent of all households); the higher this resulting ninetieth percentile/tenth percentile ratio, the greater a nation's inequality. The ratio for the United States far exceeds that for any other nation.

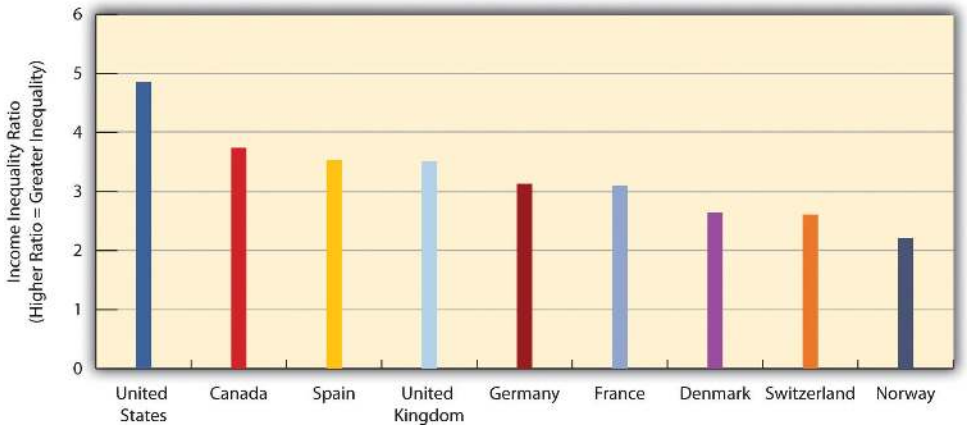



Figure 12.5 Income Inequality around the World. Ratio of median income of richest 10 percent in each nation to that of poorest 10 percent. Source: Data from Mishel, L., Bernstein, J., & Shierholz, H. (2009). The state of working America 2008/2009. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

## The Role of Tax Policy

Economic inequality in the United States has increased during the last three decades. The loss of manufacturing jobs and unions accounts for some of this increase. However, a primary reason for the rising inequality has been tax policy. More specifically, the federal government has implemented steep cuts in the highest tax rates for income from salaries and wages and especially in tax rates for income from dividends and capital gains (Hacker & Pierson, 2011).Hacker, J. S., & Pierson, P. (2011). *Winner-take-all politics: How Washington made the rich richer—and turned its back on the middle class*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. This latter cut is especially important because dividends and capital gains account for a much larger share of the income of wealthy families than the income of ordinary families. To be more specific, dividends and capital gains account for only 0.7 percent of the income of the bottom four-fifths of the nation's families, but for 18.8 percent of the income of the top fifth, 38.2 percent of the top 1 percent, and a striking 51.9 percent of the top 0.1 percent (Hungerford, 2011).Hungerford, T. L. (2011). *Changes in the distribution of income among tax filers between 1996 and 2006: The role of labor income, capital income, and tax policy*.

Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. In a related statistic, three-fourths of all capital gains are received by the top 1 percent (Krugman, 2012).Krugman, P. (2012, January 20). Taxes at the top. *New York Times*, p. A27. Relative to its national wealth, the United States is the lowest-taxed industrial democracy in the world (Leonhardt, 2012).Leonhardt, D. (2012, January 20). Why taxes aren't as high as they seem. *New York Times*, p. A15.

Keep this context in mind as we note that tax cuts in 2003 lowered the tax rate for dividends and capital gains from 28 percent to 15 percent. Meanwhile, the top tax rate for income from salaries and wages is 35 percent. Thus many very wealthy families and individuals pay a lower percentage of their income in taxes than many middle- and upper-middle-class families do because so much of the wealthy families' income is from dividends and capital gains. In fact, the four hundred wealthiest families and individuals in the country pay only about 18 percent of their income in federal tax (Krugman, 2012).Krugman, P. (2012, January 20). Taxes at the top. *New York Times*, p. A27. As the director of Citizens for Tax Justice explained, "The low taxes on capital gains and dividends are why people who make a ton of money, which is largely from investment income, do awfully well. The Warren Buffetts, the hedge fund managers—they pay really low tax rates" (Confessore, Kocieniewski, & Parker, 2011, p. A1).Confessore, N., Kocieniewski, D., & Parker, A. (2011, January 18). Romney shares some tax data; critics pounce. *New York Times*, p. A1. This fact prompts a critical question from Paul Krugman, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics: "Is there a good reason why the rich should bear a startlingly light tax burden?" His answer: "Such low taxes on the very rich are indefensible" (Krugman, 2012, p. A27).Krugman, P. (2012, January 20). Taxes at the top. *New York Times*, p. A27.

The lowering of tax rates has helped make the nation's wealthiest families even wealthier. After adjusting for inflation, their after-tax income grew by a much greater amount than that for the poorest families from 1979 to 2007. Income grew by only 18 percent for the poorest fifth but by 65 percent for the wealthiest fifth (excluding the top 1 percent), and it also grew by a whopping 275 percent for families in the top 1 percent (Congressional Budget Office, 2011).Congressional Budget Office. (2011). Trends in the distribution of household income between 1979 and 2007. Retrieved from www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/124xx/doc12485/WebSummary.pdf. As a result, economic inequality increased. Figure 12.6 shows that wealthiest 1 percent now have a much larger share of the nation's total posttax income than they did in 1979, while the poorest fifth have a lower share. As the saying goes, the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.

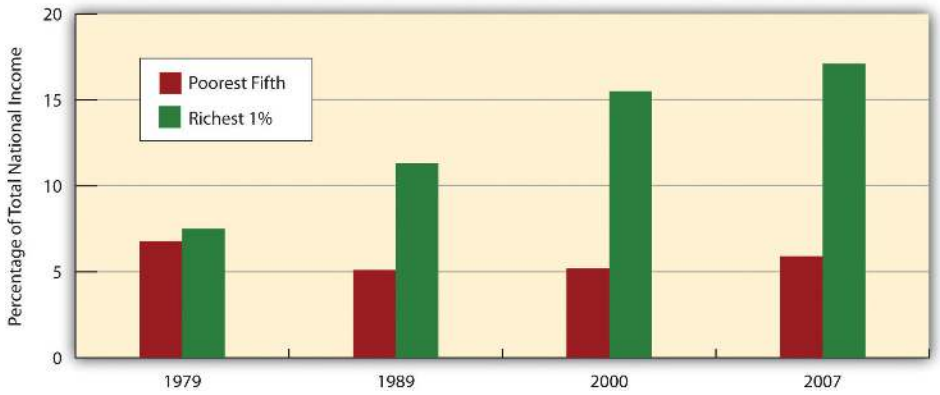



Figure 12.6 Growth of Economic Inequality in the United States (Percentage Share of Total National Income) Source: Economic Policy Institute. (2011). Share of total income by income fifths and a breakdown of the top 20%. The State of working America. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from stateofworkingamerica.org/charts/household-income-shares-1979-2007.

## The Impact of Economic Inequality

Why should we care if economic inequality has increased and if the United States has the highest degree of inequality of all industrial democracies? One answer is that it is a matter of fairness. The United States is not only the wealthiest nation in the world; it is also a nation that historically has stressed that everyone is created equal and that everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue the "American dream" by becoming economically successful. Against this backdrop, a high degree of economic inequality is simply "un-American" and unfair.

Beyond this rather philosophical critique are more practical considerations. First, a high degree of economic inequality is strongly associated with a high degree of poverty and near poverty: If the rich are getting richer, there is normally less wealth to "go around," and the poor get poorer. For the same reason, high economic inequality is also associated with a shrinking of the middle class. In the United States, as both poverty (and near poverty) and wealth have increased, the size of the middle class has reduced, as the chair of the Council of Economic Advisers has emphasized (Krueger, 2012).Krueger, A. B. (2012). The rise and

consequences of inequality in the United States. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2012/01/pdf/krueger.pdf.

Second, a high degree of economic inequality is also associated with low *economic mobility* (the movement of people up or down the socioeconomic ladder) (Krueger, 2012).Krueger, A. B. (2012). The rise and consequences of inequality in the United States. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2012/01/pdf/krueger.pdf. As noted earlier, the United States is the most economically unequal of all industrial democracies. It also has lower economic mobility: Americans born into poverty or near poverty are less likely than their counterparts in other democracies to be able to move up the socioeconomic ladder (DeParle, 2012).DeParle, J. (2012, January 5). Harder for Americans to rise from lower rungs. *New York Times*, p. A1.

Next, high economic inequality may slow economic growth. This possible effect occurs for at least three reasons (Krueger, 2012).Krueger, A. B. (2012). The rise and consequences of inequality in the United States. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2012/01/pdf/krueger.pdf. First, the wealthy tend to save their money rather than spend it. Second, a shrinking middle class means there is less spending by the middle class to stimulate the economy. Third, workers' morale is likely to be lower in a society with higher economic inequality, and their lower morale decreases their productivity. As the chair of the Council of Economic Advisers has stated, "The evidence suggests that a growing middle class is good for the economy, and that a more fair distribution of income would hasten economic growth. Businesses would benefit from restoring more fairness to the economy by having more middle class customers, more stable markets, and improved employee morale and productivity" (Krueger, 2012).Krueger, A. B. (2012). The rise and consequences of inequality in the United States. Retrieved January 19, 2012, from http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2012/01/pdf/krueger.pdf.

Finally, many social scientists consider nations with high degrees of economic inequality to be "unhealthy societies," to quote the title of a book on this issue (Wilkinson, 1996).Wilkinson, R. G. (1996). *Unhealthy societies: The afflictions of inequality*. New York, NY: Routledge. Economic inequality is thought to undermine social cohesion and increase polarization, and also to cause other problems (Barash, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011).Barash, D. (2012, January 13). The wanton wages of income inequality. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-wages-of-inequality/43020?sid=pm&utm_source=pm&utm_medium=en; Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2011). *The spirit level: Why greater equality makes societies stronger*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Press. Among the world's industrial nations, higher degrees of economic inequality are associated with worse physical and mental health, lower life expectancy, and higher rates of violent crime. High economic inequality, then, is a matter not only of fairness but also of life and death.

## Tax Evasion

Another significant problem in the American economy is *tax evasion*. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) periodically estimates the amount of tax evasion and derives a figure it calls the tax gap: the difference between what Americans owe in federal taxes and what they actually pay. Much of the annual tax gap results from the failure of professionals such as physicians and attorneys to report self-employment income and from the claiming of false deductions by wealthy individuals and families (Braithwaite, 2009).Braithwaite, V. (2009). Tax evasion. In M. Tonry (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of crime and public policy* (pp. 381–405). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

In January 2012, the IRS released its estimate of the tax gap for 2006. The initial tax gap was $450 billion. After payment of late taxes and certain enforcement efforts, this gap was reduced to $385 billion, still an astronomical figure; tax evasion by corporations amounted for about $70 billion of this amount. The total tax gap is about twenty times greater than the annual economic loss from property crimes such as burglary and motor vehicle theft. In 2006, the federal budget deficit was $248 billion. If everyone had paid the taxes they owed, there would have been no deficit at all, and the federal government in fact would have had a surplus of $137 billion (Pizzigati, 2012).Pizzigati, S. (2012). Law and order 24/7, except at tax time. Retrieved January 14, 2012, from http://toomuchonline.org/tax-gap-law-and-order.

Despite the huge problem of tax evasion, budget cuts in 2011 weakened the ability of the IRS to enforce the tax code. In 2012, the IRS had 3,000 fewer employees working in enforcement than it had in 2010 (Pizzigati, 2012).Pizzigati, S. (2012). Law and order 24/7, except at tax time. Retrieved January 14, 2012, from http://toomuchonline.org/tax-gap-law-and-order.

## Crime in the Workplace

An unfortunate fact about work in the United States is crime in the workplace, which is the last problem in work and the economy that we will examine. Two major types of such crime exist: employee theft and workplace violence.

## Employee Theft

**Employee theft** takes two forms: pilferage and embezzlement. **Pilferage** involves the stealing of goods, while **embezzlement** involves the stealing of money in its various dimensions (cash, electronic transactions, etc.). Whichever form it takes, employee theft is so common that is has been called a "widespread, pervasive, and costly form of crime" (Langton, Piquero, & Hollinger, 2006, p. 539).Langton, L., Piquero, N. L., & Hollinger, R. C. (2006). An empirical test of the relationship between employee theft and low self-control. *Deviant Behavior, 27*, 537–565. It is estimated that about 75 percent of employees steal at least once from their employers and that the annual amount of employee theft is $19.5 billion (National Retail Federation, 2007).National Retail Federation. (2007, June 11). Retail losses hit $41.6 billion last year, according to national retail security survey [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=News&op=viewlive&sp_id=318.

Employee theft occurs for many reasons, but a common reason is worker dissatisfaction with various aspects of their job. They may think their wages or salaries are too low, they may feel they have been treated unfairly by their employer, and so forth. As the estimates of the amount of employee theft suggest, this form of theft is not condemned by many people, and, indeed, many workplaces have informal norms that approve of certain forms of theft—for example, it is OK to steal inexpensive objects such as (depending on the workplace) utensils, food, pencils and pens, or toilet paper. Not surprisingly, embezzlement is often more costly to an employer than pilferage; although it can involve just a few dollars from a cash register, it can also involve hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars acquired through more sophisticated means.

When we think of employee theft, we probably usually think of theft by blue-collar or lower white-collar employees. However, physicians, attorneys, and other professionals also steal from their patients/clients or from the government, even if their form of theft is often much more complex and sophisticated than what the term "employee theft" may usually imply. Attorneys may bill their clients for work that was never done, and physicians may bill Medicare or private insurance for patients they never saw or for procedures that were never performed. We call this form of "employee" theft **professional fraud**. Fraud by physicians and other health-care professionals (including nursing homes and medical testing laboratories) is thought to amount to $100 billion every year (Rosoff et al., 2010),Rosoff, S. M., Pontell, H. N., & Tillman, R. (2010). *Profit without honor: White collar crime and the looting of America* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. a figure that far exceeds the $19.5 billion in "conventional" employee theft and the similar figure lost to property crime (robbery, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft).

## Workplace Violence

In January 2012, a lumber company employee in North Carolina entered the company's warehouse armed with a twelve-gauge shotgun. He shot and killed three coworkers and critically wounded another coworker. He then returned home, shot himself in the head, and later died at a hospital. A news report described the gunman as a "disgruntled" employee (Muskal, 2012).Muskal, M. (2012). Man Shoots 4 Co-Workers, Killing 3, Authorities Say. *Los Angeles times*, *January 12*, A12.

Many people die or are injured by acts of violence at their workplaces every year in the United States. In 2008, 517 people were slain at their workplaces, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. As disturbing as this number was, it represented a sharp drop from the numbers that prevailed a decade earlier, when 1,080 workplace homicides occurred in 1994. From 2003 through 2008, an average of 497 workplace homicides occurred every year (Needleman, 2010).Needleman, S. E. (2010, August 10). When violence strikes the workplace. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704164904575421560153438240.html?mod=googlenews_wsj.

In terms of who is involved and the reasons for their involvement, three kinds of workplace homicides are the most common. The first and by far the most common type is homicide as the result of robbery. This category includes the many store clerks, gas station attendants, taxi drivers, and other employees who are slain during a robbery, as well as police who are killed as they try to stop a robbery or apprehend the offender. The second category is homicide committed as an act of domestic violence; in this type, the offender, almost always a man, seeks out his wife or girlfriend (or ex-wife or ex-girlfriend) at her workplace and kills her. The third category involves disgruntled workers, such as the North Carolina lumber employee just discussed, who kill one or more people at their workplace whom they blame for problems the killers have been having. Although this type of homicide is the type that the phrase "workplace violence" or "workplace killings" usually brings to mind, it is actually the least common of the three types listed here (Fox, 2010).Fox, J. A. (2010). Workplace homicide: What is the risk? Retrieved from http://boston.com/community/blogs/crime_punishment/2010/08/workplace_homicide_the_risks.html.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The move to a postindustrial economy has resulted in a loss of jobs and wages in the United States, thanks in part to capital flight and outsourcing.
- Unemployment soared after the Great Recession that began in late 2007. Joblessness has significant consequences for the financial and psychological well-being of the millions of people who are unemployed.
- Economic inequality has greatly increased since the 1970s, thanks in large part to changes in the tax code that favored the wealthy.
- Corporations often engage in white-collar crime that costs hundreds of billions of dollars annually and results in tens of thousands of deaths.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a brief essay in which you discuss the benefits and disadvantages of corporations in modern society.
2. Write a brief essay in which you summarize the problems associated with increasing economic inequality.
3. Fewer workers belong to labor unions now than just a few decades ago. Do you think this is a good development or a bad development? Explain your answer.
4. Think of a job you now have or your most recent job if you are currently not employed. On a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you (were you) with your job? Explain why you have (had) this level of satisfaction.

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# 10.4: Improving Work and the Economy

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand several types of social reform for improving work and the economy.

This chapter has discussed problems related to work and the economy. Critics of capitalism say many of these and other problems arise from the nature of capitalism. According to this way of thinking, capitalism as an economic system emphasizes competition and thus a "winner takes all" mentality. In this kind of system, there are many losers, and there is also unbridled greed for ever greater wealth. Further, because there is relatively little government regulation in the free-market system that is a hallmark of capitalism, large corporations are left relatively free to engage in behavior that advances their profits but that also stifles competition, harms the environment, and causes other social ills. Regardless of the merits of this general critique, capitalism is not about to disappear. Any improvement in work and the economy, then, must stem from social reforms based on sound social research. This chapter's discussion points to several important problems that must be addressed.

One problem is racial and ethnic discrimination in hiring and employment. Several kinds of studies, but especially field experiments involving job applicants who are similar except for their race and ethnicity, provide powerful evidence of continuing discrimination despite federal and state laws banning it. This evidence certainly suggests the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws against racial and ethnic bias in employment and for public education campaigns to alert workers to signs of this type of discrimination.

A second problem concerns worker morale. Economic inequality and a faltering economy continue to threaten to undermine worker morale and hence worker productivity. Individual employers can do little about these two fundamental problems in the larger economy, but they can do something about worker morale. In this regard, this chapter discussed the importance of coworker friendships for workers' satisfaction with their jobs and for their more general individual well-being. In view of this importance, employers and employees alike should make special efforts to promote coworker friendships. Because work is such an important part of most people's lives, these efforts should prove beneficial for many reasons. Employers should also take other measures to improve worker morale, including improvements in wages and working conditions.

A third problem is unemployment. Sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars have documented the social and emotional consequences of unemployment. The effects of unemployment go far beyond the loss of money. Revealed by much research, these consequences sometimes seem forgotten in national debates over whether to extend unemployment insurance benefits. But unemployment does have a human face, and it is essential to provide monetary benefits and other kinds of help for the unemployed.

A fourth problem is corporate misbehavior. As this chapter discussed, corporations are essential to the US economy but also cause great harm. It is not an exaggeration to say that corporate crime is rampant and that it goes largely unpunished. Stricter federal and state oversight of and sanctions against corporate misbehavior are needed.

A fifth problem is economic inequality. The degree of inequality has grown during the past few decades, thanks in large part to changes in the tax codes that greatly favored the wealthy. Restoring tax rates to their standards before the 1980s would help to lessen economic inequality and thus help lessen the problems arising from this type of inequality. In a related area, although the official federal tax rate for corporate profits is 35 percent, many corporations pay a much lower percentage than this because of various loopholes and shelters in the federal tax code. From 2009 to 2011, 280 corporations paid an average of only 18.5 percent of their profits in federal taxes, and 30 of these corporations paid no federal tax during this period (Kocieniewski, 2011). The corporations' effective tax rate was lower than that of corporations in many other democracies. For the ten-year period beginning 2002, General Electric paid only 2.3 percent of its profits in federal taxes (Eichler, 2012). Ending the loopholes and shelters that corporations enjoy will help greatly to increase federal revenue. As the advocacy group Citizens for Tax Justice observes, "Closing the loopholes will have real benefits, including a fairer tax system, reduced federal budget deficits and more resources to improve our roads, bridges and schools—things that are really important for economic development here in the United States" (Kocieniewski, 2011, p. B1).

More generally, it is worth noting a recommendation of many observers concerning the federal government's role in the economy. These observers say the government must take a more active role in improving the national infrastructure, job training, and research and development, and in more generally providing incentives for large corporations to invest their resources in job creation. In this regard, they cite the recent experience of Germany, which has recovered faster than the United States from the worldwide recession (Jacobs, 2012).



To improve the economy and create many jobs, many observers say the federal government needs to follow the example of Western Europe by expanding its role in the economy. (Diego Cambiaso – White House – CC BY-SA 2.0.)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Certain social reforms are necessary to improve aspects of work and the economy.
- Returning tax codes to their rates before the 1980s will help lessen economic inequality.
- Stricter federal and state oversight of corporate behavior is needed to help address corporate crime.
- A greater investment of federal funding in job creation and the raising of taxes for the very wealthy is necessary to create jobs while stimulating the economy.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a brief essay that summarizes any three strategies for improving work and the economy.
2. To what extent, if any, do you think capitalism is to blame for the problems in work and the economy discussed in this chapter? Explain your answer.

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# 10.5: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. Capitalism and socialism are the two primary types of economic systems in the world today. Capitalism involves private ownership, the pursuit of profit, and competition for profit, while socialism involves the collective ownership of goods and resources and efforts for the common good. Several nations practice democratic socialism, which is meant to combine the best of capitalism and socialism.
2. According to functionalism, the economy makes society possible by providing essential goods and services, while work gives people income and self-fulfillment. According to conflict theory, work is alienating, and the economic elite uses its control of the economy to maintain their elite position. Symbolic interactionism focuses on social interaction in the workplace and on how they perceive the work they do.
3. Problems in work and the economy include the following: (a) the loss of jobs and wages; (b) the decline of labor unions; (c) unemployment; (d) corporate misbehavior; (e) rising economic inequality; (f) tax evasion; and (g) workplace crime.
4. Social reforms based on sound social science research are needed to improve work and the economy. Two important reforms would involve stricter enforcement of laws against racial discrimination in hiring and employment and of penalties for corporate crime.

## Using What You Know

You graduated from college a year ago and have begun working in sales for an electronics company. You've become good friends with a coworker, with whom you often "hang out" at bars and the occasional party. However, one day you notice this coworker pocketing a smartphone, and you realize that a theft is occurring. What, if anything, do you do? Explain your answer.

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the work and economy problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Start or join a group that tries to educate the public about economic inequality.
2. Assist a local labor union in its efforts to have safer workplaces.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 11: Health and Medicine


11.1: The Experience of Illness
11.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Illness
11.3: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care
11.4: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care
11.5: Problems of Health in the United States
11.6: Improving Health and Health Care
11.7: End-of-Chapter Material
11.8: Crash Course Video- Health and Medicine


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# 11.1: The Experience of Illness

## The Experience of Illness

Illness, sometimes considered another word for disease, refers to a state of poor health.

### Learning Objectives

Examine the impact of illness in America and the prevalence of diagnosed illness among the population

### Key Points

- Some scholars have maintained a distinction between illness and disease by describing illness as a patient's subjective perception of an objectively defined disease.
- Epidemiology is the scientific study of factors affecting the health and illness of individuals and population.
- Behavioral medicine is an interdisciplinary field of medicine concerned with the development and integration of psychosocial, behavioral, and biomedical knowledge relevant to health and illness.
- The rise of scientific medicine in the past two centuries has altered or replaced many historic health practices.
- Mental illness is a broad generic label for a category of illnesses that may include affective or emotional instability, behavioral dysregulation, and/or cognitive dysfunction or impairment.

### Key Terms

- **scientific medicine**: The rise of scientific medicine in the past two centuries has altered or replaced many historic health practices.
- **behavioral medicine**: Behavioral medicine is an interdisciplinary field of medicine concerned with the development and integration of psychosocial, behavioral and biomedical knowledge relevant to health and illness.
- **epidemiology**: The branch of a science dealing with the spread and control of diseases, computer viruses, concepts, etc. throughout populations or systems.

### Introduction to Illness

Illness, sometimes considered another word for disease, is a state of poor health. Some scholars have maintained a distinction by describing illness as a patient's subjective perception of an objectively defined disease. Conditions of the body or mind that cause pain, dysfunction, or distress can be deemed an illness. Sometimes the term is used broadly to include injuries, disabilities, syndromes, infections, symptoms, deviant behaviors, and atypical variations of structure and function. In other contexts these may be considered distinguishable categories.

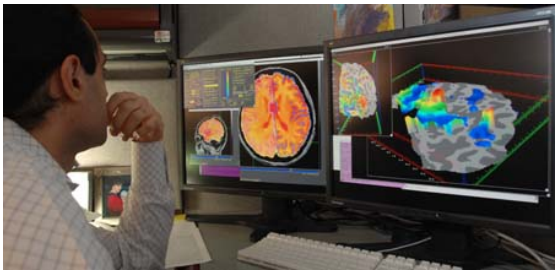
### Epidemiology

Epidemiology is the scientific study of factors affecting the health and illness of individuals and populations; it serves as the foundation and logic for interventions made in the interest of public health and preventive medicine. Behavioral medicine is an interdisciplinary field of medicine concerned with the development and integration of psychosocial, behavioral, and biomedical knowledge relevant to health and illness. According to evolutionary medicine, much illness is not directly caused by an infection or body dysfunction, but is instead a response created by the body. Fever, for example, is not caused directly by bacteria or viruses but by the body raising its normal temperature, which some people believe inhibits the growth of the infectious organism. Evolutionary medicine calls this set of responses "sickness behavior. "

All human societies have beliefs that provide explanations for, and responses to, childbirth, death, and disease. Throughout the world, illness has often been attributed to witchcraft, demons, or the will of the gods—ideas that retain some power within certain cultures and communities. However, the rise of scientific medicine in the past two centuries has altered or replaced many historic health practices.

Mental illness is a broad category of illnesses that may include affective or emotional instability, behavioral dysregulation, and/or cognitive dysfunction or impairment. Specific illnesses known as mental illnesses include major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, to name a few.

Statistics show that more and more people are being diagnosed with mental disorders. The National Institute for Mental Health reports that over 40 million adults are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in a given year, accounting for 18 percent of the population. Other disorders that are prevalent are ADHD (4 percent), mood disorders (9.5 percent) and and autism (1 percent, but quickly rising).



Researcher Test: A researcher studying a part of the human body in search for illness.

## Gender and Health

Disparities in health services play out based on different systems of stratification, such as gender.

## Learning Objectives

Examine the role gender plays in health care services, particularly for women

### Key Points

- The World Health Organization defines gender as the result of socially constructed ideas about the behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs.
- Gender, and particularly the role of women, is widely recognized as vitally important to international development issues.
- Women's dual responsibilities as carers and income earners leaves them suffering from time poverty, and thus unable to access health and education services.
- The Gender-related Development Index (GDI), developed by the United Nations, aims to show the inequalities between men and women in the following areas: long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.
- The Gender-related Development Index (GDI), developed by the United Nations, aims to show the inequalities between men and women in the following areas: long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

### Key Terms

- **gender stratification**: There are a number of ways in which health disparities play out based on different systems of stratification. Researchers also find health disparities based on gender stratification.
- **World Health Organization**: The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) that is concerned with international public health. It was established on April 7, 1948, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and is a member of the United Nations Development Group.
- **international development**: International development or global development is a concept that lacks a universally accepted definition, but it is most used in a holistic and multi-disciplinary context of human development—the development of greater quality of life for humans. It therefore encompasses foreign aid, governance, healthcare, education, poverty reduction, gender equality, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, human rights, environment and issues associated with these.

### The Role of Gender in Health



Immunization for Babies: Immunizations from various diseases have improved health worldwide.

Gender is a range of characteristics used to distinguish between males and females, particularly in the cases of men and women and the masculine and feminine attributes assigned to them. Depending on the context, the discriminating characteristics vary, from sex to social role to gender identity. The World Health Organization defines gender as the result of socially constructed ideas about the behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs. Assigning gender involves taking into account the physiological and biological attributes assigned by nature followed by socially constructed conduct. The social label of being classified into one or the other sex is obligatory to the medical stamp on the birth certificate.

There are a number of ways in which health disparities play out based on different systems of stratification. Researchers also find health disparities based on gender stratification. One study found that women are less likely than men to be recommended for knee replacement surgery, even when they have the same symptoms. While it was unclear what role the sex of the recommending physicians played, the authors of this study encouraged women to challenge their doctors in order to get care equivalent to men.

Gender, and particularly the role of women, is widely recognized as vitally important to international development issues. This often means a focus on gender-equality, ensuring participation, but includes an understanding of the different roles and expectations of the genders within the community. As recognized by the United Nations, women's dual responsibilities as carers and income earners leaves them suffering from time poverty, and thus unable to access health and education services. The Gender-related Development Index (GDI), developed by the United Nations, aims to show the inequalities between men and women in the following areas: long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

## Race and Health

Health disparities refer to gaps in the quality of health and healthcare across racial and ethnic groups.

## Learning Objectives

Discuss the health disparities in the United States based on race and the implications for racial minorities

### Key Points

- Race and health research, often done in the United States, has found both current and historical racial differences in the frequency, treatments, and availability of treatments for several diseases.
- In multiracial societies such as the United States, racial groups differ greatly in regard to social and cultural factors such as socioeconomic status, healthcare, diet, and education.
- There is a controversy regarding race as a method for classifying humans. The continued use of racial categories has been criticized.
- Apart from the general controversy regarding race, some argue that the continued use of racial categories in health care, and as risk factors, could result in increased stereotyping and discrimination in society and health services.

### Key Terms

- **life expectancy**: The amount of time one is expected to live.
- **multiracial societies**: In multiracial societies such as the United States, racial groups differ greatly in regard to social and cultural factors, such as socioeconomic status, healthcare, diet, and education.
- **Health disparities**: Health equity refers to the study of differences in the quality of health and health care across different populations.

### The Role of Race in Health

Health disparities refer to gaps in the quality of health and healthcare across racial and ethnic groups. Race and health research, often done in the United States, has found both current and historical racial differences in the frequency, treatments, and availability of treatments for several diseases. This can add up to significant group differences in variables such as life expectancy. Many explanations for such differences have been argued, including socioeconomic factors, lifestyle, social environment, and access to preventive health-care services, among other environmental differences.

In multiracial societies such as the United States, racial groups differ greatly in regard to social and cultural factors such as socioeconomic status, healthcare, diet, and education. There is also the presence of racism which some see as a very important explaining factor. Some argue that for many diseases racial differences would disappear if all environmental factors could be controlled for. Race-based medicine is the term for medicines that are targeted at specific ethnic clusters, which are shown to have a propensity for a certain disorder. Critics are concerned that the trend of research on race specific pharmaceutical treatments will result in inequitable access to pharmaceutical innovation, and smaller minority groups may be ignored.

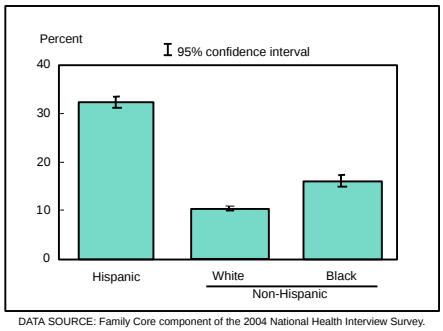
Health disparities based on race also exist. Similar to the difference in life expectancy found between the rich and the poor, affluent white women live 14 years longer in the U.S. (81.1 years) than poor black men (66.9 years). There is also evidence that blacks receive less aggressive medical care than whites, similar to what happens with women compared to men. Black men describe their visits to doctors as stressful, and report that physicians do not provide them with adequate information to implement the recommendations they are given.

Another contributor to the overall worse health of blacks is the incident of HIV/AIDS; the rate of new AIDS cases is ten times higher among blacks than whites, and blacks are 20 times as likely to have HIV/AIDS as are whites. Health disparities are well documented in minority populations such as African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. When compared to European Americans, these minority groups have higher incidence of chronic diseases, higher mortality, and poorer health outcomes. Minorities also have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, and infant mortality than whites. American ethnic groups can exhibit substantial average differences in disease incidence, disease severity, disease progression, and response to treatment.

Infant mortality is another place where racial disparities are quite evident. In fact, infant mortality rates are 14 of every 1000 births for black, non-Hispanics compared to 6 of every 1000 births for whites. Another disparity is access to health care and insurance. In California, more than half (59 percent) of Hispanics go without health care. Also, almost 25 percent of Latinos do not have health insurance, as opposed to 10 percent of Whites.

There is a controversy regarding race as a method for classifying humans. The continued use of racial categories has been criticized. Apart from the general controversy regarding race, some argue that the continued use of racial categories in health care, and as risk factors, could result in increased stereotyping and discrimination in society and health services. There is general agreement that a goal of health-related genetics should be to move past the weak surrogate relationships of racial health disparity and get to the root causes of health and disease. This includes research which strives to analyze human genetic variation in smaller groups across the world.

**Figure 1.3. Age- sex-adjusted percent of persons of all ages without health insurance coverage, by race/ethnicity: United States, 2004**




DATA SOURCE: Family Core component of the 2004 National Health Interview Survey.

Percentage Without Insurance, Based on Race: Age-sex adjusted percent of persons of all ages without health insurance coverage, by race/ethnicity, United States, 2004

## Social Class and Health

Social class has a significant impact on one's physical health, ability to receive adequate medical care and nutrition, and life expectancy.

### Learning Objectives

Discuss the role social class plays in access to adequate health care and health inequality

### Key Points

- While gender and race play significant factors in explaining healthcare inequality in the United States, socioeconomic status is the greatest determining factor in an individual's level of access to healthcare.
- Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions, and their distribution among the population, that influence individual and group differences in health status.
- They are risk factors found in one's living and working conditions (such as the distribution of income, wealth, influence, and power), rather than individual factors (such as behavioral risk factors or genetics) that influence the risk for a disease, injury, or vulnerability to disease or injury.
- Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions, and their distribution among the population, that influence individual and group differences in health status.
- Health inequality is the term used in a number of countries to refer to those instances whereby the health of two demographic groups (not necessarily ethnic or racial groups) differs despite comparative access to health care services.

### Key Terms

- **social determinants of health**: The economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status.
- **health inequality**: The unequal distribution of environmental health hazards and access to health services between demographic groups, including social classes.

### The Role of Social Class in Health

A person's social class has a significant impact on their physical health, their ability to receive adequate medical care and nutrition, and their life expectancy. While gender and race play significant factors in explaining healthcare inequality in the United States, socioeconomic status is the greatest determining factor in an individual's level of access to healthcare.

Individuals of lower socioeconomic status in the United States experience a wide array of health problems as a result of their economic status. They are unable to use health care as often, and when they do it is of lower quality, even though they generally tend to experience a much higher rate of health issues. Furthermore, individuals of lower socioeconomic status have less education and often perform jobs without significant health and benefits plans, whereas individuals of higher standing are more likely to have jobs that provide medical insurance. Consequently, they have higher rates of infant mortality, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and disabling physical injuries.

Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions, and their distribution among the population, that influence individual and group differences in health status. They are risk factors found in one's living and working conditions (such as the distribution of income, wealth, influence, and power), rather than individual factors (such as behavioral risk factors or genetics) that influence the risk for a disease, injury, or vulnerability to disease or injury. According to some viewpoints, these distributions of social determinants are shaped by public policies that reflect the influence of prevailing political ideologies of those governing a jurisdiction.

Health inequality is the term used in a number of countries to refer to those instances whereby the health of two demographic groups (not necessarily ethnic or racial groups) differs despite comparative access to health care services. Such examples include higher rates of morbidity and mortality for those in lower occupational classes than those in higher occupational classes, and the increased likelihood of those from ethnic minorities being diagnosed with a mental health disorder.

## Education and Health

Health literacy is an individual's ability to read, understand and use healthcare information to make decisions about treatment.

### Learning Objectives

Demonstrate the impact of health literacy on access to and understanding of health care issues, especially for certain social groups

### Key Points

- Health literacy is of continued and increasing concern for health professionals, as it is a primary factor behind health disparities.

- While problems with health literacy are not limited to minority groups, the problem can be more pronounced in these groups than in whites due to socioeconomic and educational factors.
- Reading level, numeracy level, language barriers, cultural appropriateness, format and style, sentence structure, use of illustrations, scope of intervention, and numerous other factors will affect how easily health information is understood and followed.
- The mismatch between a clinician's level of communication and a patient's ability to understand can lead to medication errors and adverse medical outcomes.
- Health care professionals (doctors, nurses, public health workers) can also have poor health literacy skills, such as a reduced ability to clearly explain health issues to patients and the public.
- The eHealth literacy model is also referred to as the Lily model. This model includes basic literacy, computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, science literacy, and health literacy.

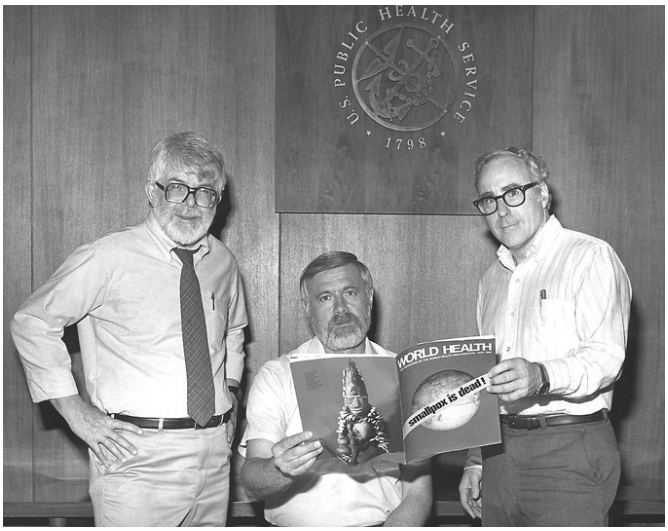
### Key Terms

- **the eHealth literacy model**: The eHealth literacy model is also referred to as the Lily model, which incorporates the following literacies, each of which are instrumental to the overall understanding and measurement of eHealth literacy: basic literacy, computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, science literacy, health literacy.
- **language barrier**: A figurative phrase for the difficulties faced when people who have no language in common attempt to communicate with each other.
- **Health literacy**: Health literacy is an individual's ability to read, understand and use healthcare information to make decisions and follow instructions for treatment.

Health literacy is an individual's ability to read, understand, and use healthcare information to make decisions and follow instructions for treatment. Health literacy is of continued and increasing concern for health professionals, as it is a primary factor behind health disparities. While problems with health literacy are not limited to minority groups, the problem can be more pronounced in these groups than in whites due to socioeconomic and educational factors.

There are many factors that determine the health literacy level of health education materials or other health interventions. Reading level, numeracy level, language barriers, cultural appropriateness, format and style, sentence structure, use of illustrations, scope of intervention, and numerous other factors will affect how easily health information is understood and followed. The mismatch between a clinician's level of communication and a patient's ability to understand can lead to medication errors and adverse medical outcomes. The lack of health literacy affects all segments of the population, although it is disproportionate in certain demographic groups, such as the elderly, ethnic minorities, recent immigrants and persons with low general literacy. Health literacy skills are not only a problem in the public. Health care professionals (doctors, nurses, public health workers) can also have poor health literacy skills, such as a reduced ability to clearly explain health issues to patients and the public.

Due to the increasing influence of the internet for information-seeking and health information distribution purposes, eHealth literacy has become an important topic of research in recent years. The eHealth literacy model is also referred to as the Lily model, which incorporates the following literacies, each of which are instrumental to the overall understanding and measurement of eHealth literacy: basic literacy, computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, science literacy, health literacy.




Directors of Global Smallpox Eradication Program: Three former directors of the Global Smallpox Eradication Program read the news that smallpox had been globally eradicated in 1980.

## Women in Medicine

Historically and in many parts of the world, women's participation in the profession of medicine has been significantly restricted.

### Learning Objectives

Analyze the role women play in the medical field and how gender parity affects women's choices when it comes to medicine

### Key Points

- Women's informal practice of medicine in the role of caregivers and in the allied health professions has been widespread.
- The practice of medicine remains disproportionately male overall. In industrialized nations, the recent parity in gender

of medical students has not yet trickled into parity in practice.
- Most countries now guarantee equal access by women to medical education. However, not all ensure equal employment opportunities, and gender parity has yet to be achieved within the medical specialties around the world.

### Key Terms

- **parity**: Equality; comparability of strength or intensity.

### The Role of Women in Medicine

Historically and in many parts of the world, women's participation in medicine (as physicians, for instance) has been significantly restricted, although women's informal practice of medicine in the role of caregivers and in the allied health professions has been widespread. Most countries of the world now guarantee equal access by women to medical education, although not all ensure equal employment opportunities. Gender parity has yet to be achieved within the medical specialties around the world.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century in industrialized nations, women have made significant gains, but have yet to achieve parity throughout the medical profession. Women's participation in medical professions was limited by law and practice during the decades while medicine was professionalizing. However, women kept practicing medicine in the allied health fields (nursing, midwifery), making significant gains in medical education and medical work during the 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ centuries. Women continue to dominate nursing in the 20$^{th}$ century. In 2000, 94.6% of registered nurses in the United States were women.

The practice of medicine remains disproportionately male overall. In some industrialized nations, women have achieved parity in medical school. Since 2003, women have formed the majority of the U.S. medical student body. However, they have yet to achieve parity in practice. In many developing nations, neither medical school nor practice approach gender parity. Moreover, there are skews within the medical profession. For example, some medical specialties like surgery are significantly male-dominated, while other specialties are or becoming significantly female-dominated.



Monique Frize, née Aubry (born 1942) is a Canadian academic and biomedical engineer known for her expertise in medical instrumentation and decision-support systems: At the beginning of the 21st century, women in industrialized nations have made significant gains, but have yet to achieve parity throughout the medical profession. In some industrialized countries, women have achieved parity in medical school. Women have formed the majority of the United States medical student body since 2003. In 2007-2008, women accounted for 49% of medical school applicants and 48.3% of those accepted. According to the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) 48.3% (16,838) of medical degrees awarded in the US in 2009-10 were earned by women, an increase from 26.8% in 1982-3.

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# 11.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Illness

## The Functionalist Perspective

In the functionalist model, Parsons argued that illness is a form of deviance that disturbs the social function of a society.

**Learning Objectives**

Discuss the functionalist perspective on illness in society, specifically the role the sick play in a specific society and how that role affects others

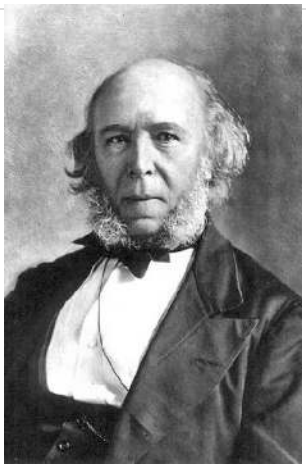
### Key Points

- Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements (namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions ), much like the interacting organs within the human body.
- Prominent functionalist theorists include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, Robert Merton, and Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell.
- Functionalism is a framework that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.
- Functionalists argue that a sick individual is not a productive member of society; therefore this deviance needs to be policed. This is the role of the medical profession.
- Structural functionalism reached the peak of its influence in the 1940s and 1950s, and by the 1960s was in rapid decline, replaced by conflict-oriented approaches in Europe and more recently by structuralism.

### Key Terms

- **deviance**: Actions or behaviors that violate formal and informal cultural norms, such as laws or the norm that discourages public nose-picking.
- **structuralism**: A theory of sociology that views elements of society as part of a cohesive, self-supporting structure.

Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism, is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole. This approach looks at both social structure and social functions. Prominent functionalist theorists include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore, Robert Merton, and Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell.



Herbert Spencer: Herbert Spencer was a prominent functionalist sociologist, who likened the functioning parts of society as organs within a body.

Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as “organs” that work toward the proper functioning of the “body” as a whole. For Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), an American sociologist, “structural-functionalism” came to describe a particular stage in the methodological development of social science, rather than a specific school of thought.

### The Sick Role

Sick role is a term used in medical sociology regarding sickness and the rights and obligations of the affected. It is a concept created by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons in 1951. Parsons was a functionalist sociologist who argued that being sick means that the sufferer enters a role of “sanctioned deviance”. This is because, from a functionalist perspective, a sick individual is not a productive member of society. Therefore this deviance needs to be policed, which is the role of the medical profession.

In the functionalist model, Parsons argued that the best way to understand illness sociologically is to view it as a form of deviance that disturbs the social function of the society. The general idea is that the individual who has fallen ill is not only physically sick, but now adheres to the specifically patterned social role of being sick. “Being Sick” is not simply a “condition”; it contains within itself customary rights and obligations based on the social norms that surround it.

The theory outlined two rights of a sick person and two obligations. The sick person’s rights are twofold: the first one is being exempt from normal social roles; the second one is not being responsible for their condition. Conversely, the sick person’s obligations included trying to get well and cooperating

with the medical professionals. Parsons concluded that there are three versions of the sick role: conditional, unconditional legitimate, and illegitimate (a condition stigmatized by others).

### Critics of the Functionalist Perspective

Critics of Parsons and the functionalist perspective point to different flaws they see with his argument. The model assumes that the individual voluntarily accepts the sick role. It also assumes that the individual may not comply with expectations of the sick role, may not give up social obligations, may resist dependency, and may avoid the public sick role if their illness is stigmatized. The model also blames the sick, where "rights" do not always apply.

Structural functionalism reached the peak of its influence in the 1940s and 1950s, and by the 1960s was in rapid decline. By the 1980s, its place was taken in Europe by more conflict-oriented approaches, and more recently by "structuralism". While some of the critical approaches also gained popularity in the United States, the mainstream of the discipline has instead shifted to a myriad of empirically-oriented middle-range theories with no overarching theoretical orientation. To most sociologists, functionalism is now obsolete.

## The Conflict Perspective

Conflict theory argues that the economic and political structures of a society create social divisions, inequalities, and conflicts.

**Learning Objectives**

Examine the differing views on conflict theory from various sociologists, such as Karl Marx and C. Wright Mills

### Key Points

- Conflict theories are perspectives in social science that emphasize the social, political, or material inequality of a social group.
- Of the classical founders of social science, conflict theory is most commonly associated with Karl Marx, who posited that capitalism would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction.
- Marx advocated for the rejection of false consciousness (explanations of social problems as the shortcomings of individuals rather than the flaws of society ) and the claiming of class consciousness (workers' recognition of themselves as a class unified in opposition to the capitalist system).
- The Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz and the American sociologist Lester F. Ward approached conflict from a comprehensive anthropological and evolutionary point-of-view.
- C. Wright Mills has been called the founder of modern conflict theory. In Mills's view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources.
- Conflict theory is most often associated with Marxism, but may also be associated with other perspectives such as critical theory, feminist theory, postmodern theory, queer theory, and race -conflict theory.

### Key Terms

- **functionalism**: Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism, is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.
- **military-industrial complex**: The armed forces of a nation together with the industries that supply their weapons and materiel.
- **capitalism**: A socio-economic system based on private property rights, including the private ownership of resources or capital, with economic decisions made largely through the operation of a market unregulated by the state.

Conflict theories are perspectives in social science that emphasize the social, political, or material inequality of a social group, that critique the broad socio-political system, or that otherwise detract from structural functionalism and ideological conservatism. Sociologists in the tradition of conflict theory argue that the economic and political structures of a society create social divisions, classes, hierarchies, antagonisms and conflicts that produce and reproduce inequalities. Certain conflict theories set out to highlight the ideological aspects inherent in traditional thought. While many of these perspectives hold parallels, conflict theory does not refer to a unified school of thought, and should not be confused with, for instance, peace and conflict studies.

Of the classical founders of social science, conflict theory is most commonly associated with Karl Marx (1818–1883). Based on a dialectical materialist account of history, Marxism posited that capitalism, like previous socioeconomic systems, would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. Marx ushered in radical change, advocating proletarian revolution and freedom from the ruling classes. At the same time, Karl Marx was aware that most of the people living in capitalist societies did not see how the system shaped the entire operation of society. Just like how we see private property, or the right to pass that property onto our children as natural, many of members in capitalistic societies see the rich as having earned their wealth through hard work and education, while seeing the poor as lacking in skill and initiative. Marx rejected this type of thinking and termed it false consciousness, which involves explanations of social problems as the shortcomings of individuals rather than the flaws of society. Marx wanted to replace this kind of thinking with something Engels termed class consciousness, which is when workers recognize themselves as a class unified in opposition to

capitalists and ultimately to the capitalist system itself. In general, Marx wanted the working class to rise up against the capitalists and overthrow the capitalist system.




Healthcare reform supporter: Karl Marx wanted to replace false consciousness with class consciousness, in which the working class would rise up against the capitalist system.

Two early conflict theorists were the Polish-Austrian sociologist and political theorist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) and the American sociologist and paleontologist Lester F. Ward (1841–1913). Although Ward and Gumplowicz developed their theories independently, they had much in common and approached conflict from a comprehensive anthropological and evolutionary point-of-view as opposed to Marx's rather exclusive focus on economic factors.

C. Wright Mills has been called the founder of modern conflict theory. In Mills's view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the "unequal distribution of power and resources in the society. " Mills argued that the interests of the power elite of American society (for example, the military-industrial complex) were opposed to those of the people. He theorized that the policies of the power elite would result in the "increased escalation of conflict, production of weapons of mass destruction, and possibly the annihilation of the human race. "

Conflict theory is most commonly associated with Marxism, but as a reaction to functionalism and the positivist method, it may also be associated with a number of other perspectives, including critical theory, feminist theory, postmodern theory, post-structural theory, postcolonial theory, queer theory, world systems theory, and race-conflict theory.

## The Interactionist Perspective

According to theorists working in the symbolic interactionist perspective, health and illness are socially constructed.

### Learning Objectives

Explain and give examples of social constructions of health according to the symbolic interactionist perspective

### Key Points

- Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self, and how they define situations of co-presence with others.
- Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the development of an interactive relationship and mutual construction of knowledge between researcher and participants.
- Medicalization of deviance refers to the process that changes "bad" behavior into "sick" behavior.
- Demedicalization refers to the process when "sick" behavior is normalized again.

### Key Terms

- **medicalization of deviance**: The medicalization of deviance refers to the process that changes "bad" behavior into "sick" behavior.
- **demedicalization**: Demedicalization refers to the process when "sick" behavior is normalized again.
- **symbolic interactionist**: Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self, and how they define situations of co-presence with others.

According to theorists working in the symbolic interactionist perspective, health and illness are socially constructed. Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self (or "identity"), and how they define situations of co-presence with others. One of the perspective's central ideas is that people act as they do because of how they define situations.

Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the development of an interactive relationship and mutual construction of knowledge between researcher and participants. Symbolic interactionists believe that objects have meaning only through people's interactions with them in the environment, that the meanings people have for things develops through social interaction and that those meanings are handled and modified by a constant and ongoing interpretive process by individuals.

An example of the social construction of health the the Rate of Perceived Exertion, or RPE. This scale measures the intensity of a person's workout on a scale of 0 to 10. This scale was developed by Gunnar Borg, and it is used by medical professionals to assess a person's health in a variety of ways.

In essence, interactionists focus on the specific meanings and causes people attribute to illness. The term "medicalization" of deviance" refers to the process that changes "bad" behavior into "sick" behavior. A related process is "demedicalization", in which "sick" behavior is normalized again. Medicalization and demedicalization affect who responds to the patient, how people

respond to the patient, and how people view the personal responsibility of the patient.

An example of medicalization is illustrated by the history of how our society views alcohol and alcoholism. During the 19th century, people who drank too much were considered "bad, lazy people. " They were called drunks, and it was not uncommon for them to be arrested or run out of a town. Drunks were not treated in a sympathetic way because, at that time, it was thought that it was their own fault that they could not stop drinking. During the latter half of the 20th century, however, people who drank too much were increasingly defined as people with a disease or a genetic predisposition to addiction. With alcoholism defined as a disease and not a personal choice, alcoholics came to be viewed with more compassion and understanding. Thus, "badness" was transformed into "sickness".




Alcoholism: In this engraving from the 19th century, "King Alcohol" is shown with a skeleton on a barrel of alcohol. The words "poverty," "misery," "crime," and "death" hang in the air behind him.

While interactionism does acknowledge the subjective nature of diagnosis, it is important to remember who benefits the most when a behavior becomes defined as illness. Pharmaceutical companies make billions of dollars treating illnesses such as fatigue, insomnia, and hyperactivity that may not actually be illnesses in need of treatment, but opportunities for companies to make more money.

## The Labeling Approach

The labeling approach to health and illness claims that mental illness is manifested solely as a result of societal influence.

### Learning Objectives

Analyze the pros and cons of labeling theory, especially the implications it has for the "mentally ill" and HIV/AIDS patients

### Key Points

- Developed by sociologists during the 1960s, labeling theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act. The theory focuses on the tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms.
- The social construction of deviant behavior plays an important role in the labeling process that occurs in society.
- Labeling theory was first applied to the term "mentally ill" in 1966 when Thomas J. Scheff published *Being Mentally Ill*. Scheff challenged common perceptions of mental illness by claiming that mental illness is manifested solely as a result of societal influence.
- Hard labeling refers to those who argue that mental illness does not exist. They note the slight deviance from the norms of society that cause people to believe in mental illness.
- Soft labeling refers to people who believe that mental illnesses do, in fact, exist. Unlike the supporters of hard labeling, soft labeling supporters believe that mental illnesses are not entirely socially constructed.

### Key Terms

- **self-fulfilling prophecy**: a prediction that, by being voiced, causes itself to come true
- **social construction**: A concept or practice that is the construct (or artifact) of a particular group, meaning that the concept or practice is understood differently by various groups and institutions.
- **deviance**: Actions or behaviors that violate formal and informal cultural norms, such as laws or the norm that discourages public nose-picking.

### Labeling Theory on Health and Illness

Labeling theory is closely related to social-construction and symbolic-interaction analysis. Developed by sociologists during the 1960s, labeling theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act. The theory focuses on the tendency of majorities to *negatively label* minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms. The theory is concerned with how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It is associated with the concepts of self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping.



1857 Lithograph by Armand Gautier: Shows personifications of dementia, megalomania, acute mania, melancholia, idiocy, hallucination, erotic mania and paralysis in the gardens of the Hospice de la Salpêtrière. A mental disorder or mental illness is a psychological pattern, potentially reflected in behavior, that is generally associated with distress or disability, and which is not considered part of normal development of a person's culture.

The social construction of deviant behavior plays an important role in the labeling process that occurs in society. This process involves not only the labeling of criminally deviant behavior—behavior that does not fit socially constructed norms—but also labeling that reflects stereotyped or stigmatized behavior of the "mentally ill." Hard labeling refers to those who argue that mental illness does not exist; it is merely deviance from the norms of society that cause people to believe in mental illness. Mental illnesses are socially constructed illnesses and psychotic disorders do not exist. Soft labeling refers to people who believe that mental illnesses do, in fact, exist, and are not entirely socially constructed.

Labeling theory was first applied to the term "mentally ill" in 1966 when Thomas J. Scheff published *Being Mentally Ill*. Scheff challenged common perceptions of mental illness by claiming that mental illness is manifested solely as a result of societal influence. He argued that society views certain actions as deviant. In order to come to terms with and understand these actions, society often places the label of mental illness on those who exhibit them. Certain expectations are placed on these individuals and, over time, they unconsciously change their behavior to fulfill them. Criteria for different mental illnesses, he believed, are not consistently fulfilled by those who are diagnosed with them because all of these people suffer from the same disorder. Criteria are simply fulfilled because the "mentally ill" believe they are supposed to act a certain way—over time, they come to do so.

Another issue involving labeling was the rise of HIV/AIDS cases among gay men in the 1980s. HIV/AIDS was labeled a disease of the homosexual and further pushed people into believing homosexuality was deviant. Even today, some people believe contracting HIV/AIDS is punishment for deviant and inappropriate sexual behaviors.

Labels, while they can be stigmatizing, can also lead those who bear them down the road to proper treatment and recovery. The label of "mentally ill" may help a person seek help, such as psychotherapy or medication. If one believes that being "mentally ill" is more than just believing one should fulfill a set of diagnostic criteria, then one would probably also agree that there are some who are labeled "mentally ill" who need help. It has been claimed that this could not happen if society did not have a way to categorize them, although there are actually plenty of approaches to these phenomena that don't use categorical classifications and diagnostic terms (for example, spectrum or continuum models). Here, people vary along different dimensions, and everyone falls at different points on each dimension.

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# 11.3: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care

**Learning Objective**

1. List the assumptions of the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives on health and medicine.

Before discussing these perspectives, we must first define three key concepts—health, medicine, and health care—that lie at the heart of their explanations and of this chapter's discussion. Health refers to the extent of a person's physical, mental, and social well-being. As this definition suggests, health is a multidimensional concept. Although the three dimensions of health just listed often affect each other, it is possible for someone to be in good physical health and poor mental health, or vice versa. Medicine refers to the social institution that seeks to prevent, diagnose, and treat illness and to promote health in its various dimensions. This social institution in the United States is vast, to put it mildly, and involves more than 11 million people (physicians, nurses, dentists, therapists, medical records technicians, and many other occupations). Finally, health care refers to the provision of medical services to prevent, diagnose, and treat health problems.

With these definitions in mind, we now turn to sociological explanations of health and health care. As usual, the major sociological perspectives that we have discussed throughout this book offer different types of explanations, but together they provide us with a more comprehensive understanding than any one approach can do by itself. Table 13.1 "Theory Snapshot" summarizes what they say.

Table 13.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical perspective | Major assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | Good health and effective medical care are essential for the smooth functioning of society. Patients must perform the "sick role" in order to be perceived as legitimately ill and to be exempt from their normal obligations. The physician-patient relationship is hierarchical: The physician provides instructions, and the patient needs to follow them. |
| Conflict theory | Social inequality characterizes the quality of health and the quality of health care. People from disadvantaged social backgrounds are more likely to become ill and to receive inadequate health care. Partly to increase their incomes, physicians have tried to control the practice of medicine and to define social problems as medical problems. |
| Symbolic interactionism | Health and illness are *social constructions*: Physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions only if they are defined as such by a society. Physicians "manage the situation" to display their authority and medical knowledge. |

## The Functionalist Approach

As conceived by Talcott Parsons (1951), the functionalist perspective emphasizes that good health and effective medical care are essential for a society's ability to function. Ill health impairs our ability to perform our roles in society, and if too many people are unhealthy, society's functioning and stability suffer. This was especially true for premature death, said Parsons, because it prevents individuals from fully carrying out all their social roles and thus represents a "poor return" to society for the various costs of pregnancy, birth, child care, and socialization of the individual who ends up dying early. Poor medical care is likewise dysfunctional for society, as people who are ill face greater difficulty in becoming healthy and people who are healthy are more likely to become ill.

For a person to be considered *legitimately* sick, said Parsons, several expectations must be met. He referred to these expectations as the sick role. First, sick people should not be perceived as having caused their own health problem. If we eat high-fat food, become obese, and have a heart attack, we evoke less sympathy than if we had practiced good nutrition and maintained a proper weight. If

someone is driving drunk and smashes into a tree, there is much less sympathy than if the driver had been sober and skidded off the road in icy weather.

Second, sick people must want to get well. If they do not want to get well or, worse yet, are perceived as faking their illness or malingering after becoming healthier, they are no longer considered legitimately ill by the people who know them or, more generally, by society itself.

Third, sick people are expected to have their illness confirmed by a physician or other health-care professional and to follow the professional's instructions in order to become well. If a sick person fails to do so, she or he again loses the right to perform the sick role.



Talcott Parsons wrote that for a person to be perceived as legitimately ill, several expectations, called the sick role, must be met. These expectations include the perception that the person did not cause her or his own health problem. (Nathalie Babineau-Griffith – grand-maman's blanket – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

If all these expectations are met, said Parsons, sick people are treated as sick by their family, their friends, and other people they know, and they become exempt from their normal obligations to all these people. Sometimes they are even told to stay in bed when they want to remain active.

Physicians also have a role to perform, said Parsons. First and foremost, they have to diagnose the person's illness, decide how to treat it, and help the person become well. To do so, they need the cooperation of the patient, who must answer the physician's questions accurately and follow the physician's instructions. Parsons thus viewed the physician-patient relationship as hierarchical: the physician gives the orders (or, more accurately, provides advice and instructions), and the patient follows them.

Parsons was certainly right in emphasizing the importance of individuals' good health for society's health, but his perspective has been criticized for several reasons. First, his idea of the sick role applies more to acute (short-term) illness than to chronic (long-term) illness. Although much of his discussion implies a person temporarily enters a sick role and leaves it soon after following adequate medical care, people with chronic illnesses can be locked into a sick role for a very long time or even permanently. Second, Parsons's discussion ignores the fact, mentioned earlier, that our social backgrounds affect the likelihood of becoming ill and the quality of medical care we receive. Third, Parsons wrote approvingly of the hierarchy implicit in the physician-patient relationship. Many experts say today that patients need to reduce this hierarchy by asking more questions of their physicians and by taking a more active role in maintaining their health. To the extent that physicians do not always provide the best medical care, the hierarchy that Parsons favored is at least partly to blame.

## The Conflict Approach

The conflict approach emphasizes inequality in the quality of health and of health-care delivery (Weitz, 2013). As noted earlier, the quality of health and health care differs greatly around the world and within the United States. Society's inequities along social class, race and ethnicity, and gender lines are reproduced in our health and health care. People from disadvantaged social backgrounds are more likely to become ill, and once they do become ill, inadequate health care makes it more difficult for them to become well. As we will see, the evidence of disparities in health and health care is vast and dramatic.

The conflict approach also critiques efforts by physicians over the decades to control the practice of medicine and to define various social problems as medical ones. Physicians' motivation for doing so has been both good and bad. On the good side, they have believed they are the most qualified professionals to diagnose problems and to treat people who have these problems. On the negative side, they have also recognized that their financial status will improve if they succeed in characterizing social problems as medical problems and in monopolizing the treatment of these problems. Once these problems become "medicalized," their possible social roots and thus potential solutions are neglected.

Several examples illustrate conflict theory's criticism. Alternative medicine is becoming increasingly popular, but so has criticism of it by the medical establishment. Physicians may honestly feel that medical alternatives are inadequate, ineffective, or even dangerous, but they also recognize that the use of these alternatives is financially harmful to their own practices. Eating disorders also illustrate conflict theory's criticism. Many of the women and girls who have eating disorders receive help from a physician, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or another health-care professional. Although this care is often very helpful, the definition of eating disorders as a medical problem nonetheless provides a good source of income for the professionals who treat it and obscures its cultural roots in society's standard of beauty for women (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008).

Obstetrical care provides another example. In most of human history, midwives or their equivalent were the people who helped pregnant women deliver their babies. In the nineteenth century, physicians claimed they were better trained than midwives and won legislation giving them authority to deliver babies. They may have honestly felt that midwives were inadequately trained, but they also fully recognized that obstetrical care would be quite lucrative (Ehrenreich & English, 2005).

In a final example, many hyperactive children are now diagnosed with ADHD, or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. A generation or more ago, they would have been considered merely as overly active. After Ritalin, a drug that reduces hyperactivity, was developed, their behavior came to be considered a medical problem and the ADHD diagnosis was increasingly applied, and tens of thousands of children went to physicians' offices and were given Ritalin or similar drugs. The definition of their behavior as a medical problem was very lucrative for physicians and for the company that developed Ritalin, and it also obscured the possible roots of their behavior in inadequate parenting, stultifying schools, or even gender socialization, as most hyperactive kids are boys (Conrad, 2008; Rao & Seaton, 2010).

Critics say the conflict approach's assessment of health and medicine is overly harsh and its criticism of physicians' motivation far too cynical. Scientific medicine has greatly improved the health of people around the world. Although physicians are certainly motivated, as many people are, by economic considerations, their efforts to extend their scope into previously nonmedical areas also stem from honest beliefs that people's health and lives will improve if these efforts succeed. Certainly there is some truth in this criticism of the conflict approach, but the evidence of inequality in health and medicine and of the negative aspects of the medical establishment's motivation for extending its reach remains compelling.

## The Symbolic Interactionist Approach

The symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes that health and illness are *social constructions*. This means that various physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions only if they are defined as such by a society and its members (Buckser, 2009; Lorber & Moore, 2002).Buckser, A. (2009). Institutions, agency, and illness in the making of Tourette syndrome. *Human Organization*, *68*(3), 293–306; Lorber, J., & Moore, L. J. (2002). *Gender and the social construction of illness* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. The ADHD example just discussed also illustrates symbolic interactionist theory's concerns, as a behavior that was not previously considered an illness came to be defined as one after the development of Ritalin. In another example first discussed in Chapter 7, in the late 1800s opium use was quite common in the United States, as opium derivatives were included in all sorts of over-the-counter products. Opium use was considered neither a major health nor legal problem. That changed by the end of the century, as prejudice against Chinese Americans led to the banning of the opium dens (similar to today's bars) they frequented, and calls for the banning of opium led to federal legislation early in the twentieth century that banned most opium products except by prescription (Musto, 2002).Musto, D. F. (Ed.). (2002). *Drugs in America: A documentary history*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

In a more current example, an attempt to redefine obesity is now under way in the United States. Obesity is a known health risk, but a "fat pride" or "fat acceptance" movement composed mainly of heavy individuals is arguing that obesity's health risks are exaggerated and calling attention to society's discrimination against overweight people. Although such discrimination is certainly unfortunate, critics say the movement is going too far in trying to minimize obesity's risks (Diamond, 2011).Diamond, A. (2011). Acceptance of fat as the norm is a cause for concern. *Nursing Standard*, *25*(38), 28–28.

The symbolic interactionist approach has also provided important studies of the interaction between patients and health-care professionals. Consciously or not, physicians "manage the situation" to display their authority and medical knowledge. Patients usually have to wait a long time for the physician to show up, and the physician is often in a white lab coat; the physician is also often addressed as "Doctor," while patients are often called by their first name. Physicians typically use complex medical terms to describe a patient's illness instead of the more simple terms used by laypeople and the patients themselves.

Management of the situation is perhaps especially important during a gynecological exam, as first discussed in Chapter 12. When the physician is a man, this situation is fraught with potential embarrassment and uneasiness because a man is examining and touching a woman's genital area. Under these circumstances, the physician must act in a purely professional manner. He must indicate no personal interest in the woman's body and must instead treat the exam no differently from any other type of exam. To further "desex" the situation and reduce any potential uneasiness, a female nurse is often present during the exam.

Critics fault the symbolic interactionist approach for implying that no illnesses have objective reality. Many serious health conditions do exist and put people at risk for their health regardless of what they or their society thinks. Critics also say the approach neglects the effects of social inequality for health and illness. Despite these possible faults, the symbolic interactionist approach reminds us that health and illness do have a subjective as well as an objective reality.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A sociological understanding emphasizes the influence of people's social backgrounds on the quality of their health and health care. A society's culture and social structure also affect health and health care.
- The functionalist approach emphasizes that good health and effective health care are essential for a society's ability to function, and it views the physician-patient relationship as hierarchical.
- The conflict approach emphasizes inequality in the quality of health and in the quality of health care.
- The interactionist approach emphasizes that health and illness are social constructions; physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions only if they are defined as such by a society and its members.

### FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Which approach—functionalist, conflict, or symbolic interactionist—do you most favor regarding how you understand health and health care? Explain your answer.
2. Think of the last time you visited a physician or another health-care professional. In what ways did this person come across as an authority figure possessing medical knowledge? In formulating your answer, think about the person's clothing, body position and body language, and other aspects of nonverbal communication.

## The Symbolic Interactionist Approach

The symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes that health and illness are *social constructions*. This means that various physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions only if they are defined as such by a society and its members (Buckser, 2009; Lorber & Moore, 2002). The ADHD example just discussed also illustrates symbolic interactionist theory's concerns, as a behavior that was not previously considered an illness came to be defined as one after the development of Ritalin. In another example first discussed in Chapter 7 "Alcohol and Other Drugs", in the late 1800s opium use was quite common in the United States, as opium derivatives were included in all sorts of over-the-counter products. Opium use was considered neither a major health nor legal problem. That changed by the end of the century, as prejudice against Chinese Americans led to the banning of the opium dens (similar to today's bars) they frequented, and calls for the banning of opium led to federal legislation early in the twentieth century that banned most opium products except by prescription (Musto, 2002).

In a more current example, an attempt to redefine obesity is now under way in the United States. Obesity is a known health risk, but a "fat pride" or "fat acceptance" movement composed mainly of heavy individuals is arguing that obesity's health risks are exaggerated and calling attention to society's discrimination against overweight people. Although such discrimination is certainly unfortunate, critics say the movement is going too far in trying to minimize obesity's risks (Diamond, 2011).

The symbolic interactionist approach has also provided important studies of the interaction between patients and health-care professionals. Consciously or not, physicians "manage the situation" to display their authority and medical knowledge. Patients usually have to wait a long time for the physician to show up, and the physician is also

often addressed as “Doctor,” while patients are often called by their first name. Physicians typically use complex medical terms to describe a patient’s illness instead of the more simple terms used by laypeople and the patients themselves.

Management of the situation is perhaps especially important during a gynecological exam, as first discussed in Chapter 12 “Work and the Economy”. When the physician is a man, this situation is fraught with potential embarrassment and uneasiness because a man is examining and touching a woman’s genital area. Under these circumstances, the physician must act in a purely professional manner. He must indicate no personal interest in the woman’s body and must instead treat the exam no differently from any other type of exam. To further “desex” the situation and reduce any potential uneasiness, a female nurse is often present during the exam.

Critics fault the symbolic interactionist approach for implying that no illnesses have objective reality. Many serious health conditions do exist and put people at risk for their health regardless of what they or their society thinks. Critics also say the approach neglects the effects of social inequality for health and illness. Despite these possible faults, the symbolic interactionist approach reminds us that health and illness do have a subjective as well as an objective reality.

## Key Takeaways

- A sociological understanding emphasizes the influence of people’s social backgrounds on the quality of their health and health care. A society’s culture and social structure also affect health and health care.
- The functionalist approach emphasizes that good health and effective health care are essential for a society’s ability to function, and it views the physician-patient relationship as hierarchical.
- The conflict approach emphasizes inequality in the quality of health and in the quality of health care.
- The interactionist approach emphasizes that health and illness are social constructions; physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions only if they are defined as such by a society and its members.

## For Your Review

1. Which approach—functionalist, conflict, or symbolic interactionist—do you most favor regarding how you understand health and health care? Explain your answer.
2. Think of the last time you visited a physician or another health-care professional. In what ways did this person come across as an authority figure possessing medical knowledge? In formulating your answer, think about the person’s clothing, body position and body language, and other aspects of nonverbal communication.

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# 11.4: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe how the nations of the world differ in important indicators of health and illness.
2. Explain the health-care model found in industrial nations other than the United States.

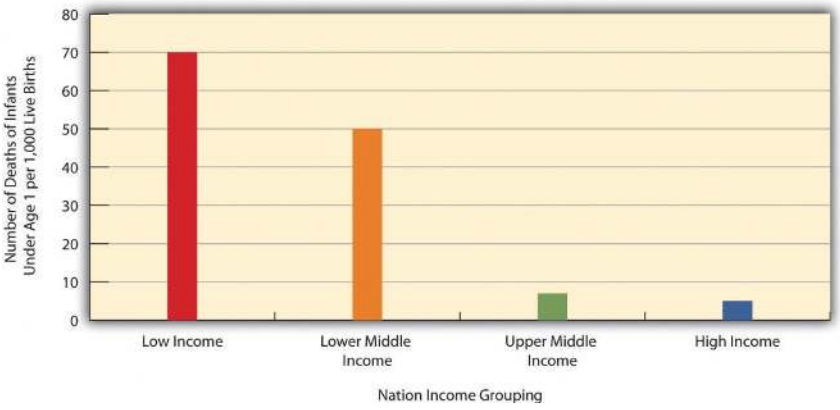
As we have seen in previous chapters, understanding what happens in other societies helps us to understand what happens in our own society. This section's discussion of health and health care across the globe, then, helps shed some light on what is good and bad about US health and medicine.

## International Disparities in Health and Illness

The nations of the world differ dramatically in the quality of their health and health care. The poorest nations suffer terribly. Their people suffer from poor nutrition, unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, rampant disease, and inadequate health care. One disease they suffer from is AIDS. Some 34 million people worldwide have HIV/AIDS, and two-thirds of these live in sub-Saharan Africa. Almost two million people, most of them from this region, died in 2010 from HIV/AIDS (World Health Organization, 2011). All these health problems produce high rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality and high death rates. For all these reasons, people in the poorest nations have shorter life spans than those in the richest nations.

A few health indicators should indicate the depth of the problem. Figure 13.1 "Infant Mortality for Low-Income, Lower-Middle-Income, Higher-Middle-Income, and High-Income Nations, 2010" compares an important indicator, infant mortality (number of deaths before age 1 per 1,000 live births) for nations grouped into four income categories. The striking contrast between the two groups provides dramatic evidence of the health problems poor nations face. When, as Figure 13.1 "Infant Mortality for Low-Income, Lower-Middle-Income, Higher-Middle-Income, and High-Income Nations, 2010" indicates, 70 children in the poorest nations die before their first birthday for every 1,000 live births (equivalent to 7 out of 100), the poor nations have serious problems indeed.

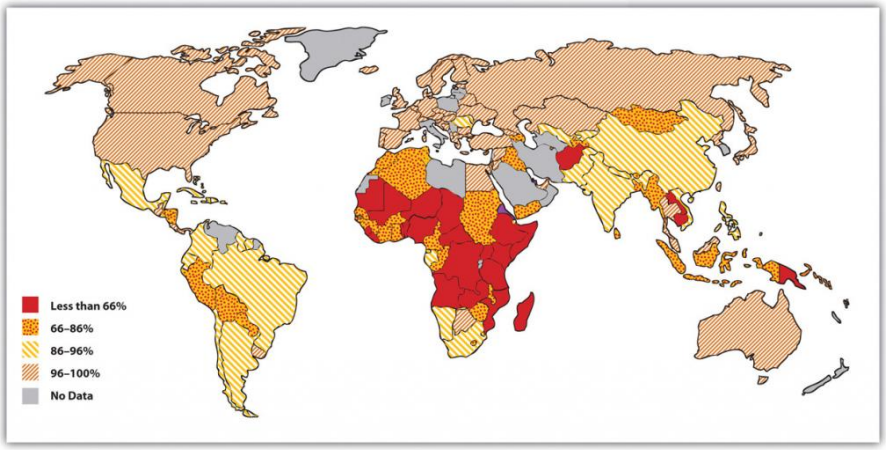
Figure 13.1 Infant Mortality for Low-Income, Lower-Middle-Income, Higher-Middle-Income, and High-Income Nations, 2010




Source: Data from World Bank. (2012). World databank. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=1&id=4.

Figure 13.2 "Percentage of Population with Access to Adequate Sanitation Facilities, 2008" shows how the world differs in access to adequate sanitation facilities (i.e., the removal of human waste from the physical environment, as by toilets). Whereas this percentage is at least 98 percent in the wealthy nations of North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, it is less than 33 percent in many poor nations in Africa and Asia.

Figure 13.2 Percentage of Population with Access to Adequate Sanitation Facilities, 2008



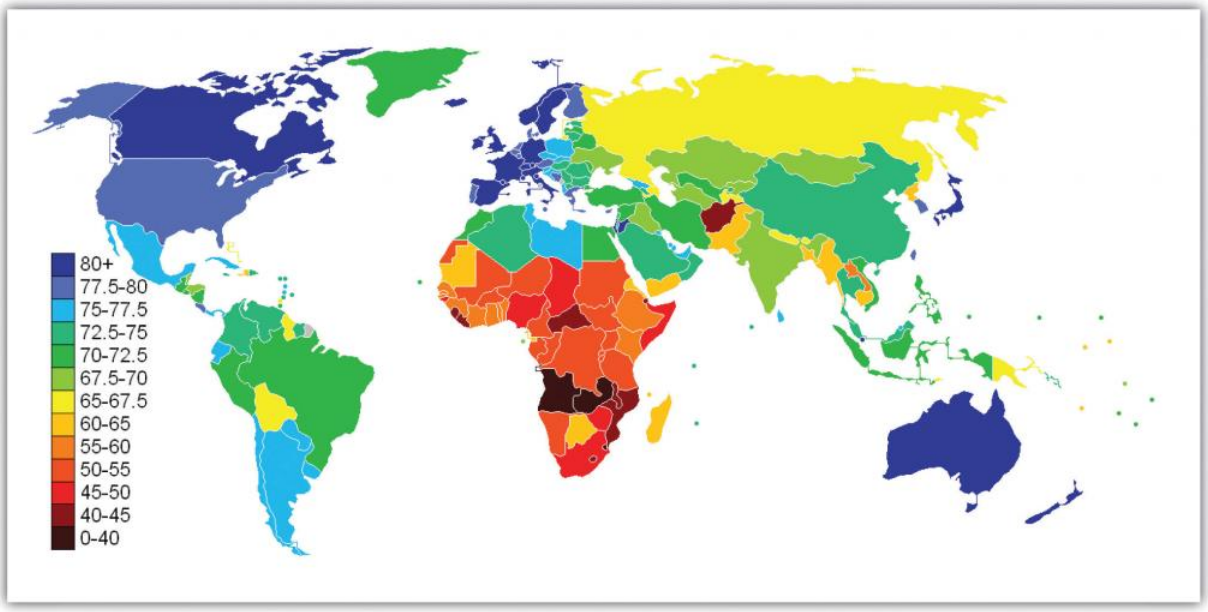

Source: Adapted from World Bank. (2010). Improved sanitation facilities (% of population with access). Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org.



Two-thirds of the 33 million people worldwide who have HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa. This terrible fact illustrates just one of the many health problems that people in poor nations suffer. (khym – AIDS Orphans and their Guardians in Sophia Village near Nairobi, Kenya – CC BY 2.0.)

Life expectancy is another important measure of a nation's health and is very relevant for understanding worldwide disparities in health and health care. Figure 13.3 "Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)" illustrates these disparities. Not surprisingly, the global differences in this map are similar to those for adequate sanitation in the map depicted in Figure 13.2 "Percentage of Population with Access to Adequate Sanitation Facilities, 2008". North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand have much longer life expectancies (75 years and higher) than Africa and Asia, where some nations have expectancies below 50 years. The society we live in can affect our life span by more than a quarter of a century.

Figure 13.3 Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)




Source: Adapted from http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Li...d_Factbook.png.

## Health Care in Industrial Nations

Industrial nations throughout the world, with the notable exception of the United States, provide their citizens with some form of national health care and **national health insurance** (Russell, 2011).Russell, J. W. (2011). *Double standard: Social policy in Europe and the United States* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Although their health-care systems differ in several respects, their governments pay all or most of the costs for health care, drugs, and other health needs. In Denmark, for example, the government provides free medical care and hospitalization for the entire population and pays for some medications and some dental care. In France, the government pays for some of the medical, hospitalization, and medication costs for most people and all these expenses for the poor, unemployed, and children under the age of 10. In Great Britain, the National Health Service pays most medical costs for the population, including medical care, hospitalization, prescriptions, dental care, and eyeglasses. In Canada, the National Health Insurance system also pays for most medical costs. Patients do not even receive bills from their physicians, who instead are paid by the government.

Although these national health insurance programs are not perfect—for example, people sometimes must wait for elective surgery and some other procedures—they are commonly credited with reducing infant mortality, extending life expectancy, and, more generally, for enabling their citizenries to have relatively good health. Their populations are generally healthier than Americans, even though health-care spending is much higher per capita in the United States than in these other nations. In all these respects, these national health insurance systems offer several advantages over the health-care model found in the United States (Reid, 2010)Reid, T. R. (2010). *The healing of America: A global quest for better, cheaper, and fairer health care*. New York, NY: Penguin Press. (see Note 13.11 "Lessons from Other Societies").

### Lessons from Other Societies

National Health Care in Wealthy Democracies

As the text discusses, industrial nations other than the United States provide free or low-cost health care to their citizens in what is known as national (or universal) health insurance and national health care. Although the United States spends more per capita than these nations on health care, it generally ranks much lower than they do on important health indicators. Of twenty-four wealthy democracies from North America, Western Europe, and certain other parts of the world (Australia, Japan, New Zealand; the exact number of nations varies slightly by indicator), the United States has the lowest life expectancy, the highest infant mortality, and the highest rates of obesity, adult diabetes, and HIV and AIDS. It ranks only twenty-first in mortality from heart disease and only tenth in breast cancer mortality rate. The United States also ranks twenty-second for annual doctor consultations per capita and among the highest for hospital admissions for various conditions, such as respiratory disease, that are avoidable with adequate primary and outpatient care. According to policy analyst Lawrence Mishel and colleagues, the conclusion from these international

comparisons is inescapable: “Although the United States spends more on health care than other countries with similar per capita income and populations, it has worse health outcomes, on average…Compared to the United States, other countries are more committed to the health and well-being of their citizens through more-universal coverage and more-comprehensive health care systems.”

Because of Canada’s proximity, many studies compare health and health-care indicators between the United States and Canada. A recent review summarized the evidence: “Although studies’ findings go in both directions, the bulk of the research finds higher quality of care in Canada.”

Surveys of random samples of citizens in several nations provide additional evidence of the advantages of the type of health care found outside the United States and the disadvantages of the US system. In surveys in 2007 of US residents and those of six other nations (Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom), Americans ranked highest in the percentage uninsured (16 percent in the United States compared to 0–2 percent elsewhere), highest in the percentage that did not receive needed medical care during the last year because of costs, and highest by far in the percentage that had “serious problems” in paying medical bills in the past year.

A fair conclusion from all the evidence is that US health lags behind that found in other wealthy nations because the latter provide free or low-cost national health care to their citizens and the United States does not. If so, the United States has much to learn from their example. Because the health-care reform achieved in the United States in 2009 and 2010 did not include a national health-care model, the United States will likely continue to lag behind other democracies in the quality of health and health care. At the same time, the cost of health care will certainly continue to be much higher in the United States than in other Western nations, in part because the United States uses a *fee-for-service* model in which many physicians are paid for every procedure they do rather than the set salary that some other nations feature.

*Sources:* Docteur & Berenson, 2009; Mishel, Bernstein, & Shierholz, 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011; Schoen et al., 2007Docteur, E., & Berenson, R. A. (2009). *How does the quality of US health care compare internationally?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press; Mishel, L., Bernstein, J., & Shierholz, H. (2009). *The state of working America 2008/2009*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). *Health at a glance 2011: OECD indicators*. Paris, France: Author; Schoen, C., Osborn, R., Doty, M. M., Bishop, M., Peugh, J., & Murukutla, N. (2007). Toward higher-performance health systems: Adults’ health care experiences in seven countries, 2007. *Health Affairs 26*(6), w717–w734.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world’s nations differ dramatically in the quality of their health and health care. People in poor nations suffer from many health problems, and poor nations have very high rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality.
- Except for the United States, industrial nations have national health-care systems and national health insurance. Their health-care models help their citizens to have relatively good health at affordable levels.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What do you think should be done to help improve the health of poor nations? What role should the United States play in any efforts in this regard?
2. Do you think the United States should move toward the national health insurance model found in other Western nations? Why or why not?

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# 11.5: Problems of Health in the United States

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe how and why social class, race and ethnicity, and gender affect physical health and health care in the United States.
2. Summarize the differences that social class, race and ethnicity, and gender make for mental health.

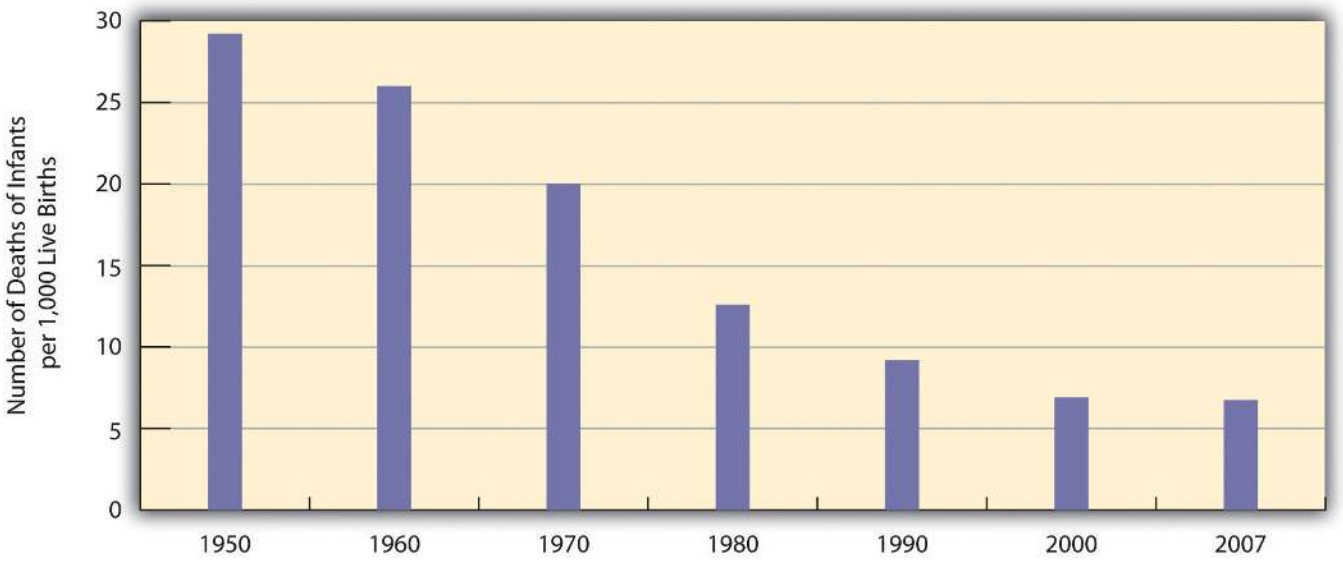
When we examine health and health care in the United States, there is both good news and bad news. The good news is considerable. Health has improved steadily over the last century, thanks in large part to better public sanitation and the discovery of antibiotics. Illnesses and diseases such as pneumonia and polio that used to kill or debilitate people are either unknown today or treatable by modern drugs. Other medical discoveries and advances have also reduced the extent and seriousness of major illnesses, including many types of cancer, and have prolonged our lives.



Cigarette smoking in the United States has declined considerably since the 1960s. (Xava du – smoke souls – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

Because of these and other factors, the US average life expectancy climbed from about 47 years in 1900 to about 78 years in 2010. Similarly, infant mortality dropped dramatically in the last half-century from 29.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1950 to only 6.75 in 2007 (see Figure 13.4). Cigarette smoking declined from 51 percent for males and 34 percent for females in 1965 to 23 percent and 18 percent, respectively, in 2009 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). *Health, United States, 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In another area, various policies during the past three decades have dramatically reduced levels of lead in young children's blood: 88 percent of children had unsafe levels in the mid-1970s, compared to less than 2 percent three decades later (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). Interpreting and managing blood lead levels <10 µg/dL in children and reducing childhood exposures to lead: Recommendations of CDC's advisory committee on childhood lead poisoning prevention. *MMWR (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report)*, *56*(RR-8), 1–16.

Figure 13.4 Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births, United States, 1950–2007




*Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). Health, United States, 2010. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

## The Poor Status of American Health

Unfortunately, the bad news is also considerable. Despite all the gains just mentioned, the United States lags behind most other wealthy democracies in several health indicators, as we have seen, even though it is the wealthiest nation in the world. Moreover, 14.5 percent of US households and almost 49 million Americans are "food insecure" (lacking sufficient money for adequate food and nutrition) at least part of the year; more than one-fifth of all children live in such households (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2011).Coleman-Jensen, A., Nord, M., Andrews, M., & Carlson, S. (2011). *Household food security in the United States in 2010*. Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture. More than 8 percent of all infants are born at low birth weight (under 5.5 pounds), putting them at risk for long-term health problems; this figure has risen steadily since the late 1980s and is higher than the 1970 rate (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). *Health, United States, 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In other areas, childhood rates of obesity, asthma, and some other chronic conditions are on the rise, with about one-third of children considered obese or overweight (Van Cleave, Gortmaker, & Perrin, 2010).Van Cleave, J., Gortmaker, S. L., & Perrin, J. M. (2010). Dynamics of obesity and chronic health conditions among children and youth. *JAMA*, *303*(7), 623–630. Clearly the United States still has a long way to go in improving the nation's health.

There is also bad news in the *social distribution* of health. Health problems in the United States are more often found among the poor, among people from certain racial and ethnic backgrounds, and, depending on the problem, among women or men. **Social epidemiology** refers to the study of how health and illness vary by sociodemographic characteristics, with such variations called **health disparities**. When we examine social epidemiology in the United States, we see that many health disparities exist. In this way, health and illness both reflect and reinforce society's social inequalities. We now turn to the most important health disparities, starting with physical health and then mental health.

## Health Disparities: Physical Health

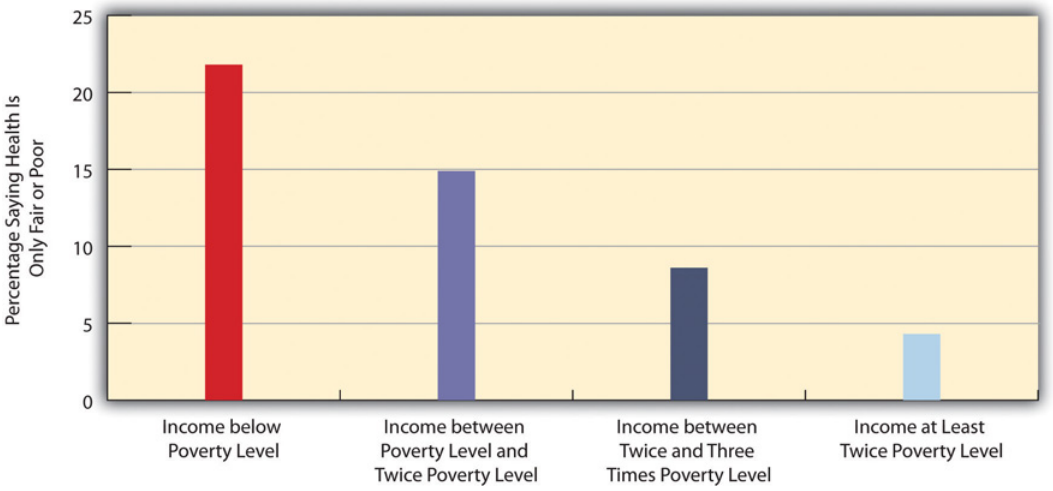
### Social Class

Not only do the poor have less money, but they also have much worse health, as the news story that began this chapter illustrated. There is growing recognition in the government and in medical and academic communities that social class makes a huge difference when it comes to health and illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). CDC health disparities and inequalities report—United States, 2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, *60*, 1–114.

Many types of health indicators illustrate the social class–health link in the United States. In an annual survey conducted by the government, people are asked to indicate the quality of their health. As Figure 13.5 shows, poor people are much more likely than those with higher incomes to say their health is only fair or poor. These self-reports of health are subjective indicators, and it is

possible that not everyone interprets “fair” or “poor” health in the same way. But objective indicators of actual health also indicate a strong social class–health link (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). *Health, United States, 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Figure 13.5 Family Income and Self-Reported Health (Percentage of People 18 or Over Saying Health Is Only Fair or Poor), 2009




*Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). Health, United States, 2010. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

## Children and Our Future

### The Poor Health of Poor Children

When we consider health disparities, some of the most unsettling evidence involves children. As a recent report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation concluded, “The data illustrate a consistent and striking pattern of incremental improvements in health with increasing levels of family income and educational attainment: As family income and levels of education rise, health improves. In almost every state, shortfalls in health are greatest among children in the poorest or least educated households, but even middle-class children are less healthy than children with greater advantages.”

Some government data illustrate the difference that poverty makes for the nation’s children:

- Children of poor mothers are more than twice as likely as children born to wealthier mothers to be born with low birth weight.
- By the age of 9 months, poor children are already more likely to exhibit poor health and lower cognitive and socioemotional development.
- By age 3, poor children are two-thirds more likely to have asthma than children whose families’ incomes are more than 150 percent of the poverty line.
- Based on their parents’ reports, poor children are almost five times more likely (33 percent compared to 7 percent) to be in less than very good health (i.e., their parents rated their children’s health as poor, fair, or good rather than as very good or excellent).

In these and other ways, children in low-income families are more likely than children in wealthier families to have more health problems, many of which last into adolescence and adulthood. Poor children’s poor health thus makes a critical difference throughout their lives. As sociologist Steven A. Haas and colleagues observe, “A growing body of work demonstrates that those who experience poor health early in life go on to complete less schooling, hold less prestigious jobs, and earn less than their healthier childhood peers.”

One reason for the poor health of poor children is that their families are more likely to experience many kinds of stress (see Chapter 2). Another reason is that their families are more likely to experience food insecurity and, if they are urban, to live in neighborhoods with higher levels of lead and pollution. Low-income children also tend to watch television more often than wealthier children and for this and other reasons to be less physically active; their relative lack of physical activity is yet another reason for their worse health. Finally, their parents are much more likely than wealthier parents to smoke cigarettes; the secondhand smoke they inhale impairs their health.

The clear evidence of poverty's effects on the health of poor children underscores the need of the United States to do everything possible to minimize these effects. Any money spent to reduce these effects will pay for itself many times over throughout these children's lifetimes: They will have fewer health problems as they grow up, costing the United States much less in health care, and be better able to do well in school and to have higher incomes as adults. In both the short run and long run, then, improving the health of poor children will also improve the economic and social health of the whole nation.

*Sources:* Haas, Glymour, & Berkman, 2011; Kaplan, 2009; Murphey, Mackintosh, & McCoy-Roth, 2011; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008Haas, S. A., Glymour, M., & Berkman, L. F. (2011). Childhood health and labor market inequality over the life course. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 52*, 298–313; Kaplan, G. A. (2009). *The poor pay more: Poverty's high cost to health*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; Murphey, D., Mackintosh, B., & McCoy-Roth, M. (2011). Early childhood policy focus: Health eating and physical activity. *Early Childhood Highlights*, *2*(3), 1–9; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2008). *America's health starts with healthy children: How do states compare?* Princeton, NJ: Author.

For example, poor adults are also at much greater risk for many health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and some types of cancer. Rates of high blood pressure, serious heart conditions, and diabetes are at least twice as high for middle-aged adults with family incomes below the poverty level than for those with incomes at least twice the poverty level. All these social class differences in health contribute to a striking difference in life expectancy, with Americans whose family incomes are more than four times the federal poverty level expected to live 6.5 years longer than those living in poverty (Kaplan, 2009).Kaplan, G. A. (2009). *The poor pay more: Poverty's high cost to health*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Several reasons account for the social class–health link (Pampel, Krueger, & Denney, 2010).Pampel, F. C., Krueger, P. M., & Denney, J. T. (2010). Socioeconomic disparities in health behaviors. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 349–370. One reason is stress, which, as Chapter 2 explained, is higher for people with low incomes because of unemployment, problems in paying for the necessities of life, and a sense of little control over what happens to them. Stress in turn damages health because it impairs the immune system and other bodily processes.

A second reason is that poor people live in conditions, including crowded, dilapidated housing with poor sanitation, that are bad for their health and especially that of their children. Although these conditions have improved markedly in the United States over the last few decades, they continue for many of the poor.

Another reason for the poor's worse health is their lack of access to adequate health care. As is well known, many poor people lack medical insurance and in other respects have inadequate health care. These problems make it more likely they will become ill in the first place and more difficult for them to become well because they cannot afford to visit a physician or to receive other health care. Still, social class disparities in health exist even in countries that provide free national health care, a fact that underscores the importance of the other reasons discussed here for the social class–health link (Elo, 2009).Elo, I. T. (2009). Social class differentials in health and mortality: Patterns and explanations in comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *35*, 553–572.



*Many people who are poor or near poor lack medical insurance and in other ways have inadequate health care. These problems make it more likely they will become ill and, once ill, less likely they will become well.*

*© Thinkstock*

A fourth reason is a lack of education, which, in ways not yet well understood, leads poor people to be unaware or unconcerned about risk factors for health and to have a fatalistic attitude that promotes unhealthy behaviors and reluctance to heed medical advice (Elo, 2009).Elo, I. T. (2009). Social class differentials in health and mortality: Patterns and explanations in comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35*, 553–572. In one study of whether smokers quit smoking after a heart attack, only 10 percent of heart attack patients without a high school degree quit smoking, compared to almost 90 percent of those with a college degree (Wray, Herzog, Willis, & Wallace, 1998).Wray, L. A., Herzog, A. R., Willis, R. J., & Wallace, R. B. (1998). The impact of education and heart attack on smoking cessation among middle-aged adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 39*, 271–294.

A final reason for the poor health of poor people is unhealthy lifestyles, as just implied. Although it might sound like a stereotype, poor people are more likely to smoke, to eat high-fat food, to avoid exercise, to be overweight, and, more generally, not to do what they need to do (or to do what they should not be doing) to be healthy (Pampel et al., 2010).Pampel, F. C., Krueger, P. M., & Denney, J. T. (2010). Socioeconomic disparities in health behaviors. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 349–370. Scholars continue to debate whether unhealthy lifestyles are more important in explaining poor people's poor health than the other factors just discussed. Regardless of the proper mix of reasons, the fact remains that the poor have worse health.

## Race and Ethnicity

Health differences also exist when we examine the effects of race and ethnicity, and they are literally a matter of life and death. We can see this when we compare life expectancies for whites and African Americans born in 2006 (Table 13.2). When we do not take gender into account, African Americans can expect to live about five fewer years than whites. Among men, they can expect to live almost six fewer years, and among women, four fewer years.

Table 13.2 US Life Expectancy at Birth for People Born in 2007

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| African American | **Both sexes** | **73.6** |
| | Men | 70.0 |
| | Women | 76.8 |
| White | **Both sexes** | **78.4** |
| | Men | 75.9 |
| | Women | 80.8 |

Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). *Health, United States, 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At the beginning of the life course, infant mortality also varies by race and ethnicity (Table 13.3), with African American infants more than twice as likely as white infants to die before their first birthday. Infant mortality among Native Americans is almost 1.5 times the white rate, while that for Latinos is about the same (although the Puerto Rican rate is also higher, at 8.0), and Asians a bit lower. In a related indicator, maternal mortality (from complications of pregnancy or childbirth) stands at 8.1 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births for non-Latina white women, 7.2 for Latina women, and a troubling 23.8 for African American women. Maternal mortality for African American women is thus about three times greater than that for the other two groups.

Table 13.3 Mother's Race/Ethnicity and US Infant Mortality, 2006 (Number of Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births)

| | |
|---|---|
| **African American** | 12.9 |
| **Asian or Pacific Islander** | 4.5 |
| **Latina** | 5.4 |
| Central and South American | 4.5 |
| Cuban | 5.1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mexican | 5.3 |
| Puerto Rican | 8.0 |
| **Native American** | 8.3 |
| **White** | 5.6 |

Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). *Health, United States, 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In other indicators, African Americans are more likely than whites to die from heart disease, although the white rate of such deaths is higher than the rates of Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans. African Americans are also more likely than whites to be overweight and to suffer from asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and several types of cancer. Latinos and Native Americans have higher rates than whites of several illnesses and conditions, including diabetes.

Commenting on all these disparities in health, a former head of the US Department of Health and Human Services said a decade ago, “We have been—and remain—two nations: one majority, one minority—separated by the quality of our health” (Penn et al., 2000, p. 102).Penn, N. E., Kramer, J., Skinner, J. F., Velasquez, R. J., Yee, B. W. K., Arellano, L. M., et al. (2000). Health practices and health-care systems among cultural groups. In R. M. Eisler & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Handbook of gender, culture, and health* (pp. 101–132). New York, NY: Routledge. The examples just discussed certainly indicate that her statement is still true today.

Why do such large racial and ethnic disparities in health exist? To a large degree, they reflect the high poverty rates for African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans compared to those for whites. In addition, inadequate medical care is perhaps a special problem for people of color, thanks to unconscious racial bias among health-care professionals that affects the quality of care that people of color receive (see discussion later in this chapter).

An additional reason for racial disparities in health is diet. Many of the foods that have long been part of African American culture are high in fat. Partly as a result, African Americans are much more likely than whites to have heart disease and high blood pressure and to die from these conditions (Parra-Medina et al., 2010).Parra-Medina, D., Wilcox, S., Wilson, D. K., Addy, C. L., Felton, G., & Poston, M. B. (2010). Heart healthy and ethnically relevant (HHER) lifestyle trial for improving diet and physical activity in underserved African American women. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, *31*(1), 92–104. In contrast, first-generation Latinos tend to have diets consisting of beans, grains, and other low-fat foods, preventing health problems stemming from their poverty from being even worse. But as the years go by and they adopt the typical American’s eating habits, their diets tend to worsen, and their health worsens as well (Pérez-Escamilla, 2009).Pérez-Escamilla, R. (2009). Dietary quality among Latinos: Is acculturation making us sick? *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, *109*(6), 988–991.

In a significant finding, African Americans tend to have worse health than whites even among those with the same incomes. Several reasons explain this racial gap. One is the extra stress that African Americans of all incomes face because they live in a society that is still racially prejudiced and discriminatory (Bratter & Gorman, 2011).Bratter, J. L., & Gorman, B. K. (2011). Is discrimination an equal opportunity risk? Racial experiences, socioeconomic status, and health status among black and white adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 52*, 365–382. In this regard, studies find that African Americans and Latinos who have experienced the most racial discrimination in their daily lives tend to have worse physical health (Lee & Ferraro, 2009).Lee, M.-A., & Ferraro, K. F. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health among Puerto Rican and Mexican Americans: Buffering effect of the lazo matrimonial? *Social Science & Medicine*, *68*, 1966–1974. Some middle-class African Americans may also have grown up in poor families and incurred health problems in childhood that continue to affect them. As a former US surgeon general once explained, “You’re never dealing with a person just today. You’re dealing with everything they’ve been exposed to throughout their lives. Does it ever end? Our hypothesis is that it never ends” (Meckler, 1998, p. 4A).Meckler, L. (1998, November 27). Health gap between races persists. *Ocala Star-Banner*, p. 4A.





*African Americans have worse health than whites, even when people with the same incomes are compared. One reason for this racial gap is the continuing racial discrimination that African Americans experience and the stress that accompanies this experience.*

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To some degree, racial differences in health may also have a biological basis. For example, African American men appear to have higher levels of a certain growth protein that may promote prostate cancer; African American smokers may absorb more nicotine than white smokers; and differences in the ways African Americans' blood vessels react may render them more susceptible to hypertension and heart disease (Meckler, 1998; Ricker & Bird, 2005).Meckler, L. (1998, November 27). Health gap between races persists. *Ocala Star-Banner*, p. 4A; Ricker, P. P., & Bird, C. E. (2005). Rethinking gender differences in health: Why we need to integrate social and biological perspectives. *Journals of Gerontology Series B, 60*, S40–S47. Because alleged biological differences have been used as the basis for racism, and because race is best thought of as a social construction rather than a biological concept (see Chapter 3), we must be very careful in acknowledging such differences (Frank, 2007).Frank, R. (2007). What to make of it? The (Re)emergence of a biological conceptualization of race in health disparities research. *Social Science & Medicine, 64*(10), 1977–1983. However, if they do indeed exist, they may help explain at least some of the racial gap in health.

A final factor contributing to racial differences in health is physical location: poor people of color are more likely to live in urban areas and in other locations that are unhealthy places because of air and water pollution, hazardous waste, and other environmental problems (Walker, 2011).Walker, A. K. (2011, November 20). Where you live can help determine your health, studies say. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from http://bangordailynews.com/2011/11/20/health/where-you-live-can-help-determine-your-health-studies-say. This problem is termed *environmental racism* (Michney, 2011).Michney, T. M. (2011). White civic visions versus black suburban aspirations: Cleveland's Garden Valley urban renewal project. *Journal of Planning History, 10*(4), 282–309. One example of this problem is found in the so-called Cancer Alley on a long stretch of the Mississippi River in Louisiana populated mostly by African Americans; 80 percent of these residents live within three miles of a polluting industrial facility (Cernansky, 2011).Cernansky, R. (2011, February 8). Cancer alley: Big industry & bigger illness along Mississippi River. Retrieved from http://www.treehugger.com/corporate-responsibility/cancer-alley-big-industry-bigger-illness-along-mississippi-river.html.

## Gender

The evidence on gender and health is both complex and fascinating. Women outlive men by more than six years, and, as Table 13.2 showed, the gender difference in longevity persists across racial categories. At the same time, women have worse health than men in many areas. For example, they are more likely to suffer from migraine headaches, osteoporosis, and immune diseases such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Women thus have more health problems than men do even though they outlive men—a situation commonly known as the *morbidity paradox* (Gorman & Read, 2006).Gorman, B. K., & Read, J. G. (2006). Gender disparities in adult health: An examination of three measures of morbidity. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 47*(2), 95–110. Why, then, do women outlive men? Conversely, why do men die earlier than women? The obvious answer is that men have more life-threatening diseases, such as heart disease and emphysema, than women, but that raises the question of why this is so.

Several reasons explain the gender gap in longevity. One might be biological, as women's estrogen and other sex-linked biological differences may make them less susceptible to heart disease and other life-threatening illnesses, even as they render them more vulnerable to some of the health problems already listed (Kuller, 2010).Kuller, L. H. (2010). Cardiovascular disease is preventable among women. *Expert Review of Cardiovascular Therapy, 8*(2), 175–187. A second reason is that men lead more unhealthy lifestyles than women because of differences in gender socialization. For example, men are more likely than women to smoke, to drink heavily, and to drive recklessly. All such behaviors make men more vulnerable than women to life-threatening illnesses and injuries. Men are also more likely than women to hold jobs in workplaces filled with environmental and safety hazards that kill thousands of people—most of them men—annually.

A final reason is men's reluctance to discuss and seek help for their medical problems, owing to their masculine socialization into being "strong, silent types." Just as men do not like to ask for directions, as the common wisdom goes, so do they not like to ask for medical help. As one physician put it, "I've often said men don't come in for checkups because they have a big *S* tattooed on their chests; they think they're Superman" (Guttman, 1999, p. 10).Guttman, M. (1999, June 11–13). Why more men are finally going to the doctor. *USA Weekend*, p. 10.

Studies find that men are less likely than women to tell anyone when they have a health problem and to seek help from a health-care professional (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2009).Emmers-Sommer, T. M., Nebel, S., Allison, M.-L., Cannella, M. L., Cartmill, D., Ewing, S., et al. (2009). Patient-provider communication about sexual health: The relationship with gender, age, gender-

stereotypical beliefs, and perceptions of communication inappropriateness. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 60*, 9–10. When both sexes do visit a physician, men ask fewer questions than women do. In one study, the average man asked no more than two questions, while the average woman asked at least six. Because patients who ask more questions get more information and recover their health more quickly, men's silence in the exam room may contribute to their shorter longevity (Foreman, 1999).Foreman, J. (1999, June 14). A vist most men would rather not make. *The Boston Globe*, p. C1. Interestingly, the development of erectile dysfunction drugs like Viagra may have helped improve men's health, as men have had to see a physician to obtain prescriptions for these drugs when otherwise they would not have seen a physician (Guttman, 1999).Guttman, M. (1999, June 11–13). Why more men are finally going to the doctor. *USA Weekend*, p. 10.

We have just discussed why men die sooner than women, which is one of the two gender differences that constitute the morbidity paradox. The other gender difference concerns why women have more nonfatal health problems than men. Several reasons explain this difference (Read & Gorman, 2010).Read, J. G., & Gorman, B. M. (2010). Gender and health inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 371–386.





*Women more than men tend to have more health problems that are not life threatening. Two reasons for this gender difference are gender inequality in the larger society and the stress accompanying women's traditional caregiving role in the family.*

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One reason arises from the fact that women outlive men. Because women are thus more likely than men to be in their senior years, they are also more likely to develop the many health problems associated with old age. This suggests that studies that control for age (by comparing older women with older men, middle-aged women with middle-aged men, and so forth) should report fewer gender differences in health than those that do not control for age, and this is indeed true.

However, women still tend to have worse health than men even when age is taken into account. Medical sociologists attribute this gender difference to the gender inequality in the larger society (Read & Gorman, 2010).Read, J. G., & Gorman, B. M. (2010). Gender and health inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 371–386. For example, women are poorer overall than men, as they are more likely to work only part-time and in low-paying jobs even if they work full time. As discussed earlier in this chapter, poverty is a risk factor for health problems. Women's worse health, then, is partly due to their greater likelihood of living in poverty or near poverty. Because of their gender, women also are more likely than men to experience stressful events in their everyday lives, such as caring for a child or an aging parent. Their increased stress impairs the immune systems and thus worsens their health. It also is an important cause of their greater likelihood of depression and the various physical health problems (weakened immune systems, higher blood pressure, lack of exercise) that depression often causes. Finally, women experience discrimination in their everyday lives because of our society's sexism, and (as is also true for people of color) this discrimination is thought to produce stress and thus poorer physical health (Landry & Mercurio, 2009).Landry, L. J., & Mercurio, A. E. (2009). Discrimination and women's mental health: The mediating role of control. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 61*, 3–4.

## Health Disparities: Mental Health

Health consists of mental well-being as well as physical well-being, and people can suffer mental health problems in addition to physical health problems. Scholars disagree over whether mental illness is real or, instead, a social construction. The predominant view in psychiatry, of course, is that people do have actual problems in their mental and emotional functioning and that these problems are best characterized as mental illnesses or mental disorders and should be treated by medical professionals (McNally, 2011).McNally, R. J. (2011). *What is mental illness?* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. But other scholars say mental illness is a social construction or a "myth" (Szasz, 2010).Szasz, T. S. (2010). *The myth of mental illness: Foundations of a theory of personal conduct*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial. In their view, all kinds of people sometimes act oddly, but only a few are labeled as mentally ill. If someone says she or he hears the voice of an angel, we ordinarily attribute their perceptions to their religious views and consider them religious, not mentally ill. But if someone instead insists that men from Mars have been in touch, we are more

apt to think there is something mentally wrong with that person. Mental illness thus is not real but rather is the reaction of others to problems they perceive in someone's behavior.

This intellectual debate notwithstanding, many people do suffer serious mental and emotional problems, such as severe mood swings and depression, that interfere with their everyday functioning and social interaction. Sociologists and other researchers have investigated the social epidemiology of these problems. Several generalizations seem warranted from their research regarding disparities in mental health (Cockerham, 2011).Cockerham, W. C. (2011). *Sociology of mental disorder* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

## Social Class

First, social class affects the incidence of mental illness. To be more specific, poor people exhibit more mental health problems than richer people: They are more likely to suffer from schizophrenia, serious depression, and other problems. A major reason for this link is the stress of living in poverty and the many living conditions associated with it. One interesting causal question here is whether poverty leads to mental illness or mental illness leads to poverty. Although there is evidence of both causal paths, most scholars believe that poverty contributes to mental illness more than the reverse (Warren, 2009).Warren, J. R. (2009). Socioeconomic status and health across the life course: A test of the social causation and health selection hypotheses. *Social Forces*, *87*(4), 2125–2153.





*Women are more likely than men to be seriously depressed. Sociologists attribute this gender difference partly to gender socialization that leads women to keep problems inside themselves while encouraging men to express their problems outwardly.*

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## Race and Ethnicity

Second, there is no clear connection between race/ethnicity and mental illness, as evidence on this issue is mixed: Although many studies find higher rates of mental disorder among people of color, some studies find similar rates to whites' rates (Mossakowski, 2008).Mossakowski, K. N. (2008). Dissecting the influence of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on mental health in young adulthood. *Research on Aging*, *30*(6), 649–671. These mixed results are somewhat surprising because several racial/ethnic groups are poorer than whites and more likely to experience everyday discrimination, and for these reasons should exhibit more frequent symptoms of mental and emotional problems. Despite the mixed results, a fair conclusion from the most recent research is that African Americans and Latinos are more likely than whites to exhibit signs of mental distress (Jang, Chiriboga, Kim, & Phillips, 2008; Mossakowski, 2008).Jang, Y., Chiriboga, D. A., Kim, G., & Phillips, K. (2008). Depressive symptoms in four racial and ethnic groups: The survey of older Floridians (SOF). *Research on Aging*, *30*(4), 488–502; Mossakowski, K. N. (2008). Dissecting the influence of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on mental health in young adulthood. *Research on Aging*, *30*(6), 649–671.

## Gender

Third, gender is related to mental illness but in complex ways, as the nature of this relationship depends on the type of mental disorder. Women have higher rates of manic-depressive disorders than men and are more likely to be seriously depressed, but men have higher rates of antisocial personality disorders that lead them to be a threat to others (Kort-Butler, 2009).Kort-Butler, L. A. (2009). Coping styles and sex differences in depressive symptoms and delinquent behavior. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *38*(1), 122–136. Although some medical researchers trace these differences to sex-linked biological differences, sociologists attribute them to differences in gender socialization that lead women to keep problems inside themselves while encouraging men to express their problems outwardly, as through violence. To the extent that women have higher levels of depression and other mental health problems, the factors that account for their poorer physical health, including their higher rates of poverty and stress and rates of everyday discrimination, are thought to also account for their poorer mental health (Read & Gorman, 2010).Read, J. G., & Gorman, B. M. (2010). Gender and health inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *36*, 371–386.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all influence the quality of health in the United States. Health problems are more common among people from low-income backgrounds and among people of color. Women are more likely than men to have health problems that are not life threatening.

- Although debate continues over whether mental illness is a social construction, many people do suffer mental health problems. The social epidemiology for mental health and illness resembles that for physical health and illness, with social class, race/ethnicity, and gender disparities existing.
- The private insurance model in the United States incurs huge administrative costs and results in more than 50 million people lacking health insurance.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. In thinking about the health problems of individuals from low-income backgrounds, some people blame lack of access to adequate health care for these problems, while other people blame unhealthy lifestyles practiced by low-income individuals. Where do you stand on this debate? Explain your answer.
2. Write a brief essay in which you present a sociological explanation of the higher rate of depression found among women than among men.

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# 11.6: Improving Health and Health Care

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain how the United States could improve the quality of health and health care.
2. List strategies that will improve global health.

The US health-care system, despite the recent health-care reform legislation and medical advances that used to be only a dream, still has a long way to go before affordable and high-quality health care is available to all. With the health of so many people at stake, the United States needs to make every effort to achieve this essential goal. How might we achieve this goal?

We have seen throughout this chapter that social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all play a profound role in the quality of health and health care. People from low-income backgrounds have higher rates of physical and mental illness because of the stress and other factors associated with living with little money and also because of their lack of access to adequate health care. Partly because they tend to be poorer and partly because of the discrimination they experience in their daily lives and in the health-care system, people of color also have higher rates of physical and mental illness. Findings on gender are more complex, but women have higher rates than men of nonfatal physical illness and of depression and other mental illness, and they experience lower quality of health care for certain conditions.

To improve health and health care in the United States, then, the importance of social class, race and ethnicity, and gender must be addressed. Efforts, as outlined in earlier chapters, that reduce poverty and racial/ethnic and gender inequality should also improve the physical and mental health of those currently at risk because of their low incomes, race or ethnicity, and/or gender, as public health experts recognize (Bradley & Taylor, 2011). At the same time, special efforts must be made to ensure that these millions of individuals receive the best health care possible within the existing system of social inequality.



Canada and other wealthy nations have national health-care systems that provide models for the United States to follow. (Samuel Auguste – Au Canada – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

In this regard, the national health-care and health insurance systems of Canada, the United Kingdom, and many other Western nations provide models for the United States. As discussed in this chapter, these nations provide better health care to their citizens in many ways and at a lower cost than that incurred under the US model of private insurance. Their models are not perfect, but a government-funded and government-run **single-payer system**—or "Medicare for all," as it has been called—shows great promise for improving the health and health care of all Americans. We in effect have single-payer—that is, government-funded—systems for police, firefighters, education, public libraries, and even the postal service, proponents of national health insurance say, and they add that Medicare, a government-funded program, is largely successful (Kristof, 2009).Kristof, N. D. (2009, September 3). Health care that works. *New York Times*, p. A31. The US government also runs a preventive care and hospital system for military veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); this system has been called "one of the best-performing and most cost-effective elements in the American medical establishment" (Kristof, 2009, p. A31).Kristof, N. D. (2009, September 3). Health care that works. *New York Times*, p. A31. According to a study by the Rand Corporation, "If other health care providers followed the V.A.'s

lead, it would be a major step toward improving the quality of care across the U.S. health care system" (Kristof, 2009, p. A31).Kristof, N. D. (2009, September 3). Health care that works. *New York Times*, p. A31.

These models all indicate that national health insurance and the single-payer system for health care found in many other democracies could also succeed in the United States. As one single-payer proponent observed, "A public role in health care shouldn't be any scarier or more repugnant than a public fire department" (Kristof, 2009, p. A31).Kristof, N. D. (2009, September 3). Health care that works. *New York Times*, p. A31. (The Note 13.28 "People Making a Difference" box highlights a national physicians group that advocates for a single-payer system.)

### People Making a Difference

Physicians in Favor of National Health Insurance

Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) is a national organization of some 18,000 physicians who support a single-payer system of national health insurance in the United States. They advocate for this goal through the PNHP's website and through a variety of advocacy efforts. These efforts include writing articles for medical and public health journal; writing op-ed columns for newspapers; and making educational materials available to members of the public who wish to contact their members of Congress. PNHP members also appear on local and national television news shows and coordinate and speak at public health forums. PNHP has local chapters and allied groups in more than forty states and the District of Columbia.

According to PNHP, a single-payer system would greatly reduce the billing, paperwork, and other administrative costs of the private insurance model that now dominates the US health care system. These costs, PNHP says, account for one-third of US health expenditures; if the United States were to adopt a national single-payer system, administrative costs would be reduced by $400 billion. PNHP also emphasizes that more than 50 million Americans are now uninsured and many others are underinsured. A national single-payer system would cover virtually the entire population.

An important reason for the high administrative costs of US health care, PNHP explains, is the fact that private insurance companies are for-profit companies. Because their goal is to make a profit, they advertise and engage in various marketing activities, and their CEOs and other executives receive extremely high salaries and other compensation. A single-payer system would eliminate all these problems.

By calling attention to the many problems in the current US health model and by advocating for a national single-payer system, Physicians for a National Health Program is helping to make a difference. For more information, visit http://www.pnhp.org.

Short of adopting national health insurance, other efforts to improve health and health care are certainly essential. One such effort would include an expansion of measures that fall broadly into what the field of public health calls *preventive care*. This approach recognizes that the best approach to health and health care is to prevent illness and disease before they begin. One facet of this approach focuses on the unhealthy behaviors and lifestyles, including lack of exercise, obesity, and smoking, characteristic of millions of Americans. Although the United States has public education campaigns and other initiatives on these risk factors, more could still be done. Another facet of this approach focuses on early childhood in general but especially on early childhood among low-income families. As this chapter has emphasized beginning with the Note 13.1 "Social Problems in the News" story, many health problems begin very early in childhood and even in the womb. Home visitation and nutrition assistance programs must be expanded across the country to address these problems.

Another effort must focus on the high cost of health care. We saw earlier that the US fee-for-service model, in which hospitals and physicians largely set the prices for their services, contributes greatly to the high cost of health care in the United States. Related to this model, physicians are paid for each patient they see, rather than receiving a set salary, as teachers, firefighters, police officers, and most other occupations that service large numbers of people receive. Yet there are some outstanding hospitals, such as the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, where physicians do work on salary rather than charging for each patient or for each surgery; costs per patient at these hospitals tend to be lower (Gawande, Berwick, Fisher, & McClellan, 2009).Gawande, A., Berwick, D., Fisher, E., & McClellan, M. (2009, August 13). 10 steps to better health care. *New York Times*, p. A27. Moving toward this model would help lower health-care costs. The greater use of electronic systems for patient records and billing and for communication among physicians would also reduce costs. So would the elimination of many diagnostic tests and medical procedures and surgeries that research has shown to be unnecessary and that may cost at least $200 billion annually (Weinberger, 2011).Weinberger, S. (2011, June 9). Pointless tests drive medical costs skyward: Doctors have to grapple with diagnostic overkill. *Philly.com*. Retrieved from http://articles.philly.com/2011-06-09/news/29638875_1_ct-scan-testing-health-care-system.

Another strategy that would reduce health care costs would be the adoption of "integrated care," also called "high touch medicine" (Emanuel, 2011).Emanuel, E. J. (2011, November 16). Saving by the bundle. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/2011/2016/saving-by-the-bundle. In this model, teams of health care professionals (nurses, pharmacists, physicians) coordinate care for the chronically ill patients (10 percent of the population) who account for two-thirds of all health care costs. This integrated care involves extensive communication among the members of a patient's team with the patient and any caregivers, home visits by nurses to check on the patient, and other components. The goal is to help the patients take better care of themselves so that they do not become sicker and need (additional) hospital or emergency room care. Because hospital and emergency room care is so expensive, the prevention of hospital and emergency room visits through integrated care yields a significant savings in health care costs. If integrated care became the norm around the country, it is estimated that its adoption would save more than $80 billion annually.

It is also essential to reduce medical errors in hospitals and to raise the rate of hand washing. Many hospitals have adopted strict protocols, such as frequent washing of hands and the use of checklists before surgeries, to reduce infection and errors, but many hospitals have also failed to adopt these protocols. Their failure to do so is a hidden national scandal that kills thousands of people annually.

What can be done to improve world health? Because the poorest nations have the poorest health, it is essential that the wealthy nations provide them the money, equipment, and other resources they need to improve their health and health care. The residents of these nations also need to be given the resources they need to undertake proper sanitation and other good health practices. In this regard, organizations like the World Health Organization have been instrumental in documenting the dire status of health in the poor nations and in promoting efforts to help them, and groups like Doctors Without Borders have been instrumental in bringing health-care professionals and medical care to poor nations. Ultimately, however, these nations' poor health is just one of the consequences of the global inequality examined in Chapter 2. Until these nations' economic circumstances and high rates of illiteracy improve dramatically, their health status will remain a serious problem.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Effective health care reform must address social class, racial and ethnic, and gender inequalities in health and health care.
- National health insurance involving a single-payer system would improve many aspects of health and health care in the United States.
- In the absence of national health insurance, several types of changes could still help to reduce health care costs.

## FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you favor or oppose national health insurance for the United States? Explain your answer.
2. Why do you think the United States remains the only industrial nation without national health insurance?

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# 11.7: End-of-Chapter Material

## Summary

1. A sociological approach emphasizes the relationship between health, medicine, and society. In particular, our social backgrounds influence our health and access to health care.
2. Sociological perspectives on health and illness fall into the functional, conflict, and interactionist approaches encountered in previous chapters. The functional view emphasizes the importance of health for a society's stability and the roles that people play when they are sick. The conflict view stresses inequality in the quality of health and health-care delivery and efforts by physicians to monopolize the practice of medicine to increase their profits. According to the interactionist view, health and illness are social constructions subject to people's and society's interpretations. The interactionist view also studies how medical professionals and patients interact and the way professionals manage understandings of such interaction.
3. Health and the quality of health care differ widely around the world and reflect global inequality. The earth's poorest nations have extremely high rates of infant mortality and life-threatening diseases such as AIDS and very low life expectancy.
4. The United States lags behind most other industrial nations in important health indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy. Moreover, serious disparities exist within the United States in the social distribution of health, as evidenced by the study of social epidemiology.
5. Social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all affect the quality of health. The health of poor people is worse than that of the nonpoor. African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans all fare worse than whites on many health indicators, in large part because of their poverty and history of discrimination. Women fare worse than men on several heath indicators, but men have lower life expectancies because of their higher rates of certain life-threatening illnesses.
6. Health care in the United States today faces several problems. The United States is alone among the world's industrial nations in not offering universal national health insurance; its absence is thought to help account for the country's low ranking in the industrial world on major health indicators. Managed care has also come under criticism for restricting coverage of important medical procedures and prescription medicines. Racial and gender bias in health care is another problem that has adverse effects on the nation's health. Other quality-of-care problems include tired physicians, a lack of emergency room physicians, and numerous mistakes made in hospitals.

## Using What You Know

You have been working for two months as a volunteer in a hospital in or near your hometown. Your duties include bringing food to patients, talking with them, and otherwise helping them to feel comfortable. However, you have noticed that many of the physicians and nurses you have seen coming into patients' rooms do not wash their hands, and you doubt that they washed their hands immediately before entering the rooms. What, if anything, do you do? Explain your answer.

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the health and health-care problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer at a local hospital or health clinic.
2. Start a group on your campus to advocate for national health insurance, or join an existing group in the nearby community.
3. Volunteer for a local agency that tries to address the health-care needs of low-income children and their families.

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# 11.8: Crash Course Video- Health and Medicine

Health & Medicine: Crash Course Sociology #42




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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 12: Media and Technology


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Thumbnail: SKY Sport24 news channel production control room. (CC-SA-BY 3.0; Morningfrost)


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# 12.1: Prelude to Media and Technology



*Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are just a few examples of social media that increasingly shape how we interact with the world. (Photo courtesy of Khalid Albaih/flickr)*

How many good friends do you have? How many people do you meet up with for coffee or a movie? How many would you call with news about an illness or invite to your wedding? Now, how many "friends" do you have on Facebook? How often do you post a "selfie" online? How often do you check e-mail? How often do you meet friends for a meal and spend your time texting other people instead of talking to each other? Technology has changed how we interact with each other. It has turned "friend" into a verb and has made it possible to share mundane news ("My dog just threw up under the bed! Ugh!") with hundreds or even thousands of people who might know you only slightly, if at all. You might be glued to your cell phone, even when you should be focused on driving your car, or you might text in class instead of listening to the professor's lecture. When we have the ability to stay constantly connected to a data stream, it is easy to lose focus on the here and now.

At the same time that technology is expanding the boundaries of our social circles, various media are also changing how we perceive and interact with each other. We don't only use Facebook to keep in touch with friends; we also use it to "like" certain television shows, products, or celebrities. Even television is no longer a one-way medium; it is an interactive one. We are encouraged to tweet, text, or call in to vote for contestants in everything from singing competitions to matchmaking endeavors—bridging the gap between our entertainment and our own lives.

How does technology change our lives for the better? Or does it? When you tweet a social cause, share an ice bucket challenge video on YouTube, or cut and paste a status update about cancer awareness on Facebook, are you promoting social change? Does the immediate and constant flow of information mean we are more aware and engaged than any society before us? Or are*Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and The Real Housewives franchise today's version of ancient Rome's "bread and circuses"—distractions and entertainment to keep the working classes complacent about the inequities of their society?

These are some of the questions that interest sociologists. How might we examine these issues from a sociological perspective? A functionalist would probably focus on what social purposes technology and media serve. For example, the web is both a form of technology and of media, and it links individuals and nations in a communication network that facilitates both small family discussions and global trade networks. A functionalist would also be interested in the manifest functions of media and technology, as well as their role in social dysfunction. Someone applying the conflict perspective would probably focus on the systematic inequality created by differential access to media and technology. For example, how can middle-class U.S. citizens be sure the news they hear is an objective account of reality, unsullied by moneyed political interests? Someone applying the interactionist perspective to technology and the media might seek to understand the difference between the real lives we lead and the reality

depicted on “reality” television shows, such as *The Bachelor*. Throughout this chapter, we will use our sociological imagination to explore how media and technology impact society.

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# 12.2: Introduction



Figure 8.1: Music fans connect in ways that overcome geographic, socioeconomic, and political differences. (Credit: whataleydude/flickr)

## Chapter Outline

8.1 Technology Today
8.2 Media and Technology in Society
8.3 Global Implications of Media and Technology
8.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Technology

When a celebrity announces that they are quitting social media, it's big news (especially on social media). Depending on the star's status and their reason for leaving, the decision is met with a blend of astonishment, dismay, concern for the individual or others they affect, and discussion about larger problems like bullying or online toxicity.

Why do they quit? Their reasons vary, and many eventually return. Lizzo left Twitter after claiming there were "too many trolls." Lorde indicated that the stress of continual updates, "having front-row seats to the hellfire" necessitated a break (Kirkpatrick 2020). Other artists, like Coldplay, never formally deactivated their accounts, but went for long periods of inactivity. Rhianna took a six month hiatus; Justin Bieber and Adele also went without for some time. No matter what the reason, if a popular artist quits social media, a slew of articles and interviews will focus on the decision and the reasons behind it.

What makes these decisions newsworthy? A person deciding not to use a particular app doesn't affect our day-to-day life. Or does it? What if that person shared intimate aspects of their life, offering a sense of connection to their followers? What if the singer provided continual updates on the progress of their new album, or gave their followers a better chance of meeting them? What if that singer posted or liked new remixes or playlists of their material, giving their fans new music to try?

Beyond the relationship with the artist, the social media presence gives fans a sense of community. Recall the discussion of groups. In traditional terms, a musician's fanbase would be a secondary group: The group creates community, but the members aren't close and are unlikely to serve expressive functions. But social media can easily turn that secondary group into a primary one. Follow a Reddit thread about a new video, and you'll see dozens of people who seem to know each other well, who affirm or argue with each other along familiar lines, as if they're cousins reuniting over a dinner table. They've never met in person and probably never will, but they may know intimate details about each other's lives; they've shared ups and downs in the manner similar to a local, close-knit group.

Selena Gomez has had a complicated relationship with social media. She has announced several times that she is quitting, and went through periods of regular downtime. She's indicated that many of her updates are posted from friends' devices. "As soon as I became the most followed person on Instagram," she said, "I sort of freaked out. It had become so consuming to me. It's what I woke up to and went to sleep to. I was an addict, and it felt like I was seeing things I didn't want to see, like it was putting things in my head that I didn't want to care about" (Haskell 2017).

This chapter will further explore the relationships, opportunities, and issues related to media and technology. While the specific products and platforms may quickly grow out of date, consider the larger implications of group dynamics, culture, socialization, and stratification as they relate to the ways we communicate and connect, and the old and new technologies that are meant to help us.

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# 12.3: Technology Today

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Define technology and describe its evolution
- Explain technological inequality and issues related to unequal access to technology
- Describe the role of planned obsolescence in technological development




(a) (b)

Figure 8.2: Throughout history, technology has been used to convey information. From petroglyphs near a Native American dwelling at Canyon de Chelly to warning signs outside of animal pens, our innovations have been used to provide the most effective delivery possible. (Credit: a: Anthony Quintano/flickr; b: tenioman/flickr)

It is easy to look at the latest virtual reality headset and think technology is a recent addition to our world. But from the steam engine to the most cutting-edge robotic surgery tools, technology has described the application of science to address the problems of daily life. We might roll our eyes at enormous and clunky computers of the 1970s that had far less storage than a free thumb drive. But chances are, twenty years from now our skinny laptops and pocket-filling phones will look just as archaic.

## What Is Technology?

If someone asked your instructor what instructional technology they used, your instructor would likely assume the questioner was referring to courseware platforms, classroom response offerings, or presentation software. But if your instructor simply responded with, “pencil and paper,” they’d still be accurately describing technology. Modern paper and writing devices would have been considered fantastical creations in ancient times. And the fact that they endure, even as many other potential replacements have come into play, shows how effective those technologies are.

Just as the availability of digital technology shapes how we live today, the creation of stone tools changed how premodern humans lived and how well they ate. From the first calculator, invented in 2400 BCE Babylon in the form of an abacus, to the predecessor of the modern computer, created in 1882 by Charles Babbage, all of our technological innovations are advancements on previous iterations. And indeed, all aspects of our lives are influenced by technology. In agriculture, the introduction of machines that can till, thresh, plant, and harvest greatly reduced the need for manual labor, which in turn meant there were fewer rural jobs. This led to the urbanization of society, as well as lowered birth rates because there was less need for large families to work the farms. In the criminal justice system, the ability to ascertain innocence through DNA testing has saved the lives of people on death row. The examples are endless: technology plays a role in absolutely every aspect of our lives.

## Technological Inequality

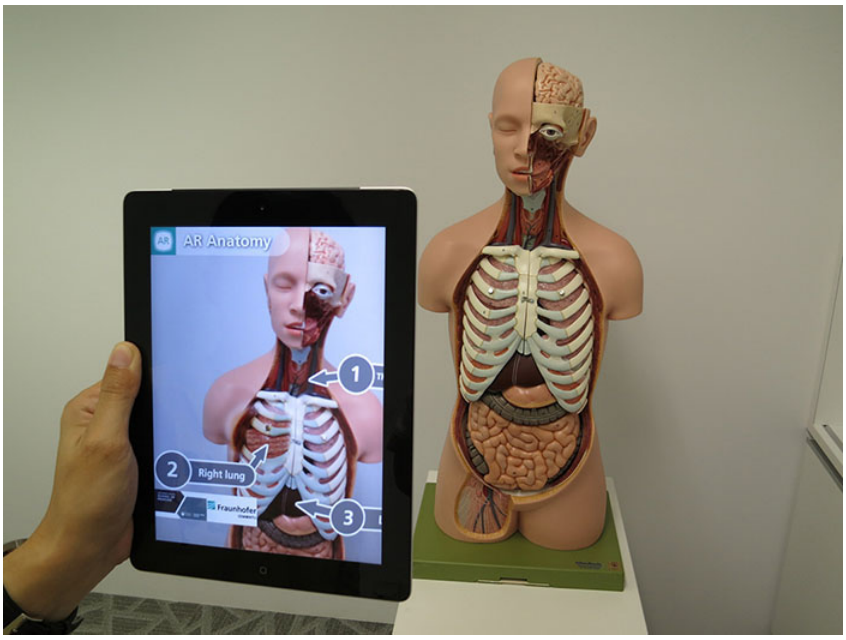



Figure 8.3: Augmented reality devices, robotics and 3D printing labs, and creatorspaces can significantly improve education. But due to their expense, they can also increase learning inequities.

As with any improvement to human society, not everyone has equal access. Technology, in particular, often creates changes that lead to ever greater inequalities. In short, the gap gets wider faster. This technological stratification has led to a new focus on ensuring better access for all.

There are two forms of technological stratification. The first is differential class-based access to technology in the form of the digital divide. This digital divide has led to the second form, a knowledge gap, which is, as it sounds, an ongoing and increasing gap in information for those who have less access to technology. Simply put, students in well-funded schools receive more exposure to technology than students in poorly funded schools. Those students with more exposure gain more proficiency, which makes them far more marketable in an increasingly technology-based job market and leaves our society divided into those with technological knowledge and those without. Even as we improve access, we have failed to address an increasingly evident gap in e-readiness—the ability to sort through, interpret, and process knowledge (Sciadas 2003).

Since the beginning of the millennium, social science researchers have tried to bring attention to the digital divide, the uneven access to technology among different races, classes, and geographic areas. The term became part of the common lexicon in 1996, when then Vice President Al Gore used it in a speech. This was the point when personal computer use shifted dramatically, from 300,000 users in 1991 to more than 10 million users by 1996 (Rappaport 2009). In part, the issue of the digital divide had to do with communities that received infrastructure upgrades that enabled high-speed Internet access, upgrades that largely went to affluent urban and suburban areas, leaving out large swaths of the country.

At the end of the twentieth century, technology access was also a big part of the school experience for those whose communities could afford it. Early in the millennium, poorer communities had little or no technology access, while well-off families had personal computers at home and wired classrooms in their schools. In the 2000s, however, the prices for low-end computers dropped considerably, and it appeared the digital divide was naturally ending. Research demonstrates that technology use and Internet access still vary a great deal by race, class, and age in the United States, though most studies agree that there is minimal difference in Internet use by adult men and adult women.

Data from the Pew Research Center (Perrin 2019) suggests the emergence of yet another divide. Larger percentages of groups such as Latinos and African Americans use their phones rather than traditional computers to connect to the Internet and undertake related activities. Roughly eight in ten White people reported owning computers, in contrast to roughly six in ten Black and Hispanic people owning them. White people were also more likely to have broadband (high-speed Internet) in their homes. But approximately one in four Black and Hispanic people reported being smartphone-only Internet users, a number that far outpaces White people's reliance on the devices. While it might seem that the Internet is the Internet, regardless of how you get there, there's a notable difference. Tasks like updating a résumé or filling out a job application are much harder on a cell phone than on a large-

screen computer in the home. As a result, the digital divide might mean no access to computers or the Internet, but could mean access to the kind of online technology that allows for empowerment, not just entertainment (Washington 2011).

Another aspect of the digital divide is present in the type of community one lives in. Census data released in 2018 showed that in the study period of 2013 to 2017, 78 percent of U.S. households had Internet access, but that homes in rural and low-income areas were below that national average by 13 percent. The data was collected by county, and showed that "mostly urban" counties significantly outpaced "mostly rural" counties. "Completely rural," lower-income counties had the lowest rates of home Internet adoption, at about 60 percent (Martin 2019).

One potential outcome of reduced home Internet and computer access can be the relatively low representation of certain populations in computing courses, computing majors, and computing careers. Some school districts, often with the help of government grants or corporate sponsorships, aim to address this aspect of the digital divide by providing computers to those who need them, either at a low cost or at no charge. A number of organizations, such as Code.org, Black Girls Code, and Black Boys Code, work to overcome the disparity by offering computer science education programs and camps, collaborative instruction programs with local school districts, and (perhaps most impactful in the long term) teacher training programs. As a result, the number of Black and Hispanic students in courses like Advanced Placement Computer Science has increased dramatically in recent years, as has the number of college majors from the same populations.

As a whole, the digital divide brings some level of controversy. Some question why it still exists after having been identified more than twenty years ago. Others question whether or not it exists at all, and offer data to support the claim that it does not exist (American Press Institute 2015). However, most experts agree that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that the digital divide has persisted, particularly in education. While millions of students were confined to home and remote instruction, they were divided by their Internet access, their familiarity with computer hardware and software, and their ability to solve their own technology issues (PRB 2020). Even when governments and educational institutions implemented improvements to the access and technology situation, there remained the qualitative aspect of unplanned remote education: Many instructors and students are not as effective while communicating only through computer screens. When considering education, policymakers faced arduous decision-making processes and contentious debates as they tried the balance the issues of safety, educational quality, teacher safety, student mental health, and the overall changing landscape of the pandemic.

### Constant Contact and Replaced Relationships

How often do you check your phone for new messages or alerts? If you're typical, it might be over 100 times a day. (The number is difficult to cite with confidence, because every few months, organizations or companies release new studies claiming to have updated statistics.) What happens to your phone when you are sleeping? In 2012, researchers reported that “44% of cell phone owners have slept with their phone next to their bed because they wanted to make sure they didn’t miss any calls, text messages, or other updates during the night, and 29% of cell owners describe their cell phone as ‘something they can’t imagine living without’” (Smith 2012). Just three years later, a frequently cited report by Bank of America indicated the number of phone-accompanied sleepers was at 71 percent (Kooser 2015). A more recent survey of 500 people found it to be 66 percent, but that survey only included adults (Abbott 2020). However, these surveys and the reaction to them might be a factor of selective memory: Prior to the rise of cell phones, many people had telephones in their rooms, often within arm's reach of their bed.

While people report that cell phones make it easier to stay in touch, simplify planning, and increase their productivity, those are not the only impacts of constant device usage in the United States. Smith also reports that “roughly one in five cell owners say that their phone has made it at least somewhat harder to forget about work at home or on the weekends; to give people their undivided attention; or to focus on a single task without being distracted” (Smith 2012). As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, even celebrities who have perhaps benefitted the most from increased communication and social media report stress and concern about their online presence and its related outcomes.

With so many people using social media both in the United States and abroad, it is no surprise that social media is a powerful force for social change or political expression. For example, McKenna Pope, a thirteen-year-old girl, used the Internet to successfully petition Hasbro to fight gender stereotypes by creating a gender-neutral Easy-Bake Oven instead of using only the traditional pink color (Kumar 2014). Movements such as MeToo and Black Lives Matter gained prominence partly through what is sometimes referred to as "hashtag activism." More recently, TikTok users who actively opposed Donald Trump's re-election registered for nearly all the seats at a major rally. When they did not attend, the arena was nearly empty, after the campaign had predicted it would be overflowing. Later, Trump supporters used the social media site Parler in their own rally planning and coordination.

Such consistent and impactful usage leads to unavoidable results: Newer communication methods are replacing older ones. Speaking by phone seems archaic and almost intrusive for some people, who greatly prefer non-voice messaging apps or texts. Media observers, etiquette commentators, and friends and family may lament people beginning and ending relationships by text message, but those methods have proven more comfortable, especially for young people.

What are the effects? There have not been studies on every type of relationship, but research into romantic relationships shows interesting results. First, consider the elements of a relationship. One is attachment, or the bond that people form with each other. Research has shown that constant communication via messaging significantly increases the level of attachment. That fact seems intuitive: people who continually check in on each other, report their whereabouts, and offer support or affirmation will build a stronger bond. The same study, however, found that the respondents rated the overall quality of the relationship as weaker or less satisfying when it was dominated by text messaging instead of voice conversation (Luo 2014).

Many of us have experienced another aspect of relationships: reliance or imbalance. Researchers have found that close friends who are heavily reliant on mobile devices and associated messaging may have more issues regarding overdependence on the relationship and differing expectations regarding communication. Friendships that do not rely on mobile devices may have far less frequent contact. Research found elements of guilt and pressure to respond (called entrapment) in mobile-dependent relationships, which led to overall dissatisfaction (Hall 2012).

### Online Privacy, Security, and Control

As we increase our footprints on the web by going online more often to connect socially, share material, conduct business, and store information, we also increase our vulnerability to those with negative intent. Most Americans seem to accept that increased usage of online and related tools brings risks, but their perceptions of those risks are evolving. For example, people have different viewpoints on risks associated with individuals, companies, and the government. The Pew Research Center conducts frequent surveys on these topics. A recent publication indicated the following:

- 81 percent of people felt they had little control over the data collected by companies; 84 percent felt they had little control over data collected by the government.
- 62 percent felt that it was not possible to go through the day without having data collected about them by companies; 63% felt it wasn't possible to go through a day without data collection by the government.
- 79 percent were concerned about that data use by companies; 64 percent were concerned about data use by the government.

Other elements of the research demonstrate that older Americans felt more concern than younger ones, and that Black and Hispanic people were more likely than White people to believe the government was tracking them (Auxier 2019).

These attitudes may be revealed by practices or attitudes toward privacy efforts and safeguards. One person may be annoyed every time a privacy notice interrupts them, and they may simply sign the statement without thinking much about it. Another person may read every word of the agreement and carefully deliberate over whether to proceed.

Online privacy concerns also extend from individuals to their dependents. In accordance with the Child Online Privacy Protection Act, school districts must consider and control certain elements of privacy on behalf of students, meaning they cannot require or encourage students under age thirteen to provide personal information. Likewise, online platforms such as Instagram do not let children under the age of thirteen register for their sites. And where children are registered by their parents, sites like YouTube and, more recently, TikTok issue controls to prevent inappropriate portrayals by children or inappropriate behavior by other members. For example, YouTube often disables comments on videos produced by children (Moreno 2020). TikTok added privacy and protection methods in 2020, but in early 2021 was hit with allegations of violating child safety and privacy guidelines.

Although schools and companies are required to take steps to lower risks to children, parents and guardians are free to make their own choices on behalf of their children. Some parents avoid showing their children on social media; they do not post pictures, and ask family members to refrain from doing so (Levy, 2019). On the other end of the spectrum, some parents run social media accounts for their children. Sometimes referred to as "sharents," they may share entertaining videos, promote products through demos or try-ons, or post professionally produced photos on behalf of clothing companies or equipment makers. A child's (even a toddler's) role as an influencer can be financially lucrative, and companies making everything from helmets to dancewear have taken notice (Allchin 2012).

### Net Neutrality

The issue of net neutrality, the principle that all Internet data should be treated equally by Internet service providers, is part of the national debate about Internet access and the digital divide. On one side of this debate is the belief that those who provide Internet

service, like those who provide electricity and water, should be treated as common carriers, legally prohibited from discriminating based on the customer or nature of the goods. Supporters of net neutrality suggest that without such legal protections, the Internet could be divided into “fast” and “slow” lanes. A conflict perspective theorist might suggest that this discrimination would allow bigger corporations, such as Amazon, to pay Internet providers a premium for faster service, which could lead to gaining an advantage that would drive small, local competitors out of business.

The other side of the debate holds the belief that designating Internet service providers as common carriers would constitute an unreasonable regulatory burden and limit the ability of telecommunication companies to operate profitably. A functional perspective theorist might point out that, without profits, companies would not invest in making improvements to their Internet service or expanding those services to underserved areas. The final decision rests with the Federal Communications Commission and the federal government, which must decide how to fairly regulate broadband providers without dividing the Internet into haves and have-nots.

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# 12.4: Media and Technology in Society

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Describe the evolution and current role of different media, like newspapers, television, and new media
- Describe the function of product advertising in media
- Demonstrate awareness of the social homogenization and social fragmentation that occur via modern society's use of technology and media




Figure 8.4: Facebook's VP of Engineering Regina Dugan gave a talk about innovations in the platform's technologies in which she shared potential innovations, including creating text directly from our thoughts. While the prospect of drafting messages or papers by thinking about them would certainly speed up our processes, opening our thoughts directly to a social media company might have larger implications. (Credit: Anthony Quintano/flickr)

Technology and the media are interwoven, and neither can be separated from contemporary society in most core and semi-peripheral nations. Media is a term that refers to all print, digital, and electronic means of communication. From the time the printing press was created (and even before), technology has influenced how and where information is shared. Today, it is impossible to discuss media and the ways societies communicate without addressing the fast-moving pace of technology change. Twenty years ago, if you wanted to share news of your baby's birth or a job promotion, you phoned or wrote letters. You might tell a handful of people, but you probably wouldn't call up several hundred, including your old high school chemistry teacher, to let them know. Now, you might join an online community of parents-to-be even before you announce your pregnancy via a staged Instagram picture. The circle of communication is wider than ever, and when we talk about how societies engage with technology, we must take media into account, and vice versa.

Technology creates media. The comic book you bought your daughter is a form of media, as is the movie you streamed for family night, the web site you used to order takeout, the billboard you passed on the way to pick up your food, and the newspaper you read while you were waiting for it. Without technology, media would not exist, but remember, technology is more than just the media we are exposed to.

## Categorizing Technology

There is no one way of dividing technology into categories. Whereas once it might have been simple to classify innovations such as machine-based or drug-based or the like, the interconnected strands of technological development mean that advancement in one area might be replicated in dozens of others. For simplicity's sake, we will look at how the U.S. Patent Office, which receives patent applications for nearly all major innovations worldwide, addresses patents. This regulatory body will patent three types of innovation. Utility patents are the first type. These are granted for the invention or discovery of any new and useful process, product, or machine, or for a significant improvement to existing technologies. The second type of patent is a design patent.

Commonly conferred in architecture and industrial design, this means someone has invented a new and original design for a manufactured product. Plant patents, the final type, recognize the discovery of new plant types that can be asexually reproduced. While genetically modified food is the hot-button issue within this category, farmers have long been creating new hybrids and patenting them. A more modern example might be food giant Monsanto, which patents corn with built-in pesticide (U.S. Patent and Trademark Office 2011).

Anderson and Tushman (1990) suggest an evolutionary model of technological change, in which a breakthrough in one form of technology leads to a number of variations. Once those are assessed, a prototype emerges, and then a period of slight adjustments to the technology, interrupted by a breakthrough. For example, in terms of portable data storage, the first mainstream device was a floppy disk–a square, plastic object larger than a playing card, which in its final iteration held 1.4 megabytes of data (or less than a single high-resolution photo). Until the early 2000s, these were common formats, and students and professionals would regularly carry several of them. Floppy disks were improved and upgraded, then replaced by higher-capacity Zip and Jaz disks, which were then replaced by flash drives. This is essentially a generational model for categorizing technology, in which first-generation technology is a relatively unsophisticated jumping-off point that leads to an improved second generation, and so on.

Another type of evolution involves disruptive technology (or disruptive innovation), which is a product, service, or process that has a major effect on the operation of an entire industry, and/or may create new industries or new markets. In the example above, a disruptive technology might be the advent of cloud-based storage platforms like Google Drive and iCloud, which have significantly reduced the need for physical portable storage. Disruptive technology can create and destroy entire industries, sometimes in a rapid manner rather than in an evolutionary one. In one of the most famous examples, the advent of digital photography rendered film-based cameras obsolete; the change came quickly, and many companies could not adjust. In a similar manner, ride-sharing services have had a massive impact on the taxi and limousine industry. Emerging technologies such as blockchain, additive manufacturing (3D printing), and augmented reality are likely to have similar impacts. For example, if companies decide that it is more efficient to 3D print many products or components close to their destinations instead of shipping them from distant manufacturing plants and warehouses, the entire shipping industry may be affected.

The sociological impact of disruptive technology can be sudden. Digital photography, for example, resulted in the rapid decline of companies like Kodak, which had been stalwarts of the American economy and a major employer. Layoffs devastated cities like Rochester, New York. The advent of online music purchasing and subscription services resulted in the closure of thousands of record stores, both small businesses and large chains like Tower Records. Beyond the economic impact, these stores were often parts of the fabric of communities, places for fans to gather to explore and share music. Automation has likewise changed manufacturing and mining, resulting in severe job loss and drastic alterations in regions such as the Great Lakes, where many towns went from being part of the Manufacturing Belt to being part of the Rust Belt.

Sociology in the Real World: Violence in Media and Video Games: Does It Matter?




Figure 8.5: One of the most popular video games, Grand Theft Auto, has frequently been at the center of debate about gratuitous violence in the gaming world. (Credit: Meddy Garnet/flickr)

A glance through popular video game and movie titles geared toward children and teens shows the vast spectrum of violence that is displayed, condoned, and acted out.

As a way to guide parents in their programming choices, the motion picture industry put a rating system in place in the 1960s. But new media—video games in particular—proved to be uncharted territory. In 1994, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ERSB) set a ratings system for games that addressed issues of violence, sexuality, drug use, and the like. California took it a step further by making it illegal to sell video games to underage buyers. The case led to a heated debate about personal freedoms and child protection, and in 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the California law, stating it violated freedom of speech (ProCon 2012).

Children's play has often involved games of aggression—from cops and robbers to fake sword fights. Many articles report on the controversy surrounding the suggested link between violent video games and violent behavior. Is the link real? Psychologists Anderson and Bushman (2001) reviewed forty-plus years of research on the subject and, in 2003, determined that there are causal linkages between violent video game use and aggression. They found that children who had just played a violent video game demonstrated an immediate increase in hostile or aggressive thoughts, an increase in aggressive emotions, and physiological arousal that increased the chances of acting out aggressive behavior (Anderson 2003).

However, though the American Psychological Association and other researchers found an increase in aggressive tendencies based on video game play, several studies and conclusions indicated "scant evidence" that violent video games cause either physical violence or criminal behavior. Researchers have found correlations between those behaviors, essentially indicating that violent people may be more likely to play violent video games, but that still does not mean that video games cause violence.

## Types of Media and Technology

Media and technology have evolved hand in hand, from early print to modern publications, from radio to television to film. New media emerge constantly, such as we see in the online world.

## Newspaper

Early forms of print media, found in ancient Rome, were hand-copied onto boards and carried around to keep the citizenry informed. With the invention of the printing press, the way that people shared ideas changed, as information could be mass produced and stored. For the first time, there was a way to spread knowledge and information more efficiently; many credit this development as leading to the Renaissance and ultimately the Age of Enlightenment. This is not to say that newspapers of old were more trustworthy than the *Weekly World News* and *National Enquirer* are today. Sensationalism abounded, as did censorship that forbade any subjects that would incite the populace.

The invention of the telegraph, in the mid-1800s, changed print media almost as much as the printing press. Suddenly information could be transmitted in minutes. As the nineteenth century became the twentieth, U.S. publishers such as Hearst redefined the world of print media and wielded an enormous amount of power to socially construct national and world events. Of course, even as the media empires of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were growing, print media also allowed for the dissemination of countercultural or revolutionary materials. Internationally, Vladimir Lenin's *Irksa* (*The Spark*) newspaper was published in 1900 and played a role in Russia's growing communist movement (World Association of Newspapers 2004).

With the invention and widespread use of television in the mid-twentieth century, newspaper circulation steadily dropped off, and in the 21st century, circulation has dropped further as more people turn to internet news sites and other forms of new media to stay informed. According to the Pew Research Center, 2009 saw an unprecedented drop in newspaper circulation—down 10.6 percent from the year before (Pew 2010).

This shift away from newspapers as a source of information has profound effects on societies. When the news is given to a large diverse conglomerate of people, it must maintain some level of broad-based reporting and balance in order to appeal to a broad audience and keep them subscribing. As newspapers decline, news sources become more fractured, so each segment of the audience can choose specifically what it wants to hear and what it wants to avoid. Increasingly, newspapers are shifting online in an attempt to remain relevant. It is hard to tell what impact new media platforms will have on the way we receive and process information.

It is hard to tell what impact new media platforms will have on the way we receive and process information. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2013) reported that audiences for all the major news magazines declined in 2012, though digital ad revenue increased. The same report suggested that, while newspaper circulation is holding steady at around $10 billion after years of decline, it is digital pay plans that allow newspapers to keep their heads above water, and the digital ad revenue that is increasing for news magazines is not enough to compensate for print revenue loss in newspapers.

A 2014 report suggested that U.S. adults read a median of five books per year in 2013, which is about average. But are they reading traditional print or e-books? About 69 percent of people said they had read at least one printed book in the past year, versus 28 percent who said they'd read an e-book (DeSilver 2014). Is print more effective at conveying information? In recent study, Mangen, Walgermo, and Bronnick (2013) found that students who read on paper performed slightly better than those who read an e-book on an open-book reading comprehension exam of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. While a meta-analysis of research by Andrews (1992) seemed to confirm that people read more slowly and comprehend less when reading from screens, a meta-analysis of more recent research on this topic does not show anything definite (Noyes and Garland 2008).

## Television and Radio



Figure 8.6: Television control rooms feature feeds from many other networks, so that producers and reporters can see different perspectives on the same events and be alerted to new developments around the world (Credit: Anthony Quintano/flickr).

Radio programming obviously preceded television, but both shaped people's lives in much the same way. In both cases, information (and entertainment) could be enjoyed at home, with a kind of immediacy and community that newspapers could not offer. For instance, many people in the United States might remember when they saw on television or heard on the radio that the Twin Towers in New York City had been attacked in 2001. Even though people were in their own homes, media allowed them to share these moments in real time. This same kind of separate-but-communal approach occurred with entertainment too. School-aged children and office workers gathered to discuss the previous night's installment of a serial television or radio show.

Right up through the 1970s, U.S. television was dominated by three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) that competed for ratings and advertising dollars. The networks also exerted a lot of control over what people watched. Public television, in contrast, offered an educational nonprofit alternative to the sensationalization of news spurred by the network competition for viewers and advertising dollars. Those sources—PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), the BBC (British Broadcasting Company), and CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company)—garnered a worldwide reputation for high-quality programming and a global perspective. Al Jazeera, the Arabic independent news station, has joined this group as a similar media force that broadcasts to people worldwide.

The impact of television on U.S. society is hard to overstate. By the late 1990s, 98 percent of U.S. homes had at least one television set, and the average person watched between two and a half and five hours of television daily. All this television has a powerful socializing effect, providing reference groups while reinforcing social norms, values, and beliefs.

### Film

The film industry took off in the 1930s, when color and sound were first integrated into feature films. Like television, early films were unifying for society: as people gathered in theaters to watch new releases, they would laugh, cry, and be scared together. Movies also act as time capsules or cultural touchstones for society. From Westerns starring the tough-talking Clint Eastwood to the biopic of Facebook founder and Harvard dropout Mark Zuckerberg, movies illustrate society's dreams, fears, and experiences. While many consider Hollywood the epicenter of moviemaking, India's Bollywood actually produces more films per year, speaking to the cultural aspirations and norms of Indian society. The film industry, like other media formats, has gone through substantial change as a result of streaming services, online privacy, and the new competition for people's entertainment dollars. Because the mainstream movie industry has been so reliant on ticket sales at live theaters, the COVID-19 pandemic affected it more dramatically than most other media categories. Highly anticipated movies slated for 2020 and 2021 releases were delayed or shifted to streaming distribution, reducing revenue. And some companies made lasting decisions regarding their future offerings.

New media encompasses all interactive forms of information exchange. These include social networking sites, blogs, podcasts, wikis, and virtual worlds. Many are not "new" in the sense that they were developed in the past few years (some may be older than you), but they are newer than the media mentioned above, and they rely on types of technologies that were not available until about thirty years ago. Many are ways disruptive to traditional media or to companies that rely on those other formats. Clearly, the list of new media grows almost daily, and you might feel we are missing some. In fact, the immediacy of new media coupled with the lack of oversight means we must be more careful than ever to ensure that we are making good decisions about the accuracy, ethics, and cultural responsiveness of these formats.

### Sociology in the Real World: Planned Obsolescence: Technology That's Built to Crash



Figure 8.7: Many people are incredibly reliant on their devices, but in business contexts, a failing phone or computer can have impacts on customers and revenues. (Credit: Rawpixel Ltd/flickr)

Chances are your mobile phone company, as well as the makers of your laptop and your household appliances, are all counting on their products to fail. Not too quickly, of course, or consumers wouldn't stand for it—but frequently enough that you might find that it costs far more to fix a device than to replace it with a newer model. Or you find the phone company e-mails you saying that you're eligible for a free new phone, because yours is a whopping two years old. And appliance repair people say that while they might be fixing some machines that are twenty years old, they generally aren't fixing those that are seven years old; newer models are built to be thrown out. This strategy is called planned obsolescence, and it is the business practice of planning for a product to be obsolete or unusable from the time it is created.

To some extent, planned obsolescence is a natural extension of new and emerging technologies. After all, who is going to cling to an enormous and slow desktop computer from 2000 when a few hundred dollars can buy one that is significantly faster and better? But the practice is not always so benign. The classic example of planned obsolescence is the nylon stocking. Women's stockings—once an everyday staple of women's lives—get "runs" or "ladders" after only a few wearings. This requires the stockings to be discarded and new ones purchased. Not surprisingly, the garment industry did not invest heavily in finding a rip-proof fabric; it was in manufacturers' best interest that their product be regularly replaced.

Those who use Microsoft Windows might feel that like the women who purchased endless pairs of stockings, they are victims of planned obsolescence. Every time Windows releases a new operating system, there are typically not many innovations in it that consumers feel they must have. However, the software programs are upwardly compatible only. This means that while the new versions can read older files, the old version cannot read the newer ones. In short order, those who have not upgraded right away find themselves unable to open files sent by colleagues or friends, and they usually wind up upgrading as well.

Planned obsolescence is not always done ethically, and some companies can dictate the obsolescence after the user makes a purchase. Apple users took to social media to confirm that their older iPhones suddenly began losing power or were slowing down considerably. Many users bought new phones at high prices, and later learned that the slow downs were intended by the phone maker. Customers filed dozens of class action lawsuits, which are suits where a very large group of people can band together. Apple was found to have intentionally and improperly altered its phones through a software update in order to hide battery problems. While it never admitted guilt, Apple's $500 million settlement paid benefits to iPhone 6 and iPhone 7 users who had been affected, and a later $113 agreement with state attorneys general included provisions to behave more ethically and transparently (CNBC 2020).

## Product Advertising and the Attention Economy

Companies use advertising to sell to us, but the way they reach us is changing. Naomi Klein identified the destructive impact of corporate branding her 1999 text, *No Logo*, an antiglobalization treatise that focused on sweatshops, corporate power, and anticonsumerist social movements. In the post-millennial society, synergistic advertising practices ensure you are receiving the same message from a variety of sources and on a variety of platforms. For example, you may see billboards for Miller beer on your way to a stadium, sit down to watch a game preceded by a Miller commercial on the big screen, and watch a halftime ad in which people are shown holding up the trademark bottles. Chances are you can guess which brand of beer is for sale at the concession stand.

Advertising has changed, as technology and media have allowed consumers to bypass traditional advertising venues. From the invention of the remote control, which allows us to skip television advertising without leaving our seats, to recording devices that let us watch programs but skip the ads, conventional television advertising is on the wane. And print media is no different. Advertising revenue in newspapers and on television has fallen significantly, which shows that companies need new ways of getting their messages to consumers.

Brand ambassadorships can also be powerful tools for advertisers. For example, companies hire college students to be their on-campus representatives, and they may target for students engaged in high-profile activities like sports, fraternities, and music. (This practice is slightly different from sponsorships, and note that some students, particularly athletes, need to follow strict guidelines about accepting money or products.) The marketing team is betting that if we buy perfume because Beyoncé tells us to, we'll also choose our workout gear, clothing, or make-up brand if another student encourages that choice. Tens of thousands of brand ambassadors or brand evangelists work on college campuses, and such marketing approaches are seen as highly effective investments for companies. The numbers make it clear: Ambassador-referred customers provide sixteen percent higher value to companies than other customers, and over ninety percent of people indicate that people trust referrals from people they know (On-Campus Advertising, 2017).

Social media has made such influencer and ambassador marketing a near constant. Some formal ambassadors are sponsored by companies to show or use their products. In some cases, compensation arrives only in the form of the free products and whatever monetization the ambassador receives from the site, such as YouTube. Influencers are usually less formally engaged with companies than are ambassadors, relying mostly on site revenue to reward their efforts. Some influencers may overstate their popularity in order to get free products or services. For example, luxury hotels report that they are barraged by influencers (some with very few followers, and therefore questionable influence) who expect free stays in exchange for creating posts promoting the location (Locker 2019).

One ethical and perhaps relationship-oriented question is whether paid ambassadors should be required to disclose their relationship with a company, and how that works in online versus face-to-face interactions. In this case, online presence may be more "truthful" than in-person relationships. A video can formally include sponsorship information, and some ambassadors list partners or sponsors on their profiles. But in day-to-day, in-person conversations, it might be awkward for a classmate or colleague to mention that they are wearing a particular brand or using gear based on a financial relationship. In other words, the person sitting next to you with the great bag may be paid to carry it, and you may never know.

## Homogenization and Fragmentation

Despite the variety of media at hand, the mainstream news and entertainment you enjoy are increasingly homogenized. Research by McManus (1995) suggests that different news outlets all tell the same stories, using the same sources, resulting in the same message, presented with only slight variations. So whether you are reading the *New York Times* or the CNN's web site, the coverage of national events like a major court case or political issue will likely be the same.

Simultaneously with this homogenization among the major news outlets, the opposite process is occurring in the newer media streams. With so many choices, people increasingly customize their news experience, minimizing their opportunity to encounter information that does not jive with their worldview (Prior 2005). For instance, those who are staunchly Republican can avoid centrist or liberal-leaning cable news shows and web sites that would show Democrats in a favorable light. They know to seek out Fox News over MSNBC, just as Democrats know to do the opposite. Further, people who want to avoid politics completely can choose to visit web sites that deal only with entertainment or that will keep them up to date on sports scores. They have an easy way to avoid information they do not wish to hear. Americans seem to view this phenomenon with great concern, indicating that the impact of customized or personalized news delivers worse news. Yet, they still engage with the platforms that deliver news in that manner.

The fragmentation of the news has led to an increased amount of digital tribalism. Tribalism in this sense is the state or tendency to gather and reinforce ideas belonging to a group, and to do so out of a sense of strong loyalty. Digital tribalism, then, is the tendency to do so online, and also to forge new tribes purely based on online personas or ideologies. Instead of basing these groups on the classic bonds of ethnic, religious, or geographic ideologies, they are based on politics, emotions, lifestyles or lifestyle goals, or even brands (Taute & Sierra 2014). Digital tribes can lead people to a greater sense of belonging, and can also be heavily exploited for commercial or power-attaining interests.

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# 12.5: Global Implications of Media and Technology

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Explain the advantages and concerns of media globalization
- Explain the globalization of technology

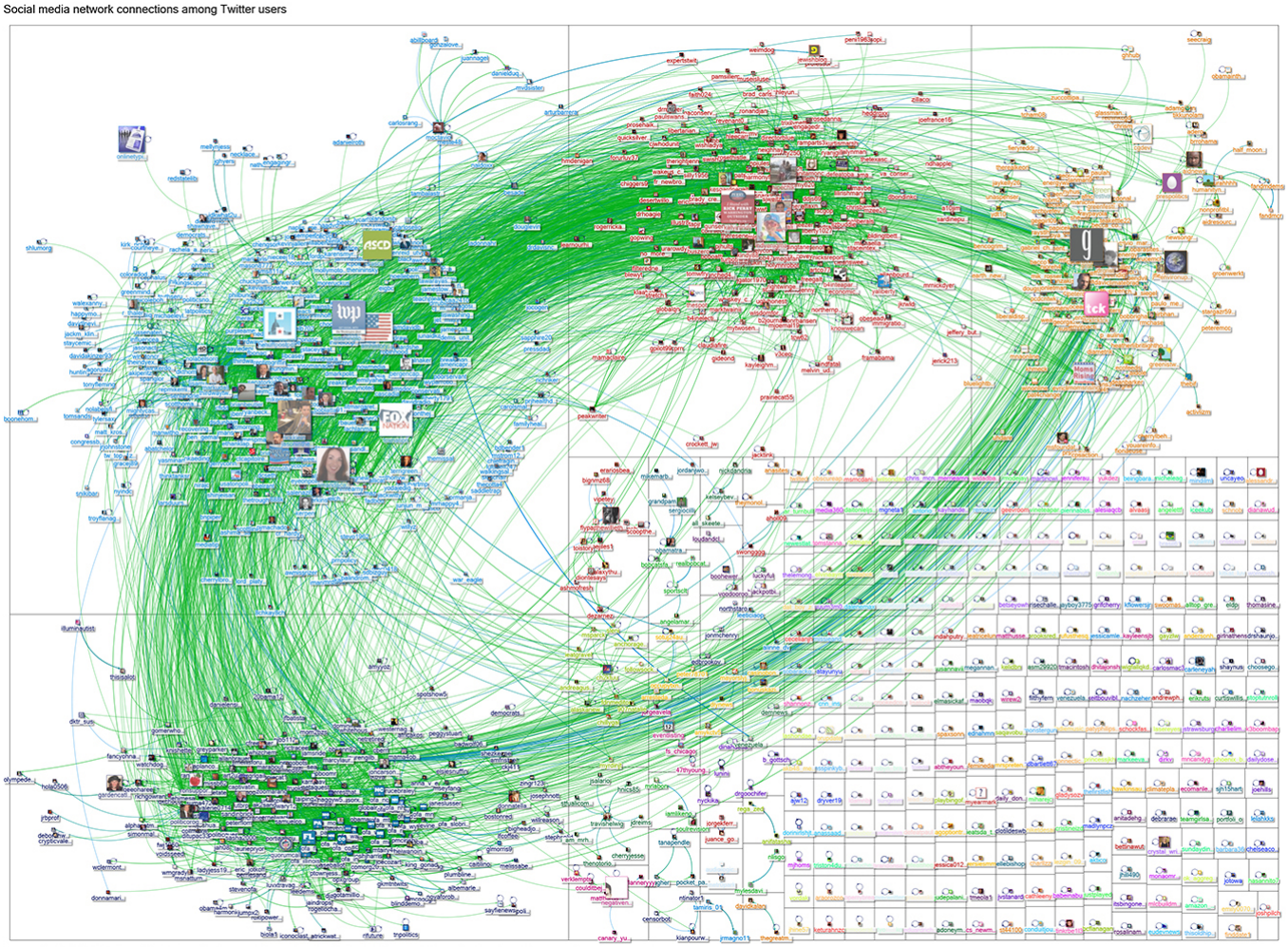



Figure 8.8: This graphic indicates the connections among people who tweeted or replied about the State of the Union address. Green lines indicate people who follow each other on the platform. (Credit Marc Smith/flickr)

Technology, and increasingly media, has always driven globalization. In a landmark book, Thomas Friedman (2005), identified several ways in which technology "flattened" the globe and contributed to our global economy. The first edition of *The World Is Flat*, written in 2005, posits that core economic concepts were changed by personal computing and high-speed Internet. Access to these two technological shifts has allowed core-nation corporations to recruit workers in call centers located in China or India. Using examples like a Midwestern U.S. woman who runs a business from her home via the call centers of Bangalore, India, Friedman warns that this new world order will exist whether core-nation businesses are ready or not, and that in order to keep its key economic role in the world, the United States will need to pay attention to how it prepares workers of the twenty-first century for this dynamic.

Of course not everyone agrees with Friedman's theory. Many economists pointed out that in reality innovation, economic activity, and population still gather in geographically attractive areas, and they continue to create economic peaks and valleys, which are by no means flattened out to mean equality for all. China's hugely innovative and powerful cities of Shanghai and Beijing are worlds away from the rural squalor of the country's poorest denizens.

It is worth noting that Friedman is an economist, not a sociologist. His work focuses on the economic gains and risks this new world order entails. In this section, we will look more closely at how media globalization and technological globalization play out in a sociological perspective. As the names suggest, media globalization is the worldwide integration of media through the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, while technological globalization refers to the cross-cultural development and exchange of technology.

## Media Globalization

Lyons (2005) suggests that multinational corporations are the primary vehicle of media globalization, and these corporations control global mass-media content and distribution (Compaine 2005). It is true, when looking at who controls which media outlets, that there are fewer independent news sources as larger and larger conglomerates develop. In the early 2000s, the United States offered about 1,500 newspapers, 2,800 book publishers, plus 6,000 magazines and a whopping 10,000 radio outlets (Bagdikian 2004). By 2019, some of those numbers had changed: There were only 1,000 newspapers, but over 7,000 magazines (note that both newspapers and magazines count as such even if they publish largely online) (BBC 2019). The number of book publishers and radio outlets has generally remained static, which may seem surprising.

On the surface, there is endless opportunity to find diverse media outlets. But the numbers are misleading. Media consolidation is a process in which fewer and fewer owners control the majority of media outlets. This creates an oligopoly in which a few firms dominate the media marketplace. In 1983, a mere 50 corporations owned the bulk of mass-media outlets. Today in the United States just five companies control 90 percent of media outlets (McChesney 1999). Ranked by 2014 company revenue, Comcast is the biggest, followed by the Disney Corporation, Time Warner, CBS, and Viacom (Time.com 2014). What impact does this consolidation have on the type of information to which the U.S. public is exposed? Does media consolidation deprive the public of multiple viewpoints and limit its discourse to the information and opinions shared by a few sources? Why does it matter?

Monopolies matter because less competition typically means consumers are less well served since dissenting opinions or diverse viewpoints are less likely to be found. Media consolidation results in the following dysfunctions. First, consolidated media owes more to its stockholders than to the public. Publicly traded Fortune 500 companies must pay more attention to their profitability and to government regulators than to the public's right to know. The few companies that control most of the media, because they are owned by the power elite, represent the political and social interests of only a small minority. In an oligopoly there are fewer incentives to innovate, improve services, or decrease prices.

While some social scientists predicted that the increase in media forms would create a global village (McLuhan 1964), current research suggests that the public sphere accessing the global village will tend to be rich, Caucasoid, and English-speaking (Jan 2009). As shown by the spring 2011 uprisings throughout the Arab world, technology really does offer a window into the news of the world. For example, here in the United States we saw internet updates of Egyptian events in real time, with people tweeting, posting, and blogging on the ground in Tahrir Square.

Still, there is no question that the exchange of technology from core nations to peripheral and semi-peripheral ones leads to a number of complex issues. For instance, someone using a conflict theorist approach might focus on how much political ideology and cultural colonialism occurs with technological growth. In theory at least, technological innovations are ideology-free; a fiber optic cable is the same in a Muslim country as a secular one, a communist country or a capitalist one. But those who bring technology to less-developed nations—whether they are nongovernment organizations, businesses, or governments—usually have an agenda. A functionalist, in contrast, might focus on the ways technology creates new means to share information about successful crop-growing programs, or on the economic benefits of opening a new market for cell phone use. Either way, cultural and societal assumptions and norms are being delivered along with those high-speed wires.

Cultural and ideological bias are not the only risks of media globalization. In addition to the risk of cultural imperialism and the loss of local culture, other problems come with the benefits of a more interconnected globe. One risk is the potential for censoring by national governments that let in only the information and media they feel serve their message, as is occurring in China. In addition, core nations such as the United States risk the use of international media by criminals to circumvent local laws against socially deviant and dangerous behaviors such as gambling, child pornography, and the sex trade. Offshore or international web sites allow U.S. citizens (and others) to seek out whatever illegal or illicit information they want, from twenty-four hour online gambling sites that do not require proof of age, to sites that sell child pornography. These examples illustrate the societal risks of unfettered information flow.




Figure 8.9: What information is accessible to these patrons of an internet café in China? What is censored from their view? (Credit: Kai Hendry/flickr)

In the United States, the Internet is used to access illegal gambling and pornography sites, as well as to research stocks, crowd-source what car to buy, or keep in touch with childhood friends. Can we allow one or more of those activities, while restricting the rest? And who decides what needs restricting? In a country with democratic principles and an underlying belief in free-market capitalism, the answer is decided in the court system. But globally, the questions—and the governments' responses—are very different.

Other countries take a far more restrictive and directive approach to Internet regulation. China, which is a country with a tight rein on the dissemination of information, has long worked to suppress what it calls “harmful information,” including dissent concerning government politics, dialogue about China’s relationship with Hong Kong, or criticism of the government’s handling of events.

With sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube blocked in China, the nation’s Internet users turn to local media companies for their needs. Even so, the country exerts strong control by identifying and prosecuting some violators of the bans, and undertaking more far-reaching tactics.

The nation blocks the use of certain terms, such as “human rights,” and passes new laws that require people to register with their real names and make it more dangerous to criticize government actions.

In early 2021, Myanmar's military launched a coup against its government. Elected leader Ang San Suu Kyi was arrested, and other top officials were detained or pushed from power. (Suu Kyi had previously spent years under house arrest.) Immediately, citizens launched widespread and persistent protests against the coup. Myanmar's military took immediate steps to quell the protests, including firing at and killing dozens of protesters and storming colleges and hospitals. But first, the government banned Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp in an effort to reduce coordination among protesters and restrain news about the crackdown. The government also arrested reporters, including foreign nationals, who were accused of violating a public order law. Social media companies replied in what ways they could, such as deactivating the accounts of Myanmar's military so that they couldn't share their own messages.

## Technological Globalization

Technological globalization is speeded in large part by technological diffusion, the spread of technology across borders. In the last two decades, there has been rapid improvement in the spread of technology to peripheral and semi-peripheral nations, and a 2008 World Bank report discusses both the benefits and ongoing challenges of this diffusion. In general, the report found that technological progress and economic growth rates were linked, and that the rise in technological progress has helped improve the situations of many living in absolute poverty (World Bank 2008). The report recognizes that rural and low-tech products such as corn can benefit from new technological innovations, and that, conversely, technologies like mobile banking can aid those whose rural existence consists of low-tech market vending. In addition, technological advances in areas like mobile phones can lead to competition, lowered prices, and concurrent improvements in related areas such as mobile banking and information sharing.

However, the same patterns of social inequality that create a digital divide in the United States also create digital divides within peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. While the growth of technology use among countries has increased dramatically over the past several decades, the spread of technology within countries is significantly slower among peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. In these countries, far fewer people have the training and skills to take advantage of new technology, let alone access it. Technological access tends to be clustered around urban areas and leaves out vast swaths of peripheral-nation citizens. While the diffusion of information technologies has the potential to resolve many global social problems, it is often the population most in need that is most affected by the digital divide. For example, technology to purify water could save many lives, but the villages in peripheral nations most in need of water purification don't have access to the technology, the funds to purchase it, or the technological comfort level to introduce it as a solution.

### Sociology in the Real World: The Mighty Cell Phone: How Mobile Phones Are Impacting Sub-Saharan Africa

Many of Africa's poorest countries suffer from a marked lack of infrastructure including poor roads, limited electricity, and minimal access to education and telephones. But while landline use has not changed appreciably during the past ten years, there's been a fivefold increase in mobile phone access; more than a third of people in Sub-Saharan Africa have the ability to access a mobile phone (Katine 2010). Even more can use a "village phone"—through a shared-phone program created by the Grameen Foundation. With access to mobile phone technology, a host of benefits become available that have the potential to change the dynamics in these poorest nations. Sometimes that change is as simple as being able to make a phone call to neighboring market towns. By finding out which markets have vendors interested in their goods, fishers and farmers can ensure they travel to the market that will serve them best and avoid a wasted trip. Others can use mobile phones and some of the emerging money-sending systems to securely send money to a family member or business partner elsewhere (Katine 2010).

These shared-phone programs are often funded by businesses like Germany's Vodafone or Britain's Masbabi, which hope to gain market share in the region. Phone giant Nokia points out that there are 4 billion mobile phone users worldwide—that's more than twice as many people as have bank accounts—meaning there is ripe opportunity to connect banking companies with people who need their services (ITU Telecom 2009). Not all access is corporate-based, however. Other programs are funded by business organizations that seek to help peripheral nations with tools for innovation and entrepreneurship.

But this wave of innovation and potential business comes with costs. There is, certainly, the risk of cultural imperialism, and the assumption that core nations (and core-nation multinationals) know what is best for those struggling in the world's poorest communities. Whether well intentioned or not, the vision of a continent of Africans successfully chatting on their iPhone may not be ideal. Like all aspects of global inequity, access to technology in Africa requires more than just foreign investment. There must be a concerted effort to ensure the benefits of technology get to where they are needed most.

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# 12.6: Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Technology

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Discuss how we analyze media and technology through various sociological perspectives

It is difficult to conceive of any one theory or theoretical perspective that can explain the variety of ways in which people interact with technology and the media. Technology runs the gamut from the match you strike to light a candle all the way up to sophisticated nuclear power plants that might power the factory where that candle was made. Media could refer to the television you watch, the ads wrapping the bus you take to work or school, or the magazines you flip through in a dentist's waiting room, not to mention all the forms of new media, including Instagram, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and the like. Are media and technology critical to the forward march of humanity? Are they pernicious capitalist tools that lead to the exploitation of workers worldwide? Are they the magic bullet the world has been waiting for to level the playing field and raise the world's poor out of extreme poverty? Choose any opinion and you will find studies and scholars who agree with you—and those who disagree.

## Functionalism

Because functionalism focuses on how media and technology contribute to the smooth functioning of society, a good place to begin understanding this perspective is to write a list of functions you perceive media and technology to perform. Your list might include the ability to find information on the Internet, television's entertainment value, or how advertising and product placement contribute to social norms.

## Commercial Function



Figure 8.10: TV commercials can carry significant cultural currency. For some, the ads during the Super Bowl are more water cooler-worthy than the game itself. (Credit: Dennis Yang/flickr)

As you might guess, with nearly every U.S. household possessing a television, and the 250 billion hours of television watched annually by people in the United States, companies that wish to connect with consumers find television an irresistible platform to promote their goods and services (Nielsen 2012). Television advertising is a highly functional way to meet a market demographic where it lives. Sponsors can use the sophisticated data gathered by network and cable television companies regarding their viewers and target their advertising accordingly. Whether you are watching cartoons on Nick Jr. or a cooking show on Telemundo, chances are advertisers have a plan to reach you.

And it certainly doesn't stop with television. Commercial advertising precedes movies in theaters and shows up on and inside public transportation, as well as on the sides of building and roadways. Major corporations such as Coca-Cola bring their advertising into public schools, by sponsoring sports fields or tournaments, as well as filling the halls and cafeterias of those schools with vending machines hawking their goods. With rising concerns about childhood obesity and attendant diseases, the era of soda machines in schools may be numbered. In fact, as part of the United States Department of Agriculture's Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act and Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Initiative, a ban on junk food in school began in July 2014.

### Entertainment Function

An obvious manifest function of media is its entertainment value. Most people, when asked why they watch television or go to the movies, would answer that they enjoy it. And the numbers certainly illustrate that. While 2012 Nielsen research shows a slight reduction of U.S. homes with televisions, the reach of television is still vast. And the amount of time spent watching is equally large. Clearly, enjoyment is paramount. On the technology side, as well, there is a clear entertainment factor to the use of new innovations. From online gaming to chatting with friends on Facebook, technology offers new and more exciting ways for people to entertain themselves.

### Social Norm Functions

Even while the media is selling us goods and entertaining us, it also serves to socialize us, helping us pass along norms, values, and beliefs to the next generation. In fact, we are socialized and resocialized by media throughout our whole lives. All forms of media teach us what is good and desirable, how we should speak, how we should behave, and how we should react to events. Media also provide us with cultural touchstones during events of national significance. How many of your older relatives can recall watching the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* on television? How many of those reading this textbook followed the events of September 11 or Hurricane Katrina on television or the Internet?

Just as in Anderson and Bushman's (2011) evidence in the Violence in Media and Video Games: Does It Matter? feature, debate still exists over the extent and impact of media socialization. One recent study (Krahe et al. 2011) demonstrated that violent media content does have a desensitizing affect and is correlated with aggressive thoughts. Another group of scholars (Gentile, Mathieson, and Crick 2011) found that among children exposure to media violence led to an increase in both physical and relational aggression. Yet, a meta-analysis study covering four decades of research (Savage 2003) could not establish a definitive link between viewing violence and committing criminal violence.

It is clear from watching people emulate the styles of dress and talk that appear in media that media has a socializing influence. What is not clear, despite nearly fifty years of empirical research, is how much socializing influence the media has when compared to other agents of socialization, which include any social institution that passes along norms, values, and beliefs (such as peers, family, religious institutions, and the like).

### Life-Changing Functions

Like media, many forms of technology do indeed entertain us, provide a venue for commercialization, and socialize us. For example, some studies suggest the rising obesity rate is correlated with the decrease in physical activity caused by an increase in use of some forms of technology, a latent function of the prevalence of media in society (Kautiainen et al. 2011). Without a doubt, a manifest function of technology is to change our lives, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Think of how the digital age has improved the ways we communicate. Have you ever used Skype or another webcast to talk to a friend or family member far away? Or maybe you have organized a fund drive, raising thousands of dollars, all from your desk chair.

Of course, the downside to this ongoing information flow is the near impossibility of disconnecting from technology that leads to an expectation of constant convenient access to information and people. Such a fast-paced dynamic is not always to our benefit. Some sociologists assert that this level of media exposure leads to narcotizing dysfunction, a result in which people are too overwhelmed with media input to really care about the issue, so their involvement becomes defined by awareness instead of by action (Lazerfeld and Merton 1948).

## Conflict Perspective

In contrast to theories in the functional perspective, the conflict perspective focuses on the creation and reproduction of inequality—social processes that tend to disrupt society rather than contribute to its smooth operation. When we take a conflict perspective, one major focus is the differential access to media and technology embodied in the digital divide. Conflict theorists also look at who controls the media, and how media promotes the norms of upper-middle-class White people in the United States while minimizing the presence of the working class, especially people of color.

### Control of Media and Technology

Powerful individuals and social institutions have a great deal of influence over which forms of technology are released, when and where they are released, and what kind of media is available for our consumption, which is a form of gatekeeping. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) define gatekeeping as the sorting process by which thousands of possible messages are shaped into a mass media-appropriate form and reduced to a manageable amount. In other words, the people in charge of the media decide what the public is exposed to, which, as C. Wright Mills (1956) famously noted, is the heart of media's power. Take a moment to think of the way "new media" evolve and replace traditional forms of hegemonic media. With hegemonic media, a culturally diverse society can be dominated by one race, gender, or class that manipulates the media to impose its worldview as a societal norm. New media weakens the gatekeeper role in information distribution. Popular sites such as YouTube and Facebook not only allow more people to freely share information but also engage in a form of self-policing. Users are encouraged to report inappropriate behavior that moderators will then address.

In addition, some conflict theorists suggest that the way U.S. media are generated results in an unbalanced political arena. Those with the most money can buy the most media exposure, run smear campaigns against their competitors, and maximize their visual presence. Almost a year before the 2012 U.S. presidential election, the candidates—Barack Obama for the Democrats and numerous Republican contenders—had raised more than $186 million (Carmi et al. 2012). Some would say that the *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Committee* is a major contributing factor to our unbalanced political arena. In *Citizens United*, the Supreme Court affirmed the right of outside groups, including Super Political Action Committees (SuperPACs) with undisclosed donor lists, to spend unlimited amounts of money on political ads as long as they don't coordinate with the candidate's campaign or specifically advocate for a candidate. What do you think a conflict perspective theorist would suggest about the potential for the non-rich to be heard in politics, especially when SuperPACs ensure that the richest groups have the most say?

### Technological Social Control and Digital Surveillance

Social scientists take the idea of the surveillance society so seriously that there is an entire journal devoted to its study, *Surveillance and Society*. The panoptic surveillance envisioned by Jeremy Bentham, depicted in the form of an all-powerful, all-seeing government by George Orwell in *1984*, and later analyzed by Michel Foucault (1975) is increasingly realized in the form of technology used to monitor our every move. This surveillance was imagined as a form of constant monitoring in which the observation posts are decentralized and the observed is never communicated with directly. Today, digital security cameras capture our movements, observers can track us through our cell phones, and police forces around the world use facial-recognition software.

## Feminist Perspective




Figure 8.11: Many people argue that women's portrayal in the media remains misleadingly narrow. But the advent of influencer culture may provide more agency to women, who can control their own portrayal. (Credit: Nenad Stojkovic/flickr)

Take a look at popular television shows, advertising campaigns, and online game sites. In most, women are portrayed in a particular set of parameters and tend to have a uniform look that society recognizes as attractive. Most are thin, White or light-skinned, beautiful, and young. Why does this matter? Feminist perspective theorists believe this idealized image is crucial in creating and reinforcing stereotypes. For example, Fox and Bailenson (2009) found that online female avatars conforming to gender stereotypes enhance negative attitudes toward women, and Brasted (2010) found that media (advertising in particular) promotes gender stereotypes. As early as 1990, *Ms.* magazine instituted a policy to publish without any commercial advertising.

The gender gap in tech-related fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) is no secret. A 2011 U.S. Department of Commerce Report suggested that gender stereotyping is one reason for this gap which acknowledges the bias toward men as keepers of technological knowledge (US Department of Commerce 2011). But gender stereotypes go far beyond the use of technology. Press coverage in the media reinforces stereotypes that subordinate women; it gives airtime to looks over skills, and coverage disparages women who defy accepted norms.

Recent research in new media has offered a mixed picture of its potential to equalize the status of men and women in the arenas of technology and public discourse. A European agency, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (2010), issued an opinion report suggesting that while there is the potential for new media forms to perpetuate gender stereotypes and the gender gap in technology and media access, at the same time new media could offer alternative forums for feminist groups and the exchange of feminist ideas. Still, the committee warned against the relatively unregulated environment of new media and the potential for antifeminist activities, from pornography to human trafficking, to flourish there.

Increasingly prominent in the discussion of new media and feminism is cyberfeminism, the application to, and promotion of, feminism online. Research on cyberfeminism runs the gamut from the liberating use of blogs by women living in Iraq during the second Gulf War (Peirce 2011) to an investigation of the Suicide Girls web site (Magnet 2007).

## Symbolic Interactionism

Technology itself may act as a symbol for many. The kind of computer you own, the kind of car you drive, your ability to afford the latest Apple product—these serve as a social indicator of wealth and status. Neo-Luddites are people who see technology as symbolizing the coldness and alienation of modern life. But for technophiles, technology symbolizes the potential for a brighter future. For those adopting an ideological middle ground, technology might symbolize status (in the form of a massive flat-screen television) or failure (ownership of a basic old mobile phone with no bells or whistles).

## Social Construction of Reality

Meanwhile, media create and spread symbols that become the basis for our shared understanding of society. Theorists working in the interactionist perspective focus on this social construction of reality, an ongoing process in which people subjectively create and understand reality. Media constructs our reality in a number of ways. For some, the people they watch on a screen can become a primary group, meaning the small informal groups of people who are closest to them. For many others, media becomes a reference group: a group that influences an individual and to which an individual compares himself or herself, and by which we judge our successes and failures. We might do very well without the latest smartphone, until we see characters using it on our favorite television show or our classmates whipping it out between classes.

While media may indeed be the medium to spread the message of rich White men, Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992) point out that some forms of media discourse allow competing constructions of reality to appear. For example, advertisers find new and creative ways to sell us products we don't need and probably wouldn't want without their prompting, but some networking sites such as Freecycle offer a commercial-free way of requesting and trading items that would otherwise be discarded. The web is also full of blogs chronicling lives lived "off the grid," or without participation in the commercial economy.

## Social Networking and Social Construction

While Tumblr and Facebook encourage us to check in and provide details of our day through online social networks, corporations can just as easily promote their products on these sites. Even supposedly crowd-sourced sites like Yelp (which aggregates local reviews) are not immune to corporate shenanigans. That is, we think we are reading objective observations when in reality we may be buying into one more form of advertising.

Facebook, which started as a free social network for college students, is increasingly a monetized business, selling you goods and services in subtle ways. But chances are you don't think of Facebook as one big online advertisement. What started out as a symbol of coolness and insider status, unavailable to parents and corporate shills, now promotes consumerism in the form of games and fandom. For example, think of all the money spent to upgrade popular Facebook games like Candy Crush. And notice that whenever you become a "fan," you likely receive product updates and special deals that promote online and real-world consumerism. It is unlikely that millions of people want to be "friends" with Pampers. But if it means a weekly coupon, they will, in essence, rent out space on their Facebook pages for Pampers to appear. Thus, we develop both new ways to spend money and brand loyalties that will last even after Facebook is considered outdated and obsolete.

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# 12.7: Key Terms

**cyberfeminism** | the application to and promotion of feminism online

**design patents** | patents that are granted when someone has invented a new and original design for a manufactured product

**digital divide** | the uneven access to technology around race, class, and geographic lines

**e-readiness** | the ability to sort through, interpret, and process digital knowledge

**evolutionary model of technological change** | a breakthrough in one form of technology that leads to a number of variations, from which a prototype emerges, followed by a period of slight adjustments to the technology, interrupted by a breakthrough

**gatekeeping** | the sorting process by which thousands of possible messages are shaped into a mass media-appropriate form and reduced to a manageable amount

**knowledge gap** | the gap in information that builds as groups grow up without access to technology

**media** | all print, digital, and electronic means of communication

**media consolidation** | a process by which fewer and fewer owners control the majority of media outlets

**media globalization** | the worldwide integration of media through the cross-cultural exchange of ideas

**neo-Luddites** | those who see technology as a symbol of the coldness of modern life

**net neutrality** | the principle that all Internet data should be treated equally by internet service providers

**new media** | all interactive forms of information exchange

**oligopoly** | a situation in which a few firms dominate a marketplace

**panoptic surveillance** | a form of constant monitoring in which the observation posts are decentralized and the observed is never communicated with directly

**planned obsolescence** | the act of a technology company planning for a product to be obsolete or unable from the time it's created

**plant patents** | patents that recognize the discovery of new plant types that can be asexually reproduced

**technological diffusion** | the spread of technology across borders

**technological globalization** | the cross-cultural development and exchange of technology

**technology** | the application of science to solve problems in daily life

**technophiles** | those who see technology as symbolizing the potential for a brighter future

**utility patents** | patents that are granted for the invention or discovery of any new and useful process, product, or machine

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# 12.8: Section Summary

### 8.1 Technology Today

Technology is the application of science to address the problems of daily life. The fast pace of technological advancement means the advancements are continuous, but that not everyone has equal access. The gap created by this unequal access has been termed the digital divide. The knowledge gap refers to an effect of the digital divide: the lack of knowledge or information that keeps those who were not exposed to technology from gaining marketable skills

### 8.2 Media and Technology in Society

Media and technology have been interwoven from the earliest days of human communication. The printing press, the telegraph, and the Internet are all examples of their intersection. Mass media have allowed for more shared social experiences, but new media now create a seemingly endless amount of airtime for any and every voice that wants to be heard. Advertising has also changed with technology. New media allow consumers to bypass traditional advertising venues and cause companies to be more innovative and intrusive as they try to gain our attention.

### 8.3 Global Implications of Media and Technology

Technology drives globalization, but what that means can be hard to decipher. While some economists see technological advances leading to a more level playing field where anyone anywhere can be a global contender, the reality is that opportunity still clusters in geographically advantaged areas. Still, technological diffusion has led to the spread of more and more technology across borders into peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. However, true technological global equality is a long way off.

### 8.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Technology

There are myriad theories about how society, technology, and media will progress. Functionalism sees the contribution that technology and media provide to the stability of society, from facilitating leisure time to increasing productivity. Conflict theorists are more concerned with how technology reinforces inequalities among communities, both within and among countries. They also look at how media typically give voice to the most powerful, and how new media might offer tools to help those who are disenfranchised. Symbolic interactionists see the symbolic uses of technology as signs of everything from a sterile futuristic world to a successful professional life.

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 13: Who Gets High? Social Problems Associated with Drug Use


13.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives
13.2: The Social Problem of Drug Use and Misuse
13.3: Harmful Drug Use- Exploring Unequal Outcomes
13.4: Five Models of Addiction
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# 13.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives

**Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Describe the social problem of drug use and misuse.
2. Explain how race and class explain the different consequences of harmful drug use.
3. Compare and contrast the five models of addiction.
4. Analyze how different solutions to the social problem of harmful drug use create social justice.

## Chapter Overview

> *With deep gratitude to the harm reduction community whose persistent critical and humane approach will change the societal understanding of drug use – Kelly Szott*

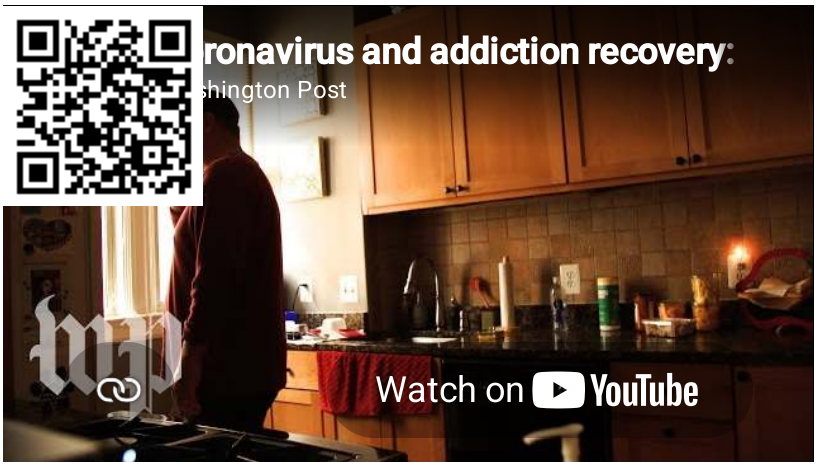



**Figure 11.1** Coronavirus and addiction recovery: Fighting isolation to stay sober [YouTube]. Please watch this 5:32-minute video. How does COVID-19 make recovery from harmful drug use more complicated? Transcript

When we consider the social problem of problematic drug use, we enter a challenging space. Like many social problems, opinions are often extreme and heartfelt. Where do we begin? As usual, we begin with another story:

Lynn has struggled with an addiction to heroin since 2018. When COVID-19 hit, she experienced isolation and other stresses of the pandemic. Public health officials fear that these stresses, coupled with isolation, may have caused addictionfor those in recovery from addiction. Due to roadblocks caused by the pandemic, Lynn decided to taper herself off Suboxone, a pharmaceutical containing buprenorphine used to treat opioid use disorder. In late March of 2020, Lynn overdosed in her apartment after using heroin laced with fentanyl. She was revived by her boyfriend, who administered Narcan, a brand of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone.

In the 2020 optional-reading article, Don't Forget the Other Pandemic Killing Thousands of Americans, author Kate Briquelet writes,"Amid social distancing, authorities nationwide are reporting a surge in fatal opioid overdoses. Addiction and recovery advocates say the US is now battling two epidemics at once. From 1999 to 2018, opioid overdoses involving prescription and illicit drugs have killed nearly 450,000 Americans." We have not just one pandemic but two.

The COVID-19 pandemic has enabled us to see how social environments and conditions impact the consequences of drug use and addiction. For example, many experts worried about the negative impacts of social isolation on those with substance use disorders. Isolation might increase depression, and the related self-medication will employ illegal substances. In addition, individuals who use opioids alone and overdose would have no one there to call 911 or administer Narcan, the overdose reversal medication. The video in Figure 11.1 focuses on the importance of in-person group meetings and the struggles faced by those in recovery as they attempt to stay sober during a global health crisis. Beyond the individualized psychological view of drug use, a sociological perspective reveals the social conditions that can cause substance use, as well as make the consequences worse for certain structurally vulnerable groups.

Social scientists assert that people often seek to alter their consciousness deliberately. Sometimes people choose prayer or meditation. Sometimes they choose to dance or sing in a choir. Sometimes they choose a pound of chocolate or a runner's high. And sometimes they choose alcohol, cannabis, or other mind-altering substances. Many find this altered state without it becoming either a personal or a social problem. In this chapter, we explore when and why *getting high* becomes a social problem.

## Focusing Questions

As we look at the social problem of problematic drug use worsened by COVID-19, the following questions guide our curiosity:

1. How can we describe drug use and misuse as a social problem?
2. How does social location impact the experience of harmful drug use?
3. How do the five models of addiction differ in how they explain the causes and consequences of harmful drug use?
4. Which interdependent actions increase social justice related to problematic drug use?

Let's learn more together!

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Figure 11.1. "Coronavirus and addiction recovery: Fighting isolation to stay sober" by The Washington Post is licensed under the Standard YouTube License.

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## 13.2: The Social Problem of Drug Use and Misuse

There are many ways to construct drug use and addiction as a social problem. Addiction is a chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2020). But it's not just addicsocial problemt drug use that is the social psocial problemequal impact of drug use on families and communities is the social prodrug useis chapter will not discuss drug use as inherently bad.

Instead, we will examine this social problem based on some of the characteristics of a social problem from Chapter 1. As the stories in section 11.1 illustrate, the opioid epidemic impacts everyone, from individuals to families, hospitals, workplaces, and governments. It goes beyond the experience of one individual.

Secondly, in our exploration of drug use and misuse, we see social construction at work. You may notice that throughout this chapter, we use the word cannabis to describe the drug that is commonly known as marijuana or weed. The common word marijuana is racist. It reflects a racist past. More specifically, the United States experienced an increase in Mexican immigration after the 1910 Mexican War of Independence. Some immigrants used the herb *mariguano* for casual smoking. Although the immigrants were important in providing needed agricultural labor, the increase in immigration raised xenophobic fears.

Mexican immigrants were often blamed for property crimes and sexual misconduct. White people in power conveniently blamed the use of marijuana for this. "One Texas state legislator proclaimed on the senate floor: "All Mexicans are crazy and this stuff [cannabis] is what makes them crazy" (Ghelani 2020:7). In 1937, Harry Ainsliger, head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics testified before Congress saying, "marihuana is an addictive drug which produces insanity, criminality, and death" (Ghelani 2020:8). Associating the use of cannabis with Mexican immigrants by nampowert marijuana was a way to assert power and control over a particular ethnic group. This is using language as a social construction. To resist this oppression, we will use the word cannabis instead of the word marijuana in this chapter, except when we are quoting from other people.

In addition, we remember that a social problem arises when groups of people experience inequality. This point is particularly important when we discuss drug use and harmful drug use. People of all races use drugs at the same rate. However, People of Color are likely to be arrested and jailed for drug offenses. White people are more likely to be seen as needing medical intervention, and therefore they are more likely to receive treatment. More specifically:

> *Although Black Americans are no more likely than Whites to use illicit drugs, they are 6–10 times more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses. (Netherland and Hansen 2017)*

This racialized response to harmful drug use is a deep source of inequality, a key component of a social problem.

Finally, we recall that social problems must be addressed interdependently, using both individual agency and collective action. In this case, citizens, lawmakers, health care workers, community advocates, and the individuals themselves must act to address the social problem. We'll look at various solutions in more detail in Recovery is Social Justice.

### Drug Use

Drug use can be a problem for anyone, but it is people's different social locations that determine how harmful the drug use will be for themselves and for their family, friends, and community. Harmful drug use occurs when it negatively impacts a person's health, livelihood, family, freedom, or other important aspects of their life.

One of the dominant approaches to understanding addiction involves looking solely at how a person's brain is affected by drug use. Another popular approach focuses on the psychology of the user and the chemical traits of the substance. Both approaches ignore social issues such as poverty, racism, and sexism that increase the harmfulness of drug use for certain individuals, populations, and neighborhoods. Incarceration, disease (such as HIV), other negative health impacts, job loss, and family disruption are examples of harms associated with drug use that are more or less likely to occur depending on one's social location.

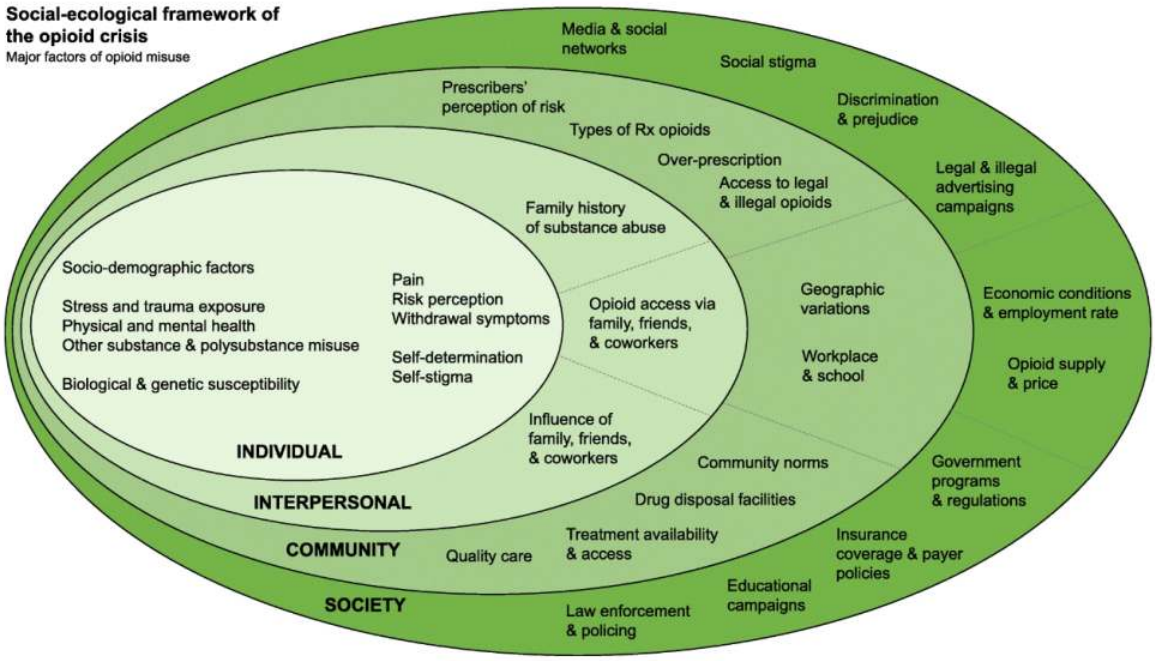



**Figure 11.2** The Social Ecological Framework of the Opioid Crisis: This social-ecological model framework of the opioid crisis is a complex model which examines individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors for the opioid crisis. We can use this model to examine harmful drug use in general. Sociologists look at the problem of harmful drug use at all levels, particularly focusing on how social location, social determinants of health, laws, policies, and practices influence drug use, misuse, and related health outcomes. Image Description

In contrast, the sociological perspective focuses on the social determinants of harmful drug use. This perspective avoids blaming the individual and making them responsible for getting the proper treatment and resources to fix issues caused by social inequality and oppression. A sociological lens can help us see how social structures of oppression can change the outcomes of harmful drug use depending on the social location of an individual (Friedman 2002).

## Problematic Drug Use

Social scientists point out that a person's socioeconomic class may impact whether they can continue to work or go to school while using substances (Zinberg 1984; Singer and Page 2014; Friedman 2002). For example, White middle-class users of opioids, like heroin, are less likely to get arrested or go to jail. Therefore they can more often keep their jobs and still earn money.

Racism in our society creates differences in how White people and People of Color are treated when they use drugs. White people are more likely to be seen as people experiencing a medical condition. Therefore, they need drug treatment to recover. Black, Brown, and Indigenous people are more likely to be seen as criminals. They are more likely to be arrested and put in jail than receive treatment This chapter will discuss how racist social structures shape the experiences of problematic drug use.

A problem in deciding how to think about and deal with drugs is the distinction between legal drugs and illegal drugs. It makes sense to assume that illegal drugs should be the ones that are the most dangerous and cause the most physical and social harm, but research shows this is not the case.



**Figure 11.3** a and b. Smoking and alcohol cause more deaths than illegal drug use. Why are some drugs legal and other drugs illegal?

Rather, alcohol and tobacco cause the most harm even though they are legal. As Kleiman and his research team note about alcohol:

> *When we read that one in twelve adults suffers from a substance abuse disorder or that 8 million children are living with an addicted parent, it is important to remember that alcohol abuse drives those numbers to a much greater extent than does dependence on illegal drugs. (2011:xviii)*

According to the CDC, cigarette smoking kills 480,000 people due to complications from smoking or secondhand smoke (CDC 2022). Alcohol use prematurely kills 140,000 people per year in the US. These deaths are caused by physical damage related to long-term use. They are also caused by drinking too much alcohol in a short period of time. DUI fatalities are one example of this premature death. The rate of premature death is much higher for legal drugs than illegal ones.

## Dependence

Substances that we consider drugs interact with our bodies in different ways. Drugs are often grouped by the kinds of physical effects they have. Some drugs, called depressants, slow down the central nervous system. Hallucinogens cause people to hallucinate, to see, hear, or experience things that are not physically real. Narcotics, derived from natural or synthetic ingredients, are effective at relieving pain, but they depress the nervous system. They are also highly physically addictive. Stimulants speed up the nervous system, potentially causing alertness, euphoria, or anxiety. Finally, cannabis may create euphoria, hunger, and relaxation and dull the sense of time and space.

Important distinctions exist between addiction, physical dependence, and drug use. These three are not mutually exclusive, but they differ from each other in significant ways. Addiction is often associated with a mental health diagnosis such as substance use disorder. Rather than using the diagnosis of addiction, health professionals now use the language of substance use disorder (SUD), which is a condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s), such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired (Saxon 2023). Physical dependence means that the body has built up a tolerance to the drug and that one must take the substance in order to not feel ill. Drug use is just that—the intake of a substance that produces a change in your body. This can happen with or without addiction or physical dependence.

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## 13.3: Harmful Drug Use- Exploring Unequal Outcomes

Now that we have clarified how our understandings of drug use[/pb_glossary[pb_glossary id="870"]drug useb_glossary id="926"]harmful drug use[/pb_glossary] are socially constructed, we can explore how differences in social location can influence when drug use is considered problematic and how outcomes may differ. For this section, we will specifically consider geographic location and race and ethnicity to look at the inequality in outcomes.

### The War On Drugs – Criminalizing Drug Use




**Figure 11.4** What is the Drug War [Video] In this 3:49-minute video, narrated by Jay-Z, we learn about the history and impact of the War on Drugs. How has the War on Drugs impacted your community? Transcript

The War on Drugs is an effort in the United States since the 1970s to combat illegal drug use by greatly increasing penalties, enforcement, and incarceration for drug offenders (Britannica 2023b). The War on Drugs was partially in response to a significant global economic recession in the early 1980s. Angela Davis, who we met in Chapter 1, describes it this way:

> *By 1994, the deindustrialization of the US economy produced by global economic shifts, was having a deleterious impact on working-class Black communities. The massive loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector, especially in cities like Detroit, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, had the result, according to Joe Willam Trotter, that "the black urban working class nearly disappeared by the early 1990s." Combined with the disestablishment of welfare state benefits, these economic shifts caused vast numbers of black people to seek other—sometimes "illegal"—means of survival. It is not accidental that the full force of the crack epidemic was felt during the early 1980s and 1990s (Davis 2021).*

The massive expenditures on the curtailment of the drug epidemic also shifted our views on drug use. The United States became much more punitive towards drugs. The courts treated harmful drug use as a criminal justice issue rather than as a substance dependence issue. The War on Drugs created tougher sanctions on drug use in America. The Drug Enforcement Agency was created in 1973 to provide another arm of the government to tackle the specific issue of drugs. By the 1980s, lengthy sentences for drug possession were also in place. One to five-year sentences for possession were increased to more than 25 years.

The War on Drugs and its associated policies also drove massive increases in prison populations. Between 1980 and 2010, the US prison population quintupled. The population only began to decline slightly in the early 2010s. As of 2019, the United States still imprisoned more than 2 million people in prisons and jails. Mass incarceration refers to the overwhelming size and scale of the US prison population. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, but how did this come to be the case?

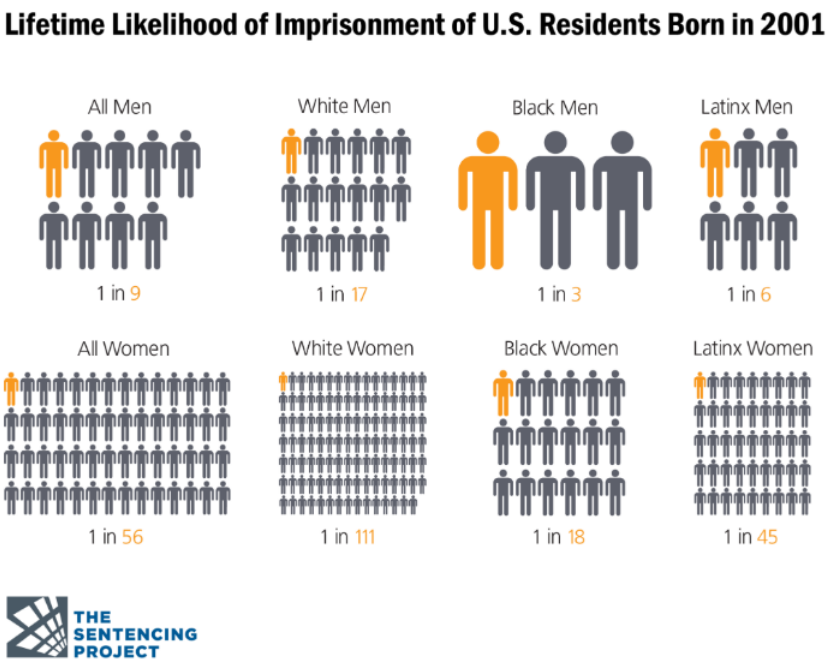



**Figure 11.5** This chart shows the lifetime likelihood of imprisonment for men and women, by race and ethnicity. You are most likely to be imprisoned if you are a Black man and least likely to be imprisoned if you are a White woman. Image Description

The War on Drugs is one of the major drivers of the prison population in the United States. In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs, dedicating increased federal funding and resources to quelling the supply of drugs in the United States. This war continued to ramp up through the 1980s and 1990s, especially as crack cocaine became a growing concern in the media and public sphere. Crack cocaine was publicly portrayed as a highly addictive drug sweeping its way through America, allowing politicians to capitalize on this hysteria and pass policies that rapidly increased the prison population. Even so, the vast majority of arrests and enforcement were not of high-level, violent dealers. More often, police arrested small-time dealers or people struggling with addiction. In fact, during the 1990s, the period of the largest increase in the US prison population, the vast majority of prison growth came from cannabis arrests (King and Mauer 2006).

The 1980s and 1990s were also an era where states turned to partnerships with private companies to meet the booming demand for facilities, leading to the rise of private prisons. Private prisons are for-profit incarceration facilities run by private companies that contract with local, state, and federaprivate prisonsThe business model of private prisons incentivizes them to keep their prisons as full as possible while spending as littlprivate prisonsn care for inmates. Down 16 percent from its peak in 2012, private prisons still held 8 percent of all people incarcerated at the state and federal level as of 2019 (The Sentencing Project 2022). This general statistic hides state-to-state differences, though. For instance, Oregprivate prisonste prison facilities in the state, while Texas has the highest number of people incarcerated in private prisons.

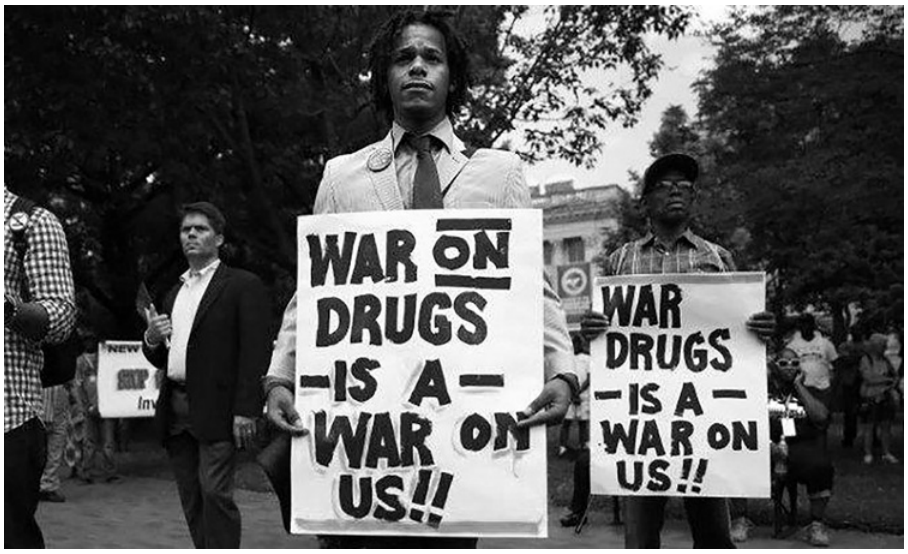



**Figure 11.6** The War on Drugs Is A War On Us! The War on Drugs, which continues today, disproportionately impacts People of Color. What are some of the causes and consequences of this war?

From the inception of the War on Drugs, racial biases were at the center of these policy changes. For instance, one of Richard Nixon's top advisors, John Erlichman, explicitly admitted to this in a 2016 interview:

> *You want to know what this [war on drugs] was really all about? The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and Black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or Black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did. (Baum 2016)*

The War on Drugs was a deliberately racist set of policies.




**Figure 11.7** As of 2018, even though rates of imprisonment are declining for people of all races and the racial gap is closing, disproportionately more People of Color are still imprisoned. Image Description

Even as the racial gap in incarceration has narrowed in recent years, the US disproportionately incarcerates Black Americans. While Black Americans make up 12 percent of the population, they make up over 33 percent of incarcerated individuals (Gramlich 2019). Similar trends exist among Latino Americans: while Latinos comprise 16 percent of the US population, they account for 23 percent of incarcerated individuals (Gramlich 2019). In contrast, while White Americans comprise 63 percent of the population, they only make up 30 percent of those incarcerated (Gramlich 2019).

This network of policies and unequal institutional practices led to what scholar Michelle Alexander terms The New Jim Crow. The New Jim Crow refers to the network of laws and practices that disproportionately funnel Black Americans into the criminal justice system, stripping them of their constitutional rights as a punishment for their offenses in the same way that Jim Crow laws did in previous eras. Because of these new mass incarceration policies, a new iteration of the racial caste system has emerged: one where Black Americans can legally be denied public benefits, housing, the right to vote, and participation on juries because of a criminal conviction.

The War on Drugs was a racialized response to a worldwide economic downturn. We had other options. James Forman Jr. puts it this way:

> *Rising levels of abuse, addiction, and drug-related violence should have been a sign that something was wrong with America. It should have led the nation to focus on the myriad*

> *ways in which 350 years of white supremacy had produced persistent Black suffering and disadvantage. It should have caused politicians to interrogate the cumulative impact of convict leasing, lynching, redlining, school segregation, and drinking water poisoned with lead. Instead of asking, "What kind of people are they that would use and sell drugs?" The nation should have been asking a question that, to this day, demands an answer: "What kind of people are we that build prisons while closing treatment centers (Forman 2021 354).*

Our response to drug use, not the drug use itself, is the social problem. Social justice requires a different response.

## Unpacking Oppression, Quantifying Justice

> *"Approximately two-thirds of all federal prisoners are in prison for violent crimes or had a prior criminal record before being incarcerated" Christopher A. Wray, Assistant Attorney General, 2004, as quoted by The Sentencing Project 2004.*
> *Nearly three-quarters of the people in federal prison are nonviolent offenders with no history of violence.*
> *Black men are disproportionately arrested and imprisoned.*

These statements are all true, but what do they actually mean? Sociologists look at patterns of difference or change over time to measure inequality between groups and to explain it. Social problems sociologists often explore the efficacy of possible interventions. Because we want to take effective action, we must examine the information we use to make decisions very carefully.

We see deep inequalities in our criminal justice system. However, we also see competing claims about what is true. How, for example, can the first two statements be true at the same time? The issue lies in combining two populations in the first statement—people who commit violent crimes and people who have a prior criminal record. Getting a prior criminal record might include being arrested for being at a protest, even if you weren't convicted. It could include failure to pay child support. It could also include having a few grams of cannabis in Oregon prior to 2015 when the related law changed. Many people have a criminal record, but they are not actually dangerous to society.

When you examine the second statement, it only includes one group of people: people who are in prison for non-violent offenses. Many of these offenses are related to drug possession, and some of them are related to drug distribution. Although harmful drug use causes harm, these offenses are non-violent. By looking at the numbers in this way, we open the door to considering options for social justice that are effective rather than carceral.

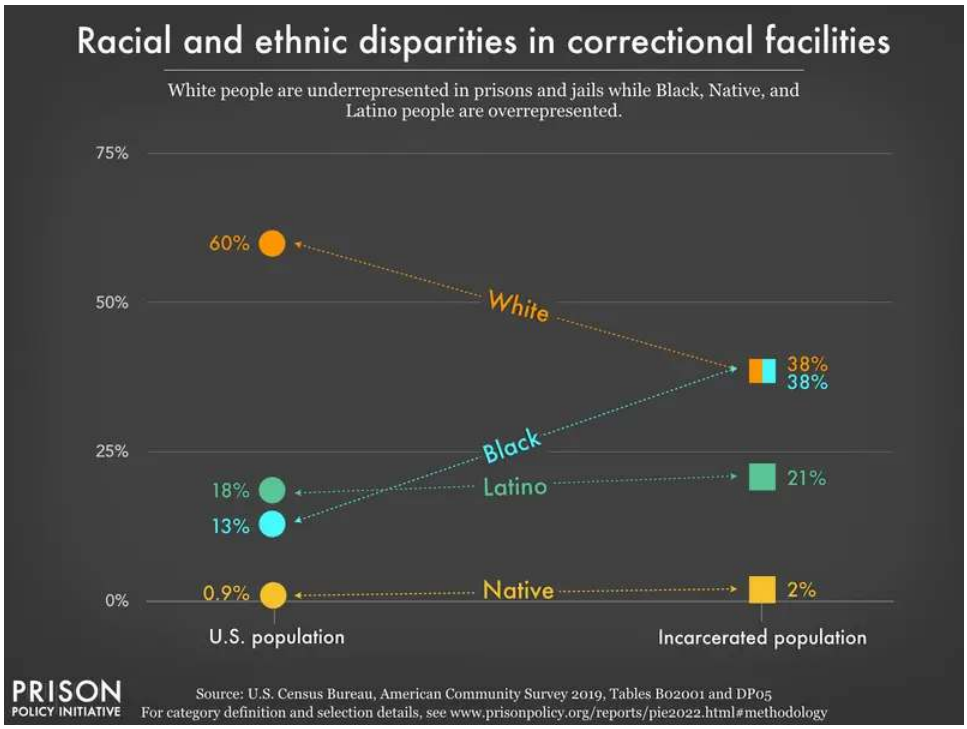



**Figure 11.8** Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Correctional Facilities. If race and ethnicity didn't matter in the criminal justice system, we would expect to see the percentages of each group in the total population of the US and the percentage of people in correctional facilities to match. Instead, we see vast inequality. Image Description

Disproportionality is the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial or ethnic group compared with its percentage in the total population, as we discussed in Chapter 6. We can see disproportionality across groudisproportionalitylocations. Racial disproportionality is commonly related to harmful drug use and the criminal justice system. As we see in Figure 11.8, White people make up 60% of the overall population of the United States, but they make up only 38% of people who are incarcerated. Black people make up 13% of the overall population of the United States, but they are also 38% of the incarcerated population. Hispanic people are 18% of the total population and 21% of people in prison or jail. Finally, Native Americans adisproportionalitylation and 2% of those in jail. In every case, we see disproportionality.

However, the measure of disproportionality doesn't tell us why the difference exists or what to do about it. If you consider the infographic The Social Ecological Framework of the Opioid Crisis (Figure 11.2), you see many causes of inequality.

The causes of disproportionality are often disparity. Disparity is the unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group compared with outcomes for another racial or ethnic group (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2021). Disparity can be used to compare any groups with different social locations.



**Figure 11.9** This picture shows powdered cocaine and the implements to use it. How does the form of a drug and the perceptions of people who use it impact drug policy?

However, as we consider the War on Drugs as an example, we see that systems, laws, policies, and practices privilege White people over People of Color. In one example, the sentencing for crack cocaine and powder cocaine (Figure 11.9) are significantly different. Distributing 5 grams of crack cocaine has a 5-year mandatory minimum federal prison sentence. Distributing 500 grams of powder cocaine has the same sentence. More than 80% of the crack cocaine defendants in 2002 were Black, even though two-thirds of the crack cocaine users were White or Hispanic (The Sentencing Project 2004). Powder cocaine is more likely to be used by wealthier people, who are disproportionately White (Vagins and McCurdy 2006).

Even when judges have more discretion in what sentences they impose, racial disparities exist:

> *Racialized assumptions by key justice system decision makers unfairly influence outcomes for people who encounter the system. In research on presentence reports, for example, scholars have found that People of Color are frequently given harsher sanctions because they are perceived as imposing a greater threat to public safety and are therefore deserving of greater social control and punishment. (Nellis 2021:12-13)*

These biases are both conscious and unconscious, and they occur at every level of the criminal justice system, from police to lawyers, to judges, to the politicians who make the laws in the first place. Structural racism and individual racist ideas result in racial disparity in the criminal justice system.

It's your turn to unpack oppression and quantify justice:

1. Examine the racial and ethnic composition of the criminal justice system in your state. You can use The Color of Justice or State Prison Growth in 50 States, but you are free to find additional sources.
2. What cause of this disproportionality is relevant to people in your state? For example, Oregon doesn't have private prisons, so that couldn't be a factor in imprisonment disparities here.
3. What changes in the criminal justice system might lower the total number of people involved in the system or decrease racial and ethnic disparities? You might look at Winnable Criminal Justice Reforms in 2023 for some ideas.

## The Opioid Crisis: Medical Intervention, not Crime

Another way to notice racism at work in response to harmful drug use is to examine the opioid crisis. The opioid crisis refers to the surge in fatal overdoses linked to opioid use (DeWeerdt 2019). The overdose fatality rate rose by 345% between 2001 and 2016 (Jalali et al. 2020). Opioids are a class of drugs that cause euphoria. Opioids include heroin, morphine, codeine, hydrocodone, OxyContin®, and fentanyl (Johns Hopkins Medicine 2023). Heroin is an illegal drug. The others are prescription drugs that doctors prescribe for pain relief.

Nearly 75% of drug overdoses in 2020 involved a legal or illegal opioid (Centers for Disease Control 2022). The CDC describes the crisis using three waves. The first wave started in the 1990s. In this wave, the deaths were primarily due to overdoses on prescription opioids, like OxyContin® and Vicodin®. This wave was a result of the overprescription of opioid-based painkillers, causing some individuals to become physically dependent.

The second wave started in 2010. The second wave was due to overdoses related to using heroin. This use of heroin partially resulted from a decrease in the amount of legally available prescription painkillers.

The third wave started in 2013. This wave marked an increase in overdose deaths from synthetic opioids like fentanyl and tramadol. While fentanyl can be prescribed, this wave was driven by illegally manufactured substances.

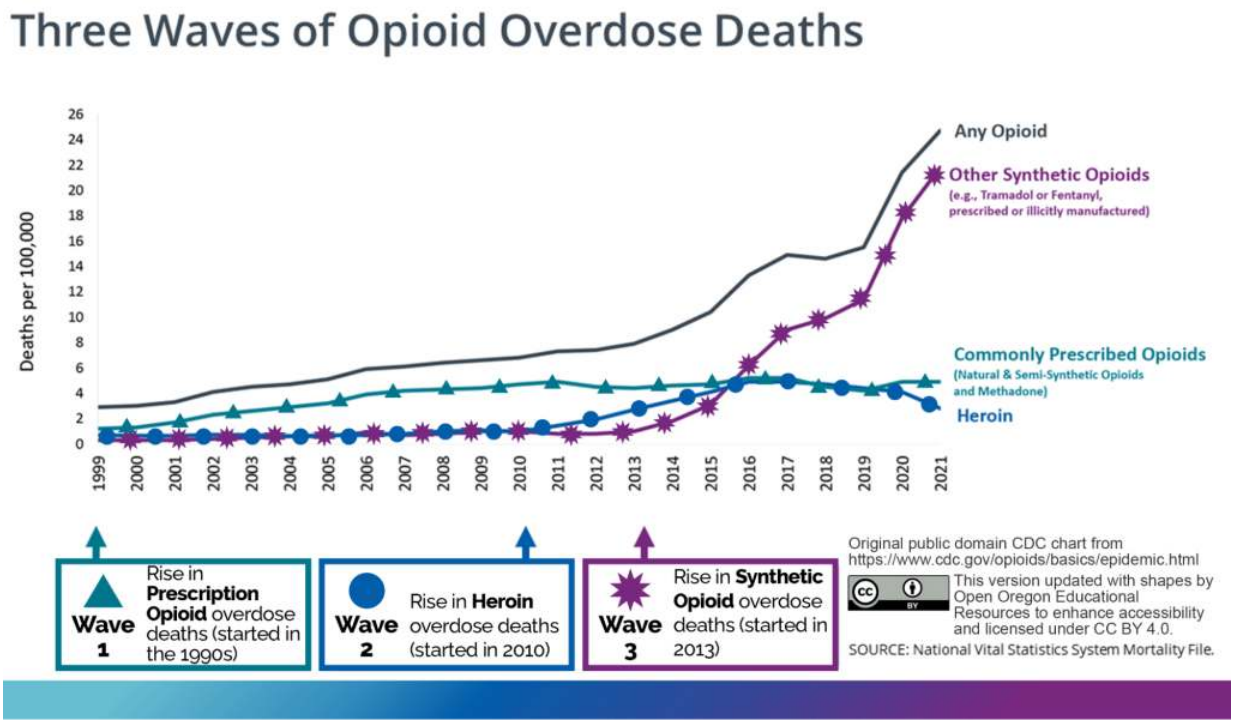



**Figure 11.10** Three Waves of Opioid Overdose Deaths. Each wave was caused by a different opioid substance. Each wave also had different racist responses. Image Description

The response to heroin use and misuse was carceral. It was part of the war on drugs that we described in the previous section.

Race was at the core of drug policy that emerged from an increase in heroin use in urban centers in the 1960s. According to media accounts, the face of the heroin user at that time was "black, destitute and engaged in repetitive petty crimes to feed his or her habit" (Hart and Hart 2019:7). A popular solution to this racialized drug scare was to incarcerate Black users of heroin and offer methadone treatment to White users.

New York state was a forerunner in creating harsh drug laws to address heroin use in cities. The infamous Rockefeller drug laws of 1973 created mandatory minimum prison sentences of 15 years to life for possession of small amounts of heroin and other drugs (Hart and Hart 2019). 90 percent of those *convicted* under the Rockefeller drug laws were Black and Latinx, though they represent a smaller proportion of people who use drugs in the population (Drucker 2002).

The societal response to opioid use and dependence among White people during this crisis has been gentler, relying more on treatment than the criminal justice system (Hart and Hart 2019; James & Jordan 2018). According to statistics from the Bureau of Justice, 80 percent of arrests for heroin trafficking are among Black and Latinx people, even though White people use heroin at higher rates and are known to purchase drugs within their own racial community (James & Jordan 2018).

As we examine the response to the overprescription of opioids and the harmful use of fentanyl, we see a stark difference in public response. We see a focus on monitoring doctors so that they don't overprescribe opioids. We see a focus on the overuse of opioids as a medical disease needing treatment rather than criminalizing the user of the drug. Our response to drug overuse in the opioid crisis is racialized. Researchers Netherland and Hansen summarize the unequal response this way:

> *The public response to White opioids looked markedly different from the response to illicit drug use in inner city Black and Brown neighborhoods, with policy differentials analogous to the gap between legal penalties for crack as opposed to powder cocaine. This less examined 'White drug war' has carved out a less punitive, clinical realm for Whites where their drug use is decriminalized, treated primarily as a biomedical disease, and where White social privilege is preserved… in the case of opioids, addiction treatment itself is being selectively pharmaceuticalized in ways that preserve a protected space for White opioid users, while leaving intact a punitive, carceral system as the appropriate response for Black and Brown drug use. (Netherland and Hansen 2017)*

We can see a racialized response in the differential access to treatment options for the harmful use of opioids White people who use opioids have been given more access to the preferred addiction treatment medication, buprenorphine. Treatment with buprenorphine is less stigmatized because it is dispensed like any other pharmaceutical medication at a private doctor's office

Another treatment option is methadone. This method requires frequent visits to a methadone clinic. Often BIPOC receive treatment at the less-preferred methadone clinics (Hansen 2015). Politicians legalized Buprenorphine treatments for opioid use disorder, supporting the privileged lives of middle-class White addicts (Netherland & Hansen, 2017).

These characteristics of the social landscape contribute to increased health harms, such as contracting HIV or hepatitis C, for Black people who use drugs. Health harms caused by substance use are higher among Black people who use drugs, not because they participate in riskier drug use behavior, but because they reside in under-resourced communities that hinder access to health-promoting services and materials (Cooper et al. 2011). Accordingly, opioid overdose rates for Black people have historically been higher than those for White people in some states. Recently this rate has been increasing more rapidly, though the media attention surrounding the opioid crisis mostly focuses on drug use by White people (James & Jordan 2018).

We also see differences in the harm caused by harmful drug use because of the lack of treatment centers in rural areas. The lack of treatment centers harms White people who live in these areas and People of Color.



**Figure 11.11** Anthropologist Angela Garcia studies heroin use among members of a Latinx community in rural New Mexico. How might geographic location play a role in drug misuse, incarceration, or treatment?

Anthropologist Angela Garcia, shown in Figure 11.11, spent several years researching heroin use among members of a Latinx community in rural New Mexico. Her findings point to the loss of a connection to land and livelihood and the experience of settler colonialism as social determinants ofcolonialismroin use (2010). Settler colonialism, as we explored inChapter 8, is a system of power that normalizes the continuous settler occupation of Indigenous lands and exploitation of Indigenous resources. It is Eurocentric in nature and assumes that European White ideas and values are superior (Cox 2017).

Garcia's research found that dispossession of ancestral lands ruptured the link to cultural heritage and caused impoverishment. Together the disconnection and poverty formed a source of never-ending emotional pain for users of heroin. The sparsely populated rural setting also meant that drug treatment was less available. By examining the history of dispossession and oppression that impacted this community, Garcia shows how the social determinants of harmful drug use can illuminate the root social causes of the problem. If you would like to learn more, please watch Angela Garcia on "Postcolonial theory and psychological anthropology" [Vimeo Video]. In it, Garcia discusses her relationship with the families that she studied.

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# 13.4: Five Models of Addiction

In this section, we explain the five models of addiction that are dominant in US society: the moral view, the disease model, a public health perspective, a sociological approach, and an intersectional approach. We will discuss these five views or models in this section, as well as where these societycan be found in action within society.

## Moral View

The moral view depicts the use of illicit substances and the state of addiction as wrong or bad. Illicit drug use is understood as a sin or personal failing. Faith-based drug rehabilitation programs are one location where we see the moral model in use. Through qualitative interviews with individuals who had attended such a facility, Gowan and Atmore (2012) found that within the teachings of evangelical conversion-based rehab, substance use is thought to be rooted in immorality. This requires the user to convert and submit to religious authority to recover. Gowan and Atmore (2012) found that taddictionm implied that the root of addiction was in secular or nonreligious life. The rigid structure of faith-based drug treatment programs can be helpful for some people in recovery. Some people also find that faith-based community programs like twelve step programs are effective.

Figure 11.12 The Federal Drug Schedule. Which drugs that impact human behavior are on this list? Which ones are missing?

| Schedule | Definition | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Schedule I | No currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. | Heroin, LSD, and cannabis |
| Schedule II | High potential for abuse, with use potentially leading to severe psychological or physical dependence. These drugs are also considered dangerous. | Vicodin, cocaine, methamphetamine, methadone, hydromorphone (Dilaudid), meperidine (Demerol), oxycodone (OxyContin), fentanyl, Dexedrine, Adderall, and Ritalin |
| Schedule III | Moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence. Abuse potential is less than Schedule I and Schedule II drugs but more than Schedule IV. | Tylenol with codeine, ketamine, anabolic steroids, and testosterone |
| Schedule IV | Low potential for abuse and low risk of dependence. | Xanax, Soma, Valium, Ativan, Talwin, Ambien, and Tramadol |
| Schedule V | Lower potential for abuse than Schedule IV and consist of preparations containing limited quantities of certain narcotics. Generally used for antidiarrheal, antitussive, and analgesic purposes. | Robitussin AC with codeine, Lomotil, and Lyrica |

The moral view toward drug use can also be seen in our criminal justice system and the criminalization of drug use. Criminalization is the act of making something illegal (Definition of Criminalize 2023). The 1970 Comprehensive Drug Abuse and Control Act (US House 1970) created drug categorizations, called *schedules*, based on the drug's potential for abuse and dependency and its accepted medical use. This new system of categorization acknowledged the medical use criminalizationhile heightening the criminalization of other drugs (Figure 11.12). Drug policy in the United States is guided by the moral view of drug use. It calls for those who use substances to be punished, whether it is through fines, some form of home arrest, or incarceration.

## Disease Model




**Figure 11.13** The Drunkard's Progress, an 1864 lithograph by Nathanial Currier, shows the progression of alcoholism as a disease. By organizing the information into careful steps, the illustrator uses the trappings of science to popularize the disease model.

Understanding drug use and particularly addiction to mind-altering substances as a disease is another dominant model found within US society and its social institutions. The idea of considering substance use a disease is at least 200 years old. Researching the history of the disease concept of addiction, sociologist Harry Levine (1978) found that habitual drinking during the eighteenth century was not considered a problematic behavior. The emergence of the temperance movement in the nineteenth century shifted American thought toward understanding addiction as a progressive disease. In this idea of disease, a person loses their will to control the consumption of a substance. In the 1940s, the National Council of Alcoholism was founded by E.M. Jellinek, a professor of applied physiology at Yale. The purpose of this council was to popularize the disease model of addiction by putting it on scientific footing by conducting research studies on drug use. Science promoted the disease model. It did not create it (Reinarman 2005).

The disease model of addiction also involves the use of pharmaceuticals, such as methadone, to treat physical and psychological dependence on opiates. Physicians Vincent Dole and Marie Nyswander successfully researched the use of methadone to stabilize a group of 22 patients previously addicted to heroin. Dole and Nyswander (1965) found that with the medication and a comprehensive program of rehabilitation, the patients showed marked improvements. They returned to school, obtained jobs, and reconnected with their families. The researchers found that the medication produced no euphoria or sedation and removed opiate withdrawal symptoms.

The legitimacy of the disease model of addiction was reinforced by the clinical research findings of Dole and Nyswander, which showed that a pharmaceutical (i.e., methadone) could be used to treat addiction. Dole and Nyswander (1965) wrote: "Maintenance of patients with methadone is no more difficult than maintaining diabetics with oral hypoglycemic agents, and in both cases, the patient should be able to live a normal life." Those who support the disease model of addiction often compare addiction to diabetes. The analogy demonstrates the similarity of addiction to other diseases.

Since the 1990s, addiction has been understood as a neurobiological disease and referred to as a chronic relapsing brain disease or disorder. Using brain imaging technology, scientists and researchers came to find that addictive long-term use of substances changed the structure and function of the brain and had long-lasting neurological and biological effects.

Social scientists have questioned the sole use of the disease model to understand addiction, asserting that addiction also involves a social component. They point out that the disease of addiction is not diagnosed through brain scans. Rather, it is often identified when one is breaking cultural and social norms around productivity and compulsion (Kaye 2012).

## Public Health Perspective

A public health perspective toward substance use incorporates a sociological understanding of drug use but focuses on maintaining the health of people who use drugs. Often this approach is labeled harm reduction. Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use (Harm Reduction Principles N.d.). Harm reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs. It focuses on providing people who use drugs with the information and material tools to reduce their risks while using drugs. This perspective focuses on reducing the harm of substance use rather than requiring abharm reductionall drug use. Similar harm reduction strategies are wearing seat belts or providing adolescents with condoms.

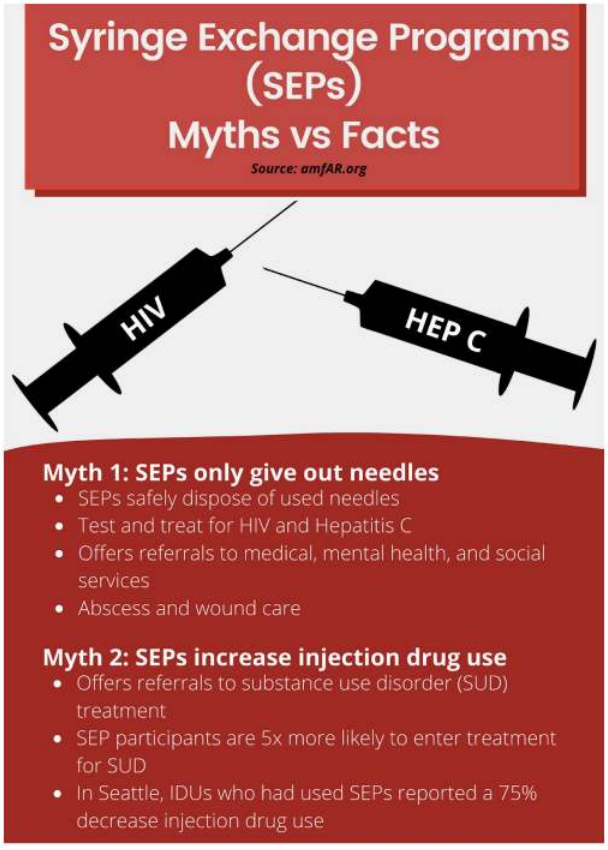



**Figure 11.14** In this infographic, we see myths about syringe exchange programs and the facts that dispel the myths.Syringe exchange programs reduce harm. Image Description

One of the most well-known harm reduction practices is syringe exchange. This became legal during the HIV epidemic of the 1980s and ’90s to help people who inject drugs avoid infection with the then-deadly virus. Currently, harm reduction is also associated with the distribution of the opioid overdose reversal antidote—Narcan or Naloxone. This harmless medication can almost instantaneously reverse an opioid overdose, saving a person’s life.

The public health or harm-reduction perspective toward drug use can be controversial because some believe that it enables drug use. There is no scientific evidence to support this idea. Instead, scientific evidence shows that syringe exchange reduces HIV and hepatitis C rates, and the distribution of Narcan lowers drug overdose mortality rates (Platt et al. 2018; Fernandes et al. 2017; Chimbar & Moleta 2018).

## Sociological Model

The sociological model of drug use and addiction examines how social structures, institutions, and phenomena may lead individuals to use mind-altering substances to cope with difficulty and distress. A sociological view also examines how social inequalities can make the impacts of drug use worse for some social groups than others.

Within the sociological model, a sociopharmacological approach looks at how social, economic, and health policy might exacerbate harm to people using substances. Sociopharmacology is a sociological theory of drug use developed by long-time drug use researcher Samuel R. Friedman. Friedman (2002) writes that approaches toward understanding drug use that focus on the psychological traits of the people using the drugs and the chemical traits of the drugs ignore socioeconomic and other social issues that make individuals, neighborhoods, and population groups vulnerable to harmful drug use.

To consider how the sociopharmacological approach plays out in everyday life, consider how drug policy prohibits the use of heroin and results in several harmful effects. New syringes can be hard to find. People will inject in unclean and rushed circumstances, which may negatively impact their health by putting them at risk of contracting HIV or life-threatening bacterial infections.

This type of analysis is also thought of using the analytic concept of risk environments developed by Tim Rhodes. A risk environment is a social or physical space where a variety of things interact to increase the chances of drug-relaterisk environment002). An analysis of risk environment looks at how the relationship between the individual and the environment impacts the production or reduction of drug harms .

In his sociopharmacology theory, Friedman also notes that the social order might cause misery for some social groups, which might cause people to self-medicate with drugs. People who experience class, gender, or racial oppression suffer harm. As a way to deal with that harm, they may choose to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

For example, working a low-paying service job where you deal with unhappy customers and mistreatment from your boss may lead you to blow off steam by using substances. Individualistic theories of drug use stigmatize and demonize individuals who use drugs as being weak or criminal. According to the sociopharmacological approach, if anything should be demonized, it should be the social order—not the individual who uses drugs (Friedman 2002).

Looking at the social determinants of the opioid crisis provides a way to discuss a sociological approach to studying drug use. opioid crisises to understanding the opioid crisis focus on the supply of opioids in the US and whether they were pharmaceutical or illicit. This approach misunderstands the reasons individuals use opioids. The label *deaths of despair* has been used to describe three types of mortality that are on the rise in the US. Deaths of despair have caused a decline in the average lifespan among Americans. These three deaths occur from drug overdose, alcohol-related disease, and suicide. Death from these conditions has risen sharply since 1999, especially among middle-aged White people without a college degree (Dasgupta, Beletsky, and Ciccarone 2018).




**Figure 11.15** "Deaths of despair" are surging in white America [YouTube]. Economists Anne Case and Sir Angus Deaton explain their research on the opioid crisis and deaths of despair in this 3:47-minute video. As you watch, please pay attention to the social forces that influence this social problem. Transcript

Researchers are examining how economic opportunities impact opioid use and overdose rates. In a study focused on the Midwest, Appalachia, and New England, areas that are predominantly White, researchers found that mortality rates from deaths of despair increased as county economic distress worsened. In rural counties with higher overdose rates, economic struggle was found to be more associated with overdose than opioid supply (Monnat 2019).

Analysis of the social and economic determinants of the opioid crisis notes that the jobs available in poor communities, which are often in manufacturing or service, present physical hazards and cause long-term wear and tear on the worker's body (Dasgupta et

al. 2018). An on-the-job injury can lead to chronic pain, which may disable a person. The disability may cause them to seek pain relief through opioids. The resulting addiction pushes them into poverty and despair. The video in Figure 11.15 describes the trends in the deaths of despair.

A 2017 report from the National Academy of Sciences used a sociological view of drug use when it commented on the cause of the opioid crisis. The report states:

> *Overprescribing was not the sole cause of the problem. While increased opioid prescribing for chronic pain has been a vector of the opioid epidemic, researchers agree that such structural factors as lack of economic opportunity, poor working conditions, and eroded social capital in depressed communities, accompanied by hopelessness and despair, are root causes of the misuse of opioids and other substances. (Zoorob and Salemi 2017)*

However, this research into deaths of despair focused on the increased opioid-related deaths due to overprescription in the first wave of the opioid crisis. Although the researchers don't name it specifically, they were looking at patterns of drug use and abuse by White people. The researchers demonstrate implicit bias.

As the crisis continues, researchers are examining the impact of the second and third waves of the crisis. According to a study from Marjorie C. Gondré-Lewis, Tomilowo Abijo, and Timothy A. Gondré-Lewis:

> *Categorically, from 2015 to 2017, African Americans experienced the highest OOD increase of all races analyzed; 103% for opiates and 361% for synthetic opioids in large central metropolitan cities, and respectively 100% and 332% in large fringe metros Illicitly manufactured fentanyl accounts for increased overdose deaths more than any other opioid across the USA. (2022)*

The opioid crisis is now impacting urban, Black people disproportionately.

Despite the research biases we notice here, a sociological view of drug use helps us to understand the social contexts that can lead to drug use and cause it to be harmful or deadly. Without a sociological analysis, we'd only be looking at individual people and drugs. We would miss the entire social environment which influences both drug use and the consequences of drug use. A sociological analysis notices widespread social structural elements that might increase drug use: racism, economic despair, and hopelessness. This analysis can help us create policies and programs that can be beneficial for large numbers of people. From the sociological perspective, we see that, like other social problems, differences in social location create unequal outcomes.

## Intersectional Model: Colonization and Drug Use

Indigenous people report the second highest rate of illicit drug use disorder between 2015 and 2019, at 4.8 percent. The highest percentage is among people who identify as two or more races or ethnicities. Indigenous people are also the highest percentage of people who sought treatment for illicit drug use disorders and received it (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality 2021).



**Figure 11.16** Researcher Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart of the Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota examines drug use. How does her work explore generational trauma you might remember from the ACEs model in Chapter 10?

The work of researcher and professor Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, shown in Figure 11.16, explains how the historically-based trauma experienced by Indigenous communities in the United States may impact substance use. She emphasizes that the traumatic losses suffered across generations by the North American Indigenous populations meet the definition of genocide. She lists massive

traumatic group experientrauma part of the intergenerational trauma experienced by this community, which may contribute to substance use (2003:8).

This list includes traumas such as massacres; prisoner of war experiences; starvation; displacement; separation of children from families and placement in compulsory and often abusive boarding schools; disease epidemics; forced assimilation; and the loss of language, culture, spirituality. All of this contributes to the breakdown of family kinship networks.

Brave Heart points to an 1881 US policy outlawing the practice of Native ceremonies, which prohibited traditional mourning practices. This undermined practices of healing and resolution that might improve wellness and potentially lower problematic substance use levels. Urban Indigenous people who use alcohol and/or other illicit substances reported symptoms of historical trauma (Wiechelt et al. 2012). Brave Heart (2003) points out that alcohol was not part of Indigenous culture except for in specific ceremonies before colonial contact. If you'd like to listen to Brave Heart herself, watch Historical Trauma in Native American Populations [Video].

Researchers suggest that treatments for substance use disorder among Indigenous peoples should coincide with decolonizing practices. This means that Indigenous communities should be supported in making attempts and achieving control of land and services. Nutton and Fast report that:

> *…communities that have made attempts to regain control of land and services have been found to have lower suicide rates, reduced reliance on social assistance, reduced unemployment, the emergence of diverse and viable economic enterprises on reservation lands, more effective management of social services and programs, including language and cultural components, and improved management of natural resources. (2015:842)*

Identity formation can also be a helpful part of drug treatment for Indigenous individuals. Research indicates that increased participation of Indigenous peoples in their culture of origin can decrease the prevalence of substance use disorder. (Nutton & Fast 2015)

Finally, all drug treatment interventions should be culturally adapted for Indigenous communities. For example, among Indigenous people inhabiting the Great Plains, the Sun Dance was performed in thanksgiving for a bountiful year and a request for another year of food, health, and success. Today community members pledge to do the Sun Dance to maintain their sobriety from alcohol or drugs.

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# 13.5: Recovery is Social Justice

Though the continued opioid (and now fentanyl) crisis may be a reason to despair, there are many individuals, social movements, and other organizations who are working to address problems associated with substance use. Social science, public health, biomedical, and legal scholars and researchers are diligently producing more evidence-based knowledge to guide societal efforts toward more humane and pragmatic responses to substance use. Reducing harmful drug use is social justice.

## Harm-Reduction Movement




**Figure 11.17** Transformation: The Alchemy of Harm Reduction [YouTube]. Please watch at least the first 5 minutes of this hour-long video. It describes an innovative harm reduction program in New York. As you watch, please consider how this approach changes the conversation around harmful drug use. Also, how can syringe exchange be a starting place for creating social transformation? Transcript

Harm reduction offers a lens through which we can understand and address issues associated with substance use. The first minute of the video in Figure 11.17 provides a list of the ways that harm reduction creates a safer environment for everyone. Harm reduction can be understood as a set of practices. It can also be understood as a social justice movement. The philosophy behind harm reduction revolutionizes the way we respond to human problems, namely addiction, drug overdose, and HIV.

Harm reduction uses a grassroots approach based on advocacy from and for people who use drugs and accept alternatives to abstinence that reduce harm (Marlatt 1996). According to the Harm Reduction Coalition, the central harm reduction organization in the US, a core principle of harm reduction philosophy "accepts for better or worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them."

Syringe exchange programs, or their more current name—syringe service programs—were one of the early harm reduction efforts made to address the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and '90s. The Harm Reduction Coalition states that "Syringe service programs (SSPs) distribute sterile syringes, safer drug use supplies, and education to people who inject drugs." The current opioid crisis in the United States is causing a dramatic increase in infectious diseases associated with injection drug use, such as HIV or hepatitis C. Syringe service programs are known to reduce HIV and hepatitis C infection rates by an estimated 50 percent (Platt et al. 2017). When paired with medication-assisted treatment to treat opioid dependence, syringe service programs can reduce HIV and hepatitis C transmission by over two-thirds (Platt et al. 2017; Fernandes et al. 2017).

Sometimes people oppose syringe service programs because they think it might enable drug use. Research shows the opposite. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), new users of syringe service programs are "five times more likely to enter drug treatment and three times more likely to stop using drugs than those who don't use the programs."

Syringe service programs can also prevent opioid overdoses by educating people who use drugs about ways to prevent overdose. Syringe service programs provide training on how to recognize an overdose and how to use naloxone or Narcan, a harmless medication that reverses opioid overdoses. Often syringe service programs will distribute overdose prevention kits that include naloxone (CDC 2019).

## Decriminalize Low-Level Drug Offenses

National social justice advocates recommend decriminalizing low-level drug offenses as a way to decrease oppression in our criminal justice system. Decriminalization is the act of reducing penalties for possession/use of small amounts from criminal sanctions to fines or civil penalties (Galvin 2014). For example, in order to address the racial and ethnic disparities in criminal justice systems, Ashley Nellis from the Sentencing Project recommends that we:

> *discontinue arrest and prosecutions for low-level drug offenses which often lead to the accumulation of prior convictions which accumulate disproportionately in communities of color. These convictions generally drive further and deeper involvement in the criminal legal system. (Nellis 2021)*

Decreasing criminal involvement in the first place related to harmful drug use is a step in treating harmful drug use like a medical condition that needs treatment rather than a criminal condition that needs punishment.

### Legalization of Cannabis

Social movements, as well as individuals who sought to decriminalize and legalize cannabis, were often motivated by the United States's long history of systemic racism and the war on drugs. Legalization means to make the possession and use of a drug legal (Galvin 2014a). Since 2012, 24 states and Washington, D.C., have legalized cannabis for adults over the age of 21. Legalizing cannabis has meant fewer arrests and jail time. In Oregon, the number of cannabis arrests decreased by 96 percent from 2013–2016, the year cannabis was legalized for adult recreational use Drug Policy Alliance 2022).

The Drug Policy Alliance, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the decriminalization of drugs, examined rates of youth cannabis use. They found that since the legalization of cannabis use in some states, youth use rates have remained stable and, in some cases, glegalizationey have also found that legalization has not made roadways less safe due to driving under the influence of cannabis. Finally, they show that states are using the money generated through taxes on legal cannabis for social good (The Drug Policy Alliance 2022). In Oregon, 40 percent of the cannabis tax revenue goes to the state school fund, and 20 percent goes to alcohol and drug treatment.

However, health researchers remain concerned about the impacts of cannabis legalization on adolescent cannabis use. Increasing amounts of research reveal correlations between adolescent cannabis use and short and potentially long-term impairments on cognition, worse academic/vocational outcomes, and increased prevalence of psychotic, mood, and addictive disorders (Hammond et al. 2020). Though cannabis use rates among adolescents are higher in states that have legalized the substance, those rates were higher even before legalization (Choo et al. 2014; Wall et al. 2011; Ammerman et al. 2015). Legalization itself did not cause higher usage rates.

Other negative impacts of cannabis use have risen in states where cannabis is legalized. Motor vehicle accidents and deaths where cannabis was involved have increased. Young children and pets accidentally overdose more often. Finally, emergency rooms see more patients and hospitalize them more often due to potent cannabis causing psychosis, depression, and anxiety (Committee on Substance Abuse & Committee on Substance Abuse Committee 2015, as cited in Hammond et al. 2020).

When considering whether cannabis should be legal, Hammond et al. (2020) point out that we must balance the negative impacts (discussed above) with the positive effect of decriminalization, reducing youth juvenile justice involvement. Youth involvement in the juvenile justice system can have long-lasting negative impacts on the life outcomes of youth. For example, involvement in the juvenile justice system may disrupt education or cause long-lasting mental health problems. We must consider the reduction of these types of issues alongside the known negative impacts of youth cannabis use.

Another equity issue arises with the legalization of cannabis and the rise of a money-making industry. A drug-related felony on an individual's record may be a barrier to gaining a license to sell cannabis through a dispensary. As we've discussed in this chapter, due to systemic racism within drug policy enforcement, those with drug-related felonies on their record are disproportionately Black. This means that Black entrepreneurs may be disproportionately blocked from entering the cannabis industry. Severalequitys and cities have implemented equity programs to address this issue. In California, a prior drug felony cannot be the sole basis for denying a cannabis license. In Portland, Oregon a portion of cannabis sales tax revenue is spent on funding women-owned and minority-owned cannabis businesses (DPA).

## Decriminalizing Personal Possession of Illegal Drugs in Oregon

On November 3, 2020, Oregon became the first state in the United States to decriminalize the personal possession of illegal drugs. By approving Measure 110, Oregon voters significantly changed the way drug possession violations are addressed. People found with smaller amounts of controlled substances (such as heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamine) are issued a Class E violation, which is punishable by a $100 fine. Alternatively, people in violation can have the fine waived if they complete a health assessment at an addiction recovery center.

Measure 110 also created a new drug addiction treatment and recovery grant program funded by the anticipated savings due to reduced enforcement of criminal drug possession penalties, as well as cannabis sales tax revenues (Lantz and Neiubuurt 2020). Advocates for Measure 110 saw it as a way to eliminate drug policies that were having a disproportionately negative impact on Black and Indigenous People of Color. This law also shifted the societal response to drug use from a punitive, moralistic approach to one that involved treatment and compassion.




**Figure 11.18** Store for Magic Mushrooms in the Netherlands. How do we use social construction at work in the conversation around the decriminalization of psilocybin?

During the same election vote in 2020, Oregonians also approved Measure 109, which directs the Oregon Health Authority to license and regulate the manufacturing, transportation, delivery, sale, and purchase of psilocybin products and the provision of

psilocybin services (Oregon Health Authority N.d.). Psilocybin is the main psychoactive component of *magic mushrooms* (Figure 11.18). This substance has been utilized for thousands of years in spiritual ceremonies in Indigenous cultures (Lowe et al. 2021). Psilocybin is considered a psychedelic hallucinogenic drug that produces both mind-altering and reality-distorting effects.

Following negative stigmatization of the substance due to its use within the *hippie* counterculture movement, in 1970, the federal government changed the classification of psychedelics (including psilocybin) to Schedule 1 drugs, which ended all scientific research on psychedelics. Research interest in the therapeutic uses of psychedelics resumed in a 2004 pilot study from the University of California, Los Angeles, which investigated the use of psilocybin treatment in patients with advanced-stage cancer (Grob et al 2010).

Since then, significant amounts of research into the use of psilocybin to treat an array of health concerns, from anxiety to cluster headaches, have taken place. Measure 109 in Oregon required a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on psilocybin's therapeutic uses. This review found research that suggests that psilocybin can reduce depression and anxiety. The FDA has designated psilocybin as a "breakthrough therapy" for the treatment of depression, which means that psilocybin treatment may be a significant improvement over existing therapies to treat depression Psilocybin therapy involves the administration of the substance in the context of counseling support in the weeks before and after dosing (Abbas et al. 2021). Though Oregon's regulated psilocybin treatment programs will not be up and running until 2023, they offer hope to those suffering from mental health disorders for whom other treatments do not work.

Oregon's decriminalization of low-level drug offenses is revolutionary, but it follows the advice of national social justice advocates, who recommend this action to address systemic inequalities related to harmful drug use.

## Community Collaboration for Drug Treatment

A final way to address the social problem of harmful drug use is to expand access to effective drug treatment. Expanding options takes collaboration by federal, state, and community partners to make a difference.

### The Intersectionality of Drug Treatment

Socioeconomic status and race impact access to drug treatment. Most elective drug treatment programs require some form of payment for services. Those without insurance and without the financial means to pay will be unable to receive treatment. Researchers have also found that racial discrimination has prevented entry for Black and Indigenous People of Color into more desirable forms of drug treatment (Hansen 2015).

While some may actively seek drug treatment, others may be forcefully mandated to attend strong-arm or faith-based rehabilitation programs. Sociologist Teresa Gowan asserts that these types of mandated rehab programs are used by the state to manage the poor. Poor individuals with a drug violation may be mandated to undertake forms of treatment that are designed to "transform basic behavioral dispositions and instill a new moral compass" (Gowan 2012).

At strong-arm rehab centers, all DWI (driving while intoxicated) and many low-level drug offenders are encouraged to define themselves as addicts, even if they may not actually have a substance use disorder. They are also punished for relapse and rewarded for a "cure." Gowan found that cultural styles and tastes that were not middle class were brought into the so-called therapeutic habilitation process and considered to be in need of reform. Bringing up the role of poverty or racism in one's life is thought to be immature and evidence of the addict's ego (Gowan 2012).

Race and class also play a role in determining which type of opioid use disorder treatment one will receive. Hansen (2015) found that BIPOC was often only offered the option of the less desirable methadone treatment, which requires near-daily visits to a clinic and a demeaning and constricting practice of surveillance (Bourgois 2000). In contrast, White middle-class individuals were more likely to be given the opportunity to receive buprenorphine treatment for their opioid use disorder. This type of treatment is more private and requires significantly fewer medical interactions. Hansen (2015) sees this systemic discrimination as working to maintain the race and class privilege of White middle-class individuals.

### Increasing Drug Treatment Options in Local Communities

Drug treatment in Oregon is particularly lacking. Oregon ranks 47th among the 50 US states in access to treatment for substance use disorders. Treatment needs are significantly unmet In fact, only 8.5 percent of teens and adults in Oregon who needed treatment actually received it (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration 2020). How might increasing treatment options impact the social problem of harmful drug use?

Higher levels of social capital within a community might protect it from higher overdose rates. Social capital is defined as the social networks or connections that an individual has available to them due to group mesocial capitale researchers measured social capital by looking at voting rates, the number of non-profit and civic organizations in a community, and response rates to the census (Zoorob and Salemi 2017). These are all indicative of one's engagement with their community, as well as increased social linkages between people through community organizations.

Community connections can also decrease drug use. Research documents the relationship between experiences with racism and illicit drug use among Black women (Ehrmin 2002). This research shows that while socioeconomic class was a factor, it was not the sole determinant of drug use (Stevens-Watkins et al.2012). Instead, Black women used drugs less if they had a strong ethnic identity and were connected to their communities (Maclin-Akinyemi et al. 2019).

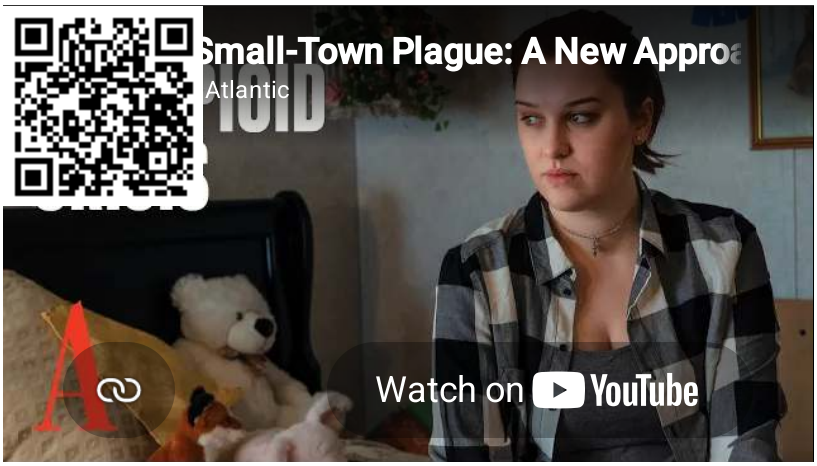



**Figure 11.19** A Small-Town Plague: A New Approach to Opioid Addiction [YouTube]. This 9.52-minute video describes community partnerships that support reducing harmful drug use in communities. Please watch the first 5 minutes. How do these approaches leverage existing interdependence, individual agency, and collective action to reduce harm? Transcript

Increasing funding for drug treatment, including drug treatment facilities, harm reduction programs, and community-based drug treatment programs can expand social justice for drug users. Community-based drug treatment programs serve over 53% of people in recovery (Bowser 1998). They include Twelve Step programs and other peer-led recovery groups. These community-based organizations may serve people with specific social identities, such as recovery groups for firefighters, queer people, or women, as examples. In addition, a recent study found that even when harm reduction or drug treatment services were available, they couldn't offer enough wrap-around services to their clients. For example, even though many clients were unhoused, most programs didn't offer housing. Even when clients were parenting, the programs had no funding for childcare services (Krawczyk et al 2022).

One way to increase funding for drug treatment is through local ballot measures. Measure 110, which decriminalizes possession of small amounts of illicit drugs, was passed in the 2020 election in Oregon. This law increases state funding for drug treatment services.

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# 13.6: Chapter Summary

Drug use is often mistakenly identified as a social problem in and of itself. This chapter has shown that it is the consequences of some forms of drug use (and often by certain groups of people) that can be constructed as prodrug usehe problems that arise from drug use must be solved collectively because they have structural roots.

Structural racism and class inequality drive different outcomes for people who use drugs. White rich people are more likely to be perceived as having a medical condition that needs treatment. They are also more likely to access effective treatment. People of Color and poor people are more likely to be seen as criminals and receive punishment. They are much less likely to have access to effective treatment. It's not the use of drugs that's the social problem—it's the deep injustice in the consequences of the behavior that is the social problem.

What is considered a harmful drug, and thus, must be outlawed, is constantly changing. This is demonstrated by the recent decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of drugs in Oregon. We must wrestle with defining drug use as legal or illegal, moral or immoral, individual or social.

Structural inequality combined with drug policy that creates avoidable harm from drug use. Social justice for people who have substance use disorder includes changing the laws, policies and practices related to harmful drug use. It includes increasing funding for effective community and inpatient treatment and services, particularly in rural communities. And it includes addressing the generational problems of racism and poverty reflected in the disproportionality of both the assignment of criminality and access to treatment.

## Essential Ideas

**Learning Objective 1:** How can we describe drug use and misuse as a social problem?

Harmful drug use is a social problem because it affects different groups of people in different ways. People differ on whether they consider drug use a moral, psychological or structural problem. They disagree on what to do, reflecting a conflict in values. Our ideas about legal and illegal drug use, and the consequences of that harmful drug use are socially constructed. Finally, taking action to expand justice requires individuals to take action to pursue recovery and collective action by people in our society to change drug laws, support harm reduction programs, fund drug treatment, and fight racism. These interdependent actions increase social justice for people who use drugs in harmful ways.

**Learning Objective 2:** How does social location impact the experience of harmful drug use?

We see disproportionality and disparity when we examine the outcomes of harmful drug use based on race and ethnicity. Whites are disproportionately less represented in prison and jail populations. Black, Brown, and Indigenous people are disproportionately more represented in prison and jaidisparityions. The reasons for this disparity include racist policing and disparate mandatory sentencing, among other practices. Generally, White people are perceived as needing treatment, and they more often have access to it. People of Color are more often seen as criminals and get punished.

**Learning Objective 3:** How do the five models of addiction differ in how they explain the causes and consequences of harmful drug use?

The five models of addiction are moral, disease, public health, sociological, and intersectional. The moral model focuses on the failings of an individual. While most sociologists don't use this approach, it can be effective in peer-led recovery groups. The disease model focuses on substance use as a medical disorder, often based on neurological explanations. This approach is helpful in developing medical treatment but often minimizes the [pb_glossahealth"1140"]social determinants of health[/pb_glossary], which influence the differential outcomes of harmful drug use. The public health model focuses on minimizing the harm that occurs related to harmful drug use. This approach focuses on harm reduction strategies. The sociological approach focuses on how structural inequalities like racism or economic inequalities influence the consequences of harmful drug use. Finally, the intersectional approach looks at how historical and generational trauma is uniquely experienced in communities of color. Scholars examine how the deep roots of colonization continue to create unequal access to treatment resources. Finally, in this model, researchers look at how cultural capital can be used to make a difference.

**Learning Objective 4:** Which interdependent actions increase social justice related to problematic drug use?

Radical justice for drug use and misuse will take federal, state, community, and individual action to transform our society. Among the options are harm reduction, decriminalization of small amounts of substances, increased access to treatment options, and

community collaborations. Recovery is social justice.

## Key Terms Review

[H5P56]

[H5P57]

[H5P58]

[H5P59]

## Key Terms List

- **addiction**: a chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences.
- **criminalization**: the act of making something illegal.
- **decriminalization**: the act of reducing penalties for possession/use of small amounts from criminal sanctions to fines or civil penalties
- **disparity**: the unequal outcomes of one group compared with outcomes for another group. Disparity can be used to compare any groups with different social locations.
- **drug use**: the imbibing of substances, which can happen without addiction or physical dependence but may lead to those outcomes.
- **five models of addiction**: five ways to understand drug use that are dominant in US society—the moral view, the disease model, the public health perspective, a sociological approach, and an intersectional approach.
- **harm reduction**: a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.
- **harmful drug use**: a person's drug use negatively impacts their health, their livelihood, their family, their freedom, or any other aspect of their life that they deem important.
- **legalization**: to make the possession and use of a drug legal
- **mass incarceration**: the overwhelming size and scale of the US prison population
- **New Jim Crow**: the network of laws and practices that disproportionately funnel Black Americans into the criminal justice system, stripping them of their constitutional rights as a punishment for their offenses in the same way that Jim Crow laws did in previous eras.
- **opioid crisis**: a surge of drug overdoses and suicides, both linked to the use of opioid drugs
- **private prisons**: for-profit incarceration facilities run by private companies that contract with local, state, and federal governments.
- **risk environment**: the space—whether social or physical—in which a variety of factors interact to increase the chances of drug-related harm.
- **social capital**: the social networks or connections that an individual has available to them due to group membership.
- **substance use disorder (SUD)**: a condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s), such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired.
- **War on Drugs**: The War on Drugs is an effort in the United States since the 1970s to combat illegal drug use by greatly increasing penalties, enforcement, and incarceration for drug offenders.

## Discuss and Do

1. Harmful Drug Use as a Social Problem: What's the difference between illegal and legal drugs? Does everyone in society agree on these categories? Why or why not?
2. Causes and Consequences: Which of the five models of addiction best explains the opioid crisis?
3. Conflict in Society: What are the advantages and disadvantages of legalizing any currently illegal drug? Feel free to use an example from the textbook, or from your community.
4. Mass Incarceration: How can we see mass incarceration as a social problem related to the racialization of drug use?
5. Social Construction of Drug Use: Please find a video, print, or social media ad that is selling or against selling a mind-altering substance. This could be prohibition, smoking in old movies, medical cannabis today, or other substances. How did this ad capture the beliefs or opinions of the drug at the time? How have the views changed over time?

6. Community Action: What drug treatment services are available in your community? Are they community-based, medical, or carceral? How might you access them? Are they effective?

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 14: Crime and Criminal Justice


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# 14.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

**Chapter Learning Objectives**

1. Understand Crime and Its Measurement: Learn about the nature and extent of crime, including public concerns and media portrayals. Understand the methods used to measure crime and become familiar with different types of crime, such as violent, property, white-collar, organized and consensual crimes. Explore the demographic and geographic variations in crime rates, including urban vs. rural differences and the impact of race and ethnicity.
2. Examine Theoretical Perspectives on Crime: Gain insight into various sociological theories explaining crime, including interactionist perspectives, social process theories, social bonding theory, labeling theory and conflict perspective. Understand how these theories contribute to our understanding of who commits crime and why, and how societal structures and interactions influence criminal behavior.
3. Analyze the Criminal Justice System and Crime Reduction Strategies: Study the structure and function of the criminal justice system, including the roles of police, criminal courts and the challenges within the prison system, such as the death penalty. Discuss various strategies and policies aimed at reducing crime, examining their effectiveness and implications for society.



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## Crime and Criminal Justice

### Introduction: Social Problems in the News

“Wilson St. Residents Stunned by Shooting,” the headline said. A shooting of a toddler in Chattanooga, TN, left a neighbor afraid. At 9:45 p.m. on a Friday night, someone walked up to an apartment and fired a gun through a window. One bullet struck the toddler in the leg, and another bullet struck a 20-year-old male with him in the hand. A neighbor across the hallway heard the shots and later told a reporter, “It scared me, my heart was beating, my hands were shaking. I was nervous and scared, is the baby going to survive. I was stuck on my bed and I was like what am I supposed to do, go see who is at my door or if I open it I might get shot at. I’m worrying about the baby, that’s all I’m worrying about.” Because the 20-year-old victim was a known gang member, police suspected that the incident was related to a drive-by gang shooting that occurred earlier in the evening.

*Source: Boatwright, 2011Boatwright, M. (2011, March 5). Wilson St. residents stunned by shooting. WRCB-TV. Retrieved from http://www.wrcbtv.com/Global/story.asp?S=14194540.*

As this poignant account reminds us, many people across the nation live in fear of crime, and you may know several people, perhaps including yourself, who have been victims of a crime. The study of crime bears directly on this book’s theme of continuity and change: Crime seems to have always been with us, yet sound social science research points to many programs and policies with great promise for reducing crime if only our nation would undertake them. We begin with some conceptual issues in understanding crime before turning to the types of crime, explanations for crime, and some aspects of the criminal justice system.

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# 14.2: The Problem of Crime

## The Problem of Crime

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand the extent of public concern about crime.
2. Explain how the news media contribute to myths about crime.
3. Describe how crime in the United States is measured.

Put most simply, **crime** is behavior that is prohibited by the criminal law because it is considered especially harmful or offensive. This simple definition, however, raises many questions:

- Who decides what is offensive or harmful?
- Are some harmful behaviors not considered crimes, and are some crimes not that harmful?
- Are some people more likely than others to be considered criminals because of their gender, race and ethnicity, social class, age, or other aspect of their social backgrounds?

These questions lie at the heart of the sociological study of deviance, of which crime is a special type. **Deviance** is behavior that violates social norms and arouses strong social disapproval. This definition reflects the common sociological view that deviance is not a quality of a behavior itself but rather the result of what other people think about the behavior. This view is reflected in an often-cited quote from sociologist Howard S. Becker (1963, p. 9),Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York, NY: Free Press. who wrote several decades ago that “deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules or sanctions to an ‘offender.’ The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.”

This definition reminds us that some harmful behaviors, such as white-collar crime, may not be considered deviant and fail to result in severe legal punishment, perhaps because wealthy individuals perform them. It also reminds us that some less harmful behaviors, such as prostitution, may be considered very deviant because the public deems the behavior immoral and because poor people engage in them. As these possibilities suggest, the application of a criminal label to an offender is *problematic*: People arrested and/or convicted of a crime may not have engaged in a very harmful behavior or even in the behavior of which they are suspected, and people with no criminal record have in fact engaged in harmful and even criminal behavior.

## Public Concern about Crime

The American public is clearly concerned about crime. Two-thirds of the public said in a 2011 Gallup poll that crime had risen from the previous year. More than a third, 38 percent, said they would be “afraid to walk alone at night” within one mile of their residence; this figure translates to more than 86 million adults. In the same poll, 47 percent (or about 114 million adults) said they worry about their homes being burglarized, and 44 percent said they worry about thefts of or from their motor vehicles. Corresponding figures for other crimes were: experiencing identity theft, 67 percent; getting mugged, 34 percent; getting attacked while driving your car, 19 percent; being sexually assaulted, 22 percent (including 37 percent of women); and getting murdered, 20 percent (among the lowest figures in this list, but one that still amounts to 42 million adults worrying about being murdered).

Although the public is concerned about crime, at least some of this concern might exceed what the facts about crime would justify. For example, although most of the public, as we just noted, thinks the crime rate has been rising, this rate has actually been declining since the early 1990s. And although one-fifth of the public worries about getting murdered, homicides comprise less than one-tenth of 1 percent of all violent and property crime (*street crime*); only about 7 of every 100,000 Americans, or 0.007 percent, are murdered every year; homicide does not rank among the top ten causes of death (which include heart disease and cancer); and the number of homicides is much lower than the number of deaths from harmful behavior by corporations (such as pollution or unsafe products and workplaces). Crime is indeed a real problem, but public concern about crime may be higher than the facts warrant.

## Media Myths

To the extent this is true, news media coverage of crime may be partly responsible (Robinson, 2011).Robinson, M. B. (2011). *Media coverage of crime and criminal justice*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press. For example, if the television news and newspapers suddenly have several stories about a few sensational crimes, public concern about crime may jump, even though crime

in general has not risen at all. Similarly, the news media have increased their crime coverage even when crime is falling, as happened during the early 1990s when the major US television networks more than doubled their nightly news stories about crime even though crime had been declining (Freeman, 1994).Freeman, M. (1994, March 14). Networks doubled crime coverage in '93, despite flat violence levels in US society. *Mediaweek*, *4*, p. 4.

The news media, in fact, distort the amount and nature of crime in several ways (Surette, 2011).Surette, R. (2011). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. First, they overdramatize crime by reporting it in many news stories. Crime dominates news coverage in many newspapers and television newscasts, and, as just noted, the media may devote much coverage to a few sensational crimes and create the false impression that a "crime wave" is occurring when the crime rate may even be declining.

Second, the media devote particularly heavy coverage to violent crime, reflecting the common saying that "if it bleeds, it leads." For example, more than 25 percent of the crime stories on evening newscasts and in newspapers concern homicide, even though homicide comprises less than 1 percent of all crime (Feld, 2003).Feld, B. C. (2003). The politics of race and juvenile justice: The "due process revolution" and the conservative reaction. *Justice Quarterly*, *20*, 765–800. Similarly, the vast majority of crime stories feature violent crime, even though violent crime comprises only about 12–14 percent of all street crimes combined. Media attention to violent crime thus gives the public the false impression that most crime is violent when in fact most crime involves a theft of some sort (*property crime*).

Third, the media tend to highlight crimes committed by African Americans or other people of color and crimes with white victims. A greater percentage of crime stories involve people of color as offenders than is true in arrest statistics. A greater percentage of crime stories also involve whites as victims than is actually true, and newspaper stories of white-victim crimes are longer than those of black-victim crimes. Crimes in which African Americans are the offenders and whites are the victims also receive disproportionate media coverage even though most crimes involve offenders and victims of the same race. In all these ways, the news media exaggerate the extent to which people of color commit crimes and the extent to which whites are victims of crimes.

Fourth, the media also tend to highlight crimes committed by youths. In one study of thousands of local newscast stories, about two-thirds of the stories about violence depicted youthful offenders, even though teenagers commit only about 14–16 percent of violent crime (Jackson, 1997).Jackson, D. Z. (1997, September 10). No wonder we're afraid of youths. *The Boston Globe*, p. A15. In a related problem, media stories involving teenagers are much more likely to show them committing crime or other antisocial acts than committing good deeds or other positive behavior. In these ways, the news media convey a false impression that leads the public to believe both that youths commit much of our violent crime and that youth violence has been rising even though it has actually declined since the early 1990s.

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# 14.3: Measuring Crime

## Measuring Crime




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It is surprisingly difficult to know how much crime occurs. Crime is not like the weather, when we all can see whether it is raining, snowing, or sunny. Usually when crime occurs, only the criminal and the victim, and sometimes an occasional witness, know about it. We thus have an incomplete picture of the crime problem, but because of various data sources we still have a pretty good understanding of how much crime exists and of who is most likely to commit it and be victimized by it.

The government's primary source of crime data is the **Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)**, published annually by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI gathers its data from police departments around the country who tell the FBI about crimes that have come to their attention. The police also tell the FBI whether someone is arrested for the crime and, if so, the person's age, gender, and race. The FBI gathers all these UCR data and reports them in an annual volume called *Crime in the United States* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011).Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). *Crime in the United States, 2010*. Washington, DC: Author.

Most UCR data concern the so-called **Part I Crimes**, eight felonies that the FBI considers the most serious. Four of these are violent crimes—homicide, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery—and four are property crimes—burglary, larceny (e.g., shoplifting, pick-pocketing, purse-snatching), motor vehicle theft, and arson.

According to the FBI, 1,246,248 violent crimes and 9,082,887 property crimes occurred in 2010, for a total of about 10.3 million. This is the nation's official crime count, and by any standard it is a lot of crime. However, this number is much lower than it should be because *more than half of all crime victims do not report their crimes to the police*, and the police thus do not know about them. These unreported crimes represent "hidden" crimes or, as they are often called, the **dark figure of crime**. Thus the true crime problem is much greater than suggested by the UCR.

This underreporting of crime represents a major problem for the UCR's validity. Several other problems exist. First, the UCR excludes white-collar crimes and thus diverts attention away from their harm. Second, police practices affect the number of crimes listed in the UCR. For example, the police do not record every report they hear from a citizen as a crime. Sometimes they do not have the time to do so, and sometimes they do not believe the citizens. If they do not record the report, the FBI does not count it as a crime. If the police start recording more reports or fail to record even more reports, the official crime rate will rise or fall, respectively, even though the actual number of crimes has not changed. This fact has led to crime-reporting scandals during the past two decades, as police departments in several major cities failed to record many crimes or downgraded others (e.g., calling a rape a simple assault) in an apparent effort to make it appear as if the crime rate were falling (Hart, 2004).Hart, A. (2004, *February 21*). Report finds Atlanta police cut figures on crimes. *New York Times*, p. A1. In a third problem, if crime victims become more or less likely to report their crimes to the police (e.g., the advent of the 911 emergency number may have increased calls to the police), the official crime rate will again change, even if the actual number of crimes has not.

To get a more accurate picture of crime, the federal government began in the early 1970s to administer a survey, now called the **National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**, to tens of thousands of randomly selected US households. People in the households are asked whether they or their residence has been the victim of several different types of crimes in the past half year. Their responses are then extrapolated to the entire US population to yield fairly accurate estimates of the actual number of crimes occurring in the nation. These estimates are thought to be more accurate than the UCR's figures, even if it is true that victims

sometimes might not want to tell NCVS interviewers what happened to them (Catalano, 2006).Catalano, S. M. (2006). *The measurement of crime: Victim reporting and police recording*. New York, NY: LFB Scholarly.

Table 8.1 lists the number of street crimes as reported by the UCR and estimated by NCVS. Note that these two crime sources do not measure exactly the crimes. For example, the NCVS excludes commercial crimes such as shoplifting, while the UCR includes them. The NCVS also includes simple assaults (where someone receives only a minor injury), while the UCR excludes them. These differences notwithstanding, we can still see that the NCVS estimates about 1.8 times as many crimes as the UCR reports to us. The *dark figure* of crime is large indeed.

Table 8.1 Number of Crimes: Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 2010

| | UCR | NCVS |
|---|---|---|
| Violent Crime | 1,246,248 | 3,817,380 |
| Property Crime | 9,082,887 | 14,908,330 |
| Total | 10,329,135 | 18,725,710 |

*Source: Maguire, K. (Ed.). (2011). Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics. Retrieved from http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/toc_3.html.*

*Alt text for image: violent crime & property crime reports*

A third source of crime information is the **self-report survey**. Here subjects, usually adolescents, indicate on an anonymous questionnaire whether and how often they committed various offenses in, say, the past year. Typically, they also answer questions about their family relationships, school performance, and other aspects of their backgrounds. Self-report studies have yielded valuable information about delinquency and explanations of crime. Like the NCVS, they underscore how much crime is committed that does not come to the attention of the police.

## Key Takeaways

- Much of the American public is concerned about crime, and many people worry about becoming a victim of various types of crime.
- The news media overdramatize the nature and amount of crime, and they give more attention to crimes involving African Americans and Latinos as offenders and whites as victims.
- The nation's major source of crime data is the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). However, many people do not report their crimes to the police, and police practices affect the number of "official" crimes reported by the UCR.

## For Your Review

1. Why do you think so many Americans are afraid of crime even though the crime rate has greatly declined since the early 1990s?
2. Why is it difficult to measure crime accurately? Why is the measurement of crime by the FBI inaccurate?

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# 14.4: Who Commits Crime?

## Who Commits Crime?

**Learning Objectives**

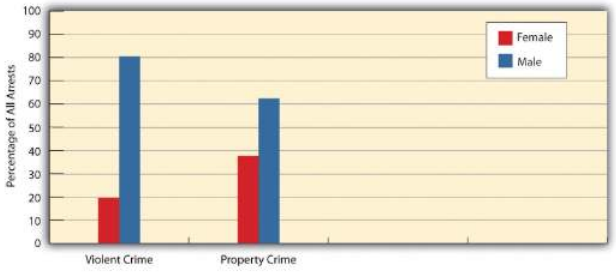
1. Explain why males commit more crime than females.
2. Discuss whether social class differences exist in crime rates.
3. Discuss whether racial/ethnic differences exist in crime rates.

While people from all walks of life commit street crime, some people are still more likely than others to break the law because of their social backgrounds. These social backgrounds include their gender, age, social class, urban/rural residence, and race and ethnicity. Despite their inaccuracies, the three data sources discussed in the first section of this chapter all provide a similar picture of what kinds of people, in terms of their social backgrounds, are more or less likely to commit street crime. We briefly discuss each background in turn

### Gender

Simply put, males commit much more crime than females. In UCR data, men comprise about 81 percent of all arrests for violent crime and about 63 percent of all arrests for property crime. (See Figure 8.3.) In the NCVS, victims report that males commit most of the violent crimes they experienced, and self-report studies find that males far outpace females in the commission of serious street offenses. When it comes to breaking the law, crime is a man's world.

Figure G*ender and Arrest (Percentage of All Arrests)*




*Source: Data from Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). Crime in the United States, 2010. Washington, DC: Author.*

The key question is why such a large gender difference exists. Some scholars attribute this difference to biological differences between the sexes, but most criminologists attribute it to sociological factors. One of these is gender role socialization: Despite greater recognition of gender roles, we continue to raise our boys to be assertive and aggressive, while we raise our girls to be gentle and nurturing (Lindsey, 2011).Lindsey, L. L. (2011). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Such gender socialization has many effects, and one of these is a large gender difference in criminal behavior. A second factor is opportunity. Studies find that parents watch their daughters more closely than they watch their sons, who are allowed to stay out later at night and thus have more opportunity to break the law.

### Age

Age also makes a difference in criminal behavior: Offending rates are highest in the late teens and early twenties and decline thereafter. Accordingly, people in the 15–24 age range account for about 40 percent of all arrests even though they comprise only about 14 percent of the population.

Several factors again seem to account for this pattern (Shoemaker, 2010).Shoemaker, D. J. (2010). *Theories of delinquency: An examination of explanations of delinquent behavior* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. First, peer relationships matter more during this time of one's life than later, and peers are also more likely during this period than later to be offenders themselves. For both reasons, our peer relationships during our teens and early twenties are more likely than those in our later years to draw us into crime. Second, adolescents and young adults are more likely than older adults to lack full-time jobs; for this reason, they are more likely to need money and thus to commit offenses to obtain money and other possessions. Third, as we age out of our early twenties, our ties to conventional society increase: Many people marry, have children, and begin full-time employment,

though not necessarily in that order. These events and bonds increase our stakes in conformity, to use some social science jargon, and thus reduce our desire to break the law (Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten, 2006).Laub, J. H., Sampson, R. J., & Sweeten, G. A. (2006). Assessing Sampson and Laub's life-course theory of crime. In F. T. Cullen (Ed.), *Taking stock: The status of criminological theory* (Vol. 15, pp. 313–333). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

## Social Class

Findings on social class differences in crime are less clear than they are for gender or age differences. Arrest statistics and much research indicate that poor people are much more likely than wealthier people to commit street crime. However, some scholars attribute the greater arrests of poor people to social class bias against them. Despite this possibility, most criminologists would probably agree that social class differences in criminal offending are "unmistakable" (Harris & Shaw, 2000, p. 138).Harris, A. R., & Shaw, J. A. W. (2000). Looking for patterns: Race, class, and crime. In J. F.Sheley (Ed.), *Criminology: A contemporary handbook* (3rd ed., pp. 129–163). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Reflecting this conclusion, one sociologist has even noted, with tongue only partly in cheek, that social scientists know they should not "stroll the streets at night in certain parts of town or even to park there" and that areas of cities that frighten them are "not upper-income neighborhoods" (Stark, 1987, p. 894).Stark, R. (1987). Deviant places: A theory of the ecology of crime. *Criminology, 25*, 893–911. Thus social class does seem to be associated with street crime, with poor individuals doing more than their fair share.

Explanations of this relationship center on the effects of poverty, which, as the next section will discuss further, is said to produce anger, frustration, and economic need and to be associated with a need for respect and with poor parenting skills and other problems that make children more likely to commit antisocial behavior when they reach adolescence and beyond. These effects combine to lead poor people to be more likely than wealthier people to commit street crime, even if it is true that most poor people do not commit street crime at all.

Although the poor are more likely than the wealthy to commit street crime, it is also true that the wealthy are much more likely than the poor to commit white-collar crime, which, as argued earlier, can be much more harmful than street crime. If we consider both street crime and white-collar crime, then there does not appear to be a social class-crime relationship, since the poor have higher rates of the former and the wealthy have higher rates of the latter.

## Urban versus Rural Residence

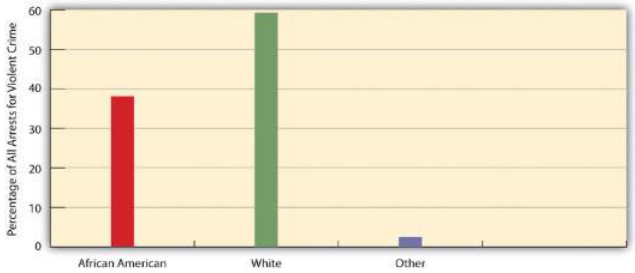
Where we live also makes a difference for our likelihood of committing crime. We saw earlier that big cities have a much higher homicide rate than small towns. This trend exists for violent crime and property crime more generally. Urban areas have high crime rates in part because they are poor, but poverty by itself does not completely explain the urban-rural difference in crime, since many rural areas are poor as well. A key factor that explains the higher crime rates of urban areas is their greater population density (Stark 1987).Stark, R. (1987). Deviant places: A theory of the ecology of crime. *Criminology, 25*, 893–911. When many people live close together, they come into contact with one another more often. This fact means that teenagers and young adults have more peers to influence them to commit crime, and it also means that potential criminals have more targets (people and homes) for their criminal activity. Urban areas also have many bars, convenience stores, and other businesses that can become targets for potential criminals, and bars, taverns, and other settings for drinking can obviously become settings where tempers flare and violence ensues.

## Race and Ethnicity

In discussing who commits crime, any discussion of race and ethnicity is bound to arouse controversy because of the possibility of racial and ethnic stereotyping. But if we can say that men and younger people have relatively high crime rates without necessarily sounding biased against individuals who are male or younger, then it should be possible to acknowledge that certain racial and ethnic groups have higher crime rates without sounding biased against them.

Keeping this in mind, race and ethnicity do seem to be related to criminal offending. In particular, much research finds that African Americans and Latinos have higher rates of street crime than non-Latino whites. For example, although African Americans comprise about 13 percent of the US population, they account for about 39 percent of all arrests for violent crime (see Figure 8.4).

Figure *Race and Arrest for Violent Crime (Percentage of All Violent Crime Arrests)*




*Source: Data from Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). Crime in the United States, 2010. Washington, DC: Author.*

Latinos also have higher crime rates than non-Latino whites, but lower rates than those for African Americans. Although racial and ethnic bias by the criminal justice system may account for some of these racial/ethnic differences in offending, most criminologists agree that such differences do in fact exist for serious street crimes (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2012).Walker, S., Spohn, C., & DeLone, M. (2012). *The color of justice: Race, ethnicity, and crime in America* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Why do these differences exist? A racist explanation would attribute them to biological inferiority of the groups, African Americans and Latinos, with the relatively high rates of offending. Such explanations were popular several generations ago but fortunately lost favor as time passed and attitudes changed. Today, scholars attribute racial/ethnic differences in offending to several sociological factors (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).Unnever, J. D., & Gabbidon, S. L. (2011). *A theory of African American offending: Race, racism, and crime*. New York, NY: Routledge. First, African Americans and Latinos are much poorer than whites on the average, and poverty contributes to higher crime rates. Second, they are also more likely to live in urban areas, which, as we have seen, also contribute to higher crime rates. Third, the racial and ethnic discrimination they experience leads to anger and frustration that in turn can promote criminal behavior. Although there is less research on Native Americans' criminality, they, too, appear to have higher crime rates than whites because of their much greater poverty and experience of racial discrimination (McCarthy & Hagan, 2003).McCarthy, B., & Hagan, J. (2003). Sanction effects, violence, and native North American street youth. In D. F. Hawkins (Ed.), *Violent crime: Assessing race and ethnic differences* (pp. 117–137). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In appreciating racial/ethnic differences in street crime rates, it is important to keep in mind that whites commit most white-collar crime, and especially corporate crime, as it is white people who lead and manage our many corporations. Just as social class affects the type of crime that people do, so do race and ethnicity. Wealthy, white people commit much crime, but it is white-collar crime they tend to commit, not street crime.

## Key Takeaways

- Males commit more street crime than females, in part because of gender role socialization that helps make males more assertive and aggressive.
- Young people commit a disproportionate amount of street crime, in part because of the influence of their peers and their lack of stakes in conformity.
- The disproportionate involvement of African Americans and Latinos in street crime arises largely from their poverty and urban residence.

## For Your Review

1. If we say that males commit more crime than females, does that imply that we are prejudiced against males? Why or why not?
2. Write a brief essay that outlines social class and racial/ethnic differences in street crime and explains the reasons for these differences.

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# 14.5: Explaining Crime

## Explaining Crime

**Learning Objectives**

1. Understand social structure theories of crime.
2. Explain the social bonding theory of crime.
3. Describe the general assumptions of conflict theories of crime.

If we want to be able to reduce crime, we must first understand why it occurs. Sociologists generally discount explanations rooted in the individual biology or psychology of criminal offenders. While a few offenders may suffer from biological defects or psychological problems that lead them to commit crime, most do not. Further, biological and psychological explanations cannot adequately explain the social patterning of crime discussed earlier: why higher crime rates are associated with certain locations and social backgrounds. For example, if California has a higher crime rate than Maine, and the United States has a higher crime rate than Canada, it would sound silly to say that Californians and Americans have more biological and psychological problems than Mainers and Canadians, respectively. Biological and psychological explanations also cannot easily explain why crime rates rise and fall, nor do they lend themselves to practical solutions for reducing crime.

In contrast, sociological explanations do help understand the social patterning of crime and changes in crime rates, and they also lend themselves to possible solutions for reducing crime. A brief discussion of these explanations follows, and a summary appears in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2 Sociological Explanations of Crime

| Major Prospective | Related Explanation | Summary of Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Functional (social structure theories) | Social disorganization | Certain social characteristics of urban neighborhoods contribute to high crime rates. These characteristics include poverty, dilapidation, population density, and population |
| | Anomie | According to Robert Merton, crime by the poor results from a gap between the cultural emphasis on economic success and the inability to achieve such a success through the legitimate means of working. |
| Integrationist (social progress theories) | Differential association | Edwin H. Sutherland argued that criminal behavior is learned by interacting with close friends who teach us how commit various crimes and also the values, motives and rationalizations we need to adopt in order to justify breaking the law. |
| | Social bonding | Travis Hirschi wrote that delinquency results from weak bonds to conventional social institutions, such as families and schools. |
| | Labeling | Deviance and crime result from being officially labeled; arrest and imprisonment increase the likelihood of reoffending. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Conflict (conflict theories) | Group conflict | Criminal law is shaped by the conflict among the various social groups in society that exist because of differences in race and ethnicity, social class, religion, and other factors. |
| | Radical | The wealthy try to use the law and criminal justice system to reinforce their power and to keep the poor and people of color at the bottom of society. |
| | Feminist | Gender plays an important role in the following areas: (1) the reasons girls and women commit crime; (2) the reasons female crime is lower than male crime; (3) the victimization of girls and women by rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence; and (4) the experience of women professionals and offenders in the criminal justice system. |

## The Functional Perspective: Social Structure Theories

Social structure theories all stress that crime results from the breakdown of society's norms and social organization and in this sense fall under the functional perspective outlined in Chapter 1. They trace the roots of crime to problems in the society itself rather than to biological or psychological problems inside individuals. By doing so, they suggest the need to address society's social structure in order to reduce crime. Several social structure theories exist.

### Social Disorganization Theory

A popular explanation is **social disorganization theory**. This approach originated primarily in the work of Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942),Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. two social scientists at the University of Chicago who studied that city's delinquency rates during the first three decades of the twentieth century. During this time, the ethnic composition of Chicago changed considerably, as the city's inner zones were first occupied by English, German, and Irish immigrants, and then by Eastern European immigrants, and then by African Americans who moved there from southern states. Shaw and McKay found that the inner zones of Chicago consistently had the highest delinquency rates regardless of which ethnic group lived there, and they also found that the ethnic groups' delinquency rates declined as they moved to outer areas of Chicago. To explain these related patterns, Shaw and McKay reasoned that the inner zones of Chicago suffered from *social disorganization*: A weakening of social institutions such as the family, school, and religion that in turn weakens the strength of social bonds and norms and the effectiveness of socialization. Research today confirms that crime rates are highest in neighborhoods with several kinds of structural problems, including high rates of residential mobility, population density, poverty, and single-parent families (Mazerolle, Wickes, & McBroom, 2010).Mazerolle, L., Wickes, R., & McBroom, J. (2010). Community variations in violence: The role of social ties and collective efficacy in comparative context. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 47*(1), 3–30.

### Anomie Theory

Another popular explanation is **anomie theory**, first formulated by Robert K. Merton (1938)Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*, 672–682. in a classic article. Writing just after the Great Depression, Merton focused on the effects of poverty in a nation like the United States that places so much emphasis on economic success. With this strong cultural value, wrote Merton, the poor who do not achieve the American dream feel especially frustrated. They have several ways or adaptations of responding to their situation (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 Anomie Theory

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Goal of economic success | |

| | Accept | Reject |
|---|---|---|
| Value of working | | |
| Accept | Conformity | Ritualism |
| Reject | Innovation | Retreatism |

First, said Merton, they may continue to accept the goal of economic success and also the value of working at a job to achieve such success; Merton labeled this adaptation *conformity*. Second, they may continue to favor economic success but reject the value of working and instead use new, illegitimate means, for example theft, of gaining money and possessions; Merton labeled this adaptation *innovation*. Third, they may abandon hope of economic success but continue to work anyway because work has become a habit. Merton labeled this adaptation *ritualism*. Finally, they may reject both the goal of economic success and the means of working to achieve such success and withdraw from society either by turning to drugs or by becoming hobos; Merton labeled this adaptation *retreatism*. He also listed a fifth adaptation, which he called *rebellion*, to characterize a response in which people reject economic success and working and work to bring about a new society with new values and a new economic system.

Merton's theory was very influential for many years but eventually lost popularity, partly because many crimes, such as assault and rape, are not committed for the economic motive that his theory assumed, and partly because many people use drugs and alcohol without dropping out of society, as his retreatism category assumed. In recent years, however, scholars have rediscovered and adapted his theory, and it has regained favor as new attention is being paid to the frustration resulting from poverty and other strains in one's life that in turn may produce criminal behavior (Miller, Schreck, & Tewksbury, 2011).Miller, J. M., Schreck, C. J., & Tewksbury, R. (2011). *Criminological theory: A brief introduction* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

## The Interactionist Perspective: Social Process Theories

Social process theories all stress that crime results from the social interaction of individuals with other people, particularly their friends and family, and thus fall under the interactionist perspective outlined in Chapter 1. They trace the roots of crime to the influence that our friends and family have on us and to the meanings and perceptions we derive from their views and expectations. By doing so, they indicate the need to address the peer and family context as a promising way to reduce crime.

## Differential Association Theory

One of the most famous criminological theories is **differential association theory**, first formulated at about the same time as Merton's anomie theory by Edwin H. Sutherland and published in its final form in an edition of a criminology text he wrote (Sutherland, 1947).Sutherland, E. H. (1947). *Principles of criminology* (4th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: J. P. Lippincott. Sutherland rejected the idea, fashionable at the time, that crime had strong biological roots and instead said it grew out of interaction with others. Specifically, he wrote that adolescents and other individuals learn that it is acceptable to commit crime and also how to commit crime from their interaction with their close friends. Adolescents become delinquent if they acquire more and stronger attitudes in favor of breaking the law than attitudes opposed to breaking the law. As Sutherland put it, "A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to the violation of law over definitions unfavorable to the violation of law." Crime and delinquency, then, result from a very normal social process, social interaction. Adolescents are more or less at risk for delinquency partly depending on who their friends are and what their friends do or don't do.

Many scholars today consider peer influences to be among the most important contributors to delinquency and other misbehavior (Akers & Sellers, 2009).Akers, R. L., & Sellers, C. S. (2009). *Criminological theories: Introduction, evaluation, and application* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. One problem with differential association theory is that it does not explain behavior, like rape, that is usually committed by a lone offender and that is generally the result of attitudes learned from one's close friends.

## Social Bonding Theory

In a 1969 book, *Causes of Delinquency*, Travis Hirschi (1969)Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. asked not what prompts people to commit crime, but rather what *keeps them from* committing crime. This question was prompted by his view that human nature is basically selfish and that it is society's task to tame this selfishness. He wrote that an adolescent's bonds to society, and specifically the bonds to family and school, help keep the adolescent from breaking the law.

Hirschi identified several types of social bonds, but generally thought that the closer adolescents feel to their family and teachers, the more they value their parents' beliefs and school values, and the more time they spend with their families and on school activities, the less likely they are to be delinquent. Turning that around, they are more likely to be delinquent if they feel more distant from their parents and teachers, if they place less value on their family's and school's values, and if they spend less time with these two very important social institutions in their lives.

Hirschi's **social bonding theory** attracted immediate attention and is one of the most popular and influential theories in criminology today. It highlighted the importance of families and schools for delinquency and stimulated much research on their influence. Much of this research has focused on the relationship between parents and children. When this relationship is warm and harmonious and when children respect their parents' values and parents treat their children firmly but fairly, children are less likely to commit antisocial behavior during childhood and delinquency during adolescence. Schools also matter: Students who do well in school and are very involved in extracurricular activities are less likely than other students to engage in delinquency (Bohm & Vogel, 2011).Bohm, R. M., & Vogel, B. (2011). *A primer on crime and delinquency theory* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## Children and Our Future



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Saving Children from a Life of Crime

Millions of children around the nation live in circumstances that put them at risk for a childhood, adolescence, and adulthood filled with antisocial behavior, delinquency, and crime, respectively. Although most of these children in fact will not suffer this fate, many of their peers will experience these outcomes. These circumstances thus must be addressed to save these children from a life of crime. As social scientists Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington observe, "Convincing research evidence exists to support a policy of saving children from a life of crime by intervening early in childhood to tackle key risk factors."

What are these risk factors? They include being born to a teenaged, single mother; living in poverty or near poverty; attending poor, dilapidated schools; and living in high-crime urban areas. As should be evident, these risk factors are all related, as most children born to teenage, single mothers live in poverty or near poverty, and many such children live in high-crime urban areas.

What can be done to help save such children from a life of crime? Ideally, our nation would lift them and their families entirely out of poverty with employment and social payment policies. Although this sort of national policy will not occur in the foreseeable future, a growing amount of rigorous social science evaluation evidence points to several effective programs and policies that can still help at-risk children. These include (1) at the individual level, certain types of preschool programs and social skills training programs; (2) at the family level, home visiting by trained professionals and parenting training programs; and (3) at the school and community levels, certain types of after-school and community-mentoring programs in which local adults spend time with children at risk for delinquency and other problems.

As Welsh and Farrington note, "Early prevention is by no means a panacea. But it does represent an integral part of any plan to reduce the nation's crime rate." They add that several other Western democracies have national agencies devoted to improving behavioral and other outcomes among those nations' children, and they call for the United States to establish a similar national agency, the National Council on Early Prevention, as part of a nationwide strategy to prevent delinquency and other antisocial behaviors among American youth.

*Sources: Piquero, Farrington, Welsh, Tremblay, & Jennings, 2009; Welsh & Farrington, 2007 Piquero, A. R., Farrington, D. P., Welsh, B. C., Tremblay, R., & Jennings, W. (2009). Effects of early family/parent training programs on antisocial behavior and delinquency. Journal of Experimental Criminology 5, 83–120; Welsh, B. C., & Farrington, D. P. (2007). Save children from a life of crime. Criminology & Public Policy, 6(4), 871–879.*

Another social institution, religion, has also been the subject of research. An increasing number of studies are finding that religious involvement seemingly helps keep adolescents from using alcohol and other drugs (see Chapter 7), from engaging in frequent sexual activity, and from engaging in delinquency generally (Desmond, Soper, & Purpura, 2009).Desmond, S. A., Soper, S. E., & Purpura, D. J. (2009). Religiosity, moral beliefs, and delinquency: Does the effect of religiosity on delinquency depend on moral beliefs? *Sociological Spectrum*, *29*, 51–71. Fewer studies of religiosity and criminality during adulthood exist, but one investigation found an association between greater religiosity and fewer sexual partners among never-married adults (Barkan, 2006).Barkan, S. E. (2006). Religiosity and premarital sex during adulthood. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *45*, 407–417.

## Labeling Theory

Our criminal justice system is based on the idea that the prospect of quick arrest and harsh punishment should deter criminal behavior. **Labeling theory** has the opposite idea, as it assumes that labeling someone as a criminal or deviant, which arrest and imprisonment certainly do, makes the person more likely to continue to offend. This result occurs, argues the theory, because the labeling process gives someone a negative self-image, reduces the potential for employment, and makes it difficult to have friendships with law-abiding individuals.

Suppose, for example, that you were just released from prison after serving a five-year term for armed robbery. When you apply for a job and list your prison term on the application, how likely are you to get hired? If you are at a bar and meet someone who interests you and then tell the person where you were for the previous five years, what are the chances that the conversation will continue? Faced with bleak job prospects and a dearth of people who want to spend time with you, what are your alternatives? Might you not succumb to the temptation to hang out with other offenders and even to commit new crime yourself?

Although research findings are not unanimous, several studies do find that arrest and imprisonment increase future offending, as labeling theory assumes (Nagin, Cullen, & Jonson, 2009).Nagin, D. S., Cullen, F. T., & Jonson, C. L. (2009). Imprisonment and reoffending. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, *38*, 115–200. To the extent this undesired consequence occurs, efforts to stem juvenile and adult crime through harsher punishment may sometimes have the opposite result from their intention.

## The Conflict Perspective

Several related theories fall under the conflict perspective outlined in Chapter 1. Although they all have something to say about why people commit crime, their major focus is on the use and misuse of the criminal law and criminal justice system to deal with crime. Three branches of the conflict perspective exist in the study of crime and criminal justice.

The first branch is called **group conflict theory**, which assumes that criminal law is shaped by the conflict among the various social groups in society that exist because of differences in race and ethnicity, social class, religion, and other factors. Given that these groups compete for power and influence, the groups with more power and influence try to pass laws that ban behaviors in which subordinate groups tend to engage, and they try to use the criminal justice system to suppress subordinate group members. A widely cited historical example of this view is Prohibition, which was the result of years of effort by temperance advocates, most of them from white, Anglo-Saxon, rural, and Protestant backgrounds, to ban the manufacture, sale, and use of alcohol. Although these advocates thought alcohol use was a sin and incurred great social costs, their hostility toward alcohol was also motivated by their hostility toward the types of people back then who tended to use alcohol: poor, urban, Catholic immigrants. Temperance advocates' use of legal means to ban alcohol was, in effect, a "symbolic crusade" against people toward whom these advocates held prejudicial attitudes (Gusfield, 1963).Gusfield, J. R. (1963). *Symbolic crusade: Status politics and the American temperance movement*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

The second branch of the conflict perspective is called **radical theory**. Radical theory makes the same general assumptions as group conflict theory about the use of criminal law and criminal justice, but with one key difference: It highlights the importance of (economic) social class more than the importance of religion, ethnicity, and other social group characteristics. In this way, radical theory evokes the basic views of Karl Marx on the exploitation and oppression of the poor and working class by the ruling class (Lynch & Michalowski, 2006).Lynch, M. J., & Michalowski, R. J. (2006). *Primer in radical criminology: Critical perspectives on crime, power and identity* (4th ed.). Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press.

An early but still influential radical explanation of crime was presented by Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger (1916).Bonger, W. (1916). *Criminality and economic conditions* (H. P. Horton, Trans.). Boston, MA: Little, Brown. Bonger blamed the high US crime rate on its economic system, capitalism. As an economic system, he said, capitalism emphasizes the pursuit of profit. Yet, if someone gains profit, someone else is losing it. This emphasis on self-gain, he said, creates an egoistic culture in which people look

out for themselves and are ready and even willing to act in a way that disadvantages other people. Amid such a culture, he said, crime is an inevitable outcome. Bonger thought crime would be lower in socialist societies because they place more emphasis on the welfare of one's group than on individual success.

Feminist approaches comprise the third branch of the conflict perspective on the study of crime and criminal justice. Several such approaches exist, but they generally focus on at least one of four areas: (1) the reasons girls and women commit crime; (2) the reasons female crime is lower than male crime; (3) the victimization of girls and women by rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence; and (4) the experience of women professionals and offenders in the criminal justice system.

Regarding the first area, the research generally finds that girls and women commit crime for the same reasons that boys and men commit crime: poverty, parental upbringing, and so forth. But it also finds that both women and men "do gender" when they commit crime. That is, they commit crime according to gender roles, at least to some extent. Thus one study found that women robbers tend to rob other women and not to use a gun when they do so (J. Miller & Brunson, 2000).Miller, J., & Brunson, R. K. (2000). Gender dynamics in youth gangs: A comparison of males' and females' accounts. *Justice Quarterly, 17*, 419–448.

In addressing the second area, on why female crime is less common than male crime, scholars often cite two reasons discussed earlier: gender role socialization and gender-based differences in parental supervision. One additional reason derives from social bonding theory: Girls feel closer to their parents than boys do, and thus are less delinquent (Lanctôt & Blanc, 2002).Lanctôt, N., & Blanc, M. L. (2002). Explaining deviance by adolescent females. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research, 29*, 113–202.

We have already commented on the victimization of women from rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, but the study of this topic began with work by feminist criminologists during the 1970s. Since that time, innumerable works have addressed this type of victimization, which is also thought to contribute to girls' delinquency and, more generally, female drug and alcohol abuse (Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010).Chesney-Lind, M., & Jones, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Fighting for girls: New perspectives on gender and violence*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

The final area for feminist work addresses women professionals and offenders in the criminal justice system. This body of research certainly goes beyond the scope of this book, but it documents the many blatant and subtle forms of discrimination that women face as police, attorneys, judges, prison guards, and other professionals (Muraskin, 2012).Muraskin, R. (Ed.). (2012). *Women and justice: It's a crime* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. A primary task of research on women offenders is to determine how they fare in the criminal justice system compared to male offenders. Studies tend to find that females receive somewhat more lenient treatment than males for serious offenses and somewhat harsher treatment for minor offenses, although some studies conclude that gender does not make too much of a difference one way or the other (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004).Chesney-Lind, M., & Pasko, L. (2004). *The female offender: Girls, women, and crime* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

## Key Takeaways

- Social structure theories stress that crime results from economic and other problems in how society is structured and from poverty and other problems in neighborhoods.
- Interactionist theories stress that crime results from our interaction with family members, peers, and other people, and from labeling by the criminal justice system.
- Conflict theories stress that social groups with power and influence try to use the law and criminal justice system to maintain their power and to keep other groups at the bottom of society.

## For Your Review

1. What are any two criminogenic (crime-causing) social or physical characteristics of urban neighborhoods?
2. According to labeling theory, why are arrest and imprisonment sometimes counterproductive?

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# 14.6: The Criminal Justice System

## The Criminal Justice System

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe what is meant by the "working personality" of the police.
2. Discuss the quality of legal representation of criminal defendants.
3. Explain whether incarceration reduces crime in an effective and cost-efficient manner.

The criminal justice system in a democracy like the United States faces two major tasks: (1) keeping the public safe by apprehending criminals and, ideally, reducing crime; and (2) doing so while protecting individual freedom from the abuse of power by law enforcement agents and other government officials. Having a criminal justice system that protects individual rights and liberties is a key feature that distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship.

How well does the US criminal justice system work in both respects? How well does it control and reduce crime, and how well does it observe individual rights and not treat people differently based on their social class, race and ethnicity, gender, and other social characteristics? What are other problems in our criminal justice system? Once again, whole books have been written about these topics, and we have space here to discuss only some of this rich literature.

### Police

The police are our first line of defense against crime and criminals and for that reason are often called "the thin blue line." Police officers realize that their lives may be in danger at any time, and they also often interact with suspects and other citizens whose hostility toward the police is quite evident. For these reasons, officers typically develop a *working personality* that, in response to the danger and hostility police face, tends to be authoritarian and suspicious (Skolnick, 1994).Skolnick, J. H. (1994). *Justice without trial: Law enforcement in democratic society* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan. Indeed, it is not too far-fetched to say that police-citizen relations are characterized by mutual hostility and suspicion (Dempsey & Forst, 2012).Dempsey, J. S., & Forst, L. S. (2012). *An introduction to policing* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning.

Two aspects of police behavior are especially relevant for a textbook on social problems. The first is police *corruption*. No one knows for sure how much police corruption occurs, but low-level corruption (e.g., accepting small bribes and stealing things from stores while on patrol) is thought to be fairly common, while high-level corruption (e.g., accepting large bribes and confiscating and then selling illegal drugs) is thought to be far from rare. In one study involving trained researchers who rode around in police cars, more than one-fifth of the officers being observed committed some corruption (Reiss, 1980).Reiss, A. J., Jr. (1980). Officer violations of the law. In R. J. Lundman (Ed.), *Police behavior: A sociological perspective* (pp. 253–272). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Several notorious police scandals have called attention to rampant corruption amid some police forces. One scandal more than three decades ago involved New York City officer Frank Serpico, whose story was later documented in a best-selling book (Maas, 1973)Maas, P. (1973). *Serpico*. New York, NY: Viking Press. and in a tension-filled film starring Al Pacino. After Serpico reported high-level corruption to his superiors, other officers plotted to have him murdered and almost succeeded. A more recent scandal involved the so-called Rampart Division in Los Angeles and involved dozens of officers who beat and shot suspects, stole drugs and money, and lied at the trials of the people they arrested (Glover & Lait, 2000).Glover, S., & Lait, M. (2000, February 10). Police in secret groups broke law routinely, transcripts say. *The Los Angeles Times*, p. A1.

The other relevant behavior is *police brutality* or, to use a less provocative term, the *use of undue* (also called *unjustified* or *excessive*) force by police. Police, of course, are permitted and even expected to use physical force when necessary to subdue suspects. Given the context of police work noted earlier (feelings of danger and suspicion) and the strong emotions at work in any encounter between police and suspects, it is inevitable that some police will go beyond the bounds of appropriate force and commit brutality. An important question is how much police brutality occurs. In a recent national survey, about 1 percent of US residents who had had an encounter with the police in 2008 believed that excessive force was used against them (Eith & Durose, 2011).Eith, C., & Durose, M. R. (2011). *Contacts between police and the public, 2008*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. This is a low figure in percentage terms, but still translates to 417,000 people who may have been victims of police brutality in one year.

How well do the police prevent crime? To answer this question, let us be clear what it is asking. The relevant question is not whether having the police we do have keeps us safer than having no police at all. Rather, the relevant question is whether hiring

more police or making some specific change in police practice would lower the crime rate. The evidence on this issue is complex, but certain conclusions are in order.

First, simply adding more officers to a city's existing police force will probably not reduce crime, or will reduce it only to a very small degree and at great expense (Walker, 2011).Walker, S. (2011). *Sense and nonsense about crime, drugs, and communities: A policy guide* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Several reasons may explain why additional police produce small or no reductions in crime. Much violence takes place indoors or in other locations far from police purview, and practical increases in police numbers still would not yield numbers high enough to guarantee a police presence in every public location where crime might happen. Because criminals typically think they can commit a crime with impunity if no police are around, the hiring of additional police is not likely to deter them.

Additional police may not matter, but how police are deployed *does* matter. In this regard, a second conclusion from the policing and crime literature is that *directed patrol* involving the consistent deployment of large numbers of police in high-crime areas ("hot spots") can reduce crime significantly (Mastrofski, Weisburd, & Braga, 2010).Mastrofski, S. D., Weisburd, D., & Braga, A. A. (2010). Rethinking policing: The policy implications of hot spots of crime. In N. A. Frost, J. D. Freilich & T. R. Clear (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in criminal justice policy* (pp. 251–264). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. *Crackdowns*—in which the police flood a high crime and drug neighborhood, make a lot of arrests, and then leave—have at most a short-term effect, with crime and drug use eventually returning to their previous levels or simply becoming displaced to other neighborhoods.

## Criminal Courts

In the US legal system, suspects and defendants enjoy certain rights and protections guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights and provided in various Supreme Court rulings since these documents were written some 220 years ago. Although these rights and protections do exist and again help distinguish our democratic government from authoritarian regimes, in reality the criminal courts often fail to achieve the high standards by which they should be judged. *Justice Denied* (Downie, 1972)Downie, L., Jr. (1972). *Justice denied: The case for reform of the courts*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books. and *Injustice for All* (Strick, 1978)Strick, A. (1978). *Injustice for all*. New York, NY: Penguin. were the titles of two popular critiques of the courts written about four decades ago, and these titles continue to apply to the criminal courts today.

A basic problem is the lack of adequate counsel for the poor. Wealthy defendants can afford the best attorneys and get what they pay for: excellent legal defense. An oft-cited example here is O. J. Simpson, the former football star and television and film celebrity who was arrested and tried during the mid-1990s for allegedly killing his ex-wife and one of her friends (Barkan, 1996).Barkan, S. E. (1996). The social science significance of the O. J. Simpson case. In G. Barak (Ed.), *Representing O. J.: Murder, criminal justice and mass culture* (pp. 36–42). Albany, NY: Harrow and Heston. Simpson hired a "dream team" of nationally famous attorneys and other experts, including private investigators, to defend him at an eventual cost of some $10 million. A jury acquitted him, but a poor defendant in similar circumstances almost undoubtedly would have been found guilty and perhaps received a death sentence.

Almost all criminal defendants are poor or near poor. Although they enjoy the right to free legal counsel, in practice they receive ineffective counsel or virtually no counsel at all. The poor are defended by public defenders or by court-appointed private counsel, and either type of attorney simply has far too many cases in any time period to handle adequately. Many poor defendants see their attorneys for the first time just moments before a hearing before the judge. Because of their heavy caseloads, the defense attorneys do not have the time to consider the complexities of any one case, and most defendants end up pleading guilty.

A 2006 report by a New York state judicial commission reflected these problems (Hakim, 2006, p. B1).Hakim, D. (2006, June 29). Judge urges state control of legal aid for the poor. *New York Times*, p. B1. The report concluded that "local governments were falling well short of constitutional requirements in providing legal representation to the poor," according to a news story. Some New York attorneys, the report found, had an average yearly caseload of 1,000 misdemeanors and 175 felonies. The report also found that many poor defendants in 1,300 towns and villages throughout the state received no legal representation at all. The judge who headed the commission called the situation "a serious crisis."

Another problem is **plea bargaining**, in which a defendant agrees to plead guilty, usually in return for a reduced sentence. Under our system of justice, criminal defendants are entitled to a trial by jury if they want one. In reality, however, most defendants plead guilty, and criminal trials are very rare: Fewer than 3 percent of felony cases go to trial. Prosecutors favor plea bargains because they help ensure convictions while saving the time and expense of jury trials, while defendants favor plea bargains because they help ensure a lower sentence than they might receive if they exercised their right to have a jury trial and then were found guilty. However, this practice in effect means that defendants are punished if they do exercise their right to have a trial. Critics of this

aspect say that defendants are being coerced into pleading guilty even when they have a good chance of winning a not guilty verdict if their case went to trial (Oppel, 2011).Oppel, R. A., Jr. (2011, September 26). Sentencing shift gives new leverage to prosecutors. *New York Times*, p. A1.

## The Problem of Prisons

The United States now houses more than 1.5 million people in state and federal prisons and more than 750,000 in local jails. This total of about 2.3 million people behind bars is about double the 1990 number and yields an incarceration rate that is by far the highest rate of any Western democracy. This high rate is troubling, and so is the racial composition of American prisoners. More than 60 percent of all state and federal prisoners are African American or Latino, even though these two groups comprise only about 30 percent of the national population. As Chapter 7 noted, African Americans and Latinos have been arrested and imprisoned for drug offenses far out of proportion to their actual use of illegal drugs. This racial/ethnic disparity has contributed to what law professor Michelle Alexander (2010)Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York, NY: New Press. terms the "new Jim Crow" of mass incarceration. Reflecting her concern, about one of every three young African American males are under correctional supervision (in jail or prison or on probation or parole).

The corrections system costs the nation more than $75 billion annually. What does the expenditure of this huge sum accomplish? It would be reassuring to know that the high US incarceration rate keeps the nation safe and even helps reduce the crime rate, and it is certainly true that the crime rate would be much higher if we had no prisons at all. However, many criminologists think the surge in imprisonment during the last few decades has not helped reduce the crime rate at all or at least in a cost-efficient manner (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011).Durlauf, S. N., & Nagin, D. S. (2011). Imprisonment and crime: Can both be reduced? *Criminology & Public Policy, 10*, 13–54. Greater crime declines would be produced, many criminologists say, if equivalent funds were instead spent on crime prevention programs instead of on incarceration (Welsh & Farrington, 2007),Welsh, B. C., & Farrington, D. P. (Eds.). (2007). *Preventing Crime: What works for children, offenders, victims and places*. New York, NY: Springer. a point returned to in Section 8.6.

Criminologists also worry that prison may be a breeding ground for crime because rehabilitation programs such as vocational training and drug and alcohol counseling are lacking and because prison conditions are substandard. They note that more than 700,000 inmates are released from prison every year and come back into their communities ill equipped to resume a normal life. There they face a lack of job opportunities (how many employers want to hire an ex-con?) and a lack of friendships with law-abiding individuals, as our earlier discussion of labeling theory indicated. Partly for these reasons, imprisonment ironically may increase the likelihood of future offending (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011).Durlauf, S. N., & Nagin, D. S. (2011). Imprisonment and crime: Can both be reduced? *Criminology & Public Policy, 10*, 13–54.

Living conditions behind bars merit further discussion. A common belief of Americans is that many prisons and jails are like country clubs, with exercise rooms and expensive video and audio equipment abounding. However, this belief is a myth. Although some minimum-security federal prisons may have clean, adequate facilities, state prisons and local jails are typically squalid places. As one critique summarized the situation, "Behind the walls, prisoners are likely to find cramped living conditions, poor ventilation, poor plumbing, substandard heating and cooling, unsanitary conditions, limited private possessions, restricted visitation rights, constant noise, and a complete lack of privacy" (Kappeler & Potter, 2005, p. 293).Kappeler, V. E., & Potter, G. W. (2005). *The mythology of crime and criminal justice* (4th ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Some Americans probably feel that criminals deserve to live amid overcrowding and squalid living conditions, while many Americans are probably at least not very bothered by this situation. But this situation increases the odds that inmates will leave prison and jail as *more* of a threat to public safety than when they were first incarcerated. Treating inmates humanely would be an important step toward successful reentry into mainstream society.

## People Making a Difference

Making a Difference in the Lives of Ex-Cons

The text notes that more than 600,000 inmates are released from prison every year. Many of them are burdened with drug, alcohol, and other problems and face bleak prospects for employment, friendships, and stable lives, in general. Since 1967, The Fortune Society has been making a difference in the lives of ex-convicts in and near New York City.

The Fortune Society's website (http://www.fortunesociety.org) describes the group's mission: "The Fortune Society is a nonprofit social service and advocacy, founded in 1967, whose mission is to support successful reentry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities." About 70 percent of its more than 190 employees are ex-

prisoners and/or have histories of substance abuse or homelessness. It is fair to say that The Fortune Society was working on prisoner reentry long before scholars discovered the problem in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The group's president, JoAnne Page, described its halfway house where inmates stay for up to two months after their release from prisons: "This is what we do. We bring people home safely. There's a point when the crime happened. The sentence was served, and the rehabilitation must begin. We look at a human being as much more than the worst they ever did." Recalling that many of her relatives died in the Holocaust, Page added, "What my family experience did was to make me want to be somebody who fights institutions that damage people and who makes the world a little safer. Prisons are savage institutions."

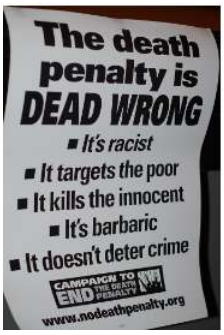
In addition to its halfway house, the Fortune Society provides many other services for inmates, ex-inmates, and offenders who are put on probation in lieu of incarceration. It regularly offers drug and alcohol counseling, family services, adult education and career development programs, and classes in anger management, parenting skills, and health care. One of its most novel programs is Miss Betty's Practical Cooking and Nutrition Class, an eight-week course for ex-inmates who are young fathers. While a first reaction might be to scoff at such a class, a Fortune counselor pointed to its benefits after conceding her own immediate reaction. "When I found out about the cooking classes, I thought, 'So they're going to learn to cook, so what?' What's that going to do? But it's building self-esteem. For most of these guys, they're in a city, they've grown up on Kool-Aid and a bag of chips. This is building structure. They're at the point where they have really accomplished something…They're learning manners. You really can change patterns."

One ex-convict that Fortune helped was 22-year-old Candice Ellison, who spent more than two years in prison for assault. After not finding a job despite applying to several dozen jobs over a six-month span, she turned in desperation to The Fortune Society for help. Fortune bought her interview clothes and advised her on how to talk about her prison record with potential employers. Commending the help she received, she noted, "Some of my high school friends say it's not that hard to get a job, but for people like me with a criminal background, it's like 20 times harder."

The Fortune Society has received national recognition for its efforts. Two federal agencies, the Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, have featured The Fortune Society as a model program for helping ex-inmates. The Urban Institute featured this model in a video it developed about prisoner reentry programs. And in 2005, the American Society of Criminology presented the Society its President's Award for "Distinguished Contributions to the Cause of Justice." These and other examples of the national recognition won by The Fortune Society indicate that for more than four decades it has indeed been making a difference.

*Sources: Bellafante, 2005; Greenhouse, 2011; Richardson, 2004 Bellafante, G. (2005, March 9). Recipe for a second chance. New York Times, p. F1; Greenhouse, S. (2011, January 25). States help ex-inmates find jobs. New York Times, p. B1; Richardson, L. (2004, July 13). Defending the despised, and loving to do so. New York Times, p. B2.*

## Focus on the Death Penalty




"The death penalty is wrong" by Steve Rhodes is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The death penalty is perhaps the most controversial issue in the criminal justice system today. The United States is the only Western democracy that sentences common criminals to death, as other democracies decided decades ago that civilized nations should not execute anyone, even if the person took a human life. About two-thirds of Americans in national surveys favor the death penalty, with their reasons including the need for retribution ("an eye for an eye"), deterrence of potential murderers, and lower expenditure of public funds compared to a lifetime sentence. Social science evidence is irrelevant to the retribution argument, which is a matter for philosophy and theology, but it is relevant to many other aspects of the death debate. Taken together, the evidence on all these aspects yields a powerful case *against* the death penalty (Death Penalty Information Center, 2011).Death

Penalty Information Center. (2011). *Facts about the death penalty*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/FactSheet.pdf.

First, capital punishment does not deter homicide: Almost all studies on this issue fail to find a deterrent effect. An important reason for this stems from the nature of homicide. As discussed earlier, it is a relatively spontaneous, emotional crime. Most people who murder do not sit down beforehand to calculate their chances of being arrested, convicted, and executed. Instead they lash out. Premeditated murders do exist, but the people who commit them do not think they will get caught and so, once again, are not deterred by the potential for execution.

Second, the death penalty is racially discriminatory. While some studies find that African Americans are more likely than whites who commit similar homicides to receive the death penalty, the clearest evidence for racial discrimination involves the race of the victim: Homicides with white victims are more likely than those with African American victims to result in a death sentence (Paternoster & Brame, 2008).Paternoster, R., & Brame, R. (2008). Reassessing race disparities in Maryland capital cases. *Criminology, 46*, 971–1007. Although this difference is not intended, it suggests that the criminal justice system values white lives more than African American lives.

Third, many people have been mistakenly convicted of capital offenses, raising the possibility of *wrongful executions*. Sometimes defendants are convicted out of honest errors, and sometimes they are convicted because the police and/or prosecution fabricated evidence or engaged in other legal misconduct. Whatever their source, wrongful convictions of capital offenses raise the ugly possibility that a defendant will be executed even though he was actually innocent of any capital crime. During the past four decades, more than 130 people have been released from death row after DNA or other evidence cast serious doubt on their guilt. In March 2011, Illinois abolished capital punishment, partly because of concern over the possibility of wrongful executions. As the Illinois governor summarized his reasons for signing the legislative bill to abolish the death penalty, “Since our experience has shown that there is no way to design a perfect death penalty system, free from the numerous flaws that can lead to wrongful convictions or discriminatory treatment, I have concluded that the proper course of action is to abolish it” (Schwartz & Fitzsimmons, 2011:A18).Schwartz, J., & Fitzsimmons, E. G. (2011, March 10). Illinois governor signs capital punishment ban. *New York Times*, p. A18.

Fourth, executions are expensive. Keeping a murderer in prison for life costs about $1 million in current dollars (say 40 years at $25,000 per year), while the average death sentence costs the state about $2 million to $3 million in legal expenses.

This diverse body of evidence leads most criminologists to oppose the death penalty. In 1989, the American Society of Criminology adopted this official policy position on capital punishment: “Be it resolved that because social science research has demonstrated the death penalty to be racist in application and social science research has found no consistent evidence of crime deterrence through execution, The American Society of Criminology publicly condemns this form of punishment, and urges its members to use their professional skills in legislatures and courts to seek a speedy abolition of this form of punishment.”

## Key Takeaways

- Partly because the police often fear for their lives, they tend to have a “working personality” that is authoritarian and suspicious. Police corruption and use of undue force remain significant problems in many police departments.
- Although criminal defendants have the right to counsel, the legal representation of such defendants, most of whom are poor or near poor, is very inadequate.
- Prisons are squalid places, and incarceration has not been shown to reduce crime in an effective or cost-efficient manner.
- Most criminologists agree that capital punishment does not deter homicide, and they worry about racial discrimination in the use of the death penalty and about the possibility of wrongful executions.

## For Your Review

1. Have you ever had an encounter with a police officer? If so, how would you describe the officer’s personality? Was it similar to what is described in the text?
2. The text argues that improvement in prison conditions would help reduce the probability of reoffending after inmates leave prison. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer.

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# 14.7: Reducing Crime

## Reducing Crime

**Learning Objectives**

1. Describe five strategies that criminologists have proposed to reduce crime.

During the last few decades, the United States has used a **get-tough approach** to fight crime. This approach has involved longer prison terms and the building of many more prisons and jails. As noted earlier, scholars doubt that this surge in imprisonment has achieved significant crime reduction at an affordable cost, and they worry that it may be leading to greater problems in the future as hundreds of thousands of prison inmates are released back into their communities every year.

Many of these scholars favor an approach to crime borrowed from the field of public health. In the areas of health and medicine, a **public health approach** tries to treat people who are already ill, but it especially focuses on preventing disease and illness before they begin. While physicians try to help people who already have cancer, medical researchers constantly search for the causes of cancer so that they can try to prevent it before it affects anyone. This model is increasingly being applied to criminal behavior, and criminologists have advanced several ideas that, if implemented with sufficient funds and serious purpose, hold great potential for achieving significant, cost-effective reductions in crime (Barlow & Decker, 2010; Frost, Freilich, & Clear, 2010; Lab, 2010).Barlow, H. D., & Decker, S. H. (Eds.). (2010). *Criminology and public policy: Putting theory to work*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple Univeristy Press; Frost, N. A., Freilich, J. D., & Clear, T. R. (Eds.). (2010). *Contemporary issues in criminal justice policy: Policy proposals from the American society of criminology conference*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; Lab, S. P. (2010). *Crime prevention: Approaches, practices and evaluations* (7th ed.). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson. Many of their strategies rest on the huge body of theory and research on the factors underlying crime in the United States, which we had space only to touch on earlier, while other proposals call for criminal justice reforms. We highlight some of these many strategies here.

### Applying Social Research

"Three Strikes" Laws Strike Out

The get-tough approach highlighted in the text has involved, among other things, mandatory minimum sentencing, in which judges are required to give convicted offenders a minimum prison term, often several years long, rather than a shorter sentence or probation.

Beginning in the 1990s, one of the most publicized types of mandatory sentencing has been the "three strikes and you're out" policy that mandates an extremely long sentence—at least twenty-five years—and sometimes life imprisonment for offenders convicted of a third (or, in some states, a second) felony. The intent of these laws, enacted by about half the states and the federal government, is to reduce crime by keeping dangerous offenders behind bars for many years and by deterring potential offenders from committing crime (general deterrence). Sufficient time since the first three strikes laws were passed has elapsed to enable criminologists to assess whether they have, in fact, reduced crime.

Studies of this issue find that three strikes laws do not reduce serious crime and, in fact, may even increase the number of homicides. Several studies have focused on California, where tens of thousands of offenders have been sentenced under the state's three strikes law passed in 1994. Almost all these studies conclude that California's law did not reduce subsequent crime or did so by only a negligible amount. A few studies also have examined nationwide samples of city and state crime rates in the states that adopted three strikes laws and in the states that did not do so. These studies also fail to find that three strikes laws have reduced crime. As one of these studies, by three criminologists from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, concludes, "Consistent with other studies, ours finds no credible statistical evidence that passage of three strikes laws reduces crime by deterring potential criminals or incapacitating repeat offenders." The national studies even find that three strikes laws have increased the number of homicides. This latter finding is certainly an unintended consequence of these laws and may stem from decisions by felons facing a third strike to kill witnesses so as to avoid life imprisonment.

In retrospect, it is not very surprising that three strikes laws do not work as intended. Many criminals simply do not think they will get caught and thus are not likely to be deterred by increased penalties. Many are also under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their offense, making it even less likely they will worry about being caught. In addition, many three strikes offenders tend to be older (because they are being sentenced for their third felony, not just their first) and thus are already "aging out" beyond

the high-crime age group, 15–25. Thus three strikes laws target offenders whose criminality is already declining because they are getting older.

In addition to the increase in homicides, research has identified other problems produced by three strikes laws. Because three strike defendants do not want a life term, some choose a jury trial instead of pleading guilty. Jury trials are expensive and slow compared to guilty pleas and thus cost the prosecution both money and time. In another problem, the additional years that three strikes offenders spend in prison are costing the states millions of dollars in yearly imprisonment costs and in health-care costs as these offenders reach their elderly years.

As should be clear, the body of three strikes research has important policy implications, as noted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham scholars: “(P)olicy makers should reconsider the costs and benefits associated with three strikes laws" (p. 235).Kovandzic, T. V., Sloan, J. J., III, & Vieraitis, L. M. (2004). “Striking out” as crime reduction policy: The impact of “three strikes" laws on crime rates in US cities. Justice Quarterly, 21, 207–239. Three strikes laws do not lower crime and in fact increase homicides, and they have forced the states to spend large sums of money on courts and prisons. The three strikes research strongly suggests that three strikes laws should be eliminated.

*Sources: Kovandzic, Sloan, & Vieraitis, 2004; Walker, 2011Kovandzic, T. V., Sloan, J. J., III, & Vieraitis, L. M. (2004). “Striking out” as crime reduction policy: The impact of “three strikes” laws on crime rates in US cities. Justice Quarterly, 21, 207–239; Walker, S. (2011). Sense and nonsense about crime, drugs, and communities: A policy guide (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.*

A first strategy involves serious national efforts to reduce poverty and to improve neighborhood living conditions. It is true that most poor people do not commit crime, but it is also true that most street crime is committed by the poor or near poor for reasons discussed earlier. Efforts that create decent-paying jobs for the poor, enhance their vocational and educational opportunities, and improve their neighborhood living conditions should all help reduce poverty and its attendant problems and thus to reduce crime (Currie, 2011).Currie, E. (2011). On the pitfalls of spurious prudence. *Criminology & Public Policy, 10*, 109–114.

A second strategy involves changes in how American parents raise their boys. To the extent that the large gender difference in serious crime stems from male socialization patterns, changes in male socialization should help reduce crime (Collier, 2004).Collier, R. (2004). Masculinities and crime: Rethinking the “man question”? In C. Sumner (Ed.), *The Blackwell companion to criminology* (pp. 285–308). Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell. This will certainly not happen any time soon, but if American parents can begin to raise their boys to be less aggressive and less dominating, they will help reduce the nation’s crime rate. As two feminist criminologists have noted, “A large price is paid for structures of male domination and for the very qualities that drive men to be successful, to control others, and to wield uncompromising power.…Gender differences in crime suggest that crime may not be so normal after all. Such differences challenge us to see that in the lives of women, men have a great deal more to learn” (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 527).Daly, K., & Chesney-Lind, M. (1988). Feminism and criminology. *Justice Quarterly, 5*, 497–538.

## Lessons from Other Societies

Preventing Crime and Treating Prisoners in Western Europe

The text suggests the get-tough approach that the United States has been using to reduce crime has not worked in a cost-effective manner and has led to other problems, including a flood of inmates returning to their communities every year. In fighting crime, the United States has much to learn from Western Europe. In contrast to the US get-tough approach, Western European nations tend to use a public health model that comprises two components. The first is a focus on crime prevention that uses early childhood intervention programs and other preventive measures to address the roots of crime and other childhood and family problems. The second is a criminal justice policy that involves sentencing defendants and treating prisoners in a manner more likely to rehabilitate offenders and reduce their repeat offending than the more punitive approach in the United States.

The overall Western European approach to offenders is guided by the belief that imprisonment should be reserved for the most dangerous violent offenders, and that probation, community service, and other forms of community corrections should be used for other offenders. Because violent offenders comprise only a small proportion of all offenders, the Western European approach saves a great deal of money while still protecting public safety.

The experience of Denmark and the Netherlands is illustrative. Like the United States, Denmark had to deal with rapidly growing crime rates during the 1960s. Whereas the United States responded with the get-tough approach involving longer and more certain prison terms and the construction of more and more prisons, Denmark took the opposite approach: It adopted shorter prison terms for violent offenders and used the funds saved from the reduced prison costs to expand community corrections for property

offenders. Finland and the Netherlands have also adopted a similar approach that favors community corrections and relatively short prison terms for violent offenders over the get-tough approach the United States adopted.

All these nations save great sums of money in prison costs and other criminal justice expenses because they chose not to adopt the US get-tough approach, yet their rates of serious violent crime lag behind the US rates. Although these nations obviously differ from the United States, the advantages of their approach should be kept in mind as the United States evaluates its get-tough policies. There may be much to learn from their less punitive approach to crime: While the United States got tough, perhaps they got sensible.

*Sources: Dammer & Albanese, 2011; Waller & Welsh, 2007Dammer, H. R., & Albanese, J. S. (2011). Comparative criminal justice systems (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; Waller, I., & Welsh, B. C. (2007). Reducing crime by harnessing international best practices. In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), Solutions to social problems: Lessons from other societies (pp. 208–216). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.*

A third and very important strategy involves expansion of early childhood intervention (ECI) programs and nutrition services for poor mothers and their children, as the Note 8.28 "Children and Our Future" box discussed earlier. ECI programs generally involve visits by social workers, nurses, or other professionals to young, poor mothers shortly after they give birth, as these mother's children are often at high risk for later behavioral problems (Welsh & Farrington, 2007).Welsh, B. C., & Farrington, D. P. (2007). Save children from a life of crime. *Criminology & Public Policy, 6*(4), 871–879. These visits may be daily or weekly and last for several months, and they involve parenting instruction and training in other life skills. These programs have been shown to be very successful in reducing childhood and adolescent misbehavior in a cost-effective manner (Greenwood, 2006).Greenwood, P. W. (2006). *Changing lives: Delinquency prevention as crime-control policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. In the same vein, nutrition services would also reduce the risk of neurological impairment among newborns and young children and thus their likelihood of developing later behavioral problems.

A fourth strategy calls for a national effort to improve the nation's schools and schooling. This effort would involve replacing large, older, and dilapidated schoolhouses with smaller, nicer, and better equipped ones. For many reasons, this effort should help improve student academic achievement and school commitment and thus lower delinquent and later criminal behavior.

A final set of strategies involves changes in the criminal justice system that should help reduce repeat offending and save much money that could be used to fund the ECI programs and other efforts just outlined. Placing nonviolent property and drug offenders in community corrections (e.g., probation, daytime supervision) would reduce the number of prison and jail inmates by hundreds of thousands annually without endangering Americans' safety and save billions of dollars in prison costs (Jacobson, 2006).Jacobson, M. (2006). Reversing the punitive turn: The Limits and promise of current research. *Criminology & Public Policy, 5*, 277–284. These funds could also be used to improve prison and jail vocational and educational programming and drug and alcohol services, all of which are seriously underfunded. If properly funded, such programs and services hold great promise for rehabilitating many inmates (Cullen, 2007).Cullen, F. T. (2007). Make rehabilitation corrections' guiding paradigm. *Criminology & Public Policy, 6*(4), 717–727. Elimination of the death penalty would also save much money while also eliminating the possibility of wrongful executions.

This is not a complete list of strategies, but it does suggest the kinds of efforts that would help address the roots of crime and, in the long run, help to reduce it. Although the United States may not be interested in pursuing this crime-prevention approach, strategies like the ones just mentioned would in the long run be more likely than our current get-tough approach to create a safer society and at the same time save us billions of dollars annually.

Note that none of these proposals addresses white-collar crime, which should not be neglected in a discussion of reducing the nation's crime problem. One reason white-collar crime is so common is that the laws against it are weakly enforced; more consistent enforcement of these laws should help reduce white-collar crime, as would the greater use of imprisonment for convicted white-collar criminals (Rosoff et al., 2010).Rosoff, S. M., Pontell, H. N., & Tillman, R. (2010). *Profit without honor: White collar crime and the looting of America* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

## Key Takeaways

- The get-tough approach has not been shown to reduce crime in an effective and cost-efficient manner. A sociological explanation of crime thus suggests the need to focus more resources on the social roots of crime in order to prevent crime from happening in the first place.
- Strategies suggested by criminologists to reduce crime include (a) reducing poverty and improving neighborhood living conditions, (b) changing male socialization patterns, (c) expanding early childhood intervention programs, (d) improving

schools and schooling, and (e) reducing the use of incarceration for drug and property offenders.

## For Your Review

1. The text notes that social science research has not shown the get-tough approach to be effective or cost-efficient. If this is true, why do you think this approach has been so popular in the United States since the 1970s?
2. Of the five strategies outlined in the text to reduce crime, which one strategy do you think would be most effective if it were implemented with adequate funding? Explain your answer.

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# 14.8: End of Chapter Summary

## Summary

1. Crime is a major concern for many Americans. More than one-third fear walking alone at night in their neighborhoods, and even larger percentages worry about specific types of crimes. News media coverage of crime contributes to these fears. The media overdramatize crime by covering so much of it and by giving especially heavy attention to violent crime even though most crime is not violent. In other problems, the news media disproportionately depict young people and people of color as offenders and whites as victims.
2. The nation's major source of crime statistics is the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). Because many people do not tell the police about crimes they have experienced, the UCR underestimates the actual level of crime in the United States. It is also subject to changes in police reporting practices and in particular to deliberate efforts by police to downplay the amount of crime. To help correct these problems, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) measures crime every year in a national survey that asks residents to report their criminal victimization. The NCVS is thought to yield a more accurate estimate of crime than the UCR, and it also provides much information on the circumstances under which victimization occurs. Self-report surveys, typically given to adolescents, are a final form of crime measurement and provide much information on the adolescents' social backgrounds and thus on the context of their offending.
3. The major categories of crime are violent crime, property crime, white-collar crime, and consensual crime. Much violent crime is relatively spontaneous and emotional, and a surprising amount involves victims and offenders who knew each other before the violent act occurred. Despite popular perceptions, most violent crime is also intraracial. A major distinction in the understanding of property crime is that between professional thieves, who are very skilled and steal valuable possessions or large sums of money, and amateur thieves, who are unskilled and whose theft is petty by comparison. Corporate crime and other kinds of white-collar crime arguably cost the nation more than street crime in economic loss, health problems, and death; corporate violence involves unsafe working conditions, unsafe products, and environmental pollution. Consensual crime, such as illegal drug use and prostitution, raises two important questions: (1) Which consensual but potentially harmful behaviors should the state ban and which should it not ban, and (2) does banning such behaviors do more harm than good or more good than harm?
4. Crime is socially patterned. Males commit more serious crimes than females. African Americans and Latinos have higher crime rates than whites, poor people have higher crime rates than the wealthy, and youths in their teens and early twenties have higher crime rates than older people. In addition, crime is higher in urban areas than in rural areas.
5. Many sociological theories of criminal behavior exist. Social structure theories highlight poverty and weakened social institutions as important factors underlying crime. Social process theories stress the importance of peer relationships, social bonding, and social reaction. Conflict theories call attention to the possible use of the legal system to punish behavior by subordinate groups, while feminist theories examine gender differences in criminality, the victimization of women by rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence, and the experiences of women professionals and offenders in the criminal justice system.
6. The criminal justice system costs tens of billions of dollars annually, yet scholars question the potential of this system to reduce crime. How police are deployed seems a more important factor regarding their potential for crime reduction than the actual numbers of police. The surge in imprisonment of the last few decades may have accounted for a relatively small drop in crime, but whatever reduction it has achieved has not been cost-effective, and hundreds of thousands of prison inmates are now returning every year to their communities. Several problems also exist in the criminal justice system itself. Police corruption and brutality remain serious concerns, while indigent defendants receive inadequate legal representation or none at all. Despite public perceptions, prisons and jails are squalid places, and rape and other violence are daily concerns.
7. The United States is the only Western democracy to use the death penalty for common criminals. Social science evidence finds that the death penalty does not deter homicide, is racially discriminatory, may involve wrongful convictions, and costs considerably more than life imprisonment.
8. Many proposals for reducing crime derive from sociological evidence. These proposals aim to reduce poverty and improve neighborhood living conditions; to change male socialization patterns; to expand early childhood intervention programs and nutrition services; to improve the nation's schools and schooling; and to reduce the number of prison inmates by placing nonviolent property and drug offenders in community corrections. The funds saved by this last proposal could be used to improve prison and jail rehabilitation programming.

## Using What You Know

Suppose you are the Democratic Party Governor of a midsized state and that you are up for reelection in two years. You were a political science major in college but had a sociology minor with a focus in criminal justice. The crime rate in your state has risen slightly since you took office, and there is growing sentiment in the state's major newspapers and from the Republican Party opposition in the state legislature to lengthen prison terms for serious crime and to build two more prisons for the greater number of prisoners that will be expected. Because of your studies in college, you are skeptical that this approach will reduce crime, and you recognize it will cost millions of dollars. But you also realize that your opponents and some members of the news media are beginning to say that you are soft on crime. What do you do?

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the problem of crime, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer at an agency that helps troubled teenagers.
2. Volunteer with an organization that helps ex-offenders.
3. Work for an organization that provides early childhood intervention services for at-risk children.

Further Reading

Broken Windows, Informal Social Control, and Crime: Assessing Causality in Empirical Studies

- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8059646/

End of chapter Discussion

1. "How is crime measured, and what are the different types of crimes, including violent, property, white-collar, organized and consensual crimes? Discuss the impact of public concerns and media portrayals on our perception of crime. Additionally, explore demographic and geographic variations in crime rates, including urban vs. rural differences and the influence of race and ethnicity on crime statistics."
2. "Examine various sociological theories explaining crime, such as interactionist perspectives, social process theories, social bonding theory, labeling theory and the conflict perspective. How do these theories shed light on the reasons behind criminal behavior and the factors that influence who commits crimes and why? Can you provide real-life examples that illustrate the application of these theories to understanding criminal behavior and societal responses?"
3. "Analyze the structure and function of the criminal justice system, including the roles of police, criminal courts and the challenges within the prison system, such as the death penalty. Discuss strategies and policies aimed at reducing crime and their effectiveness, as well as their potential implications for society. Are there any notable examples of crime reduction initiatives or criminal justice reforms that have had a significant impact on crime rates or the criminal justice system's functioning?"

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 15: Who Gets Environmental Justice? The Social Problem of Climate Change


15.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives
15.2: Climate Change as a Social Problem
15.3: Environmental Inequality and Culture
15.4: Making Sense of the Climate Crisis
15.5: Environmental Justice Is Social Justice
15.6: Chapter Summary
15.7: References


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# 15.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives

**Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Explain how climate change is a social problem as much as an environmental problem.
2. Discuss how colonization contributes to the environmental crisis.
3. Compare Indigenous and Western worldviews to explain the climate crisis and offer opportunities for innovative solutions.
4. Analyze intersections between race, class, gender, and other social locations to understand the causes and consequences of climate change.
5. Assess whether all human groups are equally responsible for causing the climate crisis.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of changes in individual behavior or collective action that support environmental and social justice.

## Chapter Overview

> *I am grateful to the land, to the forces of life that guide me to where I need to be, to my ancestors who have come before me. I know that nothing I do is done alone. I thank my chosen family, my grandmother, and my more-than-human companions who are beside me on this journey.*
> *– Avery Temple*
> *Thank you also to Patricia Halleran, PhD candidate, whose work on documenting the resistance to the Jordan Cove Energy Project formed the foundation of this chapter. May you be well.*
> *– Kim Puttman*

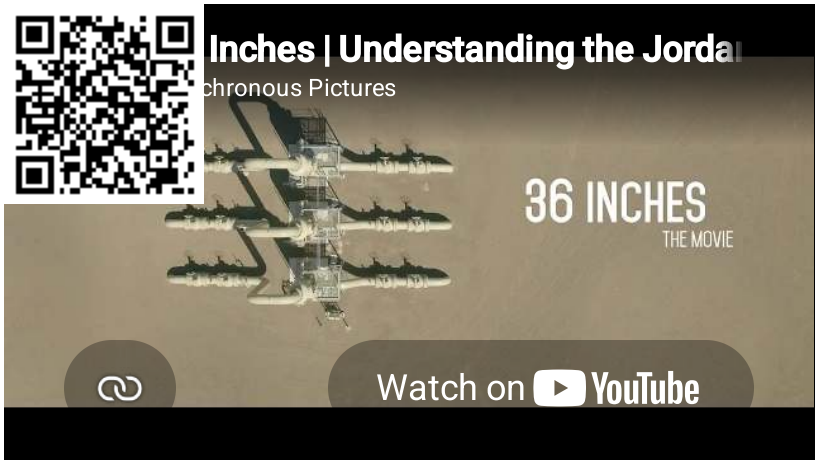





**Figure 8.1** 36 Inches: Understanding the Jordan Cove Energy Project [YouTube] (top; 36 Inches Transcript) and Rogue Climate, Klamath Co. landowners 'excited' as Jordan Cove project halts after years-long fight [YouTube] (below; Transcript). These two videos show the beginning and the end of the Jordan Cove Energy Project. Please watch all 9 minutes of these videos. As you watch, consider how this experience fits the basic definition of a social problem. Also, look for evidence that people responded in an interdependent way.

Our exploration of social problems continues with an examination of the ways that members of a community can work together to solve environmental justice issues, as shown in the opening videos in Figure 8.1. In 2005, Native American tribes and other community members throughout Oregon and northern California learned that a Canadian corporation was actively pursuing permits to construct the Jordan Cove Energy Project (JCEP). The JCEP included a large coastal terminal and refinery site and a 229-mile-long pipeline that would pass through tribal, forest, and agricultural lands. This project would cross 400 streams and rivers and six miles of wetlands. Over 600 private landowners would be threatened with eminent domain—the seizing of property normally reserved for projects thought to benefit the public, such as hospitals or roads. The ancestral territories, cultural resources, and burial grounds of five Oregon and three northern California federally recognized tribes would also be threatened. Community members from diverse backgrounds came together. They forged a campaign to stop the project once they learned about the risks it presented to themselves, the environment, and the climate.

Opponents of the JCEP argued that the project would hardly benefit Oregonians economically, considering it would only produce around 250 permanent jobs. They would not benefit from the energy either since nearly all the gas would be shipped to international markets in Asia.

Many residents were concerned about environmental and health risks posed by the JCEP. The risks of placing a pipeline carrying an enormous amount of highly explosive fuel in an area already inundated with catastrophic wildfires each year. They also worried about placing a refinery and export terminal in an earthquake and tsunami-prone area on the coast.

Environmental groups noted the inevitable impacts the JCEP would have on rivers and streams along with numerous plants and animal species, including already threatened and endangered species. If built, the JCEP would also become the state's largest greenhouse gas emitter—the equivalent of adding 7.9 million passenger cars to Oregon's roads annually (Oil Change International 2017) at a time when humans should be investing in sustainable and renewable energy sources.




**Figure 8.2** This bright orange banner, woven through the trees in a forest, says “No pipeline, No LNG” (Liquid Natural Gas). Protesters used multiple tactics to engage support.

As you might imagine, very few residents supported the JCEP development. They resisted it by any means available to them every step of the way. Protesters filed lawsuits. They attended state hearings and government hearings. They demonstrated in front of the Oregon Capitol. They decorated trees with protest signs like the one in Figure 8.2. They organized numerous events to raise awareness, such as hiking along the proposed pipeline route to show the project’s potential environmental impacts.

Tribal communities were at the forefront of the resistance movement. They considered the JCEP yet another method of colonization that disregarded their cultural and human rights. After 17 years of tireless resistance, this unified and large coalition won their fight. The JCEP was officially canceled in December 2021.

Wealthy multinational companies rarely withdraw from a project of this size. Often, they have invested millions of dollars and may stand to earn billions more. In this case, perhaps it became clear that they would lose in the long run. People would never give up the fight to stop them. This campaign was only one of far too many to name taking place across the US and internationally to put an end to industries largely responsible for causing the climate crisis in hopes of creating a safer and more just future for all.

We share our planet with far more than just members of our species. Because a great deal of our daily life is centered around the world humanity has built, it’s easy to forget that we are part of a greater whole—a whole in which we are but one of the billions of life forms that inhabit Earth, all equally dependent on a healthy and safe environment to live and to thrive. Human society and the natural environment are interconnected parts of this whole. However, the world we share with the larger circle of life is increasingly impacted by human activity. These impacts are so pervasive that scientists around the world name the current geological period of Earth’s history the Anthropocene, or the age of humans.

## Focusing Questions

The questions that guide our curiosity include:

1. Why is climate change a social problem as much as an environmental problem?

2. How does colonization contribute to the environmental crisis?
3. How do differences in Indigenous and Western worldviews contribute to the climate crisis and offer opportunities for innovative solutions?
4. How can an understanding of the intersections between race, class, gender, and other social locations help explain the causes and consequences of climate change?
5. Are all human groups equally responsible for causing the climate crisis?
6. Are changes in individual behavior or collective action more important in supporting environmental social justice?

In this chapter, we explore the causes and consequences of climate change. We find out why climate change is both an environmental issue and a social problem due to the inequitable power dynamics that place some communities at greater risk than others. We examine how individuals and communities are responding to climate change. We take action to adapt to the current effects of climate change and to prevent further social and ecological harm. We want to leave behind a cleaner and safer environment for future generations. All of us deserve clean air, clean water and a healthy earth. Environmental justice is social justice.

Let's learn more about this beautiful and troubled planet we call home!

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# 15.2: Climate Change as a Social Problem

Scientists believe global climate change is the greatest challenge humanity climate change. But what exactly is climate change? What causes climate change? Why is it a social problem and not just an environmental problem?

Climate change refers to the long-term shift in global and regional temperatures, humidity and rainfall patterns, and other atmospheric characteristics. Unlike changes in weather that occur on a local level that can be measured in hourly, daily, or weekly fluctuations, climate change refers to longer-term fluctuations (both regionally or globally) that take place over a time scale of seasons, years, or even decades.

In the past two centuries, an exponential increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have been released into the earth's atmosphere, as the chart in Figure 8.3 shows. Although there are some natural processes that affect the earth's climate, such as volcanic eruptions, the vast majority of scientists worldwide attribute the speed at which global warming has recently occurred to human activity, most notably the burning of fossil fuels. Scientists examine ocean sediments, ice cores, tree rings, and changes in glaciers to understand variations in Earth's climate over time.

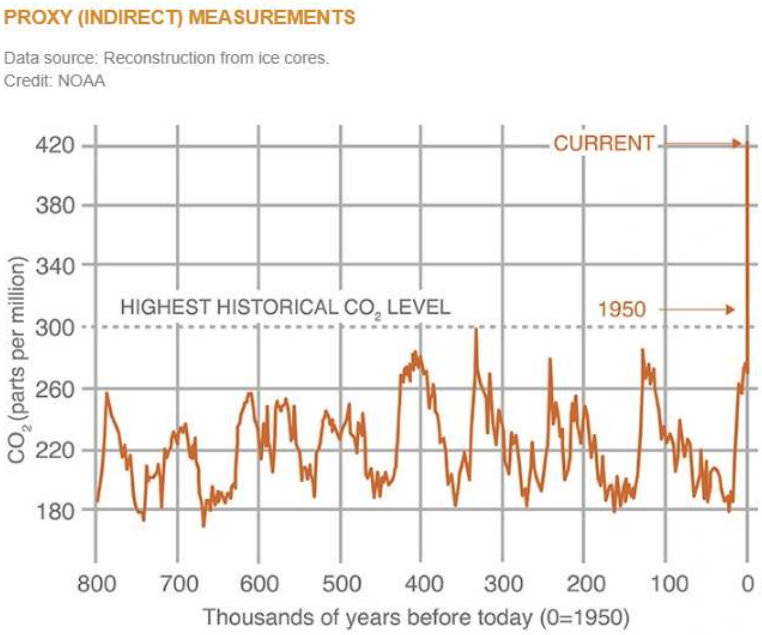



**Figure 8.3** This graph shows the level of Carbon dioxide (CO2) over time. Although some fluctuation is normal, CO2 levels have never been as high as they are now. The change is predominantly caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. Image Description

The Industrial Revolution is one reason for the increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Since the Industrial Revolution, the concentration of greenhouse gasses is higher than at any other time in the past 800,000 years. This increase in greenhouse gasses is called the greenhouse effect—an imbalance between the energy entering and leaving the earth's atmosphere, resulting in a rise in global temperature. Because certain gasses absorb energy, such as carbon dioxide and methane, they trap heat and prevent it from being released into space, causing a rise in global temperature. The burning of fossil fuels is not the onlygreenhouse effectontributing to the greenhouse effect. Other activities such as deforestation, urbanization, and unsustainable agricultural practices contribute to global climate change.

So, climate change is a social problem because humans are causing the problem and are differently impacted by the problem. If you remember the definition of a social problem from Chapter 1, a social problem is a social condition or pattern of behavior that has negative consequences for individuals, our social world, or our physical world. Early sociological definitions of social problems rarely included the phrase "our physical world." Today, climate change itself drives the importance of adding this phrase.

Climate change is a critical issue, no matter how we approach it. Scientists are studying how to minimize its effects on people and the environment more broadly and, with any hope, successfully plan for the uncertain future. We must first examine the various ways climate change is already a threat to societies and communities worldwide.

## Extreme Weather Events

As you watch the news, you may notice that extreme weather events occur regularly around the world. Many scientists argue that these events are caused or at least made worse by climate change. An extreme weather event is defined by the severity of its effects or any weather event uncommon for a particular location. Some examples of these types of severe and unusual events in the US include Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which killed over 1800 people and caused $125 billion in damage; Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the third-most destructive hurricane ever to hit the nation; and the 2020 and 2021 wildfires that engulfed the West Coast states due to severe and prolonged drought and heat waves.

One of the most serious concerns Indigenous communities and other residents had about the Jordan Cove Energy Project discussed at the beginning of this chapter was the risk of a highly explosive gas pipeline being placed in a region increasingly inundated by annual wildfires. One of the large fires that swept through southern Oregon in September 2020 was located just a few miles from the planned route of the proposed pipelines, proving that the communities' fears were valid.

And, as mentioned by communities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, climate change and mismanagement of forests will continue to create ripe conditions for unprecedented wildfires. In the Good Fire podcast, which you can listen to if you'd like, hosts Amy Cardinal Christianson and Matthew Kristoff, along with guest Frank Lake, discuss the landscape surrounding fire management:

> *Wildfire management has long been the domain of colonial governments. Despite a rich history of living with, managing, and using fire as a tool since time immemorial, Indigenous people were not permitted to practice cultural fire and their knowledge was largely ignored. As a result, total fire suppression became the prominent policy (Kristoff 2019).*

The Indigenous knowledge that might have protected us against wildfires has been suppressed. It is another consequence of colonialism, the domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation (Definition of Colonialism N.d.). The residential schools that we learned about in Chapter 5 were a tool of social control used by coloniscolonialismportant to remember that colonialism is not something that occurred in the past. It is a structure of inequality that reproduces itself, even today (Wolfe 2006).

## Cultural Loss



**Figure 8.4** Salmon returning to their spawning grounds near Port Hope, Ontario, Canada. In the chapter's next section, we will discuss what makes up a culture. How might access to salmon shape a culture? How might a lack of access to salmon impact that same culture?

Many cultures around the world are intimately connected to their environment. Certain foods, medicine, dance, and art are unique to places with particular animals, plants, or climates. With drastic temperature changes, extreme disasters, and biodiversity loss among plants and animals, people cannot practice many customs. This contributes to significant cultural loss around the world.

For example, salmon are an important symbol and food source for the Indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest (Figure 8.4). The imagery of salmon in Indigenous art demonstrates a deep connection to natural surroundings. However, one effect of climate change is the warming of bodies of water worldwide. Like many fish, salmon require a specific temperature to spawn. As water temperatures increase, salmon cannot spawn as effectively or at all. This severely impacts species who eat salmon as a staple in their diet and the Indigenous peoples who practice traditional methods of harvesting, crafting with, and cooking salmon.

Climate change can create cultural change or inhibit cultural expression.

## Climate Change and Poverty: "Those who contribute the least suffer the most"

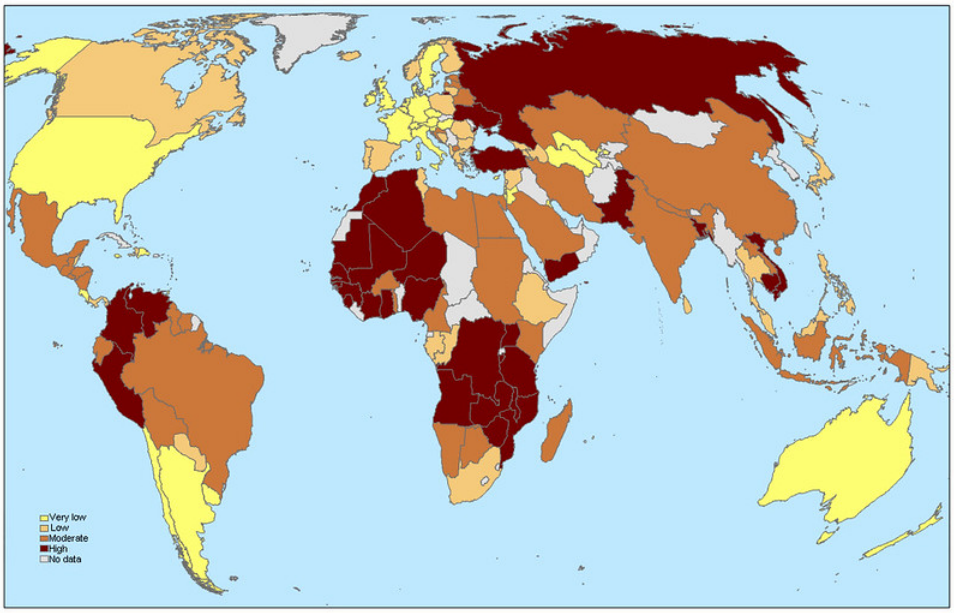



**Figure 8.5** This map shows how vulnerable people in certain countries are to climate change. The United States, Australia, parts of Western Europe and the southern part of South America experience low vulnerability. Russia, most of Africa and Asia, and most of South America experience moderate or high vulnerability. How vulnerable to climate change is your community? Image Description

This index combines a country's vulnerability to climate change, and its readiness to improve resilience. Much of Africa is both vulnerable and not ready. Most of North America is less vulnerable and more ready. However, looking at this data by country hides vulnerabilities that are unique to communities.

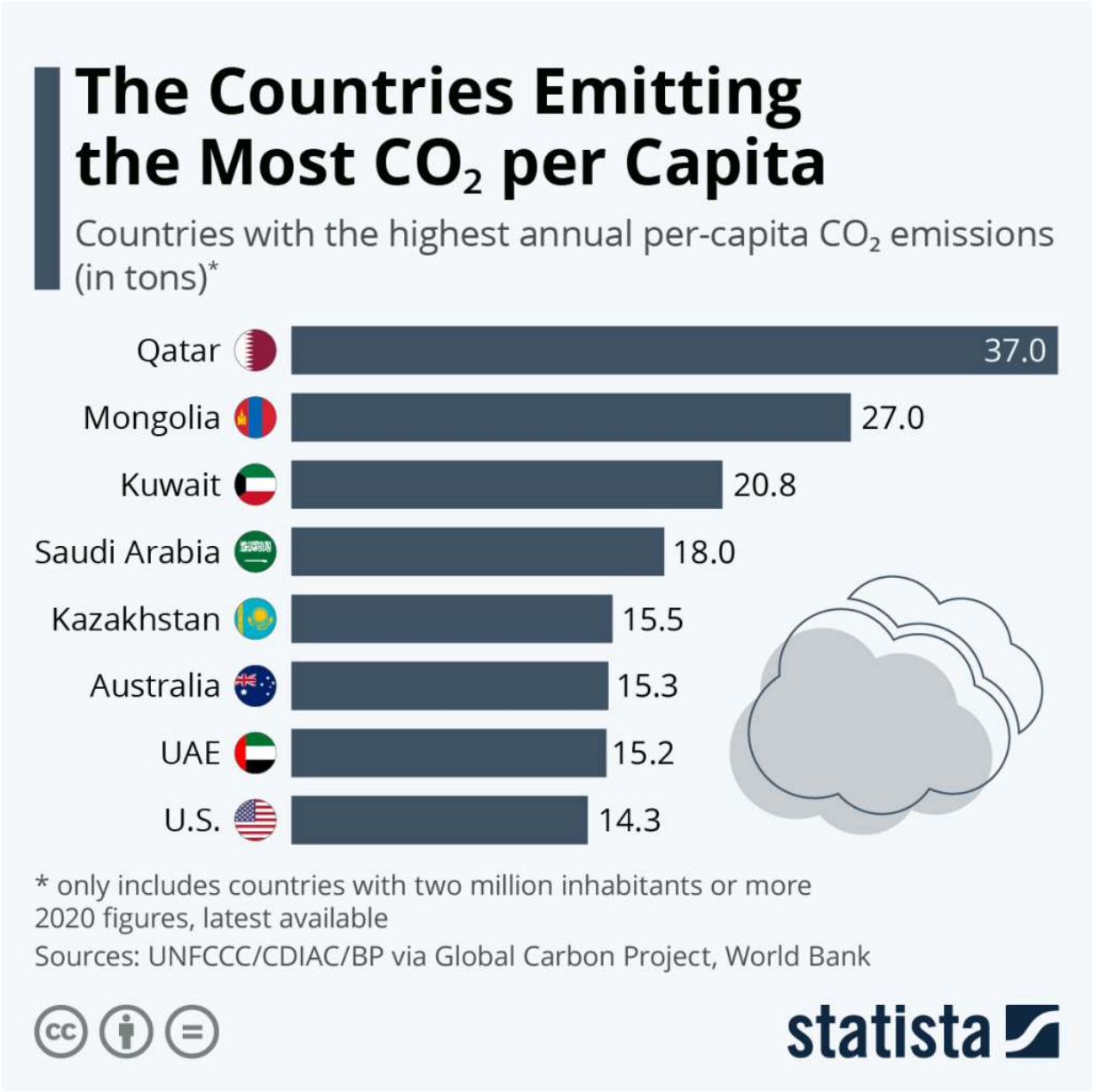



**Figure 8.6** This graph shows countries with the highest annual per-capita CO2 emissions (in tons). How does it compare to the vulnerability to climate change in Figure 8.5? Image Description

This image shows emissions of carbon dioxide, an emission that contributes to global warming. A common saying in the environmental movement is, “Those who contribute the least suffer the most.” This means that the poorest people use the least planetary resources, so they contribute to climate change the least. However, they suffer the most from climate change. We can see this as we compare the maps in figures 8.5 and 8.6. We see, for example, that Africa contributes the least greenhouse gasses, but they are the most vulnerable to climate change. The United States is a high contributor of emissions but the least vulnerable to climate change. While this model doesn’t hold true for every country, the saying encapsulates a key issue with climate change.

We are experiencing more extreme weather events related to climate change. With Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, those who contributed the least suffered the most. People with cars could evacuate. People without cars often couldn’t. People without cars contributed the least to CO2 emissions but experienced the most loss related to the extreme weather event (Bullard 2008).

You may have cheered with us as you learned that the Jordon Cove Energy Project pipeline project was shut down. However, the question remains: How else do we generate and transport our energy resources? Part of the answer is that the projects go where the resources exist, and the people are even more powerless to resist. Our unequal social locations contribute to inequality. To explore

this further, we will look at the experience of people in Nigeria and oil production. We will build on the concept of socioeconomic class (SES) that we began in Chapter 6.




**Figure 8.7** This map shows Nigeria, a country on the west coast of Africa. Nearly everyone there lives on less than $30.00 a day. Many people live on much less. How much do you think this country contributes to CO2 emissions? Image Description

Nigeria is a country on the west coast of Africa, as shown in Figure 8.7. More than 40% of the people in Nigeria live in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than $1.40 per day (Cuaresma 2018). Less than 15% of the people have access to clean fuel for cooking (Ritchie 2021), and less than 60% of the people have access to sufficient electricity (Ritchie and Rosado 2021). At the same time, Nigeria is one of the world's top oil exporters. Oil companies use a practice called gas flaring, burning the waste gas from oil exploration rather than disposing of it in other ways.



**Figure 8.8** This image shows a flame of gas burning in the background, and low quality houses and the people who live in them. Gas flaring causes poor health in Nigeria.

Poor Nigerians experience rashes and sores because of the toxic fumes. In a recent study, children exposed to flaring experience coughs, respiratory issues, fevers, and other poor health symptoms. The rate of child deaths in children under five also slightly increases (Alimi and Gibson 2022) The pollution contaminates the land, so women can't grow enough food. Pollution also contaminates the water, leaving less for drinking and crop irrigation. One article notes that the women in the Niger Delta are poor because the environmental toxins are poisoning their plants. Women plant cassava to make their flour. However, the cassava roots are dying, and the women can't replace them (Lawal 2021).

Many people are migrating to bigger cities, but it doesn't solve the local pollution and emissions problem. The article, "In Nigeria, Gas Giants Get Rich as Women Sink Into Poverty" documents the story with more details, including pictures of the impacts of the gas flares, if you would like to learn more. We also notice that those who use the least resources are impacted the most. In this case,

the environmental impact occurs on a different continent than most of the people using the oil. If you'd like to look more deeply into this problem, watch Who Is Responsible For Climate Change? – Who Needs To Fix It? .

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# 15.3: Environmental Inequality and Culture

The environmental crisis is a social problem because people contribute to the problem and experience it differently based on their race, class, gender, and ability among other social locations. A portion of this inequality is historically rooted in the destruction of culture caused by colonialism. To uculturend thcolonialism define both culture and colonialism.

In every interaction, we all adhere to various rules, expectations, and standards that are created and maintained in our specific culture. In Chapter 1, we learned that these social norms have meanings and expectations. When we do not meet those expectations, we may receive some form of disapproval. For example, someone trying to connect with you may ask: “What do you think of the weather we’re having?” A common response in Oregon might be, “I’m so tired of the rain.” If you ignored the question, you would be violating a norm. Alternatively, if you responded with your detailed analysis of climatnormanorm you would also violate the norm of a “greeting.” These norms and the norm violations are concrete examples of culture.

Culture is the shared beliefs, values, and practices that are transmitted within a social group. Culture includes:

- shared values,
- beliefs that strengthen the values,
- norms, and rules that maintain the values,
- language so that the values can be taught,
- symbols that form the language people must learn,
- arts and artifacts,
- people’s collective identities and memories.

We examine social situations to discover the expectations for norms and behaviors. People who interact within a shared culture create and enforce these expectations. Sociologists examine these circumstances and search for patterns.

## Enculturation and Cultural Universals

Anthropologist Edward Tyler (1871) was one of the earliest social scientists to define culture, stating that it was “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits” that people learn from other members of their group. In other words, culture is taught and learned. Anthropologists call the process of learning culture enculturation.

A Western example of enculturation is the belief that we must work to earn the right to live. Children are taught from a young age that we must work jobs until we are old to afford our basic necessities, such as food, shelter, water, and belonging within our communities. This is steadily reinforced throughout adolescence and into adulthood through toys, media, job fairs, career days, and paychecks.

All cultures have to solve similar problems: how to find enough to eat, how to raise children, how to care for the sick, and how to memorialize those who have died. Although cultures vary, they also share common elements. Cultural universals are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies (Murdock 1949).

One example of a cultural universal is the family unit. Every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. You might remember family difference in individualist and collectivist cultures from Chapter 7. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. Each culture has them, but they may look quite different.

## The Culture Wheel

As a sociologist exploring a social problem, you might look at how the cultures of the participants reflect different values, norms, languages, or laws in order to better understand the conflict. To remind ourselves of what these cultural differences can be, we have the culture wheel to help (Figure 8.9).

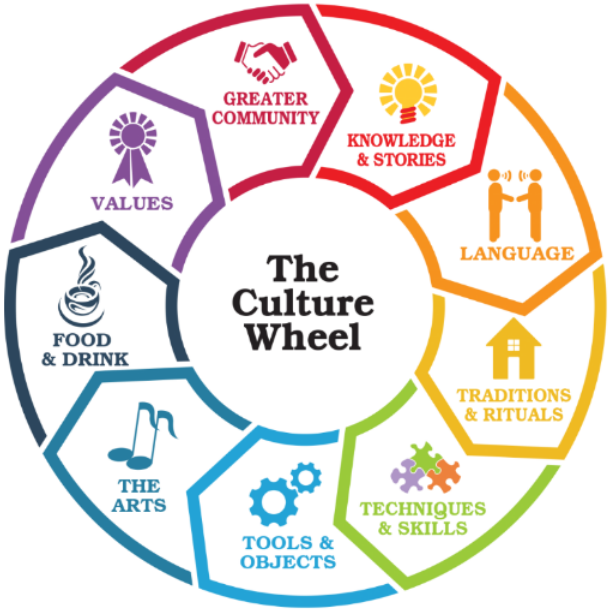



**Figure 8.9** The culture wheel visually represents a specific culture's beliefs, actions, and backgrounds. The culture wheel helps us to understand what is common and different in many cultures. When you consider your own cultural background, how is it the same or different from the dominant culture? Image Description

How might you use this culture wheel to explain your own culture to someone else? You might find this difficult, because cultures can vary so widely. As we look at conflict related to the environment, we find that it is hard to resolve partly because of deep conflict between culture and the related world views.

According to Allan Johnson, a sociologist you met in Chapter 2, a worldview is:

> *The collection of interconnected beliefs, values, attitudes, images, stories, and memories out of which a sense of reality is constructed and maintained in a social system and in the minds of individuals who participate in it. (Johnson 2014:180)*

Like culture, a worldview helps a person make sense of their world. A worldview is a perception of reality reinforced by people in a society. When worldviews conflict, they are hard to change. But before we can examine the conflict between Indigenous and colonialist world views, we need to learn more about colonialism.

## Unpacking Oppression, Living Justice: Colonialism

Many schoolchildren in the United States can tell us that our country began as thirteen colonies. However, this basic understanding is a bit flawed.

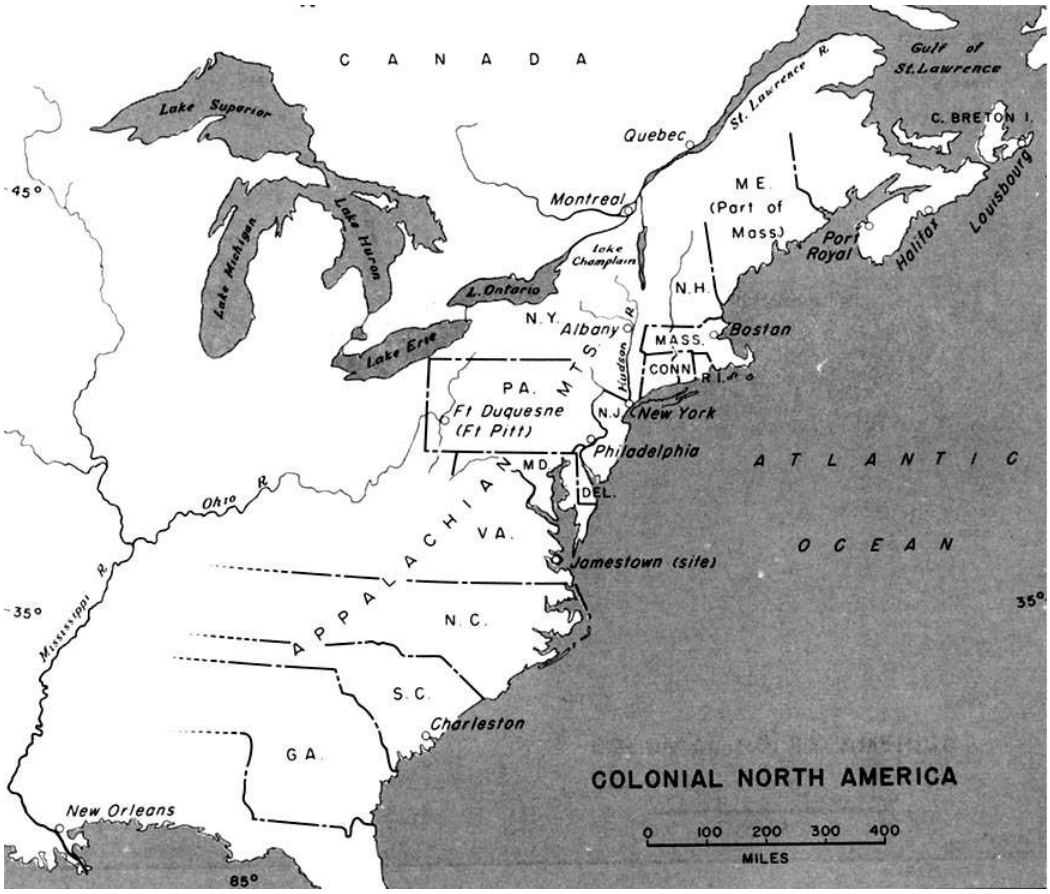



**Figure 8.10** Colonial North America (1689-1783). It shows Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine (which was part of Massachusetts). Are you surprised to see Nova Scotia, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland?

Immediately before the American Revolution, Great Britain actually had 17 colonies. Thirteen of these colonies had a revolution. They became the new country, the United States of America. The other colonies, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Prince Edward Island, remained colonies of Great Britain. These original colonies became part of the Confederation of Canada in 1867. Canada became fully independent of Great Britain in 1982.

The school child version of the thirteen colonies also simplifies a much more complicated reality. The more nuanced version of this history includes violence and genocide under the practice of colonialism.

When we say that Great Britain colonized North America, we mean that Great Britain made the laws, provided the leaders, bought animal furs, wood, and minerals, and imposed taxes. The colonizers who lived here were citizens of Great Britain, but had no rights to vote. Indigenous people and enslaved people had even fewer rights.



**Figure 8.11** Please watch minutes 16-18:09 of The History of the World: Every Year [YouTube]. This time spans from 1550 to 1970. In this period, we see political colonialism increase and decrease. Note: the video itself takes the perspective of colonizers. For example, Australia shows as empty for most of the video, but we know that the Indigenous Aboriginal people live there for at least 50,000 years.

It can be challenging to imagine the sheer scope of colonial domination. Please watch the video in Figure 8.11, particularly minutes 16 – 18:09. In this video, we see that Spain, Portugal, France, England, China, and Russia were major colonizing powers. Starting about video minute 16, in the 1550s, we can see the expansion of Spain and Portugal into Central and South America. By video minute 16:30, or the1620's, France, England, and the Netherlands established colonies in North America. By about video minute 17:17, about the year 1800, we see Great Britain establishing colonies in Australia and Canada. Much of Africa was "owned" by Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain. It was only after World War II and the rise of nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s that the power of colonialism waned. The map at video minute 18:09 shows mostly independent states worldwide.

However, very few countries are colonies now. Why is colonialism still relevant? Learning about colonialism is necessary because we still feel the effects of this historical legacy. European world powers established global slavery in this time period. Colonizers killed the people who already lived on the land through disease, war, and resettlement. As we discussed in Chapter 5, colonizers used education as a way of destroying family and community. Colonial practices fuel climate change. Part of the reason for that begins with differences in worldview.

It's your turn to unpack colonialism and live justice:

Compare the The History of the World Every Year and the Native Lands Digital Map [website]. The Native Lands Digital Map is a Canadian project which maps where Indigenous people live today and in the past.

Consider these questions:

- Who is creating the map? (You might want to look at the About section on the Native Lands page.)
- What is included and excluded?
- What worldview does each map support?
- How might this impact climate change?

## Worldview Conflict – Indigenous and Western Perspectives

Although Indigenous peoples worldwide are significantly different from one another, Indigenous people, social scientists, and activists agree that there is a common Indigenous worldview. From Chapter 1, we remember that the social construction of language is important. What do we mean when we say Indigenous? The United Nations describes Indigenous peoples in this way:

> *Indigenous peoples have in common a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong link to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic, and political systems. They have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions, and they form a non-dominant sector of society. (United Nations N.d.)*

The United Nations doesn't define who is Indigenous on purpose because Indigenous people have the right to identify themselves for themselves.

We've summarized some core differences between Indigenous and Western worldviews in the table in Figure 8.12. Each worldview defines relationships to wealth and to land, among other components. In the Indigenous view, land is sacred. Generation after generation, people care for the land and are nourished in return. Wealth is shared. In the Western worldview, land is owned or controlled. The purpose owealthng is to accumulate individual wealth. This belief supports the economic practices of capitalism. And, as a reminder, it is important to understand that not all Indigenous people have an Indigenous worldview. Not all Western people have a Western worldview.

Figure 8.12 Differences between the Indigenous World View and the Western World View. Even creating a chart that divides things into two categories is an example of the Western Worldview.

| Indigenous Worldview | Western Worldview |
|---|---|
| Collectiveness | Individualism |

| Indigenous Worldview | Western Worldview |
|---|---|
| Shared wealth | Accumulate wealth |
| Natural world more important | People's laws are more important |
| Land is sacred. We belong to the land, | Land is a resource, is dangerous, and must be controlled. |
| Silence is valued. | Silence needs to be filled. |
| Generosity | Scarcity |
| Binaries do not exist. | Binaries are crucial. |

We also see a difference in worldview when we examine how we understand what people need to thrive and grow. You may have seen the triangle on the left of Figure 8.13 at some point in your education. In Figure 8.13, the triangle (left) shows Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

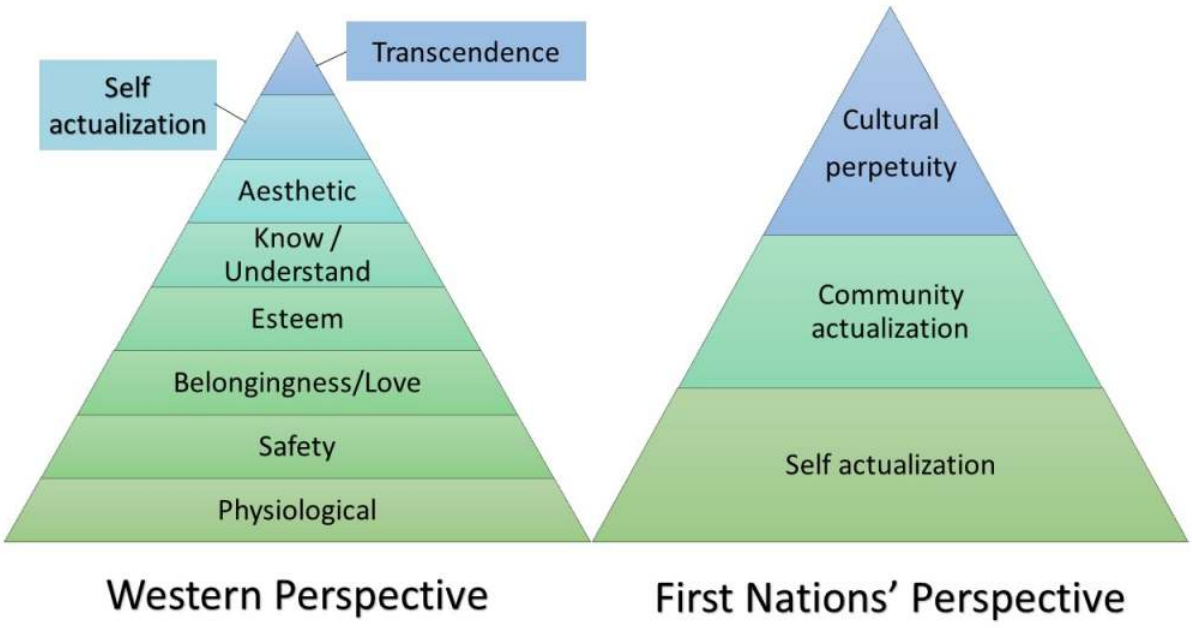



**Figure 8.13** Comparison between Maslow's Hierarchy, labeled as Western Perspective, and First Nations Perspective. Image Description

In 1938, American psychologist Abraham Maslow spent time with the people of the Blackfoot Nation in Canada prior to releasing his Hierarchy of Needs theory (Figure 8.13). Historians think he based the teepee-like structure on ideas from the Blackfoot Nation in North America, but westernized it to focus on the individual rather than the community (Bray 2019).

Maslow focuses on the needs of the individual, starting with the basic physical needs like food, water and shelter, moving to needs related to relationships and belonging, and then on to the highest level needs of becoming your best self.

In comparison, the ideas of the Blackfoot nation emphasize community. The well-being of the individual, the family, and the community are based on connectedness. Self actualization is actually the first layer not close to the last. Community actualization reflects our connection to family, friends, community and the world. We thrive when we contribute to and receive from our community. In addition, this model focuses on time. The top of the teepee is cultural perpetuity. It symbolizes a community's culture lasting forever.

To learn more about Indigenous worldview from an Indigenous person please read this story, "What I Learned from Coyote," and this explanation of worldview, "As I had shared with Coyote." if you like. In them, Jennifer Anaquod, Indigenous educator, researcher, and member of the Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation in Saskatchewan, describes her worldview through story. Describing the world through story is part of Indigenous culture.

As powerful as cultures and worldviews are, they need action in the world to become real. One institution that encapsulates our values is the economy. Let's look next at how colonialism and capitalism work together to exacerbate the social problem of climate change.

## Colonialism, Capitalism, and Climate Change

An example that illustrates the differences between the dominant Western perspective today versus the Indigenous or First Nations perspective is the economic system of capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system based on private ownership and the production of profit. This economic system requires endless consumption and use of resources, which is not sustainable on a finite planet.

When the goal is profit, people must buy more and more things. Creating more and more things uses even more planetary resources. This drive for profit shapes our values and our behaviors. For example, capitalism often requires conspicuous consumption, the purchase of expensive luxury goods or services to display one's wealth and status. It is not enough to have a small house with running water, heat, and electricity.

Instead, capitalism requires that people always want more: a mansion, two cars, a swimming pool, and a fancy vacation. We can see conspicuous consumption at work when we examine what people eat around the world. If you want to learn more, The Great Global Food Gap [website] shows images of what families across the globe buy for food. (Please note: as of 2023, a British pound (£) is worth slightly less than a United States dollar ($)). How much must you spend on food to meet your basic needs? How does that amount change when considering a diet that will make you happy?



**Figure 8.14** Carvers Owen James, Herb Sheakley, and tribal member George Dalton, Jr. hoist the Kaagwaantaan house post. They use Traditional Ecological Knowledge to craft art and homes. How does this knowledge reflect a unique worldview?

Unlike capitalism, Indigenous economic systems do not rely on exponential growth and consumption. Many journals from early colonists describe the Americas as places with lush and ample resources. Indigenous peoples had consistently managed and stewarded the land using techniques perfected throughout generations. This knowledge today is called Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or TEK (NPS 2023a). To learn more about TEK, read Native Knowledge: What Ecologists Are Learning from Indigenous People [website].

In addition to the decimation of Indigenous populations and the land that they lived on, colonization supported a worldview that contributed to ecological devastation today. In this view, land should be owned and subjugated, rather than tended and cared for. In the words of authors Laura Dominguez and Colin Luoma (who write using UK English):

> *The widespread plunder of natural resources was a hallmark of colonisation. Nature was something that was to be commodified in order to enrich the colonial power. In turn, indigenous territories were treated as business enterprises, with seemingly unlimited resources to exploit. Undoubtedly, this had dire environmental consequences…. The*

> *ideology that emerged was that nature was something that should be first exploited, then preserved, but all without the input, involvement, or participation of indigenous populations. (Dominguez and Luoma 2020)*

Further, colonization supports a worldview that leads its participants to value individual well-being above all else. This leads to a lack of action and concern regarding the well being of our neighbors, plants, and animals who surround us.

An example from Latin America shows the link between colonization, capitalism, and climate change. Uruguayan journalist and poet Edwardo Galeano wrote *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* in 1971. In it, he argued that capitalism based on colonization created poverty in Latin America. He writes:

> *Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European–or later–United States– capital, and as such has accumulated on distant centers of power. Everything: the soil, its fruits and its mineral-rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and to consume, natural resources and human resources. (Galeano 1971:2)*

He also wrote a poem "Las Nadies/The Nobodies," which describes the impact of colonial capitalism on the people who live in the colonized countries. In it, the people are nobodies. He wrote, "We don't have culture, but folklore," among other losses. The people who contribute the least suffer the most cultural and economic loss. If you'd like to listen to this poem, watch Los Nadies/The Nobodies Poem [Video].

The legacy of colonialism and capitalism on climate change continues in Latin America today. The world markets for beef, soybeans, palm oil, wood products, sugar, and coffee support continued deforestation (Union of Concerned Scientists 2016). Deforestation itself is a cause of climate change.

Environmental inequality arises from cultural differences in worldviews, and the economic systems that derive from these worldviews. This conflict provides the context for making sense of the climate crisis today.

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## 15.4: Making Sense of the Climate Crisis

Activists and scientists use a variety of perspectives to understand climate change and climate activism. This section will look at environmental justice, environmental race theory, ecofeminism, youth clenvironmental justice, and critical environmental justice theories and actions.

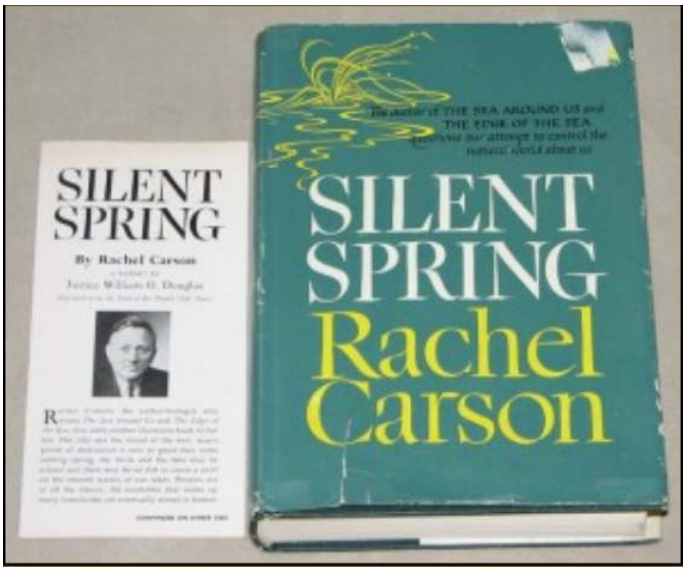



**Figure 8.15** Silent Spring Book Cover. Environmentalist Rachel Carson wrote the book *Silent Spring*. Published in 1962, it described how the pesticide DDT was killing birds. As a result, DDT was banned, and eagles, brown pelican, and osprey populations have rebounded. However, bird populations are generally still in decline, representing one component in biodiversity loss (Guynup 2022).

In addition to warming temperatures and loss of wildlife, we can look at climate change through the lens of the social problems process that we described in Chapter 1. As we examine how the environmental movement began in the United States, we begin with environmentalist and author Rachel Carson. In her book *Silent Spring* (1962), she described how toxic pesticides were killing populations of robins and causing deeper environmental damage, as seen in Figure 8.15. This is her claim, as *Step 1* in the social problems process.

By raising these issues with books, articles, and debates, activists used the media in various ways to engage people. Public awareness steadily grew concerning the connection between human activity, ecological degradation, and the dramatic loss of biodiversity. This awareness is covered in *Step 2: Media Coverage* and *Step 3: Public Reaction* in Best's model. Some activists formed the environmental movement to encourage political institutions to address the environmental damage that had already occurred and prevent further harm.

As a result of an increase in public awareness and an admirable concerted effort by the environmental movement, many governments banned or restricted the use of DDT and similar pesticides. The changes in policies show *Step 4: Policymaking* in the model. The changes in laws, regulations, and policies have saved many threatened species. They have also held polluting industries accountable for the damage that they caused. The implementation of government laws and policies is incorporated in *Step 5: Social Problems Work*, and *Step 6: Policy Outcomes*. Although the work of environmental change is ongoing, we find concrete examples of Best's model at work in society.

### What is Environmental Racism, Environmental Justice, and Critical Environmental Justice?

Environmental racism is any environmental policy or practice which disadvantages people or communities based on race. Reverend Dr. Benjamin Chavis created this term in 1982 to describe the experience of Black people in Warren County, North Carolina. Black residents protested the siting of a toxic landfill in a predominantly Black community (Bullard 2000). To be more specific,racisms (1994) defined environmental racism as:

> *racial discrimination in environmental policymaking and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official*

> *sanctioning of the presence of life-threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding People of Color from leadership of the environmental movement (Chavis 1994).*

Robert D. Bullard expands on Chavis's work.



**Figure 8.16** Environmental sociologist Robert D. Bullard is often described as the "Father of Environmental Justice." What makes his work so powerful?

Environmental sociologist Robert D. Bullard is often described as the "Father of Environmental Justice." His book *Dumping on Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990) was the first book describing environmental racism. Bullard discussed a landmark study he conducted in 1979 concerning the locations of all the municipal solid-waste sites in Houston, Texas, related to a lawsuit. The lawsuit *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management* was in response to the siting of a landfill in a suburban middle-class neighborhood in which Bullard described as "an unlikely location for a garbage dump—except that over 82 percent of its residents were African American" (Bullard 1990:xiv).

Results from Bullard's research inspired him to investigate four other Black communities in the South to see if there was indeed a correlation between race and increased exposure to toxic facilities. His research findings revealed that "the siting of local waste facilities was not random" (Bullard 1990:xiv) but were in fact clear examples of institutional racism—laws and policies that have intentionally and systematically marginalized Black communities for generations.

Bullard's groundbreaking research provided convincing evidence of environmental discrimination. At the center of this legacy of discrimination, he argued, was structural and individual racism, which led to the "impoverishment of Black communities . . . [making] it easier for Black residential areas to become the dumping grounds for all types of health-threatening toxins and industrial pollution" (Bullard 1990:7). Bullard's work illustrated how and why past injustices continue to affect and harm historically oppressed communities today.

Environmental racism also includes the colonialist land theft from Indigenous people. Indigenous scholar Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argued in *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, that "everything in US history is about the land," at least in terms of increasing European and Euro-American wealth and power (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).



**Figure 8.17** David Pellow is a sociologist and activist who researches environmental justice.

Researcher and activist David Pellow, who wrote the 2017 book *What is Critical Environmental Justice*?, agrees. He argues that environmental injustice was a major component of the European colonization agenda. From the theft of nearly all Indigenous historical lands; the extermination of entire cultural groups and millions of Indigenous peoples; the control, commodification, and over-exploitation of natural resources, and the enslavement of millions of Indigenous and African peoples to "work the land," environmental racism has been a problem in the US from the start. Environmental injustice can be traced much further back in US history to the exploitation and extermination of millions of Indigenous peoples and the violent seizure of their ancestral lands as a rcolonizationopean and Euro-American colonization and warfare (Jarratt-Snider and Nielson 2020). If you would like to learn more about David Pellow's work, watch his 6.42 minute video, Polluting the Voiceless [Video].

The scientists, scholars, and members of the public who document the social problem of environmental racism and injustice have prompted the call for environmental justice. This call is both a social movement and an academic theory. Environmental justice (EJ) is an intersectional social movement pioneered by African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Latinx, lower-income, and other historically oppressed people fighting against environmental discrimination within their communities and across the world.

Environmental justice is also an academic theory explaining the causes and consequences of environmental inequality and supporting action. As a social movement, EJ is rooted in the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement and its fight to end racial segregation and structural inequality in the 1950s and 1960s. It operates "under the assumption that all Americans have a basic right to live, work, play, go to school, and worship in a clean and healthy environment" (Bullard 2000).

The EJ movement began to receive widespread public attention in the early 1980s after a series of grassroots actions took place against the polluting practices of toxic industries. Federal and state governments failed to regulate these industries in historically marginalized communities, which also experience discrimination in access to education, housing, health, and other institutions, social problems that we discuss throughout this book. With a deep awareness of institutional racism and the socioeconomic inequalities in the US and elsewhere, early EJ activists recognized that all forms of injustice were interconnected.

Therefore, the struggle for a healthy environment must also include access to quality schools and education, adequate and safe housing, green spaces, fresh food, clean water, and sustainable employment opportunities (Checker 2007). What makes this movement unique and strong is the intersectionality of the injustices it seeks to address and the diverse communities it brings together to address various types of social inequities (Schlosberg 2007).

Many EJ activists and scholars also recognize how social inequalities of all kinds are deeply embedded within the structure of the government. Therefore, they find it hard to rely on government oversight to protect their communities because often, the government and the legal system allow these injustices to occur in the first place (Estes 2019). Many communities who strive for environmental justice create local solutions themselves. They form alliances, conduct direct action campaigns, invest in mutual aid efforts, and practice direct democratic principles to achieve their goals (Pellow 2017). We'll look at some examples in the section Environmental Justice is Social Justice.

Finally, Critical environmental justice (CEJ) is often referred to as the "second generation" of environmental justice activism and scholarship. In part, CEJ considers how all forms of structural inequality put targeted communities at risk of environmental harm and how all forms of inequality violate the human right to live in a healthy, safe, and thriving environment.

By drawing on numerous fields of inquiry – critical race studies, Black feminist studies, Indigenous studies, and more – CEJ strives to understand, document, and radically oppose intersectional forms of injustice that perpetuate oppression and exploitation on multiple levels (Pellow 2018).

For example, a community might move because chemicals were spilled in their neighborhood. Environmental justice scholars might focus on the experience of that one group of people. Critical environmental justice scholars would point out that even if the people are temporarily safe, they are likely to experience environmental injustice again. The discrimination they face is structural and historical, not just located in their own neighborhood. In addition, critical environmental justice scholars look at the intersection of all social locations to better understand power and oppression in environmental degradation and healing.

In short, critical environmental justice takes a holistic approach to understanding, exposing, and ultimately resisting the practices and policies of governments and industries that prioritize profit over the lives of people, all other life forms, and even the future of our planet.

## What is Ecofeminism?




**Figure 8.18** Gender inequality is showing up…in climate change [YouTube]. The first 12 minutes of this TED talk show Canadian researcher Amber Fletcher interviewing farm women to demonstrate how climate change impacts agriculture in Canada. How is this information new to you? Transcript

Women and children are disproportionately impacted by climate change. The video in Figure 8.18 explores this topic in more detail. In response to this and other gendered inequalities, women and nonbinary people are thinking, researching, and taking action. This strand of feminist theory and action is called ecofeminism. Ecofeminism connects the domination of women to the domination of the environment. If you would like to learn more, please read the article Ecofeminism: Encouraging Interconnectedness with Our Environment in Modern Society. In it, researchers Mondal and Majumder (2019) write, "bringing together feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism."

In addition to being a theory that fundamentally names the intersectionality of the oppression of women and non-binary people with the destruction of the environment, ecofeminism champions taking action. Women themselves say that they must become climate change activists to create a world where their children can survive and thrive.

To witness one example, you may want to watch the TED talk EcoGrief and Ecofeminism, where Heide Hutner tells her own story of cancer. She also links her grief and her activism to the activism of women around the world. Similarly, you may want to listen to Terry Tempest Williams tell the story of The Clan of the One-Breasted Women. She can connect the event of nuclear testing with her family's health. She describes how this leads her to activism.

## What is Youth Climate Activism?

Young people worldwide are taking action to end climate change, using social media to connect rich and poor countries. Their passion is creating action in new ways. Let's meet two activists and explore what youth climate action looks like.




**Figure 8.19** Greta Thunberg, environmental activist, holds a sign reading "School Strike for Climate Change." Why do you think that young people are particularly active in environmental activism?

Greta Thunberg is a youth activist from Sweden. She began protesting in front of government offices in 2018 with other young people. This small action has grown into a worldwide movement, using youth energy and new forms of social media to mobilize and educate people.

In a speech in Berlin in March 2019, Thunberg said, "We live in a strange world where children must sacrifice their own education in order to protest against the destruction of their future. Where the people who have contributed the least to this crisis are the ones who are going to be affected the most."

Her movement, Fridays for Future, started when she and other activists protested in front of the Swedish parliament to draw attention to climate change. Their social media posts went viral and encouraged other youth to take action (Fridays for Future 2022).

#FridaysForFuture continues to mobilize youth around the world. 100,000 people marched in Glasgow in 2021 to protest during the Global Climate Conference. Some estimated that 7.6 million youth have participated in global climate action. Youth are taking action worldwide, in both rich and poor countries. (Hasegawa 2022). Another young activist making a difference is Autumn Peltier.




**Figure 8.20** Autumn Peltier, youth water activist at the World Economic Forum 2021. What unique worldview do Indigenous activists bring to climate change activism?

> *In my culture, my people believe that water is one of the most sacred elements. It's something we honor. My people believe that when we're in the womb, we live in water for nine months and our mother carries us in the water. As a fetus, we learn our first two teachings: how to love the water and how to love our mother. As women, we're really connected to the water in a spiritual way. We believe that we're in ceremony for nine months when we carry a baby. Another way to look at it is that water is the lifeblood of Mother Earth, and Mother Earth is female. (Autumn Peltier 2021)*

Autumn Peltier is a world-renowned water protector, activist, and citizen of the Wikwemikong First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. Since she was 8 years old, she has fought for clean water in Canada. In 2019, Peltier was appointed as the Anishinabek Nation Chief Water Commissioner following the death of her great-aunt, Josephine Mandamin, who had been the previous Chief Water Commissioner. She criticized the Canadian Prime Minister, spoke at the United Nations, and led youth and Indigenous advocacy efforts. If you would like to learn more about Autumn Peltier, she tells her story in The teen fighting to protect Canada's water – meet Autumn Peltier [YouTube].

In a recent article, Karen O'Brian, Elin Selboe, and Bronwyn Hayward propose that young people engage in three kinds of activism regarding climate change and environmental justice: dutiful dissent, disruptive dissent, and dangerous dissent.

The dutiful dissenters create change by working within the system. They may work with school organizations to create recycling programs or policies around investment. "Through dutiful dissent, youth activists work within existing systems to express their discontent with business as usual and to promote alternative responses to climate change" (O'Brian, Selboe, and Hayward 2018).

In contrast, disruptive dissenters stage strikes and protests that highlight inequalities and injustices.

> *Disruptive actions explicitly challenge power relationships, as well as the actors and political authorities who maintain them, often through direct protests and collective organization. They may involve starting or joining petition campaigns or boycotts, disrupting international climate meetings to draw attention to hypocrisy and exclusion of important voices, or protesting key concerns through political marches or rallies. (O'Brian, Selboe, and Hayward 2018)*

Finally, dangerous dissenters begin to create alternatives to existing structures and systems to create social change. “Dangerous dissent challenges existing paradigms or ways of understanding the relationship between climate change and social change.” For example, the optional reading The Next Generation Sonoran Desert Researchers tells the story of the Sonoran Desert on both sides of the US-Mexico border. They provide alternative explanations of ecological issues and alternative methods of creating change.

The dangerous dissenters can “enable people to present organized challenges to mainstream power relationships and conventional environmental behavior.” (O’Brian, Selboe, and Hayward 2018). In these three models, youth activists are leading actions and movements for social change and the environment.

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# 15.5: Environmental Justice Is Social Justice

When we look at the problems of climate and environment, the sheer size of the issues can be disheartening. These issues are difficult to resolve because their causes and solutions are interdependent. For example, people in the US need oil to create gasoline for cars and fuel for industry. This voracious need encourages oil companies to produce oil efficiently. Industrial efficiency may incentivize some companies to use gas flaring in Nigeria. The causes of environmental degradation are linked in both obvious and subtle ways.

Solutions to environmental issues, particularly when they are effective, also reveal the power of our interdependence. Making a difference with this social problem requires both/and thinking, both individual agency and collective action. One optional video that explores how we can take action is We WILL Fix Climate Change [Video]. Let's explocollective actionmples that look at collective action taken on regional, national, and international scales.

## Environmental Justice in Oregon, Then and Now

### The Bottle Bill




**Figure 8.21** The Oregon Bottle Bill was the first law that created deposits for bottles. Do you think it has made a difference?

When I (Kim Puttman) was in college in the 1990s, I belonged to an organization known as OSPIRG, the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the group was instrumental in environmental activism in the state. They advocated for laws and policies that would reduce consumer pollution. Their legacy includes the Oregon Bottle Bill. To learn more about it, watch the 1.41-minute video How Did We Get Here: Oregon's Bottle Bill .

Then Oregon governor Tom McCall signed this bill, formally known as the Beverage Container Act of 1971, into law. With the support of other environmental groups and the legislature, the law became the first one in the nation to provide deposits on bottles and cans, encouraging people to return them rather than throw them away. The concept was both revolutionary and effective. In this post from the Oregon Historical Society, we see the consequences of this law, both then and now:

> *The Bottle Bill instantly reduced litter in Oregon. The share of beverage containers in roadside litter in the state declined from 40 percent before the law was passed to 10.8 percent in 1973 and 6 percent in 1979. The Bottle Bill also reinforces the practice of recycling. In the 2000s, about 84 percent of beverage containers were recycled, helping to make Oregon fourth in the nation for its rate of recycling (Henkles 2022).*

In the case of action in one state, activists, beverage manufacturers and bottlers, grocery store owners and clerks, the legislature, and the governor all had to agree on what to do about the pollution problem. This new law had to be implemented and advertised through the media. For decades, grocery stores had to collect the initial refunds, process the bottles, and return the money to consumers. You may have even had a job that required you to handle these sometimes gross empty bottles.

From a relatively small beginning, the impact of this state law has grown. Multiple US states have enacted similar laws. The bottle bill has even grown in Oregon. The most recent iterations established bottle drops, a more efficient and hygienic way to process bottles and cans. Solving this kind of problem requires using our interconnectedness effectively, and the consequences continue rippling into the world.

## The Latina Fire Survivors in Southern Oregon

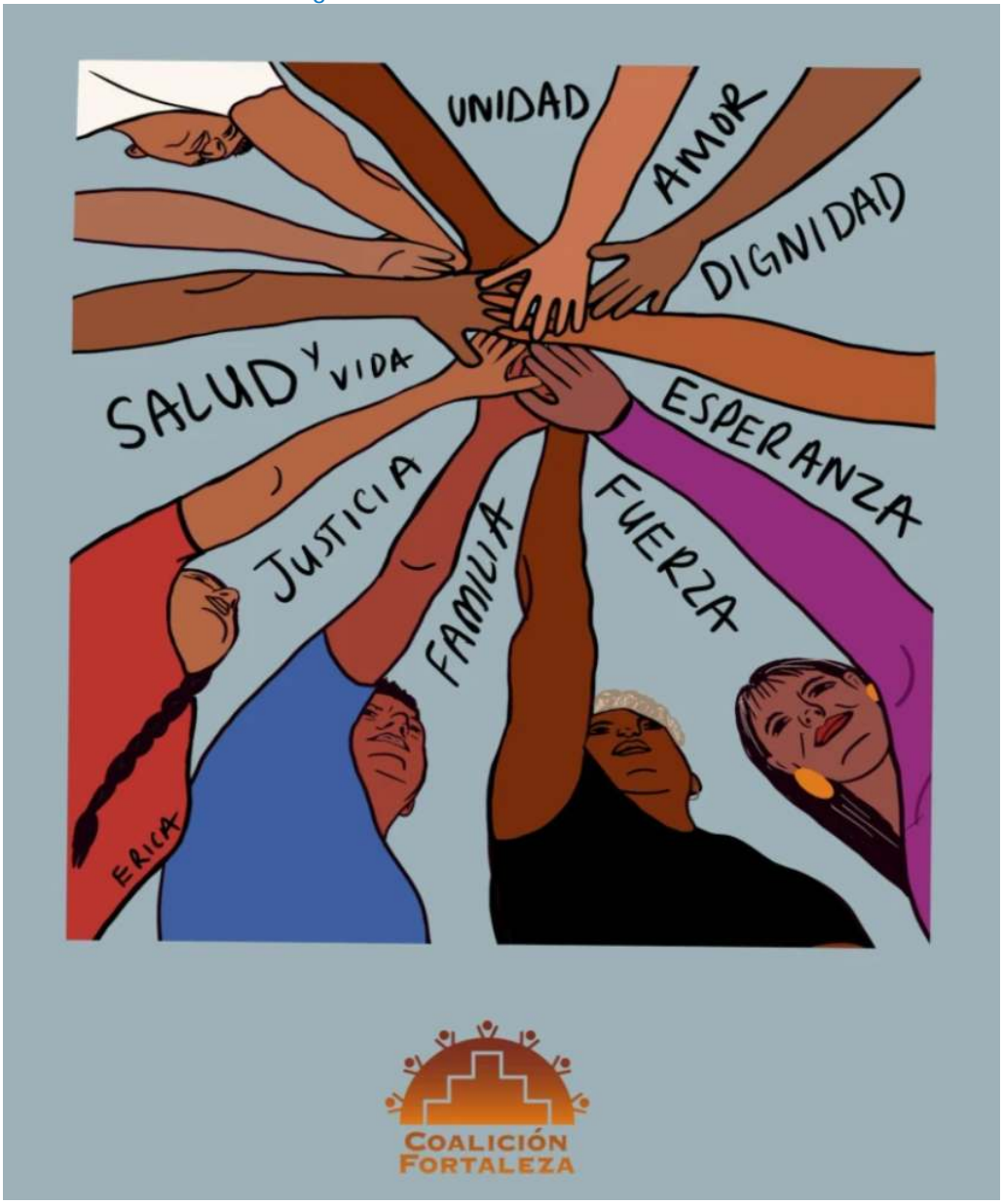



**Figure 8.22** Coalición Fortaleza grew from the experience of the Almeda Fire in southern Oregon. They value Unidad/Unity, Amor/Love, Dignidad/Dignity, Esperanza/Hope, Fuerza/Strength, Familia/Family, Justicia/Justice and Salud y Vida/Health and Life. With these values they are creating alternatives that support environmental justice. What values do you think are most important as we consider environmental justice?

Most Hispanic and Latino people say that global climate change is an important issue to address. Oclimate changem say that addressing climate change is of personal interest to them, a much higher percentage than the 67% of non-Hispanic people (Mora and Hugo Lopez 2021). Some of this focus may be because immigrants from Central America are migrating because of extreme

climate events. It may also be that states with large percentages of Hispanic people like Texas, California, and Florida are experiencing more extreme weather events like drought, flooding, and wildfires.

In Oregon, where we experienced drought and unexpected wildfires in 2020, we see Latinos organizing for change. The Almeda fire in southern Oregon, impacted several communities which housed seasonal farm workers, mixed-status families, and low-income people. As a response, Latina and Indigenous women formed Coalición Fortaleza. It is a fire survivor organization which is creating options for survivors of the Almeda Fire in southern Oregon. They are working to re-home everyone. In doing so, they are strengthening their community and finding solutions that sustain Mother Earth. They write:

As experts of our own lived experiences, we have the imaginations, local knowledge

and largest stake in ensuring that the rebuilding solutions don't recreate the systems and

conditions that have kept us in poverty and without access to life-saving information and

resources. We will focus on community-led solutions that will serve our most impacted

members (Coalición Fortaleza 2023).

The group is committed to using the disruption of their community and its rebuilding to challenge the existing structures of power and create new, more equitable environmental justice.

## Indigenous Resistance

Indigenous resistance to colonialism and climate destruction continues worldwide. Indigenous cultures are rooted in place, tradition, and land stewardship. Because there are Indigenous peoples on every acre of land that is habitable by humans, each act of destruction to the environment is also an act of destruction to the Indigenous peoples.

You may know that Indigenous people currently steward 80% of the world's biodiversity (Raygoredetsky 2018). This is true because Indigenous peoples both resisted exploitation and created new systems for protecting the land, its inhabitants, and their cultures. These acts of resistance continue today. To learn more, watch Indigenous World View Can Preserve Our Existence [YouTube].




**Figure 8.23** Water Protectors protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline in Standing Rock, North Dakota. Do you know anyone who went to Standing Rock?

A well-known example of Indigenous resistance in the United States is the land stewardship known as #noDAPL or Standing Rock. The picture in Figure 8.23 shows Indigenous Water Keepers protecting the water. The NoDAPL movement began when the Standing Rock Sioux people decided to fight the construction of a pipeline known as the Dakota Access Pipeline. This pipeline would be built on their ancestral land, destroying cultural resources and violating centuries-old treaties made between the tribe and the US government.

This led to intense protests where Indigenous peoples, allies, and community members from all over the world came to occupy and resist the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. More than 300 people were injured, and hundreds were arrested during these

protests by the US government (Montare 2018). While the Dakota Access Pipeline was built, the NoDAPL movement paved the way for many contemporary Indigenous resistance movements in North America, which you have the option to explore in #StopLine3.



**Figure 8.24** Zapatista Movement. In 1998, Zapatista women in Amador Hernadez, Southern Mexico, demanded daily that the Mexican military leave the village's communal landholdings.

Another historical example of Indigenous resistance is the Zapatista movement (Figure 8.24). In 1994, an Indigenous armed organization named the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war on the Mexican Government. They demanded, "work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace."

This uprising began in Chiapas, Mexico, as an occupation of land and continues to this day. The Indigenous and some politically aligned non-Indigenous peoples still assert sovereignty over their economic, social, and cultural development. The Zapatista movement is a current example of how Indigenous communities can defend their lands, cultures, and each other. You can learn more about the Zapatista movement if you'd like.

## Paris Climate Agreements

Our interdependence is also reflected at the other end of the scale of social change. In 2015, the United Nations brokered an international treaty known as the Paris Agreement. The goal of the agreement is to limit the emission of greenhouse gasses to prevent additional global warming. This worldwide agreement was signed by 196 parties when it initially became a treaty, with the United States later withdrawing from the agreement on July 1, 2017, due to a decision made by President Donald Trump.

The United Nations writes this about the Paris Agreement:

> *The Paris Agreement is a landmark in the multilateral climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects (United Nations 2022).*

The core components of the agreement are:

- Countries will enact limits on greenhouse gas emissions for their countries by 2020.
- Countries will also develop energy alternatives that reduce emissions.
- Countries that need help will receive financial, technological, and infrastructure assistance.

As you might expect, the implementation of this agreement is complicated. Some environmentalists argue that the agreement doesn't move fast enough to create the needed changes. When measuring progress in the five years since the agreement, the American Association for the Advancement of Science reports mixed results. On one hand, the implementation of some of the limits is starting to slow the emissions of greenhouse gasses. On the other hand, the United Nations has very little money to enforce the agreements, and countries, such as the United States, can leave the agreement anytime. If you'd like to learn more about the Paris Agreement, watch the 1:40 minute video What is the Paris Agreement and How Does It Work?[Video]

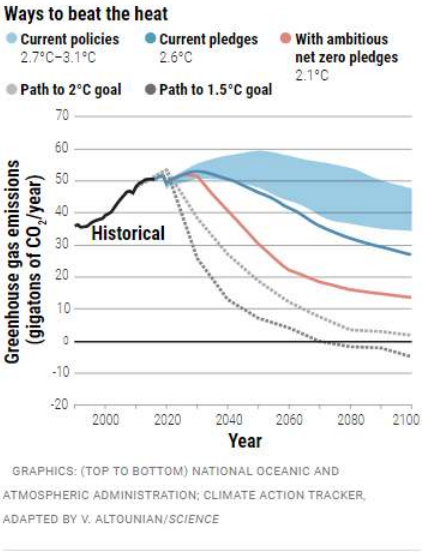



**Figure 8.25** This chart shows the amount of greenhouse emission changes we would need to make in order to meet a variety of different scenarios related to limiting global warming. What action are you willing to take? Image Description

The chart in Figure 8.25 shows both the goal for emissions and our progress. If we stay with current policies shown in the blue-shaded area, the greenhouse gas emissions would result in an approximately 3 percent increase in global temperature. If we actually do the work specified in the Paris Agreement, temperatures would only rise by 2.6 degrees Celsius. Most climate scientists believe we need to do more to sustain life.

Even though progress is uncertain, the act of global solidarity is unprecedented. Global leaders are recognizing our shared interdependence. They are acting on a global scale to make a difference.

We live on one planet. All of our actions affect each other. Critical environmental justice tells us that those who create the least harm are often harmed the most. In order to heal our people and our planet, we strive for social justice. Laws like the bottle bill and the Paris Agreement, community re-building with Latina and Indigenous fire survivors and Indigenous led protests show us the way forward. How will you commit to environmental justice?

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Figure 8.24. “In 1998, Zapatista women in Amador Hernadez demanded daily that the Mexican military leave the village communal landholdings” by Tim Russo from A Spark of Hope: The Ongoing Lessons of the Zapatista Revolution 25 Years On, Hilary Klein, North American Congress on Latin America is included under fair use.

Figure 8.25. “Greenhouse Gas emissions – goals, progress, and vision” from The Paris climate pact is 5 years old. Is it working? by Warren Cornwall, Science is included under fair use.

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# 15.6: Chapter Summary

Climate change is a social problem impacting both people and the planet. Like other social problems, climate change reveals a conflict in values. These conflicts of culture and worldview are deeply rooted in the practices of capitalism and colonialism perpetuated by Western worldviews and valuescolonialismbeen established through colonialism.

Sociologists and environmental activists use the theories and practices of environmental justice, critical environmental justice, and ecofeminism to make sense of why climate change is happening so rapidly. These theories also suggest effective opportunities for action. Youth, Indigenous people, and their supporters are leading the way with collective action for social justice.

As we look back at the Jordan Cove Energy Project, where we began this chapter, we now see how unexpected this victory is. To stop the energy company, local residents, ranchers, fishermen and women, Indigenous elders, youth, and everyday people like you and me had to come together. They had to promote a common vision of clean renewable energy and the projected costs and risks of a pipeline. They had to convince local and state government officials that the pipeline was not in the best interests of the people who lived in that area and the people who might benefit from cheap energy.

The stakes were high, and their victory was uncertain. Working together, they succeeded in protecting the piece of the planet they call home.

## Essential Ideas

**Learning Objective 1:** Why is climate change a social problem as much as an environmental problem?

Climate change is a social problem first because the activities of humans are the major contributor to creating the climate crisis. Second, we see conflicts in values between colonialist capitalism and more sustainable ways of living. Third, we know that climate disasters and environmental challenges impact groups unequally based on their social location. Finally, solving the climate crisis requires changes in laws, policies, and practices throughout the world, interdependent solutions that create environmental justice.

**Learning Objective 2:** How does colonization contribute to the environmental crisis?

Colonization as a social and economic system extracts resources from the people and lands of colonized areas to contribute to the wealth and power of the colonizers. This extractive form of economics prioritizes making profits over sustainable care for people and land. This economic system is still at play today, even though few colonies are left in the world.

**Learning Objective 3:** How do differences in Indigenous and Western worldviews contribute to the climate crisis and offer opportunities for innovative solutions?

Indigenous culture and worldview values communities and relationships. The land is sacred and must be cared for. Western culture values the individual and profit. The land is a resource that can be used to make profit. Because Indigenous cultures choose practices that nourish the land for generations, they offer solutions for healing our earth.

**Learning Objective 4:** How can an understanding of the intersections between race, class, gender, and other social locations help explain the causes and consequences of climate change?

As we consider the climate crisis, we see environmental racism and gendered impacts of environmental issues. For example, poor women in Nigeria can't farm like they used to, and their families are sick because of gas flaring. People who were poor and disproportionately Black couldn't evacuate New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina because they didn't have cars. Canadian farm families are already feeling the effects of climate change, and female farmers are picking up extra work. In all of these cases, social location matters to environmental justice.

**Learning Objective 5:** Are all human groups equally responsible for causing the climate crisis?

All human groups are not responsible equally for the climate crisis. One of the causes of the climate crisis is CO2 emissions from fossil fuels. In general, people from industrialized countries use more fossil fuels and produce more CO2. However, less industrialized countries have fewer resources to guard against the effects of climate change, so people in those countries are harmed more. That's partially why global climate agreements include provisions for transferring technology and money from more developed countries to less developed countries (although those promises aren't always honored).

**Learning Objective 6:** Are changes in individual behavior or collective action more important in supporting environmental social justice?

This is actually a trick question. Both individual agency and collective action are critical to ending the climate crisis. We need worldwide agreements like the Paris Agreement to set standards and targets for changing our collective behavior. We need feminists, youth, and Indigenous people to remind us how important this is with their social movements. And we need individual actions of recycling bottles, using less plastic, and being satisfied with less to solve the climate crisis. Environmental Justice is social justice for all of us.

## Key Terms Review

[H5P40]

[H5P41]

[H5P42]

[H5P43]

[H5P: 44]

## Key Terms List

- **capitalism**: an economic system based on private ownership and the production of profit.
- **climate change**: the long-term shift in global and regional temperatures, humidity and rainfall patterns, and other atmospheric characteristics
- **colonialism**: the domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation
- **conspicuous consumption**: the purchase of expensive luxury goods or services as a display of one's wealth and status.
- **critical environmental justice**: a theory which considers how all forms of structural inequality put targeted communities at risk of environmental harm, and how all forms of inequality essentially violate the human right to live in a healthy, safe, and thriving environment.
- **culture**: the shared beliefs, values, and practices which are socially transmitted within a social group
- **cultural universals**: patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies
- **ecofeminism**: a theory that argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism.
- **enculturation**: the process of learning culture
- **environmental justice**: an intersectional social movement pioneered by African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Latinx, lower-income, and other historically oppressed populations fighting against environmental discrimination within their communities and across the world
- **environmental racism**: any environmental policy or practice which disadvantages people or communities based on race.
- **extreme weather events**: An extreme weather event is defined by the severity of its effects or any weather event uncommon for a particular location.
- **greenhouse effect**: imbalance between the energy entering and leaving the earth's atmosphere, resulting in a rise in global temperature
- **Indigenous peoples**: Indigenous peoples have in common a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong link to their lands
- **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**: the on-going accumulation of knowledge, practice and belief about relationships between living beings in a specific ecosystem that is acquired by Indigenous people over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment, handed down through generations, and used for life-sustaining ways.
- **worldview**: the collection of interconnected beliefs, values, attitude, images, stories, and memories out of which a sense of reality is constructed and maintained in a social system and in the minds of individuals who participate in it.

## Discuss and Do

1. Environmental Activism: What organizations are working for environmental justice in your community?

1. What do they do? How do you see individual agency and collective action at work?
2. Why do you admire the actions they take?
3. How could you get involved?
4. Or, get involved and tell us what you learned.

2. Climate Activists: Introduce a climate justice activist: describe them, particularly their social location, and their work. You can choose a person introduced in the video: Indigenous Activists, or another activist. How does their contribution reflect inequality, interdependence and social justice?
3. Climate Justice and Abolition: Imagine a future in which your needs are met, you and your loved ones are safe, and you are able to spend your time how you wish. What would be different? What kind of world would we need in order to achieve this for everyone?
4. Culture, Worldview and Climate Change: How do culture and worldview contribute to causing climate change and to ending it? This is a great opportunity to dive into these stories of worldview that may be new to you: "What I Learned from Coyote" "As I had shared with Coyote."
5. Culture, Worldview and Climate Change: Climate Maps are ways of seeing the world. Compare the same region in Google Earth, Native Land Digital or History of the World Every Year. Who is telling the story? Why are the borders and boundaries different? How might this impact worldview and climate change?
6. EcoFeminism: Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate change. They may also have a unique response. The section on ecofeminism has several deeper sources: Gender inequality is showing up… in climate change [YouTube Video], Ecofeminism: Encouraging Interconnectedness with Our Environment in Modern Society[Article], Ted talk EcoGrief and Ecofeminism, and The Clan of the One-Breasted Women [Story]. How does gender impact the causes, consequences of climate change and the actions of climate justice?
7. Climate change and Social Location: What does it mean to say "Those who contribute the least, suffer the most?" when we talk about environmental justice?
8. The Politics of Climate Change: Some people argue that climate change isn't real. Others argue that climate change is the most pressing issue for our time. What do you think? How would sociologists explain why this conflict is so divisive?

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 16: War and Terrorism


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# 16.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

## War and Terrorism

**Learning Objectives**

1. Analyze War and Terrorism through Sociological Theories: Understand the application of conflict theory, functionalist and symbolic interactionism to the study of war and terrorism. Examine historical contexts like world wars and United States wars to understand war as a social phenomenon. Explore how ideologies, prejudices, and sociopolitical changes contribute to the inception and continuation of wars.
2. Explore the Social Impact of War: Investigate the broader social consequences of war, including the effects on civilian populations and veterans. Understand the prevalence and impact of rape and sexual assault in war contexts, and explore the societal challenges in supporting and rehabilitating American veterans. Examine other impacts of war, including on population, ideology and social structures.
3. Examine Military Policies and Efforts to Prevent War and Terrorism: Analyze militarism, the U.S. military budget, and its implications from an international perspective, including U.S. arms exports. Understand terrorism as a global and sociological issue, including strategies for preventing war and stopping terrorism and how is terrorism defined. Explore sociological perspectives on global efforts to address and mitigate the causes and consequences of war and terrorism.

## War and Terrorism

**Chapter Introduction**

**Real World Application: Gaza**

From a sociological standpoint, the protracted conflict in Gaza, part of the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict, can be analyzed through various lenses, including those of power dynamics, social identity, and the consequences of prolonged conflict on societies.

The Gaza conflict is deeply rooted in a complex history of territorial disputes (colonization), religious significance, national identity, and geopolitical interests. Sociologically, it is a manifestation of ethnic and nationalistic tensions exacerbated by historical grievances and competing narratives of victimhood and justice. This conflict is not only about land and sovereignty but also about the identity and recognition of people's right to self-determination.

One key aspect from a sociological perspective is the concept of in-group and out-group dynamics. Both Israelis and Palestinians have strong in-group identities forged through shared history, culture, and experiences of conflict. These identities are often in opposition to each other, leading to a heightened sense of "us versus them." This dynamic is further complicated by internal divisions within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, such as political factions and differing ideologies.

Additionally, the conflict in Gaza illustrates the concept of structural violence, where social structures or institutions harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. In Gaza, the blockade and frequent military confrontations have led to severe economic hardships and health crises, affecting the daily lives of its residents. These conditions can perpetuate a cycle of violence, where oppressive structures lead to resistance, often met with further oppression.

Moreover, the role of international actors and global public opinion plays a significant part in the sociological analysis of the Gaza conflict. International policies, humanitarian aid, and media coverage significantly influence the course of the conflict and the lives of those affected by it. One example of this is the South African government submitting a case on December 29th, 2023 to the United Nations International Court of Justice that charged the Isreali government of genocide in Gaza. On January 26th 2024 the ICJ ruled that Isreal must comply in doing “all in its power to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza” (Amnesty International, 2024).

In summary, the ongoing conflict in Gaza provides a complex case study in understanding how historical, cultural, and social factors intertwine in prolonged conflicts. It underscores the importance of examining the deeper sociological underpinnings behind such conflicts, including issues of identity, power dynamics, and the impact of structural violence on societies.

### Real World Application: Ukraine

The war in Ukraine, which escalated significantly in 2022 with the Russian invasion, comes nearly eight years after the democratically elected Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych was overthrown in a violent coup by pro-western protesters, the

annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian government, and the failure of Ukraine to follow the Minsk Accords. This situation offers a complex and multifaceted case study from a sociological perspective, particularly in the context of understanding modern warfare, national identity, and geopolitical dynamics.

Sociologically, the conflict can be viewed through the lens of national identity and sovereignty. Ukraine's struggle against Russian military aggression is not just a territorial conflict but also a battle for national identity and self-determination. This is particularly evident in the context of Ukraine's historical relationship with Russia, including the Soviet era, and it's more recent aspirations for closer ties with Western Europe. The conflict has galvanized a sense of Ukrainian national identity and has seen widespread domestic and international support for the Ukrainian cause, while at the same time causing international outrage towards the Ukrainian government for corruption and refusing to negotiate a peace deal with Russia.

Another critical aspect is the role of information and propaganda in modern warfare. The Ukraine war is taking place in an era of unprecedented information technology, where both sides use digital media to shape narratives, mobilize support, and conduct psychological operations. This “information warfare” is a crucial component of the conflict, influencing public opinion both within the combatant countries and internationally. The censorship by social media platforms and governments to not allow journalists or government-funded media (e.g., RT News) to present investigative reports on the Ukrainian master-narrative has also impacted public opinion.

The war also highlights the dynamics of international relations and the global order. The conflict has had significant implications for international law, with accusations of war crimes and breaches of international norms. It has also impacted global alliances and power structures, with NATO and the European Union playing significant roles in the response to the conflict and the global south countries standing behind Russia’s military operation and goal to create a multi-polar world. The sociological impact of these geopolitical shifts is profound, affecting international relations, global security, and economic stability.

Furthermore, the human cost of the war is a critical area of sociological concern. The conflict has led to significant human suffering, with thousands of deaths, massive displacement, and a humanitarian crisis. The war's impact on civilians, including the psychological trauma of living in a war zone, the disruption of communities, and the long-term effects on health and well-being, are crucial areas of study.

In conclusion, the war in Ukraine offers a contemporary example of the complexities of modern warfare and its sociological implications. It encompasses issues of national identity, information warfare, international relations, and the human cost of conflict. Understanding these facets is essential for comprehending not just the conflict itself, but also the broader implications it has for global society and international order.

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## Social Problems in the News

“War Crimes Haunt Iraq Vet,” the headline said. In the early 2000s, John Milton, a pseudonym, joined the Army and was sent to Iraq. There he served as a medic but was also armed. At age 21, he and five other soldiers were driving one day back from a beer run when a small bomb hit their vehicles. One of the soldiers died instantly, but the others survived and shot the bomber. As the bomber was lying on the ground and needing medical attention, the soldiers began to punch and kick him. Instead of tending to the bomber’s injuries, Milton fatally shot him in the head.

In the years since his military service ended, Milton’s war crime has haunted him. He continues to have nightmares and cannot get rid of his guilt. He talked with a psychiatrist at a Veterans Administration hospital, but that did not help because the psychiatrist “didn’t understand what [he] was talking about.” Before he entered the Army, Milton said, he “used to love being around people, but no more.” He was thinking of moving from his home in New Jersey to a quieter, emptier state like Montana or Wyoming.

Milton also remembered being ordered to euthanize wounded but treatable Iraqi soldiers, yet another war crime. After he did so several times, he decided he could no longer in good conscience follow those orders. He recalled, “I can still see every one of their faces, individually, exactly what they looked like that day.”

*Source: Bykofsky, 2012Bykofsky, S. (2012, February 10). War crimes haunt Iraq vet. Philadelphia Daily News. Retrieved from http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20120210_Stu_Bykofsky__War_crimes_haunt_Iraq_vet.html.*

Great war novels like *The Red Badge of Courage* and *War and Peace* highlight the heroism and horror that both occur on the battlefield. This news story likewise reminds us that war, however heroic, is also horrible. Atrocities happen; soldiers are killed or wounded, physically and/or mentally; and civilians suffer and die. As Sydney H. Schanberg (2005, p. 1),Schanberg, S. H. (2005, May 10). Not a pretty picture. *The Village Voice*, p. 1. a former *New York Times* reporter who covered the US wars in Vietnam and Cambodia, has bluntly observed, "'History,' Hegel said, 'is a slaughterhouse.' And war is how the slaughter is carried out."

For much of human history, people considered war a necessary evil that was often waged for noble reasons. World War II, for example, was what we now call "the good war," fought to end Hitler's attempt to conquer much of the world. Millions died on the battlefield, in cities bombed by planes, and in concentration camps before Hitler and his allies were finally defeated.

About two decades after World War II ended, the United States began fighting another war meant to save the world for democracy, but this war was very different from the one against Hitler. This war was fought in Vietnam, and however a noble effort World War II might have been, the Vietnam War was just as ignoble to its critics. It was a war, some said, not to save the world for democracy but to help extend America's power where it did not belong. The war's severest critics called it an act of genocide against Asians. If the World War II generation grew up with a patriotic love for their nation, the Vietnam War generation grew up with much more cynicism about their government and about the military.

Ironically, that generation's concern about the military was shared by none other than President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who warned about the dangers of what he called the **military-industrial complex**—the friendly interplay of the military, the defense industry, and political leaders—in his farewell presidential address (Ledbetter, 2011).Ledbetter, J. (2011). *Unwarranted influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the military-industrial complex*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Eisenhower himself had been a member of the military-industrial complex, having served as a five-star general and supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II before becoming president. His military experience made him no fan of warfare; as he once observed, "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity." He also feared that the military-industrial complex was becoming too powerful and gaining "unwarranted influence" over American life as it acted for its own interests and not necessarily for those of the nation as a whole. He warned that the "potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist" (Eisenhower, 1960).Eisenhower, D. D. (1960). *Public papers of the presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.



*President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about what he called the "unwarranted influence" of the military-industrial complex.*

*Source: "Dwight D. Eisenhower," Wikimedia, Last modified on December 13, 2011, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dwight_D._Eisenhower_-_NARA_-_531434.jpg.*

Eisenhower's fears about the military-industrial complex reflected his more general concern about **militarism**, or an overemphasis on military policy and spending, which he thought was costing the nation far too much money. In a remarkable and now famous statement made early in his presidency, Eisenhower (1960, p. A1)Eisenhower, D. D. (1960). Farewell Speech. *New York Times*, A1. declared, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron."

Eisenhower's concerns are even more valid today. As the United States and other governments spend hundreds of billions of dollars annually on their militaries, mass death and destruction from war beyond what Eisenhower could have ever imagined are a major concern, and serious social needs go unmet. It is probably trite to say that war profoundly affects societies, but that is

precisely why war and the threat of war are considered perhaps the most pressing social problem of our times and a threat to the entire planet.

Terrorism also profoundly affects societies. Yet most Americans probably did not consider terrorism a social problem before September 11, 2001, when, as has often been said, the world changed. On that terrible day, terrorists drove two passenger jets into the World Trade Center in New York and another into the Pentagon; a fourth plane apparently headed for a Washington, DC, target crashed in central Pennsylvania when brave passengers fought back. The shock of the 3,000 deaths that resulted continues to haunt us even as we have become accustomed to homeland security measures in our airports and elsewhere that would have seemed inconceivable a generation ago.

Against this horrific backdrop of the modern era, this chapter examines war and terrorism as the final social problems discussed in this book. As forms of armed conflict that aim to defeat an opponent, war and terrorism have been part of the human experience for thousands of years. However, their manifestation in the contemporary era is particularly frightening, thanks to ever more powerful weapons, such as nuclear arms, that threaten human existence. We consider their causes, dynamics, and consequences before discussing certain actions and policies that might conceivably reduce these threats to peaceful societies and human existence.

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# 16.2: Sociological Perspectives on War and Terrorism

## Sociological Perspectives on War and Terrorism

**Learning Objectives**

1. Summarize the key assumptions and emphases of the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic integrationist perspectives on war and terrorism.

The three major sociological perspectives offer some very different understandings of war and terrorism. You might agree with some of their assumptions and disagree with other assumptions, but together they capture the major dimensions of these two forms of armed conflict. Table 16.1 summarizes these assumptions.

Table 16.1 Theory Snapshot

| Theoretical Perspective | Major Assumptions |
|---|---|
| Functionalism | War and terrorism serve important functions. For example, they increases social solidarity as a society unities to defeat a perceived enemy. Some wars have also helped preserved freedom and democracy. |
| Conflict Theory | War and militarism primarily advance the interests of the military-industrial complex and take billions of dollars from unmet social needs. |
| Symbolic Interactionism | Symbols such as the flag play an important role in marshaling support for war. Definitions of several concepts also play an important role in public opinion regarding war and terrorism. |

## Functionalism

Recall that functionalism emphasizes the usefulness of certain behaviors and social institutions for many aspects of society. One of functionalism's most important insights is that social problems might actually be useful in this way, however many difficulties they might otherwise cause. To use an example from Chapter 1, crime certainly causes many problems, but it also creates hundreds of thousands of jobs in law enforcement, courts and corrections, home security, and other sectors of the economy that deal with crime.

In this spirit, functionalism similarly emphasizes the ways in which war and terrorism are useful for society, however horrible they are in so many other ways. Perhaps the first sociologist to make this point for war was Robert E. Park, the 1925 president of the American Sociological Association (which was then called the American Sociological Society—a name that was later changed because of its acronym!). In January 1941, less than a year before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Park published an influential essay called "The Social Function of War: Observations and Notes," in a leading sociology journal (Park, 1941).Park, R. E. (1941). The social function of war: Observations and notes. *American Journal of Sociology, 46*, 551–570.

Park's essay outlined several functions of war. First, war *helps resolve international disputes* over matters such as territorial boundaries and religious and other ideologies. No matter what one might think of war, historically it has resolved disputes between nations, with the winner of the war winning the dispute. Even though very few people would say that war is a preferred method for resolving a dispute, it still has performed this function.

Second, war *generates a stronger sense of social bonding and solidarity* within the societies that are at war. Having a common enemy, people within a society at war "come together" with a shared purpose and feel more united and patriotic than before. This dynamic is called the *external conflict/internal cohesion* process (Markides & Cohn, 1982).Markides, K. C., & Cohn, S. F. (1982). External conflict/internal cohesion: A reevaluation of an old theory. *American Sociological Review, 47*, 88–98. Although Park did not discuss terrorism, this form of armed conflict can also create social solidarity. In the days and weeks after 9/11, Americans came together as one people, and the president of France famously said, "We are all Americans."

Third, wars many centuries ago, such as those in which ancient Rome in essence formed and grew from conquering various tribes, *led to the development of the nation-state* as a political institution. As these tribes came under the rule of nation-states, their

separate tribal identities weakened as they gradually identified themselves as one people belonging to their nation-state; Park (p. 569) referred to this process as "the coming-together and integration of races and peoples." Moreover, the size and resources of these nation-states allowed them to generate scientific, cultural, and political advances that played an important role in world history. War, then, indirectly contributed to these advances. Although nation-states still might have eventually developed even without war, their development was accelerated by war.

Other functions of war can also be cited. Some wars, including the American colonists' war against England and the Allies' war against Hitler and Japan, have helped *maintain and establish freedom and democracy*. In the past and also today, war and military service have also *provided important opportunities for jobs and career advancement for people of color and women*. Related to this, the US military provides millions of jobs annually and is a ready form of employment for people who only have a high school education. More generally, the military and the defense industry are certainly important components of the US economy, and military spending in some eras *has helped stimulate the US economy*. In perhaps the most notable example of this effect, spending for World War II is commonly credited with helping to lift the United States out of the Great Depression (Shiller, 2012).Shiller, R. J. (2012, January 15). Spend, spend, spend. It's the American way. *New York Times*, BU3.

In a final function, weapons research and other types of military research *have contributed to scientific and technological development* in general. For example, military research played a key role in the early development of the Internet.

## Conflict Theory

Conflict theory's perspective on war and the military is decidedly more negative than that of functionalism. There are actually many different views within conflict theory about war and the military, but three related views stand out. The first view echoes President Eisenhower's concern over the power and influence of the military-industrial complex. According to conflict theory, the United States spends so much on the military and even goes to war because military officials, defense contractors, and political leaders work hand-in-hand in a rather cozy relationship. Although they may profess that their actions are meant to keep the nation safe, their ultimate goal is to enhance their political power and financial well-being.

The most famous critique of the military-industrial complex from a conflict theorist is undoubtedly that of sociologist C. Wright Mills in his book *The Power Elite* (1956).Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. According to Mills, the **power elite** is composed of government, big business, and the military, which together constitute a *ruling class* that controls society and works for its own interests, not for the interests of the citizenry. Members of the power elite, Mills said, see each other socially and serve together on the boards of directors of corporations, charitable organizations, and other bodies. When cabinet members, senators, and top generals and other military officials retire, they often become corporate executives; military officials in particular join defense contractors. Conversely, corporate executives often become cabinet members and other key political appointees, and defense industry executives often end up in the Pentagon. This *circulation of the elites* creates a rather cozy relationship that helps ensure their dominance over American life and in particular ensures that the military-industrial complex has an untold influence over economic and foreign policy.

A more recent critique of the military-industrial complex and foreign policy by sociologist Mark C. Worrell (2011, p. 51)Worrell, M. P. (2011). *Why nations go to war: A sociology of military conflict*. New York, NY: Routledge. bluntly stresses the role played by the desire for corporate profits: "War is business and it is profitable…What we learned in the aftermath of World War II is that mass destruction is great for corporate profits…War is driven by corporate profits and corporations drive politics." According to Worrell and other contemporary critics of what they call the *warfare state*, the United States now has a *permanent war economy*. In their view, the war on terrorism after 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan "have only deepened the trend toward ever more concentrated state, corporate, and military power in a society that ostensibly embraces democratic values" (Boggs, 2011, p. ix).Boggs, C. (2011). *Empire versus democracy: The triumph of corporate and military power*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The second view of conflict theory concerns **imperialism**, or the use of military power and other means to extend a nation's influence and control over other nations. This view, held by the more radical proponents of conflict theory, argues that war and other military ventures by the United States are done for the sake of imperialism rather than for noble goals such as the preservation and extension of democracy. In this view, the United States wages war and engages in other military actions to gain access to oil and other resources of other societies, with the ultimate aim of enriching multinational corporations and other parties. The characterization does not hold true for World War II, conflict theorists concede, but they argue it holds true for many and perhaps most other US wars and military actions, historically and today. In their view, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular were fought under false pretenses to maintain adequate oil supply and more generally to extend America's military and economic

influence around the world (Worrell, 2011).Worrell, M. P. (2011). *Why nations go to war: A sociology of military conflict*. New York, NY: Routledge.

A third view of conflict theory criticizes the size of the military budget and emphasizes the billions of dollars it takes from social needs such as poverty and climate change. As sociologist Carl Boggs (2011, p. 17)Boggs, C. (2011). *Empire versus democracy: The triumph of corporate and military power*. New York, NY: Routledge. argues, "The war economy, for its part, devours roughly one trillion dollars in material, technological, and human resources yearly…, ensuring a pattern of waste, destruction, uneven development, eroded public infrastructures, and decimated social programs. Decaying American cities have become a supreme legacy of the warfare system." We return to this issue later in this chapter.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionist writing on war features several emphases. One theme concerns the perceptions and experiences of people involved in war: soldiers, civilians, and others. There are many moving accounts, for example, both real and fictitious, of soldiers' life on the battlefield and after they come home from war.

Figure *International Peace Symbol*



*Source: Clip art: http://www.homemade-preschool.com/image-files/peace-sign-black.png.*

A second emphasis concerns the use of symbols to marshal support for war or protest against war. Symbols such as the flag evoke feelings of patriotism, perhaps especially when a nation is at war. The president and other politicians typically display a flag when they give major speeches, and it would be unthinkable for a flag not to be showing when the speech is about war or the threat of war. During the Vietnam War, protesters sometimes flew the US flag upside-down (the international symbol of distress) to show their hatred of the war, and some protesters also burned the flag—an act that is almost guaranteed to provoke outrage and hostility from onlookers.

Other symbols can also be important. When the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, millions of Americans put magnetic yellow ribbons on their cars, SUVs, and pickup trucks to show their support for the troops. The largest manufacturer of the ribbons sold more than one million monthly a year after the war began. However, sales slipped as support for the war declined, and four years after the war numbered only 4,000 monthly (Ward, 2007).Ward, A. (2007, March 2). Yellow ribbons dwindle with war support. *The Financial Times*. *Retrieved from* http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4793da48-c8f7-11db-9f7b-000b5df10621.html#axzz1uqyZTxHR.

Another ubiquitous symbol during the Vietnam War was the so-called international peace symbol (see Figure 16.1), originally designed in the late 1950s to symbolize concern over nuclear weapons. Vietnam War protesters wore this symbol on their clothing, and many put peace symbol decals on their motor vehicles, book bags, and other possessions.

A third emphasis of symbolic interactionism concerns how concepts related to war and terrorism come to be defined in ways that advance the goals of various parties. For example, a key goal of the military in basic training is to convince trainees that people they may face on the battlefield are *the enemy* and, as such, an appropriate target for killing. Related to this goal is the need to convince trainees that when they kill an enemy soldier, the killing is a justified killing and not murder. Similarly, the military often refers to civilian deaths or wounding as *collateral damage* in a conscious or unconscious attempt to minimize public horror at civilian casualties.

Another definitional issue concerns *terrorism*. As we shall discuss later, the definition of *terrorism* is very subjective, as actions that some people might regard as terrorism might be regarded by other people as freedom fighting or some other much more

positive term than terrorism.

With this theoretical background in mind, we now turn to several issues and problems of war and terrorism.

## Key Takeaways

- War and terrorism serve several functions, including the creation of social solidarity.
- According to conflict theory, war advances the interests of the military-industrial complex, while militarism takes money away from unmet social needs.
- Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of symbols in support for war and terrorism and the experience of civilians and veterans as victims of war.

## For Your Review

1. Which one of the three perspectives on war and terrorism do you most favor? Why?
2. Why do you think the flag has so much symbolic importance in American society?

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# 16.3: War

## War

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why war is best understood as a social phenomenon and why nations go to war.
2. Outline both sides to the debate over the size of the US military budget.
3. List the types of problems that military veterans often face.

**War** is "sustained armed conflict" that causes "large-scale loss of life or extreme material destruction" (Worrell, 2011, p. 1).Worrell, M. P. (2011). *Why nations go to war: A sociology of military conflict*. New York, NY: Routledge. Wars occur both between nations and within nations, when two or more factions engage in armed conflict. War between nations is called **international war**, while war within nations is called **civil war**.

### The World at War

More than 100 million soldiers and civilians are estimated to have died during the international and civil wars of the twentieth century (Leitenberg, 2006).Leitenberg, M. (2006). *Deaths in wars and conflicts in the 20th century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Peace Studies Program. Although this is almost an unimaginable number, there is cause for some hope, even as there is also cause for despair.

The hope arises from historical evidence that the number of international wars, civil wars, and other types of armed conflict has in fact declined over the centuries, with the number in the past half-century much smaller than in centuries past (Pinker, 2012).Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. New York, NY: Penguin. Reflecting this decline, a smaller percentage of the world's population died in armed conflict during the past century than in earlier eras.

To illustrate this trend, compare two periods of history (Pinker, 2012).Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. New York, NY: Penguin. The first is the thirteenth century, when the Mongol Empire under the initial leadership of Genghis Khan became an empire in Asia and Eastern Europe through wars and conquest in which it killed 40 million people. The second period is 1939–1945, when World War II killed 55 million people. Although 55 million is more than 40 million, the world's population in the thirteenth century was only one-seventh its population during the World War II period. A quick calculation shows that about 11 percent of the world's population died from the Mongolian wars, while 2 percent died from World War II. In terms of the risk of dying in war, then, the Mongolian wars were five times more deadly than World War II.

Looking further back in world history, the death rate in prehistoric times from tribal warfare was extremely high. If this high rate had held true during the twentieth century, 2 billion people would have died in twentieth-century wars rather than the 100 million who did die (Pinker, 2012).Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. New York, NY: Penguin. Although wars, other armed conflicts, terrorism, and genocide certainly continue, and 100 million is a terribly high number of deaths, the world overall is in fact more peaceful now than in the past.

That is the good news and the cause for hope. The cause for despair is twofold. First, war, terrorism, genocide, and other armed conflicts *do* continue. Even if they are less frequent and less deadly than in the past, that is of little comfort to the tens of millions of people around the world during the past century who died or otherwise suffered in war and other armed conflict and who live in fear today of becoming a victim of armed conflict.

Second, the world today is a much more dangerous place than in the past because of the existence of nuclear weapons. The thirteenth-century Mongolians killed their 40 million with battleaxes and other crude weapons; the World War II deaths resulted from gunfire and conventional bombs. At the end of that war, however, the nuclear age began when the United States dropped two atomic weapons on Japan that killed tens of thousands instantly and tens of thousands more from radiation exposure.

Those two weapons were tiny in both number and size compared to nuclear weapons today. More than 20,000 nuclear warheads now exist; 4,800 are operational and almost 2,000 (held by the United States and Russia) are on high alert, ready to be used at any time (Federation of American Scientists, 2011).Federation of American Scientists. (2011). Status of world nuclear forces. Retrieved February 16, 2012, from http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html. Each of these warheads is an average of at least twenty times more powerful than each of the atomic bombs that decimated Japan. The Union of Concerned Scientists (2009)Union of Concerned Scientists. (2009). Nuclear weapons overview. Retrieved February 16, 2012, from

http://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear_weapons_and_global_security/nuclear_weapons/technical_issues/nuclear-weapons-overview.html. summarizes their danger bluntly: “Nuclear weapons remain the greatest and most immediate threat to human civilization.” However more peaceful the world is today, it could easily end at any moment.

## The United States at War

If we say the history of the United States has been written in war, that is not too much of an exaggeration. The United States, of course, began with the colonial war against England. The American Civil War, also called the War Between the States, then tore it apart less than a century later. Between 1861 and 1865, at least 618,000 and perhaps as many as 750,000 soldiers in both the Union and the Confederacy died on the battlefield or from disease. The minimum estimate almost matches the number of American deaths in all the other wars the United States has fought, and the maximum estimate greatly exceeds this number (see Table 16.2).

| War | Number of troops | Troop deaths | Troops wounded |
|---|---|---|---|
| Revolutionary War | 184,000-250,000 | 4,435 | 6,188 |
| War of 1812 | 286,730 | 2,260 | 4,505 |
| Mexican War | 78,218 | 13,283 | 4,125 |
| Civil War | 2,867,500 | 618,222-750,000 | 412,175 |
| Spanish- America War | 306,760 | 2,446 | 1,662 |
| World War I | 4,743,991 | 116,516 | 204,002 |
| World War II | 16,112,566 | 405,399 | 671,846 |
| Korean War | 5,720,000 | 36,574 | 103,284 |
| Vietnam War | 8,744,000 | 58,209 | 153,303 |
| Persian Gulf War | 2,225,000 | 382 | 467 |
| Iraq and Afghanistan Wars | 2,333,972 | 6,251 | 47,566 |
| Note: Deaths are from combat, disease and other causes. | | | |

*Sources: Fischer, H. (2005). American war and military operations casualties: Lists and statistics. Retrieved from http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/american%20war%20casualty.htm; http://web.archive.org/web/20070711050249/http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/other/stats/warcost.htm; Hacker, J. D. (2011, September 20). New York Times. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/20/recounting-the-dead; US Department of Defense. (2012, May 18). Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation New Dawn (OND), and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) U.S. Casualty Status. Retrieved from http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf (accessed February 16, 2012); Martinez, L. (2011, November 11). US veterans: By the numbers. ABC News. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-veterans-numbers/story?id=14928136#1.*

*Alt text for image: US involvement in wars*

The United States has been at war in one-fifth of the years it has existed (Bumiller, 2010).Bumiller, E. (2010, July 25). The war: A trillion can be cheap. *New York Times*, p. WK3. Between the end of the colonial period and 1993, the US military was involved in at least 234 declared wars, undeclared wars, or other situations abroad involving actual or potential armed conflict (Collier, 1993).Collier, E. C. (1993). Instances of use of United States forces abroad, 1798–1993. Retrieved from http://www.history.navy.mil/wars/foabroad.htm. Since 1993, US armed forces have waged war in Iraq and in Afghanistan and also joined international military operations in such countries as Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Libya. By any measure, then, the US military has played a fundamental role, for better or worse, in the nation’s foreign affairs historically and also today. Supporters of this role say the military has both protected and advanced the political and economic interests of the United States, while critics, as we have seen, charge that the military has been an instrument of imperialism.

## Explaining War

The enormity of war has long stimulated scholarly interest in why humans wage war (Levy & Thompson, 2010).Levy, J. S., & Thompson, W. R. (2010). *Causes of war*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. A popular explanation for war derives from evolutionary biology. According to this argument, war is part of our genetic heritage because the humans who survived tens of thousands of years ago were those who were most able, by virtue of their temperament and physicality, to take needed resources from other humans they attacked and to defend themselves from attackers. In this manner, a genetic tendency for physical aggression and warfare developed and thus still exists today. In support of this evolutionary argument, some scientists note that chimpanzees and other primates also engage in group aggression against others of their species (Wrangham, 2004).Wrangham, R. W. (2004). Killer species. *Daedalus*, *133*(4), 25–35.

However, other scientists dispute the evolutionary explanation for several reasons (Begley, 2009).Begley, S. (2009, June 29). Don't blame the caveman. *Newsweek*, 52–62. First, the human brain is far more advanced than the brains of other primates, and genetic instincts that might drive these primates' behavior do not necessarily drive human behavior. Second, many societies studied by anthropologists have been very peaceful, suggesting that a tendency to warfare is more cultural than biological. Third, most people are not violent, and most soldiers have to be resocialized (in boot camp or its equivalent) to overcome their deep moral convictions against killing. If warlike tendencies were part of human genetic heritage, these convictions would not exist.



*Scholars have attempted to explain why human beings wage war. A popular explanation comes from the field of evolutionary biology and claims that a tendency toward warfare is hardwired into our genetic heritage because it conferred certain evolutionary advantages.*

*Image courtesy of Sgt. Joshua Risner, US Army, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Army_51817_BAGHDAD_-_Iraqi_Soldiers,_with_the_6th_IA_Division,_familiarize_themselves_with_their_targets_and_prepare_for_a_PKC_machine_gun_range_at_Combat_Outpost_402,_here,_Sept._28._In_addition_to_marksmanship.jpg.*

## War as a Social Phenomenon

If warfare is not biological in origin, then it is best understood as a social phenomenon, one that has its roots in the decisions of political and military officials. Sometimes, as with the US entrance into World War II after Pearl Harbor, these decisions are sincere and based on a perceived necessity to defend a nation's people and resources, and sometimes these decisions are based on cynicism and deceit (Solomon, 2006).Solomon, N. (2006). *War made easy: How presidents and pundits keep spinning us to death*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

A prime example of this latter dynamic is the Vietnam War. The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, in which Congress authorized President Lyndon Johnson to wage an undeclared war in Vietnam, was passed after North Vietnamese torpedo boats allegedly attacked US ships. However, later investigation revealed that the attack never occurred and that the White House lied to Congress and the American people (Wells, 1994).Wells, T. (1994). *The war within: America's battle over Vietnam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Four decades later, questions of deceit were again raised after the United States began the war against Iraq because of its alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. These weapons were never found, and critics charged that the White House had fabricated and exaggerated evidence of the weapons in order to win public and congressional support for the war (Danner, 2006).Danner, M. (2006). *The secret way to war: The Downing Street memo and the Iraq War's buried history*. New York, NY: New York Review of Books.

## Population Change and Environmental Change

Although war is a social phenomenon arising from decisions of political and military officials, other phenomena can make it more likely that these officials will decide to go to war. These more basic causes of war include population change and environmental

change. As Chapter 15 discussed, population growth may lead to armed conflict of various types, including war, because growing populations need more food, water, and other resources. History shows that when these resources become too scarce within a society, that society is more likely to go to war to wrest these resources from another society (Gleditsch & Theisen, 2010).Gleditsch, N. P., & Theisen, O. M. (2010). Resources, the environment, and conflict. In M. D. Cavelty & V. Mauer (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of security studies* (pp. 221–232). New York, NY: Routledge.

Chapter 15 also discussed environmental change as a source of armed conflict, including war (Fisman & Miguel, 2010).Fisman, R., & Miguel, E. (2010). *Economic gangsters: Corruption, violence, and the poverty of nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Recall that when weather disasters and other environmental changes cause drought and other problems, crops and other resources become scarcer. Historically, this scarcity has again motivated societies to go to war.

## Ideology and Prejudice

Nations also go to war for ideological reasons: they have certain belief systems that lead them to hold prejudice and other hostile feelings toward nations with different belief systems. Religion is a very important ideology in this regard. Historically and also today, nations in the Middle East and elsewhere have gone to war or are otherwise in conflict because of religious differences. Although the causes of World War II are complex, Hitler's effort to conquer much of Europe stemmed at least partly from his belief that Aryans (Germans and other Europeans with blond hair and blue eyes) were a superior species and non-Aryans were an inferior species (Bess, 2008).Bess, M. (2008). *Choices under fire: Moral dimensions of World War II*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

## Civilians: The Casualties of War

Table 16.2 listed the hundreds of thousands of troop deaths in American wars. The nation rightly grieved these deaths when they occurred and built monuments, such as the Korean and Vietnam veterans memorials in Washington, DC, that list the names of the dead.

John Tirman, director of the Center for International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, worries that Americans have neglected the civilian victims of war. He applauds the Korean and Vietnam memorials in Washington, but he laments that "neither mentions the people of those countries who perished in the conflicts" (Tirman, 2012, p. B01).Tirman, J. (2012, January 8). Do we care when civilians die in war? *The Washington Post*, p. B01. "When it comes to our wars overseas," he adds, "concern for the victims is limited to U.S. troops."

Tirman notes that approximately 6 million civilians and soldiers died in the Korean, Vietnam/Indochina, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars. Most of these victims were civilians, and most of these civilian deaths were the result of actions by the United States and its allies. These deaths stemmed from bombs and other weapons that went astray, from orders by military and political leaders to drop millions upon millions of bombs on civilian areas, and sometimes from atrocities committed by US personnel. In World War II, Tirman adds, the United States dropped two atomic bombs that killed tens of thousands of civilians, and it joined its allies in the *carpet bombing* of German and Japanese cities that also killed hundreds of thousands.



*The two atomic bombs dropped by the United States over Japan during World War II killed tens of thousands of civilians. Scholar John Tirman worries that Americans have generally ignored the civilian victims of US wars.*

*Source: "Victim of Atomic Bomb of Hiroshima," Wikipedia, Last modified on October 10, 2011, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Victim_of_Atomic_Bomb_001.jpg.*

Tirman (2012)Tirman, J. (2012, January 8). Do we care when civilians die in war? *The Washington Post*, p. B01. acknowledges that the carpet bombing, atomic bombing, and other actions in World War II that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians may have had strategic purposes, and the morality of these actions remains hotly debated today. But he also notes that the Korean and Vietnam

wars included many atrocities committed by American troops against civilians. To be blunt, American troops simply shot untold hundreds of Korean and Vietnamese civilians in cold blood.

Tirman describes one Korean incident in which machine gun fire from US warplanes killed about one hundred civilian refugees who were resting on a road. The remaining several hundred refugees hid and were shot at for three days by US ground soldiers. Tirman (2012, p. 107)Tirman, J. (2012, January 8). Do we care when civilians die in war? *The Washington Post*, p. B01. writes, "Surviving Koreans from the onslaught described in detail the chaotic panic they experienced; having believed the Americans were protecting them, they then saw the U.S. troops fire indiscriminately at men, women, and children at the scene." At the end of the three days, about four hundred civilians lay dead.

In Vietnam, Tirman writes, American troops and planes routinely razed villages to the ground, killing villagers indiscriminately, and then evacuated any survivors. Once they were evacuated, their villages were designated "free fire zones," and then often bombed indiscriminately once again, killing any villagers who managed to remain in these zones despite the evacuations. All these killings were outright slaughter.

In one example of what Tirman (2011, p. 153)Tirman, J. (2011). *The deaths of others: The fate of civilians in America's wars*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. calls a typical massacre, US soldiers arrived at a village that had just been bombed and ordered surviving residents to gather at the center of the town. After they did so, US ground troops shot them and left a pile of dead bodies that included twenty-one children. As this brief discussion indicates, although the massacre of 347 Vietnamese at the hamlet of My Lai is undoubtedly the Vietnam massacre that is best known (and perhaps the only known) to the American public, massacres were far from rare and in fact were rather common.

A central part of US military strategy in Vietnam involved destroying rice fields and the rest of the countryside to make it difficult for the Vietcong forces to engage in guerrilla warfare. To do so, it routinely deployed chemical weapons such as Agent Orange (dioxin, a known carcinogen), napalm, and white phosphorous. Planes sprayed and bombed these chemicals. These actions did destroy the countryside, but they also destroyed humans. The Note 16.13 "Children and Our Future" box discusses this problem in greater detail.

## Children and Our Future

"Napalm Sticks to Kids"

This book has emphasized that children are often the innocent victims of various social problems from the time they are born, with important consequences for their futures. There are also many innocent victims in wartime, but when children are victims, our hearts especially go out to them. The Vietnam War marked a time when many Americans became concerned about children's suffering during wartime. A key focus of their concern was the use of napalm.

Napalm is a very flammable jellylike substance made out of gasoline, soap, and white phosphorus. Napalm bombs were used in World War II to set fire to cities, military bunkers, and other targets. When napalm ends up on human skin, it causes incredibly severe pain and burns down to the bone, with death often resulting. Because napalm is very sticky, it is almost impossible to wipe off or remove with water once it does end up on skin.

Bombs containing napalm made by Dow Chemical were routinely used by the US military and its South Vietnamese allies during the Vietnam War to defoliate the countryside and to attack various targets. Some 400,000 tons of napalm were used altogether. When a napalm bomb explodes, it ignites an enormous fireball that burns everything in its path. Inevitably, Vietnamese civilians were in the path of the fireballs generated by the US and South Vietnamese militaries. An unknown number of civilians were burned severely or, if they were lucky, died. Many antiwar protests in the United States focused on the civilian suffering from napalm. Protesters at Dow Chemical's New York office carried signs that said, "Napalm Burns Babies, Dow Makes Money."

One of these civilians was a 9-year-old girl named Phan Thi Kim Phuc. An Associated Press photo of her running naked and screaming with burns after her village was napalmed was one of the most memorable photos of that war. Although she survived, it took seventeen surgeries to turn her whole again.

A poem about napalm, reportedly written by members of the US First Air Cavalry, surfaced during the war. Some verses follow.

*We shoot the sick, the young, the lame,*

*We do our best to kill and maim,*

*Because the kills all count the same,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*Ox cart rolling down the road,*

*Peasants with a heavy load,*

*They're all V.C. when the bombs explode,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*A baby sucking on his mother's t*t,*

*Children cowering in a pit,*

*Dow Chemical doesn't give a s!#t,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*Blues out on a road recon,*

*See some children with their mom,*

*What the hell, let's drop the bomb,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*Flying low across the trees,*

*Pilots doing what they please,*

*Dropping frags on refugees,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*They're in good shape for the shape they're in,*

*But, God I wonder how they can win,*

*With Napalm running down their skin,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*Drop some napalm on the barn,*

*It won't do too much harm,*

*Just burn off a leg or arm,*

*Napalm sticks to kids.*

*Sources: Ledbetter, 2011; Vietnam Veterans Against the War, 1971Ledbetter, J. (2011). Unwarranted influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the military-industrial complex. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Vietnam Veterans Against the War. (1971). A.I.D.E. napalm sticks to kids. Retrieved February 20, 2012, from http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=823.*

*Alt text for image: poem*

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# 16.4: Veterans- The Casualties of War

## The Casualties of War

The attention just given to civilians should in no way obscure or minimize the fact that veterans are also casualties of war. The Korean and Vietnam veterans' memorials in the nation's capital and so many other memorials across the nation remind us of the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women who have died serving their country. But veterans are casualties in other ways, as the news story that began this chapter made clear. They suffer terrible physical and mental wounds that can maim them for life (Dao, 2012).Dao, J. (2012, January 2). Acting out war's inner wounds. *New York Times*, p. A1.

Veterans of the Vietnam War came back to a nation that often did not greet them as heroes. Many came back addicted to heroin and other drugs, many were unemployed, and many became homeless. Many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have also come back home with these problems. Their unemployment rate was 13.1 percent in December 2011, compared to only 8.5 percent for the general public; the unemployment rate for veterans ages 20–24 was near 30 percent (Dewan, 2011; Zornick, 2012).Dewan, S. (2011, December 18). As wars end, young veterans return to scant jobs. *New York Times*, p. A1; Zornick, G. (2012, January 6). Job numbers are up, but veterans are left behind. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/165487/job-numbers-are-veterans-are-left-behind. Many veterans are experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), marked by nightmares, panic attacks, and other symptoms (Dao, 2012).Dao, J. (2012, January 2). Acting out war's inner wounds. *New York Times*, p. A1. Veterans with PTSD often end up with problems in their marriages or other relationships and are more likely to commit violence against their spouses or partners. When these problems occur, they may ironically worsen the psychological state of these veterans.

A related problem is suicide. For every 100,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who receive health care from the Veterans Administration, 38 have killed themselves. The suicide rate of the general population is only 11.3 deaths per 100,000 population. The suicide rate of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is thus more than three times higher than that of the general public (Martinez & Bingham, 2011).Martinez, L., & Bingham, A. (2011, November 11). US veterans: By the numbers. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-veterans-numbers/story?id=14928136#14928131.

Evidence from a national survey of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans underscores the problems they face (Pew Research Center, 2011).Pew Research Center. (2011). *War and sacrifice in the post-9/11 era*. Washington, DC: Author. Almost half said their family relations were strained and that they often felt irritable or angry; 44 percent said they had problems reentering civilian life; and 37 percent said they had suffered from PTSD.

One Iraq veteran with these problems is Tom Marcum, who came home with a brain injury, PTSD, and fits of violence and short-term memory loss. His wife April had to quit her teaching job to take care of him, and their life savings slowly dwindled. April missed the man she used to know: "The biggest loss is the loss of the man I married. His body's here, but his mind is not here anymore. I see glimpses of him, but he's not who he was" (Einhorn, 2011, p. A12).Einhorn, C. (2011, September 28). Looking after the soldier, back home and damaged. *New York Times*, p. A12.

As the Marcums' situation indicates, spouses and other family members of veterans also are casualties of war. Indeed, the Marcums' situation is far from rare among the families of the 2 million veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. As a news report summarized these families' experience, "Ms. Marcum has joined a growing community of spouses, parents and partners who, confronted with damaged loved ones returning from war who can no longer do for themselves, drop most everything in their own lives to care for them. Jobs, hobbies, friends, even parental obligations to young children fall by the wayside. Families go through savings and older parents dip into retirement funds" (Einhorn, 2011, p. A12).Einhorn, C. (2011, September 28). Looking after the soldier, back home and damaged. *New York Times*, p. A12.

Families of deployed troops also face many difficulties. There is the natural fear that loved ones will never return from their overseas involvement in armed conflict. This fear can take a psychological toll on all members of these families, but perhaps especially on children. One teenager recalled the tensions that arose when his father was in Iraq: "I was in eighth grade when my dad deployed to Iraq. A kid walked up to me and said, 'Your dad's a baby killer.' I didn't handle that well. We both wound up suspended for that one" (Ashton, 2011).Ashton, A. (2011, July 22). Children of deployed troops struggle, study finds. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from http://bangordailynews.com/2011/07/22/health/children-of-deployed-troops-struggle-researchers-find.

A recent study found that adolescents with a deployed parent are more likely than those with civilian parents to feel depressed and suicidal. They are also more likely to engage in drug use and binge drinking. Reflecting on these findings, an author of the study said, "It's really time to focus on the children that are left behind" (Ashton, 2011).Ashton, A. (2011, July 22). Children of deployed

troops struggle, study finds. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from http://bangordailynews.com/2011/07/22/health/children-of-deployed-troops-struggle-researchers-find.

## Rape and Sexual Assault

Women veterans face a special problem that most male veterans do not have to fear. That problem is rape, as at least one-fifth and perhaps as many as 84 percent of all military service are raped or sexually assaulted (including sexual harassment) by other military personnel (Turchik & Wilson, 2010).Turchik, J. A., & Wilson, S. M. (2010). Sexual assault in the US military: A review of the literature and recommendations for the future. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15*, 267–277. In 2010, more than 19,000 US military personnel, most of them women, were raped or sexually assaulted (Stalsburg, 2011).Stalsburg, B. L. (2011). Rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the military: The quick facts. Retrieved February 18, 2012, from http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Rape-Sexual-Assault-and-Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Military.pdf. Only about one-seventh of these victims reported their rapes and sexual assaults. Of these reported cases, only one-fifth went to trial, and only half of these defendants were convicted. As these numbers make clear, military personnel who commit rape and sexual assault almost always avoid any punishment.

## Applying Social Research

Determining the Prevalence of Rape and Sexual Assault in the Military

As the text discusses, most military women who are raped or sexually assaulted do not report these crimes to military authorities. As a result, reported rapes and sexual assaults compose only a very small percentage of all military rapes and sexual assaults. To get a more accurate estimate of how many such crimes occur, sound social research is necessary.

Despite this need, research on sexual assault in the military was scant before the early 2000s. This type of research accelerated, however, after several scandals involving sexual assault and harassment occurred during the 1990s on military bases and at military academies. The primary mode of research involved survey questionnaires given anonymously to samples, many of them random, of military members. The samples are almost entirely of women, given their higher risk of being sexually assaulted.

In these surveys, between 10 percent and 33 percent of women report being raped (including attempts) while they were serving in the military. When sexual assaults and sexual harassment are added to the crimes mentioned to respondents, between 22 percent and 84 percent of women report being raped, sexually assaulted, and/or sexually harassed while serving. Very few studies include men in their surveys, but one study reported a 3 percent rate of sexual assault victimization for men while they were in the military.

One major problem in this research literature is that different studies use different definitions and measures of sexual assault. Regardless of these problems, this growing body of research documents how often rape and sexual assault in the military occur. It also documents the psychological and health effects of military sexual assault (MSA). These effects are similar to those for civilians, and include anxiety, depression, PTSD, poorer physical health, and poorer job performance (in this case, their military duties).

In shedding light on the prevalence of military rape and sexual assault and on the many negative effects of these crimes, social science research has performed an important service. Future research will no doubt build on existing studies to further illuminate this significant problem.

*Source: Turchik & Wilson, 2010Turchik, J. A., & Wilson, S. M. (2010). Sexual assault in the US military: A review of the literature and recommendations for the future. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15, 267–277.*

Women veterans who are raped or sexually assaulted often suffer PTSD. In fact, rape and sexual assault are the leading cause of PTSD among women veterans, while combat trauma is the leading cause of PTSD among male veterans. Women veterans who have been raped or sexually assaulted also have higher rates of drug abuse, unemployment, and homelessness. One veteran recalled being gang raped by her drill sergeant and four other soldiers, who then broke several bones in her body and urinated on her. Several years later, she was still having many health problems and could not forget what happened to her. She also refused to display the American flag, saying, “When I looked at the American flag, I used to see red, white, and blue. Now, all I see is blood” (Herdy & Moffeit, 2004, p. 4).Herdy, A., & Moffeit, M. (2004). *Betrayal in the Ranks*. Retrieved from http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,0,36%257E30137%257E,00.html.

In addition to psychological and physiological trauma, rape and sexual assault impose huge economic costs on the military because of medical expenses for helping survivors and for prosecuting their rapists. Health care expenses for survivors amount to almost $1 billion annually, and the cost of prosecution amounts to $19 million annually (Stalsburg, 2011).Stalsburg, B. L. (2011). Rape,

sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the military: The quick facts. Retrieved February 18, 2012, from http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Rape-Sexual-Assault-and-Sexual-Harassment-in-the-Military.pdf.

Women veterans say that when they do report rape and sexual assault, military officials typically either blame them for what happened, ignore the crime altogether, or give the offender a very mild punishment such as not being allowed to leave a military base for a short period. When one woman who was raped by two soldiers in Iraq told her commander, he threatened her with a charge of adultery because she was married (Speier, 2012).Speier, J. (2012, February 8). Victims of military rape deserve justice. CNN.com. Retrieved http://www.cnn.com/.

## Helping American Veterans

After World War II, the GI Bill helped millions of veterans to go to college and otherwise readjust to civilian life. But many observers say that the United States has neglected the veterans of later wars. Although education benefits and many other services for veterans exist, the nation needs to do much more to help veterans, these observers say (Baker, 2012; Shusman, 2012).Baker, L. (2012, February 18). A concerted effort needed to help homeless veterans. *The Times-Leader*. Retrieved from http://www.timesleader.com/stories/A-concerted-effort-needed-to-help-homeless-veterans-COMMENTARY-STATE-SEN- LISA-BAKER,89325?search_filter=A+concerted+effort+needed+to+help+homeless +veterans &town_id=1&sub_type=stories; Shusman, B. (2012, February 18). Public, private organizations work to help thousands of homeless veterans in NY. *Voice of America News*. Retrieved from http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/Public-Private-Organizations-Work-to-Help-Thousands-of-Homeless-Veterans-in-NY- 139520143.html.

The high unemployment rate of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans has made this need even more urgent. As one business writer put it, “Collectively, it is our patriotic responsibility to help our nation’s servicemen and women thrive in today’s economy” (Gerber, 2012).Gerber, S. (2012, February 7). Why we should help veterans start their own businesses. *Time*. Retrieved from http://business.time.com/2012/02/07/why-we-should-help-veterans-start-their-own-businesses/. Advocates for veterans with severe physical or cognitive problems also urge the government to greatly expand its very small program of monthly cash payments to these veterans’ families to help replace their lost incomes (Einhorn, 2011).Einhorn, C. (2011, September 28). Looking after the soldier, back home and damaged. *New York Times*, p. A12.

As this brief discussion suggests, US veterans have many unmet needs. Our nation’s failure to meet their needs is shameful.

## Other Impacts of War

When we think of the impact of war, the consequences for civilians and veterans as just discussed come most readily to mind. But not all civilians are affected equally. One of the many sad truisms of war is that its impact on a society is greatest when the war takes place within the society’s boundaries. For example, the Iraq war that began in 2003 involved two countries more than any others, the United States and Iraq. Because it took place in Iraq, many more Iraqis than Americans died or were wounded, and the war certainly affected Iraqi society—its infrastructure, economy, natural resources, and so forth—far more than it affected American society. Most Americans continued to live their normal lives, whereas most Iraqis had to struggle to survive the many ravages of war.

War also has impact beyond the consequences for civilians and veterans. As historians and political scientists have often described, wars have a significant economic and political impact. Many examples of this impact exist, but one well-known example involves the defeat of Germany in World War I, which led to a worsening economy during the next decade that in turn helped fuel the rise of Hitler.

War can also change a nation’s political structure in obvious ways, as when the winning nation forces a new political system and leadership on the losing nation. Other political and economic changes brought by war are less obvious. World War I again provides an interesting example of such changes. Before the war, violent labor strikes were common in Britain and other European nations. When the war began, a sort of truce developed between management and labor, as workers wanted to appear patriotic by supporting the war effort and hoped that they would win important labor rights for doing so. Although the truce later dissolved and labor-management conflict resumed, labor eventually won some limited rights thanks partly to its support for the war. As a historian summarized this connection, “By the end of the war, labor’s wartime mobilization and participation had increased its relative power within European societies. As a result, and despite the fact that endeavors to reward labor for its wartime cooperation were, in general, provisional, partial, and half-hearted, it was nonetheless the case that labor achieved some real gains” (Halperin, 2004, p. 155).Halperin, S. (2004). *War and social change in modern Europe: The great transformation revisited*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Other types of less obvious social changes have also resulted from various wars. For example, the deaths of so many soldiers during the American Civil War left many wives and mothers without their family's major breadwinner. Their poverty forced many of these women to turn to prostitution to earn an income, resulting in a rise in prostitution after the war (Rafter, 1990).Rafter, N. H. (1990). *Partial justice: Women, prisons, and social control*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction. Some eighty years later, the involvement of African Americans in the US armed forces during World War II helped begin the racial desegregation of the military. This change is widely credited with helping spur the hopes of southern African Americans that racial desegregation would someday occur in their hometowns (McKeeby, 2008).McKeeby, D. (2008, February 25). End of US military segregation set stage for rights movement. *America.gov*. *Retrieved from* *http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/February/20080225120859liameruoy0.9820215.html*.

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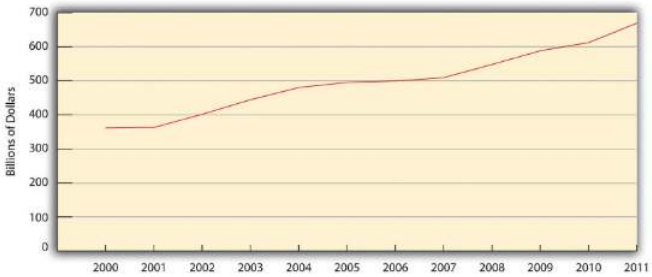
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# 16.5: Militarism and the US Military Budget

## Militarism and the US Military Budget

As discussed earlier, President Eisenhower eloquently warned about the influence of the US military and the size of the military budget. The defense industry remains a powerful force in the US economy six decades after Eisenhower issued his warning, and US military spending continues unabated. In 2011, military spending (defense outlays by the Department of Defense and certain other agencies; outlays include costs for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars) according to the government was approximately $768 billion. Defense outlays rose by 85 percent beyond inflation between 2000 and 2011 (see Figure 16.2).

Figure *US Defense Outlays, 2000–2011 (Fiscal Year 2005 Dollars)*




*Source: US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.*

## Clarifying the Military Budget

As large as it is, the $768 billion just cited as the "official" figure for the US military budget is misleading in at least two ways. First, it excludes several military-related costs such as veterans' benefits and interest on the national debt from past military spending. When these costs are taken into account, the *total* 2011 military budget ranged between an estimated $1.2 trillion and $1.4 trillion (Friends Committee on National Legislation, 2012; War Resisters League, 2012).Friends Committee on National Legislation. (2012). Where do our income tax dollars go. Retrieved from http://fcnl.org/assets/flyer/taxchart11.pdf; War Resisters League. (2012). Where your income tax money really goes. Retrieved from https://www.warresisters.org/sites/default/files/FY2012piechart-color.pdf.

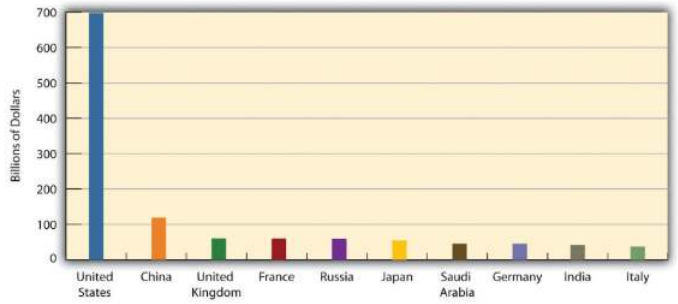
Second, the government states that defense outlays accounted for almost 20 percent of federal spending in 2011 (US Census Bureau, 2012).US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab. However, the calculation for this statement excludes the additional military expenses just discussed, and it uses a misleading measure of federal spending. This latter fact needs some explanation. Federal spending includes both mandatory and discretionary spending. As its name implies, *mandatory spending* is required by various laws and includes such things as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and interest payments on the national debt. Much of these mandatory expenses are funded by trust funds, such as Social Security taxes, which are raised and spent separately from income taxes. *Discretionary spending* involves the money the president and Congress must decide how to spend each year and includes federal income tax dollars only. Critics of the military budget argue that it is more accurate to cite its share of *discretionary* spending rather than its share of all federal spending (i.e., mandatory plus discretionary).

Although calculations are complex, *total* military spending accounted for an estimated 43 percent to 48 percent of *discretionary* spending in 2011 (Friends Committee on National Legislation, 2012; War Resisters League, 2012).Friends Committee on National Legislation. (2012). Where do our income tax dollars go? Retrieved from http://fcnl.org/assets/flyer/taxchart11.pdf; War Resisters League. (2012). Where your income tax money really goes. Retrieved from https://www.warresisters.org/sites/default/files/FY2012piechart-color.pdf. To put that another way, between 43 percent and 48 percent of all federal income tax dollars were used for military expenditures that year. This percentage range is much higher than the 20 percent share of federal spending cited by the government solely for defense outlays.

## The US Military Budget in International Perspective

However it is calculated, the US military budget is by far the highest in the world and in fact accounts for 43 percent of the world's military spending. In 2010, the US official military budget (defense outlays only) was $698 billion. China ranked a distant second at $119 billion, followed by the United Kingdom at $60 billion and France at $49 billion (see Figure 16.3).

Figure *International Military Spending, 2010*




*Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2011). Background paper on SIPRI military expenditure data, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/factsheet2010.*

## Lessons from Other Societies

Guns or Butter?

"Guns versus butter" is a macroeconomics phrase that illustrates the dilemma that nations face in deciding their spending priorities. The more they spend on their military (guns), the less they can spend on food for their poor and other domestic needs (butter).

In making this very important decision, Europe has chosen butter over guns. The wealthy European countries that compose the bulk of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an international consortium, spend 2.5 percent of their total economy (gross domestic product, or GDP) on their militaries. In contrast, the United States spends 5.1 percent of its economy on its base military budget, which does not include costs for veterans' benefits, for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and military spending that falls outside the Pentagon's budget.

The European nations' decisions to limit their military spending allows more spending for social needs. As a result, observes one economics writer, most Europeans have "universal health care, deeply subsidized education (including free university tuition in many countries), modern infrastructure, good mass transit, and far less poverty" than the United States has. Perhaps worse, the United States ranks last among the world's twenty wealthiest democracies in life expectancy and infant mortality and also ranks worst in the risk of dying before age 60. In addition, half of American children need food stamps at some time before becoming adults, while this problem is far rarer in Europe.

Compared to Euope, then, the United States has chosen guns over butter, leaving far less money for its social needs. As an economics writer wryly noted, "So remember to take pride in American power, and remember that it comes at a very high price." In making this classic macroeconomics decision, the United States has much to learn from the wealthy nations of Europe.

*Source: Holland, 2011Holland, J. (2011, June 17). Are we giant suckers? While the US blows money on the military, Europe spends dough on social programs. AlterNet. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/world/151337/are_we_giant_suckers_while_the_us_blows_money_on_the_military,_europe_spends_dough_on_social_programs.*

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# 16.6: US Arms Exports

## US Arms Exports

Another dimension of militarism involves arms exports by both the US government and US military contractors. Combining data on both types of exports, the United States sent $12.2 billion in arms deliveries to other nations in 2010. This figure ranked the highest in the world and constituted almost 35 percent of all world arms exports. Russia ranked second with $5.3 billion in arms deliveries, while Germany ranked third with $2.6 billion (Grimmett, 2011).Grimmett, R. E. (2011). *Conventional arms transfers to developing nations, 2003–2010*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Most arms exports from the United States and other exporters go to developing nations. Critics say these exports help fuel the worldwide arms race and international discord. They add that the exports often go to nations ruled by dictators, who then use them to threaten their own people (Feinstein, 2011; Shah, 2011).Feinstein, A. (2011). *The shadow world: Inside the global arms trade*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Shah, A. (2011). Arms trade: A major cause of suffering. Retrieved February 17, 2012, from http://www.globalissues.org/issue/73/arms-trade-a-major-cause-of-suffering.

## “A Theft from Those Who Hunger and Are Not Fed”

Oscar Arias, a former president of Costa Rica and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, echoed these famous words from President Eisenhower when he wrote a decade ago that US military spending took money away from important domestic needs. “Americans are hurt,” he warned, “when the defense budget squanders money that could be used to repair schools or to guarantee universal health care” (Arias, 1999, p. A19).Arias, O. (1999). Stopping America’s most lethal export. *New York Times, June 23*, p. A19.




*The $300 million cost of each F-35 fighter aircraft could pay for the salaries of 10,000 new teachers.*

*Source: “First F-35C Flight,” Wikipedia, Last modified on November 20, 2011, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:First_F-35C_Flight.ogv.*

Since Arias wrote these words, the United States has spent more than $5.5 trillion on defense outlays in constant dollars (see Figure 16.3), including $1.3 trillion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Cost equivalencies illustrate what is lost when so much money is spent on the military, especially on weapons systems that do not work and are not needed.

For example, the F-35 fighter aircraft has been plagued with “management problems, huge cost-overruns, [and] substantial performance shortfalls,” according to a recent news report (Kaplan, 2012).Kaplan, F. (2012, February 13). What happened to a leaner, meaner military. *Slate*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2012/02/_2013_pentagon_budget_why_so_much_spending_on_big_war_weapons_.html. Each F-35 costs about $300 million. This same sum could be used to pay the salaries of 10,000 new teachers earning $30,000 per year or to build twenty elementary schools at a cost of $15 million each. In another example, the Navy is designing a new series of nuclear submarines, with construction planned to start in 2019. The Navy plans to purchase twelve of these submarines. Each submarine is projected to cost more than $8 billion to build and another $21 billion in constant dollars in operation and maintenance costs over its lifetime (Castelli, 2012).Castelli, C. J. (2012, February 17). DOD: New nuclear subs will cost $347 billion to acquire, operate. *InsideDefense.com NewsStand*. Retrieved from http://defensenewsstand.com/NewsStand-General/The-INSIDER-Free-Article/dod-new-nuclear-subs-will-cost-347-billion-to-acquire-operate/menu-id-720.html. This $29 billion sum for each submarine during its lifetime could provide 5.8 million scholarships worth $5,000 each to low- and middle-income high school students to help them pay for college.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provide additional examples of "a theft from those who hunger and are not fed." These wars cost the United States about $1.3 trillion through 2012, for an average of more than $100 billion annually (Harrison, 2012).Harrison, T. (2012). *Analysis of the FY2012 defense budget*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. This same yearly amount could have paid for one year's worth (California cost figures) of **all** of the following (National Priorities Project, 2012):National Priorities Project. (2012). Trade-offs. Retrieved February 16, 2012, from http://costofwar.com/en/tradeoffs/state/CA/program/11/tradeoff/0.

- 146,000 police officers
- 9.5 million children receiving low-income health care (Medicaid)
- 1.7 million students receiving full-tuition scholarships at state universities
- 1.6 million Head Start slots for children
- 179,000 elementary school teachers
- 162,000 firefighters
- 2.5 million Pell Grants of $5,550 each

All these figures demonstrate that war and preparation for war indeed have a heavy human cost, not only in the numbers of dead and wounded, but also in the diversion of funds from important social functions and needs.

## The Debate over the Size of the Military Budget

This diversion of funds is unfortunate, but it might still be necessary if the high level of US military spending is needed to ensure the nation's security. Experts disagree over this issue. Some think the United States needs to maintain and in fact increase its level of military spending, even with the Cold War long ended, to replace aging weapons systems, to meet the threat posed by terrorists and by "rogue" nations such as Iran, and to respond to various other trouble spots around the world. Military spending is good for workers, they add, because it creates jobs, and it also contributes to technological development (Boot, 2012; England, 2012; McKeon, 2012).Boot, M. (2012). Slashing America's defense: A suicidal trajectory. Retrieved February 20, 2012, from http://www.cfr.org/defense-policy-and-budget/slashing-americas-defense-suicidal-trajectory/p26989; England, G. (2012, February 5). Military preparedness does not come cheap. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/military-preparedness-does-not-come-cheap/2012/02/05/gIQA5PLfsQ_story.html; McKeon, H. P. B. (2012, January 12). Obama's damaging blow to our military. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/obamas-damaging-blow-to-our-military/2012/01/12/gIQA3eMhuP_story.html.

Other experts echo President Eisenhower's concern over the size of the military budget (Bacevich, 2011; Korb, Rothman, & Hoffman, 2012; Lochhead, 2012; Wheeler, 2009).Bacevich, A. (2011). *Washington rules: America's path to permanent war*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books; Korb, L. J., Rothman, A., & Hoffman, M. (2012). *The fiscal year 2013 defense budget: A report card*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; Lochhead, C. (2012, February 14). Obama's defense cuts are a drop in the bucket. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A6; Wheeler, W. T. (2009). *America's defense meltdown: Pentagon reform for President Obama and the new Congress* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Noting that the military budget today exceeds the average budget during the Cold War, they think military spending is far higher than it needs to be to ensure the nation's defense with the Soviet Union no longer a threat. They say the United States could safely decrease its nuclear and conventional weapons arsenals without at all endangering national security. They also say that the stationing of some 300,000 American troops on 865 military bases abroad at the time of this writing, including 81,000 troops in Europe and 220,000 in other nations, is hardly needed to ensure the nation's defense. As one scholar said of the military bases, "It makes as much sense for the Pentagon to hold onto 227 military bases in Germany as it would for the post office to maintain a fleet of horses and buggies" (vanden Heuvel, 2011).vanden Heuvel, K. (2011, June 13). Around the globe, US military bases generate resentment, not security. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/161378/around-globe-us-military-bases-generate-resentment-not-security.

These experts say the military budget is bloated for at least four reasons. First, the defense industry is very effective at lobbying Congress for increased military spending, with the cozy relationship among members of the military-industrial complex helping to ensure the effectiveness of this lobbying. Second, members of Congress fear being labeled "weak on defense" if they try to reduce the military budget or do not agree to new weapons systems requested by the Pentagon. Regarding this fear, former US senator and presidential candidate George McGovern (2011, p. 47),McGovern, G. (2011). *What it means to be a democrat*. New York, NY: Penguin. a decorated World War II hero, writes, "We need to end the false choice between a bloated budget and a weak spine."

Third, and helping to explain the success of this lobbying, military spending provides jobs and income to the home districts of members of Congress. Fourth, *military waste* in the form of cost overruns from poor accounting and other management failures is

rampant. As just one example of such waste, a 2011 federal audit found that cost overruns over the prior two years had added at least $70 billion to projected costs of various weapons systems (Drew, 2011).Drew, C. (2011, March 30). Audit of Pentagon spending finds $70 billion in waste. *New York Times*, p. B4. A major reason for this problem was that the Pentagon had begun building these systems before their designs had been completely tested.

Critics also argue that military spending actually produces fewer jobs than spending in other sectors (Ledbetter, 2011).Ledbetter, J. (2011). *Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the military-industrial complex*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. According to a recent estimate, $1 billion spent by the Pentagon creates 11,200 jobs, but the same $1 billion spent in other sectors would create 16,800 clean energy jobs, 17,200 health-care jobs, and 26,700 education jobs (Pollin & Garrett-Peltier, 2011).Pollin, R., & Garrett-Peltier, H. (2011). *The US employment effects of military and domestic spending priorities: 2011 update*. Amherst, MA: Political Economy Research Institutes. To quote the title of a recent report, military spending is "a poor job creator" (Hartung, 2012).Hartung, W. D. (2012). *Military spending: A poor job creator*. Washington, DC: Center for International Policy. This report concluded that "the more money we spend on unneeded weapons programs, the more layoffs there will be of police officers, firefighters, teachers, and other workers whose jobs are funded directly or indirectly by federal spending."

As this overview of the debate over military spending indicates, the military remains a hot topic more than two decades after the Cold War ended following the demise of the Soviet Union. As we move further into the twenty-first century, the issue of military spending will present a major challenge for US political and economic institutions to address in a way that meets America's international and domestic interests.

## Key Takeaways

- War is a social phenomenon in which a mixture of motives underlies decisions to go to war.
- War has significant impacts, but perhaps most of all on civilians and veterans.
- US military spending amounts to more than $1 trillion annually.
- Critics of the military budget say that the billions of dollars spent on weapons and other military needs would be better spent on domestic needs such as schools and day care.

## For Your Review

1. Do you think the US military budget should be increased, be reduced, or stay about the same? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think is the worst problem that veterans have faced in returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Why?

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# 16.7: Terrorism

## Terrorism

**Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why terrorism is difficult to define.
2. List the major types of terrorism.
3. Evaluate the law enforcement and structural-reform approaches for dealing with terrorism.



*The 9/11 attacks spawned an immense national security network and prompted the expenditure of more than $3 trillion on the war against terrorism.*

*Image courtesy of Michael Foran, http://www.flickr.com/photos/pixorama/239262070/in/pool-29934416@N00/*

Terrorism is hardly a new phenomenon, but Americans became horrifyingly familiar with it on September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks remain in the nation's consciousness, and many readers may know someone who died on that terrible day. The attacks also spawned a vast national security network that now reaches into almost every aspect of American life. This network is so secretive, so huge, and so expensive that no one really knows precisely how large it is or how much it costs (Priest & Arkin, 2010).Priest, D., & Arkin, W. M. (2010, July 20). A hidden world, growing beyond control. *The Washington Post*, p. A1. However, it is thought to include 1,200 government organizations, 1,900 private companies, and almost 900,000 people with security clearances (Applebaum, 2011).Applebaum, A. (2011, September 2). The price we paid for the war on terror. *The Washington Post*, p. A17. The United States has spent an estimated $3 trillion since 9/11 on the war on terrorism, including more than $1 trillion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan whose relevance for terrorism has been sharply questioned. Questions of how best to deal with terrorism continue to be debated, and there are few, if any, easy answers to these questions.

Not surprisingly, sociologists and other scholars have written many articles and books about terrorism. This section draws on their work to discuss the definition of terrorism, the major types of terrorism, explanations for terrorism, and strategies for dealing with terrorism. An understanding of all these issues is essential to make sense of the concern and controversy about terrorism that exists throughout the world today.

## Defining Terrorism

There is an old saying that "one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist." This saying indicates some of the problems in defining terrorism precisely. Some years ago, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) waged a campaign of terrorism against the British government and its people as part of its effort to drive the British out of Northern Ireland. Many people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere hailed IRA members as freedom fighters, while many other people condemned them as cowardly terrorists. Although most of the world labeled the 9/11 attacks as terrorism, some individuals applauded them as acts of heroism. These examples indicate that there is only a thin line, if any, between terrorism on the one hand and freedom fighting and heroism on the other hand. Just as beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, so is terrorism. The same type of action is either terrorism or freedom fighting, depending on who is characterizing the action.

Although dozens of definitions of **terrorism** exist, most take into account what are widely regarded as the three defining features of terrorism: (a) the use of violence; (b) the goal of making people afraid; and (c) the desire for political, social, economic, and/or cultural change. A popular definition by political scientist Ted Robert Gurr (1989, p. 201)Gurr, T. R. (1989). Political terrorism:

Historical antecedents and contemporary trends. In T. R. Gurr (Ed.), *Violence in America: Protest, rebellion, reform* (Vol. 2, pp. 201–230). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. captures these features: “The use of unexpected violence to intimidate or coerce people in the pursuit of political or social objectives.”



*As the attacks on 9/11 remind us, terrorism involves the use of indiscriminate violence to instill fear in a population and thereby win certain political, economic, or social objectives.*

*Image courtesy of Bill Biggart, http://www.flickr.com/photos/nostri-imago/4951407339.*

## Types of Terrorism

When we think about this definition, 9/11 certainly comes to mind, but there are, in fact, several kinds of terrorism—based on the identity of the actors and targets of terrorism—to which this definition applies. A typology of terrorism, again by Gurr (1989),Gurr, T. R. (1989). Political terrorism: Historical antecedents and contemporary trends. In T. R. Gurr (Ed.), *Violence in America: Protest, rebellion, reform* (Vol. 2, pp. 201–230). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. is popular: (a) vigilante terrorism, (b) insurgent terrorism, (c) transnational (or international) terrorism, and (d) state terrorism. Table 16.3 summarizes these four types.

Table 16.3 Types of Terrorism

| | |
|---|---|
| Vigilante Terrorism | Violence committed by private citizens against other private citizens |
| Insurgent Terrorism | Violence committed by private citizens against their own governments or against businesses and institutions seen as as representing the " establishment" |
| Transnational Terrorism | Violence committed by citizens of one nation against targets in another nation. |
| State Terrorism | Violence committed by a government against its own citizens |

**Vigilante terrorism** is committed by private citizens against other private citizens. Sometimes the motivation is racial, ethnic, religious, or other hatred, and sometimes the motivation is to resist social change. The violence of racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan was vigilante terrorism, as was the violence used by white Europeans against Native Americans from the 1600s through the 1800s. What we now call “hate crime” is a contemporary example of vigilante terrorism.

**Insurgent terrorism** is committed by private citizens against their own government or against businesses and institutions seen as representing the “establishment.” Insurgent terrorism is committed by both left-wing groups and right-wing groups and thus has no political connotation. US history is filled with insurgent terrorism, starting with some of the actions the colonists waged against British forces before and during the American Revolution, when “the meanest and most squalid sort of violence was put to the service of revolutionary ideals and objectives” (Brown, 1989, p. 25).Brown, R. M. (1989). Historical patterns of violence. In T. R. Gurr (Ed.), *Violence in America: Protest, rebellion, reform* (Vol. 2, pp. 23–61). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. An example here is tarring and feathering: hot tar and then feathers were smeared over the unclothed bodies of Tories. Some of the labor violence committed after the Civil War also falls under the category of insurgent terrorism, as does some of the violence committed

by left-wing groups during the 1960s and 1970s. A relatively recent example of right-wing insurgent terrorism is the infamous 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols that killed 168 people.

**Transnational terrorism** is committed by the citizens of one nation against targets in another nation. This is the type that has most concerned Americans at least since 9/11, yet 9/11 was not the first time Americans had been killed by international terrorism. A decade earlier, a truck bombing at the World Trade Center killed six people and injured more than 1,000 others. In 1988, 189 Americans were among the 259 passengers and crew who died when a plane bound for New York exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland; agents from Libya were widely thought to have planted the bomb. Despite all these American deaths, transnational terrorism has actually been much more common in several other nations: London, Madrid, and various cities in the Middle East have often been the targets of international terrorists.

**State terrorism** involves violence by a government that is meant to frighten its own citizens and thereby stifle their dissent. State terrorism may involve mass murder, assassinations, and torture. Whatever its form, state terrorism has killed and injured more people than all the other kinds of terrorism combined (Gareau, 2010).Gareau, F. H. (2010). *State terrorism and the United States: From counterinsurgency to the war on terrorism*. Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press. Genocide, of course is the most deadly type of state terrorism, but state terrorism also occurs on a smaller scale. As just one example, the violent response of Southern white law enforcement officers to the civil rights protests of the 1960s amounted to state terrorism, as officers murdered or beat hundreds of activists during this period. Although state terrorism is usually linked to authoritarian regimes, many observers say the US government also engaged in state terror during the nineteenth century, when US troops killed thousands of Native Americans (D. A. Brown, 2009).Brown, D. A. (2009). *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian history of the American west*. New York, NY: Sterling Innovation.

## Explaining Terrorism



*Genocide is the most deadly type of state terrorism. The Nazi holocaust killed some 6 million Jews and 6 million other people.*

*Image courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buchenwald_Survivors_74607.jpg.*

Why does terrorism occur? It is easy to assume that terrorists must have psychological problems that lead them to have sadistic personalities, and that they are simply acting irrationally and impulsively. However, most researchers agree that terrorists are psychologically normal despite their murderous violence and, in fact, are little different from other types of individuals who use violence for political ends. As one scholar observed, “Most terrorists are no more or less fanatical than the young men who charged into Union cannon fire at Gettysburg or those who parachuted behind German lines into France. They are no more or less cruel and cold blooded than the Resistance fighters who executed Nazi officials and collaborators in Europe, or the American GI’s ordered to ‘pacify’ Vietnamese villages" (Rubenstein, 1987, p. 5).Rubenstein, R. E. (1987). *Alchemists of revolution: Terrorism in the modern world*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Contemporary terrorists tend to come from well-to-do families and to be well-educated themselves; ironically, their social backgrounds are much more advantaged in these respects than are those of common street criminals, despite the violence they commit.

If terrorism cannot be said to stem from individuals’ psychological problems, then what are its roots? In answering this question, many scholars say that terrorism has structural roots. In this view, terrorism is a rational response, no matter how horrible it may be,

to perceived grievances regarding economic, social, and/or political conditions (White, 2012).White, J. R. (2012). *Terrorism and homeland security: An introduction* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. The heads of the US 9/11 Commission, which examined the terrorist attacks of that day, reflected this view in the following assessment: "We face a rising tide of radicalization and rage in the Muslim world—a trend to which our own actions have contributed. The enduring threat is not Osama bin Laden but young Muslims with no jobs and no hope, who are angry with their own governments and increasingly see the United States as an enemy of Islam" (Kean & Hamilton, 2007, p. B1).Kean, T. H., & Hamilton, L. H. (2007, September 9). Are we safer today? *The Washington Post*, p. B1. As this assessment indicates, structural conditions do not justify terrorism, of course, but they do help explain why some individuals decide to commit it.

## The Impact of Terrorism

The major impact of terrorism is apparent from its definition, which emphasizes public fear and intimidation. Terrorism can work, or so terrorists believe, precisely because it instills fear and intimidation. Anyone who might have happened to be in or near New York City on 9/11 will always remember how terrified the local populace was to hear of the attacks and the fears that remained with them for the days and weeks that followed.

Another significant impact of terrorism is the response to it. As mentioned earlier, the 9/11 attacks led the United States to develop an immense national security network that defies description and expense, as well as the Patriot Act and other measures that some say threaten civil liberties; to start the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and to spend more than $3 trillion in just one decade on homeland security and the war against terrorism. Airport security increased, and Americans have grown accustomed to having to take off their shoes, display their liquids and gels in containers limited to three ounces, and stand in long security lines as they try to catch their planes.

People critical of these effects say that the "terrorists won," and, for better or worse, they may be correct. As one columnist wrote on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, "And yet, 10 years after 9/11, it's clear that the 'war on terror' was far too narrow a prism through which to see the planet. And the price we paid to fight it was far too high" (Applebaum, 2011, p. A17).Applebaum, A. (2011, September 2). The price we paid for the war on terror. *The Washington Post*, p. A17. In this columnist's opinion, the war on terror imposed huge domestic costs on the United States; it diverted US attention away from important issues regarding China, Latin America, and Africa; it aligned the United States with authoritarian regimes in the Middle East even though their authoritarianism helps inspire Islamic terrorism; and it diverted attention away from the need to invest in the American infrastructure: schools, roads, bridges, and medical and other research. In short, the columnist concluded, "in making Islamic terrorism our central priority—at times our only priority—we ignored the economic, environmental and political concerns of the rest of the globe. Worse, we pushed aside our economic, environmental and political problems until they became too great to be ignored" (Applebaum, 2011, p. A17).Applebaum, A. (2011, September 2). The price we paid for the war on terror. *The Washington Post*, p. A17.

To critics like this columnist, the threat to Americans of terrorism is "over-hyped" (Holland, 2011b).Holland, J. (2011, September 14). How fearmongering over terrorism is endangering American communities. *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/story/152403/how_fearmongering_over_terrorism_is_skewing_our_priorities_and_putting_us_all_at_risk_?page=entire. They acknowledge the 9/11 tragedy and the real fears of Americans, but they also point out that in the years since 9/11, the number of Americans killed in car accidents, by air pollution, by homicide, or even by dog bites or lightning strikes has greatly exceeded the number of Americans killed by terrorism. They add that the threat is overhyped because defense industry lobbyists profit from overhyping it and because politicians do not wish to be seen as "weak on terror." And they also worry that the war on terror has been motivated by and also contributed to prejudice against Muslims (Kurzman, 2011).Kurzman, C. (2011, July 31). Where are all the Islamic terrorists? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. *Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Where-Are-All-the-Islamic/128443/?sid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en*.

## Key Takeaways

- Terrorism involves the use of intimidating violence to achieve political ends. Whether a given act of violence is perceived as terrorism or as freedom fighting often depends on whether someone approves of the goal of the violence.
- Several types of terrorism exist. The 9/11 attacks fall into the transnational terrorism category.

## For Your Review

1. Do you think the US response to the 9/11 attacks has been appropriate, or do you think it has been too overdone? Explain your answer.
2. Do you agree with the view that structural problems help explain Middle Eastern terrorism? Why or why not?

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# 16.8: Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism

## Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism

**Learning Objectives**

1. Outline approaches that show promise for preventing war.
2. Understand the differences between the law enforcement and structural-reform approaches to preventing terrorism.

War has existed since prehistoric times, and terrorism goes back at least to the days of the Old Testament (e.g., when Samson brought down the temple of the Philistines in an act of suicide that also killed scores of Philistines). Given their long histories, war and terrorism are not easy to prevent. However, theory and research by sociologists and other social scientists point to several avenues that may ultimately help make the world more peaceful.

### Preventing War

The usual strategies suggested by political scientists and international relations experts to prevent war include arms control and diplomacy. Approaches to arms control and diplomacy vary in their actual and potential effectiveness. The historical and research literatures on these approaches are vast *(Daase & Meier, 2012; Garcia, 2012)Daase, C., & Meier, O. (Eds.). (2012). Arms control in the 21st century: Between coercion and cooperation. New York, NY: Routledge; Garcia, D. (2012). Disarmament diplomacy and human security: Regimes, norms, and moral progress in international relations*. New York, NY: Routledge. and beyond the scope of this chapter. Regardless of the specific approaches taken, suffice it here to say that arms control and diplomacy will always remain essential strategies to prevent war, especially in the nuclear age when humanity is only minutes away from possible destruction.

Beyond these two essential strategies, the roots of war must also be addressed. As discussed earlier, war is a social, not biological, phenomenon and arises from decisions by political and military leaders to go to war. There is ample evidence that deceit accompanies many of these decisions, as leaders go to many wars for less than noble purposes. To the extent this is true, citizens must always be ready to question any rationales given for war, and a free press in a democracy must exercise eternal vigilance in reporting on these rationales. According to critics, the press and the public were far too acquiescent in the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003, just as they had been acquiescent a generation earlier when the Vietnam War began being waged (Solomon, 2006).Solomon, N. (2006). *War made easy: How presidents and pundits keep spinning us to death* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. To prevent war, then, the press and the public must always be ready to question assumptions about the necessity of war. The same readiness should occur in regard to militarism and the size of the military budget.

In this regard, history shows that social movements can help prevent or end armament and war and limit the unchecked use of military power once war has begun (Breyman, 2001; Staggenborg, 2010).Breyman, S. (2001). *Why movements matter: The west German peace movement and US arms control policy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; Staggenborg, S. (2010). *Social movements*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. While activism is no guarantee of success, responsible nonviolent protest against war and militarism provides an important vehicle for preventing war or for more quickly ending a war once it has begun.

### People Making a Difference

Speaking Truth to Power

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that has long worked for peace and social justice. Its national office is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and it has local offices in more than thirty other US cities and also in more than a dozen other nations.

AFSC was established in 1917 to help conscientious objectors serve their country in nonmilitary ways during World War I. After that war ended with the defeat of Germany and Austria, AFSC provided food to thousands of German and Austrian children. It helped Jewish refugees after Hitler came to power, and sent various forms of aid to Japan after World War II ended. During the 1960s, it provided nonviolence training for civil rights activists and took a leading role in the movement to end the Vietnam War. Since the 1960s, AFSC has provided various types of help to immigrants, migrant workers, prisoners, and other “have-not” groups in need of social justice. It also works to achieve nonviolent conflict resolution in urban communities and spoke out against plans to begin war in Iraq in 2003.

In 1947, AFSC and its British counterpart won the Nobel Peace Prize for their aid to hungry children and other Europeans during and after World Wars I and II. The Nobel committee proclaimed in part, "The Quakers have shown us that it is possible to carry into action something which is deeply rooted in the minds of many: sympathy with others; the desire to help others…without regard to nationality or race; feelings which, when carried into deeds, must provide the foundations of a lasting peace."

For almost a century, the American Friends Service Committee has been active in many ways to achieve a more just, peaceable world. It deserves the world's thanks for helping to make a difference. For further information, visit http://www.afsc.org.

As we think about how to prevent war, we must not forget two important types of changes that create pressures for war: population change and environmental change. Effective efforts to reduce population growth in the areas of the world where it is far too rapid will yield many benefits, but one of these is a lower likelihood that certain societies will go to war. Effective efforts to address climate change will also yield many benefits, and one of these is also a lower likelihood of war and ethnic conflict in certain parts of the world.

Finally, efforts to prevent war must keep in mind the fact that ideological differences and prejudice sometimes motivate decisions to go to war. It might sound rather idealistic to say that governments and their citizenries should respect ideological differences and not be prejudiced toward people who hold different religious or other ideologies or have different ethnic backgrounds. However, any efforts by international bodies, such as the United Nations, to achieve greater understanding along these lines will limit the potential for war and other armed conflict. The same potential holds true for efforts to increase educational attainment within the United States and other industrial nations but especially within poor nations. Because prejudice generally declines as education increases, measures that raise educational attainment promise to reduce the potential for armed conflict in addition to the other benefits of increased education.

In addition to these various strategies to prevent war, it is also vital to reduce the size of the US military budget. Defense analysts who think this budget is too high have proposed specific cuts in weapons systems that are not needed and in military personnel at home and abroad who are not needed (Arquilla & Fogelson-Lubliner, 2011; Knight, 2011; Sustainable Defense Task Force, 2010).Arquilla, J., & Fogelson-Lubliner. (2011, March 13). The Pentagon's biggest boondoggles. *New York Times*, p. WK12; Knight, C. (2011). *Strategic adjustment to sustain the force: A survey of current proposals*. Cambridge, MA: Project on Defense Alternatives; Sustainable Defense Task Force. (2010). *Debt, deficits, & defense: A way forward*. Cambridge, MA: Project on Defense Alternatives. Making these cuts would save the nation from $100 billion to $150 billion annually without at all endangering national security. This large sum could then be spent to help meet the nation's many unmet domestic needs.

## Stopping Terrorism

Because of 9/11 and other transnational terrorism, most analyses of "stopping terrorism" focus on this specific type. Traditional efforts to stop transnational terrorism take two forms (White, 2012).White, J. R. (2012). *Terrorism and homeland security: An introduction* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. The first strategy involves attempts to capture known terrorists and to destroy their camps and facilities and is commonly called a *law enforcement* or *military* approach. The second strategy stems from the recognition of the structural roots of terrorism just described and is often called a *structural-reform* approach. Each approach has many advocates among terrorism experts, and each approach has many critics.

Law enforcement and military efforts have been known to weaken terrorist forces, but terrorist groups have persisted despite these measures. Worse yet, these measures may ironically inspire terrorists to commit further terrorism and increase public support for their cause. Critics also worry that the military approach endangers civil liberties, as the debate over the US response to terrorism since 9/11 so vividly illustrates (Cole & Lobel, 2007).Cole, D., & Lobel, J. (2007). *Less safe, less free: Why America is losing the war on terror*. New York, NY: New Press. This debate took an interesting turn in late 2010 amid the increasing use of airport scanners that generate body images. Many people criticized the scanning as an invasion of privacy, and they also criticized the invasiveness of the "pat-down" searches that were used for people who chose not to be scanned (Reinberg, 2010).Reinberg, S. (2010, November 23). Airport body scanners safe, experts say. *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com.

In view of all these problems, many terrorism experts instead favor the structural-reform approach, which they say can reduce terrorism by improving or eliminating the conditions that give rise to the discontent that leads individuals to commit terrorism. Here again the assessment of the heads of the 9/11 Commission illustrates this view: "We must use all the tools of U.S. power—including foreign aid, educational assistance and vigorous public diplomacy that emphasizes scholarship, libraries and exchange programs—to shape a Middle East and a Muslim world that are less hostile to our interests and values. America's long-term

security relies on being viewed not as a threat but as a source of opportunity and hope" *(Kean & Hamilton, 2007, p. B1).Kean, T. H., & Hamilton, L. H. (2007, September 9). Are we safer today? The Washington Post, p. B1.*

Although there are no easy solutions to transnational terrorism, then, efforts to stop this form of terrorism must not neglect its structural roots. As long as these roots persist, new terrorists will come along to replace any terrorists who are captured or killed. Such recognition of the ultimate causes of transnational terrorism is thus essential for the creation of a more peaceable world.

## Key Takeaways

- Arms control and diplomacy remain essential strategies for stopping war, but the roots of war must also be addressed.
- The law enforcement/military approach to countering terrorism may weaken terrorist groups, but it also may increase their will to fight and popular support for their cause and endanger civil liberties.

## For Your Review

1. Do you think deceit was involved in the decision of the United States to go to war against Iraq in 2003? Why or why not?
2. Which means of countering terrorism do you prefer more, the law enforcement/military approach or the structural-reform approach? Explain your answer.

## End-of-Chapter Material

**Summary**

1. President Eisenhower warned of the dangers of a high military budget and the militarism of the United States.
2. War actually serves several functions according to functional theory, but conflict theory emphasizes the many problems war causes and the role played in militarism by the military-industrial complex. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the experiences of soldiers and civilians in the military and in wartime and on their perceptions of war and the military.
3. War is best regarded as a social phenomenon rather than a biological phenomenon. Decisions to go to war are sometimes based on noble reasons, but they also involve deceit and prejudice.
4. Civilians and veterans are both victims of war. Civilian deaths in war are almost inevitable, and atrocities are far from rare. American veterans are at greater risk for PTSD, unemployment, and several other problems that also affect their families.
5. The United States has the highest military budget by far in the world. Debate continues over the size of this budget; critics say that the United States would have a higher quality of life if the military budget were reduced and the saved dollars spent on unmet social needs.
6. Terrorism is best regarded as rational behavior committed for political reasons rather than as psychologically abnormal behavior. The US response to the 9/11 attacks has cost hundreds of billions of dollars, and critics say that the war on terrorism has both exaggerated the threat of terrorism and diverted attention and funds from unmet social needs.

## Using What You Know

You are a key aide to a US senator who has been asked to participate in a university forum on the size of the US military budget. The senator asks you to write a memo for her that summarizes the arguments on both sides of debate on the military budget and that also indicates your own view of what position the senator should take on this debate. What position will you recommend to the senator? Explain your answer in detail.

## What You Can Do

To help deal with the problems of war and terrorism discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Educate yourself about the military budget and publish a pamphlet on the web and/or in print that critically examines the size of this budget.
2. Form or join a peace group on your campus or in the surrounding community that calls attention to the various problems related to the military that were discussed in this chapter.
3. Because prejudice against Muslims increased after 9/11, form or join a group in your campus or surrounding community that seeks to improve relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

## End of Chapter Discussions

1. "Discuss how conflict theory, functionalist and symbolic interactionism can be applied to the study of war and terrorism. Choose one historical context, such as world wars or United States wars, and analyze it as a social phenomenon. Explore how

ideologies, prejudices and sociopolitical changes have contributed to the initiation and perpetuation of conflicts. How do these sociological theories help us understand the dynamics of war and terrorism in different contexts?"

2. "Investigate the broader social impact of war, including its effects on civilian populations and veterans. Examine the prevalence and consequences of rape and sexual assault in war contexts and the societal challenges in supporting and rehabilitating American veterans. Additionally, analyze other social impacts of war, such as changes in population, ideologies and social structures. How can a sociological perspective help us comprehend and address these complex societal issues?"
3. "Analyze military policies and efforts to prevent war and terrorism, both from a national and international perspective. Explore topics like militarism, the U.S. military budget and arms exports. Discuss terrorism as a global sociological issue and explore strategies for preventing war and countering terrorism. Consider sociological perspectives on global efforts to address and mitigate the root causes and consequences of war and terrorism. Are there any recent examples or initiatives that illustrate the effectiveness or challenges of these efforts?"

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# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 17: Whose Lives Matter? Social Movements and Social Justice


17.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives
17.2: Applying the Social Problems Process to #BlackLivesMatter
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# 17.1: Chapter Overview and Learning Objectives

**Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Apply the social problems process to better understand the history of #BlackLivesMatter.
2. Explain why some people are more likely than others to be considered criminals because of their gender, race and ethnicity, social class, age, or other aspect of their social locations.
3. Describe what it means to be anti-racist.
4. Discuss the differences between social movement theories.
5. Explain how organizers effectively used social media in each of the phases of a social movement to support social justice.

## Chapter Overview

> *With deep gratitude to the 2012-2014 Masters in Cultural Studies University of Washington Bothell cohort and to our teachers. This chapter is grounded in our shared learning.*
> *– Nora Karena*




**Figure 9.1** 100 Days of Protest in Portland [YouTube]. In 2020, civil unrest in Portland continued for more than 100 days and captured national attention. To begin our exploration of social movements in response to the social problems that inspired Black Lives Matter protests in Portland and around the county, please watch at least the first 5 minutes of this video. Transcript

> *"Social movements are not marginal to society. They are social engines of social change." – Aldon Morris*

What do you think of when you hear, "Black Lives Matter?" You might think of protests, police violence against People of Color, or some of the counter-protests. Fundamentally, Black Lives Matter is a response to racial inequity. Racial inequity exists when different racial groups experience unequal outcomes. In 2013, #BlackLivesMatter emerged as an urgent and provocative claim driving the most recent iteration of a centuries-long social movement for racial justice in the US Racial justice is a response to racism that seeks to change social systems in order to reduce racial inequities and to address the social and interpersonal conditions caused by racial inequities. As you might remember from Chapter 2, racism is the marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.

In the summer of 2020, Portland, Oregon was one of many cities across the US that erupted in nightly protests against the over-policing of Black people. Protests in Portland continued for more than 100 days and captured national attention. These ongoing protests of outrage and dissent amplified critical narratives about policing and racism that continue to shape public policy in the city. To see highlights of the protests, please watch the first 5 minutes of the video in Figure 9.1.

Since the summer of 2020, BLM-inspired strides towards racial justice, in terms of both public opinion and policy change, have coincided with a so-called "anti-woke backlash," which includes attempts by activists and elected officials to censor educational materials about racism, intersectionality, queer studies, and other critical theories. In 2023, as of this writing, the police have killed more than 1200 people. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Black, Native American, and Hispanic people are more likely to be killed by the police than White people. If you would like to look at the most current statistics, feel free to examine Mapping Police Violence [webpage].

In this chapter, we consider the impacts of the social movement identified with #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) as a case study of how social movements can drive social change. We will apply the social problems process to policing in underserved communities. To understand how sociologists think about social movements, we will also trace out a history of BLM organizing within a broader movement to reimagine safe communities and consider theoretical and activist lineages with roots in the emancipatory sociology of W.E.B. Du Bois and the civil rights movement of the mid-20th Century.

We will get to know Alicia Garza, Ayo Tometi, and Patrice Cullors, organizers with a bold abolitionist vision who built a platform that has transformed the global conversation about racism, policing, and the value of Black lives. Finally, we will consider claims that policing can be considered a racist response to the social problems associated with communities that have been historically under-resourced and under-represented in the US

## Focusing Questions

Here are some questions to consider as you work through this chapter:

1. How do we apply the social problems process to better understand the history of #BlackLivesMatter?
2. Why are some people more likely than others to be considered criminals because of their gender, race and ethnicity, social class, age, or other aspect of their social locations?
3. What does it mean to be anti-racist?
4. How do sociologists explain social movements?
5. How did organizers effectively use social media in each of the phases of a social movement to support social justice?

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Figure 9.1. "100 Days of Protest in Portland" by The Oregonian is licensed under the Standard YouTube License.

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# 17.2: Applying the Social Problems Process to #BlackLivesMatter

Recall from Chapter 1 that most social problems go through a social problems process consisting of the following stages of development: *claimsmaking*, *media coverage*, *public reaction*, *policymaking*, *social problems work*, and *policy outcomes* (Best 2021:15). In this section, we will trace this pattern through the Portland protests of 2020. This section also explores inequalities in class, race, and policing. As you read, consider how you have observed this pattern in other social problems.

## Claimsmaking and Media Coverage

Claimsmaking: In this step, people and groups identify an issue, and they try to convince others to take it seriously. The problem in this step is called a claim "an argument that a particular troubling condition needs to be addressed" (Best 2020:15). In this stage, people who may not agree that a problem exists agree on what to do about it or who should take action

Media Coverage: In the second step, claimsmakers use media to build a base of people and groups who agree with them on the causes, impacts, and desired outcomes of the particular issue at hand.




**Figure 9.2** George Floyd was one of a very long list of Black people killed by police and vigilantes in the US. Did you see video footage of Mr. Floyd's Murder? How did it impact you?

On Monday, May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd. One of four Minneapolis police officers who arrested Floyd for allegedly trying to pass a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill, Chauvin forced Floyd to the ground and knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes. Floyd struggled to breathe, cried out in fear and pain to his mother and to his God, and foretold his own death, but Chauvin did not let up until Floyd lost consciousness. Floyd was pronounced dead at the hospital later that afternoon. Like Ahmaud Arbery, killed by White vigilantes in Februarypolice and Breonna Taylor, killed by police policech 2020, Floyd is one on a very long list of Black people killed by police and vigilantes in the US (Figure 9.2).

Horrified bystanders captured a video of Floyd's murder and shared it on social media. In the first week after Floyd's murder, 3.4 million original posts and 69 billion engagements accounted for around 15% of all posts on Twitter during that week. By June 8th, #BlackLivesMatter was mentioned in 1.2 million original posts (Wirtschafter 2021).

However, this hashtag didn't start in 2020. **#BlackLivesMatter** is a hashtag that first went viral in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. In the decade following its introduction, #BlackLivesMatter became a popular organizing tool on social media. This hashtag draws attention to racist violence in the US It is a code for a set of claims about racism, policing, lynching, and underserved communities. **Underserved communities** are groups with limited or no access to resources or are otherwise disenfranchised (FEMA 2023).

## Claim: Lynching and Racist Policing

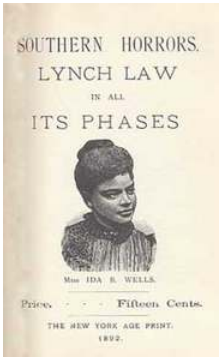



**Figure 9.3** Journalist Ida B. Wells wrote *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases* in 1892 to expose the racial violence in the South. Do you see evidence of racial violence in your community?

Lynchings are extrajudicial killings in which an individual or a mob kidnaps, tortures, and kills persons suspected of crime or social transgressions. Extrajudicial killings are murders by a person with authority, without any legal process (OMCT World Organization Against Torture 2023). In the US, the victims are most often Black men, women, and children. The perpetrators are almost never punished. More than 4,400 lynchings have been documented in the US between 1877 and 1950 (Taylor and Vinson 2020). Racially motivated lynchings are a means of social control that reinforces the dominance of White people within a racial hierarchy.

In the late 19th and early 20th Century, the journalist Ida. B. Wells wrote about lynchings as part of her work to document discrimination against Black people (Figure 9.3). She found that the prevalent myth that Black men were lynched because they raped White women, was just that – a lie. Instead, she argued that lynching was a method of social control to suppress Black freedom and the right to vote by violence and murder.

Sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, who we met in Chapter 3, led the N.A.A.C.P. in an anti-lynching campaign that reduced lynchings. This campaign inspired the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century. Despite the progressive gains these movements achieved, the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager on his way home, and the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the man who killed him, was a painful reminder that the extrajudicial killing of Black people has never stopped. Explicit racial bias has been demonstrated in some police departments. In a 2022 investigation of the Minneapolis Police Department, researchers found that:

> *…based on interviews and a review of 700 hours of body camera footage, identified an exhaustive list of slurs that officers and supervisors consistently use against women and Black people, including suspects, witnesses, bystanders and their own colleagues. (Dewan 2022)*

They also identified “patterns of discrimination in arrests and use of force (Dewan 2022).”

Portland police also have a well-documented record of individual police officers expressing racist ideas about Black people. A 2012 report documents a long and troubled history of racist policing, including an incident of harassment in which several Portland officers left dead animals at a popular restaurant owned by a Black person. You have the option to read the full 2012 report, Black and Blue: Police-Community Relations in Portland’s Albina District, 1964-1985.



**Figure 9.4** Robin DiAngelo is a White working class educator and the author of *White Fragility* and *Nice Racism*. She has written extensively about the lengths people will go to to avoid being labeled racist, even when expressing racist ideas. Have you ever been told you were being racist? How did that make you feel? Did you take action to change or heal the harm?

Violence arises from prejudice. As you might remember from Chapter 5, prejudice is an unfavorable preconceived feeling or opinion formed without knowledge or reason that prevents objective consideration of an individual or group. Many advocates for police and policing resist claims of racism by asserting that such atprejudicere the result of individual prejudice held by a few "bad apples" rather than a culture of racism. Robin DiAngelo (Figure 9.4), an educator who studies racism, has written extensively about the lengths people will go to to avoid being labeled racist, even when expressing racist ideas (DiAngelo 2018). Most people, including police officers, resist being thought of as racist, but individual racial bias is only one dimension of racism.

Claims of racism and racist policing also rest on racial disparities and historical patterns of policing. Racial disparity is the unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group compared with outcomes for another racial or ethnic group (Children's Bureau 2021:2). Racial disparities are sometimes called racial inequities. For example, BLM organizers and their allies point to higher percentages of Black people being stopped, arrested, imprisoned, and killed by police than White people. In Portland, Black people make up only 5.3% of the city population, yet they account for 22.6% of traffic stops and 16 % of pedestrian stops in 2019. They are also arrested at a rate 4.3 times higher than White people. Furthermore, Black people are killed by Portland police 3.9 times more than White people (Levinson 2021).

This pattern of racial inequity repeats in cities across the US A 2020 study found "that while Black people were much more likely to be pulled over than Whites, the disparity lessens at night, when police are less able to distinguish the race of the driver." The study also found that Black people were more likely to be searched after a stop, though White people were more likely to be found with illicit drugs (Pierson et al. 2020). In the US, Black men are about 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than White men. Black women are about 1.4 times more likely to be killed by police than White women (Edwards, Lee, and Esposito 2019).

Claims of racist policing also rest on scholarship about the history of policing in America. For example, Irish police officers in 1830's Boston were specifically hired to police communities of formerly enslaved people who were Black (NPR 2020). Slave patrols and Jim Crow-era policing of Black communities are well documented (NAACP N.d). Please watch this brief video to learn more about this history (Figure 9.5).



**Figure 9.5** Please watch the 4:51 video, NPR Throughline, History of Policing in America [YouTube], to learn more about the history of policing. What structural and individual causes of racist policing do you see? Transcript

This historic construction of racist policing recalls Racial Formation Theory. We explored this theory by Omi and Winant (1986) in Chapter 3. The theory describes how racial classifications are created, changed, and recreated through racial projects, like policing, which attach meaning and power to racial categories. Policing becomes a racist practice when Black people get profiled as more likely to be considered a threat to public safety than White people.

Critical Race Theory, also introduced in Chapter 3, helps us understand how legal statutes like The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (H.R.5484) actually create and sustain racial inequity. Another institution that contributes to racial inequities is the United States Criminal Justice System, which relies on legal codes, criminalization, policing, and punishment to mediate conflict, protect property, and maintain social order.

These laws include the Crime Bill (H.R.3355), which significantly expanded prisons and funded 100,000 new police officers. They also include the 1998 Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), which limits access to financial aid for students who have been convicted of a drug felony (Whitman and Exarhos 2020).

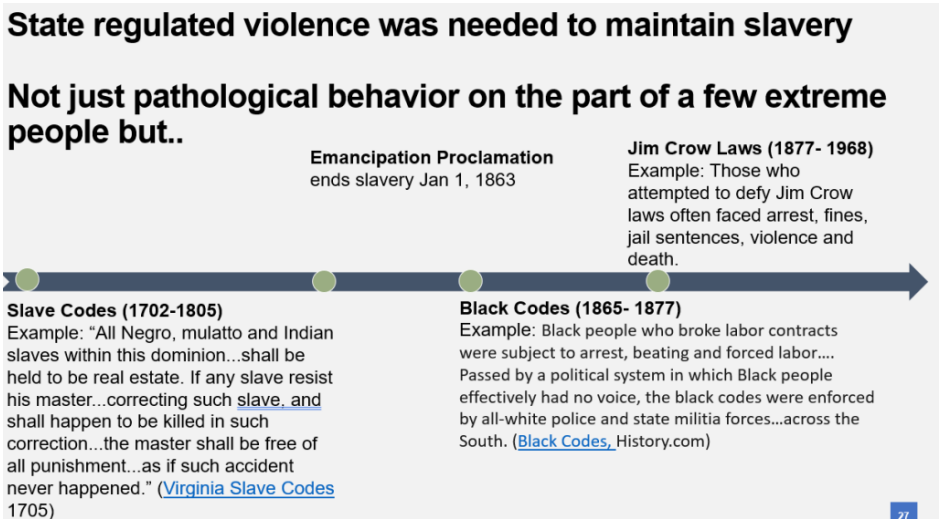



**Figure 9.6** State regulated violence was needed to maintain slavery and subsequent racial inequality, using Slave Codes, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws. Although these three sets of laws are illegal, where do you see racial inequality supported in other laws, policies, or practices? Image Description

Critical race scholarship further places this legislation within the historical context of legal statutes that regulated Black lives. A timeline of these laws and policies is shown in Figure 9.6. These laws began with the Slave Codes. After the Civil War, Slave Codes became Black Codes. They restricted Black people's right to own property, conduct business, and move freely through public spaces. They fed a convict leasing system that replaced slavery as a source of cheap labor for enslavers. Black Codes then became Jim Crow Laws in many states, legally segregating Black people and White people. In each case, the laws reinforced the racist and incorrect ideas that Black people were dangerous and needed controlling. These ideas are wrong.

## Claim: Under-resourced Communities

This claim centers the social devastation of historic racism in BIPOC communities. BIPOC is an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It is used to refer to people whose communities have been historically under-resourced, over-policed, disproportionately impacted by social problems, and underrepresented in terms of institutional power in the United States because of their assigned race category.

The history of exclusion, segregation, and discriminatory lending practices described in Chapter 6 created the social and economic conditions in the under-resourced communities we are looking at in this chapter. Under-resourced communities are areas with relatively high poverty rates that lack robust economic infrastructure. While the term often refers to cities and suburbs with populations of over 250,000 people, many rural communities are also under-resourced (adapted from Eberhardt, Wial, and Yee 2020:5). In the South, Midwest, and Northeast, these neighborhoods are disproportionately Black. In the West, these neighborhoods are disproportionately Latinx.

The legacy of economic exclusion and discrimination is well demonstrated in a 2014 report from Portland State University. The report found that African-American family income is less than half that of White families. The poverty rate among African-American children is nearly 50% compared to 13% for White children. Local unemployment levels in 2009 for African-American people were nearly double the unemployment rate for White people.

Researchers also found that “fewer than one-third of African-American households own their homes, compared to about 60% of White households, and that African-Americans have experienced housing displacement and the loss of community as the historic Albina District has gentrified” (Coalition of Communities of Color 2014:3). The same study also documented substantial disparities for health outcomes like diabetes, stroke, andhealthirth weight, and in acceshealthealth insurance, prenatal care, and mental health care. If you would like to read the full report, consider how The African American Community in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile [Report], clearly documents racial inequality.

Demands for police reform and prison abolition argue that policing and the prison system are inadequate responses to the social problems that impact historically disadvantaged communities. The call for “defunding the police” is a call for recognizing that poverty is not caused by crime and for redirecting resources to programs that actually support the well-being of communities disproportionately impacted by poverty.



**Figure 9.7** Social geographer and Black activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore traces the physical locations of prisons to better understand how economic systems create privilege and oppression. Along with Angela Davis, she champions prison abolition. What do you think a world without prisons would be like?

Social geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Figure 9.7) applies a Marxist analysis to the economic conditions that accompanied the massive expansion of prisons in California. She demonstrates that the US prison system grew to contain and control surplus labor as low-wage workers in historically disadvantaged communities lost access to jobs during the 1980s and 1990s. She also argues that mass incarceration prevents displaced workers from building robust labor movements that might challenge these exclusionary economic conditions (Wilson Gilmore 2007).

In 1996, Gilmore partnered with Angela Davis, whom we met in Chapter 1, to organize Critical Resistance, a social movement organization that challenges the idea that imprisonment and policing are acceptable solutions for social, political, and economic problems. The contemporary prison abolition movement, with which many BLM organizers are aligned, can trace its roots to these organizing efforts. Please click the link if you’d like to learn more about Critical Resistance.

## Public Reaction

Public Reaction: According to Best, in this step, individuals, groups, and organizations begin to align to a particular explanation of the problem and request a change in policy or law. Most of the time, at this step, it is the power of social movements that create the changes in policy or law.

A protest is a public expression of objection, disapproval, or dissent towards an idea or action (Definition of Protest 2023). Social movements have used sustained protests to disrupt civic life, draw attention to how the system is not working, and demand change. Protests began on May 26, 2020, in Minneapolis and around the US, growing to more than 7700 Black Lives Matter-inspired protests by mid-August. Juneteenth weekend alone saw as many as 25 million people in the US, including many celebrities and public figures, publicly demand justice and change.




**Figure 9.8** The Pacific Northwest Youth Liberation Front protested during Black Lives Matter protests in Portland, Oregon. Why do you think young people emerge as leaders in movements for social justice?

On Thursday, May 28, 2020, the Pacific Northwest Youth Liberation Front (PNYLF) (Figure 9.8) organized a protest at The Multnomah County Detention Center demanding an end to state-sanctioned violence against Black people. The young, mostly White protesters chanted, "Black Lives Matter," "I Can't Breathe," and "Defund the Police." PNYLF followers describe themselves as a "decentralized network of autonomous youth collectives dedicated to direct action towards total liberation (Graves 2020). For PNYLF, total liberation includes ending mass incarceration. If you would like to learn more about the history of mass incarceration, check out this fact sheet from The Brennan Center for Justice.

The people who attended the official NAACP protest the next day were also predominantly White. Black civil rights leaders, including past and current leaders of the NAACP, The Portland Urban League, and a City Commissioner, along with local faith leaders, rallied around a symbolic plywood casket. The casket was surrounded by banners to honor the murdered—George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Micheal Brown, and Ahmaud Arbery. They called for an end to racist policing. They called on the growing crowds to "Stop killing us!" and to "Carry your White privilege to the point that it makes a difference." Despite the peaceful tone of the day, tempers and provocations flared with urgency as evening fell. Police and protesters clashed, and the Portland mayor declared the protest a riot (Graves 2020).

By the third night, the mayor declared a state of emergency, and parts of downtown Portland were boarded up. While most protests were peaceful and non-violent, news reports in July 2020 estimated that damage from the riots cost local businesses, mostly in the vicinity of the Multnomah County Justice Center, about $23 million dollars. Later reports reminded us that a significant portion of the lost revenue was related to COVID-19 business closures, not looting and vandalism (Bailey Jr 2020).

More protesters filled the streets each night. Violence escalated when militarized federal agents were deployed in the streets of Portland. Federal officials, including the Attorney General and the President, defended the action as necessary to protect federal property and to "prevent violence from spreading to other American cities." Many state and local leaders argued that federal intervention was an unnecessary political stunt that only further escalated tensions (Graves 2020).




Figure 9.9 Black Lives Matter protesters in Portland included some unexpected groups like the Wall of Moms (top) and Dads with Leaf Blowers (below). Who protested in your community?

The protesters, now in the thousands, responded as a Wall of Moms, Dads with leaf-blowers, (Figure 9.9), a naked White woman, along with a mostly White, multigenerational multitude of first-time protesters, who took turns confronting heavily armed federal forces and demanding an end to racist policing while declaring loudly that "Black Lives Matter." If you would like to learn more about these protesters, please read these articles: "Hear from the "Wall of Moms", Dad's with leaf-blowers, and 'Naked Athena': The story behind the surreal photos of Portland protester,

On July 30th, Oregon State Police were once again responding to the protests as federal agents began to withdraw, and the protests became more peaceful, though no less urgent.

The charged protests in downtown Portland were not the only protests for Black Lives in the state. Thirty-three Oregon towns saw overwhelmingly peaceful protests like the 25-50 people enthusiastically singing "Black Lives Matter" as they paraded up and down the main street in Manzanita every weekend throughout that grim COVID summer. More than 2,000 cities in 60 countries around the world saw similar protests (Wikipedia 2022).

It was and remains a contested, often heated conversation. Around the state, smaller groups of pro-police counter-protesters refuted claims of racist policing in Oregon and declared that, in fact, "Blue Lives Matter."

## Policy Making, Social Problems Work, and Policy Outcomes

The last three steps in Best's model of the social problems process are policymaking, social problems work, and policy outcomes. As a reminder:

Policy Making: In the policy making step, governments create new laws, and institutions create new policies to implement a response to a social problem.

Social Problems Work: Once a new policy is put into place or the law is signed, institutions must act to implement the change.

Policy Outcomes: In this step, claims makers examine the outcomes of the policies and actions taken to respond to the social problem. Often, the outcome of this step is the refinement of a claim and a request for more action.

Protests were not the only way Oregonians responded to the murder of George Floyd. The small town of Vernonia was one of several that issued resolutions supporting equality and inclusion. Book clubs and racial equity work groups were convened. BLM

took center stage as the whole state seemed to enter into an urgent public conversation about racism in Oregon, alternatives to policing, and what it might look like if Black lives really mattered here. If you'd like to learn more about this work, please review the blog Victory in Vernonia.

In June, more than 800 people, organized by Unite Oregon and Imagine Black, testified at city budget hearings and urged city officials to redirect $50 million dollars from policing to community support and to sever connections between Portland Public Schools and the Portland Police Bureau. The city budget cut $15,000,000 in funding for School Resource Officers and two other controversial policing programs. The Mayor also responded with a list of 19 proposed police reforms, 13 of which he achieved within the year. If you would like to learn more about Unite Oregon and Imagine Black, please check out their websites.

In July 2020, The Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives introduced the Breathe Act, which "offers a radical reimagining of public safety, community care, and how we spend money as a society." Two Members of Congress, Rashida Talib and Ayanna Pressley stepped up to champion the measure's "four simple ideas":

- Divest federal resources from incarceration and policing.
- Invest in new, non-punitive, non-carceral approaches to community safety that lead states to shrink their criminal-legal systems and center the protection of Black lives—including Black mothers, Black trans people, and Black women.
- Allocate new money to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities.
- Hold political leaders to their promises and enhance the self-determination of all Black communities (Movement For Black Lives 2020).

You can learn more about the Breathe Act if you would like to.

In April 2021, the Portland City Counsel's Racial Equity Steering Committee issued a 65-page report with recommendations for police reform that included improved racial equity training and assessment, along with proposed changes in the way law enforcement responds to houselessness and mental health crises (Abdurraqib 2021).

In 2021, the Oregon legislature passed HB 2930 to hold police more accountable for sexual assault and racial bias. By August 2022, the commission formed to draft the new rules and released a draft proposal for public comment. The proposal has been widely criticized for being too lenient and allowing officers who commit serious crimes to keep their jobs (Levinson 2022).

Portland police followed through on several of the requests, including more robust anti-bias training (Byrne 2021). Police agencies across the state have prioritized increasing racial and gender diversity in their recruitment and have begun to screen new hires for racial bias. However, these efforts have not been broadly supported by police officers. The majority of police personnel surveyed in 2021 thought that additional anti-bias training was unnecessary, and 15% of respondents said they had plans to leave within the year. A respondent quoted in the report described a general feeling within the rank and file that had been "betrayed" by "city leaders, elected officials, and community" (Gennaco et. al. 2022:47). Those who advance an abolitionist vision, in which there are no under-resourced communities, assert that we can't train our way out of racism.

A growing coalition of organizers emerging from the 2020 protests continues to work towards decarceration, transformative justice, and community care. For example, Don't Shoot PDX, which was organized in 2016, continues to offer programming for young people impacted by racial injustice and police violence, as well as "mutual aid [including] food, household supplies, and clothing distributions to marginalized families, houseless communities, indigenous reservations and rural populations in the region" and legal outreach community members who experience racism and discrimination (Don't Shoot PDX 2022). If you'd like to learn more about Don't Shoot PDX, you can check out their website at Don't Shoot PDX.

### Unpacking Oppression: Anti-Racist Social Justiceote

Before we discuss how sociologists might explain the inequalities that resulted in #BlackLivesMatter, it is important to understand how racism works. It is even more important to harness our own antiracist power. Let's dive deeper!

Recall from Chapter 2 that identities are socially constructed, and that meanings change over time. When we think about how racism works as the sum total of racist policies, ideas, and inequitable outcomes, we can understand how racism is a process by which racial identity is socially constructed and reconstructed.

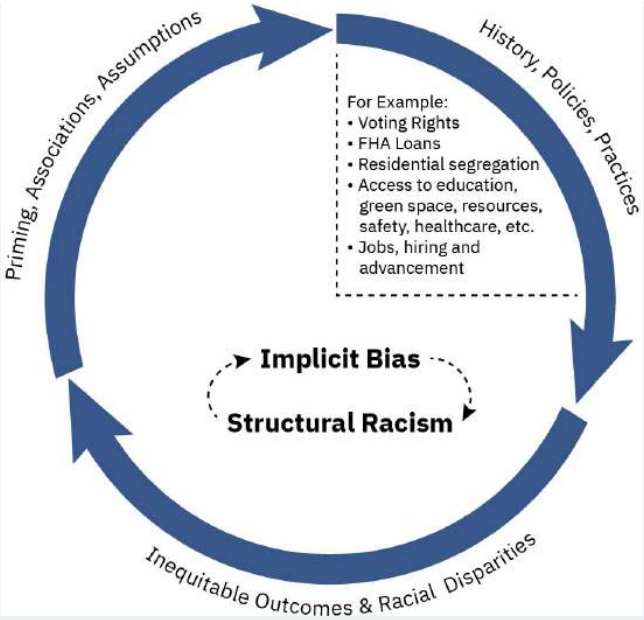



**Figure 9.10** *Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization* (Osta and Vasquez N.d.). While racial bias is a component of racism that must be acknowledged and addressed, it is also critical to understand the work racial biases and other racist ideas do to justify specific policies, which produce and sustain inequitable outcomes and racial disparities. This is why antiracism pays attention to policy change as well as challenging racist associations and assumptions. You can practice antiracism by answering the "Your Turn" questions at the end of this section. Image Description

Have you ever had or heard a conversation like this?

*"What do you mean, Black lives matter? Don't you mean all lives matter?"*

*"Of course, all lives matter, but it doesn't seem like Black lives matter when people who are Black are being killed by police and imprisoned at higher percentages than people who are White, and it's been that way for a long time. If Black lives mattered more, the police wouldn't be killing and locking up so many Black people."*

When Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors, and Ayo Tometti boldly proclaimed that Black Lives Matter, they gave us a framework for talking about racism that challenges social norms about calling out racism.

If we only think about racism as hateful feelings about people who are different, we miss the systems and social structures that those ideas inspired. A common definition of racism is racial prejudice plus power equals racism. In other words, racist ideas, which can be conscious or unconscious, can inspire interpersonal hostility, but personal or institutional power is required for racist actions to occur. If you'd like a deeper dive into how the racist ideas we learn can become implicit bias, check out module one from Kirwan Institute's Implicit Bias Module Series.

It can also be useful to look beyond individual biases and think about racism in terms of structural racism and institutional or systemic racism. As we learned in Chapter 3, structural racism refers to the social structures that emerge from racist ideas, policies, and practices and which produce racial inequities. Structural and systemic racism can be identified by the presence of racial inequity.

Racial inequity shows up as either disproportionality or disparities. As a reminder, disproportionality is the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial or ethnic group compared with its percentage in the total population. Disparities are unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group compared with outcomes for another racial or ethnic group.

For example, when Black people are killed by Portland police 3.9 times more than White people, we recognize outcome disparities (Levinson 2021). If you'd like to review this data for yourself, please read Portland has 5th worst arrest disparities in the nation according to data [website]. Similarly, since Portland police arrest Black people at a rate 4.3 higher than White people, we can say that Black people are over-represented in Portland jails. Because those inequities are racially defined, we can say that the institution or system, in this case, policing in Portland is racist.

Once constructed, racist systems and institutions can continue to impact people unevenly, even if the people who currently hold power do not share all of the same founding racist ideas (Bonilla-Silva 2015). Understanding the structural and systemic

dimensions of racism helps us understand how persistent racist policies, procedures, and systems can sustain racial inequity, even as racist ideas begin to recede or at least change.

It's your turn to unpack oppression and create antiracist social justice

The historian Ibram X. Kendi describes an anti-racist as someone supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea (Kendi 2019:13). To better understand the relationships between racist ideas, racist policies, and racial inequities, try this exercise:

Step 1: Identify a racial inequity (disparate outcome or a disproportionate representation) related to a social problem you have learned about in this book.

Step 2: Identify some of the policies, practices, or historical legacies that create or maintain the inequity.

Step 3: Identify some of the racist ideas that justify the policies or practices.

Step 4: Practice being anti-racist by identifying at least one policy that would reduce the inequity and one anti-racist idea that would challenge the racist idea.

Step 5: What are actions you can take to:

1. Support policy changes that could reduce racial inequities?
2. Challenge the racist ideas that support old racist policies?

If you need help visualizing this process, the chart in Chapter 6, Figure 6.18, Racist Policies, Racist Inequities, and Racist Ideas in Housing might be useful.

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# 17.3: The Sociology of Social Movements

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups that strive to work toward a common social goal. Movements can happen locally, at the state and national level, and worldwide. Let's look at examples of social movements, from local to global. No doubt you can think of others on all of these levels, especially since modern technology has allowed us a near-constant stream of information about the quest for social change around the world.

## Levels of Social Movements

Similar to the levels of society that sociologists study, as described in Chapter 3, socialsocietynts can occur at any level of society. This section describes the various levels. Local social movements typically refer to those in cities or towns but can also affect smaller constituencies, such as college campuses. Sometimes colleges are smaller hubs of a national movement, as seen during the Vietnam War protests or the Black Lives Matter protests. Other times, colleges are managing a more local issue.

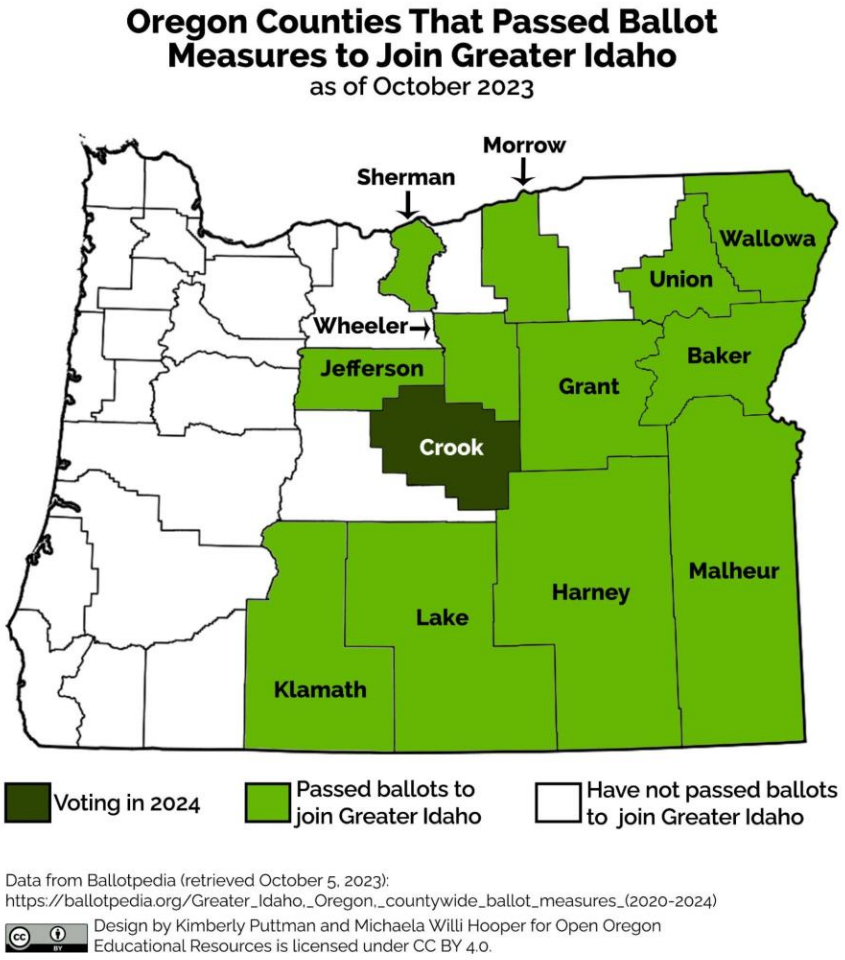



**Figure 9.11** Some counties in Oregon want to become part of Idaho. This map shows how counties voted as of October 2023. The movement to join Greater Idaho is a state-level social movement. Do you know of any others? Image Description

The ultimate state-level protest would be to cease being a state. Organizations in several states are working toward that goal. In 2021, Harney County became the 11th county in Oregon to pass a non-binding ballot measure in support of moving the Idaho border to include large parts of rural Oregon, as shown in Figure 9.11. In 2022, Morrow and Wheeler counties voted similarly (Fixler 2022). Supporters of the initiative told reporters that they feel more aligned with Idaho's conservative political culture and alienated from the liberal politics of the Portland metro area, where the majority of the state's voters reside.

State-level organizing also shows up before and after national decisions. For example, the 2022 Supreme Court ruling that reversed Roe vs. Wade and ended the federally guaranteed right to get an abortion was met with a flurry of responses at the state level. Anti-abortion organizers had worked for years to prepare for this decision by putting in place trigger laws to immediately outlaw or

severely restrict abortion access in the event of such a reversal. Other states responded with legislation to support access to abortion and other reproductive services. A notable and surprising response came from voters in Kansas, often considered reliably conservative and, by extension, anti-abortion. Kansas voters soundly rejected an attempt to repeal existing language in the state constitution that protects the right to abortion access. Each of these outcomes was shaped by competing social movements at the state level that either favor or oppose abortion access.

Many social movements worldwide mobilize collective action in response to global social problems such as poverty, inequality, and exploitation. Pro-democracy movements are also rising in response to perceived increases in authoritarianism and fascism. Some analysts cite the Arab Spring in 2010, Occupy in 2011, and Black Lives Matter protests worldwide to argue that we are in an age of global protests. In 2020, BLM protests took place in over 60 countries (Wikipedia N.d.), and blacklivesmatter.com includes significant information about and resources for global organizing for Black lives.

## Types of Social Movements

> *Talking about Abolition…*
> *Abolition is about presence—the presence of life-giving systems that allow people to thrive and be well, that prevent harm and better equip communities to address harm when it occurs.*
> *– Ruth Wilson Gilmore*
> *"Actually, the goal is not to have a world with no stealing, it's to have a world with no hunger. That's the abolitionists' goal."*
> *– Richie Reseda, Abolitionist, Producer, Organizer*

We know that social movements can occur on the local, national, or even global stage. Are there other patterns or classifications that can help us understand them? One of the most common and important types of social movements is the reform movement, which seeks limited, though still significant, changes in some aspect of a nation's political, economic, or social systems. It does not try to overthrow the existing government but rather works to improve conditions within the existing regime. Some of the most important social movements in US history have been reform movements, including many iterations of the women's movement, which have addressed suffrage, economic discrimination, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam-era anti-war movement, movements for queer and trans liberation, and the environmental movement.

A report from the Pew Research Center found that about 55% of US adults expressed at least some support for Black Lives Matter in September 2020, and those numbers held steady in a 2021 follow-up poll (Menasche Horowitz 2021). However, a 2021 survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found that only 53% of adults in Oregon favored police reform measures. The same study also found that 27policeregonians favor abolishing the police altogether and funding social services and infrastructure for under-resourced and historically oppressed communities.

A revolutionary movement goes further than a reform movement in seeking to overthrow the existing government or institution and to bring about a new one and even a new way of life. Revolutionary movements have been common throughout history. Reform and revolutionary movements are often called political movements because the changes they seek are political.

The abolitionist ideals at the heart of BLM organizing principles can be considered revolutionary in that they challenge the very premise of policing as an effective or humane response to social problems. The Black Lives Matter website invites visitors to "join the movement for Freedom, Liberation and Justice. (Black Lives Matter 2023)" If you'd like to read their goals for yourself, please check out their website Black Lives Matter. Building on the work of social theorists like Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Michelle Alexander, BLM organizers articulate an abolitionist vision that does not seek to reform policing but to replace the current criminal justice system with a system of transformative justice and community care. To learn more about what BLM organizers mean by "abolish the police," you can watch the 3 part series, Imagining Abolition.

Another type of political movement is a reactionary movement, so named because it tries to block social change or to reverse already achieved social changes. #BlueLivesMatter emerged in 2016 as a powerful call to support and respect police and to defend the institution and traditions of police. Supporters assert that police officers are doing dangerous and misunderstood jobs that deserve respect. They claim that BLM organizing has made police work more dangerous and that the police have been victims of deliberate misinformation. This can be considered a reactionary movement as the goal is to block the social changes and maintain the status quo.

Two other types of movements are self-help movements and religious movements. As their name implies, self-help movements involve people trying to improve aspects of their personal lives; examples of self-help groups include Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers. Religious movements have elements of self-help and mutual aid. They generally aim to reinforce their members' religious beliefs and convert other people to these beliefs. Principles from both religious and self-help movements have informed both reform and reaction movements.

## Stages of Social Movements




**Figure 9.12** The Four Stages of Social Movements: Emergence, Coalescence, Institutionalization and Decline. Where do you think the movement inspired by #BlackLivesMatter is today in these stages? Image Description

Sociologists also study the lifecycle of social movements—how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outlined a four-stage process, shown in Figure 9.12. In the emergence stage, people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge. This is followed by the coalescence stage, when people join together and organize in order to publicize the issue and raise awareness. In the institutionalization stage, the movement no longer requires grassroots volunteerism. The movement is now an established organization, typically with a paid staff. When people fall away and adopt a new movement, the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or when people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the decline stage. In the next section, we will consider the role of social media in each of these stages.

## New Social Movement Theory



**Figure 9.13** Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells connects the power of the internet with the efficacy of social movements to explain their effectiveness in new ways.

New social movement theory, a development of European social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to analyze using traditional social movement theotheoryRather than being one specific theory, it is more of a perspective that revolves around understanding movements as they relate to class, politics, identity, culture, and social change. The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (Figure 9.13) looks at how technology is transforming social movements. He argues that because the internet allows communication between people, often outside a government's control, social movements can be formed more rapidly and sometimes more effectively. He also believes that people act when their fear turns into anger about the oppression they experience and when they are motivated by hope. He writes:

…the second condition for individual experience to link up and form a movement is the existence of a communication process that propagates the events and the emotions attached to it. The faster and more interactive the process of communication is, the more likely the formation of a process of collective action becomes, rooted in outrage, propelled by enthusiasm and motivated by hope. (Castells 2015)

We see this combination of technology and passion present with #BlackLivesMatter-inspired organizing, and also with interrelated social movements for racial, gender, and disability justice, like ecofeminism, discussed inChapter 8, which focuses on patriarchal society as a source of environmental problems.

## Resource Mobilization Theory

White American sociologists McCarthy and Zald (1977) proposed a new theory about social movements called resource mobilization theory. In resource mobilization theory, they say that social movements are successful when they can gather people and use their resources to create change. Resources include money, people, and power. Tpowerre money, people, and access to power a movement has, the greater its ability to make change. Resource mobilization can include funding secured from sympathetic allies and donors outside of the impacted community, which can give a movement increased visibility and influence.

## Indigenous Perspective Theory



**Figure 9.14** Sociologist Aldon Morris. He was the 112th president of the American Sociological Association. His work in social movements centers on the efficacy of Black organizing, which powered social movements.

Aldon Morris (Figure 9.14) researches the origins, nature, patterns, and outcomes of global movements that have successfully resisted and overthrown systems of oppression and injustice. With the Indigenous perspective theory, Morris argues it was the mobilization of the Black community's internal resources, knowledge, power, and skill that powered both the 20th-century civil rights movement (CRM) and the 21st-century movement for Black lives (BLM). In both cases, specific systems of domination were identified by members of oppressed communities, who also planned and executed direct action and brought change. These community-based processes, which center on collective agency and lived expertise, become the foundation for a political base from which deliberate and effective collective action can emerge. To learn more about his work, please either watch the 2.18-minute video How Do People Make Change [Video] or read from Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter [website].

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Figure 9.13. "Photo of Manuel Castells" by Jorge Gonzalez is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

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# 17.4: Social Movements, Social Media, and Social Justice




**Figure 9.15** An interview with the founders of Black Lives Matter: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi [YouTube Video]. As you watch this 15:56 minute video, please pay attention to how Cullours, Garza, and Tometti talk about movement building and organizing for change. Which of the four stages of social movements do you think the BLM Movement was at when this was recorded in 2016? Transcript

> *We don't deserve to be killed with impunity. We need to love ourselves and fight for a world where Black lives matter. Black people, I love you. I love us. We matter. Our lives matter.*
> *– Alicia Garza, Facebook Post July 13, 2013.*
>
> ———
>
> *Declaration: black bodies will no longer be sacrificed for the rest of the world's enlightenment. I am done. I am so done. Trayvon you are loved infinitely. #blacklivesmatter."*
> *– Patrisse Cullors, Facebook comment, posted July 13th, 2013.*

When mass protests erupted in the wake of the acquittal of the person who killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, the two impassioned Facebook posts that launched #BlackLivesMatter were called "love letters that launched a movement" (Jennings 2020). BLM is an example of the power of social media to create and shape social movements. Here we will look at how social media was engaged at each of the four stages described in the previous section, emergence, coalescence, institutionalization, and decline.

## Emergence

Hashtag activism is the act of building up public support via social media for a cause, using a hashtag (#) (Pratim 2018:252). When Patrisse Cullors answered Alicia Garza's declaration with #BlackLivesMatter the message resonated deeply as part of an overwhelming outpouring of collective grief and anger on social media. Between July and December of 2013, the hashtag was used 5,106 times. By 2016 Twitter reported that #BlackLivesMatter was the third most popular hashtag in the platform's 10-year history, with nearly 1,200,000 tweets (Sichynsky 2016).



**Figure 9.16** This organizer is holding a picture of Trayvon Martin, and using her phone to spread the word. A series of viral posts on Facebook introduced the world to the power of a hashtag after the acquittal of the person who killed Trayvon Martin. Have you ever used hashtags to amplify a message or idea?

Patrisse Cullors and Aliza Garza were already seasoned and well-networked organizers with experience using social media, as was Ayo Tometi, who responded to the posts with plans to purchase the domain blacklivesmatter.com. Together, they deftly used social media to amplify the voices of over-policed, under-resourced communities of Black people, as they declared to one another, "We matter." and to Americans, "Stop killing us." Ayo Tometi, an organizer with a background in communications, responded by purchasing www.blacklivesmatter.com, where they linked to organizing resources and articulated the following principles:

- We are expansive. We are a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement. We also believe that in order to win and bring as many people with us along the way, we must move beyond the narrow nationalism that is all too prevalent in Black communities. We must ensure we are building a movement that brings all of us to the front.
- We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers on those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.
- We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.
- We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.
- The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation (Birdsong 2016).

## Coalescence

At the next stage, the coalescence stage, social media is also transformative. Over the next year, these seasoned organizers skillfully leveraged social media to build legitimacy for their claims.



**Figure 9.17** These marchers in Ferguson, Missouri, protested the killing of Michael Brown. Ferguson is a town of about 18,000 people. Are you surprised that such a small town became the epicenter of a revolutionary movement?

The most popular hashtag on Twitter in its first decade was #Ferguson, with 1.7 million tweets between 2014 and 2016 (Anderson 2016). Ferguson, Missouri, is where Black Lives Matter coalesced as a global movement. When Ferguson, Missouri, erupted in rage and grief over the killing of Michael Brown, Patrisse Cullors and Darnell L. Moore used social media to call for a "Freedom Ride" to Ferguson. Inspired by the activists who mobilized for Black lives during the Civil Rights Era, this Freedom Ride would focus national attention on this most recent example of state-sanctioned violence against Black lives. The plan successfully mobilized the #BlackLivesMatter Social network to gather in St. Louis for three days of solidarity with local organizers, including the *Organization for Black Struggle* (OBS) and *Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment* (MORE). Their goal was to build a sustainable coalition around the following demands:

- Justice for the family of Michael Brown and other victims of law enforcement and vigilante violence
- The demilitarization of law enforcement
- National investment in jobs, housing, and schools in Black communities (Mosendz 2014).

The use of #BlackLivesMatter was so prevalent during the Ferguson protests that organizers asked Twitter users to stop using it unless directly related to the actual activities and information about the protests.

Since Ferguson, #BlackLivesMatter has been the go-to search term for antiracist organizing. On Dec. 4, 2014, after a New York grand jury declined to indict police officers in the death of Eric Garner, #BlackLivesMatter appeared 189,210 times—the most it was ever used in a single day. Odeath first anniversary of Garners' death, the hashtag appeared more than 228,000 times in two days. When Senator Bernie Sanders defended the Black Lives Matter movement, the hashtag appeared more than 127,000 times on Twitter the following day as many users voiced support for Sanders (Anderson 2016).

Social media users report changing their minds about Black Lives Matter (BLM) and issues related to race and policing because of their interactions on social media platforms. Between Ferguson and Minneapolis, the world had a conversation on social media about what we mean when we say Black Lives Matter.

Social media is credited with helping #BLM to break through decades of color-blind racism and helped people feel OK saying that Black Lives Matter (Jennings 2020). Between 2014 and 2020, police killed at least 7680 people in the United States. Though only 12 % of the population is Black, 25% of the dead people are Black (Haddad 2021). Every time another Black life ended, the message got out again. More people engaged in the emerging network. By the time George Floyd's murder went viral, a match was struck. Around the world, seven years of organizing exploded into the streets.

## Institutionalization

Social media can also accelerate a movement toward the institutionalization stage. In some cases, like #BlackLivesMatter, one or more formal organizations might exist alongside the hashtag or general sentiment.

BLM originally operated with a decentralized leadership structure and relied on fiscal sponsorship from a larger non-profit for financial oversight. The stated intention was always to distribute funds to local chapters that were well-positioned to respond to the needs of local communities. This infrastructure was temporarily overwhelmed after receiving 90 million dollars in donations during 2020. Social media coverage during this period included accusations of misuse and misappropriation of funds, and the organization came under scrutiny for a lack of transparency.

The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation responded to these growing pains by reorganizing and creating a Transparency Center on the website with updates on a new board of directors and links to tax filings. Their 2022 disclosures list 42 million dollars in assets and reports distributing more than 26 million dollars in grants to local BLM chapters and directly to families of victims of police violence in 2021 (Morrison 2022).

## Decline

Decline simply refers to the winding down of an effort. It doesn't necessarily mean that a movement is not successful. On the contrary, a period of decline naturally follows successful efforts. It is also important to note that the status quo is not easily changed, and successful social movements also face periods in which their gains are challenged and tested. That's why it is important to view individual interconnected social movements within a larger historical context. The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century was undoubtedly one of the most successful social movements in history, yet in spite of the notable gains, the movement eventually lost momentum when the most visible leadership and supporters, including Malcolm X. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, were assassinated, while more radical organizers, like Angela Davis, Fred Hampton, and Assata

Shakur were criminalized. You met Angela Davis in Chapter 1, but please click if you'd like to know more about Fred Hampton and Assata Shakur,

Morris observes that, "the decentralized leadership structure of the BLM movement and other contemporary social movements seems to have provided a bulwark against this sort of decapitation (2021)." When Garza, Tomati, and Cullors were targeted with misinformation and disinformation, the movement itself did not falter. Distributed leadership allowed the movement to thrive while the original organizers continued to develop new projects in their quest for a world that values Black lives.

As of 2023, the original website is now maintained by the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, with current updates about the status of their ongoing work for racial justice and liberation. They also provide a link where people can report disinformation related to BLM. #BlackLivesMatter still trends on social media to signify racial injustice. While the Black Lives Matter movement may have passed, it leaves a lasting legacy that continues to shape anti-incarceration and anti-violence social justice organizing around the county.

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# 17.5: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have taken up the 2020 Portland protests as a case study of social movements. We used the social problems process framework to contextualize the protests. We considered how theories about the social, historical, and political construction of race and racism help us understand how racist policies and racist ideas produce and substance racial inequities. We also identified harmful racist ideas about under-served communities and racist policies that strive to contain rather than enrich under-served communities.

We also looked at the uses of social media for social movements, and we located Garza, Cullors, and Tometi within interdependent organizing traditions that touch back to Black Feminist Theory, the 2oth century civil rights movement, and the emancipatory sociology of Du Bois. We considered how #BlackLivesMatter makes powerful claims that engage critical consciousness, calling attention to all the places where Black lives don't matter.

We did the work that #BLM invites us to do as we analyze how policing in under-resourced communities creates and sustains racism. Finally, we considered how an antiracist framework, which centers on the well-being of people most impacted by police violence and mass incarceration, can advance social justice, and create a world where no one goes hungry.

## Essential Ideas

**Learning Objective 1:** How do we apply the social problems process to better understand the history of #BlackLivesMatter?

Organizers used the social media hashtag #BlackLivesMatter to articulate claims that identified historical patterns of over-policing in under-resourced communities of color as the reason for disproportionate rates of Black and Brown people killed by police. The public responded with record-breaking protests to demand new approaches to public safety that would redirect public resources away from policing and towards programs that increase the well-being of people who live in under-resourced communities. In Portland, the city council responded by cutting police funding and pledging to redirect those funds to support social services. As of July 2023, the implementation of those programs has been contested. Some of the funding originally cut from the Metro Police was restored. The robust organizing network that emerged in Portland and across the US is continuing efforts to reduce police violence by rethinking policing, public safety, and community well-being.

**Learning Objective 2:** Why are some people more likely than others to be considered criminals because of their gender, race and ethnicity, social class, age, or other aspect of their social locations?

Policing in the US can be traced back to slave patrols in the South that empowered White men to hunt Black people, who were considered the property of enslavers. After slavery was abolished, White people routinely policed Black communities. In many communities across the country, laws were created to control and contain the movement of Black people, Native Americans, and immigrant populations who were perceived threats to White people and their property. While civil rights organizers, led by Black and Brown people, have successfully challenged and abolished most of these laws, racist ideas about who counts as a criminal persist.

**Learning Objective 3:** What does it mean to be anti-racist?

An antiracist is a person supporting an antiracist policy through actions or expressing an antiracist idea. It's not just doing no harm (not racist) but actively challenging racist thoughts or behaviors or dismantling racist laws, policies, and practices. When we apply this to social problems, one way to take action is to identify racial inequality and the policies and practices that create it, understand the racist ideas that justify the policies, challenge them, and implement new policies and practices.

**Learning Objective 4:** How do sociologists explain social movements?

Sociologists have different ways to explain social movements. They can categorize social movements by their levels, types, and stages. They can also discuss why social movements are effective or ineffective. New social movement theory examines why social movements succeed using technology, interests based on identity, and harnessing the emotions of fear, antheorynd hope. Resource mobilization theory argues that movements are successful when they can engage resources like leadership, membership, money, or social media to convince people to take action. Unlike Resource Mobilization Theory, Indigenous Perspective argues that oppressed people use internal resources to sustain their activism rather than external resources.

**Learning Objective 5:** How did organizers effectively use social media in each of the phases of a social movement to support social justice?

The four stages of social movements are the *preliminary stage*, when people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge; the *coalescence stage*, when people join together and organize to publicize the issue and raise awareness; the *institutionalization stage*, when the organizing typically begins to rely on a paid staff, and the *decline stage*, when the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or when people no longer take the issue seriously. In each stage #BLM organizers used social media in hashtags, tweets, web pages, Facebook pages, and other social media presence to achieve their goals. Although racism persists, they succeeded in expanding the possibility for liberation and social justice.

## Key Terms List

- **anti-racist**: a person who supports an anti-racist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.
- **BIPOC**: an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It is used to refer to people whose communities have been historically under-resourced, over-policed, disproportionately impacted by social problems, and underrepresented in terms of institutional power in the United States because of their assigned race category.
- **#BlackLivesMatter**: a hashtag that first went viral in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. In the decade following its introduction, #BlackLivesMatter became a popular organizing tool on social media.
- **criminal justice system**: a system that relies on legal codes, criminalization, policing, and punishment to mediate conflict, protect property, and maintain social order.
- **hashtag activism**: the act of building up public support via social media for a cause
- **lynchings**: extrajudicial killings in which an individual or a mob kidnaps, tortures, and kills persons suspected of crime or social transgressions
- **prejudice**: an unfavorable preconceived feeling or opinion formed without knowledge or reason that prevents objective consideration of an individual or group.
- **protest**: a public expression of objection, disapproval, or dissent towards an idea or action, typically a political one.
- **racial disparity**: the unequal outcomes of one racial or ethnic group compared with outcomes for another racial or ethnic group.
- **racial justice**: a response to racism that changes social systems to reduce racial inequities and address the social and interpersonal conditions caused by racial inequities.
- **social movements**: purposeful, organized groups that strive to work toward a common social goal.
- **under-resourced communities**: areas with relatively high poverty rates that lack robust economic infrastructure. While the term often refers to cities and suburbs with populations of over 250,000 people, many rural communities are also under-resourced.
- **underserved communities**: groups with limited or no access to resources or are otherwise disenfranchised.

## Discuss and Do

1. Social Movements This chapter focuses on Black Lives Matter but refers to several other social movements. Choose one of these social movements and explain the movement using Best's Social Problems Process. What is the movement's legacy? Why are you grateful to movement activists?
2. Abolitionist Reform: Police reform is a contentious topic. It can take the form of The Breathe Act, Police in Schools, Police Divestment, or Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams. Please research one of the following possibilities, and answer:

1. What is the goal of the reform?
2. How does this change address the goal?
3. What progress has been made?
4. What could be done to support this change?

3. Racism: Why is "All Lives Matter" a racist response to "Black Lives Matter"? You might choose to journal about this or create some art that reflects your response.
4. Antiracism: What can you do to use your anti-racist power to support social justice?
5. Intersectionality: How is #BLM an effective response to intersectional social problems?
6. Antiracist Policing: Is it possible to be an anti-racist police officer?
7. Social Movement and Social Media: When you hear "#Black Lives Matter" what do you think? How has your opinion changed over the course of this week, if it has changed?
8. Social Movements and Social Justice: This chapter links to a variety of people, websites, videos, news articles, and reports. Please review one of these sources in more detail. How does this more specific evidence help you understand Black Lives Matter, policing, social movements, abolition or anti-racist power?

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