CRITICAL THINKING AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIV



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Critical Thinking & Social Problems: A Sociological Perspective

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Understanding Social Problems

1.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

1.2: What Is a Social Problem?

1.3: Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems

1.4: Continuity and Change in Social Problems

1.5: Doing Research on Social Problems

1.6: End of Chapter Synthesis

2: Social Problems and Poverty

2.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

2.2: The Measurement and Extent of Poverty

2.3: Who the Poor Are- Social Patterns of Poverty

2.4: Explaining Poverty

2.5: The Consequences of Poverty

2.6: Global Poverty

2.7: Reducing Poverty

2.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

3: Racial and Ethnic Inequality Social Problems Continuity and Change

3.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

3.2: Racial and Ethnic Inequality- A Historical Prelude

3.3: The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

3.4: Prejudice

3.5: Discrimination

3.6: Dimensions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.7: Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.8: Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.9: Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses- Who Decides?

3.10: End of Chapter Synthesis

4: Reconstructing and Analyzing Arguments

4.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

4.2: Reconstructing and analyzing arguments

4.3: Identifying Arguments

4.4: Arguments vs. Explanations

4.5: More Complex Argument Structures

4.6: Using Paraphrases to Reconstruct Arguments

4.7: Validity

4.8: Soundness
4.9: Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments
4.10: Arguments with Missing Premises
4.11: Evaluative Language
4.12: End of Chapter Synthesis

5: Gender Inequality Work and The Economy

5.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
5.2: Understanding Sex and Gender
5.3: Culture and Gender
5.4: Feminism and Sexism
5.5: Dimensions of Gender Inequality
5.6: Gender Inequality in the United States
5.7: Women of Color- A Triple Burden
5.8: Household Inequality
5.9: Violence against Women- Rape and Sexual Assault
5.10: The Benefits and Costs of Being Male
5.11: Reducing Gender Inequality
5.12: Work and the Economy
5.13: The US Labor Force
5.14: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy
5.15: Problems in Work and the Economy
5.16: The Role of Tax Policy
5.17: Crime in the Workplace
5.18: End of Chapter Synthesis

6: Crime and Criminal Justice

6.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
6.2: The Problem of Crime
6.3: Measuring Crime
6.4: Who Commits Crime?
6.5: Explaining Crime
6.6: The Criminal Justice System
6.7: Reducing Crime
6.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

7: Health, Healthcare and Informal Fallacies

7.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
7.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care
7.3: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care
7.4: Health in the United States
7.5: Problems of Healthcare in the United States
7.6: Improving Health and Health Care

7.7: Formal vs. Informal Fallacies
7.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

8: Urban and Rural Problems and Populations and the Environment

8.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
8.2: A Brief History of Urbanization
8.3: Sociological Perspectives on Urbanization
8.4: Problems of Urban Life
8.5: Problems of Rural Life
8.6: Improving Urban and Rural Life
8.7: Population and the Environment
8.8: Population
8.9: Views of Population Growth
8.10: Immigration
8.11: The Environment
8.12: Environmental Problems
8.13: Addressing Population Problems and Improving the Environment
8.14: End of Chapter Synthesis

9: War and Terrorism

9.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
9.2: Sociological Perspectives on War and Terrorism
9.3: War
9.4: Veterans- The Casualties of War
9.5: Militarism and the US Military Budget
9.6: US Arms Exports
9.7: Terrorism
9.8: Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism
9.9: End of Chapter Synthesis

Index

Glossary

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1: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

1.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
1.2: What Is a Social Problem?
1.3: Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems
1.4: Continuity and Change in Social Problems
1.5: Doing Research on Social Problems
1.6: End of Chapter Synthesis

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1.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Learning Objectives

1. Define and Analyze Social Problems: Students will define what constitutes a social problem, distinguishing between personal troubles and public issues, and identify the key characteristics that make a problem 'social'. This includes understanding how social problems are recognized and defined within a society, and the role of cultural, political, and economic factors in this process.
2. Explore Sociological Perspectives and Theories: Students will gain knowledge of various sociological perspectives and theories used to analyze social problems. This objective involves understanding how different sociological frameworks, such as conflict theory, functionalism, and symbolic interactionism, interpret the causes, impacts, and solutions of social problems. Students will learn to apply these theories to analyze specific social issues, providing them with a multi-faceted understanding of societal challenges.
3. Understand the Evolution and Research of Social Problems: Students will explore the continuity and change in social problems over time, understanding how social issues evolve and why some persist while others diminish. This includes learning about the methodologies used in sociological research to study social problems, such as surveys, interviews, and case studies, and how these methods contribute to our understanding and potential solutions of social issues today and in the past.

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Understanding Social Problems

As we move well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, the United States and the rest of the world face many social problems: poverty and hunger, racism and sexism, drug use and violence, and climate change, to name just a few. Why do these problems exist? What are their effects? What can be done about them? This new open textbook (free online, very affordable in other formats) from a student-friendly publisher, Unnamed Publisher, tries to answer these questions with the latest theory and research from sociology and other social sciences.

The discipline of sociology began in Western Europe during the late 1800s and soon made its way to the United States. Many of the new American sociologists focused on the various social problems facing the United States at the time. This was perhaps especially true at two institutions: Atlanta University (now known as Clark Atlanta University) and the University of Chicago. Befitting their urban locations, sociologists at both universities were very interested in poverty and racial inequality, and they sought to use sociological theory and research to address these problems and, more generally, to improve society (Calhoun, 2007).Calhoun, C. (2007). Sociology in America: An introduction. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Sociology in America: A history* (pp. 1–38). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

A. Javier Treviño (2011, p. 1),Treviño, A. J. (2011). Program theme: Service sociology. *Program of the 61st Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems*, 1. Retrieved from http://www.sssp1.org/file/2011AnnualMeeting/Final%20Program.pdf. recent president of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, refers to the vision and goals of these early American sociologists as *service sociology*, and he emphasizes that “early American sociology was primarily a reformist endeavor.” He adds, “Service sociology is a sociology of social problems intended to ameliorate conditions of life for those in need of assistance, and to insure and promote the welfare of the community. Motivated by care and compassion, a service-oriented sociology is aimed at helping people meet their pressing social needs. As such, service sociology involves the application of sociological knowledge combined with the expression of humanitarian sentiment.”

In the spirit of early American sociology and service sociology, this book brings sociological insights to bear on the important problems of our time. Using the latest social science evidence, it discusses the dimensions and effects of various kinds of social problems, the reasons for them, and possible solutions to them.

This first chapter begins our journey into the world of social problems by examining how sociology understands social problems

and gathers research about them.

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1.2: What Is a Social Problem?

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 gasses 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, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, & Smith, 2011).Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., & Smith, N. (2011). *Climate change in the American mind: Americans’ global warming beliefs and attitudes in May 2011*. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.

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).Rubington, E., & Weinberg, M. S. (2010). *The study of social problems: Seven perspectives* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 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.

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.

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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1.3: Sociological Perspectives on Social Problems

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, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 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.

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 (1959, p. 9)Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London, United Kingdom: 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 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 problem.

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, Reynolds, Tillman, & Martin, 2011).Boyd, E. M., Reynolds, J. R., Tillman, K. H., & Martin, P. Y. (2011). Adolescent girls' race/ethnic status, identities, and drive for thinness. *Social Science Research, 40*(2), 667–684. 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, W. (1976). *Blaming the victim* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. 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 summarizes the three perspectives.

Table 1.1 Theory Snapshot

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 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.
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, 1897/1952, p. 274).Durkheim, É. (1952). *Suicide* (J. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.). New York, NY: Free Press. (Original work published 1897) 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. Source: http://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/d/pics/durkheim.jpg.

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).Gans, H. J. (1972). The positive functions of poverty. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*, 275–289. 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, 1867/1906; Marx & Engels, 1848/1962).Marx, K. (1906). *Capital*. New York, NY: Random House. (Original work published 1867); Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1962). The communist manifesto. In *Marx and Engels: Selected works* (Vol. 2, pp. 21–65). Moscow, Russia: Foreign Language Publishing House. (Original work published 1848).

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.

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).Lorber, J. (2010). *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 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, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 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.

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 understanding 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 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

- Select an example of a "private trouble" and explain how and why it may reflect a structural problem in society.
- 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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1.4: Continuity and Change in Social Problems

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).Johnson, B. (2005). Overcoming "doom and gloom": Empowering students in courses on social problems, injustice, and inequality. *Teaching Sociology, 33*, 44–58.

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.

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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1.5: Doing Research on Social Problems

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 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.

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).Sherman, L. W., & Berk, R. A. (1984). The specific deterrent effects of arrest for domestic assault. *American Sociological Review, 49*, 261–272. 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).Sherman, L. W. (1992). *Policing domestic violence: Experiments and dilemmas*. New York, NY: Free Press.

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).Liebow, E. (1967). *Tally's corner*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown; Liebow, E. (1993). *Tell them who I am: The lives of homeless women*. New York, NY: Free Press; Whyte, W. F. (1943). *Street corner society: The social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 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

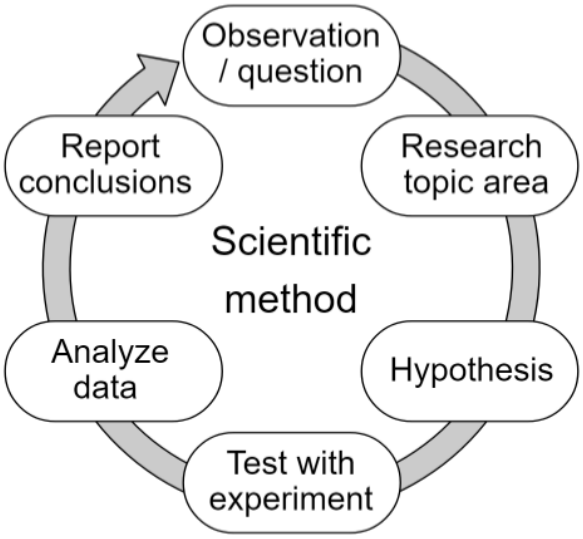
Sometimes sociologists do not gather their own data but instead analyze *existing data* that someone else has gathered. The US Census Bureau, for example, gathers data on all kinds of areas relevant to the lives of Americans, and many sociologists analyze census data on such social problems as poverty, 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.



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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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1.6: End of Chapter Synthesis

End-of-Chapter Material and Synthesis

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.

Further Reading

1. [Article 1] “Prior to COVID-19, child poverty rates had reached record lows in U.S.”
    1. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/30/prior-to-covid-19-child-poverty-rates-had-reached-record-lows-in-u-s/

2. [Article 2] ‘It’s hard to see something like this.’ Merced County ag workers sink under flood impacts
    1. https://www.mercedsunstar.com/news/weather-news/article271174757.html

End of Chapter Discussion

1. "How would you distinguish between personal troubles and public issues when defining social problems? Can you provide examples of each and explain how cultural, political, environmental, and economic factors can influence the recognition and definition of a social problem within a society?"
2. "Choose one sociological perspective (e.g., conflict theory, functionalism, symbolic interactionism) and apply it to analyze a specific social issue of your choice. How does this perspective interpret the causes, impacts, and potential solutions of the chosen social issue? What insights does this perspective provide, and are there any limitations in its analysis?"
3. "Discuss the concept of the evolution of social problems over time. Can you identify a social issue that has evolved significantly in the past century, and explain the factors contributing to this change? Additionally, how do sociological research methodologies such as surveys, interviews, and case studies help us better understand and potentially address persistent social problems around the world?"

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2: SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND POVERTY

2.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives
2.2: The Measurement and Extent of Poverty
2.3: Who the Poor Are- Social Patterns of Poverty
2.4: Explaining Poverty
2.5: The Consequences of Poverty
2.6: Global Poverty
2.7: Reducing Poverty
2.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

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2.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Social Problems & Poverty

Learning Objectives

1. Understand Poverty Metrics and Demographics: Gain an understanding of how poverty is measured and quantified, including global and national standards, and identify the demographic groups most affected by poverty. This includes recognizing social patterns and distributions of poverty across different populations and spaces.
2. Examine Causes and Consequences of Poverty: Learn about the various explanations for the persistence of poverty, ranging from economic factors to social and political structures. Understand the multifaceted consequences of poverty on individuals, generational poverty, communities, and societies, including health, education, and social mobility.
3. Explore Poverty Alleviation Strategies: Analyze approaches and strategies for reducing poverty, both globally and locally. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of various policies, programs, and practices (from the past and present) in alleviating poverty and improving the living conditions of those in poverty

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Poverty

Social Problems in the News

"Survey: More US Kids Go to School Hungry," the headline said. As the US economy continued to struggle, a nationwide survey of 638 public school teachers in grades K–8 conducted for Share Our Strength, a nonprofit organization working to end childhood hunger, found alarming evidence of children coming to school with empty stomachs. More than two-thirds of the teachers said they had students who "regularly come to school too hungry to learn—some having had no dinner the night before," according to the news article. More than 60 percent of the teachers said the problem had worsened during the past year, and more than 40 percent called it a "serious" problem. Many of the teachers said they spent their own money to buy food for their students. As an elementary school teacher explained, "I've had lots of students come to school—not just one or two—who put their heads down and cry because they haven't eaten since lunch yesterday" (United Press International, 2011).United Press International. (2011, February 23). Survey: More U.S. kids go to school hungry. UPI.com. Retrieved from http://www.upi.com/Health_News/2011/2002/2023/Survey-More-US-kids-go-to-school-hungry/UPI-20871298510763/.

The United States is one of the richest nations in the world. Many Americans live in luxury or at least are comfortably well-off. Yet, as this poignant news story of childhood hunger reminds us, many Americans also live in poverty or near poverty. This chapter explains why poverty exists and why the US poverty rate is so high, and it discusses the devastating consequences of poverty for the millions of Americans who live in or near poverty. It also examines poverty in the poorest nations of the world and outlines efforts for reducing poverty in the United States and these nations.Although this chapter will paint a disturbing picture of poverty, there is still cause for hope. As we shall see, the "war on poverty" that began in the United States during the 1960s dramatically reduced poverty. Inspired by books with titles like *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Harrington, 1962)Harrington, M. (1962). *The other America: Poverty in the United States*. New York, NY: Macmillan. and *In the Midst of Plenty: The Poor in America* (Bagdikian, 1964)Bagdikian, B. H. (1964). *In the midst of plenty: The poor in America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. that described the plight of the poor in heartbreaking detail, the federal government established various funding programs and other policies that greatly lowered the poverty rate in less than a decade (Schwartz, 1984).Schwartz, J. E. (1984, June 18). The war we won: How the great society defeated poverty. *The New Republic*, 18–19. Since the 1960s and 1970s, however, the United States has cut back on these programs, and the poor are no longer on the national agenda. Other wealthy democracies provide much more funding and many more services for their poor than does the United States, and their poverty rates are much lower than ours.

Still, the history of the war on poverty and the experience of these other nations both demonstrate that US poverty can be reduced with appropriate policies and programs. If the United States were to go back to the future by remembering its earlier war on

poverty and by learning from other Western democracies, it could again lower poverty and help millions of Americans lead better, healthier, and more productive lives.

But why should we care about poverty in the first place? As this chapter discusses, many politicians and much of the public blame the poor for being poor, and they oppose increasing federal spending to help the poor and even want to reduce such spending. As poverty expert Mark R. Rank (2011, p. 17)Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. summarizes this way of thinking, "All too often we view poverty as someone else's problem." Rank says this unsympathetic view is shortsighted because, as he puts it, "poverty affects us all" (p. 17).Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. This is true, he explains, for at least two reasons.

First, the United States spends much more money than it needs to because of the consequences of poverty. Poor people experience worse health, family problems, higher crime rates, and many other problems, all of which our nation spends billions of dollars annually to address. In fact, childhood poverty has been estimated to cost the US economy an estimated $500 billion annually because of the problems it leads to, including unemployment, low-paid employment, higher crime rates, and physical and mental health problems (Eckholm, 2007).Eckholm, E. (2007, January 25). Childhood poverty is found to portend high adult costs. *New York Times*, p. A19. If the US poverty rate were no higher than that of other democracies, billions of tax dollars and other resources would be saved.

Second, the majority of Americans can actually expect to be poor or near poor at some point in their lives, with about 75 percent of Americans in the 20–75 age range living in poverty or near poverty for at least one year in their lives. As Rank (2011, p. 18)Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. observes, most Americans "will find ourselves below the poverty line and using a social safety net program at some point." Because poverty costs the United States so much money and because so many people experience poverty, says Rank, everyone should want the United States to do everything possible to reduce poverty.

Sociologist John Iceland (2006)Iceland, J. (2006). *Poverty in America: A handbook*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. adds two additional reasons for why everyone should care about poverty and want it reduced. First, a high rate of poverty impairs our nation's economic progress: When a large number of people cannot afford to purchase goods and services, economic growth is more difficult to achieve. Second, poverty produces crime and other social problems that affect people across the socioeconomic ladder. Reductions in poverty would help not only the poor but also people who are not poor. We begin our examination of poverty by discussing how poverty is measured and how much poverty exists.

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2.2: The Measurement and Extent of Poverty

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.

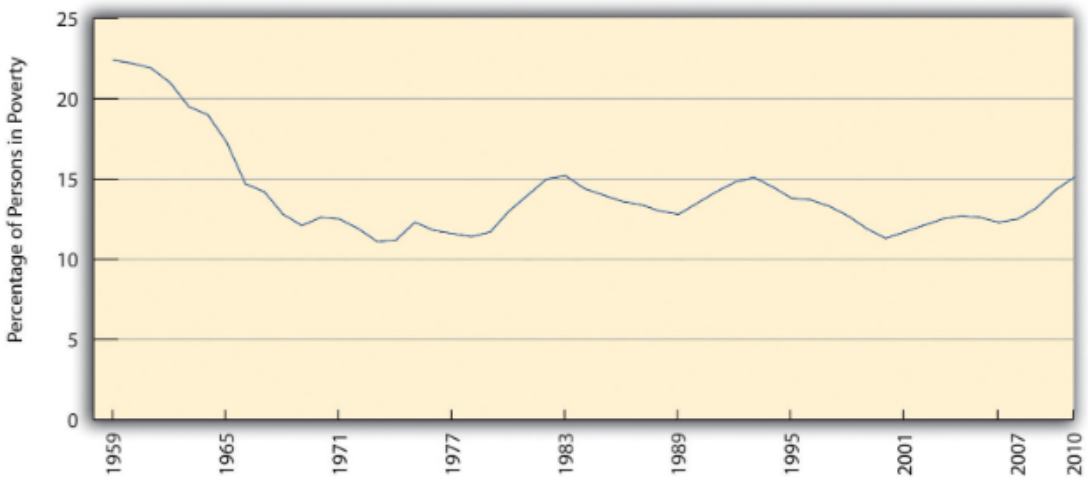
This way of calculating the official poverty line has not changed since 1963. It is thus out of date for many reasons. For example, many expenses, such as heat and electricity, child care, transportation, and health care, now occupy a greater percentage of the typical family's budget than was true in 1963. In addition, this official measure ignores a family's non-cash 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, Gebeloff, & Tavernise, 2011, p. A1).DeParle, J., Gebeloff, R., & Tavernise, S. (2011, November 4). Bleak portraits of poverty are off the mark, experts say. *New York Time*s, p. A1. We'll return to this issue shortly.

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, Chau, & Aratani, 2011).Wright, V. R., Chau, M., & Aratani, Y. (2011). *Who are America's poor children? The official story*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty. 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, 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. 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). If we were winning the war on poverty in the 1960s (notice the sharp drop in the 1960s in Figure 2.1), since then poverty has fought us to a standstill.

Figure *US Poverty, 1959–2010*



Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2011). Historical poverty tables: People. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/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).DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2010). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2009* (Current Population Reports, P60-238). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. 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).Short, K. (2011). *The research supplemental poverty measure: 2010* (Current Population Reports, P60-241). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. 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).Sherman, A. (2011). *Despite a deep recession and high unemployment, government efforts—including the Recovery Act—prevented poverty from rising in 2009, new census data show*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 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).Pereyra, L. (2011). *Half in Ten campaign criticizes House Republican funding proposal*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 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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2.3: Who the Poor Are- Social Patterns of Poverty

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).DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B. D., & Smith, J. C. (2011). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2010* (Current Population Reports, P60-298). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

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).White, J. A. (2007). The hollow and the ghetto: Space, race, and the politics of poverty. *Politics & Gender, 3*, 271–280. 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.



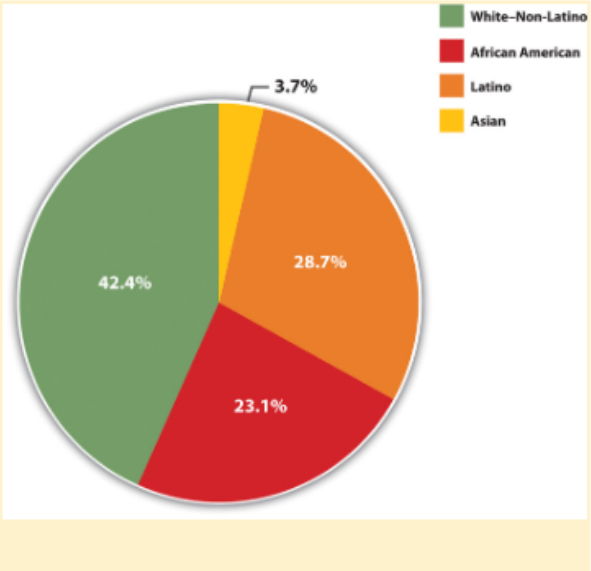
The most typical poor people in the United States are non-Latino whites. These individuals comprise 42.4 percent of all poor Americans.

Image courtesy of Yunchung Lee, http://www.flickr.com/photos/bleuman/5677830843/.

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). 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.

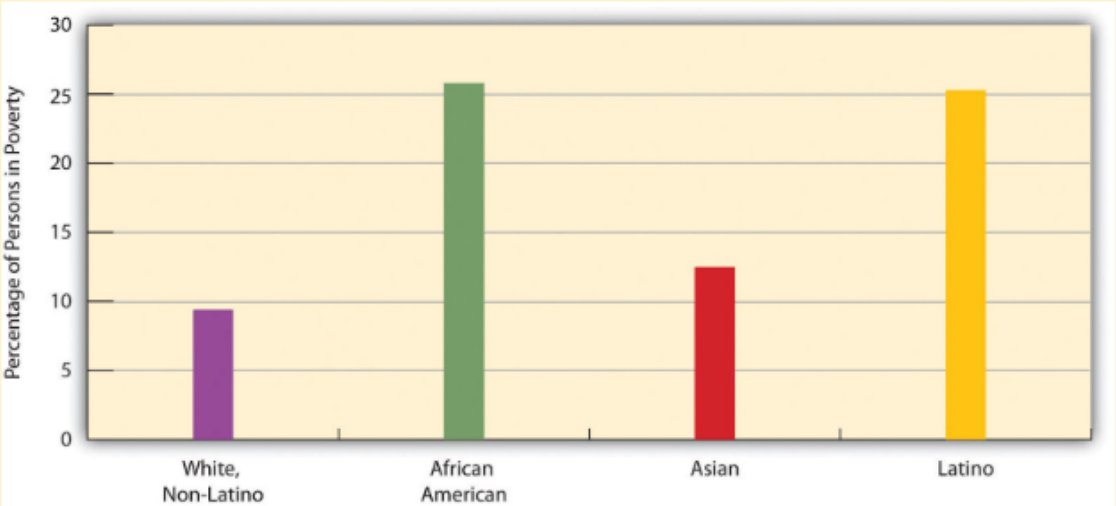
It is also true, though, that race and ethnicity affect the chances of being poor. While only 9.9 percent of non-Latino whites are poor, 27.4 percent of African Americans, 12.1 percent of Asians, and 26.6 percent of Latinos (who may be of any race) are poor (see Figure 2.3). Thus African Americans and 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).Lin, A. C., & Harris, D. R. (Eds.). (2008). *The colors of poverty: Why racial and ethnic disparities persist*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Figure *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.

Figure *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.

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.

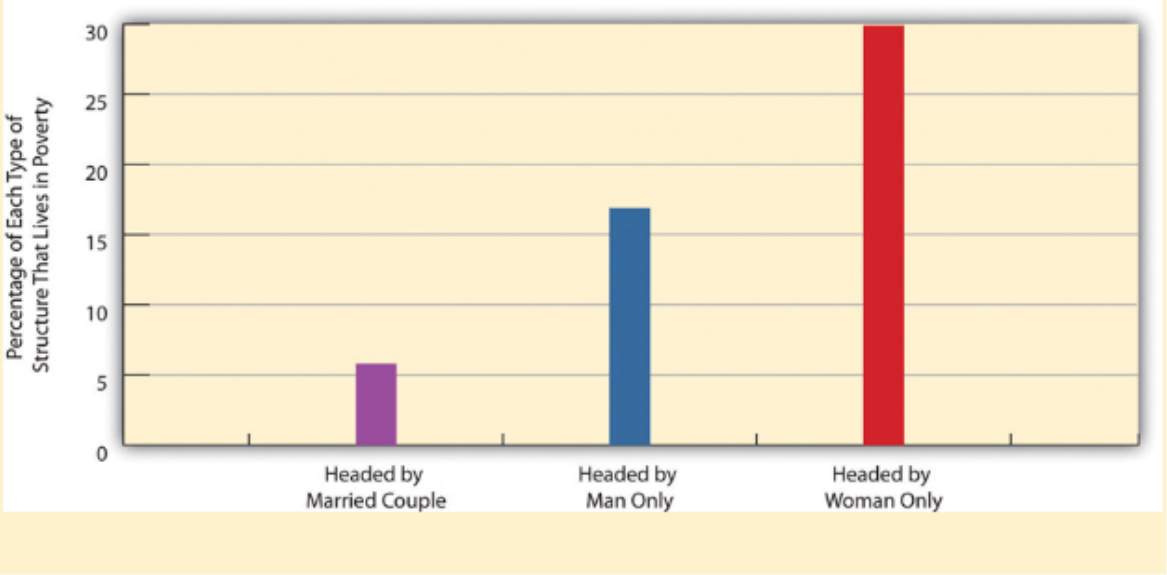
Family Structure

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 *Family Structure and Poverty Rate (Percentage of Each Type of Structure That Lives in Poverty)SDS*



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 age 16	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	
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.

Alt text for image: Table breaking down poverty and labor force

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, 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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2.4: Explaining Poverty

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 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 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, 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)Davis, K., & Moore, W. (1945). Some principles of stratification. *American Sociological Review, 10*, 242–249. 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?

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).Tumin, M. M. (1953). Some principles of stratification: A critical analysis. *American Sociological Review, 18*, 387–393; Wrong, D. H. (1959). The functional theory of stratification: Some neglected considerations. *American Sociological Review, 24*, 772–782.

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!)

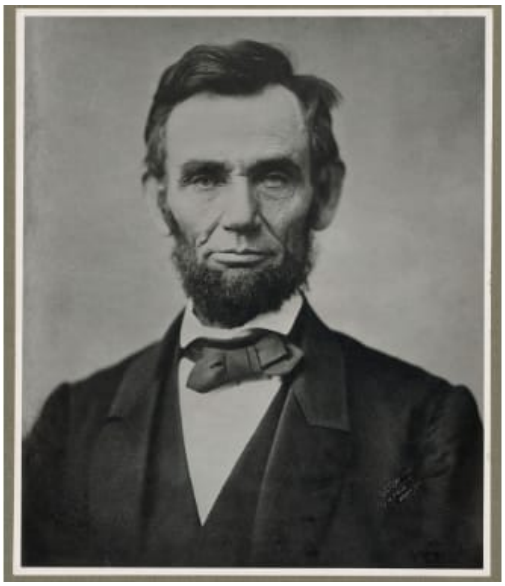
Second, the functionalist explanation implies that the most important jobs have the highest incomes and the least important jobs the lowest incomes, but many examples, including the ones just mentioned, counter this view. Coal miners make much less money than physicians, and professors, for better or 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).Gans, H. J. (1972). The positive functions of poverty. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*, 275–289. Because poverty serves all these functions and more, according to this argument, the middle and upper classes have a vested interest 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. Source: US Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a53289.

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).Kerbo, H. R. (2012). *Social stratification and inequality*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. 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).Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton; Duncan, C. M. (2000). *Worlds apart: Why poverty persists in rural America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Liebow, E. (1993). *Tell them who I am: The lives of homeless women*. New York, NY: Free Press; Rank, M. R. (1994). *Living on the edge: The realities of welfare in America*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 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).Bagdikian, B. H. (1964). *In the midst of plenty: The poor in America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Harrington, M. (1962). *The other America: Poverty in the United States*. New York, NY: Macmillan. 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, p. A19).Blow, C. M. (2011, June 25). Them that's not shall lose. *New York Times*, p. A19.

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).Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. 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 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 (2009, p. 136)Davidson, T. C. (2009). Attributions for poverty among college students: The impact of service-learning and religiosity. *College Student Journal, 43*, 136–144. 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).Bradley, C., & Cole, D. J. (2002). Causal attributions and the significance of self-efficacy in predicting solutions to poverty. *Sociological Focus, 35*, 381–396. 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).Davidson, T. C. (2009). Attributions for poverty among college students: The impact of service-learning and religiosity. *College Student Journal, 43*, 136–144. A more sophisticated version of this type of explanation is called the *culture of poverty* theory (Banfield, 1974; Lewis, 1966; Murray, 2012).Banfield, E. C. (1974). *The unheavenly city revisited*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown; Lewis, O. (1966). The culture of poverty. *Scientific American, 113*, 19–25; Murray, C. (2012). *Coming apart: The state of white America, 1960–2010*. New York, NY: Crown Forum. 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).

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).Ehrenreich, B. (2012, March 15). What "other America"? *Salon.com*. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2012/03/15/the_truth_about_the_poor/; Holland, J. (2011, July 29). Debunking the big lie right-wingers use to justify black poverty and unemployment. *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/story/151830/debunking_the_big_lie_right-wingers_use_to_justify_black_poverty_and_unemployment_?page=entire; Schmidt, P. (2012, February 12). Charles Murray, author of the "Bell Curve," steps back into the ring. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Charles-Murray-Author-of-The/130722/?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en. 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 (2011, p. 18)Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. 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, Korteweg, & Woodward, 2006, p. 17).Block, F., Korteweg, A. C., & Woodward, K. (2006). The compassion gap in American poverty policy. *Contexts, 5*(2), 14–20.

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, Harding, & Lamont, 2010).Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering culture and poverty. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 629*(May), 6–27. 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]Goszkowski, R. (2008). Among Americans, smoking decreases as income increases. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/105550/among-americans-smoking-decreases-income-increases.aspx.), 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).Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering culture and poverty. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 629*(May), 6–27. 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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2.5: The Consequences of Poverty

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, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbawa, & Collins, 2009; Ratcliffe & McKernan, 2010; Sanders, 2011).Lindsey, D. (2009). *Child poverty and inequality: Securing a better future for America's children*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Moore, K. A., Redd, Z., Burkhauser, M., Mbawa, K., & Collins, A. (2009). *Children in poverty: Trends, consequences, and policy options*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2009_04_07_RB_ChildreninPoverty.pdf; Ratcliffe, C., & McKernan, S.-M. (2010). *Childhood poverty persistence: Facts and consequences*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press; Sanders, L. (2011). Neuroscience exposes pernicious effects of poverty. *Science News, 179*(3), 32. 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).Ratcliffe, C., & McKernan, S.-M. (2010). *Childhood poverty persistence: Facts and consequences*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

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.

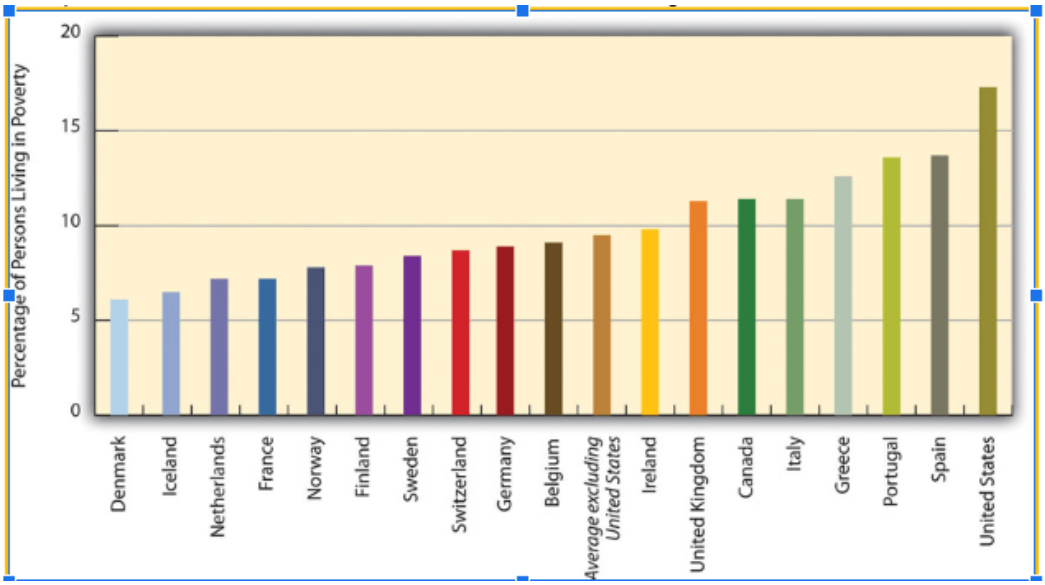
Crime and Victimization

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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2.6: Global Poverty

Global Poverty

Learning Objectives

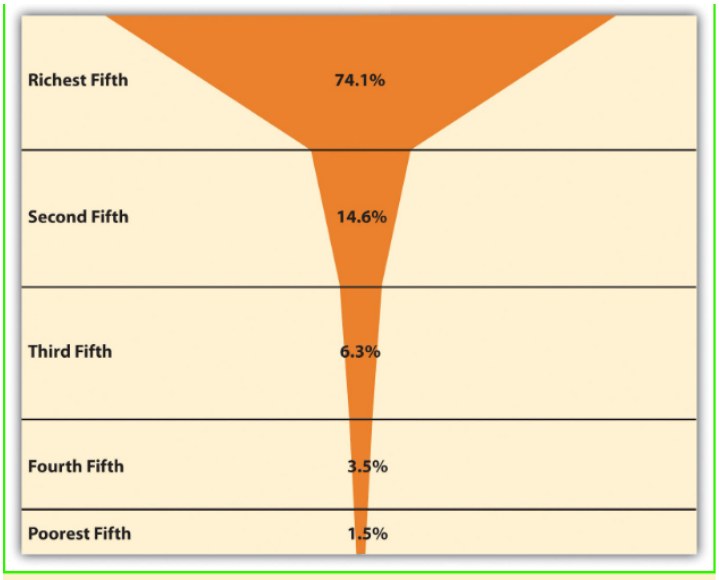
1. Describe where poor nations tend to be located.
2. Explain the difference between the modernization and dependency theories of poverty.
3. List some of the consequences of global poverty.

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 (data from 2000; Dikhanov, 2005 Dikhanov, Y. (2005). *Trends in global income distribution, 1970–2000, and scenarios for 2015*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme.). 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).Dikhanov, Y. (2005). *Trends in global income distribution, 1970–2000, and scenarios for 2015*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme. 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).United Nations Development Programme. (2009). *Human development report 2009*. New York, NY: Author. As Figure 2.5 illustrates, this distribution of income resembles a champagne glass.

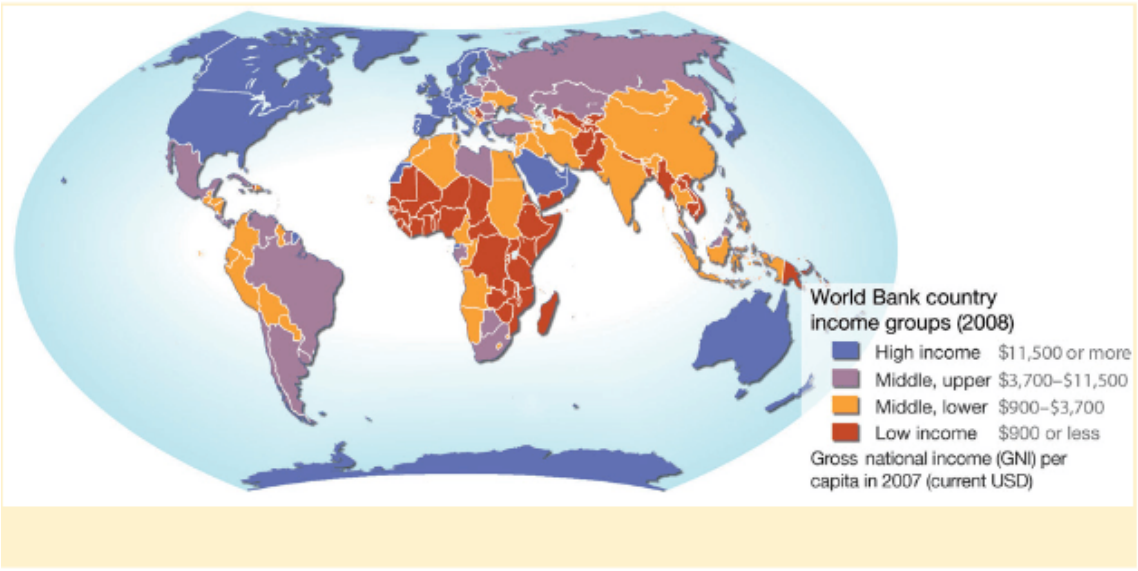
Figure *Global Income Distribution (Percentage of World Income Held by Each Fifth of World Population)*



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 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 *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/country-income-groups-world-bank-classification.

Measuring Global Poverty

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 anti-poverty 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	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 remain 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	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.

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 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.

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.

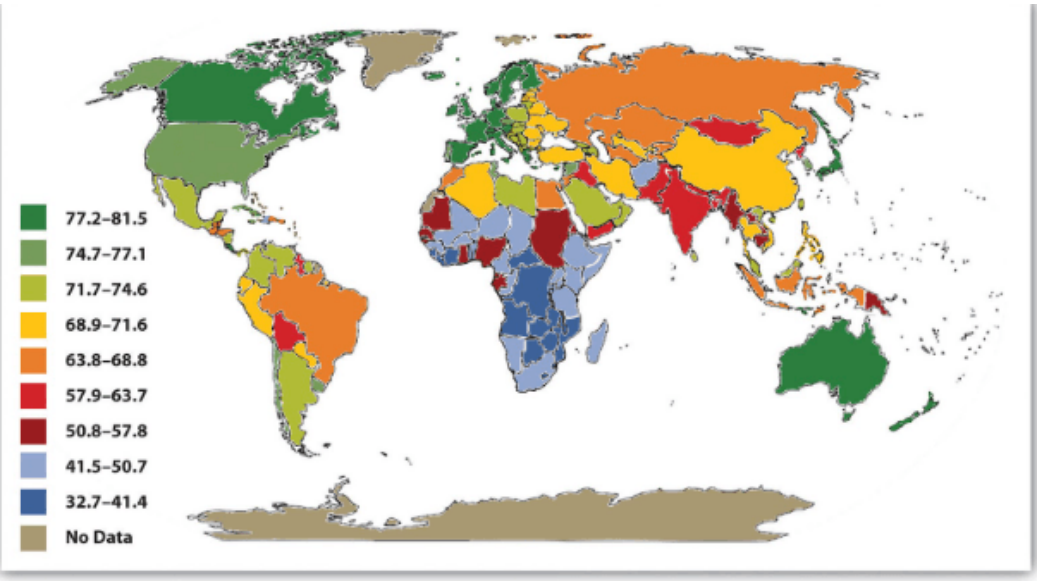
It would be nice if these images were merely fiction, but unfortunately they are far too real. AIDS, malaria, starvation, and other deadly diseases are common. Many children die before reaching adolescence, and many adults die before reaching what in the richest nations would be considered middle age. 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 *Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)*

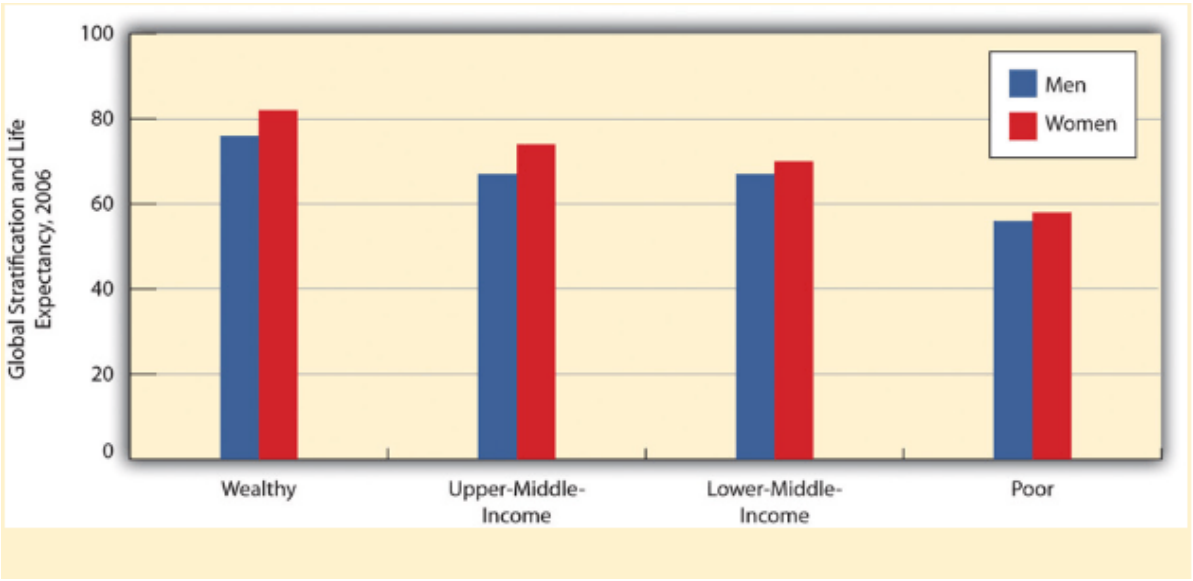


Source: Adapted from Global Education Project. (2004). Human conditions: World life expectancy map. Retrieved from

http://www.theglobaleducationproject.org/earth/human-conditions.php.

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 *Global Poverty and Life Expectancy, 2006*

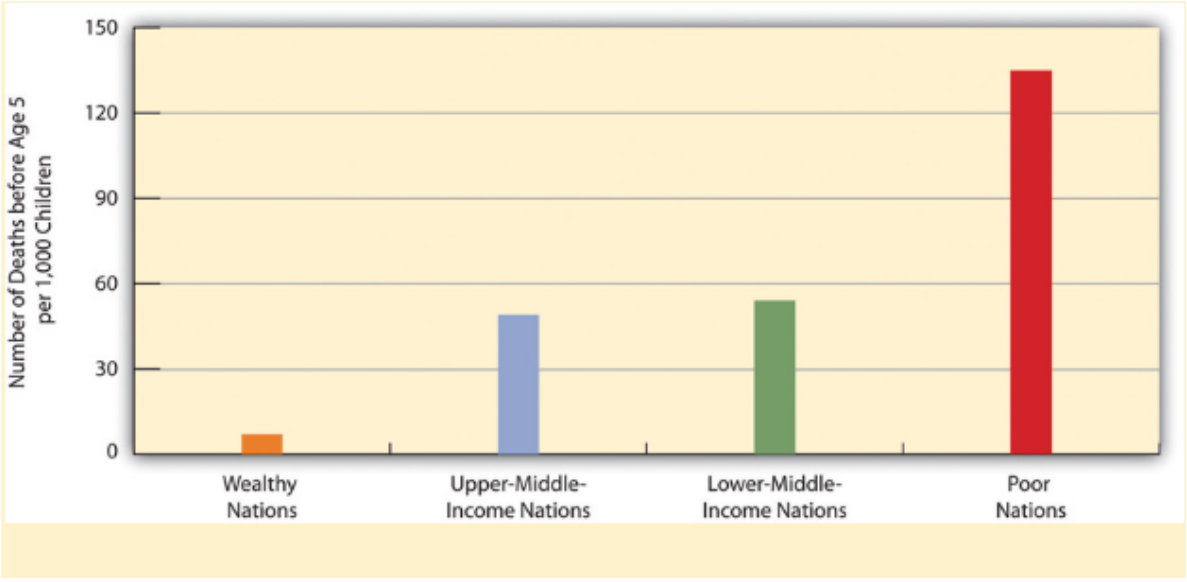


Source: Data from World Bank. (2009). World development report 2009. Washington, DC: Author.

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 *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.

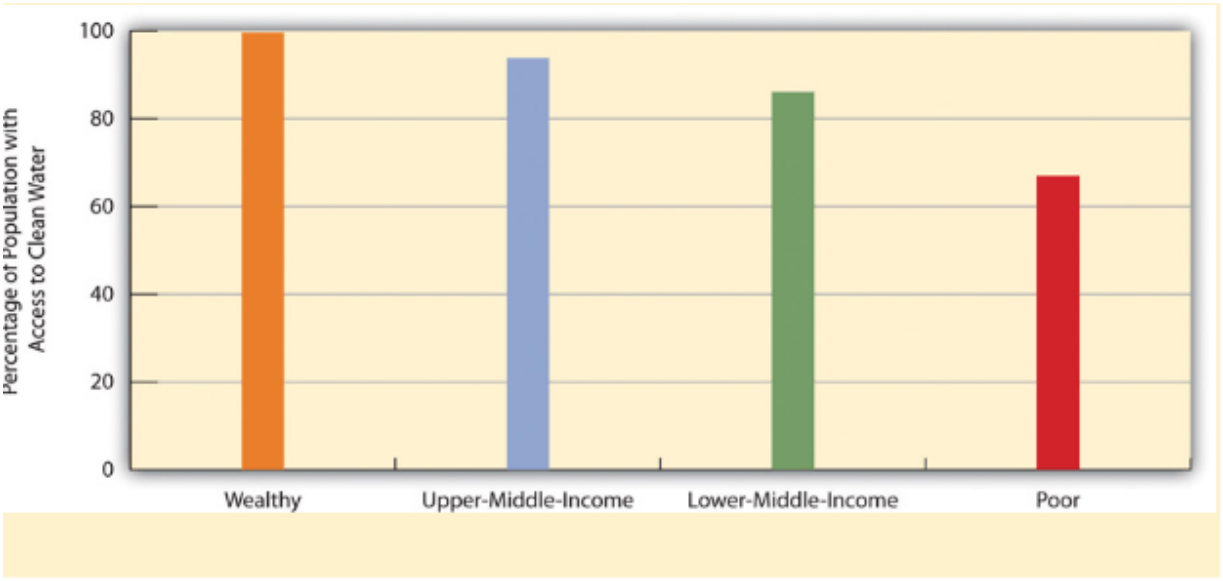
Figure *Global Stratification and Access to Adequate Sanitation, 2006*

photo of malnourished child



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

Figure *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 Global Poverty and Adult Literacy, 2008

: globally scaled 15 & older that are literate



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 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.

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 remain 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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2.7: Reducing Poverty

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, 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).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.

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, Hacker, & Mettler, 2007).Soss, J., Hacker, J. S., & Mettler, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Remaking America: Democracy and public policy in an age of inequality*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. 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).Wilson, W. J. (2010). *More than just race: Being black and poor in the inner city*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. 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 (2011, p. 18),Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. 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 (2011, p. 17)Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. 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" (Mark R. Rank, 2011, p. 20).Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. 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" (p. 20).Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21. This situation, he says, must become seen as a "moral outrage" (p. 20).Rank, M. R. (2011). Rethinking American poverty. *Contexts, 10*(Spring), 16–21.

Sociologist Joe Soss (2011, p. 84)Soss, J. (2011). The poverty fight. *Contexts, 10*(2), 84. 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 anti-poverty 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."

Anti Poverty Programs and Policies

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 school children 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, Dutta-Gupta, & Minoff, 2007; Iceland, 2006; Lindsey, 2009; Moore et al., 2009; Rank, 2004).Cancian, M., & Danziger, S. H. (2009). *Changing poverty, changing policies*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; Greenberg, M., Dutta-Gupta, I., & Minoff, E. (2007). *From poverty to prosperity: A national strategy to cut poverty in half*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; Iceland, J. (2006). *Poverty in America: A handbook*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Lindsey, D. (2009). *Child poverty and inequality: Securing a better future for America's children*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Moore, K. A., Redd, Z., Burkhauser, M., Mbawa, K., & Collins, A. (2009). *Children in poverty: Trends, consequences, and policy options*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2009_04_07_RB_ChildreninPoverty.pdf; Rank, M. R. (2004). *One nation, underprivileged: Why American poverty affects us all*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 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/ideas/articles/2009/09/20/small_change_does_microlending_actually_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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2.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

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 Known

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 emails to local, state, and federal officials that encourage them to expand antipoverty programs.

Further Reading

1. [Article 3] “France Extends Eviction Ban To Help Needy” (article)
    1. https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexledsom/2020/05/17/france-extends-eviction-ban-to-help-needy/?sh=70164e227fea

2. The end of key U.S. public assistance measures pushed millions of people into poverty in 2022
    1. https://www.epi.org/blog/the-end-of-key-u-s-public-assistance-measures-pushed-millions-of-people-into-poverty-in-2022/

End of Chapter Discussions

1. "How are poverty levels measured and quantified globally and nationally? Can you identify some of the demographic groups that are most affected by poverty and discuss the social patterns and distributions of poverty across different populations? What implications do these measurements and patterns have for addressing poverty?"
2. "Examine the various explanations for the persistence of poverty, considering economic, social, and political factors. Can you provide examples of each type of factor contributing to poverty, and discuss their interplay in perpetuating poverty cycles? Furthermore, what are some of the multifaceted consequences of poverty on individuals, communities, and societies, especially in areas like health, education and social mobility?"
3. "Explore poverty alleviation strategies and policies, both on a global and local scale. Discuss the effectiveness of different approaches in reducing poverty and improving the living conditions of those in poverty. Are there any examples of successful poverty alleviation programs or initiatives that you can identify and what lessons can we learn from them in the context of addressing poverty?"

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3: RACIAL AND ETHNIC INEQUALITY SOCIAL PROBLEMS CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

3.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

3.2: Racial and Ethnic Inequality- A Historical Prelude

3.3: The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

3.4: Prejudice

3.5: Discrimination

3.6: Dimensions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.7: Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.8: Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality

3.9: Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses- Who Decides?

3.10: End of Chapter Synthesis

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3.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Racial and Ethnic Inequality Social Problems Continuity and Change

Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Learning Objectives

1. Contextualize Racial and Ethnic Inequality: Understand the historical context of racial and ethnic inequality, including significant events like the slavery and the George Floyd case. Explore the evolution and meaning of race and ethnicity concepts, and how these have shaped societal structures and interactions.
2. Analyze Forms and Causes of Inequality: Identify and examine different forms of prejudice and discrimination, and understand their impact on racial and ethnic inequality. Explore the various dimensions of this inequality, including economic, political, and social aspects (e.g., health), and discuss the theories explaining the persistence of racial and ethnic disparities.
3. Explore Solutions to Mitigate Inequality: Evaluate strategies and measures that have been or can be implemented to reduce racial and ethnic inequality. This includes examining policies, social initiatives, and educational efforts aimed at promoting equality and reducing discrimination at both individual and institutional levels.

Chapter Introduction

Real World Application: George Floyd

On May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota George Floyd, an African American man, died after Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, knelt on his neck for approximately nine minutes during an arrest. This incident was captured on video and rapidly disseminated across social media platforms, sparking global outrage and leading to widespread protests under the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM).

From a sociological perspective, the George Floyd incident highlights several key aspects of racial and ethnic inequality. Firstly, it underscores the systemic nature of racial disparities in law enforcement and criminal justice. Floyd's death is not an isolated event but part of a broader pattern of disproportionate police violence against African Americans, a phenomenon deeply rooted in the history of the United States. This systemic inequality is interwoven with historical legacies of colonization, slavery, segregation, and institutional racism, which continue to influence contemporary social structures and relationships.

Secondly, the incident brings to light the concept of intersectionality, which refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, leading to overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Floyd's encounter with law enforcement cannot be separated from his identity as a Black man, which intersected with socio-economic factors (e.g., working class) that shape experiences of policing and judicial outcomes for minority groups.

Moreover, the global response to Floyd's death illustrates the role of social media in mobilizing social movements and shaping public discourse on race and inequality. The widespread sharing of the video and the ensuing protests exemplify how digital platforms can amplify marginalized voices and foster solidarity across different communities, transcending geographical boundaries.

In summary, the George Floyd incident is emblematic of the persistent racial, ethnic, and social class inequalities that plague U.S. society. It serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggles against systemic racism and the need for continued vigilance and activism to address these deep-seated issues. This incident, therefore, occupies a crucial place in discussions about racial justice and reform, both within and beyond the field of sociology.

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Social Problems in the News

"Anger, Shock over Cross Burning in Calif. Community," the headline said. This cross burning took place next to a black woman's home in Arroyo Grande, California, a small, wealthy town about 170 miles northwest of Los Angeles. The eleven-foot cross had recently been stolen from a nearby church.

This hate crime shocked residents and led a group of local ministers to issue a public statement that said in part, "Burning crosses, swastikas on synagogue walls, hateful words on mosque doors are not pranks. They are hate crimes meant to frighten and intimidate." The head of the group added, "We live in a beautiful area, but it's only beautiful if every single person feels safe conducting their lives and living here."

Four people were arrested four months later for allegedly burning the cross and charged with arson, hate crime, terrorism, and conspiracy. Arroyo Grande's mayor applauded the arrests and said in a statement, "Despite the fact that our city was shaken by this crime, it did provide an opportunity for us to become better educated on matters relating to diversity."

Sources: Jablon, 2011; Lerner, 2011; Mann, 2011Jablon, R. (2011, March 23). Anger, shock over cross burning in Calif. community. washingtonpost.com. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/23/AR2011032300301.html; Lerner, D. (2011, July 22). Police chief says suspects wanted to "terrorize" cross burning victim. ksby.com. Retrieved from http://www.ksby.com/news/police-chief-says-suspects-wanted-to-terrorize-cross-burning-victim/; Mann, C. (2011, March 22). Cross burning in Calif. suburb brings FBI into hate crime investigation. cbsnews.com. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/.

Cross burnings like this one recall the Ku Klux Klan era between the 1880s and 1960s, when white men dressed in white sheets and white hoods terrorized African Americans in the South and elsewhere and lynched more than 3,000 black men and women. Thankfully, that era is long gone, but as this news story reminds us, racial issues continue to trouble the United States.

In the wake of the 1960s urban riots, the so-called Kerner Commission (1968, p. 1)Kerner Commission. (1968). *Report of the National Advisory Commission on civil disorders*. New York, NY: Bantam Books. appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to study the riots famously warned, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." The commission blamed white racism for the riots and urged the government to provide jobs and housing for African Americans and to take steps to end racial segregation.

More than four decades later, racial inequality in the United States continues to exist and in many ways has worsened. Despite major advances by African Americans, Latinos, and other people of color during the past few decades, they continue to lag behind non-Hispanic whites in education, income, health, and other social indicators. The faltering economy since 2008 has hit people of color especially hard, and the racial wealth gap is deeper now than it was just two decades ago.

Why does racial and ethnic inequality exist? What forms does it take? What can be done about it? This chapter addresses all these questions. We shall see that, although racial and ethnic inequality has stained the United States since its beginnings, there is hope for the future as long as our nation understands the structural sources of this inequality and makes a concerted effort to reduce it. Later chapters in this book will continue to highlight various dimensions of racial and ethnic inequality. Immigration, a very relevant issue today for Latinos and Asians and the source of much political controversy, receives special attention in Chapter 15's discussion of population problems.

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3.2: 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).Brown, D. A. (2009). *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian history of the American West*. New York, NY: Sterling Innovation.

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)Brown, R. M. (1975). *Strain of violence: Historical studies of American violence and vigilantism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 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).Litwack, L. F. (2009). *How free is free? The long death of Jim Crow*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



During the era of Jim Crow racism in the South, several thousand African Americans were lynched.

Image courtesy of US Library of Congress, http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/npcc.12928.

African Americans were not the only targets of native-born white mobs back then (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 2009).Dinnerstein, L., & Reimers, D. M. (2009). *Ethnic Americans: A history of immigration*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 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)Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma: The negro problem and modern democracy*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers. 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).Massey, D. S. (2007). *Categorically unequal: The American stratification system*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; Wilson, W. J. (2009). The economic plight of inner-city black males. In E. Anderson (Ed.), *Against the wall: Poor, young, black, and male* (pp. 55–70). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. 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.

For Your Review

1. Describe why Myrdal said US race relations were an "American dilemma."
2. How much did you learn in high school about the history of race and ethnicity in the United States? Do you think you should have learned more?

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3.3: The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity

Learning Objectives

1. Critique the biological concept of race.
2. Discuss why race is a social construction.
3. Explain why ethnic heritages have both good and bad consequences.

To begin our understanding of racial and ethnic inequality, we first need to understand what *race* and *ethnicity* mean. These terms may seem easy to define but are much more complex than their definitions suggest.

Race

Let's start first with **race**, which refers to a category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and stature. A key question about race is whether it is more of a biological category or a social category. Most people think of race in biological terms, and for more than three hundred years, or ever since white Europeans began colonizing nations filled with people of color, people have been identified as belonging to one race or another based on certain biological features.

It is certainly easy to see that people in the United States and around the world differ physically in some obvious ways. The most noticeable difference is skin tone: Some groups of people have very dark skin, while others have very light skin. Other differences also exist. Some people have very curly hair, while others have very straight hair. Some have thin lips, while others have thick lips. Some groups of people tend to be relatively tall, while others tend to be relatively short. Using such physical differences as their criteria, scientists at one point identified as many as nine races: African, American Indian or Native American, Asian, Australian Aborigine, European (more commonly called "white"), Indian, Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian (Smedley, 2007).Smedley, A. (2007). *Race in North America: Evolution of a worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Although people certainly do differ in these kinds of physical features, anthropologists, sociologists, and many biologists question the value of these categories and thus the value of the biological concept of race (Smedley, 2007).Smedley, A. (2007). *Race in North America: Evolution of a worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. For one thing, we often see more physical differences *within* a race than *between* races. For example, some people we call "white" (or European), such as those with Scandinavian backgrounds, have very light skins, while others, such as those from some Eastern European backgrounds, have much darker skins. In fact, some "whites" have darker skin than some "blacks," or African Americans. Some whites have very straight hair, while others have very curly hair; some have blonde hair and blue eyes, while others have dark hair and brown eyes. Because of interracial reproduction going back to the days of slavery, African Americans also differ in the darkness of their skin and in other physical characteristics. In fact, it is estimated that at least 30 percent of African Americans have some white (i.e., European) ancestry and that at least 20 percent of whites have African or Native American ancestry. If clear racial differences ever existed hundreds or thousands of years ago (and many scientists doubt such differences ever existed), in today's world these differences have become increasingly blurred.



President Barack Obama had an African father and a white mother. Although his ancestry is equally black and white, Obama considers himself an African American, as do most Americans. In several Latin American nations, however, Obama would be considered white because of his white ancestry.

Image courtesy of Steve Jurvetson, http://www.flickr.com/photos/jurvetson/2175936409.

Another reason to question the biological concept of race is that an individual or a group of individuals is often assigned to a race arbitrarily. A century ago, for example, Irish, Italians, and Eastern European Jews who left their homelands were not regarded as white once they reached the United States but rather as a different, inferior (if unnamed) race (Painter, 2010).Painter, N. I. (2010). *The history of white people*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. The belief in their inferiority helped justify the harsh treatment they suffered in their new country. Today, of course, we call people from all three backgrounds white or European.

In this context, consider someone in the United States who has a white parent and a black parent. What race is this person? American society usually calls this person black or African American, and the person may adopt this identity (as does President Barack Obama, who had a white mother and African father). But where is the logic for doing so? This person, as well as President Obama, is as much white as black in terms of parental ancestry.

Or consider someone with one white parent and another parent who is the child of one black parent and one white parent. This person thus has three white grandparents and one black grandparent. Even though this person's ancestry is thus 75 percent white and 25 percent black, she or he is likely to be considered black in the United States and may well adopt this racial identity. This practice reflects the traditional *one-drop rule* in the United States that defines someone as black if she or he has at least one drop of *black blood*, and that was used in the antebellum South to keep the slave population as large as possible (Staples, 2005)Staples, B. (2005, October 31). Why race isn't as "black" and "white" as we think. *New York Time*s, p. A18.. Yet in many Latin American nations, this person would be considered white (see Note 3.7 "Lessons from Other Societies"). With such arbitrary designations, race is more of a social category than a biological one.

Lessons from Other Societies

The Concept of Race in Brazil

As the text discusses, race was long considered a fixed, biological category, but today it is now regarded as a social construction. The experience of Brazil provides very interesting comparative evidence for this more accurate way of thinking about race.

When slaves were first brought to the Americas almost four hundred years ago, many more were taken to Brazil, where slavery was not abolished until 1888, than to the land that eventually became the United States. Brazil was then a colony of Portugal, and the Portuguese used Africans as slave labor. Just as in the United States, a good deal of interracial reproduction has occurred since those early days, much of it initially the result of rape of women slaves by their owners, and Brazil over the centuries has had many more racial intermarriages than the United States. Also like the United States, then, much of Brazil's population has multiracial ancestry. But in a significant departure from the United States, Brazil uses different criteria to consider the race to which a person belongs.

Brazil uses the term preto, or black, for people whose ancestry is solely African. It also uses the term branco, or white, to refer to people whose ancestry is both African and European. In contrast, as the text discusses, the United States commonly uses the term black or African American to refer to someone with even a small amount of African ancestry and white for someone who is thought to have solely European ancestry or at least "looks" white. If the United States were to follow Brazil's practice of reserving the term black for someone whose ancestry is solely African and the term white for someone whose ancestry is both African and European, many of the Americans commonly called "black" would no longer be considered black and instead would be considered white.

As sociologist Edward E. Telles (2006, p. 79)Telles, E. E. (2006). Race in another America: The significance of skin color in Brazil. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. summarizes these differences, "[Blackness is differently understood in Brazil than in the United States. A person considered black in the United States is often not so in Brazil. Indeed, some U.S. blacks may be considered white in Brazil. Although the value given to blackness is similarly low [in both nations], who gets classified as black is not uniform." The fact that someone can count on being considered "black" in one society and not "black" in another society underscores the idea that race is best considered a social construction rather than a biological category.

Sources: Barrionuevo & Calmes, 2011; Klein & Luno, 2009; Telles, 2006Barrionuevo, A., & Calmes, J. (2011, March 21). President underscores similarities with Brazilians, but sidesteps one. New York Times, p. A8; Klein, H. S., & Luno, F. V. (2009). Slavery in Brazil. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; Telles, E. E. (2006). Race in another America: The significance of skin color in Brazil. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

A third reason to question the biological concept of race comes from the field of biology itself and more specifically from the studies of genetics and human evolution. Starting with genetics, people from different races are more than 99.9 percent the same in their DNA (Begley, 2008).Begley, S. (2008, February 29). Race and DNA. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/blogs/lab-notes/2008/02/29/race-and-dna.html. To turn that around, less than 0.1 percent of all DNA in our bodies accounts for the physical differences among people that we associate with racial differences. In terms of DNA, then, people with different racial backgrounds are much, much more similar than dissimilar.

Even if we acknowledge that people differ in the physical characteristics we associate with race, modern evolutionary evidence reminds us that we are all, really, of one human race. According to evolutionary theory, the human race began thousands and thousands of years ago in sub-Saharan Africa. As people migrated around the world over the millennia, natural selection took over. It favored dark skin for people living in hot, sunny climates (i.e., near the equator), because the heavy amounts of melanin that produce dark skin protect against severe sunburn, cancer, and other problems. By the same token, natural selection favored light skin for people who migrated farther from the equator to cooler, less sunny climates, because dark skins there would have interfered with the production of vitamin D (Stone & Lurquin, 2007).Stone, L., & Lurquin, P. F. (2007). *Genes, culture, and human evolution: A synthesis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Evolutionary evidence thus reinforces the common humanity of people who differ in the rather superficial ways associated with their appearances: We are one human species composed of people who happen to look different.

Race as a Social Construction

The reasons for doubting the biological basis for racial categories suggest that race is more of a social category than a biological one. Another way to say this is that race is a **social construction**, a concept that has no objective reality but rather is what people decide it is (Berger & Luckmann, 1963).Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1963). *The social construction of reality*. New York, NY: Doubleday. In this view, race has no real existence other than what and how people think of it.

This understanding of race is reflected in the problems, outlined earlier, in placing people with multiracial backgrounds into any one racial category. We have already mentioned the example of President Obama. As another example, golfer Tiger Woods was typically called an African American by the news media when he burst onto the golfing scene in the late 1990s, but in fact his ancestry is one-half Asian (divided evenly between Chinese and Thai), one-quarter white, one-eighth Native American, and only one-eighth African American (Leland & Beals, 1997).Leland, J., & Beals, G. (1997, May 5). In living colors: Tiger Woods is the

exception that rules. *Newsweek*, 58–60.

Historical examples of attempts to place people in racial categories further underscore the social constructionism of race. In the South during the time of slavery, the skin tone of slaves lightened over the years as babies were born from the union, often in the form of rape, of slave owners and other whites with slaves. As it became difficult to tell who was “black” and who was not, many court battles over people’s racial identity occurred. People who were accused of having black ancestry would go to court to prove they were white in order to avoid enslavement or other problems (Staples, 1998).Staples, B. (1998, November 13). The shifting meanings of “black” and “white.” *New York Times*, p. WK14.

Although race is a social construction, it is also true that race has real consequences because people *do* perceive race as something real. Even though so little of DNA accounts for the physical differences we associate with racial differences, that low amount leads us not only to classify people into different races but also to treat them differently—and, more to the point, unequally—based on their classification. Yet modern evidence shows there is little, if any, scientific basis for the racial classification that is the source of so much inequality.

Ethnicity

Because of the problems in the meaning of *race*, many social scientists prefer the term *ethnicity* in speaking of people of color and others with distinctive cultural heritages. In this context, **ethnicity** refers to the shared social, cultural, and historical experiences, stemming from common national or regional backgrounds, that make subgroups of a population different from one another. Similarly, an **ethnic group** is a subgroup of a population with a set of shared social, cultural, and historical experiences; with relatively distinctive beliefs, values, and behaviors; and with some sense of identity of belonging to the subgroup. So conceived, the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic group* avoid the biological connotations of the terms *race* and *racial group*.

At the same time, the importance we attach to ethnicity illustrates that it, too, is in many ways a social construction, and our ethnic membership thus has important consequences for how we are treated. In particular, history and current practice indicate that it is easy to become prejudiced against people with different ethnicities from our own. Much of the rest of this chapter looks at the prejudice and discrimination operating today in the United States against people whose ethnicity is not white and European. Around the world today, ethnic conflict continues to rear its ugly head. The 1990s and 2000s were filled with ethnic cleansing and pitched battles among ethnic groups in Eastern Europe, Africa, and elsewhere. Our ethnic heritages shape us in many ways and fill many of us with pride, but they also are the source of much conflict, prejudice, and even hatred, as the hate crime story that began this chapter so sadly reminds us.

Key Takeaways

- Sociologists think race is best considered a social construction rather than a biological category.
- “Ethnicity” and “ethnic” avoid the biological connotations of “race” and “racial.”

For Your Review

1. List everyone you might know whose ancestry is biracial or multiracial. What do these individuals consider themselves to be?
2. List two or three examples that indicate race is a social construction rather than a biological category.

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3.4: Prejudice

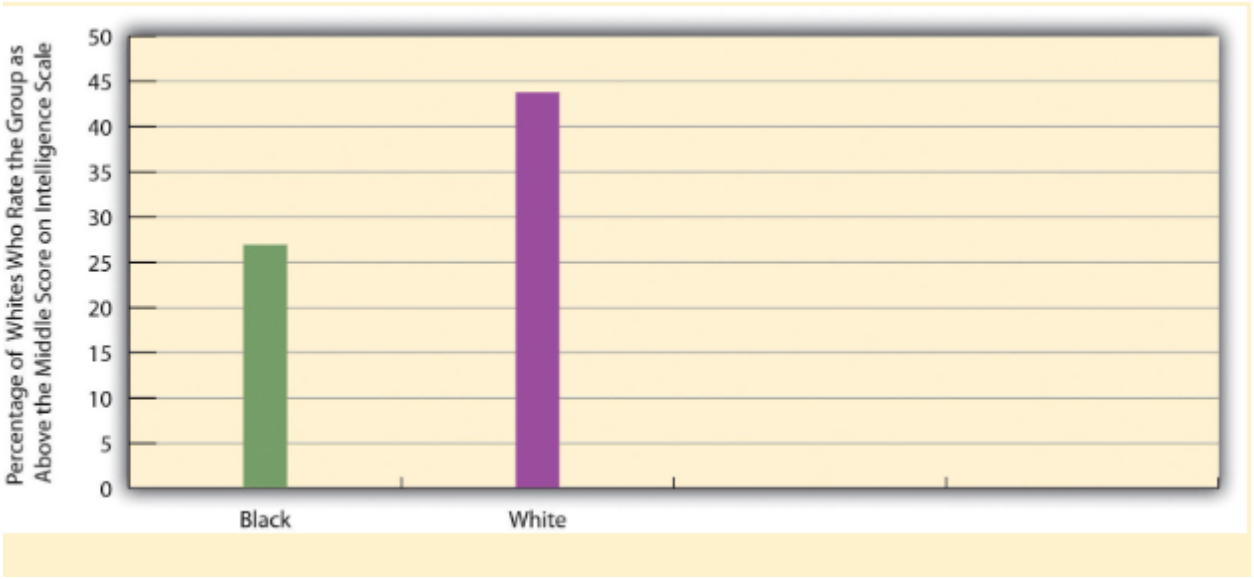
Prejudice

Learning Objectives

1. Define *prejudice*, *racism*, and *stereotypes*.
2. Discuss the major social-psychological and sociological theories of prejudice.
3. Describe how the nature of prejudice has changed.

Prejudice and *discrimination* (discussed in the next section) are often confused, but the basic difference between them is this: Prejudice is the attitude, while discrimination is the behavior. More specifically, racial and ethnic **prejudice** refers to a set of negative attitudes, beliefs, and judgments about whole categories of people, and about individual members of those categories, because of their perceived race and/or ethnicity. A closely related concept is **racism**, or the belief that certain racial or ethnic groups are inferior to one's own. Prejudice and racism are often based on racial and ethnic **stereotypes**, or simplified, mistaken generalizations about people because of their race and/or ethnicity. While cultural and other differences do exist among the various American racial and ethnic groups, many of the views we have of such groups are unfounded and hence are stereotypes. An example of the stereotypes that white people have of other groups appears in Figure 3.1, in which white respondents in the General Social Survey (GSS), a recurring survey of a random sample of the US population, are less likely to think blacks are intelligent than they are to think whites are intelligent.

Figure *Perceptions by Non-Latino White Respondents of the Intelligence of White and Black Americans*



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

Explaining Prejudice

Where does racial and ethnic prejudice come from? Why are some people more prejudiced than others? Scholars have tried to answer these questions at least since the 1940s, when the horrors of Nazism were still fresh in people's minds. Theories of prejudice fall into two camps, social-psychological and sociological. We will look at social-psychological explanations first and then turn to sociological explanations. We will also discuss distorted mass media treatment of various racial and ethnic groups.

Social-Psychological Explanations

One of the first social-psychological explanations of prejudice centered on the **authoritarian personality** (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950).Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York, NY: Harper. According to this view, authoritarian personalities develop in childhood in response to parents who practice harsh discipline. Individuals with authoritarian personalities emphasize such things as obedience to authority, a rigid adherence to rules, and low acceptance of people (out-groups) not like oneself. Many studies find strong racial and ethnic prejudice among such individuals (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008).Sibley, C. G., & Duckitt, J. (2008). Personality and prejudice: A meta-analysis and theoretical review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*, 248–279. But whether their prejudice stems from their authoritarian personalities or instead from the fact that their parents were probably prejudiced themselves remains an important question.

Another early and still popular social-psychological explanation is called **frustration theory (or scapegoat theory)** (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939).Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and Aggression*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. In this view individuals with various problems become frustrated and tend to blame their troubles on groups that are often disliked in the real world (e.g., racial, ethnic, and religious minorities). These minorities are thus scapegoats for the real sources of people's misfortunes. Several psychology experiments find that when people are frustrated, they indeed become more prejudiced. In one early experiment, college students who were purposely not given enough time to solve a puzzle were more prejudiced after the experiment than before it (Cowen, Landes, & Schaet, 1959).Cowen, E. L., Landes, J., & Schaet, D. E. (1959). The effects of mild frustration on the expression of prejudiced attitudes. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 64*, 33–38.

Sociological Explanations

One popular sociological explanation emphasizes *conformity* and *socialization* and is called *social learning theory*. In this view, people who are prejudiced are merely conforming to the culture in which they grow up, and prejudice is the result of socialization from parents, peers, the news media, and other various aspects of their culture. Supporting this view, studies have found that people tend to become more prejudiced when they move to areas where people are very prejudiced and less prejudiced when they move to locations where people are less prejudiced (Aronson, 2008).Aronson, E. (2008). *The social animal* (10th ed.). New York, NY: Worth. If people in the South today continue to be more prejudiced than those outside the South, as we discuss later, even though legal segregation ended more than four decades ago, the influence of their culture on their socialization may help explain these beliefs.

Children and Our Future

Growing Up as Farmworkers' Kids

In the large agricultural fields of California work thousands of farmworkers and their families. Adults and children alike live in poor, crowded conditions and do backbreaking work in the hot sun, day after day after day.

Because their parents are migrant workers, many children attend a specific school for only a few weeks or months at most before their parents move to another field in another town or even another state. At Sherwood Elementary School in Salinas, California, in the heart of the state's agricultural sector, 97 percent of students live in or near poverty. With their Latino backgrounds, more than three-fourths do not speak English well or at all, and many of their parents cannot read or write their own language, Spanish.

At the Sherwood school, according to a news report, many students "sleep beneath carports and live in such cramped quarters that their parents take them to the local truck stop to wash up before school." A local high school teacher said many of his students see little of their parents, who spend most of their waking hours working in the fields. "They have little brothers and sisters to take care of, maybe cook for. Yet they're supposed to turn in a 10-page paper by tomorrow? I mean, it's unreal."

These conditions have grievous consequences for California's migrant farmworker children, almost half of whom fail to complete high school. The principal of the Sherwood Elementary School said the key strategy for her faculty and school was "understanding where the students come from but also having high expectations."

The plight of farmworkers' children is just one aspect of the difficulties facing Latino children around the country. Thanks to reproduction and immigration, the number of Latino children nationwide has grown significantly during the past few decades: in 2009, 23 percent of US kindergarten children were Latino, compared to only 10 percent in 1989. These growing numbers

underscore the need to pay attention to the health and welfare of Latino children.

Against this backdrop, it is distressing to note that their health and welfare is not very good at all. About one-third of Latino children live in poverty. The average Latino child grows up in a poor neighborhood where almost half of the residents do not speak English fluently, where the schools are substandard, and where the high school dropout and teen unemployment rates are high. A number of factors, including their ethnicity, poverty, language barriers, and the immigrant status of many of their parents, limit Latino children's access to adequate health care and various kinds of social services.

Amid all these problems, however, the situation of California's farmworker children stands out as a national embarrassment for a prosperous country like the United States. As the country struggles to end racial and ethnic inequality, it must not forget the children of Salinas who have to use a truck stop to wash up before school.

Sources: P. L. Brown, 2011; Landale, McHale, & Booth, 2011; Tavernise, 2011 Brown, P. L. (2011, March 13). Itinerant life weighs on farmworkers' children. New York Times, p. A18; Landale, N. S., McHale, S., & Booth, A. (Eds.). (2011). Growing up Hispanic: Health and development of children of immigrants. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press; Tavernise, S. (2011, February 8). Among the nation's youngest, analysis finds fewer whites. New York Times, p. A14.

The mass media play a key role in how many people learn to be prejudiced. This type of learning happens because the media often present people of color in a negative light. By doing so, the media unwittingly reinforce the prejudice that individuals already have or even increase their prejudice (Larson, 2005).Larson, S. G. (2005). *Media & minorities: The politics of race in news and entertainment*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Examples of distorted media coverage abound. Even though poor people are more likely to be white than any other race or ethnicity (see Chapter 2), the news media use pictures of African Americans far more often than those of whites in stories about poverty. In one study, national news magazines, such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, and television news shows portrayed African Americans in almost two-thirds of their stories on poverty, even though only about one-fourth of poor people are African Americans. In the magazine stories, only 12 percent of the African Americans had a job, even though in the real world more than 40 percent of poor African Americans were working at the time the stories were written (Gilens, 1996).Gilens, M. (1996). Race and poverty in America: Public misperceptions and the American news media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 60*, 515–541. In a Chicago study, television news shows there depicted whites fourteen times more often in stories of good Samaritans, even though whites and African Americans live in Chicago in roughly equal numbers (Entman & Rojecki, 2001).Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (2001). *The black image in the white mind*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Many other studies find that newspaper and television stories about crime and drugs feature higher proportions of African Americans as offenders than is true in arrest statistics (Surette, 2011).Surette, R. (2011). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Studies like these show that the news media "convey the message that black people are violent, lazy, and less civic minded" (Jackson, 1997, p. A27).Jackson, D. Z. (1997, December 5). Unspoken during race talk. *The Boston Globe*, p. A27.

A second sociological explanation emphasizes *economic and political competition* and is commonly called *group threat theory* (Quillian, 2006).Quillian, L. (2006). New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination. *Annual Review of Sociology, 32*, 299–328. In this view, prejudice arises from competition over jobs and other resources and from disagreement over various political issues. When groups vie with each other over these matters, they often become hostile toward each other. Amid such hostility, it is easy to become prejudiced toward the group that threatens your economic or political standing. A popular version of this basic explanation is Susan Olzak's (1992)Olzak, S. (1992). *The dynamics of ethnic competition and conflict*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. *ethnic competition theory*, which holds that ethnic prejudice and conflict increase when two or more ethnic groups find themselves competing for jobs, housing, and other goals.

The competition explanation is the macro equivalent of the frustration/scapegoat theory already discussed. Much of the white mob violence discussed earlier stemmed from whites' concern that the groups they attacked threatened their jobs and other aspects of their lives. Thus lynchings of African Americans in the South increased when the Southern economy worsened and decreased when the economy improved (Tolnay & Beck, 1995).Tolnay, S. E., & Beck, E. M. (1995). *A festival of violence: An analysis of southern lynchings, 1882–1930*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. Similarly, white mob violence against Chinese immigrants in the 1870s began after the railroad construction that employed so many Chinese immigrants slowed and the

Chinese began looking for work in other industries. Whites feared that the Chinese would take jobs away from white workers and that their large supply of labor would drive down wages. Their assaults on the Chinese killed several people and prompted the passage by Congress of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that prohibited Chinese immigration (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 2009).Dinnerstein, L., & Reimers, D. M. (2009). *Ethnic Americans: A history of immigration*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.



During the 1870s, whites feared that Chinese immigrants would take away their jobs. This fear led to white mob violence against the Chinese and to an act of Congress that prohibited Chinese immigration.

Image courtesy of Marku1988, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_Emigration_to_America.jpg.

Correlates of Prejudice

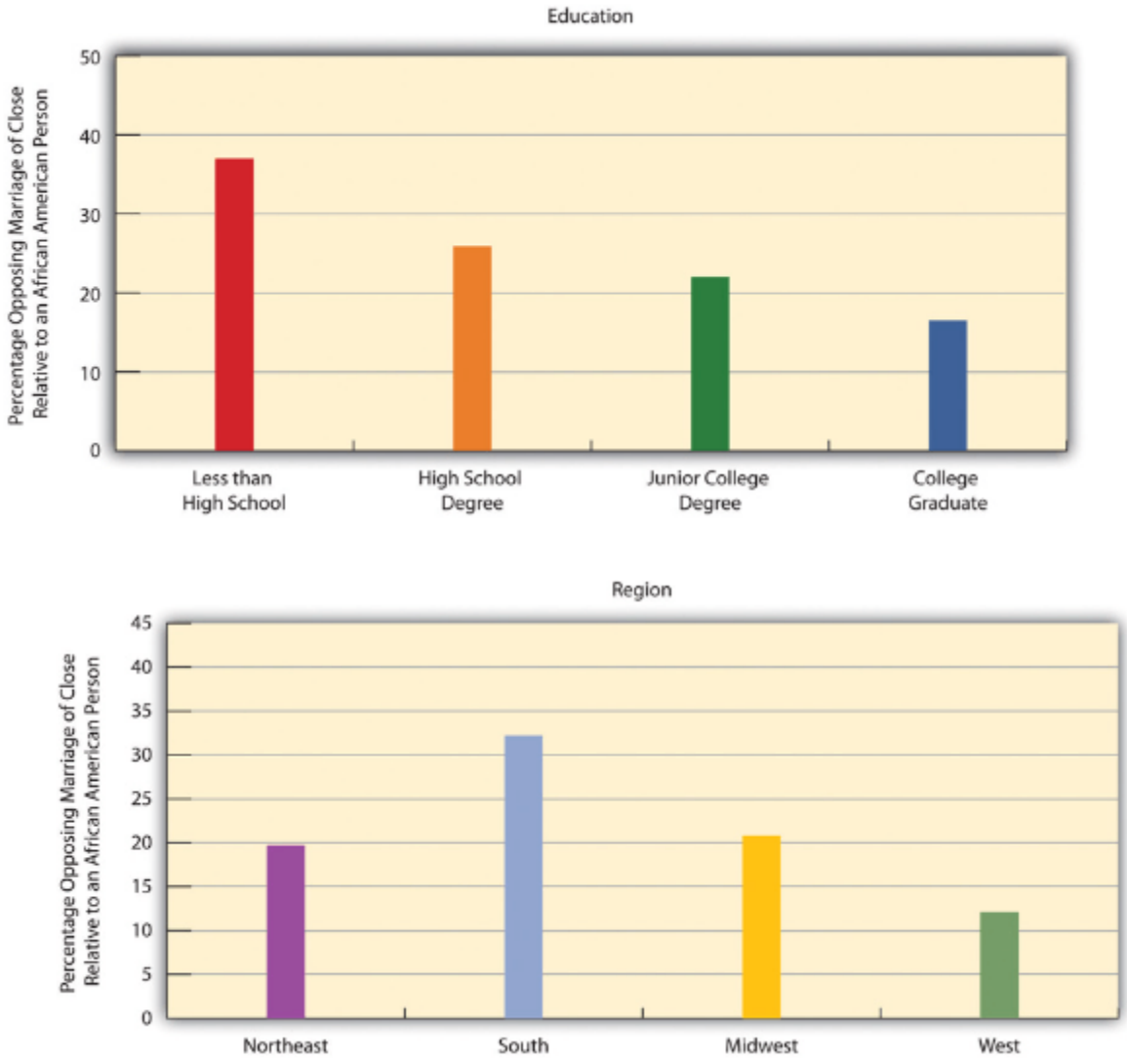
Since the 1940s, social scientists have investigated the individual correlates of racial and ethnic prejudice (Stangor, 2009).Stangor, C. (2009). The study of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination within social psychology: A quick history of theory and research. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (pp. 1–22). New York, NY: Psychology Press. These correlates help test the theories of prejudice just presented. For example, if authoritarian personalities do produce prejudice, then people with these personalities should be more prejudiced. If frustration also produces prejudice, then people who are frustrated with aspects of their lives should also be more prejudiced. Other correlates that have been studied include age, education, gender, region of country, race, residence in integrated neighborhoods, and religiosity. We can take time here to focus on gender, education, and region of the country and discuss the evidence for the racial attitudes of whites, as most studies do in view of the historic dominance of whites in the United States.

The findings on *gender* are rather surprising. Although women are usually thought to be more empathetic than men and thus to be less likely to be racially prejudiced, recent research indicates that the racial views of (white) women and men are in fact very similar and that the two genders are about equally prejudiced (Hughes & Tuch, 2003).Hughes, M., & Tuch, S. A. (2003). Gender differences in whites' racial attitudes: Are women's attitudes really more favorable? *Social Psychology Quarterly, 66*, 384–401. This similarity supports group threat theory, outlined earlier, in that it indicates that white women and men are responding more as whites than as women or men, respectively, in formulating their racial views.

Findings on *education* and *region of country* are not surprising. Focusing again just on whites, less educated people are usually more racially prejudiced than better-educated people, and Southerners are usually more prejudiced than non-Southerners (Krysan, 2000).Krysan, M. (2000). Prejudice, politics, and public opinion: Understanding the sources of racial policy attitudes. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 135–168. Evidence of these differences appears in Figure 3.2, which depicts educational and regional differences in a type of racial prejudice that social scientists call *social distance*, or feelings about interacting with

members of other races and ethnicities. The General Social Survey asks respondents how they feel about a “close relative” marrying an African American. Figure 3.2 shows how responses by white (non-Latino) respondents to this question vary by education and by Southern residence. Whites without a high school degree are much more likely than those with more education to oppose these marriages, and whites in the South are also much more likely than their non-Southern counterparts to oppose them. To recall the sociological perspective (see Chapter 1), our social backgrounds certainly do seem to affect our attitudes.

Figure *Education, Region, and Opposition by Non-Latino Whites to a Close Relative Marrying an African American*



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

The Changing Nature of Prejudice

Although racial and ethnic prejudice still exists in the United States, its nature has changed during the past half-century. Studies of these changes focus on whites’ perceptions of African Americans. Back in the 1940s and before, an era of overt *Jim Crow* racism (also called *traditional* or *old-fashioned* racism) prevailed, not just in the South but in the entire nation. This racism involved blatant bigotry, firm beliefs in the need for segregation, and the view that blacks were biologically inferior to whites. In the early 1940s, for example, more than half of all whites thought that blacks were less intelligent than whites, more than half favored segregation in public transportation, more than two-thirds favored segregated schools, and more than half thought whites should receive preference over blacks in employment hiring (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997).Schuman, H., Steeh, C., Bobo,

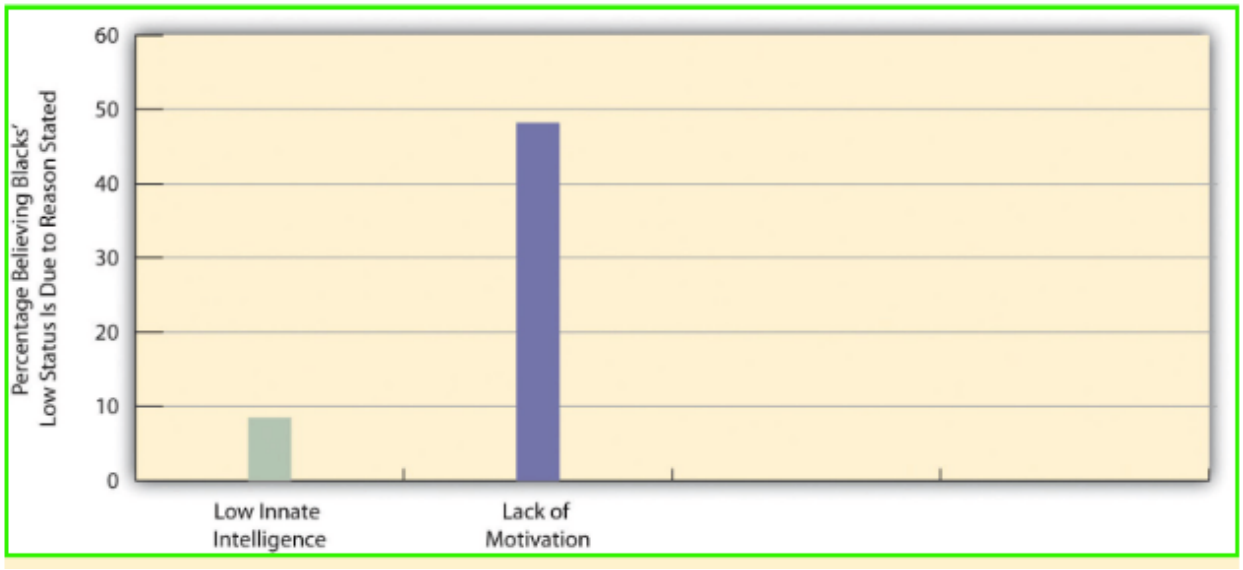
L., & Krysan, M. (1997). *Racial attitudes in America: Trends and interpretations* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Nazi experience and then the civil rights movement led whites to reassess their views, and Jim Crow racism gradually waned. Few whites believe today that African Americans are biologically inferior, and few favor segregation. So few whites now support segregation and other Jim Crow views that national surveys no longer include many of the questions that were asked a half-century ago.

But that does not mean that prejudice has disappeared. Many scholars say that Jim Crow racism has been replaced by a more subtle form of racial prejudice, termed *laissez-faire*, *symbolic*, or *modern* racism, that amounts to a "kinder, gentler, antiblack ideology" that avoids notions of biological inferiority (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997, p. 15; Quillian, 2006; Sears, 1988).Bobo, L., Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, R. A. (1997). Laissez-faire racism: The crystallization of a kinder, gentler, antiblack ideology. In S. A. Tuch & J. K. Martin (Eds.), *Racial attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and change* (pp. 15–44). Westport, CT: Praeger; Quillian, L. (2006). New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination. *Annual Review of Sociology, 32*, 299–328; Sears, D. O. (1988). Symbolic racism. In P. A. Katz & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 53–84). New York, NY: Plenum. Instead, it involves stereotypes about African Americans, a belief that their poverty is due to their cultural inferiority, and opposition to government policies to help them. Similar views exist about Latinos. In effect, this new form of prejudice blames African Americans and Latinos themselves for their low socioeconomic standing and involves such beliefs that they simply do not want to work hard.

Evidence for this modern form of prejudice is seen in Figure 3.3, which presents whites' responses to two General Social Survey (GSS) questions that asked, respectively, whether African Americans' low socioeconomic status is due to their lower "in-born ability to learn" or to their lack of "motivation and willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty." While only 8.5 percent of whites attributed blacks' status to lower innate intelligence (reflecting the decline of Jim Crow racism), about 48 percent attributed it to their lack of motivation and willpower. Although this reason sounds "kinder" and "gentler" than a belief in blacks' biological inferiority, it is still one that blames African Americans for their low socioeconomic status.

Figure Attribution by Non-Latino Whites of Blacks' Low Socioeconomic Status to Blacks' Low Innate Intelligence and to Their Lack of Motivation to Improve



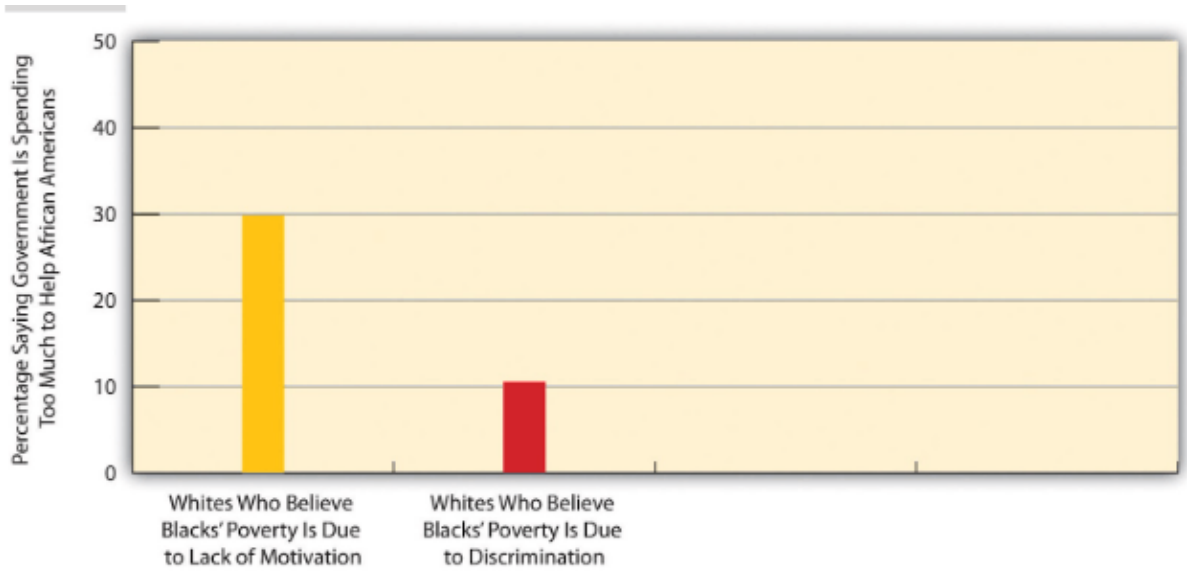
Source: Data from General Social Survey. (2010). Retrieved from http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss10.

Prejudice and Public Policy Preferences

If whites do continue to believe in racial stereotypes, say the scholars who study modern prejudice, they are that much more

likely to oppose government efforts to help people of color. For example, whites who hold racial stereotypes are more likely to oppose government programs for African Americans (Quillian, 2006).Quillian, L. (2006). New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination. *Annual Review of Sociology, 32*, 299–328. We can see an example of this type of effect in Figure 3.4, which compares two groups: whites who attribute blacks' poverty to lack of motivation, and whites who attribute blacks' poverty to discrimination. Those who cite lack of motivation are more likely than those who cite discrimination to believe the government is spending too much to help blacks.

Figure Racial Stereotyping by Non-Latino Whites and Their Opposition to Government Spending to Help African Americans



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

Racial prejudice influences other public policy preferences as well. In the area of criminal justice, whites who hold racial stereotypes or hostile feelings toward African Americans are more likely to be afraid of crime, to think that the courts are not harsh enough, to support the death penalty, to want more money spent to fight crime, and to favor excessive use of force by police (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Unnever & Cullen, 2010).Barkan, S. E., & Cohn, S. F. (2005). Why whites favor spending more money to fight crime: The role of racial prejudice. *Social Problems, 52*, 300–314; Unnever, J. D., & Cullen, F. T. (2010). The social sources of Americans' punitiveness: A test of three competing models. *Criminology, 48*, 99–129.

If racial prejudice influences views on all these issues, then these results are troubling for a democratic society like the United States. In a democracy, it is appropriate for the public to disagree on all sorts of issues, including criminal justice. For example, citizens hold many reasons for either favoring or opposing the death penalty. But is it appropriate for racial prejudice to be one of these reasons? To the extent that elected officials respond to public opinion, as they should in a democracy, and to the extent that racial prejudice affects public opinion, then racial prejudice may be influencing government policy on criminal justice and on other issues. In a democratic society, it is unacceptable for racial prejudice to have this effect.

Key Takeaways

- Social-psychological explanations of prejudice emphasize authoritarian personalities and frustration, while sociological explanations emphasize social learning and group threat.
- Education and region of residence are related to racial prejudice among whites; prejudice is higher among whites with lower levels of formal education and among whites living in the South.
- Jim Crow racism has been replaced by symbolic or modern racism that emphasizes the cultural inferiority of people of color.
- Racial prejudice among whites is linked to certain views they hold about public policy. Prejudice is associated with lower support among whites for governmental efforts to help people of color and with greater support for a more punitive criminal justice system.

For Your Review

1. Think about the last time you heard someone say a remark that was racially prejudiced. What was said? What was your reaction?
2. The text argues that it is inappropriate in a democratic society for racial prejudice to influence public policy. Do you agree with this argument? Why or why not?

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3.5: Discrimination

Discrimination

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss Merton's views on whether prejudice and discrimination always coincide.
2. Distinguish between individual discrimination and institutional discrimination.
3. Provide two examples of institutional discrimination.

Often racial and ethnic prejudice lead to discrimination against the subordinate racial and ethnic groups in a given society. **Discrimination** in this context refers to the arbitrary denial of rights, privileges, and opportunities to members of these groups. The use of the word *arbitrary* emphasizes that these groups are being treated unequally not because of their lack of merit but because of their race and ethnicity.

Usually prejudice and discrimination go hand-in-hand, but Robert Merton (1949)Merton, R. K. (1949). Discrimination and the American creed. In R. M. MacIver (Ed.), *Discrimination and national welfare* (pp. 99–126). New York, NY: Institute for Religious Studies. stressed this is not always so. Sometimes we can be prejudiced and not discriminate, and sometimes we might not be prejudiced and still discriminate. Table 3.1 illustrates his perspective. The top-left cell and bottom-right cell consist of people who behave in ways we would normally expect. The top-left one consists of "active bigots," in Merton's terminology, people who are both prejudiced and discriminatory. An example of such a person is the white owner of an apartment building who dislikes people of color and refuses to rent to them. The bottom-right cell consists of "all-weather liberals," as Merton called them, people who are neither prejudiced nor discriminatory. An example would be someone who holds no stereotypes about the various racial and ethnic groups and treats everyone the same regardless of her or his background.

Table 3.1 The Relationship between Prejudice and Discrimination

	Prejudiced	
	Yes	No
Discriminates		
Yes	Active bigots	Fair- Weather liberals
No	Timid bigots	All- weather liberals

Source: Adapted from Merton, R. K. (1949). Discrimination and the American creed. In R. M. MacIver (Ed.), Discrimination and national welfare (pp. 99–126). New York, NY: Institute for Religious Studies.

Alt text for image: relationship between prejudice and discrimination

The remaining two cells of Table 3.1 are the more unexpected ones. On the bottom left, we see people who are prejudiced but who nonetheless do not discriminate; Merton called them "timid bigots." An example would be white restaurant owners who do not like people of color but still serve them anyway because they want their business or are afraid of being sued if they do not serve them. At the top right, we see "fair-weather liberals," or people who are not prejudiced but who still discriminate. An example would be white store owners in the South during the segregation era who thought it was wrong to treat blacks worse than whites but who still refused to sell to them because they were afraid of losing white customers.

Individual Discrimination

The discussion so far has centered on **individual discrimination**, or discrimination that individuals practice in their daily lives, usually because they are prejudiced but sometimes even if they are not prejudiced. Individual discrimination is common, as Joe Feagin (1991),Feagin, J. R. (1991). The continuing significance of race: Antiblack discrimination in public places. *American*

Sociological Review, 56, 101–116. a former president of the American Sociological Association, found when he interviewed middle-class African Americans about their experiences. Many of the people he interviewed said they had been refused service, or at least received poor service, in stores or restaurants. Others said they had been harassed by the police, and even put in fear of their lives, just for being black. Feagin concluded that these examples are not just isolated incidents but rather reflect the larger racism that characterizes US society.



In February 2012, neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin as Martin was walking back from a 7-Eleven carrying some Skittles and iced tea. Critics said Zimmerman was suspicious of Martin only because Martin was black.

Image courtesy of Sunset Parkerpix, http://www.flickr.com/photos/fleshmanpix/7010115775/.

To many observers, the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin in February 2012 was a deadly example of individual discrimination. Martin, a 17-year-old African American, was walking in a gated community in Sanford, Florida, as he returned from a 7-Eleven with a bag of Skittles and some iced tea. An armed neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman, called 911 and said Martin looked suspicious. Although the 911 operator told Zimmerman not to approach Martin, Zimmerman did so anyway; within minutes Zimmerman shot and killed the unarmed Martin and later claimed self-defense. According to many critics of this incident, Martin's only "crime" was "walking while black." As an African American newspaper columnist observed, "For every black man in America, from the millionaire in the corner office to the mechanic in the local garage, the Trayvon Martin tragedy is personal. It could have been me or one of my sons. It could have been any of us" (Robinson, 2012).Robinson, E. (2012, March 23). Perils of walking while black. *The Washington Post*, p. A19.

Much individual discrimination occurs in the workplace, as sociologist Denise Segura (Segura, 1992)Segura, D. A. (1992). Chicanas in white-collar jobs: "You have to prove yourself more." In C. G. Ellison & W. A. Martin (Eds.), *Race and ethnic relations in the United States: Readings for the 21st century* (pp. 79–88). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury. documented when she interviewed 152 Mexican American women working in white-collar jobs at a public university in California. More than 40 percent of the women said they had encountered workplace discrimination based on their ethnicity and/or gender, and they attributed their treatment to stereotypes held by their employers and coworkers. Along with discrimination, they were the targets of condescending comments like "I didn't know that there were any educated people in Mexico that have a graduate degree."

Institutional Discrimination

Individual discrimination is important to address, but at least as consequential in today's world is **institutional discrimination**, or discrimination that pervades the practices of whole institutions, such as housing, medical care, law enforcement, employment, and education. This type of discrimination does not just affect a few isolated people of color. Instead, it affects large numbers of individuals simply because of their race or ethnicity. Sometimes institutional discrimination is also based on gender, disability, and other characteristics.

In the area of race and ethnicity, institutional discrimination often stems from prejudice, as was certainly true in the South during segregation. However, just as individuals can discriminate without being prejudiced, so can institutions when they engage in practices that seem to be racially neutral but in fact have a discriminatory effect. Individuals in institutions can also discriminate without realizing it. They make decisions that turn out, upon close inspection, to discriminate against people of color even if they did not mean to do so.

The bottom line is this: Institutions can discriminate even if they do not intend to do so. Consider height requirements for police. Before the 1970s, police forces around the United States commonly had height requirements, say five feet ten inches. As women began to want to join police forces in the 1970s, many found they were too short. The same was true for people from some racial/ethnic backgrounds, such as Latinos, whose stature is smaller on the average than that of non-Latino whites. Of course, even many white males were too short to become police officers, but the point is that even more women, and even more men of certain ethnicities, were too short.

This gender and ethnic difference is not, in and of itself, discriminatory as the law defines the term. The law allows for *bona fide* (good faith) physical qualifications for a job. As an example, we would all agree that someone has to be able to see to be a school bus driver; sight therefore is a *bona fide* requirement for this line of work. Thus even though people who are blind cannot become school bus drivers, the law does not consider such a physical requirement to be discriminatory.

But were the height restrictions for police work in the early 1970s *bona fide* requirements? Women and members of certain ethnic groups challenged these restrictions in court and won their cases, as it was decided that there was no logical basis for the height restrictions then in effect. In short (pun intended), the courts concluded that a person did not have to be five feet ten inches to be an effective police officer. In response to these court challenges, police forces lowered their height requirements, opening the door for many more women, Latino men, and some other men to join police forces (Appier, 1998).Appier, J. (1998). *Policing women: The sexual politics of law enforcement and the LAPD*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Whether police forces back then intended their height requirements to discriminate, or whether they honestly thought their height requirements made sense, remains in dispute. Regardless of the reason, their requirements did discriminate.

Institutional discrimination affects the life chances of people of color in many aspects of life today. To illustrate this, we turn briefly to some examples of institutional discrimination that have been the subject of government investigation and scholarly research.

Health Care

People of color have higher rates of disease and illness than whites, a fact explored further in Chapter 12's treatment of health and medicine. One question that arises is why their health is worse. One possible answer involves institutional discrimination based on race and ethnicity.

Several studies use hospital records to investigate whether people of color receive optimal medical care, including coronary bypass surgery, angioplasty, and catheterization. After taking the patients' medical symptoms and needs into account, these studies find that African Americans are much less likely than whites to receive the procedures just listed. This is true when poor blacks are compared to poor whites and also when middle-class blacks are compared to middle-class whites (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003).Smedley, B. D., Stith, A. Y., & Nelson, A. R. (2003). *Unequal treatment: Confronting racial and ethnic disparities in health care*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. In a novel way of studying race and cardiac care, one study performed an experiment in which several hundred doctors viewed videos of African American and white patients, all of whom, unknown to the doctors, were actors. In the videos, each "patient" complained of identical chest pain and other symptoms. The doctors were then asked to indicate whether they thought the patient needed cardiac catheterization. The African American patients were less likely than the white patients to be recommended for this procedure (Schulman et al., 1999).Schulman, K. A., et al. (1999). The effect of race and sex on physicians' recommendations for cardiac catheterization. *The New England Journal of Medicine, 340*, 618–626.

Why does discrimination like this occur? It is possible, of course, that some doctors are racists and decide that the lives of African Americans just are not worth saving, but it is far more likely that they have *unconscious* racial biases that somehow affect their medical judgments. Regardless of the reason, the result is the same: African Americans are less likely to receive potentially life-saving cardiac procedures simply because they are black. Institutional discrimination in health care, then, is literally a matter of life and death.

Mortgages, Redlining, and Residential Segregation

When loan officers review mortgage applications, they consider many factors, including the person's income, employment, and credit history. The law forbids them to consider race and ethnicity. Yet African Americans and Latinos are more likely than whites to have their mortgage applications declined (Blank, Venkatachalam, McNeil, & Green, 2005).Blank, E. C., Venkatachalam, P., McNeil, L., & Green, R. D. (2005). Racial discrimination in mortgage lending in Washington, DC: A mixed methods approach. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 33*(2), 9–30. Because members of these groups tend to be poorer than whites and to have less desirable employment and credit histories, the higher rate of mortgage rejections may be appropriate, albeit unfortunate.

To control for this possibility, researchers take these factors into account and in effect compare whites, African Americans, and Latinos with similar incomes, employment, and credit histories. Some studies are purely statistical, and some involve white, African American, and Latino individuals who independently visit the same mortgage-lending institutions. Both types of studies find that African Americans and Latinos are still more likely than whites with similar qualifications to have their mortgage applications rejected (Turner et al., 2002).Turner, M. A., Freiberg, F., Godfrey, E., Herbig, C., Levy, D. K., & Smith, R. R. (2002). *All other things being equal: A paired testing study of mortgage lending institutions*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press. We will probably never know whether loan officers are consciously basing their decisions on racial prejudice, but their practices still amount to racial and ethnic discrimination whether the loan officers are consciously prejudiced or not.

There is also evidence of banks rejecting mortgage applications for people who wish to live in certain urban, supposedly high-risk neighborhoods, and of insurance companies denying homeowner's insurance or else charging higher rates for homes in these same neighborhoods. Practices like these that discriminate against houses in certain neighborhoods are called *redlining*, and they also violate the law (Ezeala-Harrison, Glover, & Shaw-Jackson, 2008).Ezeala-Harrison, F., Glover, G. B., & Shaw-Jackson, J. (2008). Housing loan patterns toward minority borrowers in Mississippi: Analysis of some micro data evidence of redlining. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 35*(1), 43–54. Because the people affected by redlining tend to be people of color, redlining, too, is an example of institutional discrimination.



Banks have rejected mortgage applications from people who wish to live in certain urban, high-risk neighborhoods. This practice, called redlining, violates the law. Because many of the loan applicants who experience redlining are people of color, redlining is an example of institutional discrimination.

Image courtesy of Taber Andrew Bain, http://www.flickr.com/photos/88442983@N00/2943913721.

Mortgage rejections and redlining contribute to another major problem facing people of color: residential segregation. Housing segregation is illegal but is nonetheless widespread because of mortgage rejections and other processes that make it very difficult for people of color to move out of segregated neighborhoods and into unsegregated areas. African Americans in particular remain highly segregated by residence in many cities, much more so than is true for other people of color. The residential segregation of African Americans is so extensive that it has been termed *hypersegregation* and more generally called American apartheid (Massey & Denton, 1993).Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the*

making of the underclass. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In addition to mortgage rejections, a pattern of subtle discrimination by realtors and homeowners makes it difficult for African Americans to find out about homes in white neighborhoods and to buy them (Pager, 2008).Pager, D. (2008). The dynamics of discrimination. In A. C. Lin & D. R. Harris (Eds.), *The colors of poverty: Why racial and ethnic disparities exist* (pp. 21–51). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. For example, realtors may tell African American clients that no homes are available in a particular white neighborhood, but then inform white clients of available homes. The now routine posting of housing listings on the Internet might be reducing this form of housing discrimination, but not all homes and apartments are posted, and some are simply sold by word of mouth to avoid certain people learning about them.

The hypersegregation experienced by African Americans cuts them off from the larger society, as many rarely leave their immediate neighborhoods, and results in *concentrated poverty*, where joblessness, crime, and other problems reign. For several reasons, then, residential segregation is thought to play a major role in the seriousness and persistence of African American poverty (Rothstein, 2012; Stoll, 2008).Rothstein, R. (2012). Racial segregation continues, and even intensifies. Retrieved from http://www.epi.org/publication/racial-segregation-continues-intensifies/; Stoll, M. A. (2008). Race, place, and poverty revisited. In A. C. Lin & D. R. Harris (Eds.), *The colors of poverty: Why racial and ethnic disparities persist* (pp. 201–231). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Employment Discrimination

Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial discrimination in employment, including hiring, wages, and firing. However, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans still have much lower earnings than whites. Several factors explain this disparity, including the various structural obstacles discussed in Chapter 2's examination of poverty. Despite Title VII, however, an additional reason is that people of color continue to face discrimination in hiring and promotion (Hirsh & Cha, 2008).Hirsh, C. E., & Cha, Y. (2008). Understanding employment discrimination: A multilevel approach. *Sociology Compass, 2*(6), 1989–2007. It is again difficult to determine whether such discrimination stems from conscious prejudice or from unconscious prejudice on the part of potential employers, but it is racial discrimination nonetheless.

A now-classic field experiment documented such discrimination. Sociologist Devah Pager (2003)Pager, D. (2003). The mark of a criminal record. *American Journal of Sociology, 108*, 937–975. had young white and African American men apply independently in person for entry-level jobs. They dressed the same and reported similar levels of education and other qualifications. Some applicants also admitted having a criminal record, while other applicants reported no such record. As might be expected, applicants with a criminal record were hired at lower rates than those without a record. However, in striking evidence of racial discrimination in hiring, African American applicants *without* a criminal record were hired at the same low rate as the white applicants *with* a criminal record.

Key Takeaways

- People who practice racial or ethnic discrimination are usually also prejudiced, but not always. Some people practice discrimination without being prejudiced, and some may not practice discrimination even though they are prejudiced.
- Individual discrimination is common and can involve various kinds of racial slights. Much individual discrimination occurs in the workplace.
- Institutional discrimination often stems from prejudice, but institutions can also practice racial and ethnic discrimination when they engage in practices that seem to be racially neutral but in fact have a discriminatory effect.

For your Review

1. If you have ever experienced individual discrimination, either as the person committing it or as the person affected by it, briefly describe what happened. How do you now feel when you reflect on this incident?
2. Do you think institutional discrimination occurs because people are purposely acting in a racially discriminatory manner? Why or why not?

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3.6: Dimensions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Dimensions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Learning Objectives

1. Describe any two manifestations of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.
2. Explain how and why racial inequality takes a hidden toll on people of color.
3. Provide two examples of white privilege.

Racial and ethnic inequality manifests itself in all walks of life. The individual and institutional discrimination just discussed is one manifestation of this inequality. We can also see stark evidence of racial and ethnic inequality in various government statistics. Sometimes statistics lie, and sometimes they provide all too true a picture; statistics on racial and ethnic inequality fall into the latter category. Table 3.2 presents data on racial and ethnic differences in income, education, and health.

Table 3.2 Selected Indicators of Racial and Ethnic Inequality in the United States

	White	African Americans	Latino	Asian	Native American
Median family income, 2010 ($)	68.818	39,900	41.102	76,736	39,664
Persons who are college educated, 2010 (%)	30.3	19.8	13.9	52.4	14.9 (2008)
Persons in poverty, 2010 (%)	9.9 (non-latino)	27.4	26.6	12.1	28.4
Infant mortally (numbers of infant deaths per 1,000 births), 2006	5.6	12.9	5.4	4.6	8.3

Sources: 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; US Census Bureau. (2012). American FactFinder. Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml; MacDorman, M., & Mathews, T. J. (2011). Infant Deaths—United States, 2000–2007. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 60(1), 49–51.

Alt text for image: racial and ethnic inequality in the US

The picture presented by Table 3.2 is clear: US racial and ethnic groups differ dramatically in their life chances. Compared to whites, for example, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans have much lower family incomes and much higher rates of poverty; they are also much less likely to have college degrees. In addition, African Americans and Native Americans have much higher infant mortality rates than whites: Black infants, for example, are more than twice as likely as white infants to die. Later chapters in this book will continue to highlight various dimensions of racial and ethnic inequality.

Although Table 3.2 shows that African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans fare much worse than whites, it presents a more complex pattern for Asian Americans. Compared to whites, Asian Americans have higher family incomes and are more likely to hold college degrees, but they also have a higher poverty rate. Thus many Asian Americans do relatively well, while others fare relatively worse, as just noted. Although Asian Americans are often viewed as a “model minority,” meaning that they have achieved economic success despite not being white, some Asians have been less able than others to climb the economic ladder. Moreover, stereotypes of Asian Americans and discrimination against them remain serious problems (Chou & Feagin, 2008).Chou, R. S., & Feagin, J. R. (2008). *The myth of the model minority: Asian Americans facing racism*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm. Even the overall success rate of Asian Americans obscures the fact that their occupations and incomes are often lower than would be expected from their educational attainment. They thus have to work harder for their success than whites do (Hurh & Kim, 1999).Hurh, W. M., & Kim, K. C. (1999). The “success” image of Asian Americans: Its validity, and its practical and theoretical implications. In C. G. Ellison & W. A. Martin (Eds.), *Race and ethnic relations in the United States* (pp. 115–122). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.

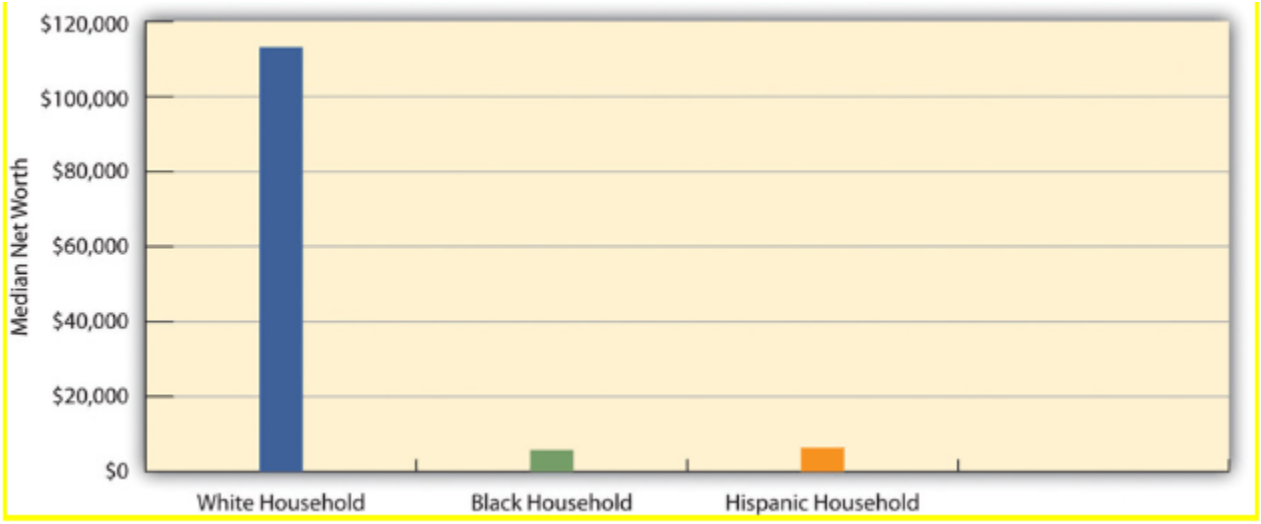
The Increasing Racial/Ethnic Wealth Gap

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that racial and ethnic inequality has existed since the beginning of the United States. We also noted that social scientists have warned that certain conditions have actually worsened for people of color since the 1960s (Hacker, 2003; Massey & Sampson, 2009).Hacker, A. (2003). *Two nations: Black and white, separate, hostile, unequal* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Scribner; Massey, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (2009). Moynihan redux: Legacies and lessons. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 621*, 6–27.

Recent evidence of this worsening appeared in a report by the Pew Research Center (2011).Pew Research Center. (2011). *Twenty-to-one: Wealth gaps rise to record highs between whites, blacks and Hispanics*. Washington, DC: Author. The report focused on racial disparities in wealth, which includes a family's total assets (income, savings and investments, home equity, etc.) and debts (mortgage, credit cards, etc.). The report found that the wealth gap between white households on the one hand and African American and Latino households on the other hand was much wider than just a few years earlier, thanks to the faltering US economy since 2008 that affected blacks more severely than whites.

According to the report, whites' median wealth was ten times greater than blacks' median wealth in 2007, a discouraging disparity for anyone who believes in racial equality. By 2009, however, whites' median wealth had jumped to twenty times greater than blacks' median wealth and eighteen times greater than Latinos' median wealth. White households had a median net worth of about $113,000, while black and Latino households had a median net worth of only $5,700 and $6,300, respectively (see Figure 3.5). This racial and ethnic difference is the largest since the government began tracking wealth more than a quarter-century ago.

Figure 3.5 *The Racial/Ethnic Wealth Gap (Median Net Worth of Households in 2009)*



Source: Pew Research Center, 2011.

A large racial/ethnic gap also existed in the percentage of families with negative net worth—that is, those whose debts exceed their assets. One-third of black and Latino households had negative net worth, compared to only 15 percent of white households. Black and Latino households were thus more than twice as likely as white households to be in debt.

The Hidden Toll of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

An increasing amount of evidence suggests that being black in a society filled with racial prejudice, discrimination, and inequality takes what has been called a "hidden toll" on the lives of African Americans (Blitstein, 2009).Blitstein, R. (2009). Weathering the storm. *Miller-McCune, 2*(July–August), 48–57. As we shall see in later chapters, African Americans on the average have worse health than whites and die at younger ages. In fact, every year there are an additional 100,000 African American deaths than would be expected if they lived as long as whites do. Although many reasons probably explain all these disparities, scholars are increasingly concluding that the stress of being black is a major factor (Geronimus et al., 2010).Geronimus, A. T., Hicken, M., Pearson, J., Seashols, S., Brown, K., & Cruz., T. D. (2010). Do US black women experience stress-related accelerated biological aging? *Human Nature: An Interdisciplinary Biosocial Perspective, 21*, 19–38.

In this way of thinking, African Americans are much more likely than whites to be poor, to live in high-crime neighborhoods, and to live in crowded conditions, among many other problems. As this chapter discussed earlier, they are also more likely, whether or not they are poor, to experience racial slights, refusals to be interviewed for jobs, and other forms of discrimination in their everyday lives. All these problems mean that African Americans from their earliest ages grow up with a great deal of stress, far more than what most whites experience. This stress in turn has certain neural and physiological effects, including hypertension (high blood pressure), that impair African Americans' short-term and long-term health and that ultimately shorten their lives. These effects accumulate over time: black and white hypertension rates are equal for people in their twenties, but the black rate becomes much higher by the time people reach their forties and fifties. As a recent news article on evidence of this "hidden toll" summarized this process, "The long-term stress of living in a white-dominated society 'weathers' blacks, making them age faster than their white counterparts" (Blitstein, 2009, p. 48).Blitstein, R. (2009). Weathering the storm. *Miller-McCune, 2*(July–August), 48–57.

Although there is less research on other people of color, many Latinos and Native Americans also experience the various sources of stress that African Americans experience. To the extent this is true, racial and ethnic inequality also takes a hidden toll on members of these two groups. They, too, experience racial slights, live under disadvantaged conditions, and face other problems that result in high levels of stress and shorten their life spans.

White Privilege: The Benefits of Being White

Before we leave this section, it is important to discuss the advantages that US whites enjoy in their daily lives simply because they are white. Social scientists term these advantages **white privilege** and say that whites benefit from being white whether or not they are aware of their advantages (McIntosh, 2007).McIntosh, P. (2007). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In M. L. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

This chapter's discussion of the problems facing people of color points to some of these advantages. For example, whites can usually drive a car at night or walk down a street without having to fear that a police officer will stop them simply because they are white. Recalling the Trayvon Martin tragedy, they can also walk down a street without having to fear they will be confronted and possibly killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer. In addition, whites can count on being able to move into any neighborhood they desire as long as they can afford the rent or mortgage. They generally do not have to fear being passed up for promotion simply because of their race. White students can live in college dorms without having to worry that racial slurs will be directed their way. White people in general do not have to worry about being the victims of hate crimes based on their race. They can be seated in a restaurant without having to worry that they will be served more slowly or not at all because of their skin color. If they are in a hotel, they do not have to think that someone will mistake them for a bellhop, parking valet, or maid. If they are trying to hail a taxi, they do not have to worry about the taxi driver ignoring them because the driver fears he or she will be robbed.

Social scientist Robert W. Terry (1981, p. 120)Terry, R. W. (1981). The negative impact on white values. In B. P. Bowser & R. G. Hunt (Eds.), *Impacts of racism on white Americans* (pp. 119–151). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications. once summarized white privilege as follows: "*To be white in America is not to have to think about it.* Except for hard-core racial supremacists, the meaning of being white is having the choice of attending to or ignoring one's own whiteness" (emphasis in original). For people of color in the United States, it is not an exaggeration to say that race and ethnicity is a daily fact of their existence. Yet whites do not generally have to think about being white. As all of us go about our daily lives, this basic difference is one of the most important manifestations of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.

Perhaps because whites do not have to think about being white, many studies find they tend to underestimate the degree of racial inequality in the United States by assuming that African Americans and Latinos are much better off than they really are. As one report summarized these studies' overall conclusion, "Whites tend to have a relatively rosy impression of what it means to be a black person in America. Whites are more than twice as likely as blacks to believe that the position of African Americans has improved a great deal" (Vedantam, 2008, p. A3).Vedantam, S. (2008, March 24). Unequal perspectives on racial equality. *The Washington Post*, p. A3. Because whites think African Americans and Latinos fare much better than they really do, that perception probably reduces whites' sympathy for programs designed to reduce racial and ethnic inequality.

Key Takeaways

- Compared to non-Latino whites, people of color have lower incomes, lower educational attainment, higher poverty rates, and worse health.
- Racial and ethnic inequality takes a hidden toll on people of color, as the stress they experience impairs their health and

ability to achieve.
- Whites benefit from being white, whether or not they realize it. This benefit is called white privilege.

For Your Review

1. Write a brief essay that describes important dimensions of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.
2. If you are white, describe a time when you benefited from white privilege, whether or not you realized it at the time. If you are a person of color, describe an experience when you would have benefited if you had been white.

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3.7: Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Learning Objectives

1. Understand cultural explanations for racial and ethnic inequality.
2. Describe structural explanations for racial and ethnic inequality.

Why do racial and ethnic inequality exist? Why do African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and some Asian Americans fare worse than whites? In answering these questions, many people have some very strong opinions.

Biological Inferiority

One long-standing explanation is that blacks and other people of color are *biologically inferior*: They are naturally less intelligent and have other innate flaws that keep them from getting a good education and otherwise doing what needs to be done to achieve the American Dream. As discussed earlier, this racist view is no longer common today. However, whites historically used this belief to justify slavery, lynchings, the harsh treatment of Native Americans in the 1800s, and lesser forms of discrimination. In 1994, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray revived this view in their controversial book, *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994),Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York, NY: Free Press. in which they argued that the low IQ scores of African Americans, and of poor people more generally, reflect their genetic inferiority in the area of intelligence. African Americans' low innate intelligence, they said, accounts for their poverty and other problems. Although the news media gave much attention to their book, few scholars agreed with its views, and many condemned the book's argument as a racist way of "blaming the victim" (Gould, 1994).Gould, S. J. (1994, November 28). Curveball. *The New Yorker*, pp. 139–149.

Cultural Deficiencies

Another explanation of racial and ethnic inequality focuses on supposed *cultural deficiencies* of African Americans and other people of color (Murray, 1984).Murray, C. (1984). *Losing ground: American social policy, 1950–1980*. New York, NY: Basic Books. These deficiencies include a failure to value hard work and, for African Americans, a lack of strong family ties, and are said to account for the poverty and other problems facing these minorities. This view echoes the culture-of-poverty argument presented in Chapter 2 and is certainly popular today. As we saw earlier, more than half of non-Latino whites think that blacks' poverty is due to their lack of motivation and willpower. Ironically some scholars find support for this cultural deficiency view in the experience of many Asian Americans, whose success is often attributed to their culture's emphasis on hard work, educational attainment, and strong family ties (Min, 2005).Min, P. G. (Ed.). (2005). *Asian Americans: Contemporary trends and issues* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. If that is true, these scholars say, then the lack of success of other people of color stems from the failure of their own cultures to value these attributes.

How accurate is the cultural deficiency argument? Whether people of color have "deficient" cultures remains hotly debated (Bonilla-Silva, 2009).Bonilla-Silva, E. (2009). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Many social scientists find little or no evidence of cultural problems in minority communities and say the belief in cultural deficiencies is an example of symbolic racism that blames the victim. Citing survey evidence, they say that poor people of color value work and education for themselves and their children at least as much as wealthier white people do (Holland, 2011; Muhammad, 2007).Holland, J. (2011, July 29). Debunking the big lie right-wingers use to justify black poverty and unemployment. *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/teaparty/151830/debunking_the_big_lie_right-wingers_use_to_justify_black_poverty_and_unemployment; Muhammad, K. G. (2007, December 9). White may be might, but it's not always right. *The Washington Post*, p. B3. Yet other social scientists, including those sympathetic to the structural problems facing people of color, believe that certain cultural problems do exist, but they are careful to say that these cultural problems arise out of the structural problems. For example, Elijah Anderson (1999)Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. wrote that a "street culture" or "oppositional culture" exists among African Americans in urban areas that contributes to high levels of violent behavior, but he

emphasized that this type of culture stems from the segregation, extreme poverty, and other difficulties these citizens face in their daily lives and helps them deal with these difficulties. Thus even if cultural problems do exist, they should not obscure the fact that structural problems are responsible for the cultural ones.

Structural Problems

A third explanation for US racial and ethnic inequality is based in conflict theory and reflects the blaming-the-system approach outlined in Chapter 1. This view attributes racial and ethnic inequality to *structural problems*, including institutional and individual discrimination, a lack of opportunity in education and other spheres of life, and the absence of jobs that pay an adequate wage (Feagin, 2006).Feagin, J. R. (2006). *Systematic racism: A theory of oppression*. New York, NY: Routledge. Segregated housing, for example, prevents African Americans from escaping the inner city and from moving to areas with greater employment opportunities. Employment discrimination keeps the salaries of people of color much lower than they would be otherwise. The schools that many children of color attend every day are typically overcrowded and underfunded. As these problems continue from one generation to the next, it becomes very difficult for people already at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder to climb up it because of their race and ethnicity (see Note 3.33 "Applying Social Research").

Applying Social Research

The Poor Neighborhoods of Middle-Class African Americans

In a society that values equal opportunity for all, scholars have discovered a troubling trend: African American children from middle-class families are much more likely than white children from middle-class families to move down the socioeconomic ladder by the time they become adults. In fact, almost half of all African American children born during the 1950s and 1960s to middle-class parents ended up with lower incomes than their parents by adulthood. Because these children had parents who had evidently succeeded despite all the obstacles facing them in a society filled with racial inequality, we have to assume they were raised with the values, skills, and aspirations necessary to stay in the middle class and even to rise beyond it. What, then, explains why some end up doing worse than their parents?

According to a recent study written by sociologist Patrick Sharkey for the Pew Charitable Trusts, one important answer lies in the neighborhoods in which these children are raised. Because of continuing racial segregation, many middle-class African American families find themselves having to live in poor urban neighborhoods. About half of African American children born between 1955 and 1970 to middle-class parents grew up in poor neighborhoods, but hardly any middle-class white children grew up in such neighborhoods. In Sharkey's statistical analysis, neighborhood poverty was a much more important factor than variables such as parents' education and marital status in explaining the huge racial difference in the eventual socioeconomic status of middle-class children. An additional finding of the study underscored the importance of neighborhood poverty for adult socioeconomic status: African American children raised in poor neighborhoods in which the poverty rate declined significantly ended up with higher incomes as adults than those raised in neighborhoods where the poverty rate did not change.

Why do poor neighborhoods have this effect? It is difficult to pinpoint the exact causes, but several probable reasons come to mind. In these neighborhoods, middle-class African American children often receive inadequate schooling at run-down schools, and they come under the influence of youths who care much less about schooling and who get into various kinds of trouble. The various problems associated with living in poor neighborhoods also likely cause a good deal of stress, which, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, can cause health problems and impair learning ability.

Even if the exact reasons remain unclear, this study showed that poor neighborhoods make a huge difference. As a Pew official summarized the study, "We've known that neighborhood matters…but this does it in a new and powerful way. Neighborhoods become a significant drag not just on the poor, but on those who would otherwise be stable." Sociologist Sharkey added, "What surprises me is how dramatic the racial differences are in terms of the environments in which children are raised. There's this perception that after the civil rights period, families have been more able to seek out any neighborhood they choose, and that…the racial gap in neighborhoods would whittle away over time, and that hasn't happened."

Data from the 2010 Census confirm that the racial gap in neighborhoods persists. A study by sociologist John R. Logan for the Russell Sage Foundation found that African American and Latino families with incomes above $75,000 are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods than non-Latino white families with incomes below $40,000. More generally, Logan concluded, "The average affluent black or Hispanic household lives in a poorer neighborhood than the average lower-income white household."

One implication of this neighborhood research is clear: to help reduce African American poverty, it is important to do everything

possible to improve the quality and economy of the poor neighborhoods in which many African American children, middle-class or poor, grow up.

Sources: Logan, 2011; MacGillis, 2009; Sharkey, 2009 Logan, J. R. (2011). Separate and unequal: The neighborhood gap for blacks, Hispanics and Asians in metropolitan America. New York, NY: US2010 Project; MacGillis, A. (2009, July 27). Neighborhoods key to future income, study finds. The Washington Post, p. A06; Sharkey, P. (2009). Neighborhoods and the black-white mobility gap. Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts.

As we assess the importance of structure versus culture in explaining why people of color have higher poverty rates, it is interesting to consider the economic experience of African Americans and Latinos since the 1990s. During that decade, the US economy thrived. Along with this thriving economy, unemployment rates for African Americans and Latinos declined and their poverty rates also declined. Since the early 2000s and especially since 2008, the US economy has faltered. Along with this faltering economy, unemployment and poverty rates for African Americans and Latinos increased.

To explain these trends, does it make sense to assume that African Americans and Latinos somehow had fewer cultural deficiencies during the 1990s and more cultural deficiencies since the early 2000s? Or does it make sense to assume that their economic success or lack of it depended on the opportunities afforded them by the US economy? Economic writer Joshua Holland (2011)Holland, J. (2011, July 29). Debunking the big lie right-wingers use to justify black poverty and unemployment. *AlterNet*. Retrieved from http://www.alternet.org/teaparty/151830/debunking_the_big_lie_right-wingers_use_to_justify_black_poverty_and_unemployment_. provides the logical answer by attacking the idea of cultural deficiencies: “That’s obviously nonsense. It was exogenous economic factors and changes in public policies, not manifestations of ‘black culture’ [or ‘Latino culture’], that resulted in those widely varied outcomes…While economic swings this significant can be explained by economic changes and different public policies, it’s simply impossible to fit them into a cultural narrative.”

Key Takeaways

- Although a belief in biological inferiority used to be an explanation for racial and ethnic inequality, this belief is now considered racist.
- Cultural explanations attribute racial and ethnic inequality to certain cultural deficiencies among people of color.
- Structural explanations attribute racial and ethnic inequality to problems in the larger society, including discriminatory practices and lack of opportunity.

For Your Review

1. Which of the three explanations of racial and ethnic inequality makes the most sense to you? Why?
2. Why should a belief in the biological inferiority of people of color be considered racist?

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3.8: Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Learning Objectives

1. Summarize the debate over affirmative action.
2. Describe any three policies or practices that could reduce racial and ethnic inequality in the United States.

Now that we have examined race and ethnicity in the United States, what have we found? Where do we stand in the second decade of the twenty-first century? Did the historic election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 signify a new era of equality between the races, as many observers wrote, or did his election occur despite the continued existence of pervasive racial and ethnic inequality?

On the one hand, there is cause for hope. Legal segregation is gone. The vicious, "old-fashioned" racism that was so rampant in this country into the 1960s has declined dramatically since that tumultuous time. People of color have made important gains in several spheres of life, and African Americans and other people of color occupy some important elected positions in and outside the South, a feat that would have been unimaginable a generation ago. Perhaps most notably, Barack Obama has African ancestry and identifies as an African American, and on his 2008 election night people across the country wept with joy at the symbolism of his victory. Certainly progress has been made in US racial and ethnic relations.

On the other hand, there is also cause for despair. Old-fashioned racism has been replaced by a modern, symbolic racism that still blames people of color for their problems and reduces public support for government policies to deal with their problems. Institutional discrimination remains pervasive, and hate crimes, such as the cross burning that began this chapter, remain all too common. So does suspicion of people based solely on the color of their skin, as the Trayvon Martin tragedy again reminds us.

If adequately funded and implemented, several types of programs and policies show strong promise of reducing racial and ethnic inequality. We turn to these in a moment, but first let's discuss affirmative action, an issue that has aroused controversy since its inception.

People Making a Difference

College Students and the Southern Civil Rights Movement

The first chapter of this book included this famous quotation by anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The beginnings of the Southern civil rights movement provide an inspirational example of Mead's wisdom and remind us that young people can make a difference.

Although there had been several efforts during the 1950s by African Americans to end legal segregation in the South, the start of the civil rights movement is commonly thought to have begun on February 1, 1960. On that historic day, four brave African American students from the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, dressed in coats and ties, sat down quietly at a segregated lunch counter in a Woolworth's store in the city of Greensboro and asked to be served. When they were refused service, they stayed until the store closed at the end of the day, and then went home. They returned the next day and were joined by some two dozen other students. They were again refused service and sat quietly the rest of the day. The next day some sixty students and other people joined them, followed by some three hundred on the fourth day. Within a week, sit-ins were occurring at lunch counters in several other towns and cities inside and outside of North Carolina. In late July, 1960, the Greensboro Woolworth's finally served African Americans, and the entire Woolworth's chain desegregated its lunch counters a day later. Although no one realized it at the time, the civil rights movement had "officially" begun thanks to the efforts of a small group of college students.

During the remaining years of the heyday of the civil rights movement, college students from the South and North joined thousands of other people in sit-ins, marches, and other activities to end legal segregation. Thousands were arrested, and at least forty-one were murdered. By risking their freedom and even their lives, they made a difference for millions of African Americans.

And it all began when a small group of college students sat down at a lunch counter in Greensboro and politely refused to leave until they were served.

Sources: Branch, 1988; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011Branch, T. (1988). Parting the waters: America in the King years, 1954–1963. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster; Southern Poverty Law Center. (2011). 41 lives for freedom. Retrieved from http://www.crmvet.org/mem/41lives.htm.

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to special consideration for minorities and women in employment and education to compensate for the discrimination and lack of opportunities they experience in the larger society. Affirmative action programs were begun in the 1960s to provide African Americans and, later, other people of color and women access to jobs and education to make up for past discrimination. President John F. Kennedy was the first known official to use the term, when he signed an executive order in 1961 ordering federal contractors to "take affirmative action" in ensuring that applicants are hired and treated without regard to their race and national origin. Six years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson added sex to race and national origin as demographic categories for which affirmative action should be used.

Although many affirmative action programs remain in effect today, court rulings, state legislation, and other efforts have limited their number and scope. Despite this curtailment, affirmative action continues to spark much controversy, with scholars, members of the public, and elected officials all holding strong views on the issue.

One of the major court rulings just mentioned was the US Supreme Court's decision in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 US 265 (1978). Allan Bakke was a 35-year-old white man who had twice been rejected for admission into the medical school at the University of California, Davis. At the time he applied, UC–Davis had a policy of reserving sixteen seats in its entering class of one hundred for qualified people of color to make up for their underrepresentation in the medical profession. Bakke's college grades and scores on the Medical College Admission Test were higher than those of the people of color admitted to UC–Davis either time Bakke applied. He sued for admission on the grounds that his rejection amounted to reverse racial discrimination on the basis of his being white (Stefoff, 2005).Stefoff, R. (2005). *The Bakke case: Challenging affirmative action*. New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark.

The case eventually reached the Supreme Court, which ruled 5–4 that Bakke must be admitted into the UC–Davis medical school because he had been unfairly denied admission on the basis of his race. As part of its historic but complex decision, the Court thus rejected the use of strict racial quotas in admission, as it declared that no applicant could be excluded based solely on the applicant's race. At the same time, however, the Court also declared that race may be used as one of the several criteria that admissions committees consider when making their decisions. For example, if an institution desires racial diversity among its students, it may use race as an admissions criterion along with other factors such as grades and test scores.

Two more recent Supreme Court cases both involved the University of Michigan: *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 US 244 (2003), which involved the university's undergraduate admissions, and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 US 306 (2003), which involved the university's law school admissions. In *Grutter* the Court reaffirmed the right of institutions of higher education to take race into account in the admissions process. In *Gratz*, however, the Court invalidated the university's policy of awarding additional points to high school students of color as part of its use of a point system to evaluate applicants; the Court said that consideration of applicants needed to be more individualized than a point system allowed.

Drawing on these Supreme Court rulings, then, affirmative action in higher education admissions on the basis of race/ethnicity is permissible as long as it does not involve a rigid quota system and as long as it does involve an individualized way of evaluating candidates. Race may be used as one of several criteria in such an individualized evaluation process, but it must not be used as the only criterion.

The Debate over Affirmative Action

Opponents of affirmative action cite several reasons for opposing it (Connors, 2009).Connors, P. (Ed.). (2009). *Affirmative action*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press. Affirmative action, they say, is reverse discrimination and, as such, is both illegal and immoral. The people benefiting from affirmative action are less qualified than many of the whites with whom they compete for employment and college admissions. In addition, opponents say, affirmative action implies that the people benefiting from it need extra help and thus are indeed less qualified. This implication stigmatizes the groups benefiting from affirmative action.

In response, proponents of affirmative action give several reasons for favoring it (Connors, 2009).Connors, P. (Ed.). (2009). *Affirmative action*. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press. Many say it is needed to make up not just for past discrimination and a lack of opportunities for people of color but also for ongoing discrimination and a lack of opportunity. For example, because of their social networks, whites are much better able than people of color to find out about and to get jobs (Reskin, 1998).Reskin, B. F. (1998). *Realities of affirmative action in employment*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association. If this is true, people of color are automatically at a disadvantage in the job market, and some form of affirmative action is needed to give them an equal chance at employment. Proponents also say that affirmative action helps add diversity to the workplace and to the campus. Many colleges, they note, give some preference to high school students who live in a distant state in order to add needed diversity to the student body; to "legacy" students—those with a parent who went to the same institution—to reinforce alumni loyalty and to motivate alumni to donate to the institution; and to athletes, musicians, and other applicants with certain specialized talents and skills. If all these forms of preferential admission make sense, proponents say, it also makes sense to take students' racial and ethnic backgrounds into account as admissions officers strive to have a diverse student body.

Proponents add that affirmative action has indeed succeeded in expanding employment and educational opportunities for people of color, and that individuals benefiting from affirmative action have generally fared well in the workplace or on the campus. In this regard research finds that African American students graduating from selective US colleges and universities after being admitted under affirmative action guidelines are slightly *more* likely than their white counterparts to obtain professional degrees and to become involved in civic affairs (Bowen & Bok, 1998).Bowen, W. G., & Bok, D. C. (1998). *The shape of the river: Long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

As this brief discussion indicates, several reasons exist for and against affirmative action. A cautious view is that affirmative action may not be perfect but that some form of it is needed to make up for past and ongoing discrimination and lack of opportunity in the workplace and on the campus. Without the extra help that affirmative action programs give disadvantaged people of color, the discrimination and other difficulties they face are certain to continue.

Other Programs and Policies

As indicated near the beginning of this chapter, one message from DNA evidence and studies of evolution is that we are all part of one human race. If we fail to recognize this lesson, we are doomed to repeat the experiences of the past, when racial and ethnic hostility overtook good reason and subjected people who happened to look different from the white majority to legal, social, and violent oppression. In the democracy that is America, we must try to do better so that there will truly be "liberty and justice for all."

As the United States attempts, however haltingly, to reduce racial and ethnic inequality, sociology has much insight to offer in its emphasis on the structural basis for this inequality. This emphasis strongly indicates that racial and ethnic inequality has much less to do with any personal faults of people of color than with the structural obstacles they face, including ongoing discrimination and lack of opportunity. Efforts aimed at such obstacles, then, are in the long run essential to reducing racial and ethnic inequality (Danziger, Reed, & Brown, 2004; Syme, 2008; Walsh, 2011).Danziger, S., Reed, D., & Brown, T. N. (2004). *Poverty and prosperity: Prospects for reducing racial economic disparities in the United States*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development; Syme, S. L. (2008). Reducing racial and social-class inequalities in health: The need for a new approach. *Health Affairs, 27*, 456–459; Walsh, R. (2011). Helping or hurting: Are adolescent intervention programs minimizing racial inequality? *Education & Urban Society, 43*(3), 370–395. Some of these efforts resemble those for reducing poverty discussed in Chapter 2, given the greater poverty of many people of color, and include the following:

1. Adopt a national "full employment" policy involving federally funded job training and public works programs.
2. Increase federal aid for the working poor, including earned income credits and child-care subsidies for those with children.
3. Establish and expand well-funded early childhood intervention programs, including home visitation by trained professionals, for poor families, as well as adolescent intervention programs, such as Upward Bound, for low-income teenagers.
4. Improve the schools that poor children attend and the schooling they receive, and expand early childhood education programs for poor children.
5. Provide better nutrition and health services for poor families with young children.
6. Strengthen efforts to reduce teenage pregnancies.
7. Strengthen affirmative action programs within the limits imposed by court rulings.
8. Strengthen legal enforcement of existing laws forbidding racial and ethnic discrimination in hiring and promotion.
9. Strengthen efforts to reduce residential segregation.

Key Takeaways

- There is reason to be both hopeful and less hopeful in regard to the future of racial and ethnic relations and inequality in the United States.
- Affirmative action continues to be a very controversial issue. Proponents think it is necessary to compensate for past and continuing racial and ethnic discrimination and lack of opportunity, while opponents think it discriminates against qualified whites.
- A variety of policies and practices hold strong potential for reducing racial and ethnic inequality, providing they are adequately funded and successfully implemented.

For Your Review

1. How hopeful are you in regard to the future of race and ethnicity in the United States? Explain your answer.
2. Do you favor or oppose affirmative action? Why?

Summary

1. Racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination have been an "American dilemma" in the United States ever since the colonial period. Slavery was only the ugliest manifestation of this dilemma. The urban riots of the 1960s led to warnings about the racial hostility and discrimination confronting African Americans and other groups, and these warnings continue down to the present.
2. Social scientists today tend to consider race more of a social category than a biological one for several reasons. Race is thus best considered a social construction and not a fixed biological category.
3. Ethnicity refers to a shared cultural heritage and is a term increasingly favored by social scientists over race. Membership in ethnic groups gives many people an important sense of identity and pride but can also lead to hostility toward people in other ethnic groups.
4. Prejudice, racism, and stereotypes all refer to negative attitudes about people based on their membership in racial or ethnic categories. Social-psychological explanations of prejudice focus on scapegoating and authoritarian personalities, while sociological explanations focus on conformity and socialization or on economic and political competition. Jim Crow racism has given way to modern or symbolic racism that considers people of color to be culturally inferior.
5. Discrimination and prejudice often go hand in hand, but not always. People can discriminate without being prejudiced, and they can be prejudiced without discriminating. Individual and institutional discrimination both continue to exist in the United States.
6. Racial and ethnic inequality in the United States is reflected in income, employment, education, and health statistics. In their daily lives, whites enjoy many privileges denied to their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups.
7. On many issues Americans remain sharply divided along racial and ethnic lines. One of the most divisive issues is affirmative action. Its opponents view it among other things as reverse discrimination, while its proponents cite many reasons for its importance, including the need to correct past and present discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities.

Using What You Know

After graduating college, you obtain a job in a medium-sized city in the Midwest and rent an apartment in a house in a nearby town. A family with an African American father and white mother has recently moved into a house down the street. You think nothing of it, but you begin to hear some of the neighbors expressing concern that the neighborhood "has begun to change." Then one night a brick is thrown through the window of the new family's home, and around the brick is wrapped the message, "Go back to where you came from!" Since you're new to the neighborhood yourself, you don't want to make waves, but you are also shocked by this act of racial hatred. You can speak up somehow or you can stay quiet. What do you decide to do? Why?

What Can You Do

To help reduce racial and ethnic inequality, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Contribute money to a local, state, or national organization that tries to help youths of color at their schools, homes, or other venues.
2. Volunteer for an organization that focuses on policy issues related to race and ethnicity.

3. Volunteer for any programs at your campus that aim at enhancing the educational success of new students of color; if no such programs exist, start one.

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3.9: Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses- Who Decides?

Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses- Who Decides?

By Shelly Arsneault at California State University, Fullerton

Introduction

Among the most enduring debates in the study and practice of public administration surrounds the making and implementation of public policy. In particular is the question of *bureaucratic discretion*: Once policy is made by elected officials, how much discretion are professional administrators afforded to implement policies according to their professional norms? This question exists in most public sector organizations, from city managers and their elected city councils, to public health administrators and their elected boards. In the following case study, this question pits education professionals, whose training, education, and experience have prepared them to implement policy and programs in public schools, against school board members, who have been democratically elected to make education policy decisions. The case asks the reader to consider how we balance this classic divide between professional public administrators—school district superintendents, principals, and teachers— and our representative democracy in which voters elect representatives at the state and local levels.

On Friday, October 8, 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill (AB) 101, making California the first state in the nation to require a semester-long course in ethnic studies for high school graduation (Fensterwald 2021a). Passage of AB 101 was years in the making. The first such bill was introduced in 2016, after Governor Jerry Brown's 2015 veto of a bill that would have created a state-level Ethnic Studies Advisory Commission to prepare a model curriculum for ethnic studies electives in grades 7-12 (Fensterwald 2021b). While many school districts, including Los Angeles Unified and Fresno Unified, were adding these courses to their curriculum, legislation at the state level continued to stall. When a bill eventually hit Gov. Newsom's desk in 2020, he vetoed it, noting ongoing disagreements over the proposed model curriculum (Fensterwald 2020). Finally, after the curricular language and expectations were refined, Gov. Newsom signed AB 101 into law; California high schools have to offer ethnic studies courses by the 2025-26 school year, and students will have had to pass at least one semester of ethnic studies to graduate in 2030. The law's model curriculum includes a focus on the four groups traditionally part of ethnic studies, Blacks, Latino/a/x/e, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, but encourages schools to include the histories and legacy of religious and ethnic groups in their own communities (Fensterwald 2021a). To facilitate this, the California Department of Education included lesson plans that address Californians of the Jewish and Sikh faiths, as well as Arab- and Armenian-American communities. As is often the case, passage of legislation is not the end of the story; in this case study it is just the beginning as local school districts, largely comprised of education professionals, attempt to implement a state policy that has become a politically contentious "culture war" issue at the local level.

The Structure of California's Education System

The structure of California's public education system is complex, including a statewide elected Superintendent of Public Instruction who serves as both the head of the California Department of Education, and the Executive Officer of the State Board of Education (SBE). Eleven other members of the SBE serve four-year terms, are appointed by the governor, and include a Board President and Vice President. Each of California's 58 counties has a County Office of Education which provides services to the state's 1,000 school districts. Each school district has its own charter and an elected board of trustees. The district charter details rules that include the number of school board members (five or more), and laws regarding their elections. The school board sets education policy at the district level, and hires—and can fire—a district superintendent. The superintendent is a professional education administrator typically with years of experience and specialized training in education administration. Superintendents answer directly to the school board, and their responsibilities include managing the district, and hiring school principals. Education professionals within each school include principals, vice principals, and teachers.

Important to note for this case study is that all of the elected officials in California's public education system, including the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, are elected via *nonpartisan* ballot. However, while candidates do not announce their political party or run on a party platform, all are partisans, and public school elections have increasingly become politically partisan events.

Why Ethnic Studies?

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s created an interest in educating students about the histories of those typically excluded from U.S. textbooks: Blacks, Latino/a/x/e, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Ethnic Studies programs, the first of which began at San Francisco State University in 1969 after a five-month student strike, spread to universities across the country over the next two decades (Ehsanipour 2020; see *Ethnic Studies* podcast, below). Ethnic studies curriculum is multi-faceted. It is described as an interdisciplinary, comparative field that focuses on the social, cultural, political, and historical contributions of Americans from ethnic and racial minority groups that puts the history of social movements into the context of the struggles these groups have faced; the curriculum typically explores alternatives to dominant cultural and institutional values as a way to assert the right to full social, political, and economic participation for people of color (Dee & Penner 2017; Hu-DeHart 1993; Tintiangco-Cubales, Kohli, Sacramento, Henning, Agarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter 2015).

From the perspective of the teaching profession, bringing ethnic studies to high schools is not without challenges. This is particularly due to a lack of education and training in the field, and is compounded by a lack of teachers of color (Tagami 2023; Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2015). Although White teachers can successfully teach ethnic studies, they are less likely to have the educational background, or the personal experiences that resonate so clearly with students of color. For those concerned about educational outcomes, it is important to note that there is ample research confirming that ethnic studies courses are important drivers of success for students of color on a number of measures including attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and graduation rates (Bonilla, Dee, & Penner 2021; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx 2014; Dee & Penner 2017; Sleeter 2011; Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2015). This is particularly important as the National Center for Education Statistics finds continuing disparities between racial groups in terms of scores in reading and mathematics, absenteeism, Advanced Placement credits, and high school completion. In general, Asian/Pacific Islanders tend to fare best on these measures, followed by Whites, with Black, Latino/a/x/e, and American Indian students faring less well (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Why California?

California is considered a majority-minority state, which means no single racial/ethnic group constitutes over 50% of the population. It is among the most diverse in the nation, with a population that is 39% Latino/a/x/e, 35% White, 15% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 5% Black, 4% multi-racial, and 1% Native American (Johnson, McGhee & Mejia 2023). More importantly for this case study, nearly 77% of California children, therefore the vast majority of public school students, are not White. As noted above, education research tells us that there are disparities in education outcomes between racial/ethnic groups, ***and*** that ethnic studies courses have profound, positive effects, particularly for students of color. For many educators, the benefits of ethnic studies curriculum for California students are fairly clear.

For example, in 2010, the elected members of the San Francisco Unified School District Board of Education voted unanimously to support ethnic studies in district high schools, and a committee of social studies teachers was tasked with creating its curriculum (Tintiangco-Cubales et al. 2015). The year-long 9th grade course they created focuses “on themes of social justice, anti-racism, stereotypes, and social movements led by people of color from US history spanning the late eighteenth century until the 1970s” (Bonilla, Dee, & Penner 2021, p.2). The course has been found to be particularly beneficial for low-performing students in the district, significantly improving attendance, engagement, and graduation rates.

As the birthplace of university Ethnic Studies programs, San Francisco was a logical, and liberal-leaning community in which to pilot high school ethnic studies courses. As such, in more than a decade, the curriculum has experienced little of the political backlash that has occurred in other communities. Perhaps most notable in this regard is the 2010 experience of Arizona’s Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), when the state legislature passed House Bill (HB) 2281, essentially dismantling TUSD’s Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in district high schools. Arguing that program curriculum was too politically charged, HB 2281 forbid courses that advocated “ethnic solidarity rather than treating pupils as individuals,” promoted “resentment toward a race or class of people,” were “designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group,” or promoted “the overthrow of the U.S. government” (Cabrera et al. 2014, p. 1085). Most dramatically, the debate over the MAS program lead to a 2011 TUSD Board of Education meeting at which student protestors chained themselves to school board members’ chairs (see *UNIDOS*, below). Although a federal court overturned HB 2281 as unconstitutional, and ethnic studies courses continue to be offered in TUSD, the lessons of the Tucson experience are important as the political rhetoric over ethnic studies heats up across the country (Stephenson 2021).

Political Battles and Education Policy

In California, several school districts in Orange County have been ground zero for these contentious battles between teachers, parents, and students who support ethnic studies curriculum, and those who fear that ethnic studies will further divide students along racial and ethnic lines. In 2021, as it became clear that Gov. Newsom would sign AB 101, ethnic studies opponents in Orange County began to mobilize. Debate about the curriculum lead to calls for recalling school board members in several districts, a Los Alamitos School Board meeting that was moved on-line at the recommendation of city police who feared violence, and at least one district voting to ban the teaching of "critical race theory" (Elattar 2021).

Many opponents of ethnic studies have argued that the curriculum is a veiled way to infuse critical race theory (CRT) into K-12 classrooms (Elattar 2022; Elatter 2023a). CRT, they argue, is racist, anti-American, and Marxist indoctrination. Education professionals say that this is a misunderstanding of CRT; in 2021 the California School Boards Association released a fact sheet[1] clarifying that CRT, taught primarily in law schools and other graduate-level courses, is a method of legal and social analysis, and is not part of California's ethnic studies curriculum. This has not stopped opponents from arguing against ethnic studies by framing it as CRT in disguise.

Much of the consternation over ethnic studies is related to what is known as the "parental rights" movement in public education. This movement is rooted in conservative social, religious, and political concerns about the way issues such as race and sexual orientation are discussed in public schools (Walsh 2022). Fueled by school closures, mask mandates, and vaccine requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic, many parents across the country were mobilized to seek greater control over their public schools. These were often the same parents who feel that issues of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation are better discussed at home, and do not belong in the classroom (Replogle 2022; Walsh 2022). Thus, the parental rights movement has blossomed since 2020, with education professionals frequently caught in the middle. In the case of the pandemic, school policies were dictated by state and local public health guidelines, leaving school officials little discretion over mandates. Similarly, AB 101 is California state law, and high schools are required to offer ethnic studies courses to ensure their students earn a high school diploma.

Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District

The communities of Placentia and Yorba Linda in north Orange County share a single school district of 24,000 students (Replogle 2022). While less than one-third of Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District (PYLUSD) students are White, the controversy around ethnic studies became heated in 2022. Although the PYLUSD School Board approved a Multicultural Studies elective for its high schools in 2021 on a 3-2 vote, the same board passed a resolution *against* CRT by the same margin in April 2022. The board resolved that while the district "honors the experiences of all students by encouraging instruction that explores the history, philosophy, and structures that comprise the American experience," it would "not allow the use of Critical Race Theory as a framework to guide such efforts" (Elsasser 2022, n.p.). In publishing the resolution, the PYLUSD superintendent added an open letter to district families in which he noted that CRT was not being used in the district, nor had there been plans to use it. He also noted that the school board resolution would not lead to any curricular changes, and that teachers would "continue to exercise professional judgment when deciding whether or not a particular issue is suitable for study or discussion" (Elsasser 2022, n.p.).

The anti-CRT resolution raised questions about censorship, and fears that some of the district's Advanced Placement (AP) classes could lose their AP license, meaning the courses would not count for AP credit (Elattar 2022). This fear is not unfounded. In response to the heated political rhetoric surrounding the curriculum of many social studies courses, College Board, the organization that runs the AP program, sent a letter to AP teachers across the country in April 2022 noting that if required curriculum was censored, course AP licenses could be revoked (Najarro 2022). Further, the California State University, Fullerton College of Education announced it would pause student-teacher placements in PYLUSD beginning in spring 2023 due to concerns about the anti-CRT resolution. Student-teachers in the district worried that their teaching experience was not in compliance with state standards for curriculum related to race and cultural identities, and noted that their mentor teachers were unable to provide adequate clarity in light of the school board resolution (CSUF News 2022; see *California District*, below.

None of this quelled the debate, and parental rights forces in PYLUSD fielded candidates for two school board seats in a contentious November 2022 election (Replogle 2022). One long-time incumbent lost, and was replaced by a very vocal parental rights supporter, the other incumbent trustee won reelection. Among the first board actions in 2023 was passing a policy that requires a vote of the school board before the district can use a new book in classrooms; these decisions are typically made by a review committee at the school or district level (*Orange County Register* Editorial Board 2023). This policy resulted from concerns over classroom adoption of an autobiographical graphic novel about one woman's experience during the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s (Elatter 2023b). While the board ultimately allowed the novel to be used, the new policy has been derided by critics as potentially making even routine decisions politically charged. The editorial board of the *Orange County Register,* well-known

to be conservative-leaning, called the policy “creepy,” and argued that it “will dumb down students’ reading material by assuring educators propose only the least-controversial books—lest it set off controversy at a board meeting. The policy encourages ideologically driven board members to grandstand” (2023, n.p.). It seems clear that the next school board elections, in which three seats will be up for grabs, will continue to be politically heated.

Orange Unified School District

Just south of PYLUSD sits the city of Orange, whose school board has similarly been the site of debate over parental rights in public schools. The Orange Unified School District (OUSD) includes parts of Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Garden Grove, and educates 27,000 children. In January 2023 during a special, closed-session board meeting of the Orange Unified School Board (OUSB), the newly elected conservative majority voted 4-3 to fire its superintendent and put the assistant superintendent on administrative leave. At that same meeting, the majority voted to appoint an interim superintendent from outside the district, and temporarily move an existing administrator into the assistant superintendent position.

These actions, coming without notice, and while district students, teachers, and both administrators were on winter break, looked political to many people. Parents argued that the superintendent had been named Administrator of the Year by Orange County PTAs just a few months earlier, and that these board actions would cost the district hundreds of thousands of dollars. Within 24 hours, hundreds had signed a petition to seek recall elections against the conservative school board majority.

The School Board president said that the board needed to act quickly to make changes desired by the new board majority which was seeking a “parent-first” district (Kopetman 2023a). He explained that the superintendent was fired to encourage reform and refocus the district on “academics and educating students. We have been focusing too much on the social politics of education” (Kopetman 2023a, n.p.). Among board concerns were how sex education, social equity, and ethnic studies were presented in district curriculum.

In addition to complaints about the political nature of firing the superintendent, a lawsuit was threatened against the OUSB for violating California’s Ralph M. Brown Act (Fensterwald 2023). The Brown Act is an open meetings law that provides transparency to actions taken by all elected bodies in the state. In addition to requiring 24-hour public notice of meetings, it disallows private negotiations among elected officials, and requires that all board actions be taken during public meetings. The four members of the OUSB majority were accused of organizing the firing and immediate hiring of an interim superintendent via email, before the January meeting. If an elected body is found to have violated the Brown Act, its actions can be nullified; in this case, the former OUSD superintendent could be reinstated.

Adding fuel for parents already angry with the school board, one of the first actions of the interim superintendent of Orange Unified was to shut down the school district’s digital library app after two parents complained about the LGBTQ-friendly content of two books in the library’s collection (Sforza 2023). Although the digital library was only suspended for a week, parent outrage grew as students lost access to library materials, some of them in the middle of finishing assignments (Elattar 2023). A district librarian argued that the lack of access is particularly hard on economically disadvantaged students for whom the digital holdings are a way to level educational resource gaps. A week after reinstating the digital library, and after five weeks on the job, the interim superintendent announced that he would be leaving the district (Schallhorn and Kopetman 2023). Four months after firing its superintendent, the Orange Unified School Board halted a search for a permanent replacement, noting that the Brown Act lawsuit, and parent efforts to recall several board trustees may make it difficult to attract suitable candidates for the job (Kopetman 2023b).

Conclusion

While it is widely recognized that it is impossible to fully separate politics from public policy, it is also generally accepted that most implementation decisions should be as free from partisan politics as possible, and that policy experts should be granted a level of discretion over their work (Overeem 2005; Rosenbloom 2008). However, the reality of implementing public policy is often not so simple. Education professionals are typically granted discretion over many decisions in public schools: they choose textbooks, software technology, maps and globes, reference materials and library books, and design curriculum based on their subject-matter expertise. In the case of AB 101, the state legislature and governor created an Ethnic Studies requirement for high school students, and teaching professionals designed a model curriculum for use in the state’s schools. However, schools do not have to use the model curriculum, and were encouraged to add materials to meet the needs of their own diverse religious and ethnic communities. As in creation of the state’s model curriculum, many expected that district teachers would drive curricular decisions in their local schools. In both PYLUSD and OUSD, however, long-time school board members were ousted in 2022 in favor of candidates who campaigned on platforms of parental rights over professional expertise.

On the issue of ethnic studies, this leaves education professionals, including district superintendents, principals, and teachers, in a quandary. AB 101 is state law; schools are required to offer ethnic studies classes beginning in the 2025-26 school year, and students will not be eligible for high school graduation without having at least a semester of ethnic studies by May 2030. While most California school districts are preparing teachers and curriculum to meet the legal requirements, others have elected school boards whose intention is to fight against implementation of AB 101, perhaps even get the state legislature to overturn the ethnic studies requirement entirely (Rossman-Benjamin 2023). It will be interesting to watch how education professionals address their legal (and some would argue *ethical*) obligations to provide a meaningful ethnic studies curriculum to California's diverse student population, while navigating the contested political waters of their elected school boards.

Questions to Consider

The study of public administration has long elevated the status of the professional as a way to provide efficient and effective public service. In the case of education, teachers are trained and educated to teach specialized subject matter, and even specific populations of students (elementary, high school, special needs, etc...). How do the values of professional public service interact with the values of democratically elected policymakers in public education?

Critics of the parental rights movement note that school policies have long allowed parents the right to seek alternate assignments or books if parents find them inappropriate for their children. Are these policies enough, or does technology like digital libraries make this an outdated way to provide parental control over access to school resources?

In our federal system, it is not uncommon to see a higher level of government pass legislation and then give lower levels of government discretion over specific policy decisions. We see this in AB 101, in which elected officials at the state level left some policy decisions to locally elected school boards. Using this case study as the example, how would you describe the pros and cons of this aspect of federalism?

In what ways does this case study affect your views on the value of ethnic studies curriculum in California schools; i.e., are you more or less in favor, and why? In what ways does it affect your views on parental rights in public schools; i.e., are you more or less in favor, and why?

Podcasts & Videos

Ethnic Studies: Born in the Bay Area from History's Biggest Student Strike **(July 30, 2020)** Asal Ehsanipour, KQED (21 minute listen)

UNIDOS takes over Tucson Unified School District School Board **(April 26, 2011)** Three Sonorans News (14 minute video)

California district loses half of its student teachers after banning critical race theory **(November 4, 2022)** Erin Burnett, CNN (4 minute video)

Attribution:

- **Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses - Who Decides?** By Shelly Arsneault | California State University Fullerton | 2023 | Libre Texts
  - https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/California_State_University_Fullerton/Cases_in_California_Politics_and_Administration%3A_Centering_Equity_and_Social_Justice_Issues/01%3A_Case_Studies/1.01%3A_Implementing_Ethnic_Studies_Courses-_Who_Decides

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3.10: End of Chapter Synthesis

Further Reading

Developing Policies to Respond to the Challenges Confronting African American and Latino Males

End of Chapter Discussions

1. "In what ways are poverty levels measured and quantified on both a global and national scale? Can you identify demographic groups that are particularly susceptible to poverty and explore the social patterns and distributions of poverty among different populations? How do these measurements and patterns inform our understanding of how to address poverty effectively? Are the current poverty measurements tools accurate?"
2. "Examine the persistent issue of poverty by considering economic, social, and political factors that contribute to it. Provide concrete examples for each type of factor and discuss how they interact to perpetuate cycles of poverty. Furthermore, analyze the multifaceted consequences of poverty, particularly in areas like healthcare, education, and social mobility, on individuals, communities and societies."
3. "Delve into poverty alleviation strategies and policies, both on a global and local level. Evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches in reducing poverty and enhancing the living conditions of impoverished individuals. Can you identify any successful poverty alleviation programs or initiatives, and what valuable lessons can we draw from them to inform our efforts in addressing poverty on a national level and globally?"

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4: RECONSTRUCTING AND ANALYZING ARGUMENTS

4.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

4.2: Reconstructing and analyzing arguments

4.3: Identifying Arguments

4.4: Arguments vs. Explanations

4.5: More Complex Argument Structures

4.6: Using Paraphrases to Reconstruct Arguments

4.7: Validity

4.8: Soundness

4.9: Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments

4.10: Arguments with Missing Premises

4.11: Evaluative Language

4.12: End of Chapter Synthesis

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4.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Reconstructing & Analyzing Arguments

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. Understand the Structure and Components of Arguments: Equip students with the ability to identify and reconstruct the structure of arguments, recognizing their core components such as premises, conclusions and underlying assumptions. Develop skills to differentiate between various types of arguments and to analyze their logical flow and coherence.
2. Develop Critical Analysis Skills: Foster critical thinking by teaching students how to critically analyze arguments, focusing on evaluating the validity and soundness of reasoning. Encourage the examination of evidence and the use of logic to assess argument strength, while also considering potential biases and logical fallacies in everyday conversation.
3. Apply Argument Analysis in Sociological Contexts: Empower students to apply these skills to real-world sociological debates and discussions, enabling them to dissect and understand complex social issues through structured argument analysis. Encourage the application of these techniques to a range of sociological topics, to enhance their ability to engage in informed and critical discourse



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4.0: Introduction

In this chapter, we will delve into the essential skills of reconstructing and analyzing arguments, viewed through a sociological lens. Our exploration will begin with understanding the fundamental nature of arguments and distinguishing them from mere explanations. We'll then move on to identifying statements and examining the concepts of validity and soundness. Through this process, we will address crucial social issues such as poverty, racial and ethnic inequality, gender inequality, crime, healthcare disparities, urban and rural divides, and the impacts of war. By incorporating real-world examples, we will see how these concepts apply to complex social arguments, enabling us to paraphrase and assess the logical processes underpinning these discussions. Ultimately, our goal is to equip you with the critical thinking tools necessary to engage thoughtfully and effectively in debates about the pressing social issues that shape our world, fostering a more informed and equitable society.

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4.2: Reconstructing and analyzing arguments

Reconstructing and analyzing arguments

Summary:

Understanding and analyzing arguments is crucial in developing critical thinking skills. This section focuses on identifying the components of an argument, distinguishing arguments from explanations, and evaluating the validity and soundness of arguments. By mastering these skills, students can effectively assess the strength of various claims and improve their reasoning abilities.

Section Learning Objectives

- Understand the premise and conclusion of an argument.
- Describe the difference between an argument and an explanation.
- Understand what makes a valid argument.

What is an Argument?

- Definition: An argument is a set of statements where some statements (premises) provide reasons for thinking another statement (conclusion) is true.
- Components:
  - Premise: A statement providing reason or support.
  - Conclusion: A statement that premises aim to support.

Argument vs. Explanation

- Argument: Provides reasons to believe a claim is true.
  - Example: "Abortion is morally wrong because it is wrong to take the life of an innocent human being, and a fetus is an innocent human being."
  - Structure:
    1. It is morally wrong to take the life of an innocent human being.
    2. A fetus is an innocent human being.
    3. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.
- Explanation: Describes why or how something is the case, without necessarily arguing for its truth.

Validity in Arguments

- Valid Argument: If premises are true, the conclusion must be true.
- Sound Argument: Valid argument with true premises.

Identifying Statements

- Statement: Can be true or false (e.g., "The Nile is a river in northeastern Africa").
- Non-Statement: Cannot be true or false (e.g., commands, questions).

Real-World Example: Climate Change Argument

- Argument:
  - Premise: Human activities release large amounts of greenhouse gases.
  - Premise: Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere.

    - Conclusion: Human activities contribute to global warming.
- This argument provides premises that support the conclusion logically, illustrating critical thinking in assessing environmental issues.

Exercise

Identify which of the following are statements:

1. No one understands me but you. (Statement)
2. Alligators are on average larger than crocodiles. (Statement)
3. Is an alligator a reptile or a mammal? (Non-statement)
4. An alligator is either a reptile or a mammal. (Statement)
5. Don't let any reptiles into the house. (Non-statement)
6. You may kill any reptile you see in the house. (Non-statement)
7. East Africans are not the best distance runners. (Statement)
8. Obama is not a Democrat. (Statement)
9. Some humans have wings. (Statement)
10. Some things with wings cannot fly. (Statement)
11. Was Obama born in Kenya or Hawaii? (Non-statement)
12. Oh no! A grizzly bear! (Non-statement)
13. Meet me in St. Louis. (Non-statement)
14. We met in St. Louis yesterday. (Statement)
15. I do not want to meet a grizzly bear in the wild. (Statement)

Conclusion:

By understanding the structure of arguments and distinguishing them from explanations, students can critically assess various claims. Evaluating the validity and soundness of arguments ensures logical consistency and truthfulness. Practicing these skills with real-world examples, such as climate change debates, enhances one's ability to apply critical thinking in practical situations. Mastering these techniques is essential for effective reasoning and informed decision-making in both academic and everyday contexts.





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4.3: Identifying Arguments

Identifying Arguments

Summary: Identifying arguments involves recognizing statements where someone attempts to establish truth based on another statement. This section discusses premise and conclusion indicators, which aid in distinguishing arguments from non-arguments. By understanding these indicators and applying substitution tests, students can accurately identify arguments.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize statements constituting arguments.
- Understand premise and conclusion indicators.
- Apply the substitution test to determine argument presence.

Identifying Arguments: An argument is present when someone seeks to establish a statement as true based on another statement. This can be determined by recognizing premise and conclusion indicators within sentences.

Premise and Conclusion Indicators:

- Premise Indicators: Words like "since," "because," and "for" introduce statements providing reasons or support.
- Conclusion Indicators: Words like "so," "therefore," and "hence" mark statements someone aims to establish as true.

Substitution Test: To verify if a word functions as a premise or conclusion indicator, substitute it with another from the list. If the resulting sentence makes sense, it likely indicates an argument.

Exercise: Identify arguments and their conclusions:

1. The woman in the hat is not a witch since witches have long noses and she doesn't have a long nose. (Conclusion: The woman in the hat is not a witch.)
2. I have been wrangling cattle since before you were old enough to tie your own shoes. (Not an argument)
3. Albert is angry with me so he probably won't be willing to help me wash the dishes. (Conclusion: Albert probably won't help wash the dishes.)
4. First I washed the dishes and then I dried them. (Not an argument)
5. If the road wasn't icy, the car wouldn't have slid off the turn. (Not an argument)
6. Albert isn't a fireman and he isn't a fisherman either. (Not an argument)
7. Are you seeing that rhinoceros over there? It is huge! (Not an argument)
8. The fact that obesity has become a problem in the U.S. is shown by the fact that obesity rates have risen significantly over the past four decades. (Conclusion: Obesity is a problem in the U.S.)
9. Bob showed me a graph with the rising obesity rates and I was very surprised to see how much they've risen. (Not an argument)
10. Albert isn't a fireman because Albert is a Greyhound, which is a kind of dog, and dogs can't be firemen. (Conclusion: Albert isn't a fireman.)
11. Charlie and Violet are dogs and since dogs don't sweat, it is obvious that Charlie and Violet don't sweat. (Conclusion: Charlie and Violet don't sweat.)
12. The reason I forgot to lock the door is that I was distracted by the clown riding a unicycle down our street while singing Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man." (Not an argument)
13. What Bob told you is not the real reason that he missed his plane to Denver. (Not an argument)
14. Samsung stole some of Apple's patents for their smartphones, so Apple stole some of Samsung's patents back in retaliation. (Conclusion: Apple stole Samsung's patents.)
15. No one who has ever gotten frostbite while climbing K2 has survived to tell about it, therefore no one ever will. (Conclusion: No one will survive frostbite while climbing K2.)

Table 1 contains a list of some common premise and conclusion indicators:

Premises indicators	Conclusion indicators

since	therefore
because	so
for	hence
as	thus
given that	implies that
seeing that	consequently
for the reason that	it follows that
is shown by the fact that	We may conclude that



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4.4: Arguments vs. Explanations

Arguments vs. Explanations

Summary: Distinguishing between arguments and explanations is essential in critical thinking. This section clarifies the difference between the two, emphasizing their distinct purposes and structures. By understanding when to use each, students can effectively support claims or provide insights into why something is true.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between arguments and explanations.
- Identify the purpose and structure of each.
- Apply critical thinking skills to assess whether a statement is an argument or an explanation.

Arguments:

- Purpose: To establish the truth of a claim.
- Structure: Premises provide reasons for accepting the conclusion.
- Example: "Obesity rates are rising in the U.S. because multiple studies by the CDC and NIH have consistently shown a rise in obesity over the last four decades."

Explanations:

- Purpose: To explain why a claim is true.
- Structure: Premises explain why the conclusion is true, assuming its truth.
- Example: "The rate of obesity is on the rise in the U.S. because Americans have increasingly consumed foods high in sugar and low in fiber, leading to more fat storage."

Exercise: Identify whether the following statements are arguments or explanations, and identify the main conclusion:

1. Wanda rode the bus today because her car was in the shop. (Explanation: Wanda rode the bus.)
2. Since Wanda doesn't have enough money in her bank account, she has not yet picked up her car from the shop. (Explanation: Wanda hasn't picked up her car.)
3. Either Bob or Henry rode the bus to work today. But it wasn't Henry because I saw him riding his bike to work. Therefore, it was Bob. (Argument: Bob rode the bus.)
4. It can't be snowing right now since it only snows when it is 32 degrees or below and right now it is 40 degrees. (Argument: It's not snowing.)
5. The reason some people with schizophrenia hear voices in their head is that the cognitive mechanism that monitors their own self-talk is malfunctioning and they attribute their own self-talk to some external source. (Explanation: People with schizophrenia hear voices.)
6. Fracking should be allowed because, although it does involve some environmental risk, it reduces our dependence on foreign oil and there is much greater harm to the environment due to foreign oil drilling than there is due to fracking. (Argument: Fracking should be allowed.)
7. Wanda could not have ridden the bus today because today is a citywide holiday and the bus service is not operating. (Explanation: Wanda couldn't have ridden the bus.)
8. The Tigers lost their star pitcher due to injury over the weekend, therefore the Tigers will not win their game against the Pirates. (Argument: The Tigers will not win.)
9. No one living in Pompeii could have escaped before the lava from Mt. Vesuvius hit. The reason is simple: the lava was flowing too fast and there was nowhere to go to escape it in time. (Explanation: No one could have escaped Pompeii.)
10. The reason people's allergies worsen when they move to Cincinnati is that the pollen count in Cincinnati is higher than almost anywhere else in the surrounding area. (Explanation: People's allergies worsen in Cincinnati.)



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4.5: More Complex Argument Structures

More Complex Argument Structures

Summary: Arguments and explanations often have complex structures beyond simple premises leading to conclusions. This section explores such structures, including intermediate conclusions and independent supporting premises. Understanding these structures enhances analytical skills, enabling students to dissect and evaluate more intricate arguments effectively.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify complex argument structures, including intermediate conclusions and independent supporting premises.
- Represent argument structures using standard form and visual diagrams.
- Analyze arguments to determine the relationships between premises and conclusions.

Intermediate Conclusions:

- Statements that support the main conclusion but are themselves supported by other premises.
- Example: "No one living in Pompeii could have survived the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. The reason is simple: the lava was flowing too fast and there was nowhere to go to escape it in time."

Independent Supporting Premises:

- Premises that provide direct support for the conclusion but are unrelated to each other.
- Example: "I know that Wanda rode her bike to work today because when she arrived at work she had her right pant leg rolled up, and Bob saw her riding towards work at 7:45 am."

Structural Representation:

- Standard Form: Statements numbered, with dependencies indicated.
- Diagrams: Visual representations of argument structures, illustrating relationships between premises and conclusions.

Exercise: Represent the following arguments in standard form and visualize their structures using diagrams.

1. There is nothing wrong with prostitution because there is nothing wrong with consensual sexual and economic interactions between adults. Moreover, since there's no difference between a man who goes on a blind date with a woman, buys her dinner and then has sex with her and a man who simply pays a woman for sex, that is another reason for why there is nothing wrong with prostitution.
2. Prostitution is wrong because it involves women who have typically been sexually abused as children. We know that most of these women have been abused from multiple surveys done with women who have worked in prostitution and that show a high percentage of self-reported sexual abuse as children.
3. There was someone in this cabin recently because there was warm water in the tea kettle and because there was wood still smoldering in the fireplace. But the person couldn't have been Tim because Tim has been with me the whole time. Therefore, there must be someone else in these woods.
4. It is possible to be blind and yet run in the Olympic Games since Marla Runyan did it at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.
5. The train was late because it had to take a longer, alternate route since the bridge was out.
6. Israel is not safe if Iran gets nuclear missiles since Iran has threatened multiple times to destroy Israel and if Iran had nuclear missiles it would be able to carry out this threat. Moreover, since Iran has been developing enriched uranium, they have the key component needed for nuclear weapons—every other part of the process of building a nuclear weapon is simple compared to that. Therefore, Israel is not safe.
7. Since all professional hockey players are missing front teeth and Martin is a professional hockey player, it follows that Martin is missing front teeth. And since almost all professional athletes who are missing their front teeth have false teeth, it follows that Martin probably has false teeth.
8. Anyone who eats the crab rangoon at China Food restaurant will probably have stomach troubles afterward. It has happened to me every time, which is why it will probably happen to other people as well. Since Bob ate the crab rangoon at China Food restaurant, he will probably have stomach troubles afterward.
9. Albert and Caroline like to go for runs in the afternoon in Hyde Park. Since Albert never runs alone, we know that any time

Albert is running, Caroline is running too. But since Albert looks like he has just run (since he is panting hard), it follows that Caroline must have run too.

10. Just because Jeremy's prints were on the gun that killed Tim and the gun was registered to Jeremy, it doesn't follow that Jeremy killed Tim since Jeremy's prints would certainly be on his own gun and someone else could have stolen Jeremy's gun and used it to kill Tim.



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4.6: Using Paraphrases to Reconstruct Arguments

Using Paraphrases to Reconstruct Arguments

Summary: Paraphrasing premises and conclusions is crucial for constructing arguments in standard form. This process enhances clarity and ensures that the essence of the argument is captured accurately. There can be multiple valid paraphrases, each offering a different perspective on the argument's logic.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of paraphrasing premises and conclusions for constructing arguments.
- Learn to create paraphrases that accurately capture the essence of an argument.
- Recognize that there can be multiple valid ways to paraphrase an argument.

Paraphrasing for Clarity:

- Paraphrasing involves using different words to express the same idea in a clearer manner.
- It helps in constructing arguments in standard form while ensuring clarity and accuracy.
- Mastery of English is essential for effective paraphrasing.

Multiple Valid Paraphrases:

- There can be several valid paraphrases of premises and conclusions.
- Each paraphrase offers a different perspective on the argument's logic.
- The choice of paraphrase depends on clarity and accuracy.

Constructing Standard Form Arguments:

- Paraphrased premises and conclusions are organized into standard form.
- The structure of the argument is maintained while ensuring clarity.
- Dependencies between premises and conclusions are indicated.

Practice: Reconstruct the following arguments in standard form using paraphrased premises and conclusions.

1. Conclusion: The fact that Jeremy's prints were on the gun that killed Tim and the gun was registered to Jeremy doesn't mean that Jeremy killed Tim. Paraphrased Premises:
    1. Jeremy's prints would be expected on a gun registered to him.
    2. Someone could have stolen Jeremy's gun and used it to kill Tim. Standard Form:
    3. Jeremy's prints would be expected on a gun registered to him.
    4. Someone could have stolen Jeremy's gun and used it to kill Tim.
    5. Therefore, the fact that Jeremy's prints were on the gun that killed Tim and the gun was registered to Jeremy doesn't mean that Jeremy killed Tim. (from 1-2)
2. Conclusion: We do not know that Jeremy killed Tim. Paraphrased Premises:
    1. Tim was killed by a gun registered to Jeremy with Jeremy's prints.
    2. It is possible that Jeremy's gun was stolen.
    3. If Jeremy's gun was stolen, Jeremy could not have killed Tim. Standard Form:
    4. Tim was killed by a gun registered to Jeremy with Jeremy's prints.
    5. It is possible that Jeremy's gun was stolen.
    6. If Jeremy's gun was stolen, Jeremy could not have killed Tim.
    7. Therefore, we do not know that Jeremy killed Tim. (from 1-3)

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4.7: Validity

Validity

Validity

Understanding the concept of validity is crucial for evaluating arguments critically. Validity refers to the logical relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an argument. An argument is valid if, assuming the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true. Here's a breakdown of how validity works, with examples and tests for determining it.

1. Valid Argument:

- Example:
  1. Violet is a dog.
  2. Therefore, Violet is a mammal.
- Here, if the premise (Violet is a dog) is true, the conclusion (Violet is a mammal) must also be true, because all dogs are mammals.

2. Validity Independent of Actual Truth:

- Example:
  1. Everyone born in France can speak French.
  2. Barack Obama was born in France.
  3. Therefore, Barack Obama can speak French.
- Despite the premises being false, the argument is valid because if the premises were true, the conclusion would necessarily follow.

3. Invalid Argument:

- Example:
  1. George was President of the United States.
  2. Therefore, George was elected President of the United States.
- This argument is invalid because it's possible for the premise to be true while the conclusion is false. Gerald Ford was President without being elected, providing a counterexample.

4. Informal Test of Validity:

To determine validity, ask whether you can imagine a world where the premises are true and the conclusion is false. If you can, the argument is invalid.

- Example:
  1. Joan jumped out of an airplane without a parachute.
  2. Therefore, Joan fell to her death.
- This is invalid because it's possible Joan jumped from a plane on the ground, making the premise true but the conclusion false.
- Revised Example:
  1. Joan jumped out of an airplane traveling 300 mph at 10,000 ft without a parachute.
  2. Therefore, Joan fell to her death.
- Even this is invalid because there are conceivable scenarios (like landing in a net or being caught by someone with a parachute) where Joan could survive.

5. Application of Validity:

- Example:
  1. A person can be President of the United States only if they were born in the United States.

2. Obama is President of the United States.
3. Kenya is not in the United States.
4. Therefore, Obama was not born in Kenya.

- This is valid because if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.
- Counter Example:
  1. A person can be President of the United States only if they were born in Kenya.
  2. Obama is President of the United States.
  3. Therefore, Obama was born in Kenya.
- Despite the false premises, the argument is valid because the conclusion logically follows from the premises.

Exercise 5: Validity Test

Determine the validity of the following arguments and provide counterexamples if invalid.

1. Katie is a human being. Therefore, Katie is smarter than a chimpanzee.
2. Bob is a fireman. Therefore, Bob has put out fires.
3. Gerald is a mathematics professor. Therefore, Gerald knows how to teach mathematics.
4. Monica is a French teacher. Therefore, Monica knows how to teach French.
5. Bob is taller than Susan. Susan is taller than Frankie. Therefore, Bob is taller than Frankie.
6. Craig loves Linda. Linda loves Monique. Therefore, Craig loves Monique.
7. Orel Hershizer is a Christian. Therefore, Orel Hershizer communicates with God.
8. All Muslims pray to Allah. Muhammad is a Muslim. Therefore, Muhammad prays to Allah.
9. Some protozoa are predators. No protozoa are animals. Therefore, some predators are not animals.
10. Charlie only barks when he hears a burglar outside. Charlie is barking. Therefore, there must be a burglar outside.

Use the informal test of validity to evaluate each argument, ensuring a clear understanding of whether the premises logically necessitate the conclusion.

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4.8: Soundness

Soundness

Summary: Soundness is a property of arguments that goes beyond validity by requiring all premises to be true. While sound arguments are valid and guarantee true conclusions, determining the truth of premises often lies outside the scope of logic.

Understanding Soundness:

- A sound argument is both valid and has all true premises.
- Soundness ensures that the conclusion of an argument is always true.
- All sound arguments are valid, but not all valid arguments are sound.

Determining Truth of Premises:

- Establishing the truth of premises involves various methods such as research, consulting experts, or studying relevant subjects.
- These methods lie outside the realm of logic and belong to specific disciplines like biology, history, etc.
- Logic focuses on the structure of arguments rather than the empirical truth of premises.

Focus of Logic Textbooks:

- Logic textbooks, including this one, primarily concentrate on argument structure, validity, and logical reasoning.
- While soundness is crucial for good arguments, it falls under the domain of other disciplines to ascertain the truth of premises.

Implications for Argumentation:

- Writers and speakers should strive for soundness in their arguments by ensuring all premises are true.
- Understanding soundness helps in evaluating the strength and reliability of arguments.
- Logic textbooks prioritize teaching principles that are universally applicable across various fields of knowledge.

Conclusion:

- While soundness is an important aspect of effective argumentation, its determination involves methods beyond the scope of logic.
- Logic textbooks focus on teaching principles that aid in constructing and evaluating arguments rather than verifying the empirical truth of premises.

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4.9: Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments

Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments

Summary: Deductive arguments aim to establish their conclusions with absolute certainty, while inductive arguments aim to support their conclusions with a high level of probability. Deductive arguments are evaluated based on validity, while inductive arguments lack a universally agreed-upon standard of evaluation.

Deductive Arguments:

- Deductive arguments guarantee the truth of their conclusions if their premises are true.
- Validity is the criterion for evaluating deductive arguments; a valid deductive argument ensures that its conclusion follows necessarily from its premises.
- Adding further premises to a valid deductive argument cannot overturn its validity.

Inductive Arguments:

- Inductive arguments provide support for their conclusions but do not ensure their truth with certainty.
- Inductive arguments use probability to establish their conclusions, often indicated by terms like "probably."
- Inductive arguments are defeasible, meaning additional information can weaken the support for their conclusions.

Strength of Inductive Arguments:

- Inductive arguments can be classified as strong or weak based on the level of support they provide for their conclusions.
- Strong inductive arguments offer a strong, albeit defeasible, reason for accepting the conclusion.
- Weak inductive arguments provide less compelling support for their conclusions.

Evaluation of Inductive Arguments:

- Unlike deductive arguments, there is no universally accepted standard for evaluating inductive arguments.
- Logic textbooks focus more on deductive reasoning due to the existence of agreed-upon methods for evaluating validity.
- Evaluation of inductive arguments remains an area of ongoing research in philosophy.

Future Considerations:

- Chapter 3 will revisit inductive arguments and explore methods for evaluating them.
- While deductive arguments dominate discussions in logic textbooks, understanding inductive reasoning is essential for various real-world contexts.

Conclusion:

- Deductive arguments seek certainty in establishing conclusions, relying on the principle of validity.
- Inductive arguments offer probabilistic support for conclusions, with their strength varying based on the evidence provided by premises.
- The evaluation of inductive arguments remains a complex and evolving area of study in philosophy.

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4.10: Arguments with Missing Premises

Arguments with Missing Premises

Summary: Many arguments contain unstated premises, which can weaken or strengthen their validity or persuasiveness. Supplying missing premises is essential for reconstructing arguments in standard form and evaluating their strength or validity.



Supplying Missing Premises:

- Arguments often omit premises necessary for validity or plausibility.
- Supplying missing premises involves identifying what is needed to make the argument logically or rhetorically stronger.
- The principle of charity suggests supplying the most plausible missing premises to strengthen the argument.
- Missing premises can be normative or descriptive statements, requiring careful consideration for validity.

Validity and Plausibility:

- Supplying missing premises aims to enhance both the validity and plausibility of arguments.
- Validity ensures logical strength, while plausibility enhances persuasiveness.
- Missing premises can be normative or descriptive, requiring different considerations for validity and persuasiveness.

Challenges in Identifying Missing Premises:

- Identifying missing premises is not always straightforward and may require careful analysis.
- Some arguments may require normative premises, which are often implicit and require thoughtful reconstruction.
- Supplying missing premises involves balancing logical strength with persuasive effectiveness.

Assuring, Guarding, and Discounting:

- Rhetorical strategies like assuring, guarding, and discounting are common in argumentation.
- Assuring involves indicating further reasons or authorities to support a claim.
- Guarding weakens claims to make them more defensible.
- Discounting acknowledges objections while dismissing them to strengthen the overall argument.

Conclusion:

- Supplying missing premises is crucial for strengthening arguments logically and rhetorically.
- Careful consideration of missing premises enhances the validity and persuasiveness of arguments.
- Rhetorical techniques like assuring, guarding, and discounting play important roles in argumentation, influencing how arguments are perceived and evaluated.

Table 2 below gives a partial list of words and phrases that commonly function as discounting terms.

although	even if	but	nevertheless
though	while	however	nontheless
even though	whereas	yet	still

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4.11: Evaluative Language

Evaluative Language

Summary: Evaluative language plays a significant role in persuasion and argumentation, influencing how people perceive and interpret information. Unlike descriptive language, which merely describes a state of affairs, evaluative language passes judgment, either positive or negative, on something.



Characteristics of Evaluative Language:

- Evaluative language involves passing judgment on something, using terms like "good," "bad," "right," or "wrong."
- Some terms are purely evaluative, while others are both descriptive and evaluative, carrying both descriptive content and a positive or negative evaluation.
- Hybrid evaluative/descriptive terms can subtly influence perceptions and acceptance of claims.

Rhetorical Influence:

- Evaluative language is prevalent in political discourse and advertising, where it can shape public opinion and attitudes.
- By framing issues or individuals using evaluative terms, speakers can influence how audiences perceive and evaluate them.

Use of "Too" to Modify Evaluation:

- Adding "too" before a positively evaluative term can change its connotation to negative, indicating excess and criticism.
- This linguistic mechanism illustrates how language can influence perception and judgment.

Logic vs. Rhetoric:

- Evaluative language exemplifies the distinction between logic and rhetoric.
- While logic is concerned with the analysis and evaluation of arguments based on rationality, rhetoric focuses on persuasion through various means, including evaluative language.
- Evaluative language may be persuasive but does not necessarily constitute a valid argument.

Philosophical Perspective:

- Philosophy distinguishes between normative sciences like logic, ethics, and epistemology, which establish standards of evaluation, and empirical sciences like psychology, which describe and explain human behavior.

Conclusion:

- Evaluative language is a powerful tool in persuasion, influencing how people perceive and interpret information.
- Understanding the role of evaluative language sheds light on the distinction between logic and rhetoric and their respective roles in argumentation and persuasion.
- Evaluative language underscores the importance of critically evaluating claims and arguments, considering both their logical

validity and persuasive effectiveness.

Table 3 below gives a small sampling of some evaluative terms.

beautiful	dangerous	wasteful	sneaky	cute
murder	prudent	courageous	timid	nosy
sloppy	sloppy	capable	insane	curt

Analyzing a Real-Life Argument

Summary: This section analyzes President Obama's speech on Syria from September 10, 2013, applying concepts and techniques introduced in the chapter. The argument focuses on the necessity of military action against the Assad regime in response to its use of chemical weapons.

Main Conclusion: "It is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike."

Supporting Subarguments:

1. **Assad's Use of Chemical Weapons:** Obama provides evidence to support the claim that Assad used chemical weapons, although the argument is more inductive than deductive due to the possibility of alternative explanations. (Paragraphs 1-9)
2. **Threat to National Security:** Obama argues that failing to respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons poses a threat to national security, with several premises supporting this claim. (Paragraphs 10-14)
    - A. Assad's continued use of chemical weapons erodes international norms.
    - B. Erosion of norms could lead to acquisition and use of chemical weapons by other tyrants.
    - C. Increased likelihood of chemical warfare poses risks to U.S. troops and allies.
    - D. Weakening of prohibitions on weapons of mass destruction could embolden Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

Implicit Assumptions:

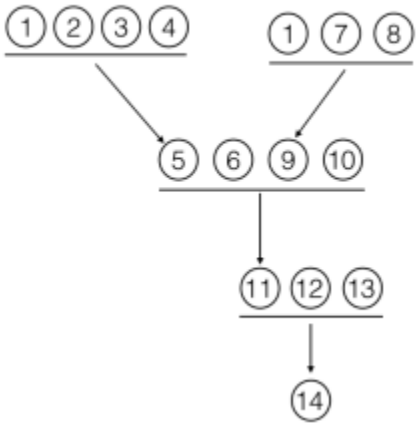
1. Allowing threats to national security to persist necessitates a response.
2. The most adequate response to national security threats involves military force.
3.

Reconstructed Argument (Standard Form):

1. If we don't respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons, then Assad's regime will continue using them with impunity.
2. If Assad's regime uses chemical weapons with impunity, this will effectively erode the ban on them.
3. If the ban on chemical weapons erodes, then other tyrants will be more likely to attain and use them.
4. If other tyrants attain and use chemical weapons, U.S. troops will be more likely to face chemical weapons on the battlefield.
5. Therefore, if we don't respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons, U.S. troops will be more likely to face chemical weapons on the battlefield.
6. If we don't respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons and if fighting spills beyond Syrian borders, our allies could face these chemical weapons.
7. If Assad's regime uses chemical weapons with impunity, it will weaken prohibitions on other weapons of mass destruction.
8. If prohibitions on other weapons of mass destruction are weakened, this will embolden Assad's ally, Iran, to develop a nuclear program.
9. Therefore, if we don't respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons, this will embolden Assad's ally, Iran, to develop a nuclear program.
10. An increased likelihood of U.S. troops or allies facing chemical weapons on the battlefield or Iran becoming emboldened to develop a nuclear program are threats to U.S. national security interests.
11. Therefore, a failure to respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons is a threat to our national security.
12. The only way that the United States can adequately respond to the security threat that Assad poses is by military force.
13. It is in the national security interests of the United States to respond adequately to any national security threat.
14. Therefore, it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to Assad's use of chemical weapons with military force.

Conclusion: Obama's argument relies on a complex structure with multiple subarguments and implicit assumptions. While the analysis provides insights into the structure of the argument, further examination and critical evaluation are necessary to fully assess its validity and effectiveness.

In addition to showing the structure of the argument by use of parentheses which show which statements follow from which, we can also diagram the arguments spatially as we did in section 1.4 like this:



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4.12: End of Chapter Synthesis

End of Chapter Summary

In conclusion, reconstructing and analyzing arguments is a vital skill in critical thinking that enables us to navigate and evaluate the vast array of information we encounter daily, particularly within the context of sociology. By understanding what constitutes an argument and distinguishing it from mere explanations, we lay the groundwork for more sophisticated analysis of social issues like poverty, racial and ethnic inequality, gender inequality, crime, healthcare disparities, urban and rural divides, and the impacts of war. Identifying statements and their roles within an argument allows us to see the structure and purpose of arguments related to these social problems clearly.

Delving into the concepts of validity and soundness provides us with the tools to assess the strength and reliability of arguments that address these critical issues. Through real-world examples and the examination of more complex arguments, we learn to apply these principles in practical contexts, such as policy debates or social justice advocacy. Paraphrasing helps to ensure that we accurately capture the essence of the arguments we analyze, fostering better understanding and communication of ideas.

Finally, distinguishing between deductive and inductive reasoning equips us with the ability to recognize and evaluate the logical processes underpinning different types of arguments. Mastery of these concepts not only enhances our critical thinking skills but also empowers us to engage more thoughtfully and effectively in both academic and everyday discussions about the pressing social issues that shape our world. By applying a sociological lens, we can critically analyze and contribute to the discourse on social problems, fostering a more informed and equitable society.

End of Chapter Discussion

1. "How can you identify and reconstruct the structure of arguments effectively, recognizing their essential components such as premises, conclusions and underlying assumptions? Provide an example of a sociological argument and dissect its structure. How does understanding argument structure contribute to your ability to engage in informed discourse about social issues?"
2. "In the context of developing critical analysis skills, how do you assess the soundness and validity of reasoning in arguments? Discuss the importance of examining evidence and using logical thinking to evaluate argument strength. Additionally, how can the recognition of potential biases and logical fallacies enhance your ability to critically analyze sociological arguments and contribute to a more informed understanding of complex social issues?"
3. "Apply the skills of argument analysis to real-world sociological debates and discussions. Choose a specific sociological topic or issue and dissect the arguments presented on both sides. How does applying these techniques enable you to better understand and engage with complex social issues? Can you provide an example of a (historic or contemporary) sociological debate where argument analysis played a crucial role in forming a well-informed perspective?

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5: GENDER INEQUALITY WORK AND THE ECONOMY

5.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

5.2: Understanding Sex and Gender

5.3: Culture and Gender

5.4: Feminism and Sexism

5.5: Dimensions of Gender Inequality

5.6: Gender Inequality in the United States

5.7: Women of Color- A Triple Burden

5.8: Household Inequality

5.9: Violence against Women- Rape and Sexual Assault

5.10: The Benefits and Costs of Being Male

5.11: Reducing Gender Inequality

5.12: Work and the Economy

5.13: The US Labor Force

5.14: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy

5.15: Problems in Work and the Economy

5.16: The Role of Tax Policy

5.17: Crime in the Workplace

5.18: End of Chapter Synthesis

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5.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Gender Inequality Work & the Economy

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. Analyze Gender Dynamics and Social Influences: Develop an understanding of the concepts of sex and gender, and the social construction of gender roles. Examine how biological, cultural, and social factors, including socialization through peers, schools, mass media and religion, contribute to gender differences. Explore the impact of feminism and sexism on societal norms and gender perceptions.
2. Examine Inequality and Discrimination in Work and Society: Understand the manifestations of gender inequality in various spheres, particularly in the family, workplace and economy. This includes analyzing the gender wage gap, sexual harassment, and the unique challenges faced by women of color. Discuss the historical growth of feminism and its role in highlighting and addressing these issues.
3. Explore Economic Structures and Workplace Dynamics: Investigate how economic systems like capitalism and policies impact gender inequality within the U.S. labor force, including the effects of job loss, wage disparities, and the role of labor unions. Examine broader economic issues such as economic inequality, tax policy, tax evasion, and crime in the workplace and their intersection with gender dynamics.



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Gender Inequality

Introduction 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

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.

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.

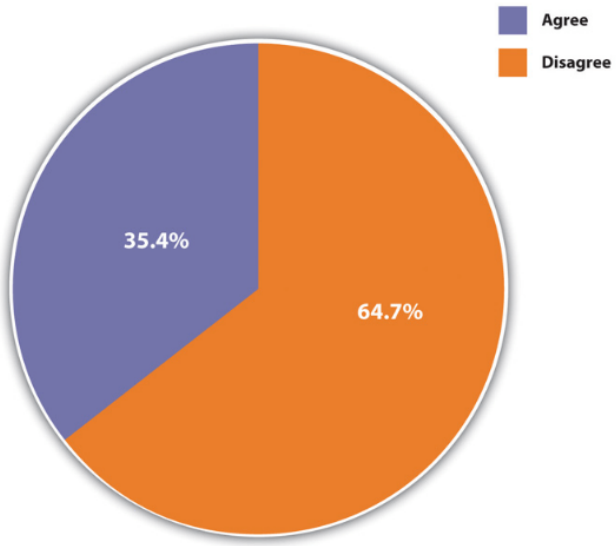
These traits might sound like stereotypes of females and males in today's society, and to some extent they are, but differences between women and men in attitudes and behavior do in fact exist (Aulette & Wittner, 2011).Aulette, J. R., & Wittner, J. (2011). *Gendered worlds* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford 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 *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.

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.

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5.3: Culture and Gender

Culture and Gender



"Gender 'tag cloud'" by International Livestock Research Institute is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

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.

More importantly, 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



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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, 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 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 teenage 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 teenage 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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5.4: Feminism and Sexism

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. 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. Stanton photo courtesy of US Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a28976;

Mott photo courtesy of US Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a42877.

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.

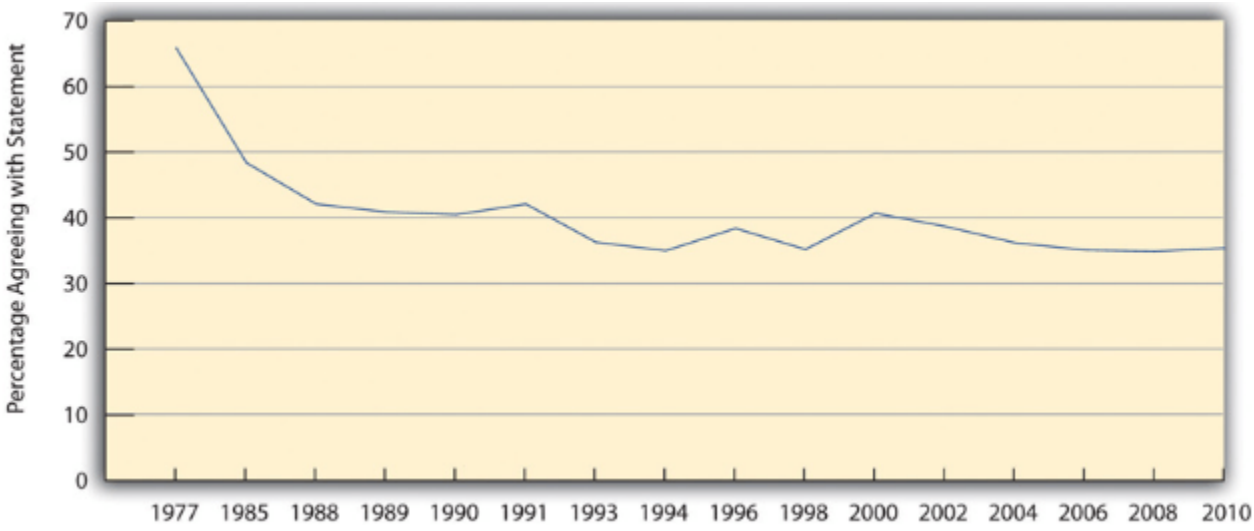
Several varieties of feminism exist. Although they all share the basic idea that women and men should be equal in their opportunities in all spheres of life, they differ in other ways (Hannam, 2012).Hannam, J. (2012). *Feminism*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman. *Liberal feminism* believes that the equality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

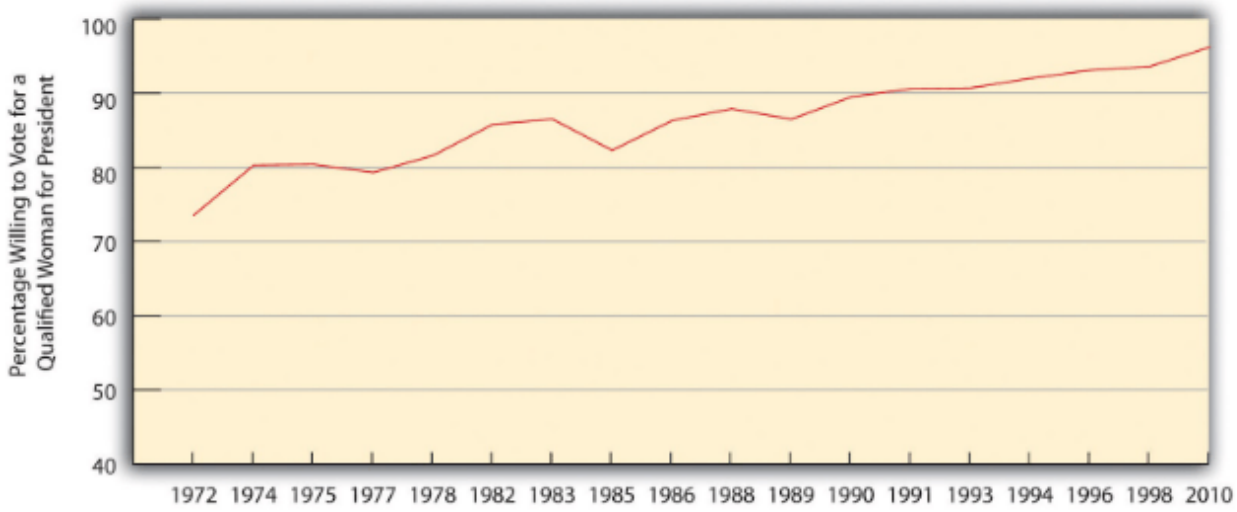
Figure *Change in Acceptance of Traditional Gender Roles in the Family, 1977–2010*



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 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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5.5: 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 is especially severe for women. Although, as Chapter 2 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).World Bank. (2012). Data. Retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org.



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.

Image courtesy of Claude Renault, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Women_moving_soil_with_bowls.jpg.

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)Amnesty International. (2004). *It's in our hands: Stop violence against women. Summary*. London, United Kingdom: Author. 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).Kaya, Y., & Cook, K. J. (2010). A cross-national analysis of physical intimate partner violence against women. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 5*, 423–444.

More than half of women in Uganda, for example, have been physically or sexually abused (Amnesty International, 2010).Amnesty International. (2010). *"I can't afford justice": Violence against women in Uganda continues unpunished and unchecked*. London, United Kingdom: Author. 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).Polgreen, L. (2011, March 27). Rapes of women show clash of old and new India. *New York Times*, p. A8. 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).Kethineni, S., & Srinivasan, M. (2009). Police handling of domestic violence cases in Tamil Nadu, India. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 25*, 202–213. 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).Kristoff, N. D. (2011, May 12). A rite of torture for girls. *New York Times*, p. A29; Rogo, K., Subayi, T., & Toubia, N. (2007). *Female genital cutting, women's health and development: The role of the World Bank*. Washington, DC: Africa Region Human Development Department.

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).Kristoff, N. D., & WuDunn, S. (2010). *Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

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.

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5.6: Gender Inequality in the United States

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.

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
Men	25,272	36,920	43,940	69,160
Women	20,176	28,236	33,176	51,272
Difference	5,019	8,684	10,764	17,888
Gender gap (% women - men)	79.8	76.5	75.5	74.1
Median weekly earnings x 52 weeks				

Source: US Department of Labor. (2011). Highlights of women's earnings in 2010. Washington, DC: Author.

Alt text for image: median weekly earnings for men and women separated by educational successes

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 fromhttp://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
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.

Alt text for image: Occupations typical for men and women

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.

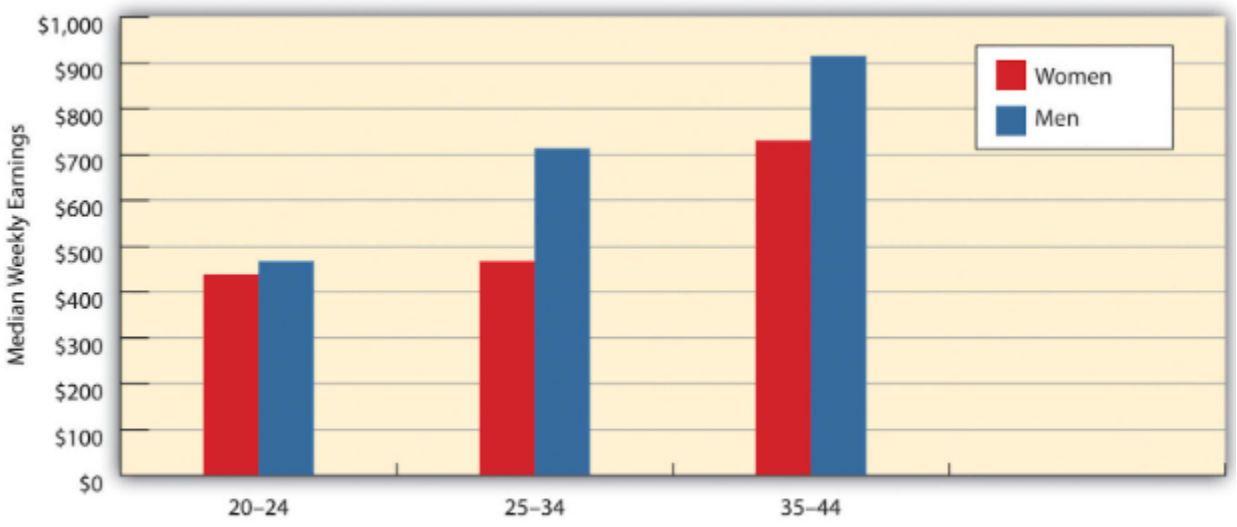
When researchers make their calculations, they find that certain women's jobs pay less than men's even though their comparable worth is equal to or even higher than the men's jobs. For example, a social worker may earn less money than a probation officer, even though calculations based on comparable 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 *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.

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.

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.

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5.7: Women of Color- A Triple Burden

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 x 52 weeks		

Source: US Department of Labor. (2011). Highlights of women's earnings in 2010. Washington, DC: Author.

Alt text for image: annual earnings for white males

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.

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5.8: Household Inequality

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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5.9: Violence against Women- Rape and Sexual Assault

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)Griffin, S.(1971, September). Rape: The all-American crime. *Ramparts, 10*, 26–35. 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'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 and pornography for Chapter 9.

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, 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?

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).Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). *Crime in the United States, 2010*. Washington, DC: Author. 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).Truman, J. L. (2011). *Criminal victimization, 2010*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. 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).Barkan, S. E. (2012). *Criminology: A sociological understanding* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. 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),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. 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).Fisher, B. S., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice; Gross, A. M., Winslett, A., Roberts, M., & Gohm, C. L. (2006). An examination of sexual violence against college women. *Violence Against Women, 12*, 288–300. 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 are a known hotel hazard. *New York Time*s, 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 statutory 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

- 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?
- Write a brief essay in which you critically evaluate the cultural beliefs that contribute to rape and sexual assault.

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5.10: The Benefits and Costs of Being Male

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, 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).McIntosh, P. (2007). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In M. L. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

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).Kimmel, M. S., & Messner, M. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Men's lives* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. 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).Wong, Y. J., & Rochlen, A. B. (2005). Demystifying men's emotional behavior: New directions and implications for counseling and research. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 6*, 62–72. 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).Corbett, K. (2011). *Boyhoods: Rethinking masculinities*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 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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5.11: Reducing Gender Inequality

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), 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)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. 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),Matthews, N. A. (1989). Surmounting a legacy: The expansion of racial diversity in a local anti-rape movement. *Gender & Society, 3*, 518–532. 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?

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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5.12: Work and the Economy

Work and the Economy

Social Problems in the News

"White-Collar Workers Join Crowds Straining Food Banks," the headline said. Amid the nation's continuing faltering economy, middle-class families across the United States who had lost their jobs were being forced to get free food at food pantries. One woman, who lost her job as a consultant, said her family's savings had dwindled to less than $200. "Without the network of food pantries around us, I don't know how we would have eaten," she said. As more middle-class workers were turning to the food pantries, the pantries' donations had fallen. As one food pantry official put it, "We're seeing many faces from the middle class who had been donors who now need support from our food bank. Right now, our donations are softer than we would like them to be." Meanwhile, a survey of college-educated New York residents found that 30 percent said they had trouble affording food.

Source: Cole, 2012Cole, P. (2012, January 11). White-collar workers join crowd straining food banks. Bloomberg.com. Retrieved from http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-11/mercedes-owners-ph-d-holders-join-swelling-crowd-straining-soup-kitchens.html.

One of the most momentous events of the twentieth century was the Great Depression, which engulfed the United States in 1929 and spread to the rest of the world, lasting almost a decade. Millions were thrown out of work, and bread lines became common. In the United States, a socialist movement gained momentum for a time as many workers blamed US industry and capitalism for their unemployment.

The Depression involved the failing of the economy. The economy also failed in the United States beginning in late 2007, when the country entered what has been called the Great Recession. Although the recession has officially ended, the jobless rate remains much higher than before the recession. The news article that began this chapter provides just a small illustration of the millions of lives that have been affected.

This chapter examines the many problems related to work and the economy in the United States today. It also examines the related issues of economic inequality and economic mobility. As we shall see, the United States has a mediocre record in both these areas when compared to other wealthy democracies.

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 the 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.

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.

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.

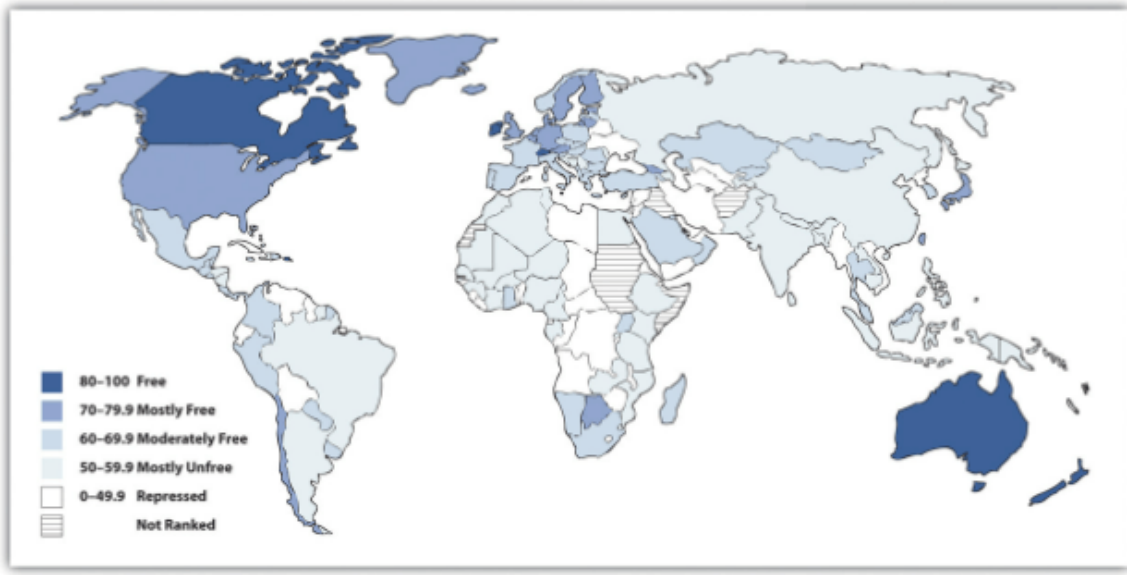
The most important goal of socialism is not the pursuit of personal profit but rather work for the collective good: The needs of society are considered more important than the needs of the individual. Because of this view, individuals do not compete with each other for profit; instead they work together 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 *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, 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 about 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 anti-business 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

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.

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5.13: The US Labor Force

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.

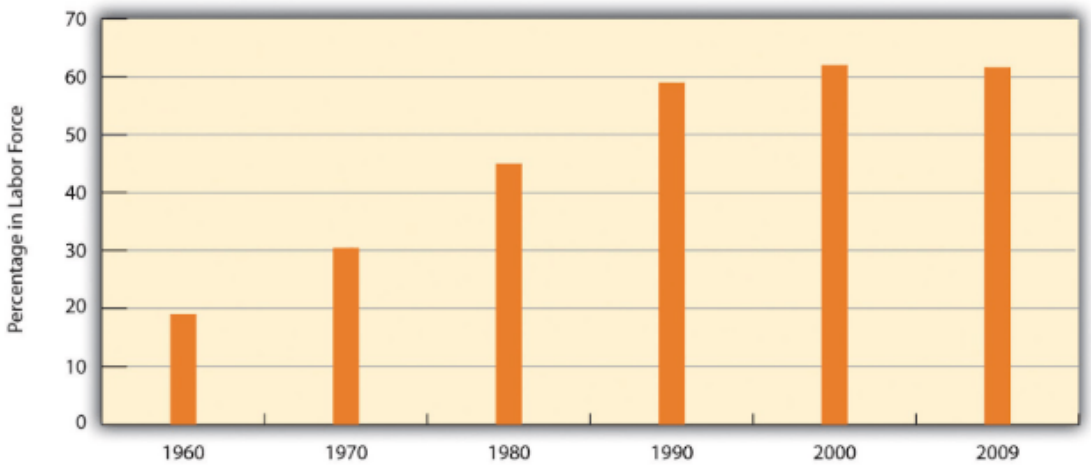
Of those who are currently employed, approximately 2.4 million people work in the agricultural sector, and a much larger number, 138 million, work in nonagricultural industries. Of the latter number, 109 million work in private industry, 21 million work in government, and almost 9 million are self-employed. 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 *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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5.14: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy

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 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 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.

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).McGuire, G. M. (2007). Intimate work: A typology of the social support that workers provide to their network members. *Work and Occupations, 34*, 125–147. 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 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. 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).Mauno, S., Kinnunen, U., & Feldt, T. (2012). Work-family culture and job satisfaction: Does gender and parenting status alter the relationship? *Community, Work & Family, 15*(1), 101–129. 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.

A classic study of the workplace grounded in the symbolic interactionist tradition was sociologist Joan Emerson's (1970)Emerson, J. P. (1970). Behavior in private places: Sustaining definitions of reality in gynecological examinations. In H. P. Dreitzel (Ed.), *Recent sociology* (Vol. 2, pp. 74–97). New York, NY: Collier. 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).Emerson, J. P. (1970). Behavior in private places: Sustaining definitions of reality in gynecological examinations. In H. P. Dreitzel (Ed.), *Recent sociology* (Vol. 2, pp. 74–97). New York, NY: Collier. 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)Rubinstein, J. (1993). *City police*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 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).Rubinstein, J. (1993). *City police*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 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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5.15: Problems in Work and the Economy

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 who post industrialization 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).Hall, D. (2011, November 3). As the manufacturing sector goes, so goes America? Retrieved January 16, 2012, from http://www.epi.org/blog/manufacturing-sector-american-economy.

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).Levine, L. (2012). *Offshoring (or offshore outsourcing) and job loss among US workers* (CRS Report RL32292). Retrieved January 17, 2012, from http://forbes.house.gov/UploadedFiles/CRS_-_Offshoring_and_Job_Loss_Among_U_S__Workers.pdf. 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.

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).Economic Policy Institute. (2012). The state of working America. Retrieved January 17, 2012, from http://stateofworkingamerica.org.

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).Mishel, L., Bernstein, J., & Shierholz, H. (2009). *The state of working America 2008/2009*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. 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).Economic Policy Institute. (2012). The state of working America. Retrieved January 17, 2012, from http://stateofworkingamerica.org. 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).Dubofsky, M., & Dulles, F. R. (2010). *Labor in America: A history* (8th ed.). Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson. 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. Image courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, http://www.library.gsu.edu/spcoll/spcollimages/labor/19clabor/Labor 20Prints/80-39_1.jpg.

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 post industrialization 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).Hirsch, B., & Macpherson, D. (2011). Union membership and coverage database from the CPS. Retrieved from http://unionstats.com. 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).Mishel, L., Bernstein, J., & Shierholz, H. (2009). *The state of working America 2008/2009*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. 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.

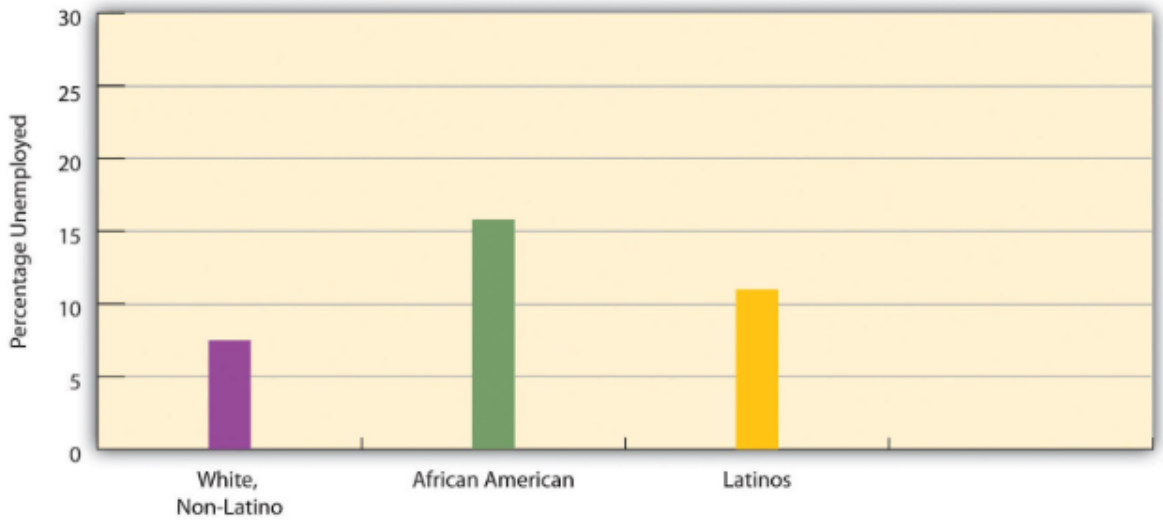
Because the union wage premium is greater for African Americans and Latinos than for whites, the wage decline caused by the decline of unions has probably been steeper for those two groups than for whites. It is also true that union workers are more likely than nonunion workers to be covered by employer-paid 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). 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).Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *2012 employment and earnings online*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/home.htm.

Figure 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).Shierholz, H. (2012, January 6). A solid step in the right direction for the labor market. Retrieved January 17, 2012, from http://www.epi.org/publication/december-2011-jobs-picture. 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).Herbert, B. (2010, August 10). The horror show. *New York Times*, 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). As C. Wright Mills (1959)Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 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, http://www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=29783.

Children and Our Future

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.



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.

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.

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 http://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 http://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 http://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.

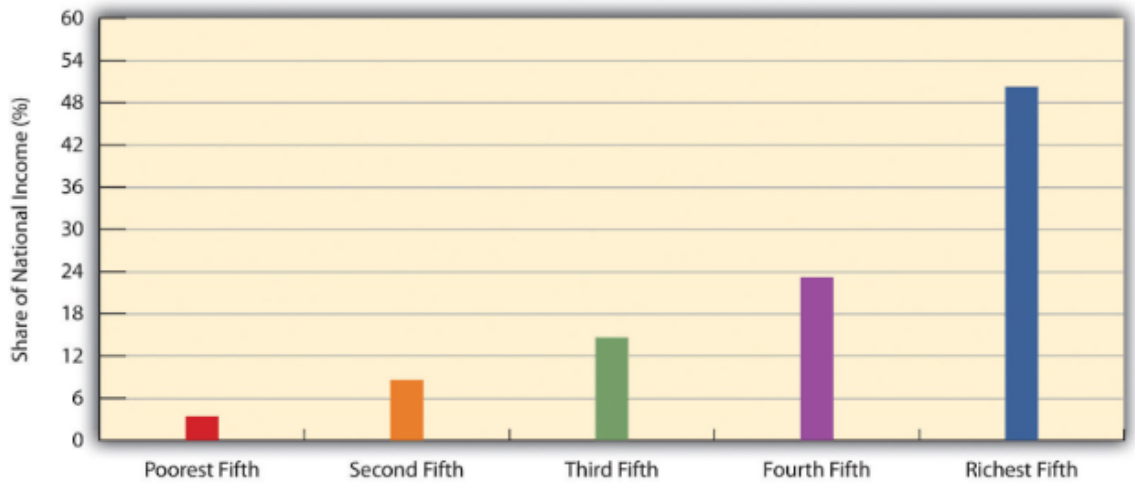
Regardless of these political differences, Occupy Wall Street succeeded in bringing economic inequality and related issues into the national limelight. In just a few short months in 2011, it made a momentous difference.

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 http://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.

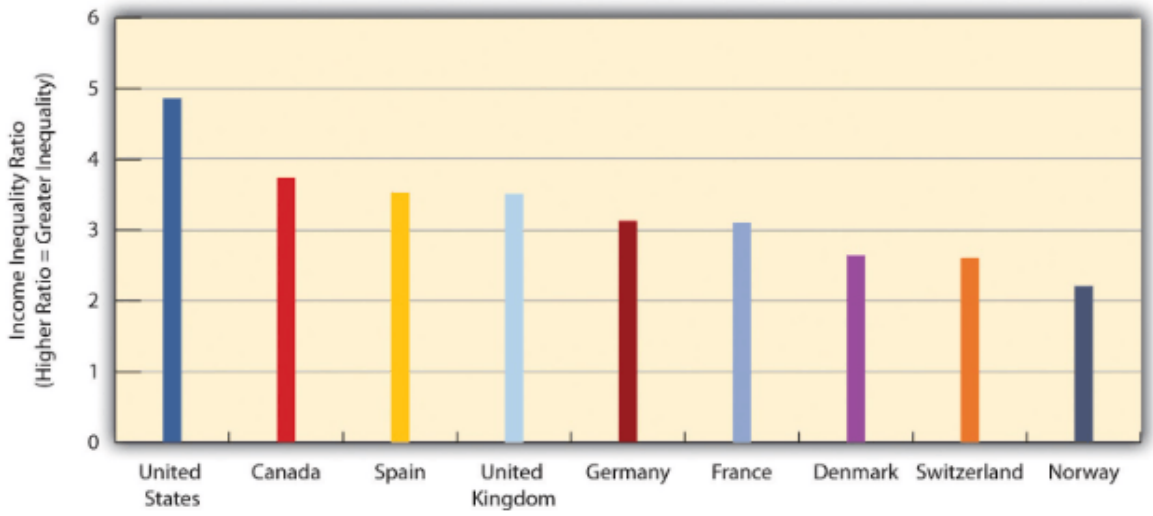
Figure *Share of National Income Going to Income Fifths, 2010*



Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://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 *Income Inequality around the World*



Ratio of median income of the 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.

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5.16: The Role of Tax Policy

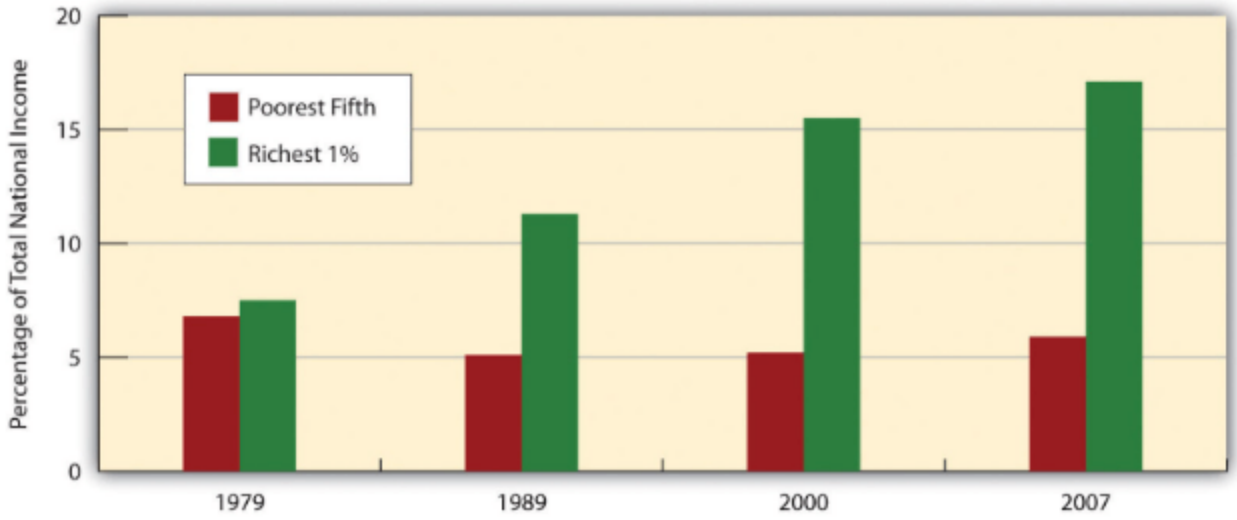
The Role of Tax Policy

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 http://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 *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 http://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.

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5.17: Crime in the Workplace

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 a 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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5.18: End of Chapter Synthesis

Improving Work and the Economy

Learning Objectives

1. 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).Kocieniewski, D. (2011, November 3). Biggest public firms paid little US tax, study says. *New York Times*, p. B1. 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).Eichler, A. (2012, February 27). General Electric tax rate 2.3 percent over decade, report finds. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/27/general-electric-tax-rate_n_1305196.html. 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).Kocieniewski, D. (2011, November 3). Biggest public firms paid little US tax, study says. *New York Times*, 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).Jacobs, E. (2012). *Growth through innovation: Lessons for the United States from the German labor market miracle*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Germany had this success, these observers say, because it undertook several labor market policies. In particular, Germany provided more generous unemployment benefits than found in the United States (including unemployment compensation in return for working shorter hours, which avoided layoffs), and it provided businesses incentives for employment training and subsidies and incentives to hire the unemployed. Other nations have also eased the effects of the recession because their governments have played this type of active role, one that is much more active than found in the United States. The experience of Germany and of several other nations strongly suggests that "government policy and investment can play a vital role in providing incentives for the private sector," as one journalist put it (Zakaria, 2012).Zakaria, F. (2012, January 18). The economic lessons the rest of the world could teach us. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-economic-lessons-the-rest-of-the-world-could-teach-us/2012/01/18/gIQAfSuG9P_story.html. If so, the US federal government would do well to follow the example of Germany and other nations.

In this regard, a comprehensive approach involving job-creation funding is essential (Fieldhouse and Thiess, 2011).Fieldhouse, A., & Thiess, R. (2011). *The Restore the American Dream for the 99% Act: An analysis of job-creation provisions*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. This approach would involve federal funding and/or budgetary policy reform in the following areas: (1) funding for the renovation of schools, improvement in transportation, and improvements in other components of the national infrastructure; (2) funding for the hiring of thousands of teachers, child care workers, and community service workers; and (3) expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, both to help the families of the unemployed and to give them money that they will spend to help stimulate the economy.

Taken together, these measures promise to create millions of jobs. Because these jobs would stimulate the economy and increase tax revenue, these measures would help to pay for themselves. Additional funding for these measures would come from raising tax rates on the very wealthy, as discussed earlier, and from other types of tax reform, including ending tax loopholes for the oil and gas industry and implementing a "financial speculation tax" (Fieldhouse & Thiess, 2011).Fieldhouse, A., & Thiess, R. (2011). *The Restore the American Dream for the 99% Act: An analysis of job-creation provisions*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. This last type of tax reform would involve a small tax on all stock transactions, with a 0.5 percent tax raising about $80 billion annually (Bivens, 2011).Bivens, J. (2011). Truly shared sacrifice includes Wall Street. Retrieved from http://www.epi.org/blog/shared-sacrifice-wall-street-financial-speculation-tax.

More generally, recall that the social democracies of Scandinavia have combined democratic freedom and economic prosperity. Although there are certainly no signs that the United States is about to follow their example, our nation also has much to learn from these societies as it considers how best to rebuild its economy and to help the millions of people who are unemployed or underemployed.

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.

End-of-Section 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 Known

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.

Further Reading

'The Second Shift' at 25: Q & A with Arlie Hochschild

End of Chapter Discussions

1. "How do you define the concepts of sex and gender, and how are gender roles socially constructed? Name a few socially constructed gender roles. Explore the various factors, including biological, cultural, and social influences, that contribute to differences in gender perceptions and behaviors. Can you provide examples of how socialization through peers, schools, mass media, and religion plays a role in shaping gender identity and expectations?"
2. "Examine the manifestations of gender inequality in different spheres, particularly in the family, workplace and the economy. Discuss the gender wage gap, sexual harassment, and the unique challenges faced by women of color in these contexts. How has feminism evolved historically, and what role has it played in raising awareness of and addressing gender-based disparities and discrimination?"
3. "Investigate the impact of economic systems like capitalism and related policies on gender inequality within the U.S. labor force. Analyze issues such as job loss, wage disparities and the role of labor unions in addressing gender-related workplace concerns. Additionally, explore the intersection of gender dynamics with broader economic issues like economic inequality, tax policy, tax evasion, and workplace-related crimes. How do these economic factors influence and shape gender dynamics and opportunities in society?"

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6: CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

6.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

6.2: The Problem of Crime

6.3: Measuring Crime

6.4: Who Commits Crime?

6.5: Explaining Crime

6.6: The Criminal Justice System

6.7: Reducing Crime

6.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

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6.1: 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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6.2: 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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6.3: 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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6.4: Who Commits Crime?

Who Commits Crime?

Learning Objectives

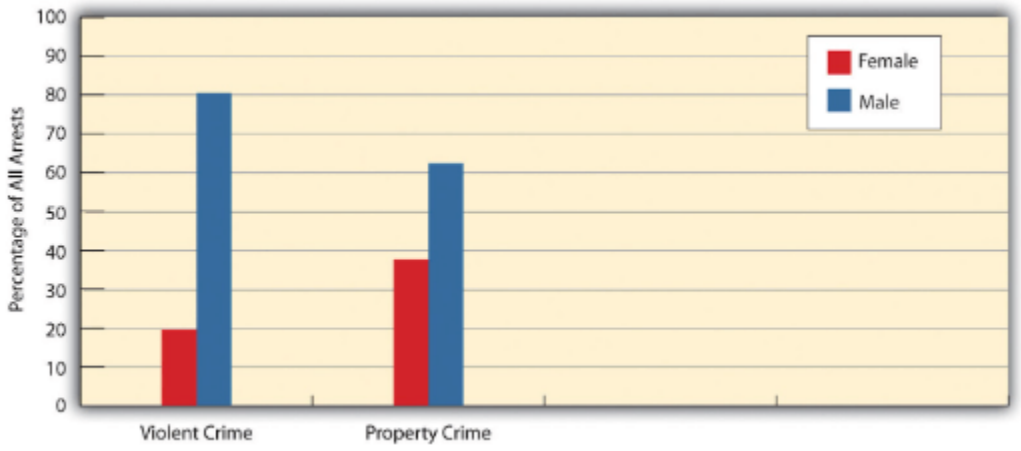
1. Explain why males commit more crime than females.
2. Discuss whether social class differences exist in crime rates.
3. Discuss whether racial/ethnic differences exist in crime rates.

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

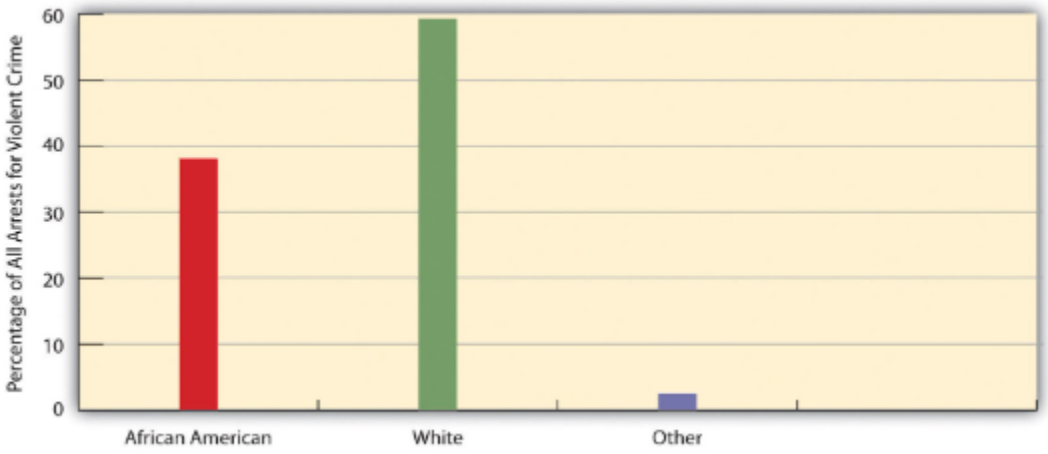
Where we live also makes a difference for our likelihood of committing crime. We saw earlier that big cities have a much higher homicide rate than small towns. This trend exists for violent crime and property crime more generally. Urban areas have high crime rates in part because they are poor, but poverty 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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6.5: 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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6.6: 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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6.7: 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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6.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

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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7: HEALTH, HEALTHCARE AND INFORMAL FALLACIES

7.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

7.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care

7.3: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care

7.4: Health in the United States

7.5: Problems of Healthcare in the United States

7.6: Improving Health and Health Care

7.7: Formal vs. Informal Fallacies

7.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

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7.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Health, Healthcare & Informal Fallacies

Learning Objectives

1. Examine Health and Healthcare through Sociological Theories: Understand the functionalist, conflict and symbolic interactionist perspectives on health and healthcare. Analyze how these sociological approaches explain the role and dynamics of health and healthcare systems, including global aspects and international disparities, particularly in industrial nations.
2. Explore Health Inequalities and Systemic Issues: Investigate the problems and challenges within the health sector, particularly in the USA, including the poor status of "American" health. Examine how social class, race, and ethnicity impact health outcomes and access to healthcare. Understand the complexities and consequences of these disparities.
3. Analyze Economic and Bias Factors in Healthcare: Delve into the economic aspects of healthcare, including the high costs and the role of private health insurance. Critically assess the presence of racial and gender biases in healthcare, understanding how these biases affect treatment and outcomes. Explore how these economic and bias factors contribute to the overall structure and effectiveness, or lack thereof, of healthcare systems.



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Health and Health Care

Chapter Introduction

Real World Application: Pandemic

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged at the end of 2019 and continued to impact global societies for several years, offers a profound case study from a sociological perspective, particularly in the context of health and healthcare. This pandemic has not only been a public health crisis but has also significantly influenced social structures, behaviors, and inequalities.

Sociologically, the pandemic highlights the concept of social determinants of health. It has vividly demonstrated how factors such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and geography can influence individuals' vulnerability to disease and access to healthcare. Lower-income communities, often with limited access to healthcare resources, have disproportionately suffered from the virus's impacts. Similarly, racial and ethnic minorities in many countries have experienced higher rates of infection and mortality, laying bare existing health disparities.

The pandemic has also brought to the forefront the relationship between individual behaviors and collective health outcomes. Measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and vaccination are not just medical issues but also social behaviors influenced by cultural norms, misinformation, trust in government and health authorities, and personal beliefs. The varied responses to these measures have reflected broader social and political divides, with significant implications for public health.

Moreover, COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on mental health, revealing the psychological strains associated with prolonged social isolation, economic uncertainty, and fear of illness. The rise in mental health issues has highlighted the need for accessible and robust mental health care services and has prompted a reevaluation of how societies approach mental health.

The pandemic has also acted as a catalyst for change in various societal aspects, including work, education, and technology. The shift to remote work and learning has altered traditional views on work-life balance and the structure of education, prompting a rethinking of future models. Additionally, the increased reliance on technology for communication, work, and healthcare has raised questions about digital access and inequality.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a defining global event with far-reaching sociological implications. It has exposed and exacerbated existing social inequalities, influenced social behaviors and norms, impacted mental health, and driven significant changes in work, education, and technology use. As such, it provides a critical area of study for understanding the complex interplay between health, society, and global challenges.

Social Problems in the News

“More Columbus Kids Living in Poverty,” the headline said. New data from the Ohio Department of Education showed that three-fourths of schoolchildren in Columbus, Ohio, live in poverty or near poverty and qualify for federally subsidized school lunch. Ten years earlier, only about 58 percent of Columbus children qualified. According to the news report, “Childhood poverty directly impacts children’s health. Children living in poverty are less likely to receive needed medical care, more likely to have health problems such as asthma, more likely to be overweight, among other health problems.”

Source: Lietz, 2012Lietz, J. (2012, January 17). More Columbus kids living in poverty. Examiner.com. Retrieved from http://www.examiner.com/children-s-health-in-columbus/more-columbus-kids-living-poverty.

This news story reminds us that social class is linked to health and illness, and it illustrates just one of the many ways in which health and health care are urgent problems in our society. Accordingly, this chapter examines these problems. Its discussion is based on the common sociological view that health and illness are not just medical problems but social problems.

Unlike physicians, sociologists and other public health scholars do not try to understand why any one person becomes ill. Instead, they typically examine rates of illness to explain why people from certain social backgrounds are more likely than those from others to become sick. Here, as we will see, our social backgrounds—our social class, race and ethnicity, and gender—make a critical difference.

The fact that our social backgrounds affect our health may be difficult for many of us to accept. We all know someone who has died from a serious illness or currently suffers from one. There is always a medical cause of this person’s illness, and physicians do their best to try to cure it and prevent it from recurring. Sometimes they succeed; sometimes they fail. Whether someone suffers a serious illness is often simply a matter of bad luck or bad genes: We can do everything right and still become ill. In saying that our social backgrounds affect our health, sociologists do not deny any of these possibilities. They simply remind us that our social backgrounds also play an important role (Cockerham, 2012).Cockerham, W. C. (2012). *Medical sociology* (12th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

With this basic understanding in mind, we now turn to sociological perspectives on health and health care.

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7.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care

Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care

Learning Objectives

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 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 healthcare. 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),Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. New York, NY: Free Press. 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 problems. 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.

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).Weitz, R. (2013). *The sociology of health, illness, and health care: A critical approach* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Wadsworth. 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 believe 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).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.

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).Conrad, P. (2008). *The medicalization of society: On the transformation of human conditions into treatable disorders*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press; Rao, A., & Seaton, M. (2010). *The way of boys: Promoting the social and emotional development of young boys*. New York, NY: Harper Paperbacks.

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 healthcare.
- 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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7.3: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care

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.

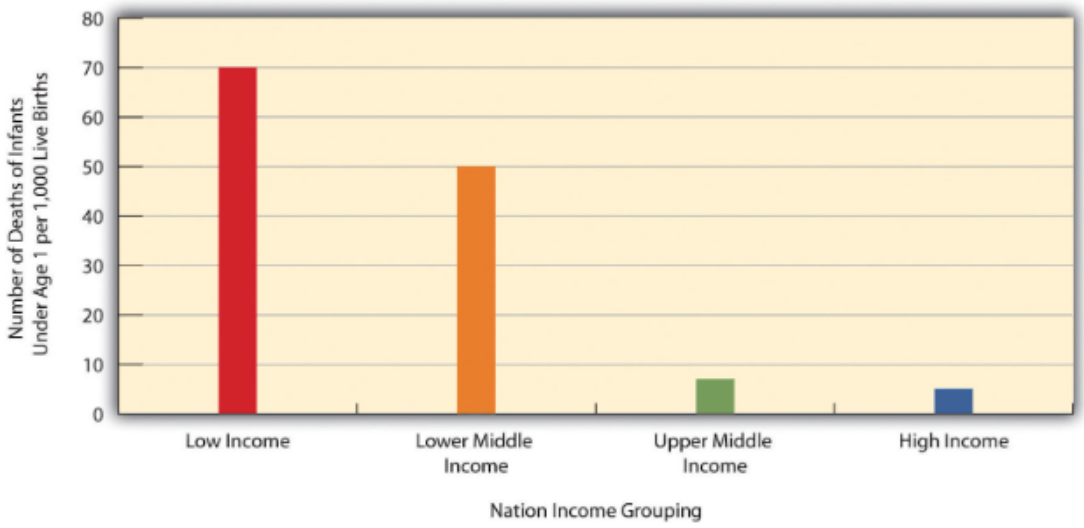
As we have seen in previous chapters, understanding what happens in other societies helps us to understand what happens in our own society. This section's discussion of health and health care across the globe, then, helps shed some light on what is good and bad about US health and medicine.

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).World Health Organization. (2011). Global response: Epidemic update and health sector progress towards universal access. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/hiv/en/index.html. 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 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 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.

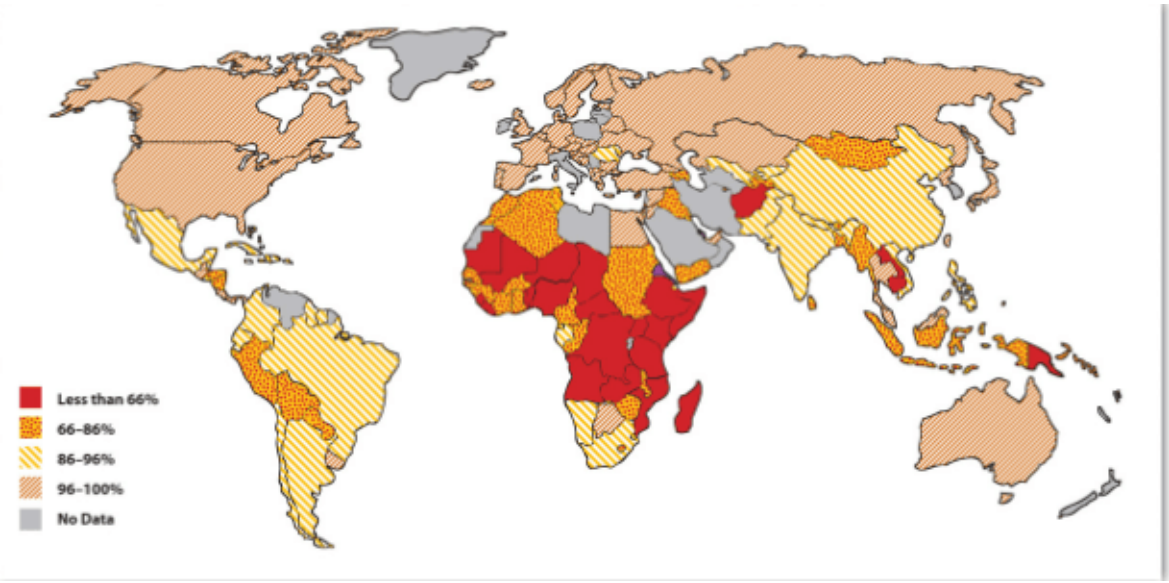
Figure *Infant Mortality for Low-Income, Lower-Middle-Income, Higher-Middle-Income, and High-Income Nations, 2010*



Source: Data from World Bank. (2012). World databank. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=1&id=4.

Figure "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 *Percentage of Population with Access to Adequate Sanitation Facilities, 2008*



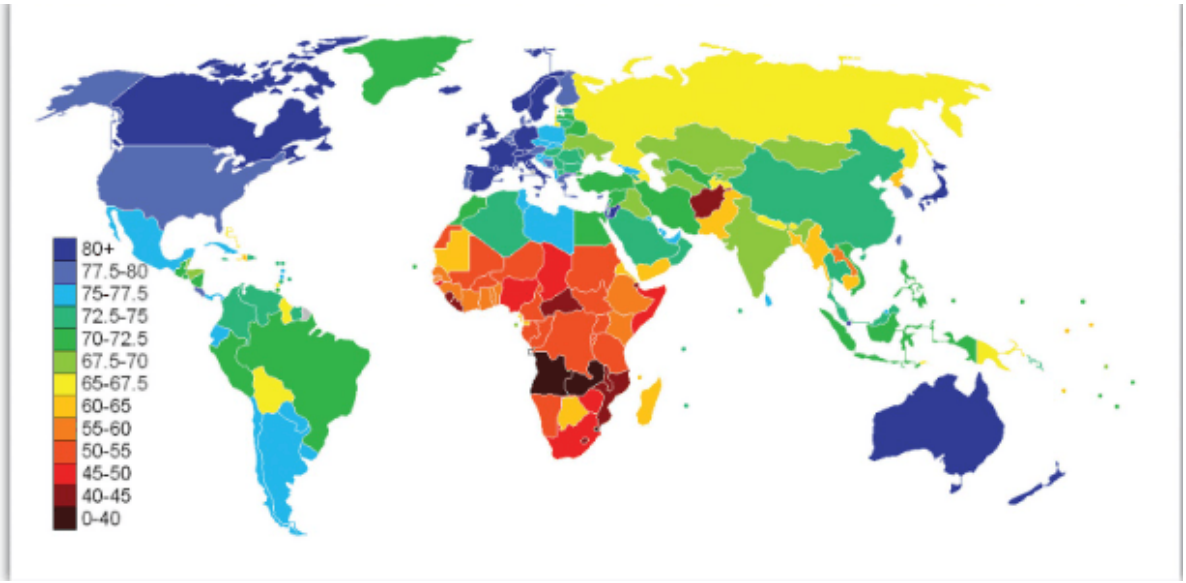
Source: Adapted from World Bank. (2010). Improved sanitation facilities (% of population with access). Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org.



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. Image courtesy of khym54, http://www.flickr.com/photos/khym54/1449150009.

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 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. 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 *Average Life Expectancy across the Globe (Years)*



Source: Adapted from http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Life_Expectancy_2011_Estimates_CIA_World_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 citizens 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., 2007 Docteur, 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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7.4: Health in the United States

Health in the United States

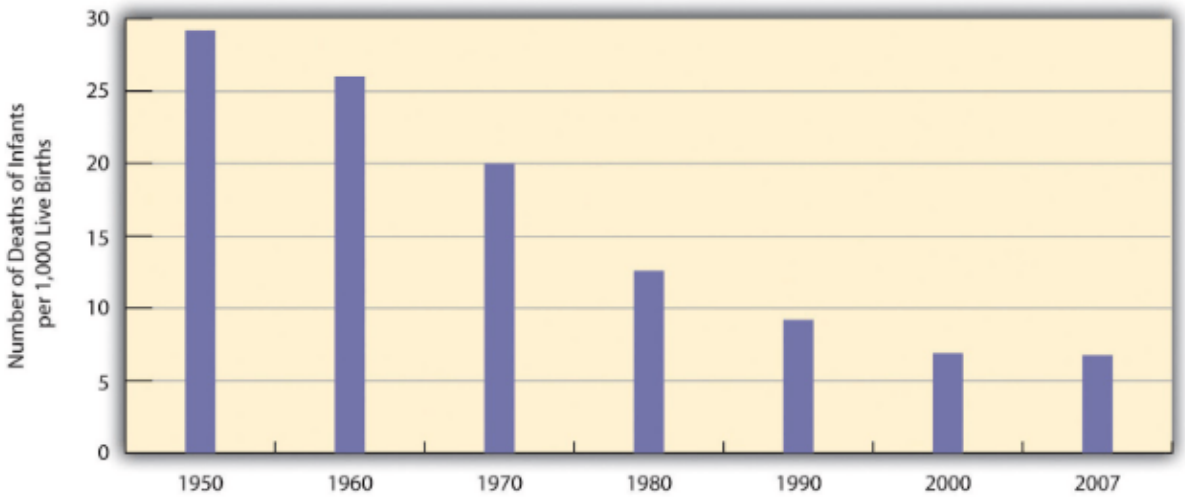
Learning Objectives

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.

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 i*nfant 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.

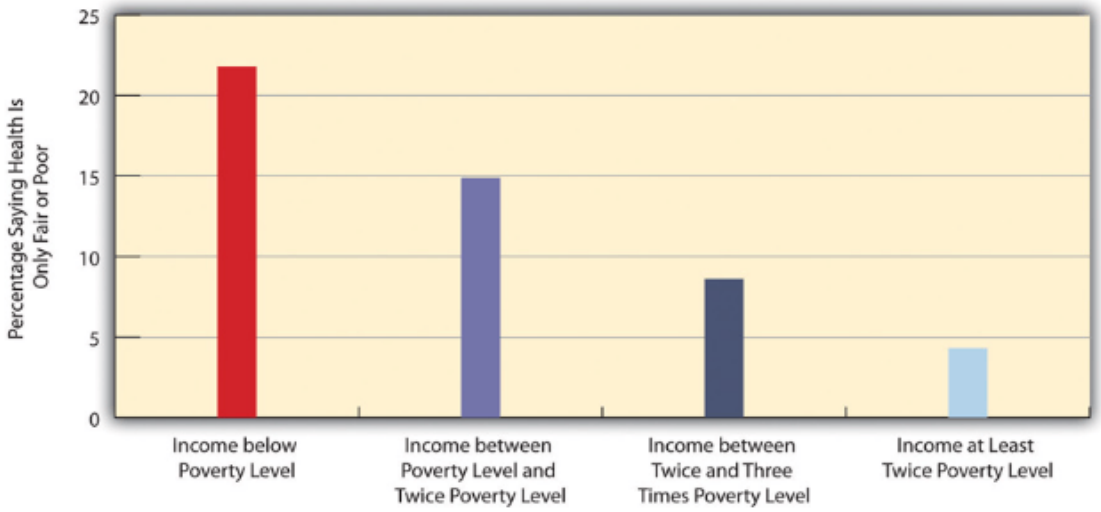
There is also bad news in the *social distribution* of health. Health problems in the United States are more often found among the poor, among people from certain racial and ethnic backgrounds, and, depending on the problem, among women or men. **Social epidemiology** refers to the study of how health 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 in 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 *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.

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
African American	Men	70.0
African American	Women	76.8
White	Both Sexes	78.4
White	Men	75.9
White	Women	80.8

Source: Data from National Center for Health Statistics. (2011). Health, United States, 2010. Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Alt text for image: Life Expectancy people born in 2007

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 Amercian	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 Americans	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.

Alt text for image: mothers race/ethnicity rate and us infant mortality rate

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.

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 visit 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 are more men 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.

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



"The greatest wealth is health. ~Virgil" by katerha is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

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.

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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7.5: Problems of Healthcare in the United States

Problems of Healthcare in the United States

Learning Objectives

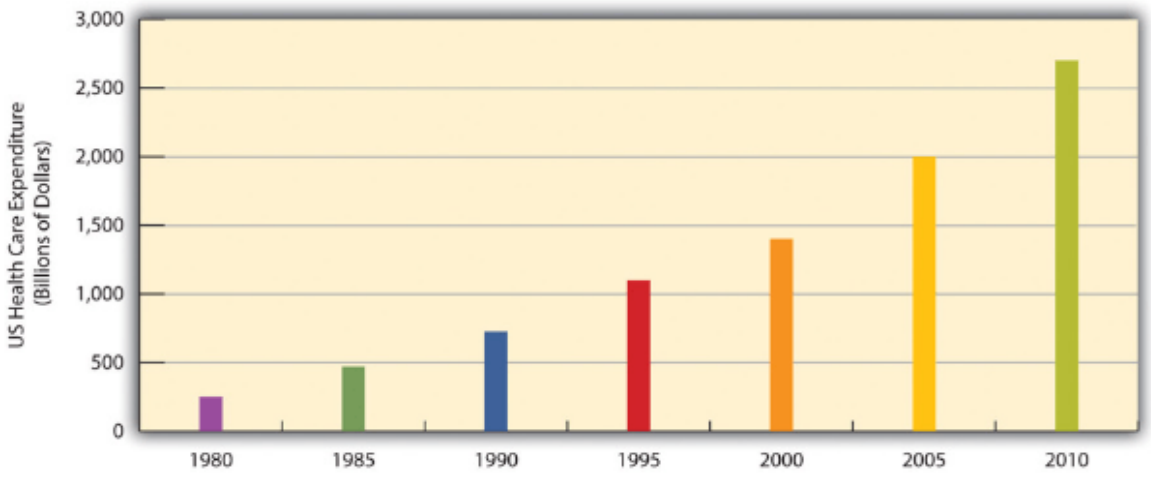
1. Summarize the problems associated with the model of private insurance that characterizes the US health system.
2. Explain how and why mistakes and infections occur in hospitals.
3. Describe any two other problems in US health care other than the lack of health insurance.

As the continuing debate over health care in the United States reminds us, the practice of medicine raises many important issues about its cost and quality. We now turn to some of these issues.

Private Health Insurance and the Lack of Insurance

Medicine in the United States is big business. Expenditures for health care, health research, and other health items and services have risen sharply in recent decades, having increased tenfold since 1980, and now costs the nation more than $2.6 trillion annually (see Figure 13.6). This translates to the largest figure per capita in the industrial world. Despite this expenditure, the United States lags behind many other industrial nations in several important health indicators, as we have already seen. Why is this so?

Figure *US Health-Care Expenditure, 1980–2010 (in Billions of Dollars)*



Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2010). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2010. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

An important reason is the US system of *private health insurance*. As discussed earlier, other Western nations have national systems of health care and health insurance. In stark contrast to these nations, the United States relies largely on a **direct-fee system**, in which patients under 65 (those 65 and older are covered by Medicare) are expected to pay for medical costs themselves, aided by private health insurance, usually through one's employer. Table 13.4 shows the percentages of Americans who have health insurance from different sources or who are not insured at all. (All figures are from the period before the implementation of the major health-care reform package was passed by the federal government in early 2010.) Adding together the top two figures in the table, 54 percent of Americans have private insurance, either through their employers or from their own

resources. About 29 percent have some form of public insurance (Medicaid, Medicare, other public), and 16 percent are uninsured. This final percentage amounts to almost 50 million Americans, including 8 million children, who lack health insurance.

Table 13.4 Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2010

Sources of coverage	Percentage of people with this coverage
Employer	49%
Individual	5%
Medicaid	16%
Medicare	12%
Other public	1%
Uninsured	16%

Source: Data from Kaiser Family Foundation. (2012). Kaiser state health facts. Retrieved from http://www.statehealthfacts.org.

Alt text for image: percent of health coverage in US by source

Their lack of health insurance has deadly consequences because they are less likely to receive preventive health care and care for various conditions and illnesses. For example, because uninsured Americans are less likely than those with private insurance to receive cancer screenings, they are more likely to be diagnosed with more advanced cancer rather than an earlier stage of cancer (Halpern et al., 2008).Halpern, M. T., Ward, E. M., Pavluck, A. L., Schrag, N. M., Bian, J., & Chen, A. Y. (2008). Association of insurance status and ethnicity with cancer stage at diagnosis for 12 cancer sites: A retrospective analysis. *The Lancet Oncology, 9*(3), 221–231. It is estimated that 45,000 people die each year because they do not have health insurance (Wilper et al., 2009).Wilper, A. P., Woolhandler, S., Lasser, K. E., McCormick, D., Bor, D. H., & Himmelstein, D. U. (2009). Health insurance and mortality in US adults. *American Journal of Public Health, 99*(12), 1–7. The Note 13.22 "Applying Social Research" box discusses a very informative real-life experiment on the difference that health insurance makes for people's health.

Applying Social Research

Experimental Evidence on the Importance of Health Insurance

As the text discusses, studies show that Americans without health insurance are at greater risk for a variety of illnesses and life-threatening conditions. Although this research evidence is compelling, uninsured Americans may differ from insured Americans in other ways that also put their health at risk. For example, perhaps people who do not buy health insurance may be less concerned about their health and thus less likely to take good care of themselves. Because many studies have not controlled for all such differences, experimental evidence would be more conclusive (see Chapter 1).

For this reason, the results of a fascinating real-life experiment in Oregon were very significant. In 2008, Oregon decided to expand its Medicaid coverage. Because it could not accommodate all the poor Oregonians who were otherwise uninsured, it had them apply for Medicaid by lottery. Researchers then compared the subsequent health of the Oregonians who ended up on Medicaid with that of Oregonians who remained uninsured. Because the two groups resulted from random assignment (the lottery), it is reasonable to conclude that any later differences between them must have stemmed from the presence or absence of Medicaid coverage.

Although this study is ongoing, initial results obtained a year after it began showed that Medicaid coverage had already made quite a difference. Compared to the uninsured "control" group, the newly insured Oregonians rated themselves happier and in better health and reported fewer sick days from work. They were also 50 percent more likely to have seen a primary care doctor in the year since they received coverage, and women were 60 percent more likely to have had a mammogram. In another effect, they were much less likely to report having had to borrow money or not pay other bills because of medical expenses.

A news report summarized these benefits of the new Medicaid coverage: "[The researchers] found that Medicaid's impact on health, happiness, and general well-being is enormous, and delivered at relatively low cost: Low-income Oregonians whose names were selected by lottery to apply for Medicaid availed themselves of more treatment and preventive care than those who remained excluded from government health insurance. After a year with insurance, the Medicaid lottery winners were happier, healthier, and

under less financial strain."

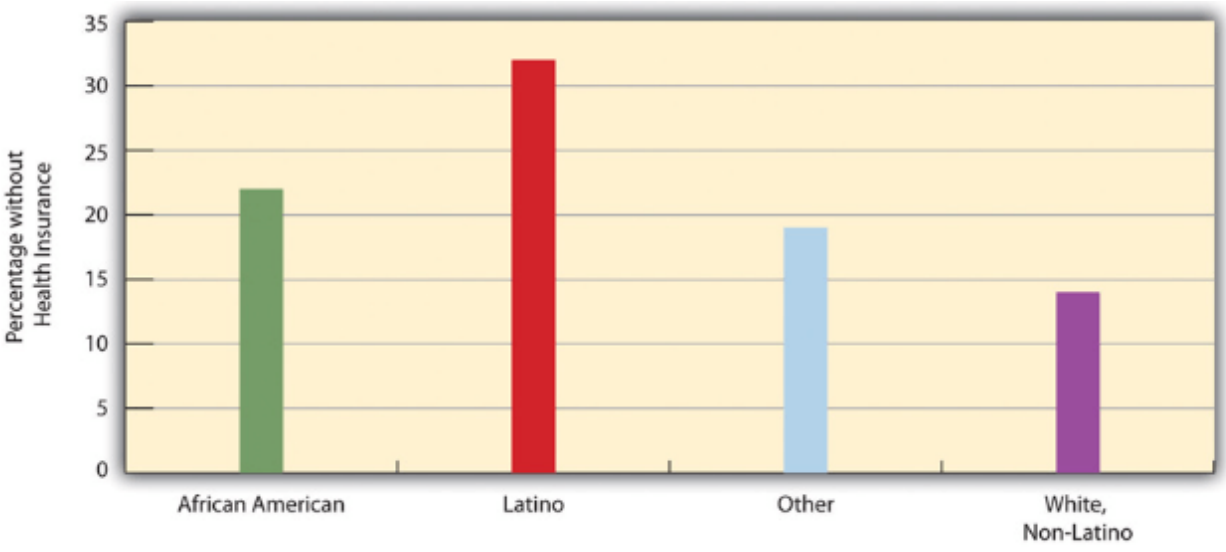
Because of this study's experimental design, it "represents the best evidence we've got," according to the news report, of the benefits of health insurance coverage. As researchers continue to study the two groups in the years ahead and begin to collect data on blood pressure, cardiovascular health, and other objective indicators of health, they will add to our knowledge of the effects of health insurance coverage.

Sources: Baicker & Finkelstein, 2011; Fisman, 2011Baicker, K., & Finkelstein, A. (2011). The effects of Medicaid coverage—learning from the Oregon experiment. New England Journal of Medicine, 365(8), 683–685; Fisman, R. (2011, July 7). Does health coverage make people healthier? Slate.com. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/business/the_dismal_science/2011/07/does_health_coverage_make_people_healthier.html.

Although 29 percent of Americans do have public insurance, this percentage and the coverage provided by this insurance do not begin to match the coverage enjoyed by the rest of the industrial world. Although Medicare pays some medical costs for the elderly, we saw in Chapter 6 that its coverage is hardly adequate, as many people must pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars in premiums, deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments. The other government program, Medicaid, pays some health-care costs for the poor, but many low-income families are not poor enough to receive Medicaid. Eligibility standards for Medicaid vary from one state to another, and a family poor enough in one state to receive Medicaid might not be considered poor enough in another state. The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), begun in 1997 for children from low-income families, has helped somewhat, but it, too, fails to cover many low-income children. Largely for these reasons, about two-thirds of uninsured Americans come from low-income families.

Not surprisingly, the 16 percent uninsured rate varies by race and ethnicity (see Figure 13.7). Among people under 65 and thus not eligible for Medicare, the uninsured rate rises to almost 22 percent of the African American population and 32 percent of the Latino population. Moreover, 45 percent of adults under 65 who live in official poverty lack health insurance, compared to only 6 percent of higher-income adults (those with incomes higher than four times the poverty level). Almost one-fifth of poor children have no health insurance, compared to only 3 percent of children in higher-income families (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012).Kaiser Family Foundation. (2012). State health facts. Retrieved from http://www.statehealthfacts.org. As discussed earlier, the lack of health insurance among the poor and people of color is a significant reason for their poorer health.

Figure *Race, Ethnicity, and Lack of Health Insurance, 2008 (Percentage of People under Age 65 with No Insurance)*



Source: Data from Kaiser Family Foundation. (2012). Kaiser state health facts. Retrieved from http://www.statehealthfacts.org.

The High Cost of Health Care

As noted earlier, the United States spends much more money per capita on health care than any other industrial nation. The US per capita health expenditure was $7,960 in 2009, the latest year for which data were available at the time of this writing. This

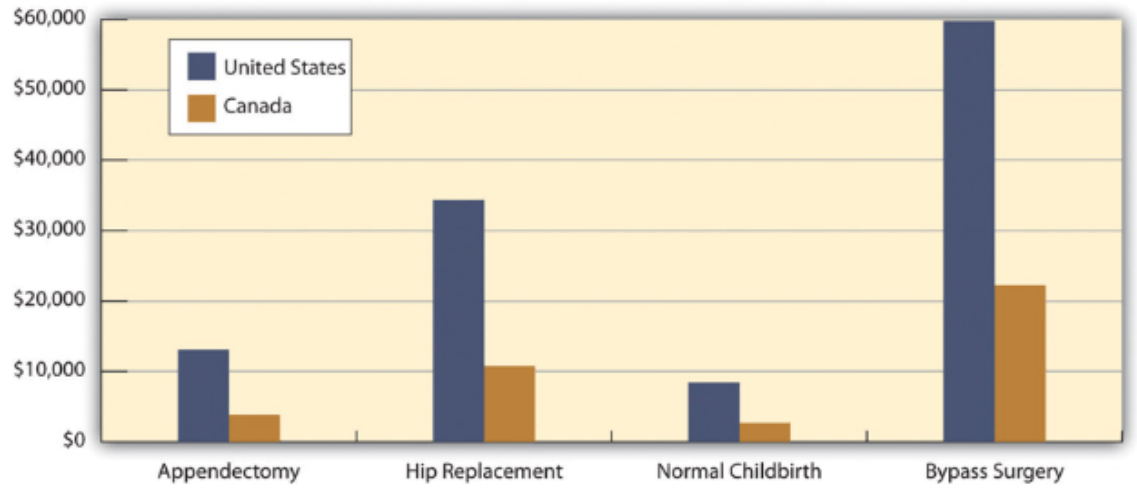
figure was about 50 percent higher than that for the next two highest-spending countries, Norway and Switzerland; 80 percent higher than Canada's expenditure; twice as high as Frances's expenditure; and 2.3 times higher than the United Kingdom's expenditure (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). *Health at a glance 2011: OECD indicators*. Paris, France: Author. The huge expenditure by the United States might be justified if the quality of health and of health care in this nation outranked that in its peer nations. As we have seen, however, the United States lags behind many of its peer nations in several indicators of health and health care quality. If the United States spends far more than its peer nations on health care yet still lags behind them in many indicators, an inescapable conclusion is that the United States is spending much more than it should be spending.

Why is US spending on health care so high? Although this is a complex issue, two reasons stand out (Boffey, 2012).Boffey, P. M. (2012, January 22). The money traps in US health care. *New York Times*, p. SR12. First, administrative costs for health care in the United States are the highest in the industrial world. Because so much of US health insurance is private, billing and record-keeping tasks are immense, and "hordes of clerks and accountants [are] needed to deal with insurance paperwork," according to one observer (Boffey, 2012, p. SR12).Boffey, P. M. (2012, January 22). The money traps in US health care. *New York Times*, p. SR12. Billing and other administrative tasks cost about $360 billion annually, or 14 percent of all US health-care costs (Emanuel, 2011).Emanuel, E. J. (2011, November 12). Billions wasted on billing. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/2011/2012/billions-wasted-on-billing/?ref=opinion. These tasks are unnecessarily cumbersome and fail to take advantage of electronic technologies that would make them much more efficient.

Second, the United States relies on a *fee for service* model for private insurance. Under this model, physicians, hospitals, and health care professionals and businesses are relatively free to charge whatever they want for their services. In the other industrial nations, government regulations keep prices lower. This basic difference between the United States and its peer nations helps explain why the cost of health care services in the United States is so much higher than in its peer nations. Simply put, US physicians and hospitals charge much more for their services than do their counterparts in other industrial nations (Klein, 2012).Klein, E. (2012, March 2). High health-care costs: It's all in the pricing. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/high-health-care-costs-its-all-in-the-pricing/2012/02/28/gIQAtbhimR_story.html. And because physicians are paid for every service they perform, they have an incentive to perform more diagnostic tests and other procedures than necessary. As one economic writer recently said, "The more they do, the more they earn" (Samuelson, 2011).Samuelson, R. J. (2011, November 28). A grim diagnosis for our ailing health care system. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-grim-diagnosis-for-our-ailing-us-health-care-system/2011/11/25/gIQARdgm2N_story.html.

A few examples illustrate the higher cost of medical procedures in the United States compared to other nations. To keep things simple, we will compare the United States with just Canada (see Figure 13.8). The average US appendectomy costs $13,123, compared to $3,810 in Canada; the average US hip replacement costs $34,354, compared to $10,753 in Canada; the average US normal childbirth costs $8,435, compared to $2,667 in Canada; and the average US bypass surgery costs $59,770, compared to $22,212 in Canada. The costs of diagnostic tests also differ dramatically between the two nations. For example, a head CT scan costs an average of $464 in the United States, compared to only $65 in Canada, and an MRI scan costs and average of $1,009 in the United States, compared to only $304 in Canada (International Federation of Health Plans, 2010).International Federation of Health Plans. (2010). *2010 comparative price report: Medical and hospital fees by country*. London, United Kingdom: Author.

Figure *Average Cost of Selected Medical Procedures and Services*



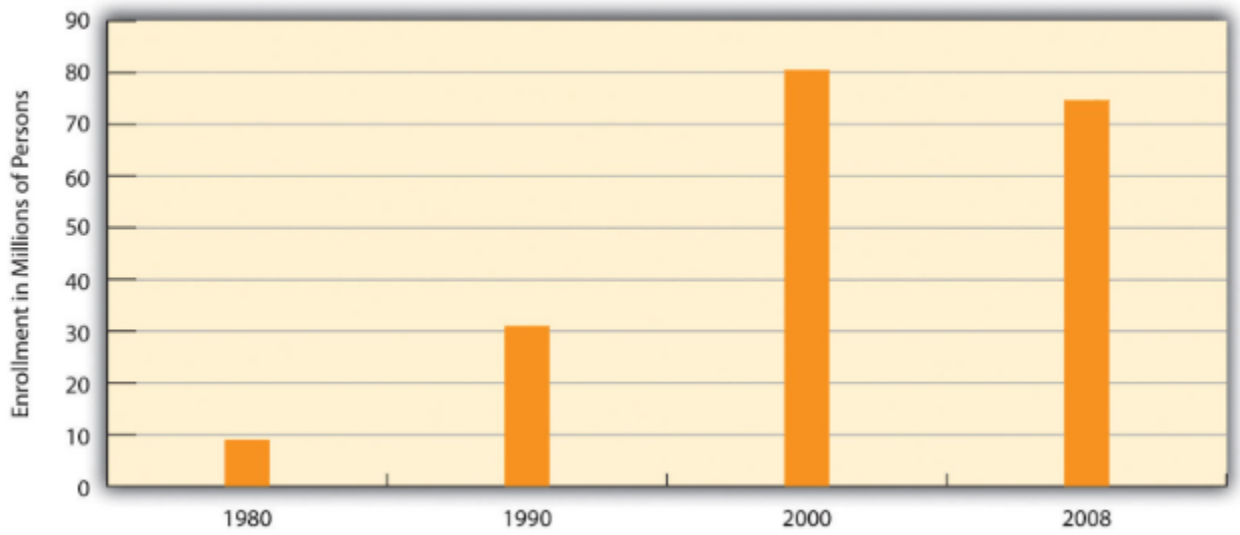
Source: Boffey, P. M. (2012, January 22). The money traps in US health care. New York Times, p. SR12.

Alt text for image: average cost for certain surgeries and procedures

Managed Care and HMOs

To many critics, a disturbing development in the US health-care system has been the establishment of **health maintenance organizations**, or HMOs, which typically enroll their subscribers through their workplaces. HMOs are prepaid health plans with designated providers, meaning that patients must visit a physician employed by the HMO or included on the HMO's approved list of physicians. If their physician is not approved by the HMO, they have to either see an approved physician or see their own without insurance coverage. Popular with employers because they are less expensive than traditional private insurance, HMOs have grown rapidly in the last three decades and now enroll more than 70 million Americans (see Figure 13.9).

Figure Growth of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs), 1980–2007 (Millions of Enrollees)



Although HMOs have become popular, their *managed care* is also very controversial for at least two reasons (Kronick, 2009).Kronick, R. (2009). Medicare and HMOs—The Search for Accountability. *New England Journal of Medicine, 360*, 2048–2050. The first is the HMOs' restrictions just noted on the choice of physicians and other health-care providers. Families

who have long seen a family physician but whose employer now enrolls them in an HMO sometimes find they have to see another physician or risk going without coverage. In some HMOs, patients have no guarantee that they can see the same physician at every visit. Instead, they see whichever physician is assigned to them at each visit. Critics of HMOs argue that this practice prevents physicians and patients from getting to know each other, reduces patients' trust in their physician, and may for these reasons impair patient health.

The second reason for the managed-care controversy is perhaps more important. HMOs often restrict the types of medical exams and procedures patients may undergo, a problem called *denial of care*, and limit their choice of prescription drugs to those approved by the HMO, even if their physicians think that another, typically more expensive drug would be more effective. HMOs claim that these restrictions are necessary to keep medical costs down and do not harm patients.

Racial and Gender Bias in Health Care

Another problem in the US medical practice is apparent racial and gender bias in health care. Racial bias seems fairly common; as Chapter 3 discussed, African Americans are less likely than whites with the same health problems to receive various medical procedures (Samal, Lipsitz, & Hicks, 2012).Samal, L., Lipsitz, S. R., & Hicks, L. S. (2012). Impact of electronic health records on racial and ethnic disparities in blood pressure control at US primary care visits. *Archives of Internal Medicine, 172*(1), 75–76. Gender bias also appears to affect the quality of health care (Read & Gorman, 2010).Read, J. G., & Gorman, B. M. (2010). Gender and health inequality. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 371–386. Research that examines either actual cases or hypothetical cases posed to physicians finds that women are less likely than men with similar health problems to be recommended for various procedures, medications, and diagnostic tests, including cardiac catheterization, lipid-lowering medication, kidney dialysis or transplant, and knee replacement for osteoarthritis (Borkhoff et al., 2008).Borkhoff, C. M., Hawker, G. A., Kreder, H. J., Glazier, R. H., Mahomed, N. N., & Wright, J. G. (2008). The effect of patients' sex on physicians' recommendations for total knee arthroplasty. *Canadian Medical Association Journal, 178*(6), 681–687.

Other Problems in the Quality of Care

Other problems in the quality of medical care also put patients unnecessarily at risk. We examine three of these here:

1. **Sleep deprivation among health-care professionals.** As you might know, many physicians get very little sleep. Studies have found that the performance of surgeons and medical residents who go without sleep is seriously impaired (Institute of Medicine, 2008).Institute of Medicine. (2008). *Resident duty hours: Enhancing sleep, supervision, and safety*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. One study found that surgeons who go without sleep for twenty-four hours have their performance impaired as much as a drunk driver. Surgeons who stayed awake all night made 20 percent more errors in simulated surgery than those who slept normally and took 14 percent longer to complete the surgery (Wen, 1998).Wen, P. (1998, February 9). Tired surgeons perform as if drunk, study says. *The Boston Globe*, p. A9.

2. **Shortage of physicians and nurses.** Another problem is a shortage of physicians and nurses (Mangan, 2011).Mangan, K. (2011). Proposals to cut federal deficit would worsen physician shortage, medical groups warn. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 58*(6), A17–A17. This is a general problem around the country, but even more of a problem in two different settings. The first such setting is hospital emergency rooms. Because emergency room work is difficult and relatively low paying, many specialist physicians do not volunteer for it. Many emergency rooms thus lack an adequate number of specialists, resulting in potentially inadequate emergency care for many patients.
   Rural areas are the second setting in which a shortage of physicians and nurses is a severe problem. As discussed further in Chapter 14, many rural residents lack convenient access to hospitals, health care professionals, and ambulances and other emergency care. This lack of access contributes to various health problems in rural areas.

3. **Mistakes by hospitals.** Partly because of sleep deprivation and the shortage of health-care professionals, hundreds of thousands of hospital patients each year suffer from mistakes made by hospital personnel. They receive the wrong diagnosis, are given the wrong drug, have a procedure done on them that was really intended for someone else, or incur a bacterial infection.
   An estimated one-third of all hospital patients experience one or more of these mistakes (Moisse, 2011).Moisse, K. (2011, April 7). Hospital errors are common and underreported. *ABCnews.com*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Health/hospital-errors-common-underreported-study/story?id=13310733#.TxxeY13310732NSRye. These and other mistakes are thought to kill almost 200,000 patients per year, or almost 2 million every decade (Crowley & Nalder, 2009).Crowley, C. F., & Nalder, E. (2009, August 9). Secrecy shields medical mishaps from public view. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A1. Despite this serious problem, a government report found that hospital employees fail to report more than 80 percent of

hospital mistakes, and that most hospitals in which mistakes were reported nonetheless failed to change their policies or practices (Salahi, 2012).Salahi, L. (2012, January 6). Report: Hospital errors often unreported. *ABCnews.com*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Wellness/hospital-staff-report-hospital-errors/story?id=15308019#.TxxfKWNSRyd.

A related problem is the lack of hand washing in hospitals. The failure of physicians, nurses, and other hospital employees to wash their hands regularly is *the* major source of hospital-based infections. About 5 percent of all hospital patients, or 2 million patients annually, acquire an infection. These infections kill 100,000 people every year and raise the annual cost of health care by $30 billion to $40 billion (Rosenberg, 2011).Rosenberg, T. (2011, April 25). Better hand-washing through technology. *New York Times*. Retrived from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/2004/2025/better-hand-washing-through-technology.

Medical Ethics and Medical Fraud



"Taking fraud seriously" by psd is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

A final set of problems concerns questions of medical ethics and outright medical fraud. Many types of health-care providers, including physicians, dentists, medical equipment companies, and nursing homes, engage in many types of health-care fraud. In a common type of fraud, they sometimes bill Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance companies for exams or tests that were never done and even make up “ghost patients” who never existed or bill for patients who were dead by the time they were allegedly treated. In just one example, a group of New York physicians billed their state’s Medicaid program for over $1.3 million for 50,000 psychotherapy sessions that never occurred. All types of health-care fraud combined are estimated to cost about $100 billion per year (Kavilanz, 2010).Kavilanz, P. (2010, January 13). Health care: A “gold mine” for fraudsters. *CNN Money*. Retrieved from http://money.cnn.com/2010/01/13/news/economy/health_care_fraud.

Other practices are legal but ethically questionable. Sometimes physicians refer their patients for tests to a laboratory that they own or in which they have invested. They are more likely to refer patients for tests when they have a financial interest in the lab to which the patients are sent. This practice, called *self-referral*, is legal but does raise questions of whether the tests are in the patient’s best interests or instead in the physician’s best interests (Shreibati & Baker, 2011).Shreibati, J. B., & Baker, L. C. (2011). The relationship between low back magnetic resonance imaging, surgery, and spending: Impact of physician self-referral status. *Health Services Research, 46*(5), 1362–1381.

In another practice, physicians have asked hundreds of thousands of their patients to take part in drug trials. The physicians may receive more than $1,000 for each patient they sign up, but the patients are not told about these payments. Characterizing these trials, two reporters said that “patients have become commodities, bought and traded by testing companies and physicians” and said that it “injects the interests of a giant industry into the delicate physician-patient relationship, usually without the patient realizing it” (Eichenwald & Kolata, 1999; Galewitz, 2009).Eichenwald, K., & Kolata, G. (1999, May 16). Drug trials hide conflicts for doctors. *New York Time*s, p. A1; Galewitz, P. (2009, February 22). Cutting-edge option: Doctors paid by drugmakers, but say trials not about money. *Palm Beach Post*. Retrieved from http://www.mdmediaconnection.com/printmedia.php#!prettyPhoto[iframe2]/0/. These trials raise obvious conflicts of interest for the physicians, who may recommend

their patients do something that might not be good for them but would be good for the physician

Key Takeaways

- The US health-care model relies on a direct-fee system and private health insurance. This model has been criticized for contributing to high health-care costs, high rates of uninsured individuals, and high rates of health problems in comparison to the situation in other Western nations.
- Other problems in US health care include the restrictive practices associated with managed care, racial/ethnic and gender bias in health-care delivery, hospital errors, and medical fraud.

For Your Review

1. Do you know anyone, including yourself or anyone in your family, who lacks health insurance? If so, do you think the lack of health insurance has contributed to any health problems? Write a brief essay in which you discuss the evidence for your conclusion.
2. Critics of managed care say that it overly restricts important tests and procedures that patients need to have, while proponents of managed care say that these restrictions are necessary to keep health-care costs in check. What is your view of managed care?

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7.6: Improving Health and Health Care

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).Bradley, E. H., & Taylor, L. (2011, December 9). To fix health, help the poor. *New York Time*s, p. A39. 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.

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 Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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. healthcare system” (Kristof, 2009, p. A31).Kristof, N. D. (2009, September 3). Health care that works. *New York Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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



"Making a difference??" by ind{yeah} is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.

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 journals; 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 healthcare 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 healthcare 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 Time*s, 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 Time*s. 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?

End-of-Section 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 health 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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7.7: Formal vs. Informal Fallacies

Formal vs. informal fallacies

A fallacy is simply a mistake in reasoning. Some fallacies are formal and some are informal. In chapter 2, we saw that we could define validity formally and thus could determine whether an argument was valid or invalid without even having to know or understand what the argument was about. We saw that we could define certain valid rules of inference, such as modus ponens and modus tollens. These inference patterns are valid in virtue of their form, not their content. That is, any argument that has the same form as modus ponens or modus tollens will automatically be valid. A formal fallacy is simply an argument whose form is invalid. Thus, any argument that has that form will automatically be invalid, regardless of the meaning of the sentences. Two formal fallacies that are similar to, but should never be confused with, modus ponens and modus tollens are denying the antecedent and affirming the consequent. Here are the forms of those invalid inferences:

Denying the antecedent

$p \supset q$

$\sim p$

$\therefore \sim q$

Affirming the consequent

$p \supset q$

q

$\therefore p$

Any argument that has either of these forms is an invalid argument. For

example:

1. If Kant was a deontologist, then he was a non-consequentialist.

2. Kant was not a deontologist.

3. Therefore, Kant was not a non-consequentialist.

The form of this argument is:

1. $D \supset C$

2. $\sim D$

3. $\therefore \sim C$

As you can see, this argument has the form of the fallacy, denying the antecedent. Thus, we know that this argument is invalid even if we don't know what "Kant" or "deontologist" or "non-consequentialist" means. ("Kant" was a famous German philosopher from the early 1800s, whereas "deontology" and "non-consequentialist" are terms that come from ethical theory.) It is mark of a formal fallacy that we can identify it even if we don't really understand the meanings of the sentences in the argument. Recall our Jabberwocky argument from chapter 2. Here's an argument which uses silly, made-up words from Lewis Carrol's "Jabberwocky." See if you can determine whether the argument's form is valid or invalid:

1. If toves are brillig then toves are slithy.

2. Toves are slithy

3. Therefore, toves are brillig.

You should be able to see that this argument has the form of affirming the consequent:

1. B ⊃ S

2. S

3. ∴ B

As such, we know that the argument is invalid, even though we haven't got a clue what "toves" are or what "slithy" or "brillig" means. The point is that we can identify formal fallacies without having to know what they mean. In contrast, informal fallacies are those which cannot be identified without understanding the concepts involved in the argument. A paradigm example of an informal fallacy is the fallacy of composition. We will consider this fallacy in the next subsection. In the remaining subsections, we will consider a number of other informal logical fallacies.

Composition fallacy

Consider the following argument:

Each member on the gymnastics team weighs less than 110 lbs.

Therefore, the whole gymnastics team weighs less than 110 lbs.



"Uzbekistan Rhythmic Gymnastics Group 2020 Olympics 5 Balls 1" by Anvar Ilyasov is licensed under CC BY 4.0.

This argument commits the composition fallacy. In the composition fallacy one argues that since each part of the whole has a certain feature, it follows that the whole has that same feature. However, you cannot generally identify any argument that moves from statements about parts to statements about wholes as committing the composition fallacy because whether or not there is a fallacy depends on what feature we are attributing to the parts and wholes. Here is an example of an argument that moves from claims about the parts possessing a feature to a claim about the whole possessing that same feature, but doesn't commit the composition fallacy:

Every part of the car is made of plastic. Therefore, the whole car is made of plastic.

This conclusion does follow from the premises; there is no fallacy here. The difference between this argument and the preceding argument (about the gymnastics team) isn't their form. In fact both arguments have the same form: Every part of X has the feature f. Therefore, the whole X has the feature f. And yet one of the arguments is clearly fallacious, while the other isn't. The difference

between the two arguments is not their form, but their content. That is, the difference is what feature is being attributed to the parts and wholes. Some features (like weighing a certain amount) are such that if they belong to each part, then it does not follow that they belong to the whole. Other features (such as being made of plastic) are such that if they belong to each part, it follows that they belong to the whole.

Here is another example:

Every member of the team has been to Paris. Therefore the team has been to Paris.

The conclusion of this argument does not follow. Just because each member of the team has been to Paris, it doesn't follow that the whole team has been to Paris, since it may not have been the case that each individual was there at the same time and was there in their capacity as a member of the team. Thus, even though it is plausible to say that the team is composed of every member of the team, it doesn't follow that since every member of the team has been to Paris, the whole team has been to Paris. Contrast that example with this one:

Every member of the team was on the plane. Therefore, the whole team was on the plane. This argument, in contrast to the last one, contains no fallacy. It is true that if every member is on the plane then the whole team is on the plane. And yet these two arguments have almost exactly the same form. The only difference is that the first argument is talking about the property, having been to Paris, whereas the second argument is talking about the property, being on the plane. The only reason we are able to identify the first argument as committing the composition fallacy and the second argument as not committing a fallacy is that we understand the relationship between the concepts involved. In the first case, we understand that it is possible that every member could have been to Paris without the team ever having been; in the second case we understand that as long as every member of the team is on the plane, it has to be true that the

whole team is on the plane. The take home point here is that in order to identify whether an argument has committed the composition fallacy, one must understand the concepts involved in the argument. This is the mark of an informal fallacy: we have to rely on our understanding of the meanings of the words or concepts involved, rather than simply being able to identify the fallacy from its form.

Division fallacy

The division fallacy is like the composition fallacy and they are easy to confuse. The difference is that the division fallacy argues that since the whole has some feature, each part must also have that feature. The composition fallacy, as we have just seen, goes in the opposite direction: since each part has some feature, the whole must have that same feature. Here is an example of a division fallacy:

The house costs 1 million dollars. Therefore, each part of the house costs 1 million dollars.

This is clearly a fallacy. Just because the whole house costs 1 million dollars, it doesn't follow that each part of the house costs 1 million dollars. However, here is an argument that has the same form, but that doesn't commit the division fallacy:

The whole team died in the plane crash. Therefore, each individual on the team died in the plane crash.



"Colombia Plane Crash" by Policía Nacional de los colombianos is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

In this example, since we seem to be referring to one plane crash in which all the members of the team died (“the” plane crash), it follows that if the whole team died in the crash, then every individual on the team died in the crash. So this argument does not commit the division fallacy. In contrast, the following argument has exactly the same form, but does commit the division fallacy:

The team played its worst game ever tonight. Therefore, each individual on the team played their worst game ever tonight.

It can be true that the whole team played its worst game ever even if it is true that no individual on the team played their worst game ever. Thus, this argument does commit the fallacy of division even though it has the same form as the previous argument, which doesn’t commit the fallacy of division. This shows (again) that in order to identify informal fallacies (like composition and division), we must rely on our understanding of the concepts involved in the argument. Some concepts (like “team” and “dying in a plane crash”) are such that if they apply to the whole, they also apply to all the parts. Other concepts (like “team” and “worst game played”) are such that they can apply to the whole even if they do not apply to all the parts.

Begging the question

Consider the following argument:

Capital punishment is justified for crimes such as rape and murder because it is quite legitimate and appropriate for the state to put to death someone who has committed such heinous and inhuman acts.

The premise indicator, “because” denotes the premise and (derivatively) the conclusion of this argument. In standard form, the argument is this:

1. It is legitimate and appropriate for the state to put to death someone who commits rape or murder.

2. Therefore, capital punishment is justified for crimes such as rape and murder.

You should notice something peculiar about this argument: the premise is essentially the same claim as the conclusion. The only difference is that the premise spells out what capital punishment means (the state putting criminals to death) whereas the conclusion just refers to capital punishment by name, and the premise uses terms like “legitimate” and “appropriate” whereas the conclusion uses the related term, “justified.” But these differences don’t add up to any real differences in meaning. Thus, the premise is essentially saying the same thing as the conclusion. This is a problem: we want our premise to provide a reason for accepting the conclusion. But if the premise is the same claim as the conclusion, then it can’t possibly provide a reason for accepting the conclusion! **Begging the question** occurs when one (either explicitly or implicitly) assumes the truth of the conclusion in one or more of the premises. Begging the question is thus a kind of circular reasoning.

One interesting feature of this fallacy is that formally there is nothing wrong with arguments of this form. Here is what I mean.

Consider an argument that explicitly commits the fallacy of begging the question. For example,

1. Capital punishment is morally permissible

2. Therefore, capital punishment is morally permissible

Now, apply any method of assessing validity to this argument and you will see that it is valid by any method. If we use the informal test (by trying to imagine that the premises are true while the conclusion is false), then the argument passes the test, since any time the premise is true, the conclusion will have to be true as well (since it is the exact same statement). Likewise, the argument is valid by our formal test of validity, truth tables. But while this argument is

technically valid, it is still a really bad argument. Why? Because the point of giving an argument in the first place is to provide some reason for thinking the conclusion is true for those who don't already accept the conclusion. But if one doesn't already accept the conclusion, then simply restating the conclusion in a different way isn't going to convince them. Rather, a good argument will provide some reason for accepting the conclusion that is sufficiently independent of that conclusion itself. Begging the question utterly fails to do this and this is why it counts as an informal fallacy. What is interesting about begging the question is that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the argument formally.

Whether or not an argument begs the question is not always an easy matter to sort out. As with all informal fallacies, detecting it requires a careful understanding of the meaning of the statements involved in the argument. Here is an example of an argument where it is not as clear whether there is a fallacy of begging the question:

Christian belief is warranted because according to Christianity there exists a being called "the Holy Spirit" which reliably guides Christians towards the truth regarding the central claims of Christianity.*

*[*This is a much simplified version of the view defended by Christian philosophers such as Alvin*

Plantinga. Plantinga defends (something like) this claim in: Plantinga, A. 2000. Warranted

Christian Belief. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.]

One might think that there is a kind of circularity (or begging the question) involved in this argument since the argument appears to assume the truth of Christianity in justifying the claim that Christianity is true. But whether or not this argument really does beg the question is something on which there is much debate within the sub-field of philosophy called epistemology ("study of knowledge"). The philosopher Alvin Plantinga argues persuasively that the argument does not beg the question, but being able to assess that argument takes patient years of study in the field of epistemology (not to mention a careful engagement with Plantinga's work). As this example illustrates, the issue of whether an argument begs the question requires us to draw on our general knowledge of the world. This is the mark of an informal, rather than formal, fallacy.

False dichotomy

Suppose I were to argue as follows:

Raising taxes on the wealthy will either hurt the economy or it will help it.

But it won't help the economy. Therefore, it will hurt the economy.

The standard form of this argument is:

1. Either raising taxes on the wealthy will hurt the economy or it will help

it.

2. Raising taxes on the wealthy won't help the economy.

3. Therefore, raising taxes on the wealthy will hurt the economy.

This argument contains a fallacy called a "false dichotomy." A false dichotomy is simply a disjunction that does not exhaust all of the possible options. In this case, the problematic disjunction is the first premise: either raising the taxes on the wealthy will hurt the economy or it will help it. But these aren't the only options. Another option is that raising taxes on the wealthy will have no

effect on the economy. Notice that the argument above has the form of a disjunctive

Syllogism:

A v B

~A

∴ B

However, since the first premise presents two options as if they were the only two options, when in fact they aren't, the first premise is false and the argument fails. Notice that the form of the argument is perfectly good—the argument is valid. The problem is that this argument isn't sound because the first premise of the argument commits the false dichotomy fallacy. False dichotomies are commonly encountered in the context of a disjunctive syllogism or constructive

dilemma.

In a speech made on April 5, 2004, President Bush made the following remarks about the causes of the Iraq war:

Saddam Hussein once again defied the demands of the world. And so I had a choice: Do I take the word of a madman, do I trust a person who had used weapons of mass destruction on his own people, plus people in the neighborhood, or do I take the steps necessary to defend the

country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

The false dichotomy here is the claim that:

Either I trust the word of a madman or I defend America (by going to war against Saddam Hussein's regime).

The problem is that these aren't the only options. Other options include ongoing diplomacy and economic sanctions. Thus, even if it is true that Bush shouldn't have trusted the word of Hussein, it doesn't follow that the only other option is going to war against Hussein's regime. (Furthermore, it isn't clear in what

sense this was needed to defend America.) That is a false dichotomy. As with all the previous informal fallacies we've considered, the false dichotomy

fallacy requires an understanding of the concepts involved. Thus, we have to use our understanding of the world in order to assess whether a false dichotomy fallacy is being committed or not.

Equivocation

Consider the following argument:

Children are a headache. Aspirin will make headaches go away.

Therefore, aspirin will make children go away.



"Walking Away" by smithwithclass is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

This is a silly argument, but it illustrates the fallacy of equivocation. The problem is that the word “headache” is used equivocally—that is, in two different senses.

In the first premise, “headache” is used figuratively, whereas in the second premise “headache” is used literally. The argument is only successful if the meaning of “headache” is the same in both premises. But it isn’t and this is what makes this argument an instance of the fallacy of equivocation.

Here’s another example:

Taking a logic class helps you learn how to argue. But there is already too much hostility in the world today, and the fewer arguments the better.

Therefore, you shouldn’t take a logic class.

In this example, the word “argue” and “argument” are used equivocally.

Hopefully, at this point in the text, you recognize the difference. (If not, go back and reread section 1.1.)

The fallacy of equivocation is not always so easy to spot. Here is a trickier example:

The existence of laws depends on the existence of intelligent beings like humans who create the laws. However, some laws existed before there were any humans (e.g., laws of physics). Therefore, there must be some non-human, intelligent being that created these laws of nature.

The term “law” is used equivocally here. In the first premise it is used to refer to societal laws, such as criminal law; in the second premise it is used to refer to laws of nature. Although we use the term “law” to apply to both cases, they are importantly different. Societal laws, such as the criminal law of a society, are enforced by people and there are punishments for breaking the laws. Natural laws, such as laws of physics, cannot be broken and thus there are no

punishments for breaking them. (Does it make sense to scold the electron for

not doing what the law says it will do?)

As with every informal fallacy we have examined in this section, equivocation can only be identified by understanding the meanings of the words involved. In fact, the definition of the fallacy of equivocation refers to this very fact: the same word is being used in two different senses (i.e., with two different meanings). So, unlike formal fallacies, identifying the fallacy of equivocation requires that we draw on our understanding of the meaning of words and of our understanding of the world, generally.

Slippery slope fallacies

Slippery slope fallacies depend on the concept of **vagueness**. When a concept or claim is vague, it means that we don't know precisely what claim is being made, or what the boundaries of the concept are. The classic example used to illustrate vagueness is the "**sorites paradox.**" The term "sorites" is the Greek term for "heap" and the paradox comes from ancient Greek philosophy. Here is the paradox. I will give you two claims that each sound very plausible, but in fact lead to a paradox. Here are the two claims:

1. One grain of sand is not a heap of sand.

2. If I start with something that is not a heap of sand, then adding one grain of sand to that will not create a heap of sand.

For example, two grains of sand is not a heap, thus (by the second claim) neither is three grains of sand. But since three grains of sand is not a heap then (by the second claim again) neither is four grains of sand. You can probably see where this is going. By continuing to add one grain of sand over and over, I will eventually end up with something that is clearly a heap of sand, but that won't be counted as a heap of sand if we accept both claims 1 and 2 above.

Philosophers continue to argue and debate about how to resolve the sorites paradox, but the point for us is just to illustrate the concept of vagueness. The concept "heap" is a vague concept in this example. But so are so many other concepts, such as color concepts (red, yellow, green, etc.), moral concepts (right, wrong, good, bad), and just about any other concept you can think of. The one domain that seems to be unaffected by vagueness is mathematical and logical concepts. There are two fallacies related to vagueness: the causal slippery slope and the conceptual slippery slope. We'll cover the conceptual slippery slope first since it relates most closely to the concept of vagueness I've explained above.

Conceptual slippery slope

It may be true that there is no essential difference between 499 grains of sand and 500 grains of sand. But even if that is so, it doesn't follow that there is no difference between 1 grain of sand and 5 billion grains of sand. In general, just because we cannot draw a distinction between A and B, and we cannot draw a distinction between B and C, it doesn't mean we cannot draw a distinction between A and C. Here is an example of a conceptual slippery slope fallacy.

It is illegal for anyone under 21 to drink alcohol. But there is no difference between someone who is 21 and someone who is 20 years and 11 months old. So there is nothing wrong with someone who is 20 years and 11 months old drinking. But since there is no real distinction between being one month older and one month younger, there shouldn't be anything wrong with drinking at any age. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with allowing a 10 year old to drink alcohol.



"Wine. Cheers. Tweet!" by Carolyn Coles is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Imagine the life of an individual in stages of 1 month intervals. Even if it is true that there is no distinction in kind between any

one of those stages, it doesn't follow that there isn't a distinction to be drawn at the extremes of either end. Clearly there is a difference between a 5 year old and a 25 year old—a distinction in kind that is relevant to whether they should be allowed to drink alcohol. The conceptual slippery slope fallacy assumes that because we cannot draw a distinction between adjacent stages, we cannot draw a distinction at all between any stages. One clear way of illustrating this is with color. Think of a color spectrum from purple to red to orange to yellow to green to blue. Each color grades into the next without there being any distinguishable boundaries between the colors—a continuous spectrum. Even if it is true that for any two adjacent hues on the color wheel, we cannot distinguish between the two, it doesn't follow from this that there is no distinction to be drawn between any two portions of the color wheel, because then we'd be committed to saying that there is no distinguishable difference between purple and yellow! The example of the color spectrum illustrates the general point that just because the boundaries between very similar things on a spectrum are vague, it doesn't follow that there are no differences between any two things on that spectrum. Whether or not one will identify an argument as committing a conceptual slippery slope fallacy, depends on the other things one believes about the world.

Thus, whether or not a conceptual slippery slope fallacy has been committed will often be a matter of some debate. It will itself be vague. Here is a good example that illustrates this point. People are found not guilty by reason of insanity when they cannot avoid breaking the law. But people who are brought up in certain deprived social circumstances are not much more able than the legally insane to avoid breaking the law. So we should not find such individuals guilty any more than those who are legally insane. Whether there is conceptual slippery slope fallacy here depends on what you think about a host of other things, including individual responsibility, free will, the psychological and social effects of deprived social circumstances such as poverty, lack of opportunity, abuse, etc. Some people may think that there are big differences between those who are legally insane and those who grow up in deprived social circumstances. Others may not think the differences are so great. The issues here are subtle, sensitive, and complex, which is why it is difficult to determine whether there is any fallacy here or not. If the differences

between those who are insane and those who are the product of deprived social circumstances turn out to be like the differences between one shade of yellow and an adjacent shade of yellow, then there is no fallacy here. But if the differences turn out to be analogous to those between yellow and green (i.e., with many distinguishable stages of difference between) then there would

indeed be a conceptual slippery slope fallacy here. The difficulty of distinguishing instances of the conceptual slippery slope fallacy, and the fact that distinguishing it requires us to draw on our knowledge about the world, shows that the conceptual slippery slope fallacy is an informal fallacy.

Causal slippery slope fallacy

The causal slippery slope fallacy is committed when one event is said to lead to some other (usually disastrous) event via a chain of intermediary events. If you have ever seen Direct TV's "get rid of cable" commercials, you will know exactly what I'm talking about. (If you don't know what I'm talking about you should Google it right now and find out. They're quite funny.) Here is an example of a causal slippery slope fallacy (it is adapted from one of the Direct TV

commercials): If you use cable, your cable will probably go on the fritz. If your cable is on the fritz, you will probably get frustrated. When you get frustrated you will probably hit the table. When you hit the table, your young daughter will probably imitate you. When your daughter imitates you, she will probably get thrown out of school. When she gets thrown out of school,

she will probably meet undesirables. When she meets undesirables, she will probably marry undesirables. When she marries undesirables, you will probably have a grandson with a dog collar. Therefore, if you use cable, you will probably have a grandson with a dog collar. This example is silly and absurd, yes. But it illustrates the causal slippery slope fallacy. Slippery slope fallacies are always made up of a series of conjunctions of probabilistic conditional statements that link the first event to the last event. A causal slippery slope fallacy is committed when one assumes that just because each individual conditional statement is probable, the conditional that links the first event to the last event is also probable. Even if we grant that each "link" in the chain is individually probable, it doesn't follow that the whole chain (or the conditional that links the first event to the last event) is probable. Suppose, for the sake of the argument, we assign probabilities to each "link" or conditional statement, like this. (I have italicized the consequents of the conditionals and assigned high conditional probabilities to them. The high probability is for the sake of the argument; I don't actually think these things are as probable as I've

assumed here.) If you use cable, then your cable will probably go on the fritz (.9) If your cable is on the fritz, then you will probably get angry (.9) If you get angry, then you will probably hit the table (.9)

If you hit the table, your daughter will probably imitate you (.8) If your daughter imitates you, she will probably be kicked out of school (.8) If she is kicked out of school, she will probably meet undesirables (.9) If she meets undesirables, she will probably marry undesirables (.8) If she marries undesirables, you will probably have a grandson with a dog collar (.8)

However, even if we grant the probabilities of each link in the chain is high (80- 90% probable), the conclusion doesn't even reach a probability higher than chance. Recall that in order to figure the probability of a conjunction, we must multiply the probability of each conjunct: (.9) × (.9) × (.9) × (.8) × (.8) × (.9) × (.8) × (.8) = .27

That means the probability of the conclusion (i.e., that if you use cable, you will have a grandson with a dog collar) is only 27%, despite the fact that each conditional has a relatively high probability! The causal slippery slope fallacy is actually a formal probabilistic fallacy and so could have been discussed in chapter 3 with the other formal probabilistic fallacies. What makes it a formal rather than informal fallacy is that we can identify it without even having to know

what the sentences of the argument mean. I could just have easily written out a nonsense argument comprised of series of probabilistic conditional statements. But I would still have been able to identify the causal slippery slope fallacy because I would have seen that there was a series of probabilistic conditional statements leading to a claim that the conclusion of the series was also probable. That is enough to tell me that there is a causal slippery slope fallacy, even if I don't really understand the meanings of the conditional statements. It is helpful to contrast the causal slippery slope fallacy with the valid form of inference, hypothetical syllogism. Recall that a hypothetical syllogism has the following kind of form:

$A \supset B$

$B \supset C$

$C \supset D$

$D \supset E$

$\therefore A \supset E$

The only difference between this and the causal slippery slope fallacy is that whereas in the hypothetical syllogism, the link between each component is certain, in a causal slippery slope fallacy, the link between each event is probabilistic. It is the fact that each link is probabilistic that accounts for the fallacy. One way of putting this is point is that probability is not transitive. Just because A makes B probable and B makes C probable and C makes X probable, it doesn't follow that A makes X probable. In contrast, when the links are certain rather than probable, then if A always leads to B and B always leads to C and C always leads to X, then it has to be the case that A always leads to X.

Fallacies of relevance

What all fallacies of relevance have in common is that they make an argument or response to an argument that is irrelevant to that argument. Fallacies of relevance can be psychologically compelling, but it is important to distinguish between rhetorical techniques that are psychologically compelling, on the one hand, and rationally compelling arguments, on the other. What makes something a fallacy is that it fails to be rationally compelling, once we have carefully considered it. That said, arguments that fail to be rationally compelling may still be psychologically or emotionally compelling. The first fallacy of relevance that we will consider, the ad hominem fallacy, is an excellent example of a fallacy that can be psychologically compelling.

Ad hominem

"Ad hominem" is a Latin phrase that can be translated into English as the phrase, "against the man." In an ad hominem fallacy, instead of responding to (or attacking) the argument a person has made, one attacks the person him or herself. In short, one attacks the person making the argument rather than the argument itself. Here is an anecdote that reveals an ad hominem fallacy (and that has actually occurred in my ethics class before).

A philosopher named Peter Singer had made an argument that it is morally wrong to spend money on luxuries for oneself rather than give all of your money that you don't strictly need away to charity. The argument is actually an argument from analogy (whose details I discussed in section 3.3), but the essence of the argument is that there are every day in this world children who die from preventable deaths, and there are charities who could save the lives of these children if they are funded by individuals from wealthy countries like our own. Since there are things that we all regularly buy that we don't need (e.g., Starbucks' lattes, beer, movie tickets, or extra clothes or shoes we don't really need), if we continue to purchase those things rather than using that money to save the lives of children, then we are essentially contributing to the deaths of those children if we choose to continue to live our lifestyle of buying things we don't need, rather than donating the money to a charity that will save lives of children in need. In response to Singer's argument, one student in the class asked: "Does Peter Singer give his money to charity? Does he do what he says we are all morally required to do?"

The implication of this student's question (which I confirmed by following up with her) was that if Peter Singer himself doesn't donate all his extra money to charities, then his argument isn't any good and can be dismissed. But that would be to commit an ad hominem fallacy. Instead of responding to the argument that Singer had made, this student attacked Singer himself. That is, they wanted to know how Singer lived and whether he was a hypocrite or not. Was he the kind of person who would tell us all that we had to live a certain way but fail to live that way himself? But all of this is irrelevant to assessing Singer's argument. Suppose that Singer didn't donate his excess money to charity and instead spent it on luxurious things for himself. Still, the argument that Singer has given can be assessed on its own merits. Even if it were true that Peter Singer was a total hypocrite, his argument may nevertheless be rationally compelling. And it is the quality of the argument that we are interested in, not Peter Singer's personal life and whether or not he is hypocritical. Whether Singer is or isn't a hypocrite, is irrelevant to whether the argument he has put forward is strong or weak, valid or invalid. The argument stands on its own and it is that argument rather than Peter Singer himself that we need to assess.

Nonetheless, there is something psychologically compelling about the question: Does Peter Singer practice what he preaches? I think what makes this question seem compelling is that humans are very interested in finding "cheaters" or hypocrites—those who say one thing and then do another. Evolutionarily, our concern with cheaters makes sense because cheaters can't be trusted and it is essential for us (as a group) to be able to pick out those who can't be trusted. That said, whether or not a person giving an argument is a hypocrite is irrelevant to whether that person's argument is good or bad. So there may be psychological reasons why humans are prone to find certain kinds of ad hominem fallacies psychologically compelling, even though ad hominem fallacies are not rationally compelling.

Not every instance in which someone attacks a person's character is an ad hominem fallacy. Suppose a witness is on the stand testifying against a defendant in a court of law. When the witness is cross examined by the defense lawyer, the defense lawyer tries to go for the witness's credibility, perhaps by digging up things about the witness's past. For example, the defense lawyer may find out that the witness cheated on her taxes five years ago or that the witness failed to pay her parking tickets. The reason this isn't an ad hominem fallacy is that in this case the lawyer is trying to establish whether what the witness is saying is true or false and in order to determine that we have to know whether the witness is trustworthy. These facts about the witness's past may be relevant to determining whether we can trust the witness's word. In this case, the witness is making claims that are either true or false rather than giving an argument. In contrast, when we are assessing someone's argument, the argument stands on its own in a way the witness's testimony doesn't. In assessing an argument, we want to know whether the argument is strong or weak and we can evaluate the argument using the logical techniques surveyed in this text. In contrast, when a witness is giving testimony, they aren't trying to argue anything. Rather, they are simply making a claim about what did or didn't happen. So although it may seem that a lawyer is committing an ad hominem fallacy in bringing up things about the witness's past, these things are actually relevant to establishing the witness's credibility. In contrast, when considering an argument that has been given, we don't have to establish the arguer's credibility because we can assess the argument they have given on its own merits. The arguer's personal life is irrelevant.

Straw man

Suppose that my opponent has argued for a position, call it position A, and in response to his argument, I give a rationally compelling argument against position B, which is related to position A, but is much less plausible (and thus much easier to refute). What I have just done is attacked a straw man—a position that "looks like" the target position, but is actually not that position. When one attacks a straw man, one commits the straw man fallacy. The straw man fallacy misrepresents one's opponent's argument and is thus a kind of irrelevance. Here is an example.

Two candidates for political office in Colorado, Tom and Fred, are having an exchange in a debate in which Tom has laid out his plan for putting more money into health care and education and Fred has laid out his plan which includes earmarking more state money for building more prisons which will create more jobs and, thus, strengthen Colorado's economy. Fred responds to Tom's argument that we need to increase funding to health care and education as follows: "I am surprised, Tom, that you are willing to put our state's economic future at risk by sinking money into these programs that do not help to create jobs. You see, folks, Tom's plan will risk sending our economy into a tailspin, risking harm to thousands of Coloradans. On the other hand, my plan supports a healthy and strong Colorado and would never bet our state's economic security on idealistic notions that simply don't work when the rubber meets the road."

Fred has committed the straw man fallacy. Just because Tom wants to increase funding to health care and education does not mean he does not want to help the economy. Furthermore, increasing funding to health care and education does not entail that fewer jobs will be created. Fred has attacked a position that is not the position that Tom holds, but is in fact a much less plausible, easier to refute position. However, it would be silly for any political candidate to run on a platform that included "harming the economy." Presumably no political candidate would run on such a platform. Nonetheless, this exact kind of straw man is ubiquitous in political discourse in our country.

Here is another example.

Nancy has just argued that we should provide middle schoolers with sex education classes, including how to use contraceptives so that they can practice safe sex should they end up in the situation where they are having sex. Fran responds: "proponents of sex education try to

encourage our children to a sex-with-no-strings-attached mentality, which is harmful to our children and to our society."

Fran has committed the straw man (or straw woman) fallacy by misrepresenting Nancy's position. Nancy's position is not that we should encourage children to have sex, but that we should make sure that they are fully informed about sex so that if they do have sex, they go into it at least a little less blindly and are able to make better decisions regarding sex.

As with other fallacies of relevance, straw man fallacies can be compelling on some level, even though they are irrelevant. It may be that part of the reason we are taken in by straw man fallacies is that humans are prone to "demonize" the "other"—including those who hold a moral or political position different from our own. It is easy to think bad things about those with whom we do not regularly interact. And it is easy to forget that people who are different than us are still people just like us in all the important respects. Many years ago, atheists were commonly thought of as highly immoral people and stories about the horrible things that atheists did in secret circulated widely. People believed that these strange "others" were capable of the most horrible savagery. After all, they may have reasoned, if you don't believe there is a God holding us accountable, why be moral? The Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, was an atheist who lived in the Netherlands in the 17th century. He was accused of all sorts of things that were commonly believed about atheists. But he was in fact as upstanding and moral as any person you could imagine. The people who knew Spinoza knew better, but how could so many people be so wrong about Spinoza? I suspect that part of the reason is that since at that time there were very few atheists (or at least very few people actually admitted to it), very few people ever knowingly encountered an atheist. Because of this, the stories about atheists could proliferate without being put in check by the facts. I suspect the same kind of phenomenon explains why certain kinds of straw man fallacies proliferate. If you are a conservative and mostly only interact with other conservatives, you might be prone to holding lots of false beliefs about liberals. And so maybe you are less prone to notice straw man fallacies targeted at liberals because the false beliefs you hold about them incline you to see the straw man fallacies as true.

Tu quoque

"Tu quoque" is a Latin phrase that can be translated into English as "you too" or "you, also." The tu quoque fallacy is a way of avoiding answering a criticism by bringing up a criticism of your opponent rather than answering the criticism. For example, suppose that two political candidates, A and B, are discussing their policies and A brings up a criticism of B's policy. In response, B brings up her own criticism of A's policy rather than responding to A's criticism of her policy. B has here committed the tu quoque fallacy. The fallacy is best understood as a way of avoiding having to answer a tough criticism that one may not have a good answer to. This kind of thing happens all the time in political discourse.

Tu quoque, as I have presented it, is fallacious when the criticism one raises is simply in order to avoid having to answer a difficult objection to one's argument or view. However, there are circumstances in which a tu quoque kind of response is not fallacious. If the criticism that A brings toward B is a criticism that equally applies not only to A's position but to any position, then B is right to point this fact out. For example, suppose that A criticizes B for taking money

from special interest groups. In this case, B would be totally right (and there would be no tu quoque fallacy committed) to respond that not only does A take money from special interest groups, but every political candidate running for office does. That is just a fact of life in American politics today. So A really has no criticism at all to B since everyone does what B is doing and it is in many ways unavoidable. Thus, B could (and should) respond with a "you too" rebuttal

and in this case that rebuttal is not a tu quoque fallacy.

Genetic fallacy

The genetic fallacy occurs when one argues (or, more commonly, implies) that the origin of something (e.g., a theory, idea, policy, etc.) is a reason for rejecting (or accepting) it. For example, suppose that Jack is arguing that we should allow physician assisted suicide and Jill responds that that idea first was used in Nazi Germany. Jill has just committed a genetic fallacy because she is implying that because the idea is associated with Nazi Germany, there must be something wrong with the idea itself. What she should have done instead is explain what, exactly, is wrong with the idea rather than simply assuming that there must be something wrong with it since it has a negative origin. The origin of an idea has nothing inherently to do with its truth or plausibility. Suppose that Hitler constructed a mathematical proof in his early adulthood (he didn't, but just suppose). The validity

of that mathematical proof stands on its own; the

fact that Hitler was a horrible person has nothing to do with whether the proof is good. Likewise with any other idea: ideas must be assessed on their own merits and the origin of an idea is neither a merit nor demerit of the idea.

Although genetic fallacies are most often committed when one associates an idea with a negative origin, it can also go the other way: one can imply that because the idea has a positive origin, the idea must be true or more plausible. For example, suppose that Jill argues that the Golden Rule is a good way to live one's life because the Golden Rule originated with Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (it didn't, actually, even though Jesus does state a version of the Golden Rule). Jill has committed the genetic fallacy in assuming that the (presumed) fact that Jesus is the origin of the Golden Rule has anything to do with whether

the Golden Rule is a good idea.

I'll end with an example from William James's seminal work, The Varieties of Religious Experience. In that book (originally a set of lectures), James considers the idea that if religious experiences could be explained in terms of neurological causes, then the legitimacy of the religious experience is undermined. James, being a materialist who thinks that all mental states are physical states— ultimately a matter of complex brain chemistry, says that the fact that any

religious experience has a physical cause does not undermine that veracity of that experience. Although he doesn't use the term explicitly, James claims that the claim that the physical origin of some experience undermines the veracity of that experience is a genetic fallacy. Origin is irrelevant for assessing the veracity of an experience, James thinks. In fact, he thinks that religious dogmatists who take the origin of the Bible to be the word of God are making exactly the same mistake as those who think that a physical explanation of a religious experience would undermine its veracity. We must assess ideas for their merits, James thinks, not their origins.

Appeal to consequences

The appeal to consequences fallacy is like the reverse of the genetic fallacy: whereas the genetic fallacy consists in the mistake of trying to assess the truth or reasonableness of an idea based on the origin of the idea, the appeal to consequences fallacy consists in the mistake of trying to assess the truth or reasonableness of an idea based on the (typically negative) consequences of accepting that idea. For example, suppose that the results of a study revealed that there are IQ differences between different races (this is a fictitious example, there is no such study that I know of). In debating the results of this study, one researcher claims that if we were to accept these results, it would lead to increased racism in our society, which is not tolerable. Therefore, these results must not be right since if they were accepted, it would lead to increased racism.

The researcher who responded in this way has committed the appeal to consequences fallacy. Again, we must assess the study on its own merits. If there is something wrong with the study, some flaw in its design, for example, then that would be a relevant criticism of the study. However, the fact that the results of the study, if widely circulated, would have a negative effect on society is not a reason for rejecting these results as false. The consequences of some idea (good or bad) are irrelevant to the truth or reasonableness of that idea.

Notice that the researchers, being convinced of the negative consequences of the study on society, might rationally choose not to publish the study (for fear of the negative consequences). This is totally fine and is not a fallacy. The fallacy consists not in choosing not to publish something that could have adverse consequences, but in claiming that the results themselves are undermined by the negative consequences they could have. The fact is, sometimes truth can have negative consequences and falsehoods can have positive consequences. This just goes to show that the consequences of an idea are irrelevant to the truth or reasonableness of an idea.

Appeal to authority

In a society like ours, we have to rely on authorities to get on in life. For example, the things I believe about electrons are not things that I have ever verified for myself. Rather, I have to rely on the testimony and authority of physicists to tell me what electrons are like. Likewise, when there is something wrong with my car, I have to rely on a mechanic (since I lack that expertise) to tell me what is wrong with it. Such is modern life. So there is nothing wrong with needing to rely on authority figures in certain fields (people with the relevant expertise in that field)—it is inescapable. The problem comes when we invoke someone whose expertise is not relevant to the issue for which we are invoking it. For example, suppose that a group of doctors sign a petition to prohibit abortions, claiming that abortions are morally wrong. If Bob cites that fact that these doctors are against abortion, therefore abortion must be morally wrong, then Bob has committed the appeal to authority fallacy. The problem is that doctors are not authorities on what is morally right or wrong. Even if they are authorities on how the body works and how to perform

certain procedures (such as abortion), it doesn't follow that they are authorities on whether or not these procedures should be performed—the ethical status of these procedures. It would be just as much an appeal to consequences fallacy if Melissa were to argue that since some other group of doctors supported abortion, that shows that it must be morally acceptable. In either case, since doctors are not authorities on moral issues, their opinions on a moral issue like abortion is irrelevant. In general, an appeal to authority fallacy occurs when someone takes what an individual says as evidence for some claim, when that individual has no particular expertise in the relevant domain (even if they do have expertise in some other, unrelated, domain).

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7.8: End of Chapter Synthesis

Further Reading

FARMWORKER HEALTH IN CALIFORNIA 2022 HEALTH IN A TIME OF CONTAGION, DROUGHT, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/fwhs_report_2.2.2383.pdf

End of Chapter Discussions

1. "How does social class influence access to healthcare services and quality of health outcomes? Discuss the implications of healthcare disparities across different socioeconomic groups."
2. "Analyze the role of culture in shaping health beliefs and practices. How do cultural norms and values influence attitudes towards preventive care, alternative medicine, and the doctor-patient relationship? "
3. "Examine the social determinants of health, such as education, employment, and housing. How do these factors contribute to health inequalities, and what policies could address these disparities?"

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8: URBAN AND RURAL PROBLEMS AND POPULATIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

8.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

8.2: A Brief History of Urbanization

8.3: Sociological Perspectives on Urbanization

8.4: Problems of Urban Life

8.5: Problems of Rural Life

8.6: Improving Urban and Rural Life

8.7: Population and the Environment

8.8: Population

8.9: Views of Population Growth

8.10: Immigration

8.11: The Environment

8.12: Environmental Problems

8.13: Addressing Population Problems and Improving the Environment

8.14: End of Chapter Synthesis

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8.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

Culture, Globalization & Economics of Migration in the Twenty-First Century

Learning Objectives

1. Understand Urbanization and Its Sociological Impact: Explore the brief history of urbanization and analyze it through various sociological perspectives, including conflict theory and functionalism . Understand different types of urban residents and the specific problems associated with urban life, such as fiscal challenges, crowding, housing, homelessness, traffic, transportation, air pollution, mental health issues, and the impact on public education and crime.
2. Examine Rural Dynamics and Population Issues: Investigate the unique problems of rural life, including aspects of fertility and birth rates, mortality and migration. Understand the dynamics of population growth and decline, including the sociological debate over population issues. Explore the sociological impact of immigration, including efforts to limit immigration, detention practices, and the relationship between immigrants and domestic violence.
3. Analyze Environmental Challenges and Policies: Delve into global environmental concerns, including the impact of nuclear power, water pollution and inadequate sanitation. Understand the sociological perspective on environmental issues and the interplay between human activity and environmental health. Examine policy responses and societal efforts to address these environmental challenges.



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Urban and Rural Problems

Introduction: Social Problems in the News

"Downtown Decay Poses Problem for Community," the headline said. The downtown district of Charleston, South Carolina, has some of the most beautiful older homes in the country, but it also has its share of dilapidated housing. According to the news article, "There are two distinct sides to downtown Charleston, the postcard perfect homes and the crumbling, rundown houses. Dilapidated buildings near the crosstown aren't just eyesores, they're becoming safety hazards." A neighborhood activist criticized city officials for ignoring the problem of rundown, dangerous houses. "It's out of sight, out of mind," he said. Ignoring this problem "wouldn't happen in the tourist areas," he added, "but why should it happen in the community where people live and work every day?"

Source: Davenport, 2012.Davenport, M. (2012, January 11). Downtown decay poses problem for community. WCSC TV. Retrieved from http://www.live5news.com/story/16501227/downtown-decay-poses-problem-for-community.

America's cities are centers of culture, innovation, fine dining, world-class medical research, high finance, and so many other

hallmarks. Yet, as this news story from Charleston reminds us, our cities also have dilapidated housing and many other problems. So do the nation's rural areas. This chapter examines urban and rural problems in the United States.

We will see that many of these problems reflect those that earlier chapters discussed. But we will also see that some problems are worse in cities precisely because they are cities (and therefore are crowded with traffic and many buildings and people). And we'll see that some problems are worse in rural areas precisely because they are rural (and therefore are isolated with long distances to travel). These defining features of cities and rural areas, respectively, should be kept in mind as we examine the problems occurring in these two important settings for American life.

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8.2: A Brief History of Urbanization

A Brief History of Urbanization

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the health problems that resulted when cities developed.
2. Explain why urbanization grew in the United States during the nineteenth century.
3. List the problems poor nations face as their cities grow even larger.

One of the most significant changes over the centuries has been **urbanization**, or the shift from rural areas to large cities. Urbanization has had important consequences for many aspects of social, political, and economic life (Kleniewski & Thomas, 2011).Kleniewski, N., & Thomas, A. R. (2011). *Cities, change, and conflict* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The earliest cities developed in ancient times after the rise of horticultural and pastoral societies made it possible for people to stay in one place instead of having to move around to find food. Because ancient cities had no sanitation facilities, people typically left their garbage and human waste in the city streets or just outside the city wall (which most cities had for protection from possible enemies). This poor sanitation led to rampant disease and high death rates. Some cities eventually developed better sanitation procedures, including, in Rome, a sewer system. Still, the world remained largely rural until the industrialization of the nineteenth century. We will return to industrialization shortly.

During the American colonial period, cities along the eastern seaboard were the centers of commerce and politics. Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were the three largest cities in population size. Yet they were tiny in comparison to their size today. In 1790, the year after George Washington became the first president of the new nation, New York's population was only 33,131; Philadelphia's was 28,522; and Boston's was 18,230 (Gibson, 1998).Gibson, C. (1998). *Population of the 100 largest cities and other urban places in the United States: 1790–1990*. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau. Today, of course, cities of this size are called small towns. New York's population is vastly higher, at about 8.2 million; Philadelphia's is 1.5 million; and Boston's is 618,000.

US cities became more numerous and much larger during the nineteenth century because of two trends. The first was immigration, as waves of immigrants from Ireland and then Italy and other nations began coming to the United States during the 1820s. The second was industrialization, as people moved to live near factories and other sites of industrial production. These two trends were momentous: People crowded together as never before, and they crowded into living conditions that were often squalid. Lack of sanitation continued to cause rampant disease, and death rates from cholera, typhoid, and other illnesses were high.



Muckraker Lincoln Steffens wrote a classic work, The Shame of the Cities, that criticized the municipal corruption characterizing

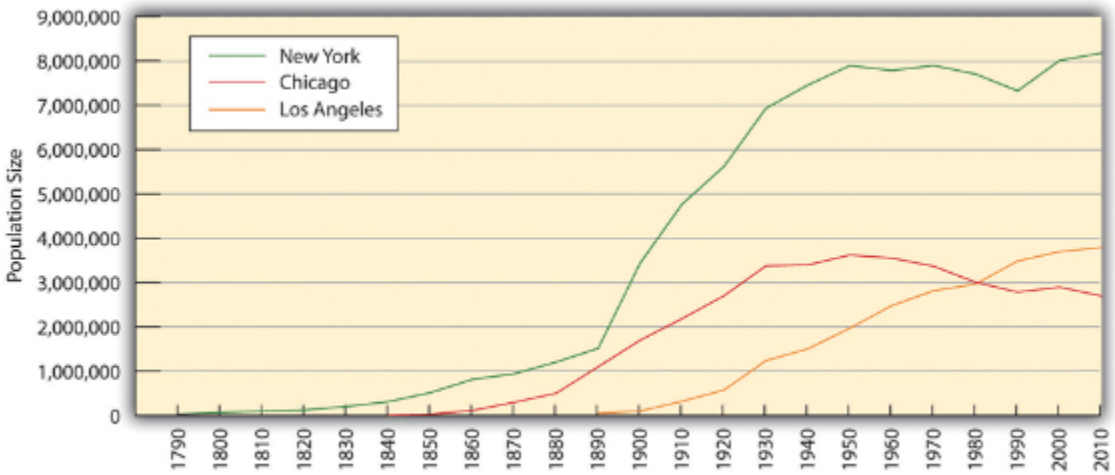
many US cities at the turn of the twentieth century. Source: "Lincoln Steffens," Wikipedia, Last modified August 19, 2009, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lincoln_Steffens.jpg.

Crime also became a significant problem, as did riots and other mob violence beginning in the 1830s. This type of mass violence was so common that the 1830s have been called the "turbulent era" (Feldberg, 1980).Feldberg, M. (1980). *The turbulent era: Riot and disorder in Jacksonian America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Most of this mass violence was committed by native-born whites against African Americans, Catholics, and immigrants. Native whites resented their presence and were deeply prejudiced against them. During the three decades beginning in 1830, almost three-fourths of US cities with populations above 20,000 had at least one riot. This wave of mass violence in the nation's cities led Abraham Lincoln to lament, "Accounts of outrages committed by mobs form the everyday news of the times...Whatever their causes be, it is common to the whole country" (Barkan & Snowden, 2008, p. 34).Barkan, S. E., & Snowden, L. L. (2008). *Collective violence*. Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan.

American cities grew even more rapidly after the Civil War as both industrialization and immigration continued. By the early years of the twentieth century, US cities on the East Coast were almost unimaginably crowded, and their living conditions continued to be wretched for many of their residents. Their city governments, police forces, and business worlds were also notoriously corrupt. In 1904, Lincoln Steffens, a renowned "muckraking" journalist, published his classic work, *The Shame of the Cities* (Steffens, 1904),Steffens, L. (1904). *The shame of the cities*. New York, NY: McClure, Phillips. which was a collection of six articles he had written for *McClure's Magazine*. In this book, Steffens used biting prose to attack the municipal corruption of the times in Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and other cities. In the original articles that compose the book, he named names: He listed by name people who gave and received bribes and those who were corrupt in other ways. A decade earlier, another muckraker, Jacob Riis, had published *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (Riis, 1890),Riis, J. (1890). *How the other half lives: Studies among the tenements of New York*. New York. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. a book of searing photographs of poverty in the largest US city. The books by Steffens and Riis remain as vivid reminders of what cities were like a century ago, and perhaps are still like today in some respects.

As Americans moved west after the Civil War and during the twentieth century, western cities appeared almost overnight and expanded the pace of urbanization. Continued industrialization, immigration, and general population growth further increased the number and size of US cities. Internal migration had a similar impact, as waves of African Americans moved from the South to Chicago and other northern cities.

Figure *Populations of Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, 1790–2010*



Note: New York annexed Brooklyn in 1898; therefore, New York's population beginning in 1900 includes Brooklyn's population.

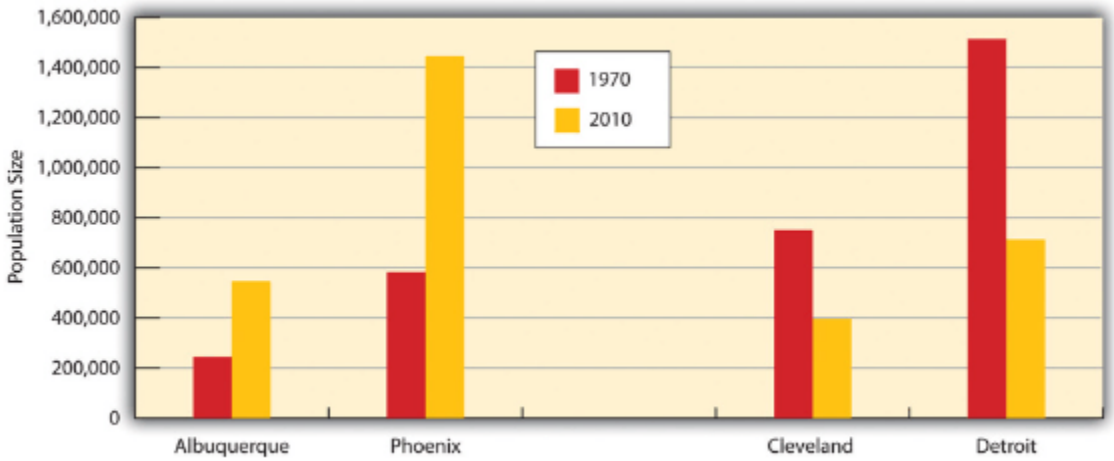
Sources: Gibson, C. (1998). Population of the 100 largest cities and other urban places in the United States: 1790–1990. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

Figure "Populations of Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, 1790–2010" depicts the growth of Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles

from 1790 to 2010. Chicago and Los Angeles first appear in the graph when they began to rank in the largest one hundred cities.

Note that the populations of New York and Chicago show some decline after 1950. This decline reflects two other trends affecting cities in the past half-century: (1) the movement of people from cities to suburbs; and (2) the movement of Americans from northern cities to southern and southwestern cities. Reflecting this second trend, and also reflecting increases in immigration from Mexico and Asia, southern and southwestern cities have grown rapidly during the past few decades. For example, during the 1970–2010 period, the populations of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Phoenix, Arizona, more than doubled, while the populations of Cleveland, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, both fell by about half (see Figure 14.2).

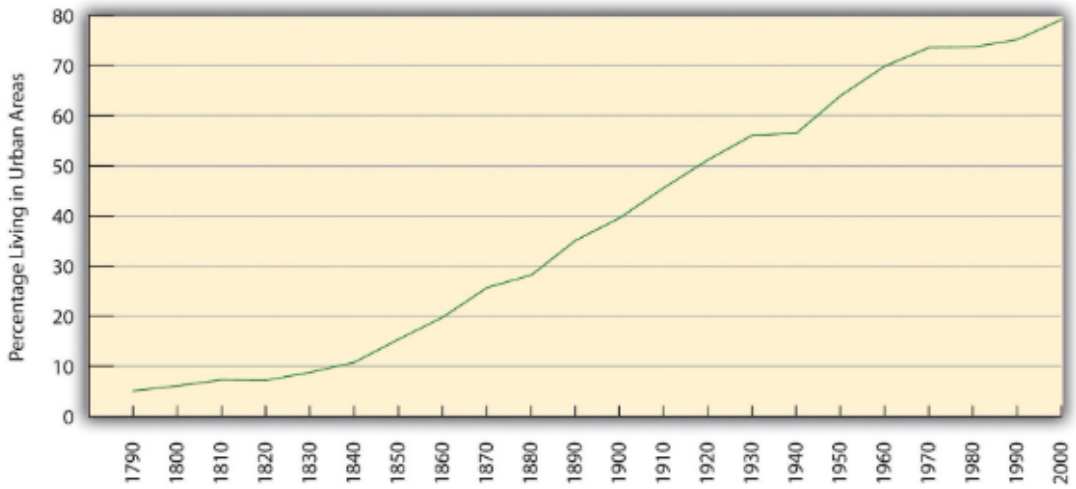
Figure Population Change from 1970 to 2010 for Selected Cities



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.

This trend in urbanization aside, the fact remains that the United States has become much more urbanized since its formation. Today, more than three-fourths of the US population lives in an **urban area** (defined generally as an incorporated territory with a population of at least 2,500), and less than one-fourth lives in a rural area. As Figure 14.3 shows, the degree of urbanization rose steadily through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before slowing down by the end of the last century.

Figure Urbanization in the United States (Percentage Living in Urban Areas)



Sources: *http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-4.pdf*; *http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census_issues/archives/metropolitan_planning/cps2k.cfm*.

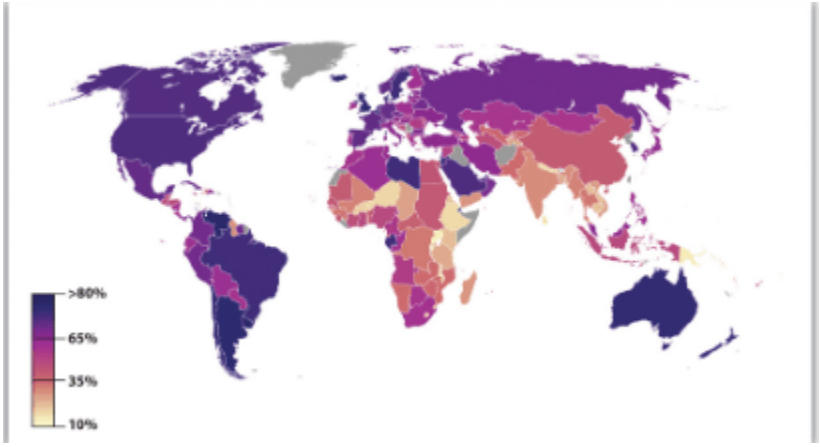
Global Urbanization

If the United States has urbanized during the last two centuries, so has much of the rest of the world. Only 3 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas in 1800. By a century later in 1900, 14 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas, and twelve cities had populations over 1 million. Just a half-century later in 1950, the world's urban population had doubled to 30 percent, and the number of cities over 1 million grew six times to eighty-three cities.

Today, more than half the world's population lives in urban areas, and the number of cities over 1 million stands at more than four hundred. By 2030, almost two-thirds of the world's population is projected to live in urban areas. The number of **megacities**—cities with populations over 10 million—rose from three in 1975 to sixteen in 2000, and is expected to reach twenty-seven by 2025 (Population Reference Bureau, 2012).Population Reference Bureau. (2012). Human population: Urbanization. Retrieved from http://www.prb.org/Educators/TeachersGuides/HumanPopulation/Urbanization.aspx.

Despite all this growth, the degree of urbanization still varies around the world (see Figure 14.4). In general, wealthy nations are more urban than poor nations, thanks in large part to the latter's rural economies. Still, urbanization in poor nations is proceeding rapidly. Most megacities are now in, and will continue to be in, nations that are relatively poor or desperately poor. The number of urban residents in these nations will increase greatly in the years ahead as people there move to urban areas and as their populations continue to grow through natural fertility. Fertility is a special problem in this regard for two reasons. First, women in poor nations have high fertility rates. Second, poor nations have very high proportions of young people, and these high rates mean that many births occur because of the large number of women in their childbearing years.

Figure *Percentage of World Population Living in Urban Areas*



Source: Adapted from *http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Urban_population_in_2005_world_map.PNG*.

Rapid urbanization poses both opportunities and challenges for poor nations. The opportunities are many. Jobs are more plentiful in cities than in rural areas and incomes are higher, and services such as health care and schooling are easier to deliver because people are living more closely together. In another advantage, women in poor nations generally fare better in cities than in rural areas in terms of education and employment possibilities (United Nations Population Fund, 2011).United Nations Population Fund. (2011). *The State of World Population 2011*. Retrieved from http://foweb.unfpa.org/SWP2011/reports/EN-SWOP2011-FINAL.pdf.



In large cities in poor nations, as this scene illustrates, many people live in deep poverty and lack clean water and sanitation.

BazaNews, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Delhi_Jama_Masjid_Street_Scene.jpg.

But there are also many challenges. In the large cities of poor nations, homeless children live in the streets as beggars, and many people lack necessities and conveniences that urban dwellers in industrial nations take for granted. As the United Nations Population Fund (2007)United Nations Population Fund. (2007). Linking population, poverty, and development. Urbanization: A majority in cities. Retrieved from http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm. warns, "One billion people live in urban slums, which are typically overcrowded, polluted and dangerous, and lack basic services such as clean water and sanitation." The rapid urbanization of poor nations will compound the many problems these nations already have, just as the rapid urbanization in the industrial world more than a century ago led to the disease and other problems discussed earlier. As cities grow rapidly in poor nations, moreover, these nations' poverty makes them ill equipped to meet the challenges of urbanization. Helping these nations meet the needs of their cities remains a major challenge for the world community in the years ahead. In this regard, the United Nations Population Fund (2007)United Nations Population Fund. (2007). Linking population, poverty, and development. Urbanization: A majority in cities. Retrieved from http://www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm. urges particular attention to housing: "Addressing the housing needs of the poor will be critical. A roof and an address in a habitable area are the first step to a better life. Improving access to basic social and health services, including reproductive health care, for poor people in urban slums is also critical to breaking the cycle of poverty."

Life in the megacity of Mumbai (formerly called Bombay) in India illustrates many of the problems facing large cities in poor nations. Mumbai's population exceeds 12.4 million, with another 8 million living in the greater metropolitan area; this total of more than 20 million ranks Mumbai's metropolitan population as the fourth highest in the world. An author who grew up in Mumbai calls his city an "urban catastrophe." He continued, "Bombay is the future of urban civilization on the planet. God help us" (Kotkin, 2011).Kotkin, J. (2011). A leg up: World's largest cities no longer homes of upward mobility. Retrieved January 29, 2012, from http://www.newgeography.com/content/002051-a-leg-up-worlds-largest-cities-no-longer-homes-upward-mobility. A recent news story illustrated his bleak assessment with this description of life in Mumbai: "The majority of Mumbai's population now lives in slums, up from one-sixth in 1971—a statistic that reflects a lack of decent affordable housing, even for those gainfully employed. Congested, overcrowded, and polluted, Mumbai has become a difficult place to live. The life expectancy of a Mumbaikar is now seven years shorter than an average Indian's, a remarkable statistic in a country still populated by poor villagers with little or no access to health care" (Kotkin, 2011).Kotkin, J. (2011). A leg up: World's largest cities no longer homes of upward mobility. Retrieved January 29, 2012, from http://www.newgeography.com/content/002051-a-leg-up-worlds-largest-cities-no-longer-homes-upward-mobility.

Key Takeaways

- US cities grew rapidly during the nineteenth century because of industrialization and immigration.
- The United States is now a heavily urbanized society, whereas it was largely a rural society just a century ago.
- Urbanization poses special challenges for poor nations, which are ill equipped to address the many problems associated

with urbanization.

For Your Review

1. Write an essay in which you discuss the advantages and disadvantages of urbanization.
2. If you had your preference, would you want to live in a large city, small city or town, or rural area? Explain your answer.

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8.3: Sociological Perspectives on Urbanization

Sociological Perspectives on Urbanization

Learning Objectives

1. List the assumptions of the three major sociological perspectives concerning urbanization.

Once again the three major sociological perspectives offer important but varying insights to help us understand urbanization. Table 14.1 summarizes their assumptions.

Table 14.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical Perspective	Major Assumptions
Functionalism	Cities serve many important function for society but also have their dysfunctions. Functionalism theorists differ on the relative merits and disadvantages urban life, and in particular on the degree to which a sense of community and soical bonding exists within cites.
Conflict Theory	Cities are run by political and economic elites that use their resources to enrich their positions and to take resources from the poor and people of color. The diversity of social backgrounds found in cities contributes to conflict over norms and values.
Symbolic Interactionism	City residents differ in their types of interaction of perceptions of urban life. Cities are no chaotic places but rather location in which strong norms and values exist.

Functionalism

A basic debate within the functionalist perspective centers on the relative merits of cities and urbanization: In what ways and to what extent are cities useful (functional) for society, and in what ways and to what extent are cities disadvantageous and even harmful (dysfunctional) for society? Put more simply, are cities good or bad?

In essence, there is no one answer to this question, because cities are too complex for a simple answer. Cities are both good and bad. They are sites of creativity, high culture, population diversity, and excitement, but they are also sites of crime, impersonality, and other problems.

Since sociologists began studying urbanization in the early years of the discipline, an important question has been the degree to which cities are impersonal and alienating for their residents. In 1887, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/1963)Tönnies, F. (1963). *Community and society*. New York, NY: Harper and Row. (Original work published 1887) raised this question when he wrote about the changes that occurred as societies changed from small, rural, and traditional cultures to larger, urban, and industrial settings. He said that a sense of community, or **Gemeinschaft**, characterizes traditional societies. In these societies, family, kin, and community ties are quite strong, with people caring for each other and looking out for one another. As societies grew and industrialized and as people moved to cities, he wrote, social ties weakened and became more impersonal. Tönnies called this type of society a **Gesellschaft**, and he was quite critical of this development. He lamented the loss in urban societies of close social bonds and of a strong sense of community, and he feared that a sense of rootlessness in these societies begins to replace the feeling of stability and steadiness characteristic of small, rural societies.

One of the key founders of sociology, French scholar Émile Durkheim, was more positive than Tönnies about the nature of cities and urbanized societies. He certainly appreciated the social bonds and community feeling, which he called **mechanical solidarity**, characteristic of small, rural societies. However, he also thought that these societies stifled individual freedom and that social ties still exist in larger, urban societies. He called these latter ties **organic solidarity**, which he said stems from the division of labor. When there is a division of labor, he wrote, everyone has to depend on everyone else to perform their jobs. This interdependence of roles creases a solidarity that retains much of the bonding and sense of community found in small,

rural societies (Durkheim, 1893/1933).Durkheim, É. (1933). *The division of labor in society*. London, United Kingdom: Free Press. (Original work published 1893)

Contemporary research tends to emphasize that strong social bonds do exist in cities (Guest, Cover, Matsueda, & Kubrin, 2006).Guest, A. M., Cover, J. K., Matsueda, R. L., & Kubrin, C. E. (2006). Neighborhood context and neighboring ties. *City & Community, 5*(4), 363–385. Although cities can be anonymous (think of the mass of people walking by each other on a busy street in the downtown area of a large city), many city residents live in neighborhoods where people do know each other, associate with each other, and look out for each other. In these neighborhoods, a sense of community and strong social bonds do, in fact, exist.

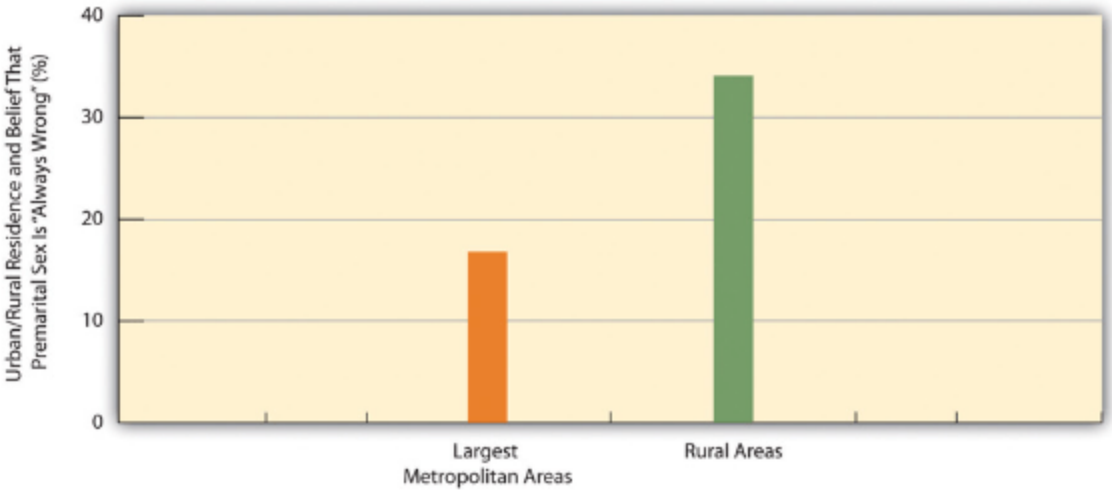


In many urban neighborhoods, people are friendly with each other and feel a strong sense of community. Image courtesy of Hynek Moravec, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Delhi_Old_Delhi_Ulice2001.JPG,

In 1938, University of Chicago sociologist Louis Wirth wrote a very influential essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," in which he took both a positive and a negative view of cities (Wirth, 1938).Wirth, L. (1938). Urbanism as a way of life. *American Journal of Sociology, 44*, 3–24. He agreed with Tönnies that cities have a weaker sense of community and weaker social bonds than do rural areas. But he also agreed with Durkheim that cities generate more creativity and greater tolerance for new ways of thinking. In particular, he said that urban residents are more tolerant than rural residents of nontraditional attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, in part because they are much more exposed than rural residents to these nontraditional ways. Supporting Wirth's hypothesis, contemporary research finds that urban residents indeed hold more tolerant views on several kinds of issues (Moore & Ovadia, 2006).Moore, L. M., & Ovadia, S. (2006). Accounting for spatial variation in tolerance: The effects of education and religion. *Social Forces, 84*(4), 2205–2222.

An example of the greater tolerance of urban residents (and thus the lower tolerance of rural residents) appears in Figure 14.5, which depicts the percentage of Americans in the nation's twelve largest metropolitan areas and in its rural areas who say that premarital sex is "always wrong." Rural residents are twice as likely as urban residents to feel this way.

Figure *Urban/Rural Residence and Belief That Premarital Sex Is "Always Wrong" (%)*



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

Conflict Theory

We just saw that functionalism has mixed views about the benefits and disadvantages of cities and urban life and thus of urbanization. In contrast to this ambivalence, conflict theory's views are uniformly critical. In this regard, recall from Chapter 1 that conflict theory assumes a basic conflict between society's "haves" and "have-nots," or between the economic and political elites and the poor and people of color. This type of conflict, says conflict theory, manifests itself especially in the nation's cities, in which the "haves" and "have-nots" live very different lives. On the one hand, the rich in American cities live in luxurious apartments and work in high-rise corporate buildings, and they dine at the finest restaurants and shop at the most expensive stores. On the other hand, the poor and people of color live in dilapidated housing and can often barely make ends meet.

Beyond this basic disparity of city life, conflict theorists add that the diverse backgrounds and interests of city residents often lead to conflict because some residents' beliefs and practices clash with those of other residents. In one of the earliest statements of this position, sociologist Thorsten Sellin (1938),Sellin, T. (1938). *Culture conflict and crime* (No. Bulletin 41): New York, NY: Social Science Research Council. who was writing during an era of mass immigration into American cities of people from other nations, said that crime is the result of "culture conflict." In particular, he wrote that crime by immigrants often results from the clash of their traditional ways of thinking and acting with the norms of American society. As one example, he wrote that a father in New Jersey who had emigrated from Sicily killed a teenage boy who had slept with his daughter. The father was surprised when he was arrested by local police, because in the traditional Sicilian culture a man was permitted and even expected to defend his family's honor by acting as the father did!

More recent applications of conflict theory to urbanization emphasize the importance of **political economy**, or the interaction of political and economic institutions and processes. In this way of thinking, political and economic elites in a city (bankers, real estate investors, politicians, and others) collaborate to advance their respective interests. Thus urban development often takes the form of displacing poor urban residents from their homes so that condominiums, high-rise banks and other corporate buildings, posh shopping malls, or other buildings favoring the rich can be built. More generally, these elites treat cities as settings for the growth of their wealth and power, rather than as settings where real people live, go to school, work at a job, and have friends and acquaintances. Sociologists John Logan and Harvey Molotch use the term *growth machine ideology* to characterize the view of the city that guides these elites' policies and practices (Logan & Molotch, 2007).Logan, J. R., & Molotch, H. L. (2007). *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place* (2nd ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Symbolic Interactionism

Consistent with the overall approach of symbolic interactionism, scholars of the city who take this approach focus on the nature of urban residents' interaction with each other, the reasons for their patterns of interaction, and their perceptions of various aspects of urban life. Their work has yielded many rich, vivid descriptions of the urban life. Many and probably most of these accounts have concerned the lives of the poor and of people of color. The late Elliott Liebow wrote two of the most famous accounts. The first

of these two was his majestic *Tally's Corner* (Liebow, 1967), which depicted the lives of African American men who "hung around" a particular street corner in a large city. His second account was *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women* (Liebow, 1993),Liebow, E. (1993). *Tell them who I am: The lives of homeless women*. New York, NY: Free Press. which, as its title implies, depicted the lives of urban homeless women. Yet another classic account is William Foote Whyte's (1943)Whyte, W. F. (1943). *Street corner society: The social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. *Street Corner Society*, which examined leadership in a street gang in Chicago, Illinois.

These and other accounts all depict cities as places where various norms and values prevail, in contrast to views of cities that depict them as wild, chaotic places. Building on these more positive accounts, recent work by sociologist Elijah Anderson emphasizes that most poor urban residents are "decent" (as they call themselves), law-abiding people who strongly disapprove of the crime and drug use in their neighborhoods (Anderson, 2000).Anderson, E. (2000). *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. He also emphasizes that cities are filled with parks and other public settings in which people from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds gather every day and interact in various ways that help foster interracial understanding. Anderson calls these settings "cosmopolitan canopies," and says they "offer a respite from the lingering tensions of urban life and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together…Through personal observation, they may come casually to appreciate one another's differences and empathize with the other in a spirit of humanity" (Anderson, 2011, pp. xiv–xv).Anderson, E. (2011). *The cosmopolitan canopy: Race and civility in everyday life*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. In this manner, writes Anderson, people from different races can at least partly overcome the racial tensions that afflict many American cities.

Types of Urban Residents

Other work in the symbolic interactionist tradition seeks to understand the different lifestyles of city residents. Sociologist Herbert Gans (1982)Gans, H. J. (1982). *The urban villagers: Group and class in the life of Italian-Americans* (Updated and expanded ed.). New York, NY: Free Press. authored a classic typology of urban residents based on their differing lifestyles and experiences. Gans identified five types of city residents.

The first type is *cosmopolites*. These are people who live in a city because of its cultural attractions, restaurants, and other features of the best that a city has to offer. Cosmopolites include students, writers, musicians, and intellectuals. *Unmarried and childless* individuals and couples are the second type; they live in a city to be near their jobs and to enjoy the various kinds of entertainment found in most cities. If and when they marry or have children, respectively, many migrate to the suburbs to raise their families. The third type is *ethnic villagers*, who are recent immigrants and members of various ethnic groups who live among each other in certain neighborhoods. These neighborhoods tend to have strong social bonds and more generally a strong sense of community. Gans wrote that all these three types generally find the city inviting rather than alienating and have positive experiences far more often than negative ones.

In contrast, two final types of residents find the city alienating and experience a low quality of life. The first of these two types, and the fourth overall, is the *deprived*. These are people with low levels of formal education who live in poverty or near poverty and are unemployed, are underemployed, or work at low wages. They live in neighborhoods filled with trash, broken windows, and other signs of disorder. They commit high rates of crime and also have high rates of victimization by crime. The final type is the *trapped*. These are residents who, as their name implies, might wish to leave their neighborhoods but are unable to do so for several reasons: they may be alcoholics or drug addicts, they may be elderly and disabled, or they may be jobless and cannot afford to move to a better area.

In thinking about this typology, it is important to keep in mind that city residents' social backgrounds—their social class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation—all influence the kind of lifestyle they tend to adopt and thus the type of resident they are according to the typology. As earlier chapters documented, these dimensions of our social backgrounds often yield many kinds of social inequalities, and the quality of life that city residents enjoy depends heavily on these dimensions. For example, residents who are white and wealthy have the money and access to enjoy the best that cities have to offer, while those who are poor and of color typically experience the worst aspects of city life. Because of fear of rape and sexual assault, women often feel more constrained than men from traveling freely throughout a city and being out late at night; older people also often feel more constrained because of physical limitations and fear of muggings; and gays and lesbians are still subject to physical assaults stemming from homophobia. The type of resident we are, then, in terms of our sociodemographic profile affects what we experience in the city and whether that experience is positive or negative.

Key Takeaways

- Functionalism offers both a positive and a negative view of urbanization. Functionalist sociologists differ on the degree of social solidarity that exists in cities.
- According to conflict theory, economic and political elites use their resources to develop cities in a way that benefits them. The diverse social backgrounds of urban residents also contribute to certain types of conflict.
- According to symbolic interactionism, social inequality based on social class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation affects the quality of urban experiences. In addition to differences in their sociodemographic profiles, city residents differ in other ways. Herbert Gans identified several types of urban dwellers: cosmopolites, unmarried and childless, ethnic villagers, deprived, and trapped.

For Your Review

1. Write an essay that summarizes the assumptions of any two of the major sociological perspectives on urbanization.
2. Which of the three perspectives makes the most sense to you? Why?

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8.4: Problems of Urban Life

Problems of Urban Life

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss any three problems of urban life.
2. Provide an example of a problem that specifically arises from the fact that cities consist, by definition, of large numbers of people living in a relatively small space.

Life in US cities today is certainly complex. On the one hand, many US cities are vibrant places, filled with museums and other cultural attractions, nightclubs, theaters, and restaurants and populated by people from many walks of life and from varied racial and ethnic and national backgrounds. Many college graduates flock to cities, not only for their employment opportunities but also for their many activities and the sheer excitement of living in a metropolis.

On the other hand, many US cities are also filled with abject poverty, filthy and dilapidated housing, high crime rates, traffic gridlock, and dirty air. Many Americans would live nowhere but a city, and many would live anywhere but a city. Cities arouse strong opinions, pro and con, because there are many things both to like and to dislike about cities.

By definition, cities consist of very large numbers of people living in a relatively small amount of space. Some of these people have a good deal of money, but many people, and in some cities most people, have very little money. Cities must provide many kinds of services for all their residents, and certain additional services for their poorer residents. These basic facts of city life make for common sets of problems affecting cities throughout the nation, albeit to varying degrees, with some cities less able than others to address these problems. This section examines several of these problems.

Fiscal Problems

One evident problem is *fiscal*: Cities typically have serious difficulties in paying for basic services such as policing, public education, trash removal, street maintenance, and snow removal (at least in cold climates), and in providing certain services for their residents who are poor or disabled or who have other conditions. The fiscal difficulties that cities routinely face became even more serious with the onset of the nation's deep recession in late 2007, as the term *fiscal crisis* was used again and again to describe the harsh financial realities that cities continued to face even after the recession officially ended in mid-2009 (McNichol, 2009).McNichol, D. A. (2009, May 1). Revenue loss putting cities in fiscal vise. *New York Times*, p. NJ1.

In early 2012, almost three years after the United States officially emerged from the recession, this fiscal crisis persisted. The mayor of Syracuse, New York, announced that her city faced a budget deficit of $16 million and called its fiscal problems "staggering" (Knauss, 2012).Knauss, T. (2012, January 26). Former Lt. Gov. Richard Ravitch to advise Syracuse on finances, Mayor Stephanie Miner says. *The Post-Standard*. Retrieved from http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2012/01/former_lt_gov_richard_ravitch.html. Mayors in Rhode Island told their governor that their cities need fiscal aid from the state to prevent them from having to declare bankruptcy. One of the mayors said, "We all have the same issues. Something has to be done this year. We cannot have a study commission. We cannot say 'we'll wait until 2013 or 2014.' This is do or die" (Klepper, 2012).Klepper, D. (2012, January 5). RI Gov., mayors say state must help cities now. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/news/local/rhode_island/articles/2012/01/05/ri_gov_mayors_say_state_must_help_cities_now. Detroit, Michigan, was in danger of running out of money altogether and being taken over by its state government. The member of the US House of Representatives who represents Detroit said he was seeking aid from the federal government: "Bottom line, I'm asking for federal aid to avoid massive layoffs, especially for our public safety workers. That's what we actually need to attract businesses here who create jobs. We need safe streets and we need good schools" (Oosting, 2012).Oosting, J. (2012, January 30). Rep. Hansen Clarke talks with president on Air Force One, seeks emergency aid for Detroit. *Mlive.com*. Retrieved from http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2012/01/rep_hansen_clarke_talks_with_p.html.

In response to financial problems in these and other cities across the nation, the US Conference of Mayors urged Congress in early 2012 to provide several kinds of aid to cities, including low-interest loans for local rail and road projects and funding for housing and job training for low-income residents (United States Conference of Mayors, 2012).US Conference

of Mayors. (2012, January 24). Statement by US Conference of Mayors president Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in reaction to President Obama's State of the Union address. Retrived from http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2012/0124-statement-sotu.pdf.

Applying Social Research

Urban Neighborhoods and Poor Health

Social scientists have long thought that poor urban neighborhoods pose, in and of themselves, significant health risks for their residents. These neighborhoods lack supermarkets with fresh fruits and vegetables, and they lack safe parks and other settings for exercise. They are also neighborhoods with high crime rates and thus much stress. For all these reasons, they should impair the physical health of their residents. Reflecting this argument, the residents of poor urban neighborhoods do, in fact, exhibit significant health problems compared to the residents of wealthier neighborhoods.

Although this argument might sound compelling, the residents of poor and wealthier neighborhoods might differ in other ways that affects their respective health. For example, people living in wealthier neighborhoods are generally more educated and more conscious of taking care of their health. If their health then is better than that of their counterparts in poor neighborhoods, it is difficult to know how much the neighborhood setting itself plays a role in the health of residents.

For this reason, a recent study of a real-life experiment provided compelling evidence of the importance of the quality of a neighborhood for one's health. In the 1990s, the federal government conducted an experiment in which 1,800 poor urban women were randomly selected and, with their permission, assigned to move from their neighborhoods to wealthier neighborhoods. The women were studied a decade after they moved. In particular, they were weighed and had their blood checked for evidence of diabetes. Their results were then compared to women in their original neighborhoods who were not selected to move away. The women who did move away ended up with somewhat lower rates of diabetes and obesity than those who stayed behind.

The experimental design of this study allowed the researchers to conclude that the change in neighborhoods was the reason for their improvement in these two health measures. Reflecting this conclusion, the secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development said, "This study proves that concentrated poverty is not only bad policy, it's bad for your health." A news report observed that the results of this study "offered some of the strongest support yet for the idea that where you live can significantly affect your overall health, especially if your home is in a low-income area."

The results of this experimental study underscore the need to improve the living conditions of poor urban neighborhoods, as these conditions affect many life outcomes of the adults and children who live in them.

Sources: Ludwig et al., 2011; Stobbe, 2011Ludwig, J., Sanbonmatsu, L., Gennetian, L., Adam, E., Duncan, G. J., Katz, L. F., et al. (2011). Neighborhoods, obesity, and diabetes—a randomized social experiment. New England Journal of Medicine, 365(16), 1509–1519; Stobbe, M. (2011, October 20). Decade-long study links living in low-income neighborhoods to poor health. The Boston Globe, p. A15.

Crowding

Another problem is *crowding*. Cities are crowded in at least two ways. The first involves *residential crowding*: large numbers of people living in a small amount of space. City streets are filled with apartment buildings, condominiums, row houses, and other types of housing, and many people live on any one city block. Residential crowding is perhaps the defining feature of any large city. In this regard, let's compare the Manhattan borough of New York City with the state of Idaho. Roughly 1.6 million people live in each location. However, in Manhattan they are packed into only about 24 square miles, while in Idaho they live within 84,000 square miles. Manhattan's *population density*, the number of people per square mile, is 68,000 people per square mile; Idaho's population density is only about 19 people per square mile. Population density in Manhattan is thus 3,579 times (68,000 ÷ 19) greater than in Idaho.

New York is incredibly crowded, but other cities are also very crowded. Chicago's population density, for example, exceeds 12,200 persons per square mile, while even a smaller city like Cincinnati (population 331,000) has a population density of 4,700 persons per square mile. Even a much smaller city like Ames, Iowa (population 51,000) has a population density of 2,360 persons per square mile. Population density in the small city of Ames is still 124 times greater than in the entire state of Idaho. Residential crowding is thus very high in almost any city in the United States compared to a rural area.

The second type of crowding is *household crowding*: Dwelling units in cities (apartments and houses) are typically small because of lack of space, and much smaller overall than houses in suburbs or rural areas. This forces many people to live in close quarters within a particular dwelling unit, especially if they are low-income individuals or families.

Some research finds that either type of crowding produces higher levels of stress, depression, aggression and crime. Here an interesting gender difference may exist (Regoeczi, 2008):Regoeczi, W. C. (2008). Crowding in context: An examination of the differential responses of men and women to high-density living environments. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 49, 254–268*. Household crowding may produce depression in women but not men, and aggression in men but not women.

Although crowding of both types is a problem, then, there is little that cities can do to reduce crowding. This fact underscores the need to undertake other efforts that might address the various consequences of residential and household crowding. In this regard, Chapter 8 outlined several efforts to help reduce crime and delinquency.

Housing

A third problem involves *housing*. Here there are several related issues. Much urban housing is *substandard*, as this chapter's opening news story illustrated, and characterized by such problems as broken windows, malfunctioning heating systems, peeling lead paint, and insect infestation.

At the same time, adequate housing is *not affordable* for many city residents, as housing prices in cities can be very high, and usually higher than in rural areas, and the residents' incomes are typically very low. Cities thus have a great need for adequate, affordable housing. According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2012),US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2012). Affordable housing. Retrieved Janaury 31, 2012, from http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing. housing is affordable when a household pays no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing. Low-income households that must spend more than this benchmark may be unable to afford clothing, food, health care, and transportation. Yet 12 million US households pay more than half their annual incomes for housing.

Another housing issue concerns *racial segregation*. Although federal law prohibits segregated housing, cities across the country are nonetheless highly segregated by race, with many neighborhoods all or mostly African American. In a widely cited book, sociologists Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton (1993)*Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A.* (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. termed this situation "American apartheid." They said that these segregated neighborhoods result from a combination of several factors, including (a) "white flight" into suburbs, (b) informal—and often illegal—racially discriminatory actions that make it difficult for African Americans to move into white neighborhoods (such as real estate agents falsely telling black couples that no houses are available in a particular neighborhood), and (c) a general lack of income and other resources that makes it very difficult for African Americans to move from segregated neighborhoods.

Massey and Denton argued that residential segregation worsens the general circumstances in which many urban African Americans live. Several reasons account for this effect. As whites flee to the suburbs, the people left behind are much poorer. The tax base of cities suffers accordingly, and along with it the quality of city schools, human services, and other social functions. All these problems help keep the crime rate high and perhaps even raise it further. Because segregated neighborhoods are poor and crime ridden, businesses do not want to invest in them, and employment opportunities are meager. This fact worsens conditions in segregated neighborhoods even further. Consequently, concluded Massey and Denton, racial segregation helps to keep very poor people living in deep poverty and decaying neighborhoods.

Other research supports this conclusion. As a review of the research evidence summarized this situation, "Whether voluntary or involuntary, living in racially segregated neighborhoods has serious implications for the present and future mobility opportunities of those who are excluded from desirable areas. Where we live affects our proximity to good job opportunities, educational quality, and safety from crime (both as victim and as perpetrator), as well as the quality of our social networks" (*Charles, 2003, pp. 167–168*).*Charles, C. Z.* (2003). The dynamics of racial residential segregation. *Annual Review of Sociology, 29*, 167–207.

Against this pessimistic backdrop, it is worth noting that neighborhood segregation in US cities is somewhat less extensive now than four decades ago, thanks in part to fair-housing legislation enacted during the 1960s (Roberts, 2012).Roberts, S. (2012, January 31). Study of census results finds that residential segregation is down sharply. *New York Times*, p. A13. Despite this bit of progress, racial discrimination in the housing market continues (see Chapter 3), and most African Americans still live in neighborhoods that are heavily populated by African Americans and hence racially segregated (Logan & Stults, 2011).Logan, J. R., & Stults, B. J. (2011). *The persistence of segregation in the metropolis: New findings from the 2010 census*. Retrieved from *http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report2.pdf*. One demographer summarizes this "good news, bad news" situation

as follows: “There is now very much more black-white neighborhood integration than 40 years ago. Those of us who worked on segregation in the 1960s never anticipated such declines. Nevertheless, blacks remain considerably more segregated from whites than do Hispanics or Asians” (*Roberts, 2012, p. A13*).*Roberts,* S. (2012, January 31). Study of census results finds that residential segregation is down sharply. *New York Times*, p. A13.

To improve the socioeconomic status and living circumstances of African Americans, then, it is critical that residential segregation be reduced. Although Latinos live in segregated neighborhoods to a smaller degree, reducing segregation would also help their circumstances.

Children and Our Future

The Plight of Homeless Children

The faltering economy and wave of home foreclosures of the past few years resulted in what has been called a “national surge” of homeless children. The number of children who are homeless at least part of the year now reaches more than 1.6 million annually, equal to more than 2 percent of all American children. Because of their circumstances, they are at greater risk than their housed peers for hunger, asthma and other chronic health conditions, and stress and emotional problems.

They are at also greater risk for poor school performance. Amid the surge in children’s homelessness, the nation’s schools marshaled their resources to help their homeless children. An official with a private charity that helps poor families pointed out the obvious problem: “It’s hard enough going to school and growing up, but these kids also have to worry where they’ll be staying that night and whether they’ll eat. We see 8-year-olds telling Mom not to worry, don’t cry.”

School districts began sending special buses to homeless shelters, motels, and other settings for homeless children and their parents so that the children could continue attending their regular school. They also assigned social workers to help homeless families and other personnel to bring them school supplies, to drive them to look at shelters where they could live, and to perform other tasks. Federal legislation in fact requires schools to take extra measures to help homeless children, but school superintendents say that the federal government has not provided them the necessary funds to carry out the intent of the legislation. This lack of funding adds to their school districts’ already dire financial situation.

Charity Crowell, age 9, was just one of the hundreds of thousands of homeless children the schools were trying to help. During the semester her family became homeless, her grades fell to C’s from her usual high standard. One reason was that she had trouble staying awake in class. She explained why: “I couldn’t go to sleep, I was worried about all the stuff.”

Another homeless student, Destiny Corfee, age 11, became homeless after her parents lost both their jobs and then their house and had to move into their van. The family then parked the van at a Wal-Mart so that their children could go into the store and clean themselves before they went to school. Recalling life in the van, Destiny said, “I was embarrassed that maybe one of my friends might see me. I don’t want anybody to know that I was actually in there.”

Sources: Bassuk, Murphy, Coupe, Kenney, & Beach, 2011; Eckholm, 2009; Pelley, 2011 Bassuk, E., Murphy, C., Coupe, N. T., Kenney, R. R., & Beach, C. A. (2011, September 6). America’s youngest outcasts 2010. Needham, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness; Eckholm, E. (2009). Surge in homeless pupils strains schools. New York Times, p. A1; Pelley, S. (2011, March 6). Homeless children: The hard times generation. CBSnews.com. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/2003/2006/2060minutes/main20038927.shtml.

Homelessness

A related problem to housing is *homelessness*. In cities throughout the United States, men, women, and children live in the streets, abandoned vehicles or houses, cheap motels, or trailers, or living in someone else’s home temporarily. In cities with cold climates, homelessness can be life-threatening during the winter. But regardless of climate, the homeless are in a dire situation. Some research finds that one-third of the homeless are victims of violence or theft during the year; this rate of victimization is four times higher than that in the general population (Wenzel, Leake, & Gelberg, 2001).*Wenzel, S. L., Leake, B. D., & Gelberg, L. (2001)*. Risk factors for major violence among homeless women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 16, 739–752*. Homeless shelters provide some relief against crime, hunger, and the many other problems arising from homelessness, but too few shelters exist to meet the demand, and those that do exist are underfunded.

As should be clear, the problem of homelessness cannot be understood from the problem of poverty (see Chapter 2). Wealthy

families that lose their homes, as after a fire, usually can expect to find suitable temporary lodging and have their homeowners' insurance pay for a new home *(Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010).Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010).* The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 501–521. Poor families who can no longer pay their rent or mortgage payments face eviction and homelessness from which they find it difficult to recover.

It is rather difficult to determine the actual number of homeless persons *(Lee et al., 2010).Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010).* The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36, 501–521.* For example, if a family is living literally in the streets, we would all agree they are homeless. But if they are living in an abandoned building or in a cheap motel, should they be considered homeless? Even with an adequate definition of homelessness, it is difficult to actually count the number of homeless persons because it is very difficult to find them all. For example, if researchers count all the homeless people who use all the shelters in a city within a given time period, they still fail to count the homeless people who do not come to a shelter.

Keeping these definition and measurement problems in mind, it is nonetheless worth noting that the federal government estimates 650,000 Americans to be homeless on any given night, and 1.6 million to use a shelter or other transitional housing annually (*Lee et al., 2010).Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010).* The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36, 501–521.* Because people move in and out of homelessness, the number of people who are homeless at least part of the year is undoubtedly much higher. National survey evidence suggests that 14 percent of Americans have been homeless at least once in their lives, a figure much higher than that in most European nations *(Lee et al., 2010).Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010).* The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36, 501–521.*

The US Conference of Mayors (2011)US Conference of Mayors. (2011). *Hunger and homelessness survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities*. Washington, DC: Author. compiled information on homelessness in twenty-nine cities across the country. This large study yielded the following profile of homeless adults:

- 26% with severe mental illness
- 16% physically disabled
- 15% employed
- 13% victims of domestic violence
- 13% military veterans
- 4% HIV positive

As this profile suggests, the homeless population is at much greater risk for a variety of physical and mental health problems and other difficulties (*Lee et al., 2010).Lee, B. A., Tyler, K. A., & Wright, J. D. (2010).* The new homelessness revisited. *Annual Review of Sociology, 36*, 501–521. In particular, they are much more likely than housed Americans to experience hunger and food insecurity, and they are up to twenty times more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses such as hepatitis, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, and vascular disease. On the average, homeless adults die by their mid fifties, about twenty years shorter than the average lifespan of housed adults.

Traffic and Transportation

A fifth problem of city life is *traffic and transportation*. For better or worse, a fact of city life that arises from the defining feature of cities—many people living in a relatively small area—is that many people need to travel to get to work or school and to visit stores, museums, and any number of other leisure-time settings. Someone living in a rural area is probably able to drive ten miles to work in no longer than twenty minutes, but someone living in an urban area may easily take an hour or longer to travel the same distance after crawling along in traffic and stopping at light after light, or sitting and crawling along in long miles of traffic on an urban highway.

One manifestation of the traffic problem in cities is traffic *gridlock*, when traffic in all directions is barely moving or not moving at all. Gridlock occurs in urban areas, not rural ones, because of the sheer volume of traffic and the sheer number of intersections controlled by traffic lights or stop signs. Some cities have better public transportation than others, but congested traffic and time-consuming commuting are problems that urban residents experience every day (see Note 14.19 "Lessons from Other Societies").

Lessons from Other Societies

Making Drivers Miserable to Reduce Traffic Congestion

One of the costs of urbanization and modern life is traffic. Urban streets and highways are clogged with motor vehicles, and two

major consequences of so much traffic are air pollution and tens of thousands of deaths and injuries from vehicular accidents. To reduce city traffic, many European cities are trying to make driving so burdensome that commuters and other drivers will seek other forms of transportation. As a recent news story summarized this trend, these cities are "creating environments openly hostile to cars. The methods vary, but the mission is clear: to make car use expensive and just plain miserable enough to tilt drivers toward more environmentally friendly modes of transportation."

For example, Copenhagen, Munich, and Vienna have banned cars on many streets. Barcelona and Paris have replaced car lanes with bicycle lanes. London and Stockholm now require drivers entering their downtowns to pay a heavy toll charge. Many German cities restrict parts of their downtowns to cars that meet certain limits on carbon dioxide emission. Other European cities have sharply limited the number of parking spaces at shopping malls and other areas, and they have also eliminated on-street parking.

This European strategy to relieve traffic congestion differs greatly from the strategy the United States uses. As a European environmental official explained this difference, "In the United States, there has been much more of a tendency to adapt cities to accommodate driving. Here there has been more movement to make cities more livable for people, to get cities relatively free of cars."

Zurich, the largest city in Switzerland, has made special efforts to "torment drivers," said the news story, in the hope that drivers will seek other modes of transportation. For example, it added more traffic lights to cause more traffic delays, and it shortened the length of green lights and lengthened red lights. It also banned cars in one of its busiest downtown areas and elsewhere imposed speed limits of just a few miles an hour so that pedestrians are free to cross the street whenever they want. Although store owners in Zurich worried that they would lose business after their streets were closed to traffic, that effect has not happened because pedestrian traffic increased.

Observing traffic inching through hundreds of pedestrians and bicyclists, a Zurich traffic official was happy. "Driving is a stop-and-go experience," he said. "That's what we like! Our goal is to reconquer public space for pedestrians, not to make it easy for drivers."

In contrast, most American cities have tried to make it easier for drivers through such measures as synchronizing green lights and developing apps to help drivers find parking. However, these measures do not reduce the number of cars and do little to relieve traffic congestion. Instead, they tend to make it more likely that people will want to drive in the downtown areas. In contrast, Europe has tried to relieve traffic congestion by reducing the number of cars. Its model offers more potential for reducing the pollution and other problems caused by traffic, and it is one that the United States should adopt.

Source: Rosenthal, 2011Rosenthal, E. (2011, June 27). Across Europe, irking drivers is urban policy. New York Times, A1.

To help reduce traffic congestion, cities long ago developed various means of public transportation: buses, subways, and light rail. Some cities have better public transportation than other cities; Los Angeles has a notoriously bad reputation for the quality of its public transportation. Yet residents of cities with relatively good public transportation still experience severe traffic congestion, long commutes, and related problems: It is estimated that the average Chicago commuter spends seventy hours per year just sitting in traffic jams (Greenfield, 2011).Greenfield, B. (2011, September 23). America's most stressful cities. *Forbes*. *Retrieved from* *http://www.forbes.com/sites/bethgreenfield/2011/09/23/americas-most-stressful-cities*. Public transportation is sometimes faster than commuting by car or SUV but can still be very time consuming. People who take a bus or other public transportation can easily spend an hour or more, depending on how far they have to travel and the quality of their city's transportation system, traveling to a bus or train station, waiting for their transportation, making any necessary connections, and then traveling to their workplace.

One consequence of traffic congestion is stress. As one mental health expert observed, "Commuters can experience greater stress than fighter pilots in battle" (*Greenfield, 2011).Greenfield, B. (2011, September 23*). America's most stressful cities. *Forbes*. *Retrieved from* *http://www.forbes.com/sites/bethgreenfield/2011/09/23/americas-most-stressful-cities*. Another consequence is huge financial costs. Sitting in traffic wastes both time and fuel. The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), perhaps the leading scholarly unit for the study of traffic problems, estimates that traffic congestion costs the nation $115 billion annually in wasted time and fuel, or $713 for every auto commuter. Traffic congestion wastes 4.8 billion hours and 1.9 billion gallons of gasoline annually, an amount that would fill more than 200,000 gasoline tank trucks *(Schrank, Lomax, & Eisele, 2011).Schrank, D., Lomax, T., & Eisele, B. (2011). 2011 urban mobility report*. College Station, TX: Texas Transportation Institute. To relieve traffic congestion, TTI recommends significant investments of public funds in public transportation and more efficient designs in private and public transportation systems such as the greater use of electronic toll taking and better timing of traffic lights to increase traffic flow.

Air Pollution

Traffic congestion and the sheer amount of traffic in cities also contribute mightily to *air pollution*, which we consider here as a separate urban problem. Traffic creates pollution from motor vehicles' exhaust systems, and some cities have factories and other enterprises that also pollute. As a result, air quality in cities is substandard.

This poor air quality has significant health consequences, as it produces higher rates of respiratory and heart disease and higher mortality rates in cities *(Stylianou & Nicolich, 2009).Stylianou, M., & Nicolich, M. J. (2009)*. Cumulative effects and threshold levels in air pollution mortality: Data analysis of nine large US cities using the NMMAPS dataset. *Environmental Pollution, 157, 2216–2213*. Because even fairly low levels of air pollution can have these health effects *(Brunekreef, 2011),Brunekreef, B. (2011)*. Air pollution and health: Evidence, thresholds, standards. *Air Quality & Climate Change, 45(3), 35–37*. cities are unhealthy places and even deadly places for many people.

Both to increase their "carbon footprint" and to get some exercise, many urban residents bicycle in traffic to and from work or bicycle during their leisure time. Ironically, doing so subjects them to air pollution from the traffic surrounding them. This pollution has been shown to impair their cardiovascular and respiratory functioning (*Weichenthal et al., 2011).Weichenthal, S., Kulka, R., Dubeau, A., Martin, C., Wang, D., & Dales, R. (2011)*. Traffic-related air pollution and acute changes in heart rate variability and respiratory function in urban cyclists. *Environmental Health Perspectives, 119(10), 1373–1378*.

Because people of color disproportionately live in cities, urban air pollution affects them more than it affects white people. As Chapter 13 noted, this disparity is part of the larger problem of *environmental racism*. Cities are bad in many ways for their residents, and the air pollution of cities is bad for the health of their residents, who are overwhelmingly people of color in many cities.

If urban residents in general suffer health consequences from air pollution, these consequences are particularly serious and more common among children. Air pollution increases their rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases *(Patel et al., 2011).Patel, M. M., Quinn, J. W., Jung, K. H., Hoepner, L., Diaz, D., Perzanowski, M., et al. (2011)*. Traffic density and stationary sources of air pollution associated with wheeze, asthma, and immunoglobulin E from birth to age 5 years among New York City children. *Environmental Research, 111(8), 1222–1229*. These health problems in turn affect their school performance and can have other lifelong consequences.

Mental Health Problems

Our earlier discussions of crowding and of traffic congestion indicated that stress is one of the most important consequences of these two urban problems. Stress in turn impairs the mental health of urban residents. Much research finds that urban residents have worse mental health than rural residents. In particular, they have much higher levels of mood and anxiety disorders and of schizophrenia *(Lederbogen et al., 2011).Lederbogen, F., Kirsch, P., Haddad, L., Streit, F., Tost, H., Schuch, P., et al. (2011)*. City living and urban upbringing affect neural social stress processing in humans. *Nature, 474(7352), 498–501*

Public Education

Yet another issue for cities is the state of their *public education*. As Chapter 11 emphasized, many city schools are housed in old buildings that, like much city housing, are falling apart. City schools are notoriously underfunded and lack current textbooks, adequate science equipment, and other instructional materials.

People Making a Difference

Working to Achieve Social Justice

Nancy Radner has been a tireless advocate for the homeless and for social justice more generally. From 2006 to 2012, she served as the head of the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness, which works with eighty-four homeless service agencies and manages more than $50 million in state and federal funding for homeless services. The Alliance also gathers and distributes various kinds of information on homelessness and coordinates political, educational, and public relations events to increase understanding of homelessness.

Before joining the Chicago Alliance, Radner was a program officer at the Corporation for Supportive Housing, a national organization that engages in many kinds of efforts aimed at helping the homeless and other low-income individuals find affordable housing. She also served as a staff attorney at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, where she specialized in

housing law.

In 2012, Radner left the Chicago Alliance for another social justice position when she joined the Ounce of Prevention Fund as director of Illinois policy. The Ounce, as this Illinois organization calls itself, advocates for early childhood education and other programs and policies aimed at helping low-income children.

Many people who receive a law degree from a top law school, as Radner did, take a job in a large law firm or with a large corporation and spend their careers helping the wealthy. Instead, Radner chose to use her legal knowledge to help achieve social justice for the poor. She once said of her efforts to end homelessness, "People call us starry-eyed dreamers. But I actually say we're steely-eyed realists because ending homelessness is not hard. We know exactly how to do it. And what we're trying to do is create the political will to get it fully done. We can't prevent people from losing their housing. But what we can do is ensure that if that happens that there's a system in place to get them out of homelessness really quickly."

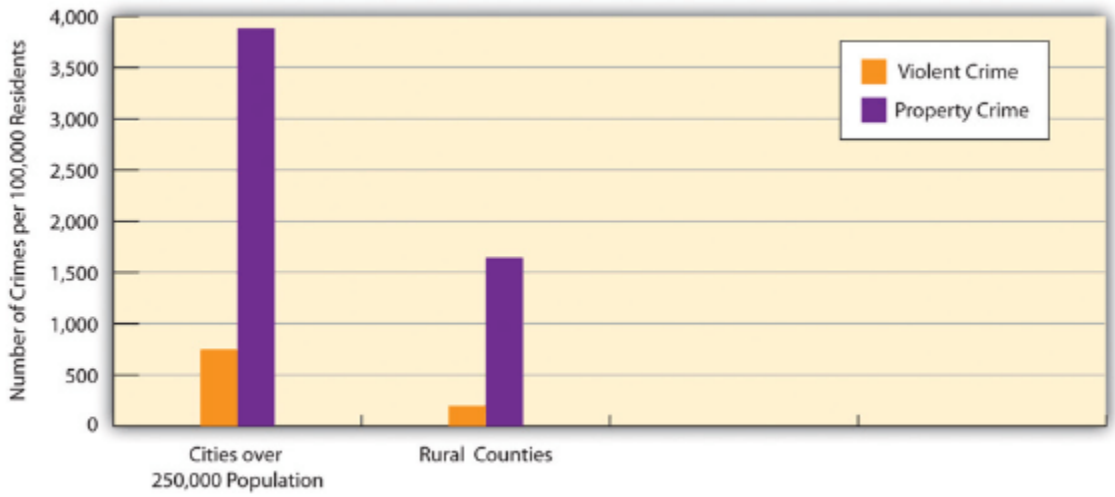
In working her entire career to help the poor and homeless, Nancy Radner has helped make a difference.

Sources: Kapos, 2012; Schorsch, 2010Kapos, S. (2012, January 31). Nancy Radner leaves poverty group's top job to direct policy at Ounce of Prevention. Chicago Business. Retrieved from http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20120131/BLOGS03/120139929/nancy-radner-leaves-poverty-groups-top-job-to-direct-policy-at-ounce-of-prevention; Schorsch, K. (2010, October 17). Alliance sees a path to ending homelessness. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-17/news/ct-met-holiday-giving-chicago-allianc20101017_1_end-homelessness-nancy-radner- homeless-system.

Crime

When many people think about the disadvantages of city life, they probably think about crime, a problem mentioned several times already in this chapter. Their fears are well grounded. Simply put, cities have much higher rates of violent and property crime than do small towns or rural areas (see Figure 14.6). For example, the violent crime rate (number of crimes per 100,000 residents) in 2010 was almost four times higher in the nation's largest cities than in its rural counties, while the property crime rate was more than twice as high.

Figure *Crime Rates in Large Cities and Rural Counties, 2010 (Number of Crimes per 100,000 Residents)*



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). Crime in the United States, 2010. Washington, DC: Author.

Why are city crime rates much higher? Because crime *rates* take the number of people into account, the answer is not simply that cities have more people than rural areas. Nor is the answer simply that cities have higher poverty than rural areas, because rural areas in fact have higher poverty overall, as we discuss later in this chapter. Rather, an important answer is that cities have higher residential crowding (or higher population density) and also more household crowding, as we saw earlier.

Several reasons explain why higher residential crowding produces higher crime rates. Consider violent crime. For a violent crime

to occur, it takes two people to tangle, so to speak. Criminals cannot kill, rob, or assault someone unless there is a “someone” to assault. In a city, there are many potential targets of violence all crowded together into a relatively small space, and thus many potential targets for criminals. In a rural area, potential targets are spread across miles, and a robber can go a long time without ever seeing a potential victim. Many assaults are also committed not by hardened criminals but by people (usually men) who get angry because of some perceived insult. In a city, there is a much greater chance for interaction to occur where someone might feel insulted, simply because there are so many people living within a small space and bars and other venues for them to congregate. A thousand people living on one city block are more likely to encounter each other than a thousand people living across thirty square miles in a rural area. Because there is more opportunity in a city for insults and other problems to occur that lead to violence, more violence occurs.

Cities also have more crowded households than rural areas, as we saw earlier, and these also make a difference for at least two reasons (Stark, 1987).Stark, R. (1987). Deviant places: A theory of the ecology of crime. *Criminology, 25*, 893–911. Crowded households are more stressful, and people who experience stress are more likely to be aggressive. Further, people (and perhaps especially young people) who live in crowded households often find they need to “get outside” to be away from the stress of the household and to have some “elbow room” and privacy. But once outside, they are that much more likely to interact with other people. Because, as we just noted, social interaction is a prerequisite for violence, household crowding indirectly contributes to violence for this reason.

Residential crowding and household crowding thus combine to produce higher crime rates in cities than in urban areas. City neighborhoods differ in their degree of both types of crowding, and those that have higher crowding rates should have higher crime rates, all else equal. In sociologist Rodney Stark’s (1987)Stark, R. (1987). Deviant places: A theory of the ecology of crime. *Criminology, 25*, 893–911. term, these neighborhoods are **deviant places** because their structural features, such as crowding, almost automatically contribute to higher crime rates regardless of who is living in these neighborhoods.

Another structural feature of cities helps to explain why they have a higher property crime rate than rural areas. Burglars obviously cannot burglarize a home unless there is a nearby home to burglarize. In cities, there are many homes to serve as potential targets for burglars; in rural areas, these homes are far and few between. Similarly, if someone wants to shoplift in a store or break into a store overnight, they can more easily do so in an urban area, where there are many stores, than in a rural area, where the landscape is filled with trees or fields rather than Walmarts or Best Buys.

Although Stark (1987)Stark, R. (1987). Deviant places: A theory of the ecology of crime. *Criminology, 25*, 893–911. coined the term *deviant places* to refer to urban neighborhoods that had certain features that contribute to high crime rates, his term can also refer to cities themselves. For the reasons just discussed, cities are inevitably much more likely than rural areas to be deviant places. The defining feature of a city—large numbers of people living in a small area—guarantees that cities will have higher crime rates than rural areas. Cities are deviant places precisely because they are cities.

Key Takeaways

- Major issues and problems confronting US cities today include those involving fiscal difficulties, crowding, housing, traffic, pollution, public education, and crime.
- Several of these problems stem directly from the fact that cities involve large numbers of people living in a relatively small amount of space.

For Your Review

1. If you were to work for a mayor of a large city to help address one specific problem in that city, which problem would you prefer to work on? Why?
2. Americans often seem to blame city residents for many of the problems affecting US cities today, including low academic achievement and rundown conditions in city schools and crime in the streets. Do you think it is fair to blame city residents for these problems, or are there other reasons for them? Explain your answer.

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8.5: Problems of Rural Life

Problems of Rural Life

Learning Objectives

1. List three positive aspects of rural life in the United States.
2. Describe two problems of rural life in the United States.

About one-fourth of the US population and more than 40 percent of the world population live in rural areas. As the previous section demonstrated, a dual view of cities exists: they have many advantages, but they also have many disadvantages. This dual view also applies to rural areas, but it does so in a sort of mirror image: The advantages of cities are often disadvantages for rural areas, and the disadvantages of cities are often advantages for rural areas.

On the positive side, and focusing on the United States, rural areas feature much more open space and less crowding. Their violent and property crime rates are much lower than those in large cities, as we have seen. The air is cleaner because there is less traffic and fewer factories and other facilities that emit pollution. Life in rural areas is thought to be slower paced, resulting in lower levels of anxiety and a greater sense of relaxation. For these and other reasons, rural residents exhibit better mental health on the average than do urban residents.

On the negative side, rural areas are often poor and lack the services, employment opportunities, and leisure activities that cities have. Teens often complain of boredom, and drug and alcohol use can be high (Johnson et al., 2008).Johnson, A. O., Mink, M. D., Harun, N., Moore, C. G., Martin, A. B., & Bennett, K. J. (2008). Violence and drug use in rural teens: National prevalence estimates from the 2003 youth risk behavior survey. *Journal of School Health, 78*(10), 554–561. Public transportation is often lacking, making it difficult for people without motor vehicles, who tend to have low incomes, to get to workplaces, stores, and other venues (Brown, 2008).Brown, D. M. (2008). *Public transportation on the move in rural America*. Washington, DC: Economic Research Service. Rural residents with motor vehicles often must still travel long distances to shop, to visit a doctor, to go to work, and to do any number of other activities. Many rural areas in the United States lack high-speed broadband, a necessity in today's economy. As a result, their economic development is impaired (Whitacre, 2010).Whitacre, B. E. (2010). The diffusion of Internet technologies to rural communities: A portrait of broadband supply and demand. *American Behavioral Scientist, 53*, 1283–1303. All these challenges contribute to special problems in rural areas. We now examine some of these problems

Rural Health

As Chapter 13 noted, rural areas often lack sufficient numbers of health care professionals, hospitals, and medical clinics. The National Rural Health Association (2012)National Rural Health Association. (2012). What's different about rural health care? Retrieved from http://www.ruralhealthweb.org/go/left/about-rural-health. points out that although one-fourth of the US population is rural, only one-tenth of physicians practice in rural areas. Urban areas have 134 physician specialists for every 100,000 residents, but rural areas have less than one-third this number.

Compounding these shortages are other problems. The first is that the small hospitals typical of rural areas generally lack high-quality care and equipment. A patient who needs heart bypass surgery, brain surgery, or other types of complex medical care is likely to have travel to an urban hospital far away.

The second problem is the long distances that ambulances and patients must travel. Because ambulances and other emergency vehicles must travel so far, rural residents with emergencies receive medical attention more slowly than their urban counterparts. The long distances that people must travel make it more difficult for patients with health problems to receive medical care. For example, a rural cancer patient who needs chemotherapy or radiation might have to travel two to three hours in each direction to receive treatment. Travel distances in rural areas also mean that rural residents are less likely than urban residents to receive preventive services such as physical examinations; screenings for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and colorectal cancer; and vaccinations for various illnesses and diseases.

In yet another problem, rural areas are also much more likely than urban areas to lack mental health care, drug abuse counseling

and programs, and other services related to physical and mental health.

For all these reasons, rural residents are more at risk than urban residents for certain health problems, including mortality. For example, only one-third of all motor vehicle accidents happen in rural areas, but two-thirds of all deaths from such accidents occur in rural areas. These problems help explain why rural residents are more likely than urban residents to report being in only fair or poor health in government surveys (Bennett, Olatosi, & Probst, 2009).Bennett, K. J., Olatosi, B., & Probst, J. C. (2009). *Health disparities: A rural-urban chartbook*. Columbia, SC: South Carolina Rural Health Research Center.

An additional health problem in rural areas arises from the age profile of their populations. Compared to urban areas, rural areas have an "aging population," or a greater percentage of adults aged 65 and older. This fact adds to the health-care problems that rural areas must address.

Rural Schools and Education

The discussion of education in Chapter 11 focused mostly on urban schools. Many of the problems discussed there also apply to rural schools. However, rural schools often face hurdles that urban and suburban schools are much less likely to encounter (Center for Rural Policy and Development, 2009).Center for Rural Policy and Development. (2009). *A region apart: A look at challenges and strategies for rural K–12 schools*. Saint Peter, MN: Center for Rural Policy and Development.

First, because rural areas have been losing population, they have been experiencing declining school enrollment and school closings. When a school does close, teachers and other school employees have lost their jobs, and students have to rather suddenly attend a new school that is usually farther from their home than their former school.

Second, rural populations are generally older than urban populations, as mentioned earlier, and have a greater percentage of retired adults. Therefore, rural areas' per-capita income and sales tax revenue are lower than that for urban and suburban areas, and this lower revenue makes the funding of public schools more challenging.

Third, rural families live relatively far from the public schools, and the schools are relatively far from each other. As a result, rural school districts have considerable expenses for transporting children to and from school, after-school athletic events, and other activities.

Finally, it is often difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers in rural areas. This problem has forced some rural school districts to offer hiring bonuses or housing assistance to staff their schools.

Rural Poverty

Although many US cities have high poverty rates, the poverty rate is actually somewhat higher overall in rural areas than in urban areas. In 2010, 16.5 percent of rural residents were classified as officially poor, compared to 14.9 percent of urban residents. However, the poverty rate in the nation's largest cities was higher yet at 19.7 percent. The number of poor rural residents was almost 8 million, while the number of poor urban residents (reflecting the fact that most Americans live in urban areas) was almost 36 million (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.

Rural poverty is thought to be more persistent than urban poverty because of the factors that contribute to its high rate. These factors include the out-migration of young, highly skilled workers; the lack of industrial jobs that typically have been higher paying than agricultural jobs; and limited opportunities for the high-paying jobs of the information age. Biotech companies, electronics companies, and other symbols of the information age are hardly ever found in the nation's rural areas. Instead, they locate themselves in or near urban areas, in which are found the universities, masses of people, and other necessary aspects these companies need to succeed.

Compounding the general problem of poverty, rural areas are also more likely than nonrural areas to lack human services programs to help the poor, disabled, elderly, and other people in need of aid (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2011).National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services. (2011). *The 2011 report to the secretary: Rural health and human services issues*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Because rural towns are so small, they often cannot afford services such as soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and Meals on Wheels, and thus must rely on services located in other towns. Yet rural towns are often far from each other, making it difficult and expensive for

rural residents to obtain the services they need. For example, a Meals on Wheels program in an urban area may travel just a few miles and serve dozens of people, while it may have to travel more than one hundred miles in a rural area and serve only a few people. Adding to this problem is the strong sense in many rural areas that individuals should be strong enough to fend for themselves and not accept government help. Even when services are available, some people who need them decline to take advantage of them because of pride and shame.

Domestic Violence

One of the sad facts of rural life is domestic violence. This form of violence is certainly common in urban areas, but the defining feature of rural areas—a relatively low number of people living in a relatively broad area—creates several problems for victims of domestic violence, most of them women (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009).DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2009). *Dangerous exits: Escaping abusive relationships in rural America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

For example, these women often find it difficult to get help and/or to leave their abusers wherever they live. However, it is often even more difficult for rural women to do so. Rural police may be unenlightened about domestic violence and may even know the abuser; for either reason, they may not consider his violence a crime, and abused women may be that much more reluctant to tell the police about their abuse.

Another problem concerns the availability of battered women's shelters, which provide invaluable services for abused women and any children they might have. These shelters tend to be found in cities, which still do not have nearly enough shelters. Rural areas generally lack shelters, and any shelters that exist are often long distances from the homes of abused women. In rural areas, abused women are also more likely than their urban counterparts to lack neighbors and friends to whom they can turn for support, or at least to live farther from these individuals. For all these reasons, rural women who experience domestic violence face a problem that has been called "dangerous exits"

(DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009).DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2009). Dangerous exits: Escaping abusive relationships in rural America. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Key Takeaways

- Like cities, rural areas also have their advantages and disadvantages. They can be beautiful, relaxing places in which to live, but they also lack many of the cultural advantages and other amenities that cities feature.
- Rural areas are characterized by sparse populations and long distances that people must travel. These conditions make it difficult to provide adequate public transportation and various kinds of human services. The poverty of many rural areas aggravates these problems.

For Your Review

1. If you had your choice, would you want to live in a large city, medium-sized city, small town, or rural area? Explain your answer.
2. Americans often seem to blame city residents for many of the problems affecting US cities today, including low academic achievement, rundown conditions in city schools, and crime in the streets. Do you think it is fair to blame city residents for these problems, or are there other reasons for them? Explain your answer.

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8.6: Improving Urban and Rural Life

Improving Urban and Rural Life

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the value of a sociological perspective for addressing urban housing and crowding problems.

Many urban problems are not, strictly speaking, sociological or other social science problems. For example, traffic congestion is arguably more of an engineering issue than a sociological issue, even if traffic congestion has many social consequences. Other urban problems are problems discussed in previous chapters that disproportionately affect urban areas. For example, crime is more common in urban areas than elsewhere, and racial and ethnic inequality is much more of an issue in urban areas than rural areas because of the concentration of people of color in our cities. Previous chapters have discussed such problems in some detail, and the strategies suggested in those chapters need not be discussed again here.

Still other urban issues exist that this chapter was the first to present. Two of these involve crowding and housing. Cities are certainly crowded, and some parts of cities are especially crowded. Housing is expensive, and many urban residents live in dilapidated, substandard housing. Here again a sociological perspective offers some insight, as it reminds us that these problems are intimately related to inequalities of social class, race and ethnicity, and gender. Although it is critical to provide adequate, affordable housing to city residents, it is also important to remember that these various social inequalities affect who is in most need of such housing. Ultimately, strategies aimed at providing affordable housing will not succeed unless they recognize the importance of these social inequalities and unless other efforts reduce or eliminate these inequalities. Racial residential segregation also remains a serious problem in our nation's urban centers, and sociologists have repeatedly shown that residential segregation contributes to many of the problems that urban African Americans experience. Reducing such segregation must be a fundamental goal of any strategy to help American cities.

Although traffic congestion is largely an engineering issue, engineers do not operate in a social vacuum. People will be more likely to drive in a city when it is easier for them to drive, and less likely to drive when it is more difficult for them to drive. As the Note 14.19 "Lessons from Other Societies" box illustrated, European cities have done much more than US cities to reduce traffic congestion and thus improve air quality in their cities. Americans may resist the measures the European nations have taken, but the success of these measures suggests that the United States should also use them to deal with the many problems associated with traffic congestion.

Certain problems discussed in previous chapters are also more urgent in rural areas. In particular, the isolation and long distances of rural areas poses special challenges for the provision of adequate health care and for addressing the needs of victims of domestic violence. Ironically, some of the very features that make rural areas so attractive to many people also make them difficult settings for other people. In view of this context, it is essential that public transportation in rural areas be expanded, and that the many types of medical care and social and legal services commonly found in urban areas also be expanded. Although rural residents undoubtedly do not expect to find the range of care and services available to their urban counterparts, they should not have to suffer from a lack of adequate care and services.

Key Takeaway

- Many of the problems of urban and rural life were addressed in earlier chapters. The strategies discussed in these chapters to address these problems thus also apply to the problems examined in this chapter.
- Many urban problems are associated with poverty and racial discrimination. Reducing these problems should help relieve urban problems.
- The characteristics of rural areas that often make them so appealing also lead to certain problems that are especially urgent in rural areas.

For You Review

1. How do you think American cities should try, if at all, to reduce traffic congestion?
2. Are urban problems worse than rural problems, or are rural problems worse than urban problems? Explain your answer.

End-of-Section Material

Summary

1. Urbanization is a consequence of population growth. Cities first developed in ancient times after the rise of horticultural and pastoral societies and “took off” during the Industrial Revolution as people moved to be near factories. Urbanization led to many social changes then and continues today to affect society.
2. Functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism offer varied understandings of urbanization. Functionalists have a mixed view of urbanization, while conflict theorists hold a negative view.
3. Cities face many problems, several of which reflect the fact that cities feature large numbers of people living within a relatively small space. Among the most serious of these problems are residential crowding, substandard and racially segregated housing, heavy traffic and great amounts of air pollution, and high crime rates.
4. Rural areas face many challenges that result from their sparse populations and the great distances that people must often travel. Among other problems, rural areas have a lack of economic opportunities in today’s information age and a general lack of various kinds of human services.

Using What You Know

After graduating from college, you are now working as an entry-level assistant to the mayor of a medium-sized city. You are aware that many city residents are unhappy with the quality of housing in their neighborhoods. The mayor thinks the city has little, if any, money to help improve the city’s housing, and also thinks that the housing problem is not nearly as bad as the city’s residents seem to think. The mayor asks your opinion about this issue. Based on what you have learned in this chapter and perhaps in other coursework and reading, what do you tell the mayor?

What You Can Do

To help deal with the urban and rural problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Volunteer at a social service agency in your community.
2. Start or join a Habitat for Humanity or other group that builds homes for low-income families.
3. Attend local city council meetings to learn about budgetary issues so that you will be in a more knowledgeable position to help your community.

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8.7: Population and the Environment

Population and the Environment

Social Problems in the News

“India’s Air the World’s Unhealthiest,” the headline said. A study by researchers at Columbia and Yale Universities ranked India as having the worst air pollution on the planet. India’s levels of one component of air pollution, fine particulate matter, were almost five times higher than the safe level for humans. The head of an Indian environmental organization attributed her country’s air problem to its numbers of motor vehicles. Although India has fewer vehicles per capita than wealthy nations, its vehicles are very polluting, and it still has a very high number of vehicles because of its huge population. Adding that India has very weak emission standards, she called for stronger standards: “We need to take big steps or the problem will overwhelm us.”

Source: Timmons & Vyawahare, 2012Timmons, H., & Vyawahare, M. (2012, February 1). India’s air the world’s unhealthiest, study says. New York Times. Retrieved from http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/2002/2001/indias-air-the-worlds-unhealthiest-study-says.

This news story reminds us that air pollution is a worldwide problem. The story also reminds us that a major reason for India’s air pollution problem is its sheer population size, as India ranks second in the world with 1.2 billion people, just behind China. As India’s example suggests, population and environmental problems are often intertwined.

This chapter examines problems such as food scarcity and climate change associated with population growth and the environment. We will see that these problems raise complex issues without easy solutions, but we will also see that these are urgent problems that must be addressed. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the fate of the earth depends on adequate solutions to these problems.

Sociological Perspectives on Population and the Environment

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the perspectives that functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism offer on population and the environment.

As usual, the major sociological perspectives offer insights that help us understand issues relating to population growth and to the environment. Table 15.1 summarizes their assumptions.

Table 15.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical Perspective	Major Assumptions
Funtionalism	Population and the environments affect each other. Normal population growth is essential for any society, but population growth that is too great too little leads to various problems. Environmental problems are to be expected in an industrial society, but severe environmental problems are dysfunctionals.
Conflict Theory	Population growth is not a serious problems because the world has sufficient food and other resources, all of which must to be more equitably distributed. The practices of multinational corporation and weak regulation of these practices account for many environment problems.
Symbolic Interactionism	People have certain perceptions and understanding of population and environmental issues. Their social backgrounds affect these perceptions, which are important to appreciate if population and environmental problems are to be addressed.

Functionalism

Functionalism considers population growth and its various components (birth, death, and migration) as normal and essential processes for any society. A society certainly cannot survive if it loses members, but it can thrive only if it grows so that it can meet future challenges. Functionalism also considers pollution and other environmental problems to be an inevitable consequence of today's society, but it assumes that environmental problems that are too severe are certainly dysfunctional for society.

The reasons for the importance of population growth depend on the type of a society's economy. For example, agricultural and other nonindustrial societies need high birth rates to counteract their high death rates. Industrial societies have lower death rates, but they still need to be able to hire younger workers as older workers retire, while new industries need to be able to count on hiring enough young workers with the skills and knowledge these industries require. However, population growth that is too rapid and severe can be dysfunctional for a society. Such growth creates crowding and can use up valuable resources such as food, and it can also harm the environment.

As this discussion suggests, functionalism emphasizes how the population and environment affect each other. Population growth leads to certain environmental problems, as we shall see, while environmental problems have important consequences for the populations for whole nations and even the world. At the same time, several industrial nations today actually do not have enough population growth to provide sufficient numbers of younger workers to replace retiring workers and to maintain their tax bases. While too much population growth causes many problems, then, too little population growth also causes problems.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory does not consider population growth to be a serious problem. Instead, it assumes that the earth has enough food and other resources to meet the needs of its growing population. To the extent that food shortages and other problems meeting these needs exist, these problems reflect decisions by economic and political elites in poor nations to deprive their peoples of food and other resources; they also reflect operations by multinational corporations that deprive these nations of their natural resources. If population growth is a problem, then, it is a problem not because there is a lack of food and other resources, but rather because these resources are not distributed fairly. To the extent this is true, efforts to satisfy the world's need for food and other resources should focus on distributing these resources more equitably rather than on limiting population growth.

At the same time, conflict theory recognizes that many poor nations still have population growth that is more than desirable. The theory blames this growth on the failure of these nations' governments to make contraceptives readily available and to do everything possible to increase women's education and independence (which both reduce their birth rates).

In regard to a particular population issue we will discuss (immigration), conflict theory emphasizes the role played by racial and ethnic prejudice in popular views on immigration. It generally favors loosening restrictions on immigration into the United States and making it possible for undocumented immigrants to become US citizens if they so desire.

Conflict theory also assumes that the world's environmental problems are not inevitable and instead arise from two related sources. First, multinational corporations engage in practices that pollute the air, water, and ground. Second, the United States and other governments fail to have strong regulations to limit corporate pollution, and they fail to adequately enforce the regulations they do have.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism offers four kinds of understandings of population and environmental problems. First, it seeks to understand why people engage or do not engage in activities related to population growth and other problems (e.g., the use of contraception) and to environmental problems (e.g., recycling). In order to address population growth and environmental problems, it is important to understand why people become involved, or fail to become involved, in various activities related to these problems.

Second, it emphasizes people's perceptions of population and environmental problems. To the extent that public attitudes play a key role in the persistence of these problems, it is important to know the reasons for public views on these problems so that efforts to address the problems may be better focused.

Next, symbolic interactionism assumes that population and environmental problems are to some extent social constructions (see Chapter 1), as these problems do not come to be considered *social problems* unless sufficient numbers of people and/or

influential organizations in the public and private sectors recognize them as problems. For example, lead was a serious health problem long before the US government banned it in paint in 1977 and in gasoline in 1990. As early as the first few years of the twentieth century, scientists were calling attention to the toxic properties of lead paint and more generally of lead itself. Still, lead was added to gasoline in 1922 to raise octane levels. Despite growing evidence over the next few decades of lead's toxic qualities, various industries continued to say that lead was safe for the general public (Michaels, 2008).Michaels, D. (2008). *Doubt is their product: How industry's assault on science threatens your health*. New York, NY Oxford University Press. The banning of lead was ultimately due to the efforts of environmental groups and to the fact that the growing amount of scientific evidence of lead's dangers became overwhelming

Finally, symbolic interactionism emphasizes that people from different social backgrounds and from different cultures may have different understandings of population issues and of environmental issues. For example, someone who grows up in a rural area may consider even a small city to be incredibly crowded, while someone who grows up in a large city may consider a small city to be too tiny and lacking in museums, restaurants, and other amenities that large cities offer.

Key Takeaways

1. Functionalism recognizes the problems arising from population growth that is too rapid, but disagrees on the extent to which overpopulation is a serious problem.
2. Conflict theory attributes world hunger to inequalities in the distribution of food rather than to overpopulation.
3. Symbolic interactionism considers people's perceptions and activities regarding population (e.g., contraception) and the environment.

For Your Review

1. Which of the three major perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, or symbolic interactionism—seems to have the best approach in how it understands population and environmental issues? Explain your answer.

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8.8: Population

Population

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the central concepts of the study of demography.
2. Understand demographic transition theory and how it compares with the views of Thomas Malthus.
3. Explain why some experts feel that world hunger does not result from overpopulation.
4. Provide examples of how US history is marked by anti-immigrant prejudice.

Population change often has weighty consequences throughout a society. As we think about population change, we usually think about and worry about population growth, but population decline is also a concern. Consider the experience of Michigan (Dzwonkowski, 2010).Dzwonkowski, R. (2010, September 19). New leaders can't shrink from Michigan realities. *Detroit Free Press*, p. 2A. Like several other northern states, Michigan has lost population during the past few decades. Its birth rate has declined by 21 percent from 1990, and elementary school populations dropped as a result. Several schools lost so many students that they had to close, and others are in danger of closing. In addition, many more people have been moving out of Michigan than moving in. Because many of those moving out are young, college-educated adults, they take with them hundreds of millions of dollars in paychecks away from Michigan's economy and tax revenue base. They also leave behind empty houses and apartments that help depress the state's real estate market. Because of the loss of younger residents from the declining birth rate and out-migration, Michigan's population has become older on the average. This shift means that there is now a greater percentage of residents in their older years who need state services.

Among other consequences, then, Michigan's population decline has affected its economy, educational system, and services for its older residents. While Michigan and other states are shrinking, states in the southern and western regions of the nation are growing, with their large cities becoming even larger. This population growth also has consequences. For example, schools become more crowded, pressuring communities to hire more teachers and either enlarge existing schools or build new ones. The population growth also strains hospitals, social services, and many other sectors of society.

This brief discussion of US cities underscores the various problems arising from population growth and decline. These are not just American problems, as they play out across the world. The remainder of this section introduces the study of population and then examines population problems in greater depth.

The Study of Population

We have commented that population change is an important source of other changes in society. The study of population is so significant that it occupies a special subfield within sociology called **demography**. To be more precise, demography is the study of changes in the size and composition of population. It encompasses several concepts: fertility and birth rates, mortality and death rates, and migration. Let's look at each of these briefly.

Fertility and Birth Rates

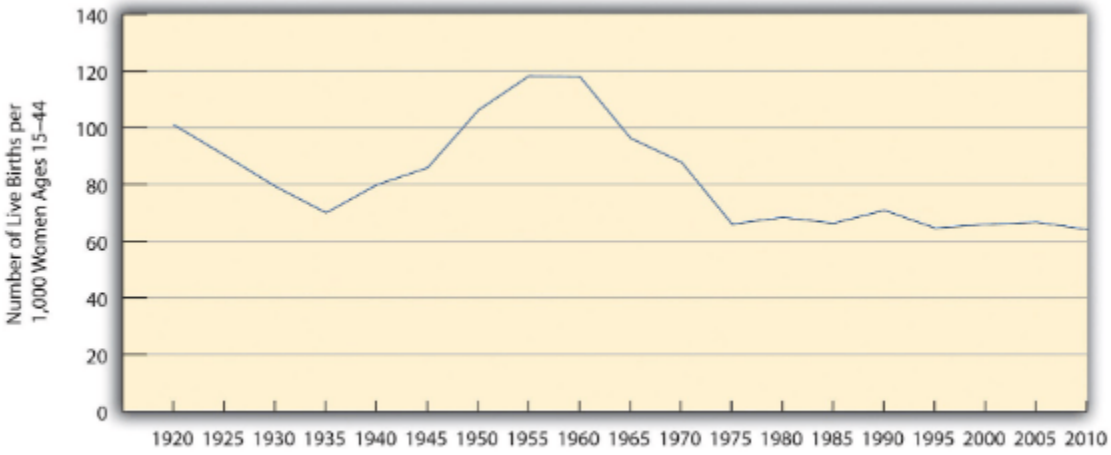
Fertility refers to the number of live births. Demographers use several measures of fertility. One measure is the **crude birth rate**, or the number of live births for every 1,000 people in a population in a given year. We call this a "crude" birth rate because the population component consists of the total population, not just the number of women or even the number of women of childbearing age (commonly considered 15–44 years).

A second measure is the **general fertility rate** (also just called the *fertility rate* or *birth rate*), or the number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15–44 (i.e., of childbearing age). The US general fertility rate for 2010 was about 64.7 (i.e., 64.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15–44) (Sutton & Hamilton, 2011).Sutton, P. D., & Hamilton, B. E. (2011). *Recent trends in births and fertility rates through 2010*. Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A third measure is the **total fertility rate**, or the number of children an average woman is expected to have in her lifetime (taking into account that some women have more children and some women have fewer or no children). This measure often appears in the news media and is more easily understood by the public than either of the first two measures. In 2010, the US total fertility rate was about 1.93 (or 1,930 births for every 1,000 women) (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2011).Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., & Ventura, S. J. (2011). Births: Preliminary data for 2010. *National Vital Statistics Reports, 60*(2), 1–14.

As Figure 15.1 indicates, the US general fertility rate has changed a lot since 1920, dropping from 101 (per 1,000 women aged 15–44) in 1920 to 70 in 1935, during the Great Depression, before rising afterward until 1955. (Note the very sharp increase from 1945 to 1955, as the post–World War II baby boom began.) The fertility rate then fell steadily after 1960 until the 1970s but has remained rather steady since then, fluctuating only slightly between 65 and 70 per 1,000 women aged 15–44.

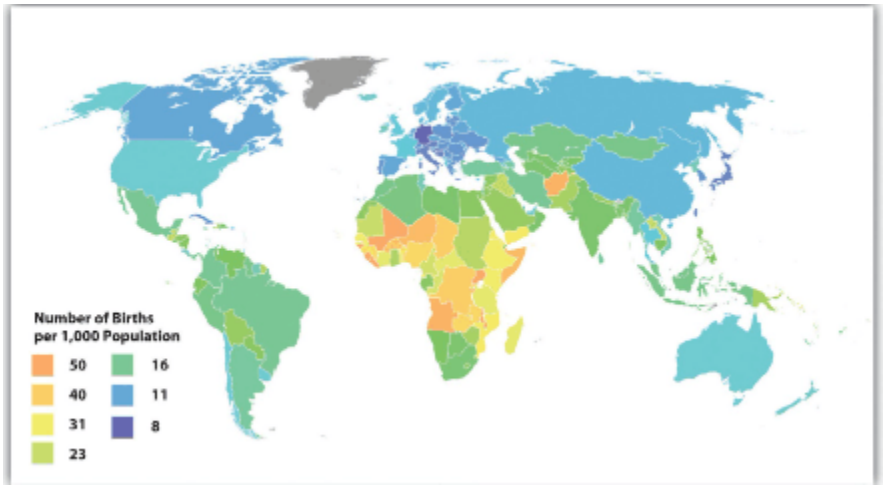
Figure US General Fertility Rate, 1920–2010



Sources: Data from Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., & Ventura, S. J. (2011). Births: Preliminary data for 2010. National Vital Statistics Reports, 60(2), 1–13; Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Sutton, P. D., Ventura, S. J., Menacker, F., Kirmeyer, S., & Mathews, T. J. (2009). Births: Final data for 2006. National Vital Statistics Reports, 57(7), 1–102; US Census Bureau. (1951). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1951. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

Fertility rates differ around the world and are especially high in poor nations (see Figure 15.2). Demographers identify several reasons for these high rates (Weeks, 2012).Weeks, J. R. (2012). *Population: An introduction to concepts and issues* (11th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Figure *Crude Birth Rates around the World, 2008 (Number of Births per 1,000 Population)*



Source: Adapted from http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Birth_rate_figures_for_countries.PNG.

First, poor nations are usually agricultural ones. In agricultural societies, children are an important economic resource, as a family will be more productive if it has more children. This means that families will ordinarily try to have as many children as possible. Second, infant and child mortality rates are high in these nations. Because parents realize that one or more of their children may die before adulthood, they have more children to make up for the anticipated deaths.

A third reason is that many parents in low-income nations prefer sons to daughters, and, if a daughter is born, they try again for a son. Fourth, traditional gender roles are often very strong in poor nations, and these roles include the belief that women should be wives and mothers above all. With this ideology in place, it is not surprising that women will have several children. Finally, contraception is uncommon in poor nations. Without contraception, many more pregnancies and births certainly occur. For all these reasons, then, fertility is much higher in poor nations than in rich nations.



Poor nations have higher birth rates for several reasons. One reason is the agricultural economies typical of these nations. In these economies, children are an important economic resource, and families will ordinarily try to have as many children as possible.

Image courtesy of R. Kalden, Voice of America, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Children_near_renovation_of_Jawaharlal_Nehru_Stadium_in_New_Delhi_2010-02-24.JPG

Mortality and Death Rates

Mortality is the flip side of fertility and refers to the number of deaths. Demographers measure it with the **crude death rate**, the number of deaths for every 1,000 people in a population in a given year. We call this a "crude" death rate because the population component consists of the total population and does not take its age distribution into account. All things equal, a society with a higher proportion of older people should have a higher crude death rate. Demographers often calculate *age-adjusted* death rates that adjust for a population's age distribution.

Migration

Another important demographic concept is **migration**, the movement of people into and out of specific regions. Since the dawn of human history, people have migrated in search of a better life, and many have been forced to migrate by ethnic conflict or the slave trade.

Several classifications of migration exist. When people move into a region, we call it *in-migration*, or *immigration*; when they move out of a region, we call it *out-migration*, or *emigration*. The *in-migration rate* is the number of people moving into a region for every 1,000 people in the region, while the *out-migration rate* is the number of people moving from the region for every 1,000 people. The difference between the two is the *net migration rate* (in-migration minus out-migration). Recalling our earlier discussion. Michigan has had a net migration of less than zero, as its out-migration has exceeded its in-migration.

Migration can also be either domestic or international in scope. *Domestic migration* happens within a country's national borders, as when retired people from the northeastern United States move to Florida or the Southwest. *International migration* happens

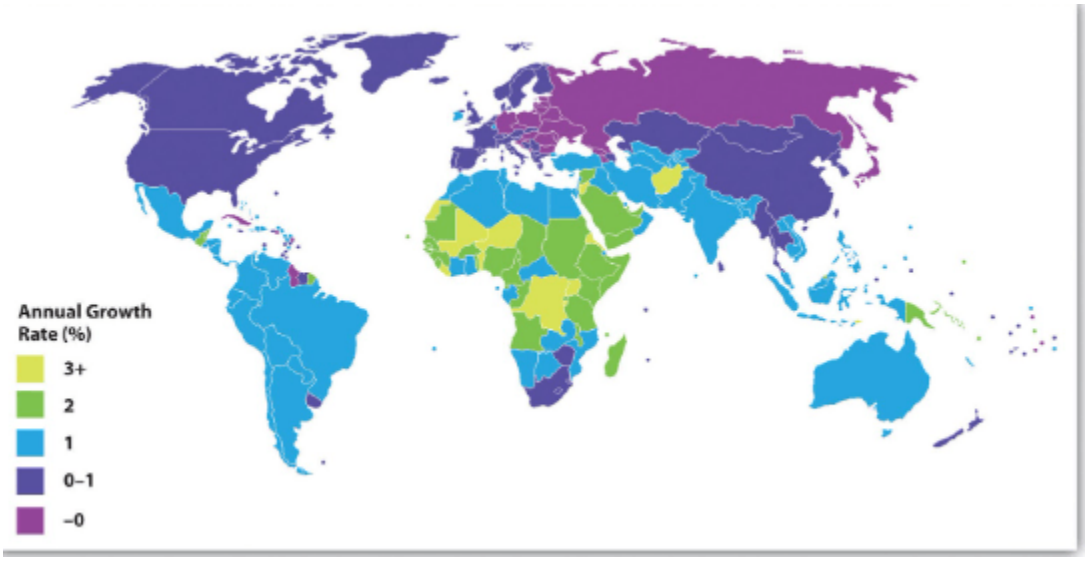
across national borders. When international immigration is heavy, the effect on population growth and other aspects of national life can be significant, as can increased prejudice against the new immigrants. Domestic migration can also have a large impact. The great migration of African Americans from the South into northern cities during the first half of the twentieth century changed many aspects of those cities' lives (Wilkerson, 2011).Wilkerson, I. (2011). *The warmth of other suns: The epic story of America's great migration* New York, NY: Vintage Books. Meanwhile, the movement during the past few decades of northerners into the South and Southwest also had quite an impact: The housing market initially exploded, for example, and traffic increased.

Population Growth and Decline

Now that you are familiar with some basic demographic concepts, we can discuss population change in more detail. Three of the factors just discussed determine changes in population size: fertility (crude birth rate), mortality (crude death rate), and net migration. The **natural growth rate** is simply the difference between the crude birth rate and the crude death rate. The US natural growth rate is about 0.6 percent (or 6 per 1,000 people) per year. When immigration is also taken into account, the total population growth rate has been almost 1.0 percent per year (Rosenberg, 2012).Rosenberg, M. (2012). Population growth rates. Retrieved from http://geography.about.com/od/populationgeography/a/populationgrow.htm.

Figure 15.3 depicts the annual population growth rate (including both natural growth and net migration) of all the nations in the world. Note that many African nations are growing by at least 3 percent per year or more, while most European nations are growing by much less than 1 percent or are even losing population, as discussed earlier. Overall, the world population is growing by about 80 million people annually *(Population Reference Bureau, 2012).Population Reference Bureau. (2012). World population growth, 1950–2050. Retrieved February 4, 2012, from http://www.prb.org/Educators/TeachersGuides/HumanPopulation/PopulationGrowth.aspx*.

Figure *International Annual Population Growth Rates (%), 2005–2010*

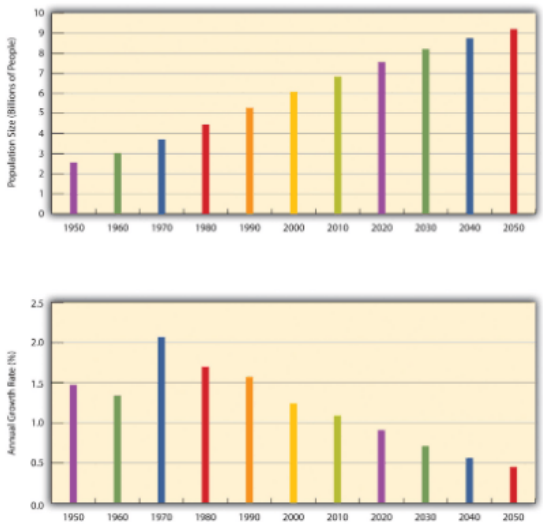


Source: Adapted from http://lt.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaizdas:Population_growth_rate_world_2005-2010_UN.PNG.

To determine how long it takes for a nation to double its population size, divide the number 70 by its population growth rate. For example, if a nation has an annual growth rate of 3 percent, it takes about 23.3 years (70 ÷ 3) for that nation's population size to double. As you can see from the map in Figure 15.3, several nations will see their population size double in this time span if their annual growth continues at its present rate. For these nations, population growth will be a serious problem if food and other resources are not adequately distributed.

Demographers use their knowledge of fertility, mortality, and migration trends to make *projections* about population growth and decline several decades into the future. Coupled with our knowledge of past population sizes, these projections allow us to understand population trends over many generations. One clear pattern emerges from the study of population growth. When a society is small, population growth is slow because there are relatively few adults to procreate. But as the number of people grows over time, so does the number of adults. More and more procreation thus occurs every single generation, and population growth then soars in a virtual explosion.

We saw evidence of this pattern when we looked at world population growth. When agricultural societies developed some 12,000 years ago, only about 8 million people occupied the planet. This number had reached about 300 million about 2,100 years ago, and by the fifteenth century it was still only about 500 million. It finally reached 1 billion by about 1850; by 1950, only a century later, it had doubled to 2 billion. Just fifty years later, it tripled to more than 6.8 billion, and it is projected to reach more than 9 billion by 2050 (see Figure 15.4) and 10 billion by 2100 (Gillis & Dugger, 2011).Gillis, J., & Dugger, C. W. (2011, May 4). UN forecasts 10.1 million by century's end. *New York Time*s, p. A1.

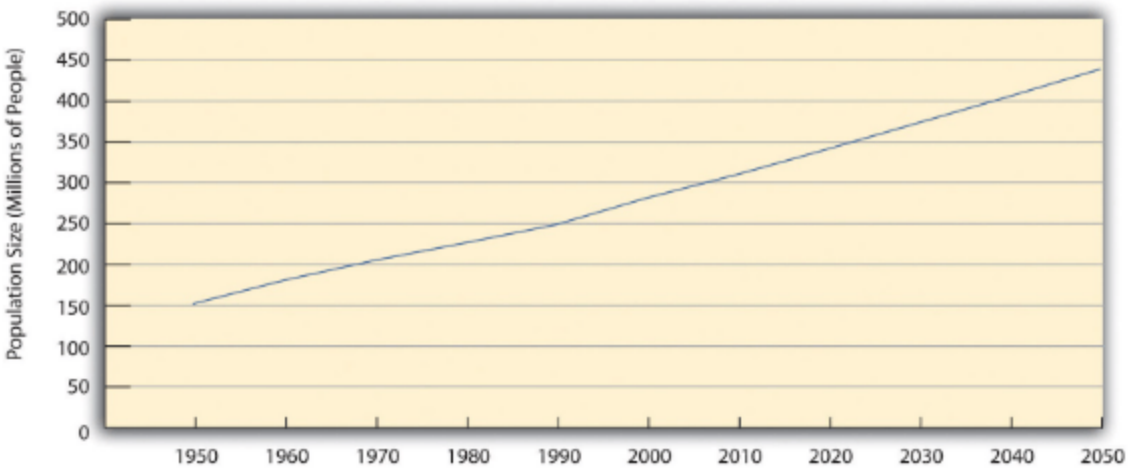


Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2012). Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab.

Eventually, however, population growth begins to level off after exploding, as explained by *demographic transition theory*, discussed later. We see this in the bottom half of Figure 15.4, which shows the average annual growth rate for the world's population. This rate has declined over the last few decades and is projected to further decline over the next four decades. This means that while the world's population will continue to grow during the foreseeable future, it will grow by a smaller rate as time goes by. As Figure 15.3 suggested, the growth that does occur will be concentrated in the poor nations in Africa and some other parts of the world. Still, even in these nations the average number of children a woman has in her lifetime dropped from six a generation ago to about three today.

Past and projected sizes of the US population appear in Figure 15.5. The US population is expected to number about 440 million people by 2050.

Figure *Past and Projected Size of the US Population, 1950–2050 (in Millions)*



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.

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8.9: Views of Population Growth

Views of Population Growth



Thomas Malthus, an English economist who lived about two hundred years ago, wrote that population increases geometrically while food production increases only arithmetically. These understandings led him to predict mass starvation.

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Robert_Malthus.jpg.

The numbers just discussed show that the size of the United States and world populations has increased tremendously in just a few centuries. Not surprisingly, people during this time have worried about population growth and specifically overpopulation. One of the first to warn about population growth was Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), an English economist, who said that population increases *geometrically* (2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024...). If you expand this list of numbers, you will see that they soon become overwhelmingly large in just a few more "generations." Malthus (1798/1926)Malthus, T. R. (1926). *First essay on population*. London, United Kingdom: Macmillan. (Oringal work published 1798) said that food production increases only *arithmetically* (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...) and thus could not hope to keep up with the population increase, and he predicted that mass starvation would be the dire result.

During the 1970s, population growth became a major issue in the United States and some other nations. *Zero population growth*, or ZPG, was a slogan often heard. There was much concern over the rapidly growing population in the United States and, especially, around the world, and there was fear that our "small planet" could not support massive increases in the number of people (Ehrlich, 1969).Ehrlich, P. R. (1969). *The population bomb*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club. Some of the most dire predictions of the time warned of serious food shortages by the end of the century.

Fortunately, Malthus and ZPG advocates were wrong to some degree. Although population levels have certainly soared, the projections in Figure 15.4 show the rate of increase is slowing. Among other factors, the development of more effective contraception, especially the birth control pill, has limited population growth in the industrial world and, increasingly, in poorer nations. Food production has also increased by a much greater amount than Malthus and ZPG advocates predicted.

The Debate over Overpopulation

Many experts continue to be concerned about overpopulation, as they feel it is directly responsible for the hunger and malnutrition that plague hundreds of millions of people in poor nations (Gillis, 2011).Gillis, J. (2011, June 5). A warm planet struggles to feed itself. *New York Times*, p. A1. One expert expressed this concern: "Every billion more people makes life more difficult for

everybody—it's as simple as that. Is it the end of the world? No. Can we feed 10 billion people? Probably. But we obviously would be better off with a smaller population" (Gillis & Dugger, 2011, p. A1).Gillis, J., & Dugger, C. W. (2011, May 4). UN forecasts 10.1 million by century's end. *New York Times*, p. A1. Recognizing this problem, India has begun giving cash bonuses to poor, rural married couples, who typically have high fertility rates, to wait to have children, and it has intensified its encouragement of contraception (Yardley, 2010).Yardley, J. (2010, August 22). India tries using cash bonuses to slow birthrates. *New York Times*, p. A8.

However, other experts say the world's resources remain sufficient and minimize the problem of overpopulation. They acknowledge that widespread hunger in Africa and other regions does exist. However, they attribute this problem not to overpopulation and lack of food but rather to problems in distributing the sufficient amount of food that does in fact exist. As an official for Oxfam International explained, "Today's major problems in the food system are not fundamentally about supply keeping up with demand, but more about how food gets from fields and on to forks" (2011).King, R. (2011, June 1). Global food crisis: The challenge of changing diets. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jun/01/global-food-crisis-changing-diets. The official added that enough grain (cereal and soy) exists to easily feed the world, but that one-third of cereal and 90 percent of soy feed livestock instead. Moving away from a meat-laden Western diet would thus make much more grain available for the world's hungry poor.

Sociologists Stephen J. Scanlan and colleagues add that food scarcity results from *inequalities in food distribution* rather than from overpopulation: "[Food] scarcity is largely a myth. On a per capita basis, food is more plentiful today than any other time in human history…Even in times of localized production shortfalls or regional famines there has long been a global food surplus…A good deal of thinking and research in sociology…suggests that world hunger has less to do with the shortage of food than with a shortage of *affordable* or *accessible* food. Sociologists have found that social inequalities, distribution systems, and other economic and political factors create barriers to food access" (Scanlan, Jenkins, & Peterson, 2010, p. 35).Scanlan, S. J., Jenkins, J. C., & Peterson, L. (2010). The scarcity fallacy. *Contexts, 9*(1), 34–39.

This sociological view has important implications for how the world should try to reduce global hunger. International organizations such as the World Bank and several United Nations agencies have long believed that hunger is due to food scarcity, and this belief underlies the typical approaches to reducing world hunger that focus on increasing food supplies with new technologies and developing more efficient methods of delivering food. But if food scarcity is not a problem, then other approaches are necessary. According to Scanlan et al., these approaches involve reducing the social inequalities that limit poor nations' access to food.

As an example of one such inequality, Scanlan et al. point out that poor nations lack the funds to import the abundant food that does exist. These nations' poverty, then, is one inequality that leads to world hunger, but gender and ethnic inequalities are also responsible. Nations with higher rates of gender inequality and ethnic inequality have higher rates of hunger. In view of this fact, the authors emphasize that improvements in gender and ethnic equality are necessary to reduce global hunger: "International attention to food security should therefore shift from increasing food supply to regulating armed conflict, improving human rights, and promoting gender equity throughout the world—factors that reduce barriers to access and empower populations throughout the world to benefit from their food entitlements" *(Scanlan et al., 2010, p. 39).Scanlan, S. J., Jenkins, J. C., & Peterson, L. (2010). The scarcity fallacy. Contexts, 9(1), 34–39.*

Demographic Transition Theory

As we consider whether overpopulation is the threat that Malthus and contemporary concerned scientists have considered it to be, it is important to appreciate **demographic transition theory**, mentioned earlier. This theory links population growth to the level of technological development across three stages of social evolution and suggests that this growth slows considerably as nations become more industrialized.

In the first stage, coinciding with preindustrial societies, the birth rate and death rate are both high. The birth rate is high because of the lack of contraception and the several other reasons cited earlier for high fertility rates, and the death rate is high because of disease, poor nutrition, lack of modern medicine, and other problems. These two high rates cancel each other out, and little population growth occurs.

In the second stage, coinciding with the development of industrial societies, the birth rate remains fairly high, owing to the lack of contraception and a continuing belief in the value of large families, but the death rate drops because of several factors, including increased food production, better sanitation, and improved medicine. Because the birth rate remains high but the death rate drops, population growth takes off dramatically.

In the third stage, the death rate remains low, but the birth rate finally drops as families begin to realize that large numbers of

children in an industrial economy are more of a burden than an asset. Another reason for the drop is the availability of effective contraception. As a result, population growth slows, and, as we saw earlier, it has become quite low or even gone into a decline in several industrial nations.

Demographic transition theory, then, gives us more reason to be cautiously optimistic regarding the threat of overpopulation: As poor nations continue to modernize—much as industrial nations did two hundred years ago—their population growth rates should start to decline.

Still, population growth rates in poor nations continue to be high, and, as already mentioned, gender and ethnic inequality helps allow rampant hunger to persist. Hundreds of thousands of women die in poor nations each year during pregnancy and childbirth. Reduced fertility would save their lives, in part because their bodies would be healthier if their pregnancies were spaced farther apart (Schultz, 2008).Schultz, T. P. (2008). Population policies, fertility, women's human capital, and child quality. In T. P. Schultz & J. Strauss (Eds.), *Handbook of development economics* (Vol. 4, pp. 3249–3303). Amsterdam, Netherlands: North-Holland, Elsevier. Although world population growth is slowing, then, it is still growing too rapidly in poor nations. To reduce it further, more extensive family planning programs are needed, as is economic development in general: Women who are better educated and have more money tend to have lower fertility.

Population Decline and Pronatalism

If population growth remains a problem in poor nations, population decline is a problem in some industrial nations. As noted earlier, some nations are even experiencing population declines, while several more are projected to have population declines by 2050 (Brooks, 2012).Brooks, D. (2012, March 13). The population implosion. *New York Times*, p. A25. For a country to maintain its population, the average woman needs to have 2.1 children, the *replacement level* for population stability. But several industrial nations, not including the United States, are below this level. Increased birth control is one reason for their lower fertility rates but so are decisions by women to stay in school longer, to go to work right after their schooling ends, and to postpone having their first child.

Ironically, these nations' population declines have begun to concern demographers and policymakers (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010).Haartsen, T., & Venhorst, V. (2010). Planning for decline: Anticipating on population decline in the Netherlands. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic & Social Geography), 101*(2), 218–227. Because people in many industrial nations are living longer while the birth rate drops, these nations are increasingly having a greater proportion of older people and a smaller proportion of younger people. In several European nations, there are more people 61 or older than 19 or younger. As this trend continues, it will become increasingly difficult to take care of the health and income needs of so many older persons, and there may be too few younger people to fill the many jobs and provide the many services that an industrial society demands. The smaller labor force may also mean that governments will have fewer income tax dollars to provide these services.

To deal with these problems, several governments have initiated **pronatalist** policies aimed at encouraging women to have more children. In particular, they provide generous child-care subsidies, tax incentives, and flexible work schedules designed to make it easier to bear and raise children, and some even provide couples outright cash payments when they have an additional child. Russia in some cases provides the equivalent of about $9,000 for each child beyond the first, while Spain provides €2,500 (equivalent to about $3,400) for each child (Haub, 2009).Haub, C. (2009). *Birth rates rising in some low birth-rate countries. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau. Retrieved from* http://www.prb.org/Articles/2009/fallingbirthrates.aspx.

Two Other Problems Related to Population Growth

As we saw, population experts debate the degree to which population growth contributes to global poverty and hunger. But there is little debate that population growth contributes to two other global problems.

One of these problems concerns the *environment*. Population growth in both wealthy and poor nations has damaged the environment in many ways (Walsh, 2011).Walsh, B. (2011, October 26). Why the real victim of overpopulation will be the environment. *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2097720_2097782_2097814,00.html. As the news story that opens this chapter illustrated, countries with large numbers of people drive many motor vehicles that pollute the air, and these countries engage in many other practices of the industrial era that pollute the air, water, and ground. Further, as populations have expanded over the centuries, they have cut down many trees and deforested many regions across the globe. This deforestation ruins animal habitats and helps to contribute to global warming because trees help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen into the atmosphere.

Another problem is *interpersonal conflict* in general and *armed conflict* in particular. As populations grow, they need more and more food, water, and other resources. When these resources have become too scarce over the centuries, many societies have decided to take resources from other societies "by any means necessary," as the old saying goes, meaning the use of force (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.*

Population growth thus helps to create armed conflict between societies, but it also helps to generate conflict within a single society. As a society grows, people begin to compete for resources. This competition has often led to hostility of many types, including interpersonal violence. As we shall discuss shortly, the history of immigration in the United States illustrates this dynamic. As the number of immigrants grew rapidly in various historical eras, native-born whites perceived threats to their jobs, land, and other resources and responded with mob violence.

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8.10: Immigration

Immigration

Recall that migration generally and immigration specifically are central concepts in the study of population. As just indicated, immigration is also a source of great controversy in the United States and in many other countries. This controversy is perhaps almost inevitable, as increasing numbers of immigrants can affect many aspects of a society: crowding in its cities, increasing enrollments in its schools, having enough jobs for everyone who wants to work, and so forth. However, the fact that immigration can cause these complications does not begin to justify the prejudice and hostility that have routinely greeted immigrants into the United States and elsewhere.

The history of the United States is filled with prejudice and hostility of this type. Starting with the Pilgrims, this nation was settled by immigrants who came to these shores seeking political and religious freedom and economic opportunity. Despite these origins, when great waves of immigrants came to the United States beginning in the nineteenth century, they were hardly greeted with open arms (Roediger, 2006).Roediger, D. R. (2006). *Working toward whiteness: How America's immigrants became white*. New York, NY: Basic Books. During the first half of this century, some 3 million Irish immigrants, most of them Catholic, moved to the United States. Because these immigrants were not Anglo-Saxon Protestants, native-born whites (most of whom were Anglo-Saxon Protestants) deeply disliked them and even considered them to be a different race from white. During the 1850s, the so-called Know-Nothing Party, composed of native-born whites, was openly hostile to Irish immigrants and would engage in mob violence against them, with many murders occurring. Later waves of immigrants from Italian, Polish, and Jewish backgrounds also were not considered fully white and subject to employment discrimination and other ethnic prejudice and hostility.

Beginning with the California gold rush of 1849 and continuing after the Civil War, great numbers of Chinese immigrants came to the United States and helped to build the nation's railroads and performed other important roles. They, too, were greeted hostilely by native-born whites who feared the Chinese were taking away their jobs (Pfaelzer, 2008).Pfaelzer, J. (2008). *Driven out: The forgotten war against Chinese Americans*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. As the national economy worsened during the 1870s, riots against the Chinese occurred in western cities. In more than three hundred cities and towns, whites went into Chinese neighborhoods, burned them down, and murdered some Chinese residents while forcing the remainder to leave town. Congress finally outlawed Chinese immigration in 1882, with this ban lasting for almost a century.

During the 1930s, rising numbers of Mexican Americans in the western United States led to similar hostility (Daniels, 2002).Daniels, R. (2002). *Coming to America: A history of immigration and ethnicity in American life*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial. The fact that this decade was the time of the Great Depression deepened whites' concerns that Mexican immigrants were taking away their jobs. White-owned newspapers falsely claimed that these immigrants posed a violent threat to white Americans, and that their supposed violence was made more likely by their use of marijuana. It is estimated that at least 500,000 Mexicans returned to their native country, either because they were forcibly deported or because they returned there themselves under great pressure.

Immigration Today

Immigration continues to be a major concern for many Americans today, whose concern centers mostly on Mexican immigrants even though they are less than a majority of all immigrants. According to political scientist *Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto (2012),DeFrancesco Soto, V. M. (2012, February 24)*. Anti-immigrant rhetoric is anti-Latino. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/166442/anti-immigrant-rhetoric-anti-latino. this focus stems from racial prejudice: "Let's call a spade a spade. Opposition to immigration is not a concern rooted in personal economic concerns. Neither is it a concern having to do with state's rights. Anti-immigrant sentiment isn't even about immigrants as a whole. As rigorous social scientific research shows, opposition to immigration is closely linked to the negative racial animus toward one very specific group, Latinos."

As we try to make sense of immigration and of immigration policy, some basic facts are worth appreciating. The number of immigrants greatly increased two or three decades ago, but the number of illegal immigrants entering the United States now is very small compared to just a decade ago (Myers, 2012).Myers, D. (2012, January 12). The next immigration challenge. *New York Times*, p. A27. Foreign-born residents composed 12.9 percent of the US population in 2010, or 40 million immigrants overall, compared to only 7.9 percent in 1990 (Immigration Policy Center, 2012).Immigration Policy Center. (2012). *Strength in diversity: The economic and political power of immigrants, Latinos, and Asians*. Washington, DC: Author. Almost one-third of immigrants

are Mexican, while one-fourth are Asian. Most of the remainder come from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Slightly more than half of all foreign-born residents come from Mexico or one of the other Latin American nations. Almost 40 percent of Latinos and two-thirds of Asians in the United States are foreign-born.

Almost three-fourths of immigrants are naturalized US citizens, legal residents, or legal temporary migrants. Slightly more than one-fourth, 28 percent, or about 11 million people, are illegal residents. About 60 percent, or almost 7 million, of these residents are Mexican. Approximately 4.5 million children born in the United States, who are thus citizens, have at least one parent who is an unauthorized immigrant.

Unauthorized immigrants compose more than 5 percent of the US labor force, a number equivalent to 8 million workers. Households headed by unauthorized immigrants paid an estimated $11.2 billion in state and federal taxes in 2010. According to the Immigration Policy Center (2012),Immigration Policy Center. (2012). *Strength in diversity: The economic and political power of immigrants, Latinos, and Asians*. Washington, DC: Author. if all unauthorized immigrants somehow left the United States, the US economy would suffer an annual loss of 2.8 million jobs, $552 billion in economic activity, and $245 billion in gross domestic product (GDP).

As these labor and economic figures make clear, illegal immigrants form an important component of the US economy. In another fact that may surprise immigration opponents, many studies also find that immigrants, both legal and illegal, have lower crime rates than nonimmigrants (Wadsworth, 2010).Wadsworth, T. (2010). Is immigration responsible for the crime drop? An assessment of the influence of immigration on changes in violent crime between 1990 and 2000. *Social Science Quarterly, 91*, 531–553. These low rates are thought to stem from immigrants' stable families, strong churches, and high numbers of small businesses that make for stable neighborhoods. Ironically, as immigrants stay longer in the United States, the crime rates of their children, and then those of their children's children, become higher. As immigrant families stay longer in the United States, then, their crime rates tend to rise, in part because they become "Americanized" *(Sampson, 2008).Sampson, R. J. (2008). Rethinking crime and immigration. Contexts, 7(2), 28–33.*

Efforts to Limit Immigration

Although immigrants strengthen the US economy and have low crime rates, much of the public is opposed to immigration. In the 2010 General Social Survey (GSS), half the respondents said that the number of immigrants to the United States should be reduced by "a little" or "a lot," and only about 14 percent said this number should be increased. In a 2011 CNN poll, one-third of the public said it is "somewhat" or "very" unsympathetic toward illegal immigrants and their families. In the same poll, more than half the public favored building a seven-hundred-mile fence along the border with Mexico (PollingReport.com, 2012).PollingReport.com. (2012). Immigration. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from http://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm.

In recent years, many states enacted strict laws regarding immigrants, including the denial of schooling and various social services to unauthorized immigrant families. Arizona, Georgia, and Alabama enacted some of the most restrictive legislation.



Arizona is one of several states that have enacted very restrictive laws regarding immigration.

Image courtesy of Nevele Otseog, http://www.flickr.com/photos/45976898@N02/4574551377/.

Arizona's law, passed in 2010, made failing to carry immigration documents a crime and required the police to question and detain anyone they suspected of being an illegal immigrant. Previously, these restrictions had been the sole province of the federal government. Critics charged this new law would lead to ethnic and racial profiling, as only people who looked Mexican would be stopped by police for suspicion of being illegal (Archibold, 2010).Archibold, R. C. (2010, April 24). Arizona enacts stringent law on immigration. *New York Times*, p. A1. They also noted that the new law caused an economic loss of $250 million during the first year after its enactment from a loss in conference and convention business in Arizona (Brown, 2011).Brown, R. (2011, May 14). Georgia gives police added power to seek out illegal immigrants. *New York Times*, p. A12.

Georgia's law, enacted in 2011, allowed police to demand immigration documents from criminal suspects and to hold suspects who do not provide documentation for deportation by federal officials. The law also made it more difficult to hire workers without proper documentation, increased the penalties for businesses that hire these workers, and provided penalties for people who house or transport unauthorized immigrants. Georgia's Chamber of Commerce worried about the law's economic impact, and in particular was concerned that the law would reduce tourism. Reports estimated that if the law forced all unauthorized workers to leave Georgia, the state's agricultural industry would lose up to $1 billion annually, since unauthorized workers form the bulk of the Georgia's farm labor force (Berman, 2011).Berman, J. (2011, November 28). Georgia immigration law could have dire consequences for state's economy: Study. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/2010/2005/georgia-immigration-law-economy_n_995889.html.

Alabama's law, enacted in 2011, also allowed police to detain people suspected of being unauthorized immigrants. In addition, it required schools to record the immigration status of all students and also required people seeking a driver's license to prove that they were US citizens. The law led to very long lines to renew driver's licenses, and, because immigrant migrant workers left the state, many crops went unharvested on the state's farms. Business leaders feared the law would harm the state's economy, a fear that was heightened when a German executive at Mercedes-Benz was detained by police (Ott, 2012).Ott, T. (2012, February 7). Alabama's immigration law may get a second look. *National Public Radio*. Retrived from http://www.npr.org/2012/2002/2007/146490508/alabamas-immigration-law-may-get-a-second-look.

Several months after the Alabama law took effect, a study by a University of Alabama economist concluded that it had forced at least 40,000 and perhaps as many as 80,000 unauthorized workers to leave the state (Lee, 2012).Lee, M. J. (2012, February 1). Alabama immigration law costs $11 billion, study shows. *Politico*. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72308.html. The exit of so many workers caused an estimated annual loss to Alabama's GDP of at least $2 billion, a loss in state and state revenue from income and sales taxes of at least $57 million, and a loss in local sales tax revenue of at least $20 million.

Self-Deportation

Many critics of immigration hope these and other laws and practices will make life so difficult for unauthorized immigrants that they engage in *self-deportation* by returning to Mexico or their other native countries. According to the Immigration Policy Center (2012),Immigration Policy Center. (2012). *The real meaning of "self-deportation."* Washington, DC: Author. however, there is little evidence that self-deportation actually occurs. A major reason for this fact is that two-thirds of unauthorized adult immigrants have been in the United States for at least ten years, and almost half are parents of children born in the United States (who, as mentioned earlier, are thus US citizens). These adults and their children therefore have established roots in American soil and simply want to stay in the United States.

Detention

The federal government has the responsibility for detaining and deporting unauthorized immigrants. The number of immigrants detained every year exceeds 360,000, with an average detention length of almost three months; more than 1,000 individuals are detained for over a year. At a cost of more than $60,000 per detainee, the annual cost of this detention system exceeds $21 billion. Most detainees are in custody for technical violations of immigrant laws, such as overstaying a visa, rather than for serious criminal behavior. As such, they do not pose a public danger.

Debate continues over the extent to which the government should carry out deportation, but critics and even immigration judges decry the conditions under which illegal immigrants are detained (Semple, 2011).Semple, K. (2011, December 19). In a study, judges express a bleak view of lawyers representing immigrants. *New York Times*, p. A24. They say that detainees are denied

basic due process rights, such as the right to have a court-appointed attorney. More than four-fifths have no legal representation at all, and those who do receive legal assistance often receive incompetent assistance.

Immigrants and Domestic Violence

Another immigration issue concerns battered women who are immigrants (Constable, 2012).Constable, P. (2012, February 8). For battered immigrant women, fear of deportation becomes abusers' weapon, but 2 laws can overcome that. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/for-battered-immigrant-women-fear-of-deportation-becomes-abusers-weapon/2012/01/30/gIQAZCx3zQ_story.html. When women are beaten or otherwise abused by their husbands or boyfriends, it is often difficult for them to leave their abusers (see Chapter 10). But abused immigrant women face a special problem in this regard. Because often they are allowed to live in the United States only because their husbands are legal residents or citizens, they fear deportation if they go to the police and their husband is deported. Other abused immigrant women who are in the United States illegally similarly fear they will be deported if they go to the police. Fortunately, federal law now allows abused immigrant women to apply for legal residency, but many women are not aware of this possibility.

Although our discussion of immigration has painted a critical portrait of many aspects of US immigration policy, the United States actually ranks fairly high among the world's nations in how it treats its immigrants. The Note 15.17 "Lessons from Other Societies" box discusses this international comparison in greater detail.

Lessons from Other Societies

The Status of Legal Immigrants in Western Democracies

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is an effort of the British Council and the Migration Policy Group, an international consortium. This index ranks the United States, Canada, and twenty-eight European nations on the extent to which legal immigrants are integrated into each nation's political and economic life and on the path to full citizenship. It also ranks the extent to which each nation has antidiscrimination laws to protect immigrants. Overall, MIPEX consists of 148 policy indicators.

In the latest (2011) MIPEX report, the United States ranked ninth out of the thirty-one states on this index; Sweden ranked first, followed by Portugal and Canada. Summarizing one of the effort's major findings, a news report observed that "strong U.S. antidiscrimination laws protect immigrants and guarantee them equal rights and opportunities, a model for immigration rules elsewhere." MIPEX also ranked the United States highly on legal immigrants' opportunities for employment, for education, and for reuniting with family members.

At the same time, the MIPEX report noted that the United States denies many immigrants several federal benefits and imposes large fees for certain immigration procedures. It also asserted that US immigration laws are unnecessarily complex and that visa availability is too limited. The relatively lower scores that the United States enjoyed in all these areas led it to lag behind the eight nations that scored higher on the index.

Reacting to the MIPEX report, the director of the Immigration Policy Center in Washington, DC, said the United States would benefit from improving its efforts to integrate immigrants, for example by better helping them learn English, and she warned that federal and state budget cuts threatened to lower the US ranking.

Although the United States, then, ranks fairly high among the world's democracies in the status of its legal immigrants, the higher status enjoyed by immigrants in Canada and some other democracies points to directions the United States should follow to improve its ranking and create a better climate for its immigrants.
Sources: Huddleston & Niessen, 2011; Restrepo, 2011Huddleston, T., & Niessen, J. (2011). Migrant integration policy index III. Brussels, Belgium: British Council and Migration Policy Group; Restrepo, M. (2011, March 1). International study points out US immigration policy successes, failures. The American Independent. Retrieved from http://www.americanindependent.com/171724/international-study-points-out-u-s-immigration-policy-successes-failure

Key Takeaways

- To understand changes in the size and composition of population, demographers use several concepts, including fertility and birth rates, mortality and death rates, and migration.
- Although overpopulation remains a serious concern, many experts say the world's food supply is sufficient providing that it

is distributed efficiently and equitably.
- Although illegal immigration to the United States has dwindled and immigrants are faring well overall, many Americans are concerned about immigration, and several states have passed very restrictive laws concerning immigration.

For Your Review

1. How concerned are you about population growth and overpopulation? Explain your answer in a brief essay.
2. Before you began reading this chapter, did you think that food scarcity was the major reason for world hunger today? Why do you think a belief in food scarcity is so common among Americans?
3. Do you think nations with low birth rates should provide incentives for women to have more babies? Why or why not?
4. If immigrants seem to be faring fairly well in the United States, as the text explains, why do you think so many Americans have negative attitudes about immigration and immigrants? Explain your answer.

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8.11: The Environment

The Environment

Learning Objectives

1. List two reasons that make the environment an appropriate topic for sociologists to study.
2. Describe two of the environmental problems facing the world today.
3. Describe what is meant by the assertion that environmental problems are human problems.
4. Explain the concepts of environmental inequality and environmental racism.
5. Understand the various environmental problems that exist today.

At first glance, the environment does not seem to be a sociological topic. The natural and physical environment is something that geologists, meteorologists, oceanographers, and other scientists should be studying, not sociologists. Yet we have just discussed how the environment is affected by population growth, and that certainly sounds like a sociological discussion. In fact, the environment is very much a sociological topic for several reasons.

First, our worst environmental problems are the result of human activity, and this activity, like many human behaviors, is a proper topic for sociological study. This textbook has discussed many behaviors: racist behavior, sexist behavior, criminal behavior, sexual behavior, and others. Just as these behaviors are worthy of sociological study, so are the behaviors that harm (or try to improve) the environment.

Second, environmental problems have a significant impact on people, as do the many other social problems that sociologists study. We see the clearest evidence of this impact when a major hurricane, an earthquake, or another natural disaster strikes. In January 2010, for example, a devastating earthquake struck Haiti and killed more than 250,000 people, or about 2.5 percent of that nation's population. The effects of these natural disasters on the economy and society of Haiti will certainly also be felt for many years to come.



As is evident in this photo taken in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti, changes in the natural environment can lead to profound changes in a society. Environmental changes are one of the many sources of social change.

Image courtesy of United Nations, http://www.flickr.com/photos/37913760@N03/4274632760.

Slower changes in the environment can also have a large social impact. As noted earlier, industrialization and population growth have increased the pollution of our air, water, and ground. Climate change, a larger environmental problem, has also been

relatively slow in arriving but threatens the whole planet in ways that climate change researchers have documented and will no doubt be examining for the rest of our lifetimes and beyond. We return to these two environmental problems shortly.

A third reason the environment is a sociological topic is a bit more complex: Solutions to our environmental problems require changes in economic and environmental policies, and the potential implementation and impact of these changes depends heavily on social and political factors. In the United States, for example, the two major political parties, corporate lobbyists, and environmental organizations regularly battle over attempts to strengthen environmental regulations.

A fourth reason is that many environmental problems reflect and illustrate social inequality based on social class and on race and ethnicity: As with many problems in our society, the poor and people of color often fare worse when it comes to the environment. We return to this theme later in our discussion of environmental racism.

Fifth, efforts to improve the environment, often called the *environmental movement*, constitute a social movement and, as such, are again worthy of sociological study. Sociologists and other social scientists have conducted many studies of why people join the environmental movement and of the impact of this movement.

Environmental Sociology

All these reasons suggest that the environment is quite fittingly a sociological topic, and one on which sociologists should have important insights. In fact, so many sociologists study the environment that their collective study makes up a subfield in sociology called **environmental sociology**, which refers simply to the sociological study of the environment. More specifically, environmental sociology is the study of the interaction between human behavior and the natural and physical environment. According to a report by the American Sociological Association, environmental sociology "has provided important insights" (Nagel, Dietz, & Broadbent, 2010, p. 13)Nagel, J., Dietz, T., & Broadbent, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Workshop on sociological perspectives on global climate change*. Washington, DC: National Science Foundation. into such areas as public opinion about the environment, the influence of values on people's environmental behavior, and inequality in the impact of environmental problems on communities and individuals.

Environmental sociology assumes "that humans are part of the environment and that the environment and society can only be fully understood in relation to each other" (McCarthy & King, 2009, p. 1).McCarthy, D., & King, L. (2009). Introduction: Environmental problems require social solutions. In L. King & D. McCarthy (Eds.), *Environmental sociology: From analysis to action* (2nd ed., pp. 1–22). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Because humans are responsible for the world's environmental problems, humans have both the ability and the responsibility to address these problems. As sociologists Leslie King and Deborah McCarthy (2009, p. ix)King, L., & McCarthy, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Environmental sociology: From analysis to action* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. assert, "We both strongly believe that humans have come to a turning point in terms of our destruction of ecological resources and endangerment of human health. A daily look at the major newspapers points, without fail, to worsening environmental problems…Humans created these problems and we have the power to resolve them. Naturally, the longer we wait, the more devastating the problems will become; and the more we ignore the sociological dimensions of environmental decline the more our proposed solutions will fail."

Environmental sociologists emphasize two important dimensions of the relationship between society and the environment: (a) the impact of human activity and decision making and (b) the existence and consequences of environmental inequality and environmental racism. We now turn to these two dimensions.

Human Activity and Decision Making

Perhaps more than anything else, environmental sociologists emphasize that *environmental problems are the result of human decisions and activities that harm the environment*. Masses of individuals acting independently of each other make decisions and engage in activities that harm the environment, as when we leave lights on, keep our homes too warm in the winter or too cool in the summer, and drive motor vehicles that get low gas mileage. Corporations, government agencies, and other organizations also make decisions and engage in practices that greatly harm the environment. Sometimes individuals and organizations know full well that their activities are harming the environment, and sometimes they just act carelessly without much thought about the possible environmental harm of their actions. Still, the environment is harmed whether or not individuals, corporations, and governments intend to harm it.

A major example of the environmental harm caused by human activity was the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill that began in April 2010 when an oil rig leased by BP exploded in the Gulf of Mexico and eventually released almost 5 million barrels of oil (about

200 million gallons) into the ocean. Congressional investigators later concluded that BP had made a series of decisions that "increased the danger of a catastrophic well," including a decision to save money by using an inferior casing for the well that made an explosion more likely. A news report paraphrased the investigators as concluding that "some of the decisions appeared to violate industry guidelines and were made despite warnings from BP's own employees and outside contractors" (Fountain, 2010, p. A1).Fountain, H. (2010, June 15). Documents show risky decisions before BP blowout. *New York Time*s, p. A1.

Sociologists McCarthy and King (2009)McCarthy, D., & King, L. (2009). Introduction: Environmental problems require social solutions. In L. King & D. McCarthy (Eds.), *Environmental Sociology: From Analysis to Action* (2nd ed., pp. 1–22). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. cite several other environmental accidents that stemmed from reckless decision making and natural disasters in which human decisions accelerated the harm that occurred. One accident occurred in Bhopal, India, in 1984, when a Union Carbide pesticide plant leaked forty tons of deadly gas. Between 3,000 and 16,000 people died immediately and another half million suffered permanent illnesses or injuries. A contributing factor for the leak was Union Carbide's decision to save money by violating safety standards in the construction and management of the plant.



The April 2010 BP oil spill occurred after BP made several decisions that may have increased the possibility of a catastrophic explosion of the well.

Image courtesy of International Bird Rescue Research Center, http://www.flickr.com/photos/ibrrc/4670207222.

A second preventable accident was the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker disaster, in which the tanker hit ground off the coast of Alaska and released 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound. Among other consequences, the spill killed hundreds of thousands of birds and marine animals and almost destroyed the local fishing and seafood industries. The immediate cause of the accident was that the ship's captain was an alcoholic and left the bridge in the hands of an unlicensed third mate after drinking five double vodkas in the hours before the crash occurred. Exxon officials knew of his alcoholism but let him command the ship anyway. Also, if the ship had had a double hull (one hull inside the other), it might not have cracked on impact or at least would have released less oil, but Exxon and the rest of the oil industry had successfully lobbied Congress not to require stronger hulls.

Hurricane Katrina was a more recent environmental disaster in which human decision making resulted in a great deal of *preventable* damage. After Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and especially New Orleans in August 2005, the resulting wind and flooding killed more than 1,800 people and left more than 700,000 homeless. McCarthy and King (2009, p. 4)McCarthy, D., & King, L. (2009). Introduction: Environmental problems require social solutions. In L. King & D. McCarthy (Eds.), *Environmental sociology: From analysis to action* (2nd ed., pp. 1–22). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. attribute much of this damage to human decision making: "While hurricanes are typically considered 'natural disasters,' Katrina's extreme consequences must be considered the result of social and political failures." Long before Katrina hit, it was well known that a major flood could easily breach New Orleans levees and have a devastating impact. Despite this knowledge, US, state, and local officials did nothing over the years to strengthen or rebuild the levees. In addition, coastal land that would have protected New Orleans had been lost over time to commercial and residential development. In short, the flooding after Katrina was a human disaster, not a natural disaster.

Environmental Inequality and Environmental Racism

A second emphasis of environmental sociology is *environmental inequality* and the related concept of *environmental racism*. **Environmental inequality** (also called *environmental injustice*) refers to the fact that low-income people and people of color are disproportionately likely to experience various environmental problems, while **environmental racism** refers just to the greater likelihood of people of color to experience these problems (Walker, 2012).Walker, G. (2012). Environmental justice: Concepts, evidence, and politics. New York, NY: Routledge. The term **environmental justice** refers to scholarship on environmental inequality and racism and to public policy efforts and activism aimed at reducing these forms of inequality and racism. The Note 15.25 "Applying Social Research" box discusses some very significant scholarship on environmental racism.

Applying Social Research

Environmental Racism in the Land of Cotton

During the 1970s, people began to voice concern about the environment in the United States and across the planet. As research on the environment grew by leaps and bounds, some scholars and activists began to focus on environmental inequality in general and on environmental racism in particular. During the 1980s and 1990s, their research and activism spawned the environmental justice movement that has since shed important light on environmental inequality and racism and helped reduce these problems.

Research by sociologists played a key role in the beginning of the environmental justice movement and continues to play a key role today. Robert D. Bullard of Clark Atlanta University stands out among these sociologists for the impact of his early work in the 1980s on environmental racism in the South and for his continuing scholarship since then. He has been called "the father of environmental justice" and was named by Newsweek as one of the thirteen most influential environmental leaders of the twentieth century, along with environmental writer Rachel Carson, former vice president Al Gore, and ten others.

Bullard's first research project on environmental racism began in the late 1970s after his wife, an attorney, filed a lawsuit on behalf of black residents in Atlanta who were fighting the placement of a landfill in their neighborhood. To collect data for the lawsuit, Bullard studied the placement of landfills in other areas. He found that every city-owned landfill in Houston was in a black neighborhood, even though African Americans amounted to only one-fourth of Houston residents at the time. He also found that three out of four privately owned landfills were in black neighborhoods, as were six of the eight city-owned incinerators. He extended his research to other locations and later recalled what he discovered: "Without a doubt, it was a form of apartheid where whites were making decisions and black people and brown people and people of color, including Native Americans on reservations, had no seat at the table."

In 1990, Bullard published his findings in his book Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality. This book described the systematic placement in several Southern states of toxic waste sites, landfills, and chemical plants in communities largely populated by low-income residents and/or African Americans. Dumping in Dixie was the first book to examine environmental racism and is widely credited with helping advance the environmental justice movement. It received some notable awards, including the Conservation Achievement Award from the National Wildlife Federation.

More recently, Bullard, along with other sociologists and scholars from other disciplines, has documented the impact of race and poverty on the experience of New Orleans residents affected by the flooding after Hurricane Katrina. As in many other cities, African Americans and other low-income people largely resided in the lower elevations in New Orleans, and whites and higher-income people largely resided in the higher elevations. The flooding naturally had a much greater impact on the lower elevations and thus on African Americans and the poor. After the flood, African Americans seeking new housing in various real estate markets were more likely than whites to be told that no housing was available.

Bullard's early work alerted the nation to environmental racism and helped motivate the Environmental Protection Agency in the 1990s to begin paying attention to it. His various research efforts are an outstanding example of how social research can increase understanding of a significant social problem.

Sources: Bullard, 1990; Bullard & Wright, 2009; Dicum, 2006Bullard, R. D. (1990). Dumping in Dixie: Race, class, and environmental quality. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Bullard, R. D., & Wright, B. (2009). Race, place, and the environment in post-Katrina New Orleans. In R. D. Bullard & B. Wright (Eds.), Race, place, and environmental justice after hurricane Katrina: Struggles to reclaim, rebuild, and revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast (pp. 19–48). Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Dicum, G. (2006, March 14). Meet Robert Bullard, the father of environmental justice. Grist Magazine. Retrieved from http://www.grist.org/article/dicum.

According to the American Sociological Association report mentioned earlier, the emphasis of environmental sociology on environmental inequality reflects the emphasis that the larger discipline of sociology places on social inequality: “A central finding of sociology is that unequal power dynamics shape patterns of social mobility and access to social, political, and economic resources” (Nagel et al., 2010, p. 17).Nagel, J., Dietz, T., & Broadbent, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Workshop on sociological perspectives on global climate change*. Washington, DC: National Science Foundation. The report adds that global climate change will have its greatest effects on the poorest nations: “Many of the countries least responsible for the rise in greenhouse gases will be most likely to feel its impacts in changes in weather, sea levels, health care costs, and economic hardships” (Nagel et al., 2010, p. 17).Nagel, J., Dietz, T., & Broadbent, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Workshop on sociological perspectives on global climate change*. Washington, DC: National Science Foundation.

Examples of environmental racism and inequality abound. Almost all the hazardous waste sites we discuss later in this chapter are located in or near neighborhoods and communities that are largely populated by low-income people and people of color. When factories dump dangerous chemicals into rivers and lakes, the people living nearby are very likely to be low-income and of color. Around the world, the people most affected by climate change and other environmental problems are those in poor nations and, even within those nations, those who are poorer rather than those who are wealthier.

Some evidence shows that although low-income people are especially likely to be exposed to environmental problems, this exposure is even more likely if they are people of color than if they are white. As a review of this evidence concluded, “It would be fair to summarize this body of work as showing that the poor and especially the non white poor bear a disproportionate burden of exposure to suboptimal, unhealthy environmental conditions in the United States. Moreover, the more researchers scrutinize environmental exposure and health data for racial and income inequalities, the stronger the evidence becomes that grave and widespread environmental injustices have occurred throughout the United States” (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002, p. 323).Evans, G. W., & Kantrowitz, E. (2002). Socioeconomic status and health: The potential role of environmental risk exposure. *Annual Review of Public Health, 23*(1), 303.

As should be apparent from the discussion in this section, the existence of environmental inequality and environmental racism shows that social inequality in the larger society exposes some people much more than others to environmental dangers. This insight is one of the most important contributions of environmental sociology.



Global climate change is very likely to have its greatest impact on people in the poorest nations, even though these nations are the least responsible for greenhouse gases.

Image courtesy of Hamed Saber, http://www.flickr.com/photos/hamed/266139764.

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8.12: Environmental Problems

Environmental Problems

To say that the world is in peril environmentally might sound extreme, but the world is in fact in peril. An overview of environmental problems will indicate the extent and seriousness of this problem.

Air Pollution

Estimates of the annual number of US deaths from *air pollution* range from a low of 10,000 to a high of 60,000 (Reiman & Leighton, 2010).Reiman, J., & Leighton, P. (2010). *The rich get richer and the poor get prison: Ideology, class, and criminal justice* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. The worldwide toll is much greater, and the World Health Organization (2011)World Health Organization. (2011). Air quality and health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs313/en/index.html. estimates that 1.3 million people across the globe die every year from air pollution.

These deaths stem from the health conditions that air pollution causes, including heart disease, lung cancer, and respiratory disease such as asthma. Most air pollution stems from the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas, and coal. This problem occurs not only in the wealthy industrial nations but also in the nations of the developing world; countries such as China and India have some of the worst air pollution. In developing nations, mortality rates of people in cities with high levels of particulate matter (carbon, nitrates, sulfates, and other particles) are 15–50 percent higher than the mortality rates of those in cleaner cities. In European countries, air pollution is estimated to reduce average life expectancy by 8.6 months. The World Health Organization (2011)World Health Organization. (2011). Air quality and health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs313/en/index.html. does not exaggerate when it declares that air pollution "is a major environmental health problem affecting everyone in developed and developing countries alike."

Pollution of many types especially harms children's health. The Note 15.26 "Children and Our Future" box discusses this harm in greater detail.

Children and Our Future

Children and Environmental Health Hazards

As we consider environmental problems, we must not forget the world's children, who are at special risk for environmental health problems precisely because they are children. Their bodies and brains grow rapidly, and they breathe in more air per pound of body weight than adults do. They also absorb substances, including toxic substances from their gastrointestinal tract faster than adults do.

These and other physiological differences all put children at greater risk than adults for harm from environmental health hazards. Children's behavior also puts them at greater risk. For example, no adult of normal intelligence would eat paint chips found on the floor, but a young child can easily do so. Children also play on lawns, playgrounds, and other areas in which pesticides are often used, and this type of activity again gives them greater exposure. Young children also put their hands in their mouths regularly, and any toxins on their hands are thereby ingested.

Poverty compounds all these problems. Poor children are more likely to live in houses with lead paint, in neighborhoods with higher levels of air pollution, and in neighborhoods near to hazardous waste sites. Poor children of color are especially at risk for these environmental problems.

Three of the greatest environmental health hazards for children are lead, pesticides, and air pollution. Lead can cause brain and nervous system damage, hearing problems, and delayed growth among other effects; pesticides can cause various problems in the immune, neurological, and respiratory systems; and air pollution can cause asthma and respiratory illnesses. All these health problems can have lifelong consequences

Unfortunately, certain environmentally induced health problems for children are becoming more common. For example, US children's asthma cases have increased by more than 40 percent since 1980, and more than four hundred American children

now have asthma. Two types of childhood cancer thought to stem at least partly from environmental hazards have also increased during the past two decades: acute lymphocytic by 10 percent and brain tumors by 30 percent.

It should be evident from this overview that environmental health hazards pose a serious danger for children in the United States and the rest of the world. Because children are our future, this danger underscores the need to do everything possible to improve the environment.

Source: Children's Environmental Health Network, 2009Children's Environmental Health Network. (2009). An introduction to children's environmental health. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from http://www.cehn.org/introduction_childrens_environmental_health.

Global Climate Change

The burning of fossil fuels also contributes to *global climate change*, often called *global warming*, thanks to the oft-discussed *greenhouse effect* caused by the trapping of gases in the atmosphere that is turning the earth warmer, with a rise of almost 1°C during the past century. In addition to affecting the ecology of the earth's polar regions and ocean levels throughout the planet, climate change threatens to produce a host of other problems, including increased disease transmitted via food and water, malnutrition resulting from decreased agricultural production and drought, a higher incidence of hurricanes and other weather disasters, and extinction of several species (Gillis & Foster, 2012; Zimmer, 2011).Gillis, J., & Foster, J. M. (2012, March 29). Weather runs hot and cold, so scientists look to the ice. *New York Times*, p. A1; Zimmer, C. (2011, April 5). Multitude of species face climate threat. *New York Times*, p. D1. All these problems have been producing, and will continue to produce, higher mortality rates across the planet. The World Health Organization (2010)World Health Organization. (2010). Climate change and health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/index.html. estimates that climate change causes more than 140,000 excess deaths worldwide annually.

Another problem caused by climate change may be interpersonal violence and armed conflict (Agnew, 2012; Fisman & Miguel, 2010; Kristof, 2008),Agnew, R. (2012). Dire forecast: A theoretical model of the impact of climate change on crime. *Theoretical Criminology, 16*, 21–42; Fisman, R., & Miguel, E. (2010). *Economic gangsters: Corruption, violence, and the poverty of nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Kristof, N. D. (2008, April 13). Extended forecast: Bloodshed. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/13/opinion/13kristof.html. already discussed as a consequence of population growth. Historically, when unusual weather events have caused drought, flooding, or other problems, violence and armed conflict have resulted. For example, witch-burnings in medieval Europe accelerated when extremely cold weather ruined crops and witches were blamed for the problem. Economic problems from declining farm values are thought to have increased the lynchings of African Americans in the US South. As crops fail from global warming and reduced rainfall in the years ahead, African populations may plunge into civil war: According to an Oxford University economist, having a drought increases by 50 percent the chance that an African nation will have a civil war a year later (Kristof, 2008).Kristof, N. D. (2008, April 13). Extended forecast: Bloodshed. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/13/opinion/13kristof.html.

As we consider climate change, it is important to keep in mind certain inequalities mentioned earlier (McNall, 2011).McNall, S. G. (2011). *Rapid climate change: Causes, consequences, and solutions*. New York, NY: Routledge. First, the world's richest nations contribute more than their fair share to climate change. The United States, Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom compose 15 percent of the world's population but are responsible for half of the planet's carbon dioxide emissions. Second, the effects of climate change are more severe for poor nations than for rich nations. Africans, for example, are much less able than Americans to deal with the effects of drought, weather disasters, and the other problems caused by climate change.

Although almost all climate scientists believe that climate change is a serious problem and stems from human behavior, 28 percent of Americans in a November 2011 poll responded "no" when asked, "Is there solid evidence the earth is warming?" Another 18 percent said solid evidence does exist but that global warming is occurring because of "natural patterns" rather than "human activity." Only 38 percent agreed with climate scientists' belief that global warming exists and that it arises from human activity (Pew Research Center, 2011).Pew Research Center. (2011). *Modest rise in number saying there is "solid evidence" of global warming*. Washington, DC: Author.

Overall, 63 percent of respondents agreed that solid evidence of global warming exists (leaving aside the question of *why* it is occurring). This figure differed sharply by political party preference, however: Whereas 77 percent of Democrats said solid evidence exists, only 43 percent of Republicans and 63 percent of Independents shared this opinion. Similarly, whereas 55 percent of Democrats said global warming is a "very serious" problem, only 14 percent of Republicans and 39 percent of Independents felt this way (Pew Research Center, 2011).Pew Research Center. (2011). *Modest rise in number saying there is "solid evidence" of global warming. Washington, DC: Author.*

Water Pollution and Inadequate Sanitation

Water quality is also a serious problem. Drinking water is often unsafe because of poor sanitation procedures for human waste in poor nations and because of industrial discharge into lakes, rivers, and streams in wealthy nations. Inadequate sanitation and unsafe drinking water cause parasitic infections and diseases such as diarrhea, malaria, cholera, intestinal worms, typhoid, and hepatitis A. The World Health Organization estimates that unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation cause the following number of annual deaths worldwide: (a) 2.5 million deaths from diarrhea, including 1.4 million child deaths from diarrhea; (b) 500,000 deaths from malaria; and (c) 860,000 child deaths from malnutrition. At least 200 million more people annually suffer at least one of these serious diseases due to inadequate sanitation and unsafe drinking water (Cameron, Hunter, Jagals, & Pond, 2011; Prüss-Üstün, Bos, Gore, & Bartram, 2008).Cameron, J., Hunter, P., Jagals, P., & Pond, K. (Eds.). (2011). *Valuing water, valuing livelihoods*. London, United Kingdom: World Health Organization; Prüss-Üstün, A., Bos, R., Gore, F., & Bartram, J. (2008). *Safer water, better health: Costs, benefits, and sustainability of interventions to protect and promote health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

Nuclear Power

Nuclear power has been an environmental controversy at least since the 1970s. Proponents of nuclear power say it is a cleaner energy than fossil fuels such as oil and coal and does not contribute to global warming. Opponents of nuclear power counter that nuclear waste is highly dangerous no matter how it is disposed, and they fear meltdowns that can result if nuclear power plant cores overheat and release large amounts of radioactive gases into the atmosphere.

The most serious nuclear plant disaster involved the Chernobyl plant in Ukraine in 1986. Chernobyl's core exploded and released radioactive gases into the atmosphere that eventually spread throughout Europe. The amount of radiation released was four hundred times greater than the amount released by the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima at the end of World War II. About five-dozen people (Chernobyl workers or nearby residents) soon died because of the disaster. Because radiation can cause cancer and other health problems that take years to develop, scientists have studied the health effects of the Chernobyl disaster for the last quarter-century. According to the United Nations Scientific Committee of the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), an estimated 27,000 additional cancer deaths worldwide will eventually result from the Chernobyl disaster (Gronlund, 2011).Gronlund, L. (2011). *How many cancers did Chernobyl really cause?—updated version*. Cambridge, MA: Union of Concerned Scientists.

Seven years earlier in March 1979, a nuclear disaster almost occurred in the United States at the Three Mile Island plant in central Pennsylvania. A series of technological and human failures allowed the plant's core to overheat to almost disastrous levels. The nation held its breath for several days while officials sought to bring the problem under control. During this time, some 140,000 people living within twenty miles of the plant were evacuated. The near disaster severely weakened enthusiasm for nuclear power in the United States, and the number of new nuclear plants dropped sharply in the ensuing two decades (Fischer, 1997).Fischer, D. (1997). *History of the International Atomic Energy Agency: The first forty years*. Vienna, Austria: Internatinal Atomic Energy Agency.

Japan was the site of the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in March 2011, when an earthquake and tsunami seriously damaged a nuclear plant in the Fukushima region, 155 miles north of Tokyo. More than 80,000 residents had to be evacuated because of the massive release of radioactive gases and water, and they remained far from their homes a year later as high levels of radiation continued to be found in the evacuated area. A news report on the anniversary of the disaster described the desolation that remained: "What's most striking about Japan's nuclear exclusion zone is what you don't see. There are no people, few cars, no sign of life, aside from the occasional livestock wandering empty roads. Areas once home to 80,000 people are now ghost towns, frozen in time. Homes ravaged from the powerful earthquake that shook this region nearly a year ago remain virtually untouched. Collapsed roofs still block narrow streets. Cracked roads make for a bumpy ride" (Fujita, 2012).Fujita, A. (2012, February 6). Japan's nuclear exclusion zone shows few signs of life. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/International/fukushimas-nuclear-exclusion-zone-shows-signs-life/story?id=15521091#.TzFSXONSRyc. It will take at least thirty years to fully decommission the damaged reactors at Fukushima. The news report said, "This nuclear wasteland may not be livable for decades" (Fujita, 2012).Fujita, A. (2012, February 6). Japan's nuclear exclusion zone shows few signs of life. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/International/fukushimas-nuclear-exclusion-zone-shows-signs-life/story?id=15521091#.TzFSXONSRyc.

In February 2012, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) issued a study that said the risk from nuclear power accidents in the United States was "very small." If an accident should occur, the NRC concluded, plant operators would have time to cool down reactor cores and prevent or reduce the emission of radiation (DiSavino, 2012).DiSavino, S. (2012, February 1). Nuclear accidents pose little risk to health: NRC. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/01/us-utilities-nuclear-

accidentstudy-idUSTRE8101ZA20120201. However, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is more concerned about this risk (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2011).Union of Concerned Scientists. (2011). Nuclear reactor crisis in Japan FAQs. Retrieved from http://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear_power/nuclear_power_risk/safety/nuclear-reactor-crisis-faq.html#us-plant-risk. It says that several US reactors are of the same design as the Fukushima reactors and thus potentially at risk for a similar outcome if damaged by an earthquake. According to the UCS, "If [these reactors] were confronted with a similar challenge, it would be foolish to assume the outcome would not also be similar." It adds that although earthquakes can cause fires at reactors, US plants routinely violate fire protection standards. A news report on the similarities between US nuclear power plants and the Fukushima plant reached a similar conclusion, noting that US nuclear power plants "share some or all of the risk factors that played a role at Fukushima" (Zeller, 2011).Zeller, T., Jr. (2011, March 14). US nuclear plants have same risks, and backups, as Japan counterparts. *New York Times*, p. A10.

As this conclusion implies, nuclear power critics say NRC oversight of the nuclear industry is too lax. A 2011 investigation by the Associated Press (AP) yielded support for this criticism (Donn, 2011).Donn, J. (2011, June 20). As nuclear plants age, NRC loosens safety regulations. *The Boston Globe*, p. A2. The AP found that the NRC has been "working closely with the nuclear power industry to keep the nation's aging reactors operating within safety standards by repeatedly weakening those standards or simply failing to enforce them." The report continued, "Time after time, officials at the [NRC] have decided that original regulations were too strict, arguing that safety margins could be eased without peril." For example, when certain valves at nuclear plants leaked, the NRC revised its regulations to permit more leakage. Also, when cracking of steam generator tubes allowed radiation to leak, standards on tubing strength were weakened. And when reactors began to violate temperature standards, the NRC almost doubled the permitted temperatures. The investigation found "thousands" of problems in aging reactors that it said the NRC have simply ignored, and it concluded that a "cozy relationship" exists between the NRC and the nuclear industry.

A retired NRC engineer interviewed by the AP agreed that his former employer too often accommodated the nuclear industry by concluding that existing regulations are overly stringent. "That's what they say for everything, whether that's the case or not," the engineer said. "They say 'We have all this built-in conservatism.'"

Ground Pollution and Hazardous Waste

Pollution of the air and water is an environmental danger, as we saw earlier, but so is pollution of the ground from hazardous waste. *Hazardous wastes* are unwanted materials or byproducts that are potentially toxic. If discarded improperly, they enter the ground and/or bodies of water and eventually make their way into the bodies of humans and other animals and/or harm natural vegetation.



Love Canal, an area in Niagara Falls, New York, was the site of chemical dumping that led to many birth defects and other health problems.

Image courtesy of US Environmental Protection Agency, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Love_Canal_protest.jpg.

Two major sources of hazardous waste exist: (1) commercial products such as pesticides, cleaning fluids, and certain paints, batteries, and electronics and (2) byproducts of industrial operations such as solvents and wastewater. Hazardous waste enters the environment through the careless actions of homeowners and other consumers, and also through the careless actions of major manufacturing corporations. It can cause birth defects, various chronic illnesses and conditions, and eventual death.

Sometimes companies have dumped so much hazardous waste into a specific location that they create *hazardous waste sites*. These sites are defined as parcels of land and water that have been contaminated by the dumping of dangerous chemicals into the ground by factories and other industrial operations. The most famous (or rather, infamous) hazardous waste site in the United States is undoubtedly Love Canal, an area in a corner of Niagara Falls, New York. During the 1940s and 1950s, a chemical company dumped 20,000 tons of toxic chemicals into the canal and then filled it in with dirt and sold it for development to the local school board. A school and more than eight hundred homes, many of them low income, were later built just near the site. The chemicals eventually leached into the groundwater, yards, and basements of the homes, reportedly causing birth defects and other health problems. (See Note 15.27 "People Making a Difference".)

People Making a Difference

In Praise of Two Heroic Women

In the annals of activism against hazardous waste dumping, two women stand out for their contributions.

One was Lois Gibbs, who led a movement of residents of Love Canal to call attention to the dumping of hazardous waste in their neighborhood, as just discussed in the text. Gibbs had never been politically active before 1978, when evidence of the dumping first came to light. After reading a newspaper article about the dumping, she began a petition to shut down a local school that was next to the dump site. Her efforts generated a good deal of publicity and prompted state officials to perform environmental tests in the homes near the site. Two years later the federal government authorized funding to relocate 660 families from the dangerous area. Gibbs later wrote, “It will take a massive effort to move society from corporate domination, in which industry’s rights to pollute and damage health and the environment supersede the public’s right to live, work, and play in safety. This is a political fight. The science is already there, showing that people’s health is at risk. To win, we will need to keep building the movement, networking with one another, planning, strategizing, and moving forward. Our children’s futures, and those of their unborn children, are at stake.”

The second woman was Erin Brockovich, the subject of a 2000 film of that name starring Julia Roberts. Brockovich also was not politically active before she discovered hazardous waste dumping while she was working as a legal assistant for a small California law firm. As part of her work on a real estate case, she uncovered evidence that Pacific Gas & Electric had been dumping a toxic industrial solvent for thirty years into the water supply of the small town of Hinkley. Her investigation led to a lawsuit that ended in 1996 with the awarding of $333 million in damages to several hundred Hinkley residents.

Both Lois Gibbs and Erin Brockovich have remained active on behalf of environmental safety in the years since their celebrated initial efforts. They are two heroic women who have made a very significant difference.

Sources: Brockovich, 2010; Gibbs, 1998Brockovich, E. (2010). Erin Brockovich biography. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from http://www.brockovich.com/mystory.html; Gibbs, L. M. (1998). Learning from Love Canal: A 20th anniversary retrospective. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from http://arts.envirolink.org/arts_and_activism/LoisGibbs.html.

The Superfund program of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), begun about thirty years ago, monitors and cleans up hazardous waste sites throughout the country. Since its inception, the Superfund program has identified and taken steps to address more than 1,300 hazardous waste sites. About 11 million people live within one mile of one of these sites.

Oceans

The world’s oceans are at peril for several reasons, with “potentially dire impacts for hundreds of millions of people across the planet,” according to a news report (ScienceDaily, 2010).ScienceDaily. (2010, June 19). Ocean changes may have dire impact on people. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved from http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/06/100618103558.htm. A major reason is that overfishing of fish and mammals has dramatically reduced the supply of certain ocean animals. This reduction certainly makes it difficult for people to eat certain fishes at restaurants or buy them at supermarkets, but a far more important problem concerns the ocean food chain (Weise, 2011).Weise, E. (2011, July 15). Predator loss can start food-chain reaction. *USA Today*, p. 9A. As the supply of various ocean animals has dwindled, the food supply for the larger ocean animals that eat these smaller animals has

declined, putting the larger animals at risk. And as the number of these larger animals has declined, other animals that prey on these larger animals have had to turn to other food sources or not have enough to eat. This chain reaction in the ocean food chain has serious consequences for the ocean's ecosystem.

One example of this chain reaction involves killer whales and sea otters in the ocean off of western Alaska (Weise, 2011).Weise, E. (2011, July 15). Predator loss can start food-chain reaction. *USA Today*, p. 9A. Killer whales eat many things, but sea lions and harbor seals form a key part of their diet. However, the supply of these ocean mammals in western Alaska and elsewhere has decreased because of human overfishing of their prey fish species. In response, killer whales have been eating more sea otters, causing a 90 percent decline in the number of sea otters in western Alaska. Because sea otters eat sea urchins, the loss of sea otters in turn has increased the number of sea urchins there. And because sea urchins consume kelp beds, kelp beds there are disappearing, removing a significant source of food for other ocean life (Estes et al., 2011).Estes, J. A., Terborgh, J., Brashares, J. S., Power, M. E., Berger, J., Bond, W. J., et al. (2011). Trophic downgrading of planet Earth. *Science, 333*(6040), 301–306.

Another example of the ocean chain reaction concerns whales themselves. The whaling industry that began about 1,000 years ago and then intensified during the eighteenth century severely reduced the number of whales and made right whales almost extinct. In southern oceans, whale feces are an important source of nutrients for very small animals and plankton. As the whale population in these oceans has declined over the centuries, these animals and plankton that are essential for the ocean's ecosystem have suffered immeasurable losses (Weise, 2011).Weise, E. (2011, July 15). Predator loss can start food-chain reaction. *USA Today*, p. 9A.

Bycatch. In addition to overfishing, *bycatch*, or the unintentional catching and killing of fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds while other fish are being caught, also endangers hundreds of ocean species and further contributes to the chain reaction we have described. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (2012)National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2012). National bycatch program. Retrieved February 13, 2012, from http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/by_catch/index.htm. says that bycatch "can have significant social, environmental, and economic impacts." It costs the fishing industry much time and money, it threatens many ocean species, and it endangers the ocean's ecosystem.

A familiar bycatch example to many Americans is the accidental catching and killing of dolphins when tuna are being caught by large fishing nets. A less familiar example involves sea turtles. These animals' numbers have declined so steeply in recent decades that six of the seven species of sea turtles are in danger of extinction. The major reason for this danger is bycatch from shrimp trawl nets and other types of fishing. This bycatch has killed millions of sea turtles since 1990 (Viegas, 2010).Viegas, J. (2010, April 6). Millions of sea turtles captured, killed by fisheries. *Discovery News*. Retrieved from http://news.discovery.com/animals/turtles-bycatch-fishing.html.

Climate change. Other ocean problems stem from climate change. The oceans' coral reefs are among the most colorful and beautiful sights in the world. More important, they are an essential source of nutrients for the oceans' ecosystem and a major source of protein for 500 million people. They help protect shorelines from natural disasters such as tsunamis, and they attract tens of billions of dollars in tourism.



The decline of the whale population due to the whaling industry threatens the world's supply of plankton and other very small marine animals.

Image courtesy of Joel T. Barkan.

Despite all these benefits, coral reefs have long been endangered by overfishing, tourism, and coastal development, among other factors. Scientists have now found that climate change is also harming coral reefs (Rudolf, 2011).Rudolf, J. C. (2011, June 5). Under the sea, coral reefs in peril. *New York Times*, p. WK3. The global warming arising from climate change is overheating coral reefs throughout the world. This overheating in turn causes the reefs to expel the algae they consume for food; the algae are also responsible for the reefs' bright colors. The reefs then turn pale and die, and their deaths add to the ocean's food chain problem already discussed. Scientists estimate that three-fourths of the earth's reefs are at risk from global warming, and that one-fifth of all reefs have already been destroyed. They further estimate that almost all reefs will be at risk by 2050.

Global warming will continue to be a main culprit in this regard, but so will increasing acidity, yet another problem arising from climate change. As carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere, much of it falls into the ocean. This lowers the oceans' pH level and turns the oceans more acidic. This increasing acidity destroys coral reefs and also poses a risk to commercial species such as clams, lobsters, and mussels.

An additional ocean problem stemming from climate change is rising sea levels (Daley, 2011).Daley, B. (2011, April 3). Fighting a losing battle with the sea. *Boston.com*. Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/news/science/articles/2011/04/03/fighting_a_losing_battle_with_the_sea. Global warming has caused polar ice caps to melt and the seas to rise. This problem means that storm surges during severe weather are becoming an ever-greater problem. Even without storm surges, much coastal land has already been lost to rising ocean levels. Despite these problems, many coastal communities have failed to build adequate barriers that would minimize damage from ocean flooding.

Food

This chapter discussed food shortages earlier as a population problem, but food can also be an environmental hazard. Simply put, food is often unsafe to eat. In 2011, at least 31 Europeans died from a rare strain of E. coli, a deadly bacterium, and more than 3,000 became very ill; the culprit was contaminated bean sprouts (CNN, 2011).CNN. (2011, June 10). E. coli death toll rises to 31; sprouts traced to trash in home. *CNN World*. Retrieved from http://articles.cnn.com/2011-06-10/world/europe.e.coli_1_coli-outbreak-sprouts-german-health?_s=PM:WORLD. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 325,000 Americans are hospitalized annually because of illnesses contracted from contaminated food, and 5,000 Americans die each year from these illnesses (Kristof, 2011).Kristof, N. D. (2011, June 12). When food kills. *New York Times*, p. WK10.

The deadly bacteria at fault often result from improper handling and other activities related to growing livestock and processing food. But they also result from the fact that livestock are routinely given antibiotics to keep them healthy despite the crowded and often dirty conditions in which they live. However, this wide use of antibiotics allows bacteria resistant to antibiotics to grow. When humans contract illnesses from these bacteria, antibiotics do not relieve the illnesses (Kristof, 2012).Kristof, N. (2012, April 5). Arsenic in our chicken? *New York Times*, p. A23.

One journalist pointed out the obvious problem: "We would never think of trying to keep our children healthy by adding antibiotics to school water fountains, because we know this would breed antibiotic-resistant bacteria. It's unconscionable that Big Ag [Big Agriculture] does something similar for livestock" (Kristof, 2011, p. WK10).Kristof, N. D. (2011, June 12). When food kills. *New York Times*, p. WK10. A member of the US House of Representatives who is also a microbiologist agreed: "These statistics tell the tale of an industry that is rampantly misusing antibiotics in an attempt to cover up filthy, unsanitary living conditions among animals. As they feed antibiotics to animals to keep them healthy, they are making our families sicker by spreading these deadly strains of bacteria" (Kristof, 2011, p. WK10).Kristof, N. D. (2011, June 12). When food kills. *New York Times*, p. WK10.

Key Takeaways

- Environmental problems are largely the result of human behavior and human decision making. Changes in human activity and decision making are thus necessary to improve the environment.
- Environmental inequality and environmental racism are significant issues. Within the United States and around the world, environmental problems are more often found where poor people and people of color reside.
- Air pollution, global climate change, water pollution and inadequate sanitation, and hazardous waste are major environmental

problems that threaten the planet.

For You Review

1. Pretend you are on a debate team and that your team is asked to argue in favor of the following resolution: *Be it resolved, that air and water pollution is primarily the result of reckless human behavior rather than natural environmental changes*. Using evidence from the text, write a two-minute speech (about three hundred words) in favor of the resolution.
2. How much of the environmental racism that exists do you think is intentional? Explain your answer.
3. List one thing you did yesterday that was good for the environment and one thing that was bad for the environment.

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8.13: Addressing Population Problems and Improving the Environment

Addressing Population Problems and Improving the Environment

Learning Objectives

1. Outline sociological-based strategies that should help address population issues.
2. List sociological-based strategies and other efforts that should help improve environmental problems.

The topics of population and the environment raise many issues within the United States and across the globe for which a sociological perspective is very relevant. We address a few of these issues here.

Population

We saw earlier that experts disagree over how concerned we should be generally about global population growth, and especially about the degree to which overpopulation is responsible for world hunger. Still, almost everyone would agree that world hunger is a matter of the most serious concern, even if they do not agree on why world hunger is so serious and so persistent. Both across the globe and within the United States, children and adults go hungry every day, and millions starve in the poorest nations in Africa and Asia.

As our earlier discussion indicated, many experts believe it is a mistake to blame world hunger on a scarcity of food. Instead, they attribute world hunger to various inequalities in access to, and in the distribution of, what is actually a sufficient amount of food to feed the world's people. To effectively reduce world hunger, inequalities across the globe and within the United States based on income, ethnicity, and gender must be addressed; some ways of doing so have been offered in previous chapters.

Population growth in poor nations has slowed but remains a significant problem. Their poverty, low educational levels, and rural settings all contribute to high birth rates. More effective contraception is needed to reduce their population growth, and the United Nations and other international bodies must bolster their efforts, with the aid of increased funding from rich nations, to provide contraception to poor nations. But contraceptive efforts will not be sufficient by themselves. Rather, it is also necessary to raise these nations' economic circumstances and educational levels, as birth rates are lower in nations that are wealthier and more educated. In particular, efforts that raise women's educational levels are especially important if contraceptive use is to increase. In all these respects, we once again see the importance of a sociological perspective centering on the significance of socioeconomic inequality.

The Environment

Environmental problems cannot be fully understood without appreciating their social context. In this regard, we discussed two major emphases of environmental sociology. First, environmental problems are largely the result of human decision making and activity and thus preventable. Second, environmental problems disproportionately affect the poor and people of color.

These two insights have important implications for how to improve our environment. Simply put, we must change the behaviors and decisions of individuals, businesses, and other organizations that harm the environment, and we must do everything possible to lessen the extra environmental harm that the poor and people of color experience. Many environmental scholars and activists believe that these efforts need to focus on the corporations whose industrial activities are often so damaging to the air, water, and land.

Beyond these general approaches to improving the environment, there are many strategies and policies that the United States and other nations could and should undertake to help the environment. Although a full discussion of these lies beyond the scope of this chapter, environmental experts recommend a number of actions for the United States to undertake (Lever-Tracy, 2011; Madrid, 2010; McNall, 2011).Lever-Tracy, C. (2011). *Confronting climate change*. New York, NY: Routledge; Madrid, J. (2010). *From*

a "green farce" to a green future: Refuting false claims about immigrants and the environment. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress; McNall, S. G. (2011). *Rapid climate change: Causes, consequences, and solutions*. New York, NY: Routledge. These include the following:

1. Establish mandatory electricity and natural gas reduction targets for utilities.
2. Expand renewable energy (wind and sun) by setting a national standard of 25 percent of energy to come from renewable sources by 2025.
3. Reduce deforestation by increasing the use of sustainable building materials and passing legislation to protect forests.
4. Reduce the use of fossil fuels by several measures, including higher fuel economy standards for motor vehicles, closing down older coal-fired power plants, and establishing a *cap-and-trade* system involving large payments by companies for carbon emissions to encourage them to reduce these emissions.
5. In cities, increase mass transit and develop more bicycle lanes and develop more efficient ways of using electricity and water.

Another strategy is perhaps delightfully simple: turn rooftops and paved surfaces white! In many US cities, roofs of houses, high-rises, and other buildings are covered with dark asphalt shingles. Dark surfaces trap heat from the sun and promote higher air temperatures. Painting roofs white or using white shingles to reflect the sun's heat would reduce these temperatures and help offset the effects of global warming (Levinson et al., 2010; Lomborg, 2010).Levinson, R., Akbari, H., Berdahl, P., Wood, K., Skilton, W., & Petersheim, J. (2010). A novel technique for the production of cool colored concrete tile and asphalt shingle roofing products. *Solar Energy Materials & Solar Cells, 94*(6), 946–954; Lomborg, B. (2010, November 17). Cost-effective ways to address climate change. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/16/AR2010111604973.html. A similar offset would occur from changing the color of our streets. Many roads in cities and other areas are composed of dark asphalt; using a lighter material would also help reduce air temperature and counter global warming. If these measures reduced air temperature in warm cities, less air conditioning would be needed. In turn, electricity use and carbon dioxide emissions would also decline.

To repeat what was said at the outset of this chapter, it is no exaggeration to say that the fate of our planet depends on the successful implementation of these and other strategies and policies. Because, as sociology emphasizes, the environmental problems that confront the world are the result of human activity, changes in human activity are necessary to save the environment.

Key Takeaways

1. Efforts to address population issues should focus on the various inequalities that lead to both overpopulation and food scarcity.
2. Efforts to improve the environment should keep in mind the greater environmental harm that the poor and people of color suffer.

For Your Review

1. If you had a million dollars to spend to address one population problem, would you use it to provide contraception, or would you use it to improve the distribution of food? Explain your answer.
2. Which one of the environmental problems discussed in the text concerns you the most? Why?

Key Takeaways

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8.14: End of Chapter Synthesis

End-of-Chapter Material

Summary

1. Functionalism stresses the value of normal changes in population growth and the environment, but recognizes that certain population and environmental problems are dysfunctional. Conflict theory stresses that world hunger stems from lack of access to food, not from overpopulation, and it blames multinational corporations for environmental problems. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes people's activities and perceptions in regard to population and the environment.
2. Demography is the study of population. It encompasses three central concepts—fertility, mortality, and migration—which together determine population growth.
3. The world's population is growing by about 80 million people annually. Population growth is greatest in the low-income nations of Africa and other regions, while in several industrial nations it is declining.
4. Thomas Malthus predicted that the earth's population would greatly exceed the world's food supply. Although his prediction did not come true, hunger remains a serious problem around the world. Food supply is generally ample thanks to improved technology, but the distribution of food is inadequate in low-income nations.
5. Demographic transition theory helps explain why population growth did not continue to rise as much as Malthus predicted. As societies become more technologically advanced, first death rates and then birth rates decline, leading eventually to little population growth.
6. US history is filled with prejudice against immigrants. Immigrants today contribute in many ways to the American economy and have relatively low crime rates. Despite these facts, many people are opposed to immigration, and many states have passed laws to restrict benefits and movement for immigrants.
7. Environmental sociology is the sociological study of the environment. One major emphasis of environmental sociology is that environmental problems are largely the result of human activity and human decision making. A second major emphasis is that environmental problems disproportionately affect low-income people and people of color. These effects are called environmental inequality and environmental racism, respectively.
8. Environmental problems include climate change, air and water pollution, and hazardous waste. Children are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of environmental problems.

Using What You Know

You are in your second year in the accounting division of a large company that operates a factory on the main river in a small town. One day you notice some financial documents. These documents suggest to you that your company has been dumping a toxic solvent into the river rather than having it collected and taken to a safe site. Having had an environmental sociology course in college, you are very concerned about this possible problem, but you are not certain that the dumping is in fact occurring, and you also do not want to lose your job. Do you take any action related to your new suspicion of the possible dumping, or do you remain silent? Explain your answer.

What You Can Do

To help deal with the population and environmental problems discussed in this chapter, you may wish to do any of the following:

1. Contribute money to a national environmental organization or join a local environmental group in your activity.
2. Start an organization on your campus to deal with world hunger.
3. Organize speaker series on your campus to various environmental topics.

Further Reading

RACIAL DISPARITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- https://psci.princeton.edu/tips/2020/8/15/racial-disparities-and-climate-change

‘Unbearable’ landfill has to go, demand Avenal residents

- https://www.yourcentralvalley.com/news/unbearable-landfill-has-to-go-demand-avenal-residents/

End of Chapter Discussions

1. "How has urbanization evolved over time, and what are the sociological perspectives, such as conflict theory and functionalism, that can be applied to analyze its impact on society? Discuss the specific challenges associated with urban life, such as housing, homelessness, traffic, and air pollution, and their implications for urban residents. How do these issues relate to public education and crime rates in urban areas?"
2. "Examine the unique problems faced by rural communities, including fertility and birth rates, mortality and migration patterns. Explore the sociological debate over population issues in rural areas and the impact of immigration on these dynamics. Discuss the sociological aspects of immigration policies, detention practices and the relationship between immigrants and domestic violence in rural settings."
3. "Analyze the global environmental concerns mentioned in the chapter, including the effects of nuclear power, water pollution, and inadequate sanitation. How does the sociological perspective contribute to our understanding of these environmental challenges and their connection to human activities? Explore policy responses and societal efforts aimed at addressing these issues. What effects do these environmental changes have on other animals? Are there any notable examples of successful environmental policies or initiatives that have made a positive impact on communities, whether urban or rural?"

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9: WAR AND TERRORISM

9.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives

9.2: Sociological Perspectives on War and Terrorism

9.3: War

9.4: Veterans- The Casualties of War

9.5: Militarism and the US Military Budget

9.6: US Arms Exports

9.7: Terrorism

9.8: Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism

9.9: End of Chapter Synthesis

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9.1: 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 Time*s 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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9.2: 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 Time*s, 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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9.3: 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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9.4: 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 Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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 Time*s, 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*.

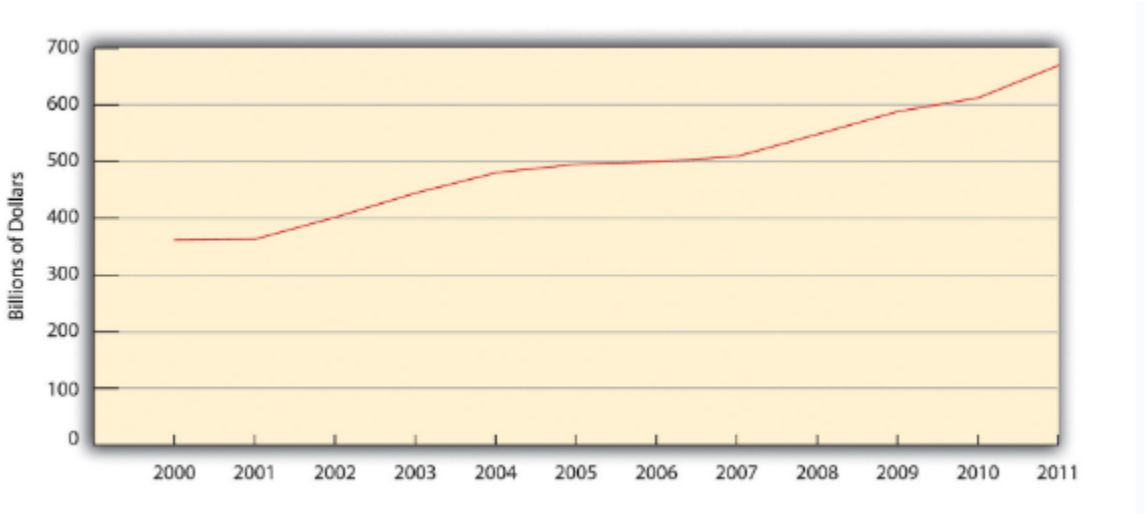
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9.5: Militarism and the US Military Budget

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.

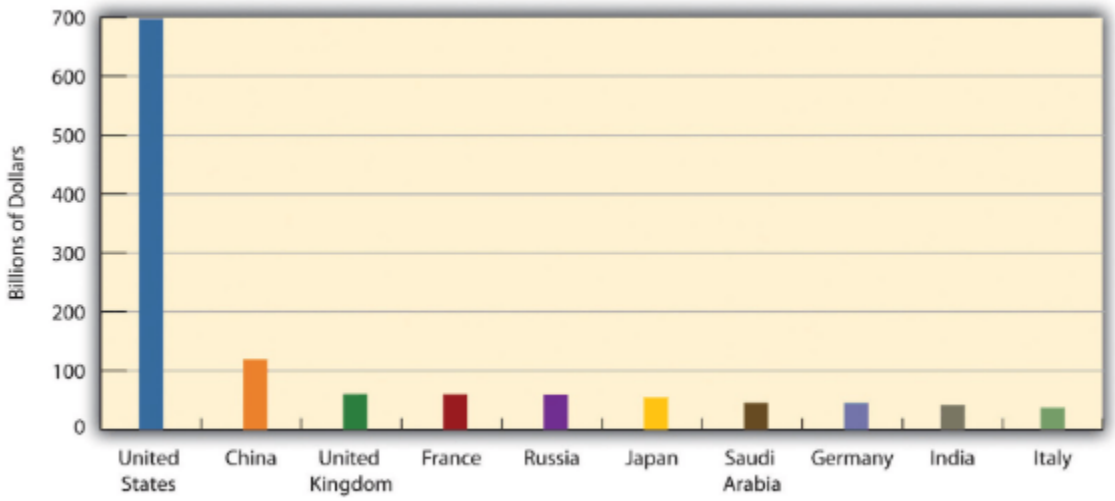
Second, the government states that defense outlays accounted for almost 20 percent of federal spending in 2011 (US Census Bureau, 2012).US Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab. 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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9.6: 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 Time*s, 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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9.7: 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/2392620700/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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9.8: 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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    - 3.7: Explaining Racial and Ethnic Inequality - *Undeclared*
    - 3.8: Reducing Racial and Ethnic Inequality - *Undeclared*
    - 3.9: Implementing Ethnic Studies Courses- Who Decides? - *Undeclared*
    - 3.10: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 4: Reconstructing and Analyzing Arguments - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.2: Reconstructing and analyzing arguments - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 4.3: Identifying Arguments - *Undeclared*
    - 4.4: Arguments vs. Explanations - *Undeclared*
    - 4.5: More Complex Argument Structures - *Undeclared*
    - 4.6: Using Paraphrases to Reconstruct Arguments - *Undeclared*
    - 4.7: Validity - *Undeclared*
    - 4.8: Soundness - *Undeclared*
    - 4.9: Deductive vs. Inductive Arguments - *Undeclared*
    - 4.10: Arguments with Missing Premises - *Undeclared*
    - 4.11: Evaluative Language - *Undeclared*
    - 4.12: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5: Gender Inequality Work and The Economy - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 5.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 5.2: Understanding Sex and Gender - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 5.3: Culture and Gender - *Undeclared*

- 5.4: Feminism and Sexism - *Undeclared*
- 5.5: Dimensions of Gender Inequality - *Undeclared*
- 5.6: Gender Inequality in the United States - *Undeclared*
- 5.7: Women of Color- A Triple Burden - *Undeclared*
- 5.8: Household Inequality - *Undeclared*
- 5.9: Violence against Women- Rape and Sexual Assault - *Undeclared*
- 5.10: The Benefits and Costs of Being Male - *Undeclared*
- 5.11: Reducing Gender Inequality - *Undeclared*
- 5.12: Work and the Economy - *Undeclared*
- 5.13: The US Labor Force - *Undeclared*
- 5.14: Sociological Perspectives on Work and the Economy - *Undeclared*
- 5.15: Problems in Work and the Economy - *Undeclared*
- 5.16: The Role of Tax Policy - *Undeclared*
- 5.17: Crime in the Workplace - *Undeclared*
- 5.18: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

◦ 6: Crime and Criminal Justice - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.2: The Problem of Crime - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.3: Measuring Crime - *Undeclared*
- 6.4: Who Commits Crime? - *Undeclared*
- 6.5: Explaining Crime - *Undeclared*
- 6.6: The Criminal Justice System - *Undeclared*
- 6.7: Reducing Crime - *Undeclared*
- 6.8: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

◦ 7: Health, Healthcare and Informal Fallacies - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 7.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 7.2: Sociological Perspectives on Health and Health Care - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 7.3: Global Aspects of Health and Health Care - *Undeclared*
- 7.4: Health in the United States - *Undeclared*
- 7.5: Problems of Healthcare in the United States - *Undeclared*
- 7.6: Improving Health and Health Care - *Undeclared*
- 7.7: Formal vs. Informal Fallacies - *Undeclared*
- 7.8: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

◦ 8: Urban and Rural Problems and Populations and the Environment - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.2: A Brief History of Urbanization - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 8.3: Sociological Perspectives on Urbanization - *Undeclared*
- 8.4: Problems of Urban Life - *Undeclared*
- 8.5: Problems of Rural Life - *Undeclared*
- 8.6: Improving Urban and Rural Life - *Undeclared*
- 8.7: Population and the Environment - *Undeclared*
- 8.8: Population - *Undeclared*
- 8.9: Views of Population Growth - *Undeclared*
- 8.10: Immigration - *Undeclared*
- 8.11: The Environment - *Undeclared*
- 8.12: Environmental Problems - *Undeclared*
- 8.13: Addressing Population Problems and Improving the Environment - *Undeclared*
- 8.14: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

◦ 9: War and Terrorism - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 9.1: Chapter Introduction and Objectives - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 9.2: Sociological Perspectives on War and Terrorism - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 9.3: War - *Undeclared*
- 9.4: Veterans- The Casualties of War - *Undeclared*
- 9.5: Militarism and the US Military Budget - *Undeclared*
- 9.6: US Arms Exports - *Undeclared*
- 9.7: Terrorism - *Undeclared*
- 9.8: Preventing War and Stopping Terrorism - *Undeclared*
- 9.9: End of Chapter Synthesis - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

◦ Back Matter - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- Index - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- Glossary - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- Detailed Licensing - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*

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