

SSC 190:CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY



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Contemporary Society | SSC 190 Textbook

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This text was compiled on 04/16/2026

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1: Introduction to the Social Sciences



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This chapter discusses some of the disciplines and sub-disciplines that fall under the “umbrella” of the social sciences.

1) What are the Social Sciences?

The Six Social Sciences

The social sciences include many different disciplinary and sub-disciplinary areas. These include, for example, sociology, anthropology, criminology, archaeology, social policy, human geography, and many more. The ones we will focus on in this text are six: anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, history, and psychology.

Anthropology is the study of humanity. It is the study of everything and anything that makes humans human. Anthropologists examine every dimension of humanity by asking questions like: How did we come to be human and who are our ancestors? Why do people look and act so differently throughout the world? What do we all have in common? How have we changed culturally and biologically over time? What factors influence diverse human beliefs and behaviors throughout the world?

Anthropology is an expansive field of study. It is comprised of four subfields that in the United States include cultural anthropology, archaeology, biological (or physical) anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. Together, these subfields provide a multi-faceted picture of the human condition. Applied anthropology is another area of specialization that aims to solve specific practical problems in collaboration with governmental, non-profit, and community organizations as well as businesses and corporations.

Sociology is the systematic study of all those aspects of life designated by the adjective “social.” They concern relationships, and what happens when more than one person is involved. These aspects of social life never simply occur; they are organized processes. They can be the briefest and most unconscious of everyday interactions — moving to the right to let someone pass on a busy sidewalk, for example — or the largest and most enduring interactions — such as the billions of daily exchanges that constitute the circuits of global capitalism. If there are at least two people involved, even in the seclusion of one’s own mind, then there is a social interaction. Why does the person move to the right on the sidewalk? What collective processes lead to the decision that moving to the right rather than the left is normal? Is it different in countries where people drive on the left?

Think about the T-shirts in the chest of drawers at home. What are the sequences of linkages, exchanges, transportation conduits, and social relationships that connect one’s T-shirts to the dangerous and hyper-exploitative garment factories in rural China or Bangladesh? These are the type of questions that sociology seeks to explore and understand.

Economics is a social science that examines how people choose among the limited alternatives available to them. Every economy must answer the following questions:

- What should be produced? Using the economy’s resources to produce one thing often requires giving up another. Producing better education, for example, may require cutting back on other services, such as health care. A decision to preserve a wilderness area requires giving up other uses of the land. Every society must decide what it will produce with its resources.

· How should goods and services be produced? There are all sorts of choices to be made in determining how goods and services should be produced. Should a firm employ a few skilled or a lot of unskilled workers? Should it produce in its own country or should it use foreign plants? Should manufacturing firms use new or recycled raw materials to make their products?

· For whom should goods and services be produced? If a good or service is produced, a decision must be made about who will get it. A decision to have one person or group receive a good or service usually means it will not be available to someone else. For example, representatives of the poorest nations on earth often complain that energy consumption per person in the United States is 17 times greater than energy consumption per person in the world's 62 poorest countries. Critics argue that the world's energy should be more evenly allocated. Should it? That is a "for whom" question.

Every economy must determine what should be produced, how it should be produced, and for whom it should be produced. Economics looks at this.

Political Science

The systematic study of the process of who gets what, when, and how—political science—investigates the reasons behind the decisions governments make. For example, political scientists investigate the degree of control governments choose to exercise over various forms of communication, like your smartphone. Political scientists examine both the ways individuals and groups seek to influence governmental action and the ways governmental decisions in turn affect individuals and groups.

Political scientists may not have lab coats or electron microscopes, but like other types of scientists, they use theory, logic, and evidence in an attempt to answer questions, to make predictions, or to arrive at conclusions. Some political scientists strive to understand the fundamental laws of politics in much the same way theoretical physicists seek to comprehend the cosmos for pure knowledge. These political scientists try to uncover the universal principles of how humans and their institutions aim to prevail in political conflicts. But most political scientists accept that human behavior is not entirely *deterministic* (that is, perfectly predictable, strictly obeying set laws), so they instead look for patterns that may enable them to predict in general how humans and their institutions interact.

History

The study of history is about more than giving a recounting of past events. It is about helping us know more about ourselves and our present. Once historians muster as many facts as they can about the past, they then try to understand *causation*. Causation is the why behind events. What are the forces that shape history, that shift it one way or another, that move people to change on both an individual and a societal level? Then, with greater understanding of how the past brought us to the present, historians can also ask, what can or should society or individuals do in that present to change the future?

Historians, particularly those trained in recent times, work to eliminate as much bias as they can. For example, historians in the 1960s and 1970s began to question their discipline's traditional focus on elites and sought out new sources that highlight the lives of more ordinary people. Driven by a bias in favor of the counterculture and politics of the era, (such as the counterculture, the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the gay rights movement) they wanted to know more about what *all* people experienced. This opened up new realms of historical study and understanding. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that people (even historians!) cannot wholly disconnect themselves from their environment and beliefs while studying the past.

Psychology

People tend to have a limited view of psychologists as people who provide professional services such as therapy or counseling. Of course, many people with education in psychology are involved in these activities. More, however, are devoted to other activities. In fact, the very large majority of people who have degrees in psychology devote their careers to some other goal than providing therapy or counseling.

Psychology refers to the scientific study of the mind and behavior. This is a very broad definition, and psychology is a very broad discipline. Psychology is made up of several major subdivisions. Biological psychology involves the study of the biological bases of behavior. Sensation and perception refer to the area of psychology that is focused on how information from our senses is received, and how this information is transformed into our perceptual experiences of the world around us. Cognitive psychology is concerned with the relationship that exists between thought and behavior, and developmental psychologists study the physical and cognitive changes that occur throughout one's lifespan. Personality psychology focuses on individuals' unique patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion.

Industrial and organizational psychology, health psychology, sport and exercise psychology, forensic psychology, and clinical psychology are all considered applied areas of psychology. Industrial and organizational psychologists apply psychological concepts to industrial and organizational settings. Health psychologists look for ways to help people live healthier lives, and clinical psychology involves the diagnosis and treatment of psychological disorders and other problematic behavioral patterns. Sport and exercise psychologists study the interactions between thoughts, emotions, and physical performance in sports, exercise, and other activities. Forensic psychologists carry out activities related to psychology in association with the justice system.

Development of Social Science

The study of the social sciences, as developed in the Western world, can be said to emerge from the Age of Enlightenment in the late 17th Century.

This is not to say that the study of the social sciences emerged exclusively from the West. Some of the earliest written and spoken accounts of human action, values, and the structure of society can be found in Ancient Greek, Islamic, Chinese and indigenous cultures.

For example, Ibn Khaldoun, a 14th-century North African philosopher, is considered a pioneer in the field of social sciences. He wrote the book *Muqaddimah*, which is regarded as the first comprehensive work in the social sciences. It charts an attempt to create a universal history based on studying and explaining the economic, social, and political factors that shape society and discussed the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations.

Moreover, indigenous peoples across the world have contributed in various and significant ways to the development of scientific knowledge and practices. Indeed, contemporary social science has much to learn from indigenous knowledges and methodologies, as well as much reconciling to do in terms of its treatment of indigenous peoples the world over.

Nevertheless, the dominant Western European narrative of the achievements of the enlightenment still tends to overlook and discredit much of this knowledge. Additionally, male thinkers have tended to dominate within the Western social sciences, while women have historically been excluded from academic institutions and their perspectives largely omitted from social science history and texts. Therefore, much of the history of the social sciences represent a predominantly white, masculine viewpoint. This is important to keep in mind as we go forward.

Beginning with René Descartes (1596-1650), both the natural and social sciences developed from the concept of the rational, thinking individual. Early Enlightenment thinkers argued that human beings use reason to understand the world, rather than only referring to religion.

Other thinkers around this time such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), M. de Voltaire (1694-1778) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784), began to develop different methodologies to scientifically explain processes in the body, the structure of society, and the limits of human knowledge.

In 1784, a Prussian philosopher named Immanuel Kant published a short essay entitled *What is Enlightenment?* According to Kant, Enlightenment was all about the courage to think for one's self, to question the accepted notions of any field of human knowledge rather than relying on a belief imposed by an outside authority.

Enlightenment thinkers embraced the idea that scientific progress was limitless. They argued that all citizens should be equal before the law. They claimed that the best forms of government were those with rational laws oriented to serve the public interest. In a major break from the past, they increasingly claimed that there was a real, physical universe that could be understood using the methods of science, in contrast to the false, made-up universe of "magic" suitable only for myths and storytelling. In short, Enlightenment thinkers proposed ideas that were novel at the time, but were eventually accepted by almost everyone in Europe (and many other places, including the colonies of the Americas).

The Enlightenment introduced themes of thought that undermined traditional religious beliefs, at least in the long run. Perhaps the major theme of Enlightenment thought that ran contrary to almost every form of religious practice at the time was the rejection of "superstitions," things that simply could not happen according to science (such as a virgin giving birth to a child, or wine turning into blood during Communion).

Most Enlightenment thinkers argued that the "real" natural universe was governed by natural laws, all watched over by a benevolent but completely remote "supreme being" who took no direct interest or action in human affairs. While few

Enlightenment thinkers were outright atheists, almost all of them decried many church practices and what they perceived as the ignorance and injustice behind church (especially Catholic) laws.

The Enlightenment was also against “tyranny,” which meant the arbitrary rule of a monarch indifferent to the welfare of his or her subjects. Almost no Enlightenment thinkers openly rejected monarchy as a form of government - indeed, some Enlightenment thinkers befriended powerful kings and queens - but they roundly condemned cruelty and selfishness among individual monarchs. The perfect state was, in the eyes of most Enlightenment thinkers, one with an “enlightened” monarch at its head, presiding over a set of reasonable laws. Many Enlightenment thinkers thus looked to Great Britain, since 1689 ruled by a monarch who agreed to its written constitution and worked closely with an elected parliament, as the best extant model of enlightened rule.

Behind the rejection of tyranny was a focus on the human mind’s capacity for reason. Reason is the mental faculty that takes sensory data and orders it into thoughts and ideas. The basic argument that underwrote the thought of the Enlightenment is that reason is universal and inherent to humans, and that if society could strip away the pernicious patterns of tradition, superstition, and ignorance, humankind would arrive naturally at a harmonious society. Thus, almost all of the major thinkers of the Enlightenment tried to get to the bottom of just that task: what is standing in the way of reason, and how can humanity become more reasonable?

It is this kind of thinking, as described above, that the world, people, society, and government can be understood, and changed through reason and effort, rather than the belief that the world is run by forces beyond our understanding or control, that gives rise to the social sciences.

It should be noted however that despite their more progressive view of society, most Enlightenment thinkers did not advocate equality for all, regardless of race, gender, or class. Rather, they insisted that rights and freedoms were not hereditary. This perspective attacked the traditionally exclusive position of the European aristocracy, but was still largely limited to expanding the political and individual rights of middle and upper class white males. Most women, men at the lower end of the social hierarchy, and people of color were generally excluded from participating in the Enlightenment or benefiting from its ideals of social and political equality.

Some elite women, such as the French philosophers Émilie du Châtelet and Germaine de Staël, assumed leadership roles in the era’s vibrant intellectual debates and gained recognition for their contributions. Some Enlightenment thinkers, however, did not consider women to be equal in status to their male counterparts. Rousseau, for example, described women as subordinate to men based on the assumption that they were weaker and less rational by nature. On this premise, Rousseau argued that women belonged in the domestic space of the home, while the public space of politics and business was the preserve of men. Other thinkers such as Locke supported women’s increased access to education and participation in the public sphere, but they asserted that men should retain leadership roles within the household and in public life due to their greater strength and ability. Although a small number of women played important roles in the Enlightenment, most did not immediately benefit from its emphasis on ideals of equality and freedom.

In what later became the United States and in some European countries, Enlightenment theories coexisted with the institution of slavery, the appropriation of lands from Indigenous people, and access to political participation and the protections afforded by the state that were generally limited to White men of property. These contradictions were often justified by asserting that because Indigenous peoples resided in a nonpolitical state, and because they were believed to lack the capacity to reason, they were not entitled to the rights and protections afforded to other peoples. Enlightenment lawyers defended slavery on the grounds that either it was a justifiable consequence of conquest or that Black people were incapable of governing themselves without the protection of White owners.

Although Enlightenment ways of thinking helped form the foundations of documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, the ideals of rights and freedoms Enlightenment thinking espoused coexisted with ingrained racial injustices that formed the foundation of slavery and colonialism.

2) What Do the Social Sciences Do?

Natural Sciences vs. Social Sciences

Often in public and political discourse, the natural sciences are seen as being more ‘scientific’ and a source of ‘stronger’ or ‘more objective’ knowledge than the social sciences. However, the reality is that both have equally important but different things to offer.

Natural sciences try to create explanatory and predictive universal theories and truths that explain the natural world and can predict how it will behave – like studying the weather. This type of science deals with what *is*, not what *should be*. In this sense it is *empirical* – dealing with observable facts and events. For example, you can observe and count how many polling places there are in a state (what *is*), but that does not and cannot tell you how many polling places there *should be* to properly serve the population of that state.

The social sciences analyze people and societies to help create practical values-based action to better those societies. Social inquiry does not generally seek universal laws or principles that can be used to predict courses of action, but instead offers a critical assessment of values, *norms*, and structures of power and dominance. (A *norm* is an accepted standard or expectation regarding behavior.)

Social inquiry then is linked to questions of the good life, that is, to questions of what we *ought* to do to live well. In this sense the social sciences are *normative* – dealing with values and norms and the idea of *what should be* (rather than the empirical focus, which is on *what is*).

Power and the Social Sciences

In order to undertake this kind of inquiry, the issue of power, who has it, and how it is exercised must be addressed. Power shapes what individuals can do, have, and achieve. Power is however not equally distributed. Some people, groups, and institutions have more, some have less. The distribution of power shapes society and affects people's lives in profound ways. Social sciences, in its concern for *what should be*, then must concern itself with the idea and practice of power.

The analysis, assessment, and interpretation that social science engages in regarding society and its power structures, if it is conducted publicly and in ways that engage the public can challenge power structures and support efforts to promote social change. It can also be used to thwart change and to defend the *status quo* (i.e., the existing state of affairs). In this way then the practice of the social sciences is also a use of power – to change or to defend the current shape of society.

Let's take a look at some of the ways social science studies varies aspects of people, society, and power.

Social Science, the Self, and the Other

The social sciences use a range of methods to study the self (especially in psychology) and others (especially in anthropology). Social science tries to understand more about ourselves by studying others, searching for common traits or cultural and social differences between “us” and “the other.” In this process, the “Other” and their characteristics of otherness are often studied to better understand relationships between “us” and “Other.”

However, the process of labelling someone as “Other” inherently places them at the margins, setting them apart from mainstream society on the basis of particular traits, and decentering their own identity. Moreover, “othering” often takes place on the basis of particular traits, such as a person's religious, social, cultural, sexual, or ethnic identities. This can have significant negative effects, leading to ostracization and discrimination. This process feeds into an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality that creates ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups – power imbalances - as a result.

Examples of a social identity that can give way to “othering” and consequent power imbalances are sex, gender and sexuality. Sex refers to a biological classification based on anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. *Gender* refers to the social and cultural norms, expectations, and behaviors that are associated with being labeled a particular sex (for example, dressing in certain ways). Gender is not solely based on biological sex and can vary across cultures and time periods.

Many genders exist – *cisgender* (in which you identify with the gender you were assigned at birth based on physical traits), *transgender* (in which you do not so identify), agender, genderfluid, nonbinary, and more. For more on this, you should refer to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mzNEKd7yCE>

There are also *intersex* people, who are not clearly either male or female at birth. For more on this, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7lXq54ioa4>

Typically, ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are gendered traits that are used to describe certain qualities and behaviors that are expected to be associated with being male or female. Masculinity is often associated with toughness, assertiveness, and competitiveness, while femininity is often associated with softness, emotional expressiveness, and nurturing.

In reality, however, traits that are considered either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ exist on a spectrum; individuals can exhibit both masculine and feminine traits, regardless of their biological sex or gender identity.

Critical scholars have also drawn attention to the ways in which these gendered traits are bound up in expressions of power and domination. That is, these categories themselves are oppressive social constructs rather than objective reflections of reality. For example, in US history, “feminine” traits were deemed to be an indication of mental weakness, thereby serving as an excuse to deprive women of legal rights such as the right to vote and to keep them out of the economic, political, social spheres dominated by men, keeping men in power.

Feminist scholar Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), provides an example of how the notion of femininity can be used to oppress and deny rights and freedoms to those who identify as women. In her book ‘The Second Sex’ (1949), she argued that femininity was a myth that served to oppress women and deny their rights to free and equal participation in society.

To learn more, watch the video below and think about the kinds of implications this thinking has had on the social institution of the family, and on conceptions of gender today.

Feminine beauty – a social construct? (YouTube, 2:01) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT6wjgssVK4>

In addition to gender, sexuality refers to an individual’s sexual orientation and desires. For instance, sexual orientation can include, among other things, heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality. The LGBTQI+ acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex, with the plus sign representing a variety of other identities, including asexual, aromantic, and more. Sexuality is a complex and multi-faceted aspect of our identities that can be shaped by a variety of influences, including biological, social, cultural, and psychological factors.

Sexuality, like sex and gender, can be a sources of opportunity or oppression, depending on the society and culture within which a person exists. A gay man or a transgender woman for example may find themselves being “othered” in various ways in society, from being shunned socially, to being denied basic rights, to fearing for their physical safety. A straight person, on the other hand, would not encounter these obstacles, and could even benefit from the ostracization of these “others” in terms of opportunity.

It’s also important to keep in mind though that individuals can face multiple forms of oppression and/or privilege based on not only on one of these factors, but on other aspects of their identity as well.

For example, a transgender woman of color may face discrimination and prejudice based on both her gender identity and her race. Additionally, individuals may also experience privilege based on one aspect of their identity while facing oppression based on another aspect. For instance, a white, gay man may face discrimination based on his sexual orientation, but also benefit from privilege based on his race. This is the concept of *intersectionality*.

Intersectionality highlights the importance of recognizing the unique experiences and perspectives of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized communities. For example, a black, lesbian woman may face discrimination and prejudice based on her race, sexuality, and gender identity, and may also experience unique forms of discrimination and violence that are specific to her intersecting identities.

Social science studies these and other kinds of “othering,” how they connect to power, and the effects they have on individuals and society.

Social Science, Borders, Globalization, and Capitalism

The social sciences are also interested in explaining how different cultures and societies interact with each other on a global as well as local scale. From the ancient empires that rose and fell, to colonization during the expansion of the British and Spanish empires, to the new forms imperialism led by American expansionism, human history has long been a global history. This history, far from a unified tale of the equality of human beings sharing a single world, is divided: along lines of class, race, religion, nationality, and gender. It is the job of social scientists to address these conflicts and inconsistencies, so as to imagine a better world united by a shared humanity.

Borders mark the formal boundaries between different nation-states. Borders between groups of people are nothing new, but the formalized demarcation between political units or nation-states as marked in maps and determined to be legally binding is a relatively new development. Early borders were physical, such as rivers, mountains and the sea. People were often divided into

lowland and highland peoples, or land and sea peoples, who traded and were in contact, even though they were physically distanced.

With the rise of the nation-state in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, borders became more politically significant. Nation-states sought to define their territories and assert their sovereignty over their borders. To do this, they employed techniques such as boundary markers, boundary surveys, and maps. These techniques were used to physically demarcate the border and provide a clear visual representation of the territory controlled by a given state. Thus, bordering techniques include the physical building of border fences, walls and other barriers as well as the technological in the form of passports and other identification documents that tie us via citizenship to a particular nation-state.

Borders and bordering techniques have a long history tied to war, imperialism, and economic exploitation. Legal boundaries are often disputed by different ethnic, religious, or otherwise distinctive groups. Conflicts over borders as the result of colonization are often the result of arbitrary border lines drawn on a map, then sanctified as law by colonizing entities.

For example, due to the haphazard divisions of geographic areas without consideration for the people who lived there, such as across Africa in the late 1800s, and across Australia from the late 1700s, the peoples that occupy a particular area often became forcibly unified under a nation-state, despite significant cultural differences. In other cases ethnic groups were split up by arbitrary borders across multiple nation-states such as after the Mexican-American war in the 1840s.

The nation-state is also closely linked to the emergence of capitalism and both developed together. The nation-state provided the security, infrastructure and regulations across a larger geographic area that capitalism needed to grow. Fundamentally an economic system, capitalism has nevertheless evolved over its relatively short history into a political and social system which profoundly affects the lives of individuals. As an example, there is the phenomenon of globalization and capitalism's role in it.

Globalization refers to the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of the world's economies, societies, and cultures due to advancements in communication, transportation, and technology. While it was a celebrated concept and reality in the 1990s and early 2000s, when euphoria of this interconnectedness and global connection was meant to diminish conflict in a new liberal world order of peace and prosperity, such analysis was short lived. Critics soon showed that globalization rests on exploitation and unequal global power relations.

For example, Eric Wolf's work, "Europe and the People Without History" shows how globalization has been driven by the interests of dominant states (nations) and the interest of capital (e.g., large business concerns and powerful wealthy business leaders). This then lead to *cultural* and *economic imperialism*.

Economic imperialism is when one nation (or business concern) has substantial power over the economy or economic resources of another nation, region, or people. This power can be used for various purposes that profit the imperial nation at the expense of the dominated one. The imperial nation can, for instance, control the development and sale of the subject nation's raw materials (such as tea in India by Britain), exploit its people for cheap labor (such as in sweatshops in Asian nations), or seek unequal but profitable business opportunities (such as the US in Latin America).

Cultural imperialism is when a dominant nation uses cultural means to maintain its economic dominance over another nation, region, or people. This is often done through mass media, and seeks to impose the values and beliefs of the dominant country onto the subject country (including the beliefs that support imperialism).

According to his *world systems theory*, the global economy can be divided into three main categories: core, semi-periphery, and periphery.

Core countries are highly industrialized and economically dominant, possessing a disproportionate amount of wealth and power in the world system. Peripheral countries, on the other hand, are less industrialized and economically dependent, often serving as suppliers of raw materials for the core. Semi-peripheral countries occupy a middle ground between the two, sometimes acting as intermediaries between the core and periphery.

The relationships between these three groups are characterized by unequal power dynamics and exploitation. Core countries are seen as benefiting from the exploitation of peripheral countries, which are subjected to low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to (often their own) resources. Over time, this leads to unequal development, poverty, and underdevelopment in peripheral countries, perpetuating their position as suppliers of cheap labor and raw materials.

Social Science and Institutions

Social institutions are important to social scientists because they form a critical part of the fabric of our societies and have considerable influence on our lives. They also function as sources of power.

Key social institutions include (but are not limited to):

- The state
- Work
- The family
- Education
- The economy
- Media
- Religion
- Health care
- Criminal justice system

Social institutions are typically long lasting, though their shape and structure often change incrementally over time, and they sometimes also experience significant changes in response to particularly revolutionary moments (e.g. the feminism of the 1960s-80s had considerable and relatively quick impacts on the social institution of the family).

We will briefly consider a few of these institutions – namely, family, the state, religion, education, and work below.

The family

The family unit has changed dramatically over time but remains a critically important social institution. Changes to the family unit have often occurred along gender lines; because (after the industrial revolution) men have typically earned higher wages in the formal economy. They are the ones who have most often undertaken waged labor while women have generally tended to work in the domestic realm (the informal economy). The changing nature of work has, thus, had a significant impact on women's role in the family, as shown in the figure below.

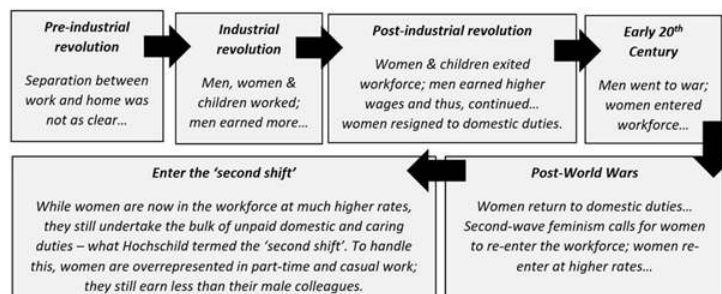


Figure 1.2 (Copyright; author via source)

Pre-industrial revolution - Separation between work and home was not as clear...Industrial revolution - Men, women & children worked; men earned more... Post-industrial revolution - Women & children exited workforce; men earned higher wages and thus, continued... women resigned to domestic duties. Early 20th Century - Men went to war; women entered workforce... Enter the 'second shift' - While women are now in the workforce at much higher rates, they still undertake the bulk of unpaid domestic and caring duties - what Hochschild termed the 'second shift'. To handle this, women are overrepresented in part-time and casual work; they still earn less than their male colleagues. Post-World Wars - Women return to domestic duties... Feminist calls for women to re-enter the workforce; women re- enter at higher rates...

The feminism of the 1960s-80s saw the re-entry of large numbers of women into the workforce and significant changes to the family unit as a result. The paid childcare sector stepped in to fill the gap and, as contraception became more readily available, women gained greater control over planning their families, or choosing not to have children at all (though social norms differ across geography and culture). However, even though women now participate in the formal economy at much higher rates, the playing field is far from even.

Arlie Hochschild shed light on what one of her research participants called the ‘second shift’. Women would go off to work in the formal economy, do their ‘day shift’, and then come home and do a second shift that consisted of unpaid work: cooking dinner, preparing children for bed, doing the washing, cleaning and other domestic duties. Women also tend to absorb these duties by taking on less work in the formal economy — e.g., through part-time and casual positions. As a result, women — particularly women of color and First Nations women — are far more likely across the globe to earn less and experience poverty. This represents, among other things, a power imbalance in the institution of the family.

The nation state

The state might be considered a ‘meta-institution’, insofar as it is a social institution that — to an extent — has an overarching role in organizing other social institutions. For example, governments typically preside over the organization and administration of education, the economy, the criminal justice system, and more.

According to international law, nation states have sovereignty over their territories. They govern citizens of their territory in accordance with an invisible ‘*social contract*’. A social contract is a sort of agreement between the state and its citizens in which citizens agree to abide by the laws and rulings of the state in return for being able to live peaceably within the nation state’s bounds and receive other benefits from the state, such as citizenship rights (e.g. access to welfare, health care and more).

However, we can also consider how the state can also operate as a key site of power and oppression.

As a *settler colony**, Australia as we know it today was erected on the stolen lands of Indigenous peoples who lived here for 65,000+ years prior. It was stolen on the basis that it was erroneously understood to be a ‘no man’s land’; that is, uncivilized and uncultivated. There is, today, still no formal recognition of the unceded sovereignty of Indigenous Australians, nor any reckoning for the theft of Indigenous lands, including the violent genocide that has accompanied and enabled colonization. The experience of indigenous people in the United States has been similar.

(**Settler colonialism* is when colonizers and settlers invade and occupy territory to permanently replace the existing society with the society of the colonizers. As noted above, the United States is also a settler colony.)

Nevertheless, there have been strong and ongoing proposals by Indigenous Australians for a stronger voice in governance and policymaking, including through the Yirrkala bark petitions in 1963 and the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017 which called for a recognition of the unceded sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, as well as for three structural reforms (a ‘voice’ in the Australian constitution, treaty, and truth-telling via a Makkarata Commission).

When we take a critical perspective to thinking about the state as a key social institution, we can also delve more deeply into how it can operate as a source of stability for some, while simultaneously operating as a site of instability and oppression for others.

Religion

Religion plays an important role in life around the world. It is an umbrella term to describe a range of beliefs and practices. There are many definitions of religion with most but not all focusing on the supernatural. Broadly, religion is a system of beliefs with symbols and rituals or performances that provide meaning to life.

There are several functions of religion as a social institution:

1. Religions can provide answers to the most fundamental questions of life and death, such as why are we here? or why do people suffer? The religious answers can be reassuring and provide meaning to people’s existence on Earth.
2. Religion as social institution can create social solidarity as its members adhere to a shared set of social norms and worldview. In everyday religious life and on special occasions, such as birth, marriage or death, rituals act to bind community together.
3. The socialization or initiation into a religious community and larger social institution with rules and norms leads to social cohesion and provides for a meaningful place for people in society.
4. Religions act as a source of social control in many societies. A religion’s moral codes can direct believers to act in certain ways to avoid judgement or punishment by supernatural or earthly judges (e.g., God or clergy). The possibility of divine punishments can then act to control behavior and even thoughts. Clergy and other earthly religious figures, speakers, or writers may also act to police behavior and thoughts of people in ways they deem acceptable.

There are several critiques of the social functions of religions. For example, religion can be used to perpetuate social inequality by reflecting the interests of the rich and powerful. This is done by claiming that the order of things as it is is somehow divinely mandated (that this or that situation is somehow “natural” or “part of God’s order”), or that those in power are in power because they are the favored of God (their wealth and power is proof of God’s favor). It can also be used to reassure those that are oppressed or marginalized in the system that their best strategy is to accept their lot and hope for happiness in the afterlife – which they will only achieve if they don’t make trouble or raise questions about the current status quo on Earth.

When people believe either of these ideas, it makes any change in the status quo that much more difficult to make and keeps the oppressed or marginalized in that position. In these ways then religion can solidify and perpetuate political and economic inequalities.

Religion can also perpetuate gender and racial inequalities. God and other divine figures are almost exclusively depicted as male. Almost all of the world’s major religions, including Christianity, are patriarchal. Many religions ban women from serving as clergy, and place rules on women’s behavior to keep them in a subordinate position. Slavery in the US South was defended as being approved by God and the Bible.

This is not to say that all religions are conservative or reactionary. Some, like the Quaker sect in the US, fought for the abolition of slavery and women’s suffrage. But it’s important to keep in mind that religion does not inhabit some sort of neutral sphere in society. It is not separate from power and the use of power to gain certain ends. This can and is then studied by social sciences.

Education

Education was and still is a process of socialization whereby children become exposed to the social, cultural and political conventions of larger society and are taught how to perform skills and tasks that may be later required of them in the workplace. While education serves a variety of important social functions, it is also a site within which power imbalances are reflected and reinforced.

For example, boys were typically sent to school while girls stayed home; the gender pay gap meant (and in lots of cases, still means) boys and men were the ones who would later be able to bring in a larger income. Early feminist writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) argued that girls and women should also have equal rights to education and work. However, it wasn’t until the late 1800s that schools were made compulsory for both boys and girls; even then, girls were directed towards subjects that taught domestic duties (e.g., home economics) and guided into what were considered ‘feminine’ professions (e.g., administration, nursing, teaching), the latter of which continue to be paid less, overall, than other professions.

Who and what are included as part of a “typical” education is also important in terms of power. For instance, for many years in US history, the stories of minorities, common folk, and women were left out of standard history texts. That changed over the years, however, the tide has been shifting again to specifically exclude diverse voices in some states. For example, in 2022, the governor of Florida banned instruction concerning sexual orientation and gender identity and limited what schools in Florida can teach about racism. Other states have taken similar actions. To control what people can and can’t learn is an exercise of power.

Further, a main motivation to access education today is the credential (degree, diploma or certificate) that one attains at the end. This has created a tendency to value education mainly based on the eventual credential one attains and not the learning that happens in between.

We often hear that education is a social equalizer. However, many also challenge this myth. Consider the following scenario:

Raul and Jean both want to go to college, study hard, and get ahead. Raul is able to draw on a variety of family resources, including money, social connections, and a knowledge of how the institution of college works, because both his parents are college graduates. Janet however is the first of her family to attend college, they are not that well off, and they have no connections. Janet will have to hold down a job as well as study and will not be able to join any of the prestigious sororities or clubs on campus.

As we can see, then, class has important implications for educational engagement and outcomes. So do other aspects of social identity (e.g., gender, race, sexuality and more). This is because educational institutions tend to reflect and reinforce dominant social norms. What is not accepted in larger society tends not to be as easily accepted in schools either. Education also tend to judge students’ abilities and behaviors against socially determined benchmarks, which can serve to perpetuate rather than alleviate inequality (for example, *neurodivergent** students may be judged more harshly than neurotypical students).

*Neurodivergent means that a person's brain processes information differently than a typical brain. This term covers a wide range of situations, including ADHD and being on the autism spectrum, or having differences in terms of sensory processing, communication style, and behavior.

Work/The economy

We typically think about “work” through a very narrow frame — that is, work in the *formal economy*. The formal economy is the part of an economy that is recognized and regulated by government, such as in terms of contract and company law, taxation, and labor law. Working as a librarian, or as a teacher, or as a banker are all examples of jobs in the formal economy.

However, this narrow framing tends to exclude lots of different forms of work, including:

- work in the black (illegal) economy
- work in the informal economy (e.g. unpaid care work, volunteer work, domestic work)
- work inside versus outside the home.



Figure 1.3:(Copyright; author via source)

Work hasn't always been conceptualized in the way it is today; understanding this helps us critique current conceptualizations of work and the impact these narrow frames have on our lives.

What we consider to be “work” has changed over time. In pre-industrial societies, families tended to work on the land and/or in craft-like trades. Work was typically undertaken at home or very close to home; the distinction between work and home was not as strong as it is today (though COVID-19 has challenged this!). Domestic responsibilities, including caring for children, were more evenly shared amongst families and communities. People also tended to be more self-sufficient and independent (e.g., growing their food locally and perhaps also participating in local bartering).

These workers often owned and had a stake in the product of their labor. For instance, if a family managed to grow 2 pounds of tomatoes, but only needed 1 pound to sustain themselves, they could sell the extra tomatoes and directly reap the benefit of their labor — that is, they would be paid directly for the tomatoes they produced.

Then things changed. Technological advances led to the industrial revolution, more people began to work in mills and factories, which started to pop up as the mass manufacture of goods became more commonplace. Families also moved away from the land and into cities to take up work in these new industries.

The shift to wage work meant that workers no longer owned the product of their labor.

People started working for wages. This meant the extra benefit that might be accumulated through an individual's hard work was redirected away from workers and to employers. Returning to the example of tomatoes, while pre-industrial workers would directly reap the rewards of producing an extra pound of tomatoes, workers during the industrial revolution were instead paid the same wage regardless of how many tomatoes they produced. Any extra capital from surplus tomatoes instead went to the employer.

Conditions were terrible in early industrial workplaces; horrific workplace accidents and deaths were commonplace. However, because families began to move into industrial cities at extremely high rates, employers had a surplus workforce to choose from. This meant that employees had very little power. If they demanded better working conditions or higher wages, they could be fired and easily replaced. Workers began to realize that they had greater power in numbers and, so, began to see value in unionizing as a means of pooling their collective bargaining power. It was more difficult to fire and replace an entire workforce than it was when dealing with just one or two people.

Workers' unions made some great gains, such as demanding higher wages and time off (e.g., we owe the concept of the weekend to unions). However, union membership has decreased dramatically in recent decades. Many have argued that this is related to the erosion of workers' rights and concomitant rise in more precarious and insecure forms of work.

This more precarious work includes such work as:

- part-time, temporary ("temp"), or casual work,
- self-employment, and
- chronically low, sporadic and/or stagnant wages.

Precarious workers are also often unable to enjoy social protections, like vacations, pensions, or sick or maternity leave. The impacts of increasingly insecure and precarious work are now felt across most industries and by people from a range of backgrounds. When other factors come into play, such as racism, sexism, ableism and more, some workers can effectively be locked out of the labor market for long periods of time.

There are several contributing factors to the emergence of these types of workers, including:

- a surplus of workers but not a surplus of jobs (so employees increasingly have to take whatever's offered, rather than what might be in their best interest),
- a decline in the general quality of work conditions and workers' rights, which has been accompanied by significant declines in unions,
- government policies that are directed towards supporting increasingly unregulated capitalism, and
- the rise of technology, which has resulted in new platforms for work (like the '*gig economy*'). (The *gig economy* is when independent or freelance workers are hired for short-term work projects, rather than salaried employees.)

Work, definitions of work, structures of work, are all areas where power plays a role in determining how a person will live, what opportunities they will have, and how they will be treated in society.

Social scientists observe the specific features of society and its organization. These elements include structures, institutions, power considerations, and role of human agency. Identifying problematic elements in society allows us to ponder the question: how should the world look? The answer to that question then can lead to re-thinking society. The job of social scientists is to see past the barriers that prevent change by striving for a better world for all. This kind of "blue sky thinking" is what allows societies to progress, by imagining an ideal world without social problems and then endeavoring to get as close to that ideal as possible.

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2: The Science of Social Science

1) Social Science and Science

At their core, the social sciences apply the ‘scientific method’ to the analysis of people, societies, power, and social change. So in order to understand social science, it’s important to know both what “the scientific method” and “science” are, what they are not, and ways they should and should not be used.

Science

What is science? To some, science refers to high school or college courses such as physics, chemistry, and biology. To others, science is a craft practiced by scientists in white coats using specialized equipment in their laboratories.



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A typical view of a “scientist” doing “science.” (Public domain)

To be more specific, however, *science* refers to a systematic and organized body of knowledge in any area of inquiry that is acquired using the scientific method (the scientific method is described further in the next section).

Science can be grouped into two broad categories: natural science and social science. Natural science is the science of naturally occurring objects or phenomena, such as light, objects, matter, earth, celestial bodies, or the human body. Natural sciences can be further classified into physical sciences, earth sciences, life sciences, and others. Physical sciences consist of disciplines such as physics (the science of physical objects), chemistry (the science of matter), and astronomy (the science of celestial objects). Earth sciences consist of disciplines such as geology (the science of the earth). Life sciences include disciplines such as biology (the science of human bodies) and botany (the science of plants).

In contrast, social science is the science of people or collections of people, such as groups, firms, societies, or economies, and their individual or collective behaviors. Social sciences can be classified into disciplines such as psychology (the science of human behaviors), sociology (the science of social groups), economics (the science of firms, markets, and economies), and others. A list of the various social sciences was given in the first chapter.

The natural sciences are different from the social sciences in several respects. The natural sciences are very precise, accurate, deterministic, and independent of the person making the scientific observations. For instance, a scientific experiment in physics, such as measuring the speed of sound through a certain media or the refractive index of water, should always yield the exact same results, regardless of the time or place of the experiment, or the person conducting the experiment. If two students conducting the same physics experiment obtain two different values of these physical properties, then it generally means that one or both of those students must be in error.

However, the same cannot be said for the social sciences, which tend to be less accurate, deterministic, or unambiguous. For instance, if you measure a person’s happiness using a hypothetical instrument, you may find that the same person is more happy or less happy (or sad) on different days and sometimes, at different times on the same day. One’s happiness may vary depending on the news that person received that day or on the events that transpired earlier during that day.

Furthermore, there is not a single instrument or metric that can accurately measure a person’s happiness. Hence, one instrument may calibrate a person as being “more happy” while a second instrument may find that the same person is “less happy” at the same instant in time. In other words, there is a high degree of measurement error in the social sciences and there is considerable uncertainty and little agreement on social science policy decisions.

For instance, you will not find many disagreements among natural scientists on the speed of light or the speed of the earth around the sun, but you will find numerous disagreements among social scientists on how to solve a social problem such as reducing global terrorism or rescuing an economy from a recession. Any student studying the social sciences must be comfortable with handling higher levels of ambiguity, uncertainty, and error that come with such sciences.

Five Key Properties of Science

In order for a conclusion about either the natural or the social world to be “scientific” it has to be arrived at in a certain way. Scientific research has five key properties:

- Science is empirical.
- Science is repeatable.
- Science is self-correcting.
- Science relies on rigorous observation.
- Science strives to be objective.
- Science Is Empirical

Empirical means “derived from experience.” Scientists “experience” the world and make observations from that actual experience, like touching a cactus and finding it’s sharp.

Another kind of observation is an inside-the-head one, observation of one’s own consciousness and thought processes. This second technique is known as introspection. This kind of observation is not empirical. For example, you can imagine lying on a beach and relaxing and then to report how that thought makes you feel. You might report it to be a very effective way of helping you to relax. But because you did not have to leave your own head, so to speak, your feeling is not an empirical observation - you can’t conclude from it that beaches are in fact relaxing, because you never experienced an actual beach. You’re only experiencing your own imagination of a beach.

It is probably fair to say that empirical observations are the most fundamental principle of science. These experience-based, public observations are what allow the remaining four characteristics of science to be achieved. Empirical observations are the fundamental basis of science.

Science Is Repeatable

After conducting a scientific research project, a scientist often publishes an article about their research in a scientific journal. One of the sections of that article would be called Methods and it would lay out in great detail how the scientist conducted their study. If future researchers wanted to repeat the study, all they would have to do is pick up the article and follow the methods like a recipe. This process, repeating a research study, is called *replication*.

Well, that sounds boring and useless, you might think. How do science and psychology progress if researchers spend their time repeating someone else’s study? First, replication is precisely what creates the third key property of science, the capacity for self-correction (see below).

Second, relatively few studies are simple repetitions of previous studies. Instead, the replication seeks to repeat some key aspects of an earlier study while introducing a new wrinkle. To give a simple example, a replication of a study done on learning in preschool children might examine the same phenomenon in children in the primary grades. It could show that the way that preschool children learn also applies to children of other ages as well.

Replication applies both to methods and the results of a study. If a study is repeated exactly in terms of method, it should yield the same results.

Science Is Self-Correcting

It was stated above that replication is what allows science to be self-correcting. Self-correcting means, roughly, that evidence based on good research tends to accumulate, while information based on bad research tends to fade away and be forgotten.

Here are two real-life examples of this scenario.

First, in 1989, a team of scientists claimed that they had achieved something called cold fusion, a nuclear reaction previously thought to be impossible. Observers noted that the results of these experiments, if verified, could be harnessed to solve the world’s

energy supply problems (Energy Research Advisory Board, USDOE, 1989). Researchers across the world could not believe that this difficult problem, with such important potential for the human race, had finally been solved. Many tried to replicate these results in their own labs. The vast majority was unable to do so, and the original research was forgotten.

The second example is from biology. In 1997, a team of researchers again claimed that they had achieved what had previously been thought impossible. They were able to clone a higher mammal, a sheep; they named her Dolly. Doubting researchers across the world attempted to replicate these results, and this time, they were successful. Since the cloning of Dolly, there have been other sheep, cats, deer, dogs, horses, mules, oxen, rabbits, rats, and rhesus monkeys (NHGRI, 2017). It is now commonly accepted scientific knowledge that cloning of higher mammals is possible.

Of course, it can take many years for enough evidence to accumulate on one side of a controversy in order to draw a firm conclusion. This lengthy time frame makes it very frustrating to be a consumer of scientific information. We may learn through media reports, for example, that a study found a particular diet to be safe and effective. Soon after, another study is reported in which the first study is contradicted. What is happening is that we are hearing about the individual pieces that compose the scientific controversy while it is still in progress.

Science Relies on Rigorous Observation

Scientific evidence produced under tightly controlled conditions is what allows the scientist to draw valid conclusions. These conditions are defined by specific research methods. These methods are essentially the rules for making scientific observations. There are many different research methods depending on what type of science you are doing and what questions you are trying to investigate. There are entire courses that teach the details (that is, the rules) about various methods and explain why one method may be more appropriate in a given situation than another. The important point here is that scientists learn about phenomena by carefully controlling, recording, and analyzing their empirical observations.

Science Strives to Be Objective

Science strives to be objective in two ways. First, scientists strive to be personally objective; they try to not let their personal beliefs influence their research. Second, the observations that scientists make must be objective, meaning that different observers would observe the same thing. For example, if a research participant answers a question on a survey by choosing a number on a 5-point scale, different observers would be able to agree which number was chosen.

It can be very difficult to make objective observations. Imagine sending different observers out to watch a group of children and count how many aggressive acts they commit. As you might guess, the different observers might come back with very different reports. One source of difficulty can be the personal background and beliefs of the individual observers. Perhaps one observer believes that boys are more aggressive, so they watch boys more carefully than they watch girls.

Another source of difficulty when trying to make objective observations is a lack of clarity about precisely what is being observed. In order to make observations more objective, researchers use *operational definitions*. Operational definitions specify exactly how a concept will be measured in the research study.

For example, an operational definition for aggressiveness could be a checklist of behaviors that observers might see in the children they are watching: hitting, punching, kicking another child, using profanity toward another child, directing a threat toward another child, and so on. The goal is to come up with a list of behaviors that are a reasonable reflection of aggressiveness and that different observers can consistently recognize as aggressiveness. An operational definition like this gives observers a way to know what to count as an aggressive behavior so they can compare apples to apples.

The Role of Peer Review in Science

Scientific research uses a technique called *peer review* to help ensure that the features of good science are contained in any specific research project. Here is how it works. If someone wants to have their research study published in a scientific journal, it will be reviewed by a small group (often three) of experts in the research area. These experts, the peers, will evaluate the article, making comments about and suggestions to improve the scientific strength of the project and report. Publication decisions are based on the recommendations of the peer reviewers.

As a result of peer-review, a great many articles are rejected, and nearly all others are required to make significant revisions before they can be published. Peer review, then, is the basic mechanism that used for quality control throughout the scientific disciplines.

Peer review is not perfect however. Low quality studies can slip through, and high quality studies may occasionally be rejected by a powerful but biased reviewer. It is, however, the best procedure available to maintain scientific rigor in published research.

The Scientific Method

The preceding sections defined science as knowledge acquired through a scientific method. So what exactly is the scientific method? The *scientific method* refers to a standardized set of techniques for building scientific knowledge, such as how to make valid observations, how to interpret results, and how to generalize those results.

The scientific method must satisfy four key characteristics:

Replicability: Others should be able to independently replicate or repeat a scientific study and obtain similar, if not identical, results.

Precision: Theoretical concepts, which are often hard to measure, must be defined with such precision that others can use those definitions to measure those concepts and test that theory.

Falsifiability: A theory must be stated in such a way that it can be disproven. Theories that cannot be tested or falsified are not scientific theories and any such knowledge is not scientific knowledge. A theory that is specified in imprecise terms or whose concepts are not accurately measurable cannot be tested, and is therefore not scientific. Sigmund Freud's ideas on psychoanalysis fall into this category and are therefore not considered a "theory," even though psychoanalysis may have practical utility in treating certain types of ailments.

Parsimony: When there are multiple different explanations of a phenomenon, scientists must always accept the simplest or logically most economical explanation. This concept is called parsimony or "Occam's razor." Parsimony prevents scientists from pursuing overly complex or outlandish theories with an endless number of concepts and relationships that may explain a little bit of everything but nothing in particular.

Any branch of inquiry that does not allow the scientific method to test its basic laws or theories cannot be called science. For instance, theology (the study of religion) is not science because theological ideas—such as the presence of God—cannot be tested by independent observers using a logical, confirmable, repeatable, and scrutinizable. Similarly, arts, music, literature, humanities, and law are also not considered science, even though they are creative and worthwhile endeavors in their own right.

The scientific method, as applied to social sciences, includes a variety of research approaches, tools, and techniques for collecting and analyzing qualitative or quantitative data. These methods include laboratory experiments, field surveys, case research, ethnographic research, action research, and so forth.



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The basic cycle of the scientific method (Public domain)

2) What Science (and Social Science) is NOT

Science is one way to ask about, learn about, and describe the world. All other ways to do this are *non-science*. Areas such as religion, ethics, philosophy, and art are all non-science. They don't follow the scientific method. That doesn't mean they are somehow "less good" or "less important" than science, they are simply something different that also is of value to us and the world.

Pseudoscience

Pseudoscience refers to activities and beliefs that are claimed to be scientific by their proponents—and may appear to be scientific at first glance—but are not.

Consider, for instance, the champions of intelligent design, who essentially present their argument for the existence of God as a properly scientific theory which is purportedly based on scientific studies in fields such as molecular biology and evolutionary biology but incorporates both blatant and subtle misconceptions about evolutionary biology. Not only is the theory of intelligent design unscientific, but it is pseudoscientific, as it camouflages and presents itself as a legitimate science. In short, while not all non-science is pseudoscience, all pseudoscience is definitely non-science.

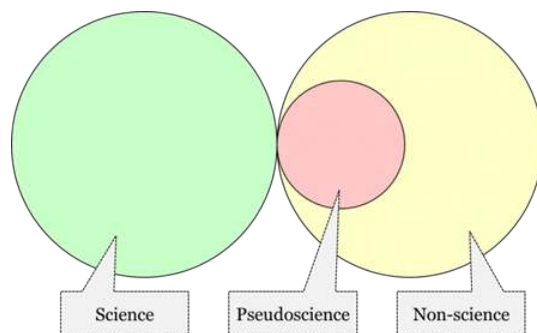


Figure 2.3: Copy and Paste Caption here. (Copyright; author via source)

How science, pseudoscience, and non-science intersect

So how can we tell if something is science or pseudoscience?

A set of beliefs or activities can be said to be pseudoscientific if (a) its adherents claim or imply that it is scientific but (b) it lacks one or more of the characteristics of science. For instance, it might lack systematic empiricism. Either there is no relevant scientific research or, as in the case of biorhythms, there is relevant scientific research but it is ignored. People who promote the beliefs or activities might claim to have conducted scientific research but never publish that research in a way that allows others to evaluate it.

A set of beliefs and activities might also be pseudoscientific because it is not falsifiable. As an example of an unfalsifiable claim, consider that many people who believe in extrasensory perception (ESP) and other psychic powers claim that such powers can disappear when they are observed too closely. This makes it so that no possible observation would count as evidence against ESP. If a careful test of a self-proclaimed psychic showed that she predicted the future at better-than-chance levels, this would be consistent with the claim that she had psychic powers. But if she failed to predict the future at better-than-chance levels, this would also be consistent with the claim because her powers can supposedly disappear when they are observed too closely.

Why should we concern ourselves with pseudoscience? To appreciate the practical importance of this question, let's imagine what would happen if there was no way of telling science from non-science. Let's consider some of these practical implications in turn.

Suppose a certain community argues that we are facing a potential environmental disaster: say, an upcoming massive earthquake, an approaching asteroid, or slow but steady global warming. How seriously should we take such a claim? Naturally our reaction would depend on how trustworthy we think the position of this community is. We would probably not be very concerned, if this was a claim championed exclusively by a pseudoscientific community. However, if the claim about looming disaster was accepted by a scientific community, it would likely have serious effect on our environmental policy and our decisions going forward. But this means that we need to have a way of telling what's science and what's not.

The ability to tell science from non-science and pseudoscience is equally important in courts, which customarily rely on the testimony of experts from different fields of science. Since litigating sides have a vested interest in the outcome of the litigation, they might be inclined towards using any available "evidence" in their favor, including "evidence" that has no scientific foundation whatsoever. Thus, knowing what's science and what's not is very important for the proper function of courts. Consider, for example, the ability to distinguish between claimed evidence obtained by psychic channeling, and evidence obtained by the analysis of DNA found in blood at the scene of the crime.

The difference between science and pseudoscience is also crucial for healthcare. The promise of an easy profit often attracts those who are quick to offer “treatments” whose therapeutic efficacy hasn’t been properly established. Biorhythms, crystals, astrology, homeopathy, and many other pseudoscientific beliefs are promoted on the Internet, on television, and in books and magazines. Far from being harmless, the promotion of these beliefs often results in great personal toll as believers in these types of pseudoscience opt to pursue them for serious medical conditions instead of empirically-supported treatments. Such “treatments” can have health- and even life-threatening effects.

Thus, any proper health care system should use only those treatments whose therapeutic efficacies have been scientifically established. But this assumes a clear understanding as to what’s science and what merely masks itself as such. Learning what makes them pseudoscientific can help us to identify and evaluate such beliefs and practices when we encounter them so that we can make the best healthcare decisions we can.

A solid educational system is one of the hallmarks of a contemporary civilized society. It is commonly understood that we shouldn’t teach our children any pseudoscience but should build our curricula around knowledge accepted by our scientific community. For that reason, we don’t think astrology, divination, or creation science have any place in school or university curricula. Of course, sometimes we discuss these subjects in history and philosophy of science courses, where they are studied as examples of non-science or as examples of what was once considered scientific but is currently deemed unscientific. Importantly, however, we don’t present them as accepted science. Therefore, as teachers, we must be able to tell pseudoscience from science proper.

In recent years, there have been organized campaigns to portray pseudoscientific theories as bearing the same level of authority as the theories accepted by proper science. Social media makes these kinds of campaigns increasingly easy to orchestrate. Consider, for instance, the deniers of climate change or deniers of the efficacy of vaccination who have managed – through orchestrated journalism – to portray their claims as a legitimate stance in a scientific debate. Journalists should be properly educated to know the difference between science and pseudoscience, for otherwise they risk hampering public opinion and dangerously influencing policy-makers. Once again, this requires a philosophical understanding on how to tell science from non-science and pseudoscience.

In brief, the philosophical problem of demarcation between science and non-science is of great practical importance for a contemporary civilized society and its solution is a task of utmost urgency.

One source for information on pseudoscience is The Skeptic’s Dictionary ([The Skeptic's Dictionary](http://www.skeptidic.com) [www.skeptidic.com]). Among the pseudoscientific beliefs and practices you can learn about are the following:

- Cryptozoology. The study of “hidden” creatures like Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster, and the chupacabra.
- Pseudoscientific psychotherapies. Past-life regression, rebirthing therapy, and bioscream therapy, among others.
- Homeopathy. The treatment of medical conditions using natural substances that have been diluted sometimes to the point of no longer being present.
- Pyramidology. Odd theories about the origin and function of the Egyptian pyramids (e.g., that they were built by extraterrestrials) and the idea that pyramids, in general, have healing and other special powers.

Another online resource is Neurobonkers ([Neurobonkers](http://neurobonkers.com) [neurobonkers.com]), which regularly posts articles that investigate claims that pertain specifically to psychological science.

Science and Common Sense

Some people wonder whether the scientific approach to behavior is necessary. Can we not reach the same conclusions based on common sense or intuition? Certainly we all have intuitive beliefs about behavior—and these beliefs are collectively referred to as folk psychology. Although much of our folk psychology is probably reasonably accurate, it is clear that much of it is not.

For example, most people believe that anger can be relieved by “letting it out”—perhaps by punching something or screaming loudly. Scientific research, however, has shown that this approach tends to leave people feeling more angry, not less (Bushman, 2002)¹. Likewise, most people believe that no one would confess to a crime that they had not committed unless perhaps that person was being physically tortured. But again, extensive empirical research has shown that false confessions are surprisingly common and occur for a variety of reasons (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004)².

In *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*, psychological scientist Scott Lilienfeld and colleagues discuss several widely held commonsense beliefs about human behavior that scientific research has shown to be incorrect (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, & Beyerstein, 2010)³.

Here is a short list:

- “People use only 10% of their brain power.”
- “Most people experience a midlife crisis in their 40s or 50s.”
- “Students learn best when teaching styles are matched to their learning styles.”
- “Low self-esteem is a major cause of psychological problems.”
- “Psychiatric admissions and crimes increase during full moons.”

How can so many of our intuitive beliefs about behavior be so wrong? Notice that this is an empirical question, and it just so happens that behavioral scientists have conducted scientific research on it and identified many contributing factors (Gilovich, 1991)⁴.

One factor is that forming detailed and accurate beliefs requires powers of observation, memory, and analysis to an extent that we do not naturally possess. For example, it would be nearly impossible to count the number of words spoken by the women and men we happen to encounter, estimate the number of words they spoke per day, average these numbers for both groups, and compare them—all in our heads – to determine whether men or women talk more.

Because we can’t do that, we tend to rely on mental shortcuts in forming and maintaining our beliefs. One of these shortcuts is if a belief is widely shared, especially by people who call themselves experts or influencers, and it makes intuitive sense, we tend to assume it’s true. To make matters worse, once we decide something is true, even without actual scientific evidence, we then tend to focus on cases that confirm our beliefs and not on cases that contradict them. This is called *confirmation bias*. For example, once we begin to believe that women are more talkative than men, we tend to notice and remember talkative women and silent men but ignore or forget silent women and talkative men.

We also hold incorrect beliefs in part because it would be nice if they were true. For example, many people believe that calorie-reducing diets are an effective long-term treatment for obesity, yet a thorough review of the scientific evidence has shown that they are not (Mann et al., 2007)⁵. People may continue to believe in the effectiveness of dieting in part because it gives them hope for losing weight if they are obese or makes them feel good about their own “self-control” if they are not.

Scientists—especially behavioral scientists—understand that they are just as susceptible as anyone else to intuitive but incorrect beliefs. This is why they cultivate an attitude of *skepticism*. Skepticism does not mean being cynical or distrustful, nor does it mean questioning every belief or claim one comes across (which would be impossible anyway). Instead, it means pausing to consider alternatives and to search for evidence—especially systematically collected empirical evidence—when there is enough at stake to justify doing so.

For example, imagine that you read a magazine article that claims that giving children a weekly allowance is a good way to help them develop financial responsibility. This is an interesting and potentially important claim (especially if you have children of your own). Taking an attitude of skepticism, however, would mean pausing to ask whether it might be instead that receiving an allowance merely teaches children to spend money—perhaps even to be more materialistic. Taking an attitude of skepticism would also mean asking what evidence supports the original claim. Is the author a scientific researcher? Is any scientific evidence cited?

If the issue was important enough, it might also mean turning to the research literature to see if anyone else had studied it. Because there is often not enough evidence to fully evaluate a belief or claim, scientists also cultivate a tolerance for uncertainty. They accept that there are many things that they simply do not know. For example, it turns out that there is no scientific evidence that receiving an allowance causes children to be more financially responsible, nor is there any scientific evidence that it causes them to be materialistic.

Although this kind of uncertainty can be problematic from a practical perspective—for example, making it difficult to decide what to do when our children ask for an allowance—it is exciting from a scientific perspective. If we do not know the answer to an interesting and empirically testable question, science, and perhaps even you as a researcher, may be able to provide the answer.

Some Things to Avoid in Scientific Research

Bias

Bias is any systematic distortion of findings due to the way that the research is conducted, and it takes many forms. Imagine interviewing strangers about their opinions of a particular political candidate. How might their answers be different if the candidate is African-American and the interviewer is white? What if the respondent is interviewed at her huge fancy house and the interviewer is wearing tattered shoes? The human tendencies to want to be liked, to just get along, and to avoid embarrassment are very strong, and they can significantly affect how people answer questions asked by strangers.

This introduces *social desirability bias* – the desire to “look good” to the interviewer affecting how a person answers a question. This needs to be taken into account when collecting answers from people as part of social science research. (This is also sometimes called “*the halo effect*” – the desire to give “good” responses to questions, even if the answers don’t reflect your real beliefs or thoughts or actions. For example, to say you recycle even if you don’t is to display the halo effect or social desirability bias.)

You also need to look out for other sources of bias. For example, what if instead of talking to people you decide that having respondents answer questions using a self-administered written questionnaire would be better. This helps avoid social desirability bias, but it introduces other problems. Mail is easier to ignore than someone knocking at your door or making an appointment to meet with you in your office. You have to count more on the respondent’s own motivation to complete the questionnaire, and if motivated respondents’ answers are systematically different than unmotivated nonrespondents, your research plan has introduced *self-selection bias*. This means that when people voluntarily choose to participate in a survey or study, you might end up with a biased sample, because those who choose to participate may differ in some systematic way from those who do not.

Here’s another one: maybe you decide to call people instead. Most telephone polling is limited to calling land lines, so you can imagine how that could introduce *sampling bias*—bias introduced when some members of the population are more likely to be included in a study than others. When cell phones are included, you can imagine that there are systematic differences between people who are likely to answer the call and those who are likely to ignore the unfamiliar Caller ID—another source of sampling bias.

Web-based surveys have become a very appealing option for researchers. They are incredibly cheap, allow complex skip patterns to be carried out unbeknownst to respondents, face no geographic boundaries, and automate many otherwise tedious and error-prone data entry tasks. For some populations, this is a great option. For other populations, though—low-income persons, homeless persons, disabled persons, the elderly, and young children—web-based surveys are often unrealistic.

Deciding what wording to use can also introduce *wording bias*. Well-crafted questions elicit unbiased responses that are useful for answering research questions; poorly crafted questions do not. Asking if people who need it should receive aid can elicit very different answers than if you ask if people should get welfare.

So, what can we do to make sure we’re asking useful questions? Tips for designing good data collection instruments for asking questions, whether questionnaires, web-based surveys, interview schedules, or focus group protocols, boil down to a few basics.

Perhaps most important is paying careful attention to the wording of the questions themselves. Let’s assume that respondents want to give us accurate, honest answers. For them to do this, we need to word questions so that respondents will interpret them in the way we want them to, so we have to avoid ambiguous language. (What does “often” mean? What is “sometimes”?) If we’re providing the answer choices for them, we also have to provide a way for respondents to answer accurately and honestly. Surveys can be very frustrating when you can’t answer the way you want to.

Here is an example of a bad question.

Do you think teaching online is as good as teaching face-to-face?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I think they’re about the same

If you answer no, the researchers might infer that you think online teaching is inferior to face-to-face teaching. But by saying no, you may mean that you think online teaching is superior to face-to-face! There’s a huge potential for disconnect between the

meaning the respondent attaches to this answer and the meaning the researcher attaches to it. Also, what is meant, exactly, by as good as? As good as in terms of what? In terms of student learning? For transmitting knowledge? Instructor's convenience? Students' convenience? A respondent could attach any of these meanings to that phrase, regardless of what the researcher has in mind. Maybe the answer is, "it depends" – but that's not an option.

What conclusions could the researcher draw from responses to this question? Not much, but uncritical researchers would probably report the results as filtered through their own preconceptions about the meanings of the question and answer wording, introducing a pernicious sort of bias—difficult to detect, particularly if you're just casually reading a report based on this study, and distorting the findings so much as to actually convey the opposite of what respondents intended. Question wording must facilitate unambiguous, fully accurate communication between the researcher and respondent.

Just as with mode of administration, question wording can also introduce social desirability bias. Leading questions are the most obvious culprit. A question like Don't you think public school teachers are underpaid? makes you almost fall over yourself to say "Yes!" A less leading question would be Do you think public school teachers are paid too much, paid too little, or paid about the right amount? To the ear of someone who doesn't want to give a bad impression by saying the "wrong" answer, all of the answers sound acceptable.

If we're particularly worried about potential social desirability bias, we can use normalizing statements: Some people like to follow politics closely and others aren't as interested in politics. How closely do you like to follow politics? would probably get fewer trying-to-sound-like-a-good-citizen responses than Do you stay well informed about politics?

Closed-ended questions—questions that give answers for respondents to select from—are susceptible to another form of bias, *response set bias*. When respondents look at a range of choices, there's subconscious pressure to select the "normal" response.

Imagine answering this question:

How many hours per week do you study?

☐ Less than 10

☐ 10 – 20

☐ More than 20

That middle category just looks like it's the "normal" answer, doesn't it? The respondent's subconscious whispers "Lazy students must study less than 10 hours per week; more than 20 must be excessive." This pressure is hard to avoid completely, but we can minimize the bias by anticipating this problem and constructing response sets that represent a reasonable distribution.

Response sets must be exhaustive—be sure you offer the full range of possible answers—and the responses must be mutually exclusive.

How not to write a response set:

How often do you use public transportation?

☐ Never

☐ Every day

☐ Several times per week

☐ 5 – 6 times per week

☐ More than 10 times per week

Of course, you could avoid problems with response sets by asking open-ended questions. Open-ended questions can give respondents freedom to answer how they choose, they remove any potential for response set bias, and they allow for rich, in-depth responses if a respondent is motivated enough.

However, respondents can be shockingly ambiguous themselves, they can give responses that obviously indicate the question was misunderstood, or they can just plain answer with total nonsense. The researcher is then left with a quandary — what to do with these responses? Throw them out? Is that honest? Try to make sense of them? Is that honest? Closed-ended questions do have their problems, but the answers are unambiguous, and the data they generate are easy to manage.

It's a tradeoff: With closed-ended questions, the researcher is structuring the data, which keeps things nice and tidy; with open-ended questions, the researcher is giving power to respondents to structure the data, which can be awfully messy, but it can also yield rich, unanticipated results.

Choosing open-ended and closed-ended questions to different degrees gives us a continuum of approaches to asking individuals questions, from loosely structured, conversational-style interviews, to highly standardized interviews, to fill-in-the-bubble questionnaires. When we conduct interviews, it is usually in a semi-structured interview style, with the same mostly open-ended questions asked, but with variations in wording, order, and follow-ups to make the most of the organic nature of human interaction.

Lack of Proper Ethics

The social sciences have a long history of unethical, complicit and dangerous research that has undermined the mission to better understand the world and make it a better place. Early anthropologists helped create sometimes persistent stereotypes of certain peoples as lazy, industrious, 'good', or 'bad' based on poor research. Research might be done at the expense of the studied population – for example, using methods that “outed” gay populations at a time when homosexuality remained illegal across many countries including the United States. Social sciences have assisted colonial entities to name, categorize, and label indigenous peoples the world over as ‘inferior’ and thereby assist in colonial domination and theft. (For example, the systematic removal of “uncivilized” Native Americans from their homelands in North America, or the categorization of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as savage and inferior, making way for the theft and pillaging of peoples and lands.)

These examples show how studies can be undone by the unethical methods some social scientists use to get their data, tell their story, or even just make things up.

How to avoid these traps? How can you be a “good” social scientist?

A “good” social scientist is skilled at examining and understanding issues and phenomena from multiple perspectives, never assuming that their own perspective is the only one that exists. This avoids the trap of *ethnocentrism*, or considering your own culture to be the best, the most advanced, morally superior, and the standard against which others should be judged. When people are *ethnocentric*, they do not value the perspectives of people from other cultures, and they do not bother to learn about or consider other ways of doing things. Avoiding this requires deep, active listening, coupled with a healthy dose of humility and a strong understanding that all knowledge is partial and that there is always more to learn.

In the very first minute of the 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*, the theme song declares that Aladdin comes from “a faraway place / where the caravan camels roam / where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face / it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” Facing criticism by antidiscrimination groups, Disney was forced to change the lyrics for the home video release of the film.

This is related to a second desirable quality – being consciously aware of your own assumptions and how they influence your thinking. A good social scientist should question their own assumptions, values, and biases, and understand how they will affect social science work. Our own values and biases, which we all have, influence us in terms of how we see and react to various situations, to others and to ourselves. The objective is not to deny this, but instead to be aware of them and how they influence our behaviors, thinking, and more.

Third, “good” social scientists take a critical viewpoint* to everything they hear and see. They scratch below the surface, questioning assumptions and beliefs that may otherwise seem “natural” or “unquestionable.” This means intentionally exposing oneself to different viewpoints and critiques on a range of topics. Reading and engaging with diverse news sources is one way to do this; another is to, as a social science researcher, intentionally step outside of one’s sub-field or area of specific expertise to engage with publications, debates, and researchers that contradict one’s own.

*To be critical in this sense is not to criticize everything, to complain about everything, or to be cynical, but to not automatically accept what we are told, or read, or presented with.

In sum, being a good social scientist is about more than just conducting research or analyzing data. It requires a deep commitment to understanding the complexities of human behavior and social systems, and a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives and experiences. To be a good social scientist, one must be driven by a passion for knowledge, a sense of responsibility to conduct ethical and meaningful research, and a desire to use that research to make a positive impact on the world.

Notes:

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Introduction to Anthropology

[Introduction to Anthropology](#)

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3: Anthropology

1) Structure of Anthropology

Anthropology is Vast



Figure 3.1: Artist's depiction of a woman hunting, created in 1565. Contrary to some long held beliefs, women have always played a role in hunting game. (credit: "Illustration of activities of Lapps and Finns: Men and women hunting with bows and arrows on snowshoes; "women hunt...as nimbly...or more than men" by Illustration of activities of Lapps and Finns/Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)

Imagine a research project that contains these three members:

Randy Haas discovered the 9,000-year-old grave of a teenager buried with a hunting tool kit in the Andes mountains of Peru. Haas found that this hunter from long ago was a young woman. This discovery has upset the notion that hunting was the exclusive activity of men throughout human evolutionary history.

Daniel Miller is part of a global team researching how people use smartphones in various parts of the world, including Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, Ireland, Italy, Japan, East Jerusalem, and Uganda. The team is exploring how smartphones take on different functions in different cultural contexts. Focusing on Ireland, Miller theorizes that smartphones become a kind of personal avatar, expressing and enacting the specific social identity of the user.



Figure 3.2: Red-tailed monkeys, the subject of anthropologist Michelle Brown's study, are primates that are found in Central and East Africa. This red-tailed monkey lives in Uganda. They are social animals and live in groups of 8-30 individuals. (credit: "Schmidt's Red-tailed Monkey" by Meghan Murphy/Smithsonian's National Zoo, CC0 1.0)

Michelle Brown spends long days observing blue monkeys, red-tailed monkeys, and baboons in a conservation park in Uganda. She records the behavior of these primates as they find food, communicate, and fight with one another. She collects urine and feces to analyze hormone levels, intestinal parasites, and DNA. She wants to understand how primates compete as individuals and groups for access to various foods in their environment.

What kind of research project could encompass such a diversity of topics and methods? Though they conduct research on vastly different topics, all three are anthropologists. How could the work of these researchers be united in one academic discipline? The reason, as we will see, is that anthropology is vast.

Anthropology, the study of humanity, is guided by a central narrative and set of research commitments. Anthropology aims to overcome bias by examining cultures as complex, integrated products of specific environmental and historical conditions.

Anthropologists use many different research strategies in their efforts to represent people from cultures very different from their own.

Anthropology explores controversial topics that may challenge individual assumptions and values. The goal is to understand the full experience of humanity, including elements that may seem unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Anthropology teaches a set of skills for setting aside personal perspectives and keeping an open mind while learning about the diversity of human practices and ideas. As discussed further at the end of this chapter, this does not mean abandoning individual personal values, but rather suspending judgment temporarily while learning to understand the perspectives of others.

The Subfields of Anthropology

Anthropology comprises four main approaches, the four subfields of our discipline. Each subfield specializes in exploring a different aspect of the common narrative. Combining insights from the four fields gives us a rich and complex understanding of specific issues such as gender, inequality, race, and the environment. Let's take a look at each subfield and then examine how the subfields combine in the study of racial categories and relations.

Biological Anthropology

Biological anthropology focuses on the earliest processes in the biological and sociocultural development of human beings as well as the biological diversity of contemporary humans. In other words, biological anthropologists study the origins, evolution, and diversity of our species. Some biological anthropologists use genetic data to explore the global distribution of human traits such as blood type or the ability to digest dairy products. Some study fossils to learn how humans have evolved and migrated. Some study our closest animal relatives, the primates, in order to understand what biological and social traits humans share with primates and explore what makes humans unique in the animal world.

The Dutch primatologist Carel van Schaik spent six years observing orangutans in Sumatra, discovering that these reclusive animals are actually much more social than previously thought (2004). Moreover, van Schaik observed that orangutans use a wide variety of tools and pass down skills to their young. By studying these primates, van Schaik and other biological anthropologists gain insight into the origins of human intelligence, technology, and culture. These researchers also warn that habitat loss, illegal hunting, and the exotic pet trade threaten the survival of our fascinating primate cousins.

Biological anthropologists frequently combine research among primates with evidence from the human fossil record, genetics, neuroscience, and geography to answer questions about human evolution. Sometimes their insights are startling and unexpected. Anthropologist Lynne Isbell argues that snakes have played a key role in the evolution of human biology, particularly our keen sense of sight and our ability to communicate through language (Isbell, 2009). Isbell's "snake detection theory" posits that primates developed specialized visual perception as well as the ability to communicate what they were seeing in order to alert others to the threat of venomous snakes in their environment. She points to the near-universal fear of snakes shared by both humans and primates and has documented the prevalence of snake phobia in human myth and folklore. Isbell's research highlights how human-animal relations are central to humanity, shaping both biology and culture.

Not all biological anthropologists study primates. Many biological anthropologists study fossilized remains in order to chart the evolution of early hominins, the evolutionary ancestors of modern humans. In this field of study, anthropologists consider the emergence and migration of the various species in the hominin family tree as well as the conditions that promoted certain biological and cultural traits. Some biological anthropologists examine the genetic makeup of contemporary humans in order to learn how certain genes and traits are distributed in human populations across different environments. Others examine human genetics looking for clues about the relationships between early modern humans and other hominins, such as Neanderthals.

Forensic anthropology

Forensic anthropology uses the techniques of biological anthropology to solve crimes. By analyzing human remains such as decomposed bodies or skeletons, or tissue samples such as skin or hair, forensic anthropologists discern what they can about the nature of a crime and the people involved. Key questions are who died, how they died, and how long ago they died. Often, forensic anthropologists can discover the age, sex, and other distinctive features of perpetrators and victims. Looking closely at forms of bodily trauma and patterns of blood or bullets, they piece together the story of the crime. They work on investigative teams with law enforcement officers and medical experts in ballistics, toxicology, and other specialties. Forensic anthropologists often present their findings as witnesses in murder trials.

Not all of these crimes are contemporary. Sometimes, forensic anthropology is used to understand historical events. Excavating the historic Jamestown colony of early English settlers in North America, archaeologist William Kelso found a human skull in the midst of food remains. Noticing strange cut marks on the skull, he called upon Douglas Owsley, a forensic anthropologist working for the Smithsonian Institution, to help him figure out what the markings meant. Owsley determined that the markings were evidence of intentional chopping to the skull with a sharp blade. He concluded that the skeleton belonged to a 14-year-old girl who had been cannibalized by other settlers after she died. This interpretation corroborates historical evidence of severe starvation in the colony during the harsh winter of 1609–1610.

Archaeology

Archaeologists use artifacts and fossils to explore how environmental and historical conditions have produced a diversity of human cultures – the study of archaeology. Artifacts are objects made by human beings, such as tools or pottery. Fossils are the remains of organisms preserved in the environment. Archaeologists have developed careful methods of excavation, or removing fossils and artifacts from the ground, in order to learn as much as possible about how people lived in times before and after the development of writing. They are interested in how people met basic needs such as clothing and shelter, as well how they organized their societies in family groups, trade networks, and systems of leadership. Many archaeologists seek to understand how humans lived in relation to the natural world around them, altering the environment at the same time that the environment was shaping their evolution and social development.

A group of archaeologists led by Tom Dillehay spent seven years excavating a set of sites in northern Peru, charting the development of human society in this area over a period of 14,000 years (2017). They traced the society from the early ways of life to the emergence of cities and early states, discovering how people there developed fishing, farming, and herding strategies that led to increased sociocultural complexity. The team collected data on the plants and animals of the area as well as the buildings, tools, cloth, and baskets made by the people. They concluded that the people who lived in this area placed a high value on cooperation and living in harmony with nature.

Some archaeologists focus on more specific topics in more recent time periods. Archaeologist Eric Tourigny examined the graves at pet cemeteries in the United Kingdom from 1881 to 1981(2020). Looking at the epitaphs on the gravestones of the pets, Tourigny noted a change from earlier Victorian ways of thinking of pets as friends to later, more modern ways of conceptualizing pets as members of the family. He noted, too, that epitaphs expressed an increasingly common belief that pet owners would be reunited with their pets in the afterlife.

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is devoted to describing and understanding the wide variety of cultures referred to in anthropology's central narrative. Cultural anthropologists explore the everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions of people in different cultures as well as the cultural and historical events that they consider important. Examining social discourse and action, cultural anthropologists seek to understand unspoken norms and values as well as larger forces such as economic change and political domination. Cultural anthropologists also study how different societies are structured, including the roles and institutions that organize social life.

Cultural anthropologists often live for many months or years in the societies they study, adopting local ways of living, eating, dressing, and speaking as accurately as possible. This practice is called fieldwork. Anthropologists who undertake fieldwork might write an ethnography, an in-depth study of the culture they have been studying. Classic ethnographies of the early 20th century often portrayed the cultures of non-Western peoples as harmonious and unchanging over time.

Bronislaw Malinowski, a pioneer of the long-term fieldwork method, spent nearly two years studying trade and magic among the Trobriand peoples living in what is now the Kiriwina island chain northeast of New Guinea. His ethnography, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), describes how Trobrianders undertook canoe voyages from island to island for the ceremonial exchange of white shell bracelets and red shell necklaces among different island groups, an exchange system known as the kula ring. Curiously, these highly valued objects had no use whatsoever, as no one ever wore them. Rather, the exchange of bracelets and necklaces functioned as a means of enhancing social status (for the givers) and reinforcing trade relationships. Malinowski argues that this form of exchange took the place of warfare. Exploring the kula ring in great detail, Malinowski also learned about many other aspects of Trobriand culture, such as the making of tools and canoes, farming practices, gender roles, sexuality, and magical beliefs and practices.

Nowadays, cultural anthropologists tend to focus more on issues involving conflict and change, such as suicide bombing in Afghanistan (Edwards 2017), a creationist theme park in Kentucky (Bielo 2018), sperm donation in Denmark (Mohr 2018), and garbage pickers in Rio de Janeiro (Millar 2018). Often, anthropologists explore overlooked and marginalized perspectives on controversial issues, shedding light on the cultural complexities and power dynamics involved.

Anthropologist Tracey Heatherington was interested in why some people were resisting the creation of a conservation park on the Italian island of Sardinia (2010). The central highlands of Sardinia are home to many endangered species and old growth forests, as well as local herding peoples who fiercely resisted the appropriation of their homeland. Heatherington's research identified three competing perspectives: those of global environmentalists, the national government of Italy, and the local people of Sardinia. The global environmentalists view the Sardinian highlands as a delicate ecosystem that should be protected and controlled by environmental experts. The Italian government sees in the same land an opportunity to develop ecotourism and demonstrate the Italian commitment to environmentalism. The local peoples of Sardinia treasure their homeland as the foundation of their way of life, an intimate landscape imbued with history and cultural value.

As the controversy drew these three perspectives together, Western-led global environmentalism combined with national government to undermine the legitimacy of local knowledge and authority. Heatherington describes how stereotypes of Sardinians as ignorant and culturally backward were used to delegitimize their resistance to the conservation park, drawing our attention to forms of ecological racism that lurk in the global environmental movement.

Linguistic Anthropology

As you might guess, *linguistic anthropology* focuses on language. Linguistic anthropologists view language as a primary means by which humans create their diverse cultures. Language combines biological and social elements. Some linguistic anthropologists study the origins of language, asking how language emerged in our biological evolution and sociocultural development and what aspects of language might have given early hominins an evolutionary advantage. Other linguistic anthropologists are interested in how language shapes our thinking processes and our views of the world. In addition to its cognitive aspects, language is a powerful tool for getting things done. Linguistic anthropologists also study how people use language to form communities and identities, assert power, and resist authority.

Linguistic anthropologists frequently conduct the same kinds of long-term, immersive research that cultural anthropologists do. Christopher Ball spent a year living and traveling with the Wauja, an indigenous group in Brazil (2018). He describes the many routine and ritualized ways of speaking in this community and how each kind of talk generates specific types of social action. "Chief speech" is used by leaders, while "bringing the spirits" is used for healing the sick. Ceremonial language is used for giving people names and for conducting exchanges between different indigenous groups. Ball, like many linguistic anthropologists, also examined public speeches, such as the ones delivered by Wauja leaders to protest a dam on a nearby river. Ball also analyzed the forms of language used by state officials and development workers to marginalize and subordinate indigenous groups such as the Wauja.

Language is central to the way we conceptualize ourselves and our lives. Have you ever been asked to write an essay about yourself, perhaps as part of a school assignment or college application? If so, you might have used different phrases and concepts than if you'd been chatting with a new acquaintance. The purpose and intended audience of our language use shapes the way we represent ourselves and our actions.

Anthropologist Summerson Carr examined an addiction treatment program for homeless women in the midwestern United States, looking at the role of language in the therapeutic process (2011). After observing therapy sessions and self-help meetings, she describes how addiction counselors promote a certain kind of "healthy talk" that conveys deep cultural notions about personhood and responsibility. As patients master this "healthy talk," they learn to demonstrate progress by performing very scripted ways of speaking about themselves and their addiction.

How the Four Fields Work Together: The Example of Race

With their unique methods and emphases, the four fields of anthropology may seem like completely different disciplines. It's true that anthropologists from the four fields don't always agree on the best approach to sociocultural enquiry. Biological anthropologists often see themselves as "hard" scientists committed to studying humanity through the scientific method. Cultural anthropologists rely on the "softer" methods of observation, participation, and interviews. Someone who studies the genetic

distribution of blood types and someone who studies an addiction treatment program may have a difficult time finding common ground.

Increasingly, however, urgent concerns such as inequality and climate change have highlighted the importance of an integrated approach to the study of humanity. The issue of racial inequality is an excellent example. Beginning with an approach from the cultural side of our discipline, many anthropologists explore what we think we know about the concept of race. How many racial categories do you think there are in the world? How can you tell a person's racial identity? What do you know about your own racial category?

Biological anthropologist Jada Benn Torres and cultural anthropologist Gabriel Torres Colón teamed up to explore how people use genetic ancestry testing to construct notions of collective history and racial belonging (2020). For instance, if you learn through genetic testing that your ancestors most likely came from Nigeria, you might begin to feel a certain identification with that country and with the continent of Africa as a whole. You might begin to feel that you have less in common with the people of your country of citizenship and more in common with the people of your country of ancestry, a racial connection perhaps felt as more fundamental than the sociocultural connection to your home culture. While concerned about the potential for spreading misconceptions about racial categories, Torres and Colon also note that racialized solidarity across national boundaries can foster transnational movements for social justice.

Such research shows how we actively construct our concepts about race using biological information about ourselves, all the time believing that those concepts are embedded in nature.

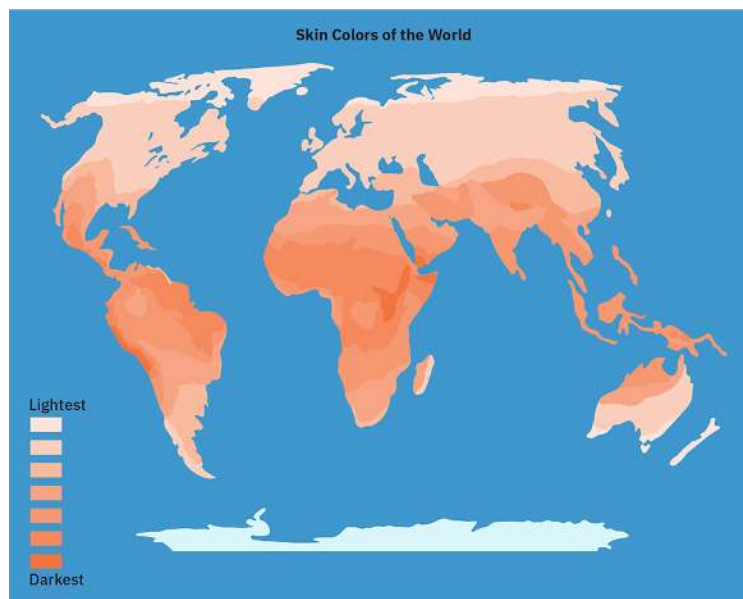


Figure 3.3: This map shows the predicted skin colors of people based on the levels of ultraviolet radiation in the areas where they live. (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

Importantly, biological anthropology demonstrates that our common notions of race are inaccurate. Biological anthropologists such as Agustín Fuentes (2012) and Nina Jablonski (2006) have looked carefully at the global distribution of human traits such as skin color, facial features, hair texture, and blood type, among other markers, in order to determine if humans are indeed grouped into discrete categories based on race. Short answer: biologically speaking, there are no real racial categories. Each human trait varies along a spectrum, and the various traits are mixed and matched among people in ways that make racial distinctions impossibly inaccurate. As an example, take the issue of skin color, which is the most common way people assign race. Jablonski demonstrates that skin color varies along a spectrum, from pinkish beige to dark brown, with people throughout the world having skin of every possible shade between those two. Originally, humans evolving on the African continent had dark skin to protect them from the direct ultraviolet light of the sun. As some early humans migrated north into environments with less direct sunlight, their skin lightened to allow the absorption of vitamin D from the much weaker sunlight.

Today, if we look at people with deep historical connections to particular geographical areas, we find that skin color shifts gradually with location. Imagine setting out on a road trip from Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, just

a few degrees south of the equator in central Africa, and traveling all the way up to the city of Tromsø in Norway, north of the Arctic Circle. This 157-hour trip would take you through Nigeria, Niger, Algeria, Spain, France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. If you were paying attention to the skin color of the indigenous peoples in each location, you would notice a gradual shift from deep brown in Kinshasa to lighter brown in Algeria to dark beige in southern Spain to lighter beige in Sweden. You might also notice other changes, such as more green and blue eyes and more red and blond hair, as you head into northern Europe. At no point in your trip could you identify a boundary between groups. Rather, you would see a gradual spectrum of change.

Whether looking at visible characteristics such as skin color or invisible genetic markers such as blood type, biological anthropologists have demonstrated time and time again that there is no scientifically justifiable way to divide the human population into racial categories. Any way you draw the lines, there will be more variation within categories than between categories.

Does this mean that race does not exist? In terms of biology, that is exactly what it means. But in terms of social reality, unfortunately not. Race does not exist in nature, but race does exist in our minds, our practices, and our institutions. Archaeological excavations of the material lives of various groups in the United States, including people from China and Ireland as well as enslaved peoples from Africa, show how notions of race shaped their whole ways of life: the buildings in which they lived, the clothing they wore, the property they owned, and the structure of their families (Orser 2007; Singleton [1985] 2016).

In contemporary societies, cultural anthropologists studying forms of racial inequality in societies all over the world—including the United States, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Japan, Kenya, and Zimbabwe—have uncovered the different ways that each of these societies constructs racial categories and uses various criteria to assign (and often reassign) race to a particular person.

Moreover, in-depth ethnographies illuminate the severity of racism in the everyday lives of people of color in the United States and elsewhere. After three years of fieldwork on the West Side of Chicago, anthropologist Laurence Ralph documented the suffering of people in this Black neighborhood as they contend with discrimination, economic deprivation, gang violence, and political marginalization (2014). Ralph emphasizes that the people he observed dream of a better life for themselves and their children, in spite of these struggles, and describes how many turn to social and political activism in an attempt to make their neighborhood a better place for everyone who lives there.

Linguistic anthropologists are interested in how race is constructed and expressed through language. Marcyliena Morgan studied the underground hip-hop scene in Los Angeles, exploring how Black emcees and musicians craft linguistic codes that reference their experiences of police violence, urban unrest, gang activity, and gentrification (2009). Like Ralph, Morgan highlights the creativity and resilience of Black American communities in the face of enduring racism in American society.

Taken together, these various anthropological approaches to race provide more insight and understanding than any one approach ever could. Overturning the biological myth of race is essential to understanding the complex reality of human diversity, but it is not enough. It would be a mistake to pretend that racial categories do not matter just because the concept of race has no basis in biology. The combined work of archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and linguistic anthropologists demonstrates how the mythic notion of race has been used to exploit and marginalize certain people throughout history and into the present. We also see how people respond to racial subjugation with creativity and resilience, inventing cultural forms of resistance and mobilizing their communities through social activism.

2) Problems in Anthropology

Ethnocentrism

Have you ever known somebody who seems to think the world revolves around them? The kind of friend who is always talking about themselves and never asks any questions about you and your life? The kind of person who thinks their own ideas are cool and special and their own way of doing things is absolutely the best? You may know the word used to describe that kind of person: *egocentric*. An egocentric person is entirely caught up in their own perspective and does not seem to care much about the perspectives of others. It is good to feel proud of your personal qualities and accomplishments, of course, but it is equally important to appreciate the personal qualities and accomplishments of others as well.

The same sort of “centric” complex operates at the level of culture. Some people in some cultures are convinced that their own ways of understanding the world and of doing things are absolutely the best and no other ways are worth consideration. They imagine that the world would be a much better place if the superior beliefs, values, and practices of their own culture were spread or imposed on everyone else in the world. This is what we call *ethnocentrism*.

Enculturation and Ethnocentrism

We are all brought up in a particular culture with particular norms and values and ways of doing things. Our parents or guardians teach us how to behave in social situations, how to take care of our bodies, how to lead a good life, and what we should value and think about. Our teachers, religious leaders, and bosses give us instruction about our roles, responsibilities, and relationships in life. By the time we are in our late teens or early twenties, we know a great deal about how our society works and our role in that society.

Anthropologists call this process of acquiring our particular culture *enculturation*. All humans go through this process. It is natural to value the particular knowledge gained through our own process of enculturation because we could not survive without it. It is natural to respect the instruction of our parents and teachers who want us to do well in life. It is good to be proud of who we are and where we came from. However, just as egocentrism is tiresome, it can be harmful for people to consider their own culture so superior that they cannot appreciate the unique qualities and accomplishments of other cultures. When people are so convinced that their own culture is more advanced, morally superior, efficient, or just plain better than any other culture, we call that ethnocentrism. When people are ethnocentric, they do not value the perspectives of people from other cultures, and they do not bother to learn about or consider other ways of doing things.

Beyond the sheer rudeness of ethnocentrism, the real problem emerges when the ethnocentrism of one group causes them to harm, exploit, and dominate other groups. Historically, the ethnocentrism of Europeans and Euro-Americans has been used to justify subjugation and violence against peoples from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. In the quest to colonize territories in these geographical areas, Europeans developed two main styles of ethnocentrism, styles that have dominated popular imagination over the past two centuries. These styles each identify a cultural “self” as European and a cultural other as a stereotypical member of a culture from a specific region of the world. Using both of these styles of ethnocentrism, Europeans strategically crafted their own coherent self-identity in contrast to these distorted images of other cultures.

Primitivism and Orientalism

Since the 18th century, views of Africans and Native Americans have been shaped by the obscuring lens of primitivism. Identifying themselves as enlightened and civilized, Europeans came to define Africans as ignorant savages, intellectually inferior and culturally backward. Nineteenth-century explorers such as Henry M. Stanley described Africa as “the dark continent,” a place of wildness and depravity (Stanley 1878). Similarly, European missionaries viewed Africans as simple heathens, steeped in sin and needing Christian redemption. Elaborated in the writings of travelers and traders, primitivism depicts Africans and Native Americans as exotic, simple, highly sexual, potentially violent, and closer to nature. Though both African and Native American societies of the time were highly organized and well-structured, Europeans often viewed them as chaotic and violent. An alternative version of primitivism depicts Africans and Native Americans as “noble savages,” innocent and simple, living in peaceful communities in harmony with nature. While less overtly insulting, the “noble savage” version of *primitivism* is still a racist stereotype, reinforcing the notion that non-Western peoples are ignorant, backward, and isolated.

Europeans developed a somewhat different style of ethnocentrism toward people from the Middle East and Asia, a style known as *orientalism*. As detailed by literary critic Edward Said (1979), orientalism portrays peoples of Asia and the Middle East as irrational, fanatical, and out of control. The “oriental” cultures of East Asia and Middle East are depicted as mystical and alluring. The emphasis here is less on biology and nature and more on sensual and emotional excess. Middle Eastern societies are viewed not as lawless but as tyrannical. Relations between men and women are deemed not just sexual but patriarchal and exploitative. Said argues that this view of Asian and Middle Eastern societies was strategically crafted to demonstrate the rationality, morality, and democracy of European societies by contrast.

In his critique of orientalism, Said points to the very common representation of Muslim and Middle Eastern peoples in mainstream American movies as irrational and violent. In the very first minute of the 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*, the theme song declares that Aladdin comes from “a faraway place / where the caravan camels roam / where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face / it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” Facing criticism by antidiscrimination groups, Disney was forced to change the lyrics for the home video release of the film (Nittle 2021). Many thrillers such as the 1994 film *True Lies*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, cast Arabs as America-hating villains scheming to plant bombs and take hostages. Arab women are frequently portrayed as sexualized belly dancers or silent, oppressed victims shrouded in veils. These forms of representation draw from and reproduce orientalist stereotypes.

Both primitivism and orientalism were developed when Europeans were colonizing these parts of the world. Primitivist views of Native Americans justified their subjugation and forced migration. In the next section, we'll explore how current versions of primitivism and orientalism persist in American culture, tracing the harmful effects of these misrepresentations and the efforts of anthropologists to dismantle them.

Western Bias in Assumptions about Humanity

Euro-American ethnocentrism is everywhere in American culture—in our movies, advertising, museums, amusement parks, and news media. Though the styles have shifted somewhat in the past century, both primitivism and orientalism still persist as two discernible styles of bias.

Primitivism and Orientalism in Popular Culture

Think for a minute about the last time you saw an image of an African person. Was it, perhaps, an image of wide-eyed girl in tattered clothing in an advertisement from a development agency requesting a charitable donation? Or maybe it was a news media photograph of a child soldier wielding an AK-47 in a conflict zone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or another African country. Africa is still popularly represented as a dark place full of deprivation and crisis. Africans are frequently infantilized as simple children who need the support and tutelage of White Western helpers. But isn't it true, you may say, that poverty and violent conflicts are widespread in Africa? Isn't the representation accurate to some degree?

The most troubled places on the African continent are the places where European colonialism was most brutal and violent. In what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Belgian king Leopold II oversaw a reign of terror against the local peoples, encouraging their enslavement for the lucrative rubber trade. Elsewhere in Africa, European colonial governments stole land from local peoples and confined them to reservations, forcing them to work on European plantations in order to pay taxes to the colonial government. Colonial officials fomented conflict by privileging some ethnic groups and repressing others. Where you see violence and conflict in Africa today, the roots can often be traced to the colonial period. Is this painful history included in American representations of Africa?

Moreover, there are many bright spots in Africa, places such as Ghana and Botswana, with growing economies and stable democracies. Would it surprise you to learn that Ghana has a space program? That there are more mobile phones than people in Kenya? That several electric cars are manufactured in Africa?

Similar distortions are applied to Native Americans, frequently represented as victims of history, poor and helpless, in need of outside help. The primitivist gaze shapes the representation of Native Americans in museums, which often feature dioramas of humble people with stone tools, buckskin clothes, and tepees, either living a simple life close to nature or engaged in tribal warfare, their bodies painted with vibrant colors. Of course, Native Americans do not live this way now, but these are the images that come to mind in the popular imagination. It is of course important for non-Native Americans to learn about the cultures of Native peoples before and during their contact with European settlers, but it is equally important to understand the legacies of history in the contemporary living conditions and activities of Native communities. Rather than seeing Native peoples as passive victims, popular culture should also depict the dynamic and creative responses of Native Americans to the forms of cultural violence enacted against them.



Figure 3.4: One example of a healthy Native American dish is Navajo mutton stew with blue corn and dry bread. (credit: "Mutton Stew with Blue Corn and Dry Bread" by Neeta Lind/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

For instance, did you know that a Native food movement is surging across the United States, both on Native reservations and in American cities? Native food activists such as Karlos Baca and Sean Sherman are reviving and reinventing the balanced, healthy

cuisines of their ancestors, featuring dishes such as braised elk leg and maple red corn pudding. Sherman and his partner, Dana Thompson, have founded the nonprofit group North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS), devoted to preserving Native foodways. The group offers opportunities for tribes to set up Native cuisine restaurants, providing jobs and profits to communities with high unemployment. Watch this video to learn more about Sean Sherman and the Native Food movement.

Like primitivism, orientalism has endured in American and European cultures. In the two decades following the al-Qaeda attacks on American targets on September 11, 2001, the most prominent example of orientalism in American culture has been the stereotype that all Islamic peoples are fanatical and violent. The indiscriminate application of this stereotype to Islamic peoples across the Middle East was a major contributor to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, a country that had nothing at all to do with the September 11 attacks. To promote the invasion, politicians used the orientalist notion that Iraq was a violent and irrational country stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (which turned out to be false). As the war raged on, the Iraqi people came to be categorized as either “unlawful combatants” or helpless victims of a cruel dictator. American officials argued that Iraqis needed the help of American troops to save them from their subjugation and teach them democracy.

For many Europeans and Americans, these forms of ethnocentric bias distort views of peoples living in large geographical regions of the globe. Misunderstanding other cultures this way can result in policies and military actions that do not achieve desired results. Moreover, ethnocentric bias promotes and reinforces inequality among social groups within multicultural societies. When people with certain ethnic or racial identities are seen as helpless or violent, they face discrimination in their pursuit of education, employment, and justice.

[The Bias of Backwardness](#)

Common to both primitivism and orientalism is the notion that European and Euro-American cultures are more advanced and civilized than other cultures. Since at least the 19th century, Euro-American thinking has been dominated by the idea that the various cultures of the world can be evaluated on a scale of sociocultural sophistication from least advanced to most advanced. Typically, Native American and African cultures were considered the most primitive, while those of Asia and the Middle East were thought of as slightly more developed but certainly not as civilized as the societies of Europe, which were ranked at the top as the epitome of human progress.

Early anthropology played a role in promoting this ethnocentric way of thinking. Nineteenth-century anthropologists detailed various hypothetical schemes charting the developmental stages that each culture would go through in its pursuit of the European ideal of civilization. One very prominent scheme was proposed by the British anthropologist Edward Tylor. Tylor suggested that each culture progressed from “savagery” to “barbarism” to “civilization.” Since the change from one stage to another could not be witnessed by the researcher, such “evolutionary” schemes were largely based on hypothetical conjecture, sometimes called “theorizing from the armchair.”

While some anthropologists played a role in popularizing this way of thinking, others worked to expose it as misguided and inaccurate. The writings of American anthropologist Franz Boas highlighted the fact that no culture is isolated in its process of developmental change. Instead, each culture develops through interactions with other cultures, as new ideas and inventions diffuse from one culture to the next. Moreover, cultural change is not structured by an overall trajectory of progress as defined by the European example; rather, cultures change in many ways, sometimes adopting new ways of doing things and other times reviving and reclaiming older ways. Through these varied patterns of change, each culture forges its own unique history.

While the evolutionary schemes of 19th-century anthropology have been disproven, the underlying notion of sociocultural progress toward a Euro-American ideal is still a widespread form of ethnocentric bias outside of anthropology. Many people still refer to some countries as “developed” and “modern” and others as “undeveloped” and “backward.” Think for a minute: Which countries are generally thought of as modern? Which ones are frequently referred to as undeveloped? What is really meant by these labels?

These labels are rooted in Euro-American values. Championing capitalism and technology, many Europeans and Americans view the generation of material wealth as the primary measure of the success of any society. The divide between the more and less “advanced” countries of the world is largely a distinction between the richer and poorer countries. European and American societies, which have become wealthy through the development of global trade and industrial capitalism, are considered the most successful. Societies that have not achieved the levels of wealth and technology associated with Euro-American industrial

capitalism are sometimes labeled “undeveloped.” Societies that have not industrialized at all are sometimes called “premodern” or simply “traditional.”

As with older evolutionary schemes, this way of thinking relies on the notion that each society pursues economic development in isolation. The poorer countries of the world are told: if you work hard and apply the correct economic policies, then you too can become rich like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. But how did those countries become rich in the first place? Certainly not in isolation. The Boasian emphasis on cultural interaction also applies to economic change. To a large degree, European and American societies became wealthy by dominating other societies and keeping them poor. European countries constructed a system of global capitalism designed to make them very rich by extracting raw materials and human labor from their colonies. In fact, that was the whole impetus for colonialism.

The cultural anthropologist Sidney Mintz is one of many who have studied how this happened. Mintz explored how European merchants designed a very lucrative system of production and consumption based on sugar (1985). As European consumers began developing a taste for sugar in the 17th century, European merchants developed sugar plantations in the New World using the labor of enslaved people transported from West Africa. Sugar produced on these plantations was exported to Europe and the rest of the world, earning a hefty profit for the European merchants who designed the system. Local people living in the places where sugar was produced did not benefit much from this trade, and enslaved people suffered and died for it. Similar systems were developed for the production of other global commodities such as cocoa, coffee, tea, and cotton. Some commodities required enslaved labor and others involved small farmers, but the basic structure of the trade was the same. The economies of many South Asian and African countries were designed entirely around the export of primary commodities, the production of which was controlled by European merchants who reaped the profits from this global trade. Many postcolonial countries still rely on the export of these primary commodities.

What do these historical processes mean for understanding the world today? European merchants and governments crafted strategic ways of thinking about the parts of the world they wanted to invade and colonize. To justify the development of the slave trade, the plantation system, and colonial rule, Europeans labeled many non-Europeans as backward peoples needing the civilizing influence of European domination. This form of bias persists in contemporary notions of backwardness applied to the poorer peoples and parts of the world.

In reality, the colonial system was a global mechanism for European merchants and governments to extract wealth from other parts of the world. European merchants took great care to maintain control over these forms of highly profitable trade, edging out local merchants and forbidding local competition. Even today, we see the remnants of this system in Euro-American domination of global trade. If the world seems divided between rich and poor, it is not because some countries work hard and others are “backward.” It is because the global system was founded on forms of inequality that endure into the present.

3) Some Characteristics of Anthropology

[Holism, Anthropology's Distinctive Approach](#)

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe. Nearly 210 million people had fallen sick with the coronavirus and more than 4 million had died as of August 2021. Medical researchers are still studying the long-term effects of this illness on the lungs and brains of people who have recovered. Some have discovered psychological effects as well, such as increased risks for depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.

Beyond the medical realm, the effects of the pandemic reached into every aspect of our societies and our everyday lives. In societies all over the world, people were forced to remain at home, “sheltering in place” from the dangers of the disease. Businesses closed their doors to the public, and many shut down permanently, unable to pay their bills. By May 2020, nearly 50 million Americans had reported losing their jobs due to the pandemic. The epidemic of disease ballooned into an epidemic of grief as people mourned the loss of the those who had died and worried about those who had fallen sick. Stressed out by so many disruptions, some adults turned to alcohol and drugs, and addiction rates soared. Incidents of domestic violence escalated. Racial violence against Asian Americans increased as some Americans blamed China for the emergence and global spread of the disease. People everywhere reported feeling lonelier and more cut off from their friends and family members.

And yet there were also some positive consequences. Because people were not driving as much, air quality improved in many urban areas, giving relief to many people who suffer from asthma. Looking up into the night sky, some people were able to see

stars for the very first time. Some people reported valuing their friends and family members even more now that they could not spend time with them in person. New social media technologies spread, such as Zoom, and many people learned to use existing technologies such as FaceTime and Skype. People also became aware of the valuable contributions made by “essential workers” in drugstores, hardware stores, and grocery stores as well as hospitals and nursing homes.

How did a virus cause so many changes? The various elements of society are entwined in a complex whole. Dramatic changes in one area, such as epidemic disease in the realm of public health, can trigger a chain of effects throughout other social realms, such as the family, the economy, religion, and the political system.

Holism is a distinctive method of analysis that emphasizes the ever-changing relationships among different realms of culture.

Society as an Integrated Whole

Throughout the 2010s, infant death rates in certain rural areas in Africa decreased dramatically. While thrilled with this positive trend, researchers did not initially know how to explain it. Were mothers and fathers doing something different to promote the health of their babies? Were African governments providing better health services for infants? Were aid agencies providing more resources? None of these things seemed to be true in any significant way.

The one thing that had changed in the areas with lower infant mortality was the spread of mobile phones. Could that have something to do with lower infant mortality? And if so, how? Researchers hypothesize that it wasn't just the possession or use of mobile phones that was making the difference—it was the capability to use mobile money transfers and other fintech. If a baby had a fever in the middle of the night, the mother could now immediately text members of her extended family to organize the necessary funds to take the baby to a hospital for treatment. Quicker treatment meant a better chance for recovery. Something that does not appear to be directly related to infant health may in fact have a great impact on it.

Recall from the beginning of this chapter our discussion of the very broad scope of anthropology. While other disciplines focus on one realm of society, such as medicine or technology, anthropology ranges across all realms of human thought and activity. Using the technique of holism, anthropologists ask how seemingly disparate elements of social life might be related in unexpected ways.

In American and European cultures, the most common form of marriage is a union of two people. In the United States, many marriages end in divorce and most people then remarry, resulting in a cycle of marriage-divorce-remarriage called serial monogamy. In other cultures, however, a man may have more than one wife. It might be tempting to think that the dominant form of marriage in a culture is related to morality or gender relations. It turns out, however, that one very significant influence on marriage patterns is the food-getting strategy of a particular culture. In small-scale farming cultures, the marriage of one man to two or more women provides an abundance of children to help out with the work of weeding, watering, fertilizing, and guarding the crops (Boserup [1970] 2007; Goody 1976). In cultures where children contribute to food production, the marriage of one man to multiple women is more prevalent. This isn't always the case, of course, as there are other factors that influence the form of marriage practiced in a culture, but the useful work of children does contribute to the popularity of this form of marriage.

In the contemporary United States, by contrast, most people work not on farms but in offices, shops, and factories. Children are not valued as sources of household labor, and they are not legally permitted to work for wages. In fact, children can be viewed as a drain on the household, each one requiring a massive investment of resources in the form of health care, childcare, special equipment, educational opportunities, and expensive toys. In this context, the increased fertility of multiple wives might impoverish the household.

Moreover, our fast-paced, capitalist economy requires a flexible and highly mobile work force. American workers can lose their jobs, and they must be prepared to move and retrain in order to find further work. Many Americans experience periods of uncertainty and precarity in their work lives, conditions that affect the livelihood of their households as well as their relationships with their marriage partners and children. Such a context contributes to smaller family size and fragile marriage bonds. The cycles of stability and disruption in American work life are mirrored in the cycles of marriage and divorce involved in serial monogamy.

These are just two examples of why anthropologists are committed to taking such a broad view of the cultures they study. Often, the various realms of society are related in ways that are not at first apparent to the researcher. By specializing too narrowly on only one realm, the researcher might miss the wider forces that shape the object of study.

Sources of Contradiction, Conflict, and Change

Holistic analysis considers not only how the various features of culture hold together but also how change in one feature can generate cascading changes among others. Often, anthropologists begin their analysis by focusing on one significant change in the lives of a particular cultural group and then chart the ramifications of that change through various other realms of culture.

Attiya Ahmad conducted research among South Asian women who migrate to the Middle East for jobs as housekeepers (2017). She writes about how these women adapt to a new culture and living situation in Kuwait and the disruptions they face when they return to their families and home cultures. On the job in Kuwait, these domestic workers must learn to speak Arabic, operate household gadgets, prepare an entirely different cuisine, respect Islamic norms and practices, and perform their appropriate gender role as female members of a Kuwaiti household. They face the cultural requirement that women should be *naram*, or soft and malleable, as they develop emotionally charged relationships with the various members of the household. These requirements bring about profound personal transformations for these women as they deal with the contradictions of being both successful wage earners and subordinated cultural others.

The motivation to migrate is primarily financial: the need to pay for schooling, marriages, medical care, and other family expenses. While the women are working in Kuwait, their families become economically dependent on the money they send back home even as their emotional relationships with their family members become weaker and more difficult. When they return home, profoundly changed by their experiences in Kuwait, their natal families nonetheless expect them to behave exactly as they did before they left, observing the same gender and age-related norms that govern the household. This creates a sense of internal conflict for these women. Unable to truly reintegrate with their natal families, many either seek out new connections in their home communities or migrate back to Kuwait. Some begin learning more about Islam by attending special *da'wa* classes, where they meet other women in the same situation. Finding ethical inspiration in Islamic teachings, many do convert, against the objections of their natal families and their Kuwaiti employers.

All cultures are constantly changing, with small changes in one realm snowballing into larger and larger changes within and beyond that culture. The Me Too movement is another good example. What began in 2006 as a call by American activist Tarana Burke for solidarity and empathy with victims of sexual harassment has now spread into many sectors of American society and across the globe. Initially focused on high-profile celebrities and the movie industry, the Me Too movement has raised awareness of widespread sexual harassment and assault in the fashion industry, churches, the finance industry, sports, medicine, politics, and the military. Activists press for legal changes to protect workers, especially whistleblowers who come forward with allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior. Evaluations of patriarchal and chauvinistic behavior in these institutional realms have sparked scrutiny of the more informal cultural norms of American romance and dating. The Me Too movement challenges the way Americans think about the gender roles of men and women, appropriate speech and gestures, and the distinction between public life and private life.

The movement has prompted processes of dialogue and change in at least 28 other countries, including Afghanistan, China, Nigeria, and the Philippines. The global campaign has been interpreted differently in each of these cultural contexts as the transcultural intentions of American activists intersect with local norms of gender and sexuality. Indeed, some critique the Me Too movement as ethnocentric. Though the calls for reform resonated with French feminists, Me Too activism sparked a backlash among many other French people, with some men and even women arguing that French men should have the right to make sexually provocative comments and rub against women in public places.

While many anthropologists actively support the Me Too movement, our methods of cross-cultural comparison call on us to set aside our personal values (at least temporarily) in order to understand how people in various cultural contexts interpret and act on the cross-cultural campaign against gender-based harassment and assault. This method of suspending personal values is key to understanding how all the elements of a particular culture interact with one another, including pressures from the outside.

Cross-Cultural Comparison and Cultural Relativism

Recall our earlier discussion of cultural styles of clothing. American clothing style is related to American values. Ghanaian clothing style is related to Ghanaian values. We have seen how different realms of culture are interrelated, fitting together to form distinctive wholes. Anthropologists use the term *cultural relativism* to describe how every element of culture must be understood within the broader whole of that culture. Relativism highlights how each belief or practice is related to all of the other beliefs and practices in a culture. The anthropological commitment to relativism means that anthropologists do not judge the merits of particular beliefs

and practices but rather seek to understand the wider contexts that produce and reinforce those elements of culture. Even when studying controversial topics such as piracy and guerilla warfare, anthropologists set aside their personal convictions in order to explore the complex web of cultural forces that determine why we do the things we do.

Relativism Is Not “Anything Goes”

Critics of the notion of relativism believe so strongly in their own cultural norms that they cannot set them aside, even temporarily. They argue that relativism is amoral, a refusal to condemn aspects of culture considered to be wrong and harmful. For them, relativism means “anything goes.”

For anthropologists, cultural relativism is a rigorous mode of holistic analysis requiring the temporary suspension of judgment for the purposes of exploration and analysis. Anthropologists do not think that violent or exploitative cultural practices are just fine, but they do think that the reasons for those practices are a lot more complex than we might imagine. And frequently, we find that the judgmental interventions of ethnocentric outsiders can do more harm than good.

Morality, Activism, and Cultural Relativism

A striking example of the application of cultural relativism in anthropology is the controversy surrounding female genital cutting (FGC), sometimes called female genital mutilation. FGC is a cultural practice in which an elder cuts a younger woman’s genitalia, removing all or part of the clitoris and labia. The practice is common in parts of Africa and the Middle East. FGC is not only extremely painful; it can also lead to infection, urination problems, infertility, and complications in childbirth.

The World Health Organization and the United Nations condemn the practice as a form of violence against children, a danger to women’s health, and a violation of basic human rights. These organizations view FGC as a form of discrimination against women, enforcing extreme inequality among the sexes. Efforts to ban FGC have focused on educating parents and children about the medical harms associated with the practice. Local governments are encouraged to enact laws banning FGC and impose criminal penalties against the elders who perform it.



Figure 3.5: Rendille Kenyan women attending a church dedication ceremony. (credit: “180818_TSCOKenya_EstherHavens_0997” by Ann/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Despite decades of campaigning against FGC, however, the practice remains widespread. If condemning FGC has not been effective in reducing it, then what can be done? Anthropologist Bettina Shell-Duncan has taken a more relativist approach, attempting to understand the larger cultural norms and values that make FGC such an enduring practice. Setting aside her personal opinions, Shell-Duncan spent long periods in African communities where FGC is practiced, talking to people about why FGC is important to them. She learned that FGC has different functions in different sociocultural contexts. Among the Rendille people of northern Kenya, many people believe that men’s and women’s bodies are naturally androgynous, a mix of masculine and feminine parts. In order for a girl to become a woman, it is necessary to remove the parts of female genitalia that resemble a man’s penis. Likewise, in order for a boy to become a man, the foreskin must be removed because it resembles the folds of female genitalia.

Other societies value FGC for different reasons. Some Muslim societies consider FGC a form of hygiene, making a girl clean so that she can pray to Allah. Some communities see FGC as a way of limiting premarital sex and discouraging extramarital affairs. In

the colonial period, when FGC was banned by the colonial government, some Kenyan girls practiced FGC on themselves as a form of resistance to colonial authority. As FGC is promoted and carried out by senior women in most contexts, the practice becomes a way for senior women to solidify power and exert influence in the community.

People in communities practicing FGC are often aware of the efforts of outside groups to ban the practice. They know about medical complications such as the risk of infection. But the denunciations of outsiders often seem unconvincing to them, as those denunciations tend to ignore the cultural reasons for the endurance of FGC. People who practice FGC do not do it because they despise women or want to harm children. Shell-Duncan argues that parents weigh the risks and benefits of FGC, often deciding that the procedure is in the best interest of their child's future.

Personally, Shell-Duncan remains critical of FGC and works on a project with the Population Council designed to dramatically reduce the practice. Cultural relativism does not mean permanently abandoning our own value systems. Instead, it asks us to set aside the norms and values of our own culture for a while in order to fully understand controversial practices in other cultures.

By suspending judgment, Shell-Duncan was able to learn two important things. First, while campaigns to eradicate FGC frequently target mothers, providing them with educational material about the medical risks involved, Shell-Duncan learned that the decision to go ahead with the procedure is not made by parents alone. A large network of relatives and friends may pressure a girl's parents to arrange for the cutting in order to ensure the girl's chastity, marriageability, and fertility. Secondly, Shell-Duncan learned that people who practice FGC do it because they want the best for their girls. They want their girls to be respected and admired, considered clean and beautiful, fit for marriage and childbearing.

Shell-Duncan argues that outside organizations should reconsider their efforts, focusing more on communities than on individual parents. Awareness campaigns will be more effective if they resonate with local norms and values rather than dismissively condemning them as part of the whole culture of FGC. Some researchers urge anti-FGC activists to connect with local feminists and women's groups in an effort to empower local women and localize the movement against FGC. Some alternative approaches press for more incremental forms of change, such as moving the practice to more sanitary conditions in clinics and hospitals and reducing the severity of the procedure to smaller cuts or more symbolic nicks.

As this example illustrates, cultural relativism is not an amoral "anything goes" approach but rather a strategy for forming cross-cultural relationships and gaining deeper understanding. Once this foundation has been established, anthropologists are often able to revise their activist goals and more effectively work together with people from another culture in pursuit of common interests.

Reaching for an Insider's Point of View

Bettina Shell-Duncan's work on FGC demonstrates the importance of setting aside your own values and opinions in order to see an issue from the point of view of those directly involved. This often means working across contexts, whether studying another group or another culture. Anthropologists across the four fields apply this technique. Cultural anthropologists talk to people and participate in social activities in order to understand cultural life. Archaeologists rely on artifacts and fossils to reconstruct the sociocultural life of peoples in earlier times and different places. Through these different methods, anthropologists all aim for the same thing: they want to understand the perspectives of the people who practice a particular culture, sometimes called an insider's point of view.

The Challenge of Representing Others

The anthropological goal of representing an insider's point of view is controversial. Is it truly possible to step outside your own identity to really understand a different perspective? How can a researcher from a particular culture possibly understand exactly how it feels to be a member of another culture? Even anthropologists who study their own cultures may find themselves researching people from different classes, ethnicities, or gender categories. Is it possible to accurately represent the perspectives of people whose lives are so different from your own? Is it ethical? Is it valuable?

For decades, White European and American anthropologists conducted research and wrote ethnographies as if the challenge of representing cultures very different from their own was really no problem at all. Empowered by White privilege and ethnocentrism, many earlier anthropologists believed that long-term intensive fieldwork was enough to give them cross-cultural insight into the perspectives of the people they studied.

Too frequently, those anthropologists reduced the complexity of the non-Western cultures they studied to just one point of view, as if the people in that society all interpreted their cultural rules the same way and never disagreed or changed the rules over time. In

her book about Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), anthropologist Ruth Benedict describes Japanese people in terms of common personality traits, such as reverence for the emperor and a moral sense guided by shame. Critics have argued that her conclusions are skewed by her overreliance on very few informants, all of them Japanese people confined to internment camps during World War II. As we have explored in this chapter, every culture comprises multiple perspectives that often contradict one another, generating sociocultural conflict and change. Recognizing this situation, contemporary anthropologists often conduct research among several different subgroups and geographical locations, integrating insights from these various arenas into a comprehensive and dynamic view of cultural complexity.

Then there is the question of deep-seated bias, often operating unconsciously among researchers and the people they study. Consider the situation above in which a white American anthropologist conducts research in an African country previously colonized by Europeans. European colonialism left behind a legacy of white privilege in postcolonial African countries. Earlier anthropologists did not often recognize how racialized power dynamics might shape their research and writing, distorting their representations of the peoples they studied. In the 1960s, anthropologists began to think more carefully about these issues, realizing that an insider's point of view is never perfectly achievable. As human beings, our own perspectives are conditioned by our own enculturation, our own ways of seeing and thinking about the world around us.

If an insider's point of view is never really possible, should we give up on this aspirational goal of the discipline? In such a scenario, researchers would only study and write about people from the same sociocultural categories as themselves. So, for example, Americans would only research and write about other Americans. But are all Americans really members of the same sociocultural category? Could an upper-class Asian American from Manhattan research and write about a poor Black community in the Deep South? Could a Latino man write about a group of Latinx/Latina/Latino people consisting of all genders? American culture is not unique in its complex array of identities. In all cultures, people have multiple identities as members of multiple sociocultural categories. While you may be an insider within your culture in some respect, you may be an outsider by some other measure. The ethical question of who can represent who is riddled with difficulties.

Moreover, resigning ourselves to studying "our own people," whoever they might be, is tantamount to giving up on cross-cultural research and the insight, empathy, dialogue, and transformation that frequently result from it. Anthropological insights have been key to rethinking American notions of sexuality, family, and race, among so many other pressing issues. We need the skills of cross-cultural research now more than ever. While perfect representations of different communities and cultures may be impossible, many anthropologists now deploy innovative methods designed to address the problems of history and power at the heart of the discipline. The aim is not to achieve perfect ethnography but to work ethically and collaboratively to produce what contemporary cultural anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes has termed "good enough ethnography."

Collaborative Methods of Representation

Faced with the challenges of representation, many anthropologists practice methods of collaboration with the individuals and groups that they study. *Collaborative ethnography** has a very long history in cultural anthropology, traceable all the way back to early Euro-American ethnographies of Native Americans. Often, anthropologists began their research by employing a local person as a translator or field assistant, a role that usually evolved into something much more cooperative.

*Ethnography is the study of a particular society



Figure 3.6: Francis La Flesche (credit: “Francis laflesche” by National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Researching the Omaha peoples in the early 20th century, anthropologist Alice Cunningham Fletcher began working with a young Omaha man, Francis La Flesche. Through their collaboration, La Flesche became an ethnographer himself. While most anthropologists of the day merely acknowledged their local collaborators (if they did even that), La Flesche became a full coauthor of their joint ethnography, *The Omaha Tribe* (1911).

Today, anthropologists collaborate with the people they study in a number of ways. Some involve local people as readers and editors of their work, sometimes including community responses in the published ethnography. Some conduct focus groups to generate local feedback on particular chapters. Some anthropologists hold community meetings or forums to talk about the major themes and implications of their work. And some, like Fletcher, collaborate with members of the local community as equal coauthors on books and articles. Such methods strengthen ethnography by ensuring accuracy, promoting multiple perspectives, and striving to make anthropological work more relevant to the communities being studied.

Collaboration also draws attention to the personal side of ethnography. Instead of extracting ethnographic “facts” from the process of fieldwork, many contemporary anthropologists focus on describing particular people, insightful conversations, and cooperative practices encountered in their research.

Through this kind of representation, culture is represented as a constellation of personal perspectives, each one shaped by the position of each person in that community. Anthropologists also now acknowledge that ethnography is shaped by the personal background and identity of the researcher as well as the motivations and intended audience of the research. Collaborative anthropologists frequently describe their research in the first person, openly acknowledging how their personal and cultural biases influence their research.

Anthropologist Luke E. Lassiter takes a collaborative approach in his study of the song and dance of contemporary Kiowa communities of southern Oklahoma (1998). Lassiter describes how he became interested in Kiowa song as a boy through his involvement in the Order of the Arrow, an affiliate of the Boy Scouts. Moving beyond the superficial representations of Native American culture in Boy Scout teachings, Lassiter went on to attend powwows, where he met singers and learned more about Kiowa culture. He developed a close friendship with renowned Kiowa singer Billy Evans Horse, who taught Lassiter how to sing Kiowa songs and encouraged him to pursue his interest in Kiowa culture in graduate school. Instead of foregrounding his own description of Kiowa song and dance, Lassiter highlights the individual experiences and opinions of his local collaborators as they describe how songs are created, passed down, and interpreted in the community.

Collaborative anthropology is not only more ethical and accurate; it is also more socially conscious and political. When anthropologists collaborate as equals, they often become socially involved and politically committed to the welfare of the communities they study. There are various terms for this, among them engaged anthropology, public anthropology, anthropological advocacy, and applied anthropology. When those communities face struggles over land, food security, medical care, or human

rights abuses, many anthropologists support their interests in a number of ways. Anthropologists often speak out publicly, write sympathetic ethnographies, testify in court, participate in protests, and coordinate with organizations that can provide material aid.

Anthropologist Stuart Kirsch was researching magic and sorcery in a Yonggom village in Papua New Guinea when he became concerned about pollution from local copper and gold mines nearby (2018). As the community he was studying mobilized to protect their environment, Kirsch became involved in their lawsuit against the Australian owners of the mine. He contributed to a social and environmental impact study and advised lawyers representing the affected communities. He spoke out to local media and scholarly publications, explaining the environmental problems caused by pollution from the mine.

[Working across Cultures toward Common Goals](#)

Stepping back for a moment, consider the problems facing us as humans on our shared planet. Climate change threatens the survival of humanity and the biodiversity of plants and animals. Forms of deeply entrenched inequality fuel racial, ethnic, and class conflicts within and between nations. These are global problems, transnational problems, cross-cultural problems. Human beings need to find a way to communicate and cooperate across the sociocultural boundaries that divide us, always recognizing the power dynamics involved in that process.

How can we do this? Anthropology teaches us that we may never understand exactly how it feels to be a member of a different culture or group within our own culture. But if we want to work together with people of different sociocultural backgrounds to solve these pressing global issues, we have to try. Long-term fieldwork and cross-cultural collaboration are not perfect solutions to the challenges of cross-cultural understanding, but these methods give us a place to begin. And anthropological methods and insights can be transformative, making possible the kinds of empathy and dialogue necessary to solve our global problems.

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4: Sociology

1) Why Study Sociology?



Figure 4.1: The research of Kenneth and Mamie Clark helped the Supreme Court decide to end “separate but equal” racial segregation in schools in the United States. (Credit: University of Texas)

Here is an example of sociology and its effect on the world.

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd and was turned away by authorities. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned twenty-one state laws that allowed Black and white people to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.”

The decision was nothing short of momentous, not only for education, but for a number of other segregation and discrimination issues that have lasted into this decade. And in that momentous decision, the Supreme Court cited the research of the husband-and-wife team of social scientists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, as evidence that segregation generates in minority students a feeling of inferiority. In the ‘doll test,’ for example, the Clarks showed children four dolls, two with white skin and yellow hair and two with brown skin and black hair. When asked which doll they preferred, the majority of Black children chose the doll with the light skin doll, and they assigned positive characteristics to it. Most of the Black children discarded the doll with the brown skin—the one that had a closer resemblance to themselves.

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

Sociology and a Better Society

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

The predominant American sociologist, the late Peter L. Berger (1929–2017), in his 1963 book, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as “someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way.” He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

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

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

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

The Sociological Perspective

Our freedom to think and act is constrained at least to some degree by society's standards and expectations and by the many aspects of our social backgrounds. This is true for the kinds of important beliefs and behaviors just discussed, and it is also true for less important examples. For instance, think back to the last class you attended. How many of the women wore evening gowns? How many of the men wore skirts? Students are "allowed" to dress any way they want in most colleges and universities (as long as they do not go to class naked), but notice how few students, if any, dress in the way just mentioned. They do not dress that way because of the strange looks and even negative reactions they would receive.

Think back to the last time you rode in an elevator. Why did you not face the back? Why did you not sit on the floor? Why did you not start singing? Children can do these things and "get away with it," because they look cute doing so, but adults risk looking odd. Because of that, even though we are "allowed" to act strangely in an elevator, we do not.

The basic point is that society shapes our attitudes and behavior even if it does not determine them altogether. We still have freedom, but that freedom is limited by society's expectations. Moreover, our views and behavior depend to some degree on our social location in society—our gender, race, social class, religion, and so forth. Thus society as a whole and also our own social backgrounds affect our attitudes and behaviors. Our social backgrounds also affect one other important part of our lives, and that is our life chances—our chances (whether we have a good chance or little chance) of being healthy, wealthy, and well educated and, more generally, of living a good, happy life.

The influence of our social environment in all of these respects is the fundamental understanding that sociology—the scientific study of social behavior and social institutions—aims to present. At the heart of sociology is the *sociological perspective*, the view that our social backgrounds influence our attitudes, behavior, and life chances. In this regard, we are not just individuals but rather social beings deeply enmeshed in society. Although we all differ from one another in many respects, we share with many other people basic aspects of our social backgrounds, perhaps especially gender, race and ethnicity, and social class. These shared qualities make us more similar to each other than we would otherwise be.

Does society totally determine our beliefs, behavior, and life chances? No. Individual differences still matter, and disciplines such as psychology are certainly needed for the most complete understanding of human action and beliefs. But if individual differences matter, so do society and the social backgrounds from which we come. Even the most individual attitudes and behaviors, such as the marriage and voting decisions discussed earlier, are influenced to some degree by our social backgrounds and, more generally, by the society to which we belong.

2) Sociology as a Social Science

Generalizations

A generalization in sociology is a general statement regarding a trend between various dimensions of our lives: gender and suicide rate, race and voting choice, and so forth. Many people will not fit the pattern of such a generalization, because people are shaped but not totally determined by their social environment. That is both the fascination and the frustration of sociology. Sociology is fascinating because no matter how much sociologists are able to predict people's behavior, attitudes, and life chances, many people will not fit the predictions. But sociology is frustrating for the same reason. Because people can never be totally explained by their social environment, sociologists can never completely understand the sources of their behavior, attitudes, and life chances.

In this sense, sociology as a social science is very different from a discipline such as physics, in which known laws exist for which no exceptions are possible. For example, we call the law of gravity a law because it describes a physical force that exists on the

earth at all times and in all places and that always has the same result. If you were to pick up the book you are now reading or the computer or other device on which you are reading or listening to it and then let go, the object you were holding would obviously fall to the ground. If you did this a second time, it would fall a second time. If you did this a billion times, it would fall a billion times. In fact, if there were even one time out of a billion that your book or electronic device did not fall down, our understanding of the physical world would be totally revolutionized, the earth could be in danger, and you could go on television and make a lot of money.

For better or worse, people and social institutions—the subject matter of sociology—do not always follow our predictions. They are not like that book or electronic device that keeps falling down. People have their own minds, and social institutions their own reality, that often defy any effort to explain. Sociology can help us understand the social forces that affect our behavior, beliefs, and life chances, but it can only go so far. That limitation conceded, sociological understanding can still go fairly far toward such an understanding, and it can help us comprehend who we are and what we are by helping us first understand the profound yet often subtle influence of our social backgrounds on so many things about us.



Figure 4.2: People's attitudes, behavior, and life chances are influenced but not totally determined by many aspects of their social environment. Thinkstock

Although sociology as a discipline is very different from physics, it is not as different as one might think from this and the other “hard” sciences. Like these disciplines, sociology as a social science relies heavily on systematic research that follows the standard rules of the scientific method. We return to these rules and the nature of sociological research later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that careful research is essential for a sociological understanding of people, social institutions, and society.

At this point a reader might be saying, “I already know a lot about people. I could have told you that young people voted for Obama. I already had heard that men have a higher suicide rate than women. Maybe our social backgrounds do influence us in ways I had not realized, but what beyond that does sociology have to tell me?”

Students often feel this way because sociology deals with matters already familiar to them. Just about everyone has grown up in a family, so we all know something about it. We read a lot in the media about topics like divorce and healthcare, so we all already know something about these, too. All this leads some students to wonder if they will learn anything in their introduction to sociology course that they do not already know.

How Do We Know What We Think We Know?

Let's consider this issue a moment: how do we know what we think we know? Our usual knowledge and understanding of social reality come from at least five sources: (a) personal experience; (b) common sense; (c) the media (including the Internet); (d) “expert authorities,” such as teachers, parents, and government officials; and (e) tradition. These are all important sources of our understanding of how the world “works,” but at the same time their value can often be very limited.

Let's look at them separately by starting with personal experience. Although personal experiences are very important, not everyone has the same personal experience. This obvious fact casts some doubt on the degree to which our personal experiences can help us understand everything there is to know about a topic and the degree to which we can draw conclusions from our personal experiences that necessarily apply to other people.

For example, say you grew up in Maine or Vermont, where more than 98% of the population is white. If you relied on your personal experience to calculate how many people of color live in the country, you would conclude that almost everyone in the United States is also white, which obviously is not true. As another example, say you grew up in a family where your parents had the proverbial perfect marriage, as they loved each other deeply and rarely argued. If you relied on your personal experience to understand the typical American marriage, you would conclude that most marriages were as good as your parents' marriage, which, unfortunately, is also not true. Many other examples could be cited here, but the basic point should be clear: although personal experience is better than nothing, it often offers only a very limited understanding of social reality other than our own.

If personal experience does not help that much when it comes to making predictions, what about common sense? Although common sense can be very helpful, it can also contradict itself. For example, which makes more sense, haste makes waste or he or she who hesitates is lost? How about birds of a feather flock together versus opposites attract? Or two heads are better than one versus too many cooks spoil the broth? Each of these common sayings makes sense, but if sayings that are opposite of each other both make sense, where does the truth lie? Can common sense always be counted on to help us understand social life? Slightly more than five centuries ago, everyone “knew” the earth was flat—it was just common sense that it had to be that way. Slightly more than a century ago, some of the leading physicians in the United States believed that women should not go to college because the stress of higher education would disrupt their menstrual cycles (Ehrenreich & English, 1979). If that bit of common sense (lessness) were still with us, many of the women reading this book would not be in college.

Still, perhaps there are some things that make so much sense they just have to be true; if sociology then tells us that they are true, what have we learned? Here is an example of such an argument. We all know that older people—those 65 or older—may have more problems than younger people. First, their health is generally not as good. Second, they may have physical infirmities which can make it harder for them to walk or otherwise move around. Third, many have seen their spouses and close friends pass away and thus live lonelier lives than younger people. Finally, many are on fixed incomes and face financial difficulties. All of these problems indicate that older people should be less happy than younger people. If a sociologist did some research and then reported that older people are indeed less happy than younger people, what have we learned? The sociologist only confirmed the obvious.

The trouble with this confirmation of the obvious is that the “obvious” turns out not to be true after all. In the 2010 General Social Survey, which was given to a national random sample of Americans, respondents were asked, “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days? Would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” Respondents aged 65 or older were actually slightly more likely than those younger than 65 to say they were very happy! About 33% of older respondents reported feeling this way, compared with only 28% of younger respondents. What we all “knew” was obvious from common sense turns out not to have been so obvious after all.

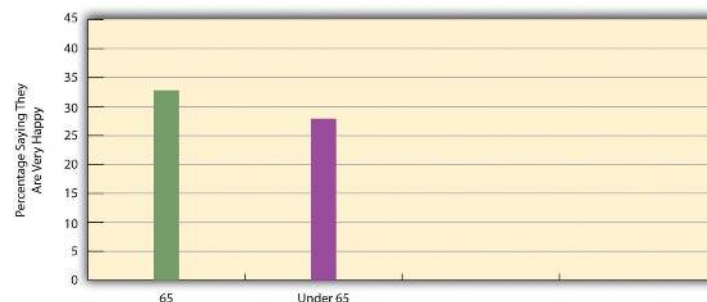


Figure 4.3: Age and Happiness. Source: Data from General Social Survey, 2010

If personal experience and common sense do not always help that much, how about the media? We learn a lot about current events and social and political issues from the Internet, television news, newspapers and magazines, and other media sources. It is certainly important to keep up with the news, but media coverage may oversimplify complex topics or even distort what the best evidence from systematic research seems to be telling us.

A good example here is crime. Many studies show that the media sensationalize crime and suggest there is much more violent crime than there really is. For example, in the early 1990s, the evening newscasts on the major networks increased their coverage of murder and other violent crimes, painting a picture of a nation where crime was growing rapidly. The reality was very different, however, as crime was actually declining. John Gramlich with the Pew Research Center reports that according to FBI statistics

violent crime rates declined by 49% between 1992 and 2019 (Gramlich, 2020). The view that crime was growing was thus a myth generated by the media (Kurtz, 1997).

Expert authorities, such as teachers, parents, and government officials, are a fourth source that influences our understanding of social reality. We learn much from our teachers and parents and perhaps from government officials, but, for better or worse, not all of what we learn from these sources about social reality is completely accurate. Teachers and parents do not always have the latest research evidence at their fingertips, and various biases may color their interpretation of any evidence with which they are familiar. As many examples from U.S. history illustrate, government officials may simplify or even falsify the facts. We should perhaps always listen to our teachers and parents and maybe even to government officials, but that does not always mean they give us a true, complete picture of social reality.



Figure 4.4: The news media often oversimplify complex topics and in other respects provide a misleading picture of social reality. As one example, news coverage sensationalizes violent crime and thus suggests that such crime is more common than it actually is. © Thinkstock

A final source that influences our understanding of social reality is tradition, or long-standing ways of thinking about the workings of society. Tradition is generally valuable, because a society should always be aware of its roots. However, traditional ways of thinking about social reality often turn out to be inaccurate and incomplete.

For example, traditional ways of thinking in the United States once assumed that women and people of color were biologically and culturally inferior to men and whites. Although some Americans continue to hold these beliefs, as we shall see in later chapters, these traditional assumptions have given way to more egalitarian assumptions. As we shall also see in later chapters, most sociologists certainly do not believe that women and people of color are biologically and culturally inferior.

If we cannot always trust personal experience, common sense, the media, expert authorities, and tradition to help us understand social reality, then the importance of systematic research gathered by sociology and the other social sciences becomes apparent. Although sociology sometimes does confirm the obvious, often it also confirms the nonobvious and even challenges conventional understandings of how society works and of controversial social issues. This emphasis is referred to as the *debunking motif*, to which we now turn.

The Debunking Motif

As Peter L. Berger notes in his classic book *Invitation to Sociology*, “The first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem.” (1963, pp. 23–24). Social reality, he says, has “many layers of meaning,” and a goal of sociology is to help us discover these multiple meanings. He continues, “People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School...should stay away from sociology.”

This is because sociology helps us see through conventional understandings of how society works. Berger refers to this theme of sociology as the *debunking motif*. By “looking for levels of reality other than those given in the official interpretations of society” (1963 p. 38), Berger says sociology looks beyond on-the-surface understandings of social reality and helps us recognize the value of alternative or other ways of understanding. In this manner, sociology often challenges conventional understandings about social reality and social institutions.

For example, suppose two people meet at a college party. They are interested in getting to know each other. What would be an on-the-surface understanding and description of their interaction over the next few minutes? What do they say? If they are like a

typical couple who just met, they will ask questions like, What's your name? Where are you from? What dorm do you live in? What's your major?

Now, such a description of their interaction is OK as far as it goes, but what is really going on in this interaction? Does either of the two people really care that much about the other person's answers to these questions? Isn't each one more concerned about how the other person is responding, both verbally and nonverbally, during this brief interaction? Is the other person paying attention and even smiling? Isn't this kind of understanding a more complete analysis of these few minutes of interaction than an understanding based solely on the answers to questions like, What's your major? For the most complete understanding of this brief encounter, then, we must look beyond the rather superficial things the two people are telling each other to uncover the true meaning of what is going on.

As another example, consider the power structure in a city or state. To know who has the power to make decisions, we would probably consult a city or state charter or constitution that spells out the powers of the branches of government. This written document would indicate who makes decisions and has power, but what would it not talk about? To put it another way, who or what else has power to influence the decisions elected officials make? Big corporations? Labor unions? The media? Lobbying groups representing all sorts of interests? The city or state charter or constitution may indicate who has the power to make decisions, but this understanding would be limited unless one looks beyond these written documents to get a deeper, more complete understanding of how power really operates in the setting being studied.

Social Structure and the Sociological Imagination

One way sociology achieves a more complete understanding of social reality is through its focus on the importance of the social forces affecting our behavior, attitudes, and life chances. This focus involves an emphasis on social structure, the social patterns through which a society is organized.

Social structure can be both horizontal or vertical. *Horizontal social structure* refers to the social relationships and the social and physical characteristics of communities to which individuals belong. Some people belong to many networks of social relationships, including groups like the PTA and the Boy or Girl Scouts, while other people have fewer such networks. Some people grew up on streets where the houses were crowded together, while other people grew up in areas where the homes were much farther apart. These are examples of the sorts of factors constituting the horizontal social structure that forms such an important part of our social environment and backgrounds.

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

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

To illustrate Mills's viewpoint, let's use our sociological imaginations to understand some important contemporary social problems. We will start with unemployment, which Mills himself discussed. If only a few people were unemployed, Mills wrote, we could reasonably explain their unemployment by saying they were lazy, lacked good work habits, and so forth. If so, their unemployment would be their own personal trouble. But when millions of people are out of work, unemployment is best understood as a public issue because, as Mills 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." (1959, p. 9).

The growing unemployment rate stemming from the severe economic downturn that began in 2008 provides a telling example of the point Mills was making. Millions of people lost their jobs through no fault of their own. While some individuals may be unemployed because they are lazy or lack good work habits, a more structural explanation focusing on lack of opportunity is needed to explain why so many people were out of work as this book went to press. If so, unemployment is best understood as a public issue rather than a personal trouble. The same can be said for the unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2020. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate rose to 13.9 during April, May and June of 2020 ([BLS \[www.bls.gov\]](https://www.bls.gov)). Why were so many Americans out of work? Were they just lazy? No, there was a global pandemic which caused many businesses to close during those months of 2020.

Another contemporary problem is crime. If crime were only a personal trouble, then we could blame crime on the moral failings of individuals, and many explanations of crime do precisely this. But such an approach ignores the fact that crime is a public issue, as structural factors such as inequality and the physical characteristics of communities contribute to high crime rates among certain groups in American society.

As an illustration, consider identical twins separated at birth. One twin grows up in a wealthy suburb or rural area, while the other twin grows up in a blighted neighborhood in a poor, urban area. Twenty years later, which twin will be more likely to have a criminal record? You probably answered the twin growing up in the poor, run-down urban neighborhood. If so, you recognize that there is something about growing up in that type of neighborhood that increases the chances of a person becoming prone to crime . That “something” is the structural factors just mentioned. Criminal behavior is a public issue, not just a personal trouble.

A final problem we will consider for now is eating disorders. We usually consider a person’s eating disorder to be a personal trouble that stems from a lack of control, low self-esteem, or other personal problem. This explanation may be OK as far as it goes, but it does not help us understand why so many people have the personal problems that lead to eating disorders. Perhaps more important, this belief also neglects the larger social and cultural forces that help explain such disorders.

For example, most Americans with eating disorders are women, not men. This gender difference forces us to ask what it is about being a woman in American society that makes eating disorders so much more common. To begin to answer this question, we need to look to the standard of beauty for women that emphasizes a slender body (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008 p. 345-358). If this cultural standard did not exist, far fewer American women would suffer from eating disorders than do now. Even if every girl and woman with an eating disorder were cured, others would take their places unless we could somehow change the cultural standard of female slenderness. To the extent this explanation makes sense, eating disorders are best understood as a public issue, not just as a personal trouble.

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

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

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

3) Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

We have talked repeatedly about “a” sociological perspective, as if all sociologists share the same beliefs on how society works. This implication is misleading. Although all sociologists would probably accept the basic premise that social backgrounds affect people’s attitudes, behavior, and life chances, their views as sociologists differ in many other ways.

Macro and Micro Approaches

Although this may be overly simplistic, sociologists’ views basically fall into two camps: macrosociology and microsociology. *Macrosociologists* focus on the big picture, which usually means such things as social structure, social institutions, and social, political, and economic change. They look at the large-scale social forces that change the course of human society and the lives of individuals. *Microsociologists*, on the other hand, study social interaction. They look at how families, coworkers, and other small groups of people interact; why they interact the way they do; and how they interpret the meanings of their own interactions and of the social settings in which they find themselves.

Often macro- and microsociologists look at the same phenomena but do so in different ways. Their views taken together offer a fuller understanding of the phenomena than either approach can offer alone.



Figure 4.5: Microsociologists examine the interaction of small groups of people, such as the two women conversing here. These sociologists examine how and why individuals interact and interpret the meanings of their interaction. Wikimedia Commons

The different but complementary nature of these two approaches can be seen in the case of armed robbery. Macrosociologists would discuss such things as why robbery rates are higher in poorer communities and whether these rates change with changes in the national economy. Microsociologists would instead focus on such things as why individual robbers decide to commit a robbery and how they select their targets. Both types of approaches give us a valuable understanding of robbery, but together they offer an even richer understanding.

Within the broad macro camp, two perspectives dominate: functionalism and conflict theory. Within the micro camp, two other perspectives exist: symbolic interactionism and utilitarianism (also called rational choice theory or exchange theory) Collins, R. (1994). *Four sociological traditions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. We now turn to these four theoretical perspectives, which are summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical perspective	Major assumptions
Functionalism or Structural Functionalism	Social stability is necessary to have a strong society, and adequate socialization and social integration are necessary to achieve social stability. Society's social institutions Functionalism or Structural Functionalism perform important functions to help ensure social stability. Slow social change is desirable, but rapid social change threatens social order. Functionalism is a macro theory.
Conflict theory	Society is characterized by pervasive inequality based on social class, gender, and other factors. Far-reaching social change is needed to reduce or eliminate social inequality and to create an egalitarian society. Conflict theory is a macro theory.
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. Symbolic interactionism is a micro theory.
Utilitarianism or Exchange Theory	People act to maximize their advantages in a given situation and to reduce their disadvantages. If they decide that benefits outweigh disadvantages, they will initiate the interaction or continue it if it is already under way. If they instead decide that Utilitarianism or Exchange Theory disadvantages outweigh benefits, they will decline to begin interacting or stop the interaction if already begun. Social order is possible because people realize it will be in their best interests to cooperate and to make compromises when necessary. Utilitarianism is a micro theory.

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Functionalism or Structural Functionalism

Functionalism, also known as the functionalist perspective, arose out of two great revolutions of the 18th and 19th 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 19th 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. One result of these conditions was mass violence, as mobs of the poor roamed the streets of European and American cities. They attacked bystanders, destroyed property, and generally wreaked havoc. 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 (Collins, R. 1994). In this regard, their view was similar to that of the 20th-century novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding which many college students read in high school. In this story, some British boys are stranded on an island after a plane crash. No longer supervised by adults and no longer in a society as they once knew it, they are not sure how to proceed and come up with new rules for their behavior. These rules prove ineffective, and

the boys slowly become savages, as the book calls them, and commit murder. However bleak, Golding's view echoes back to that of the conservative intellectuals writing in the aftermath of the French and Industrial Revolutions. 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. He wrote, "To achieve any other result, the passions first must be limited....But since the individual has no way of limiting them, this must be done by some force exterior to him." This force, Durkheim continued, is the moral authority of society.

How does society limit individual aspirations? Durkheim emphasized 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 to socialize us and to integrate us into society and reinforce our respect for its rules. In general, Durkheim added, society comprises many types of social facts, or forces external to the individual, that affect and constrain individual attitudes and behavior. The result is that socialization and social integration help establish a strong set of social rules—or, as Durkheim called it, a strong collective conscience—that is needed for a stable society. By so doing, society "creates a kind of cocoon around the individual, making him or her less individualistic, more a member of the group" (Collins, 1994 p. 181). Weak rules or social ties weaken this "moral cocoon" and lead to social disorder. In all of these respects, says Randall Collins, Durkheim's view represents the "core tradition" of sociology that lies at the heart of the sociological perspective.



Figure 4.6: Émile Durkheim was a founder of sociology and largely responsible for the sociological perspective as we now know it. Public domain.

Durkheim used suicide to illustrate how social disorder can result from a weakening of society's moral cocoon. Focusing on group rates of suicide, he felt they could not be explained simply in terms of individual unhappiness and instead resulted from external forces. One such force is *anomie*, or normlessness, which results from situations, such as periods of rapid social change, when social norms are weak and unclear or social ties are weak. When anomie sets in, people become more unclear about how to deal with problems in their life. Their aspirations, no longer limited by society's constraints, cannot be fulfilled. The frustration stemming from anomie leads some people to commit suicide (Durkheim, 1897/1952).

To test his theory, Durkheim gathered suicide rate data and found that Protestants had higher suicide rates than Catholics. To explain this difference, he rejected the idea that Protestants were less happy than Catholics and instead reasoned that Catholic doctrine provides many more rules for behavior and thinking than does Protestant doctrine. Protestants' aspirations were thus less constrained than Catholics' desires. In times of trouble, Protestants also have fewer norms on which to rely for comfort and support than do Catholics. He also thought that Protestants' ties to each other were weaker than those among Catholics, providing Protestants fewer social support networks to turn to when troubled. In addition, Protestant belief is ambivalent about suicide, while Catholic doctrine condemns it. All of these properties of religious group membership combine to produce higher suicide rates among Protestants than among Catholics.

Today's functionalist perspective arises out of Durkheim's work and that of other conservative intellectuals of the 19th 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. We look at these institutions in later chapters.

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. By taking a skeptical approach to social change, functionalism supports the status quo and is thus often regarded as a conservative perspective.

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 result (Marx, 1867/1906; Marx & Engels, 1848/1962).

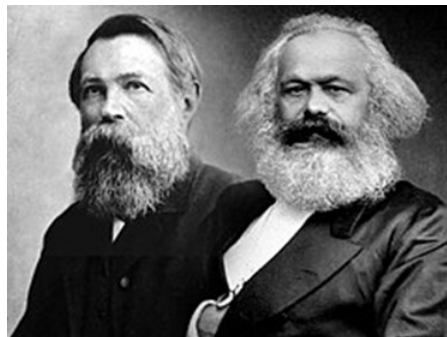


Figure 4.7: Karl Marx (right) and his collaborator Friedrich Engels (left). Their work inspired the development of conflict theory in sociology. Public domain.

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 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 among workers of class consciousness, or an awareness of the reasons for their oppression. Their class consciousness in turn leads them to revolt against the bourgeoisie to eliminate the oppression and exploitation they suffer.

Over the years, Marx and Engels’s views on the nature of capitalism and class relations have greatly influenced social, political, and economic theory and also inspired revolutionaries in nations around the world. History though has not supported their prediction that capitalism will *inevitably* result in a revolution of the proletariat. For example, no such revolution has occurred in

the United States, where workers never developed the degree of class consciousness envisioned by Marx and Engels. Because the United States claims to be a free society where everyone has the opportunity to succeed, even many poor Americans feel that the system is basically just.

How true those claims are, however, is debatable. The term *false consciousness* is used to describe the proletariat's inability to see their real position within the class system, partly due to the control that the bourgeoisie often exerts over the media outlets that disseminate and normalize information. In this sense it may not matter if claims to opportunity or fairness are actually true, as long as people believe they are. That belief, even if it doesn't reflect reality, will keep people from challenging the system. Either way, it remains that various aspects of American society and ideology have helped minimize the development of class consciousness and prevent the revolution that Marx and Engels foresaw.

Lack of revolution in the US aside, however, the basic 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.



Figure 4.8: Some different interests in society making themselves known. Public domain

Some different interests in society making themselves known. Public domain

In general, 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. In this regard, conflict theory may be considered a progressive perspective.

Symbolic Interactionism

Whereas the functionalist and conflict perspectives are macro approaches, symbolic interactionism is a micro approach that focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction. Its roots lie in the work in the early 1900s of American sociologists, social psychologists, and philosophers who were interested in human consciousness and action. Herbert Blumer (Blumer, H. 1969) a sociologist at the University of Chicago, built upon their writings to develop symbolic interactionism, a term he coined. This view remains popular today, in part because many sociologists object to what they perceive as the overly deterministic view of human thought and action and passive view of the individual inherent in the sociological perspective derived from Durkheim.

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 so doing, 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.

Now let's say that someone does not shake hands, but this time the reason is that the person's right arm is broken. Because the other person realizes this, no snub or insult is inferred, and the two people can then proceed to have a comfortable encounter. Their definition of the situation depends not only on whether they shake hands but also, if they do not shake hands, on why they do not. As the term symbolic interactionism implies, their understanding of this encounter arises from what they do when they interact and their use and interpretation of the various symbols included in their interaction.

According to symbolic interactionists, social order is possible because people learn what various symbols (such as shaking hands) mean and apply these meanings to different kinds of situations. If you visited a society where sticking your right hand out to greet someone was interpreted as a threatening gesture, you would quickly learn the value of common understandings of symbols.

Utilitarianism or Social Exchange Theory

Utilitarianism is a general view of human behavior that says people act to maximize their pleasure and to reduce their pain. It holds the view that people act rationally and decide before they act whether their behavior will cause them more pleasure or pain.

In sociology, utilitarianism is also called exchange theory or rational choice theory. No matter what name it goes under, this view emphasizes that when people interact, they seek to maximize the benefits they gain from the interaction and to reduce the disadvantages. If they decide that the interaction's benefits outweigh its disadvantages, they will initiate the interaction or continue it if it is already under way. If they instead decide that the interaction's disadvantages outweigh its benefits, they will decline to begin interacting or stop the interaction if already begun. Social order is possible because people realize it will be in their best interests to cooperate and to make compromises when necessary.

A familiar application of exchange theory would be a dating relationship. Each partner in a dating relationship gives up a bit of autonomy in return for love and other benefits of being close to someone. Yet every relationship has its good and bad moments, and both partners make frequent compromises to ensure the relationship will endure. As long as the couple feels the good moments outweigh the bad moments, the relationship will continue. But once one or both partners decide the reverse is true, the relationship will end.

Comparing Macro and Micro Perspectives

This brief presentation of the four major theoretical perspectives in sociology is necessarily incomplete but should at least outline their basic points. Each perspective has its proponents, and each has its detractors. All four offer a lot of truth, and all four oversimplify and make other mistakes. We will return to them in many of the chapters ahead, but a brief critique is in order here.

A major problem with functionalist theory is that it tends to support the status quo and thus seems to favor existing inequalities based on race, social class, and gender. By emphasizing the contributions of social institutions such as the family and education to social stability, functionalist theory minimizes the ways in which these institutions contribute to social inequality.

Conflict theory's problems are the opposite of functionalist theory's. By emphasizing inequality and dissensus in society, conflict theory overlooks the large degree of consensus on many important issues. And by emphasizing the ways in which social institutions contribute to social inequality, conflict theory minimizes the ways in which these institutions are necessary for society's stability.

Neither of these two macro perspectives has very much to say about social interaction, one of the most important building blocks of society. In this regard, the two micro perspectives, symbolic interactionism and utilitarianism, offer significant advantages over their macro cousins. Yet their very micro focus leads them to pay relatively little attention to the reasons for, and possible solutions to, such broad and fundamentally important issues as poverty, racism, sexism, and social change, which are all addressed by functionalism and conflict theory. In this regard, the two macro perspectives offer significant advantages over their micro cousins.

In addition, one of the micro perspectives, rational choice theory, has also been criticized for ignoring the importance of emotions, altruism, and other values for guiding human interaction (Lowenstein, 1996, p, 272–292).



Figure 4.9: To explain armed robbery, symbolic interactionists focus on how armed robbers decide when and where to rob a victim and on how their interactions with other criminals reinforce their own criminal tendencies. © Thinkstock

These criticisms aside, all four perspectives taken together offer a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena than any one perspective can offer alone. To illustrate this, let's return to our armed robbery example. A functionalist approach might suggest that armed robbery and other crimes actually serve positive functions for society. As one function, fear of crime ironically strengthens social bonds by uniting the law-abiding public against the criminal elements in society. As a second function, armed robbery and other crimes create many jobs for police officers, judges, lawyers, prison guards, the construction companies that build prisons, and the various businesses that provide products the public buys to help protect against crime.

Conflict theory would take a very different but just as helpful an approach to understanding armed robbery. It might note that most street criminals are poor and thus emphasize that armed robbery and other crimes are 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.

In explaining armed robbery, 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. Exchange or rational choice theory would emphasize that armed robbers and other criminals are rational actors who carefully plan their crimes and who would be deterred by a strong threat of swift and severe punishment.

4) Ethical Issues in Sociological Research

Research involving human subjects must follow certain ethical standards to make sure the subjects are not harmed. Such harm can be quite severe in medical research unless certain precautions are taken. For example, in 1932 the U.S. Public Health Service began studying several hundred poor, illiterate African American men in Tuskegee, Alabama. The men had syphilis, for which no cure then existed, and were studied to determine its effects. After scientists found a decade later that penicillin could cure this disease, the government scientists decided not to give penicillin to the Tuskegee men because doing so would end their research. As a result, several of the men died from their disease, and some of their wives and children came down with it. The study did not end until the early 1970s, when the press finally disclosed the experiment. Several observers likened it to experiments conducted by Nazi scientists. If the subjects had been white and middle class, they said, the government would have ended the study once it learned that penicillin could cure syphilis (Jones, 1981).

Fortunately, sociological research does not have this potential for harm, but it still must follow ethical standards. The federal government has an extensive set of standards for research on human subjects, and the major sociology professional society, the American Sociological Association, has a *code of ethics* for sociological research.

Today, the ASA Code of Ethics consists of the following six principles:

- Professional competence

- Integrity
- Professional and scientific responsibility
- Respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity
- Social responsibility
- Human rights

In addition, there are nineteen ethical standards, covering the following topics: competence, representation and misuse of expertise, delegation and supervision, discrimination, exploitation, harassment, employment decisions, conflicts of interest and commitment, public communications, confidentiality, informed consent, research planning, implementation, and dissemination, plagiarism, authorship, publication process, responsibilities of reviewers, education, teaching, and training, contractual and consulting services, and adherence to the code of ethics.

The ethical standards that relate most to the research process itself are: confidentiality, informed consent, research planning, implementation, and dissemination.

Each of these principles and ethical standards have detailed descriptions and parameters in the 2018 ASA Code of Ethics. [ASA Code of Ethics](https://www.asanet.org) [www.asanet.org]

One of the most important ethical guidelines in sociological and other human subject research concerns privacy and confidentiality. When they do research, sociologists should protect the privacy and confidentiality of their subjects. When a survey is used, the data must be coded (prepared for computer analysis) anonymously, and in no way should it be possible for any answers to be connected with the respondent who gave them. In field research, anonymity must also be maintained, and aliases (fake names) should normally be used when the researcher reports what she or he has been observing.

Some sociologists consider the privacy and confidentiality of subjects so important that they have risked imprisonment when they have refused to violate confidentiality. In one example, a graduate student named Mario Brajuha had been doing participant observation as a restaurant waiter when the restaurant burned down. When the police suspected arson, they asked Brajuha to turn over his field notes. When Brajuha refused, he was threatened with imprisonment. Meanwhile, two suspects in the case also demanded his field notes for their legal defense, but again Brajuha refused. The controversy ended two years later when the suspects died and the prosecutor's office abandoned its effort to obtain the notes (Brajuha & Hallowell, 1986 p, 454–478).

In another case, a graduate student named Rik Scarce refused to turn over his field notes on radical environmentalists after one of the groups he was studying vandalized a university laboratory. Scarce was jailed for contempt of court when he refused to tell a grand jury what he had learned about the group and spent several months behind bars (Monaghan, 1993).

A third example aroused much discussion among sociologists when it came to light. Laud Humphreys studied male homosexual sex that took place in public bathrooms. He did so by acting as the lookout in several encounters where two men had sex; the men did not know Humphreys was a researcher. He also wrote down their license plates and obtained their addresses and a year later disguised himself and interviewed the men at their homes. Many sociologists and other observers later criticized Humphreys for acting so secretly and for violating his subjects' privacy. Humphreys responded that he protected the men's names and that their behavior was not private, as it was conducted in a public setting (Humphreys, 1975). As this example demonstrates, it is not always easy to decide whether a particular research project is ethically justifiable. Partly for this reason, colleges and universities have committees that review proposed human subject research to ensure that federal guidelines are followed.

Researchers have long been aware of the tendency of people to act differently when they know they are being watched. In other words, we don't always behave naturally when we know we are being observed. This is called the Hawthorne effect—where people change their behavior because they know they are being watched as part of a study. The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some research. In most cases, sociologists have to make the purpose of the study known. Subjects must be aware that they are being observed, and a certain amount of artificiality may result (Sonnenfeld 1985).

How do sociologists do research with this Code of Ethics in place? Some strategies will be discussed with each research methodology, but as it turns out, most people respond well to honesty. Sociologist Kathleen Blee studied women in the neo-Nazi movement and in other racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, utilizing the same methodology of participant observation and interviews that Humphries did, but she followed all research protocols and was able to earn the trust and cooperation of her research subjects.

Similarly, Philippe Bourgois studied crack dealers in New York City using participant observation and interviews, and was forthright concerning the purpose of his research. Observing ASA principles, he obtained informed consent from all of his research subjects. These projects take years to execute, but provide invaluable information about human behavior and social groups. They also inform policy on issues such as racism or the drug trade. These studies, and many others, show that sociologists can obtain valuable research about behavior that can be highly secretive while still abiding by the ASA Code of Ethics.

Researchers must also make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest or seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. For example, if Amazon wants to fund a researcher to study the effects of Amazon Prime on small businesses, sociologists would see a conflict of interest because the corporation would be invested in the results. The ASA's ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Pioneer German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for disclosing study results. While he accepted that some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, he declared it was entirely inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of the responses. Sociologists, he stated, must establish *value neutrality*, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results (1949). Sociologists are obligated to disclose research findings without omitting or distorting significant data.

Is value neutrality possible? Many sociologists believe it is not feasible to entirely set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. It does not discredit the results, but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than as a singular fact. Sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions; however, value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data. It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.

5) Sociological Research in the Service of Society

Sociological knowledge and insights, as derived from sound, objective research, can be used to address many of the social issues facing American society and various nations around the world.

However, while sociological research findings may be relevant for many social issues, this certainly does not guarantee that these findings will actually be marshaled to address these issues. For this to happen, elected officials and other policymakers must be open to the implications of research findings, and an informed public must make its desire for addressing these issues known. Regardless of how further you may choose to go in studying sociology, or whether you become an elected official or policymaker or not, you remain a member of the informed public, and thinking like a sociologist as social issues continue can help you make those decisions.

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5: History

1) What is History?

Though you have likely spent a good part of your education sitting in history classes and reading history books, you probably have not really thought deeply about how to define the subject. In many ways, it's easier to start with what history is not: It is not simply a record of what happened in the past. For one thing, clearly too much happened yesterday alone—let alone ten, one hundred, one thousand years ago—to record. People ate meals, chose which socks to wear, kissed someone new, scanned their Twitter feed, etc., etc.

History is not even a record of important things that happened in the past, because that definition raises the question of what counts as important and who gets to decide. If those new lovers kissing for the first time were Antony and Cleopatra—whose relationship redirected Egyptian history—or if the meal inspired an immigrant activist by reminding of her roots, then those seemingly mundane actions were critical.

Deciding what is important—which among myriad of past events should be retold, the order to put them in, how to phrase stories so that they reach the right audience—that is what history is. As historians James Davidson and Mark Lytle put it, “History is not ‘what happened in the past;’ rather it is the act of selecting, analyzing, and writing about the past.”

Historians are tasked with finding evidence about the past and then deciding what to do with it. They research, evaluate, and write using what past actors have left behind. That means that the historical narratives scholars create actually depend upon scholars’ interpretations of surviving evidence—on what are called “*primary sources*.” Primary sources are those produced by the people living at the time the events are occurring and can run the gamut from oral histories to government documents to Hollywood films to material culture and beyond.



Figure 5.1: A painting called “American Progress” done in 1872 depicting one artist’s view of the westward travel of white Americans. This is a primary source picture. Public domain.

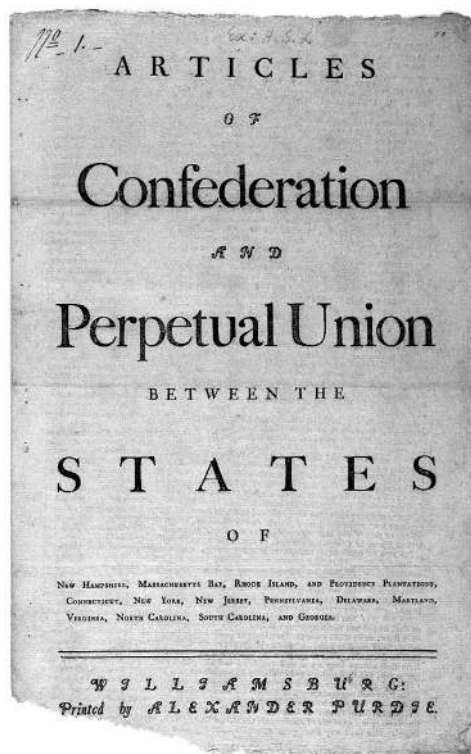


Figure 5.2: A printed copy of the Articles of Confederation from 1777. This is a primary source document. Public domain.

Historians also keep in mind other historians' writings, or *secondary sources*. Historians seek as many sources from as many different perspectives as possible, and scrutinize each one carefully, in the attempt to overcome any biases infusing those sources. We'll talk more about primary and secondary sources below.

Yet no matter how skilled the researcher there will be gaps in the sources that require interpretation. Gaps or silences in the record merit attention, meaning that historians must consider why some perspectives are not found in archives or in published scholarship. The reason may be perfectly harmless, such as the warehouse fire in 1921 that destroyed the 1890 U.S. Census questionnaires. The resulting silence about literacy rates among immigrants (or a number of other topics that rely on Census records) for that decade is frustrating and has certainly diminished our knowledge of the past, but historians do not need to explain the silence beyond noting this accident of history.

At other times, silences speak directly to the experience of those under study, such as the shortage of written records by enslaved peoples. In this case, the silence must be explained by the pernicious decision by White legislators to limit the literacy of enslaved Americans and is itself a part of the history of slavery.

In sum, historians must be adept at not only ferreting out sources and assessing their meaning, but also evaluating the meaning of what remains hidden. Writing history is at heart the art and science of deciding how to stitch together what remains of the past in a way that is meaningful to readers in the present.

Where does the (social) science part come from? Though gaps in the record mean that we can never know everything about the past—and thus a certain amount of art and interpretation is necessarily a part of history—historians mimic scientific processes, posing and testing hypotheses and placing weight on the use of peer review before publication. Guidelines about the value of a source, rules about how you record where you find it, and advice on how to present your findings when you present them to the public (or just your instructor) are all part of an effort to create reliable scholarship that can be replicated—the key elements of reason. Writing and teaching history successfully depends upon the ability to understand and master those guidelines. While historians know a good deal of art shapes their interpretations, they still value the role of scientific inquiry in their discipline.

The Philosophy of History

Historical interpretations vary over time and between competing points of view. For example, in the past, some historians embraced the notion of *cyclical history* (that time is not linear, and events reoccur repeatedly) or *providential history* (that God is directing all

events for a particular outcome). More recently, there is also the *progressive view* (that humanity is constantly improving) and the much more common *postmodern view* of history (that a pure understanding of the past is unknowable, but that learning as much as we can about the past from our current constantly changing perspectives helps us learn more about ourselves and our own time).

Within the context of the more modern day, history also involves historical debates—discussions in which some historians try to convince others to revise previous interpretations of past people and events for a range of reasons. Some of these debates stem from differences in political perspective, some emerge out of access to new sources or new ideas about how to read old sources. Other conflicts between historians happen because of a difference in approach to how societies work. For example, roughly speaking, some historians emphasize the ability of culture and ideas to shape the importance of economic/material infrastructure, and other historians see it the opposite way around (that is, that certain geographies or other material structures permit or promote what sort of ideas and cultural artifacts develop).

The section below, which explains historiography, will give you some tools for discerning interpretive points of view. Awareness of differences and understanding where they come from are among the most important critical thinking skills of an historian.

Historiography

Writing about the past has changed over time. In other words, history has a history, and the fancy term for how historians recount and analyze previous interpretations of the past is “*historiography*.” Historiographical change refers to the fact that over time, historians have altered their explanations of past events, and the discipline of history keeps track of, and continuously reconsiders, these changing interpretations. The history of history is called historiography.

One of the easiest ways to grasp the importance of historiography involves looking at a subject such as slavery in the United States. The history of slavery has changed dramatically over the last one hundred years. The first professional historians of slavery wrote in the very years in which state and local governments were establishing and justifying racial segregation. Their interpretations of the “peculiar institution” (as slavery was sometimes called) fit in with their society’s world view, and often suggested slavery was benign or at least a critical part of the process of “improving” those of African descent.

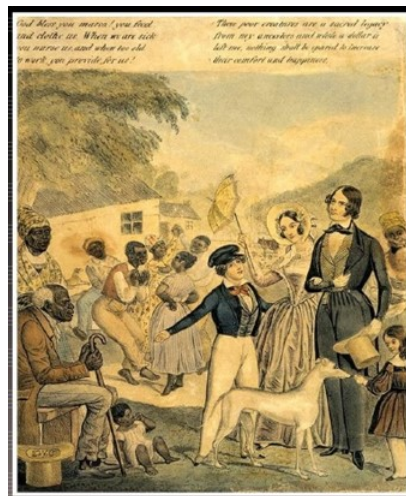


Figure 5.3: An old picture (1841) showing an idealized portrayal of American slavery. Note the old people, the children, all cared for, the happy dancing enslaved people in the back, the enslaver visiting and everyone looking like one big happy family. This view would be debunked in the process of historiography. Public domain

As legal segregation and other types of racialized thinking came increasingly under attack over the course of the twentieth century, such views were criticized and the historians of slavery more often focused on the violence and dehumanizing elements of the institution. As the Civil Rights Movement led to the outlawing of segregated education, it opened the door to new Black and other scholars with new perspectives. *Critical race studies* today—scholarship that assesses the many ways that the practice and justification of racial slavery still shapes U.S. politics and society and holds that current American society and institutions are not “colorblind” – has a decidedly different view of enslaved peoples than did the history written in the past.

The scholarship about the history of race also actually has within it a variety of perspectives, including differences between historians about how the global economy, technology, religion, gender and/or disability shaped the experience of the enslaved,

those who claimed ownership of enslaved people, and those who fought for and against the institution of slavery.

Though other historical topics may not have seen shifts as dramatic as the scholarship on slavery, every subject has experienced some shifting over time. Historians writing articles or books often begin by explaining earlier interpretations in order to show how their own work will add to what we already know, perhaps by pointing out errors in the use of a primary source or how a particular philosophical or political assumption unfairly limited analysis. This is important, because historians who don't consider current knowledge risk "reinventing the wheel" or worse, creating a faulty interpretation because of unfamiliarity with a major finding by an earlier historian. It is important therefore for historians to know the historiography of topics they are studying.

Linking new understandings to old scholarship is a part of building knowledge. Sometimes the linkage is a direct challenge to past explanations, but more likely new historical writing provides a nuance to the older work. For example, a scholar might look at new evidence to suggest a shift in periodization ("actually the rightward shift in the Republican Party began much earlier than Ronald Reagan's campaigns") or the importance of different actors ("middle-class Black women were more critical in the spreading of Progressive reforms in the South than we once thought"). Because historians are concerned with building knowledge and expanding scholarship, they choose their subjects of research with an eye toward adding to what we know, perhaps by developing new perspectives on old sources or by finding new sources.

2) What is Historical Analysis?

History is more than a narrative of the past; the discipline cares less for the who, what, where, and when of an event, instead focusing on how and why certain events unfolded the way they did and what it all means. History is about argument, interpretation, and consequence. To complete quality historical analysis—that is, to "do history right"—one must use appropriate evidence, assess it properly (which involves comprehending how it is related to the situation in question), and then draw appropriate and meaningful conclusions based on that evidence.

Writing history requires making informed judgments; historians must read primary sources correctly, and then decide how to weigh the inevitable conflicts between those sources correctly. Think for a moment about a controversial moment in your own life—a traffic accident perhaps or a rupture between friends. Didn't the various sources who experienced it—both sides, witnesses, the authorities—report on it differently? But when you recounted the story of what happened to others, you told a seamless story, which—whether you were conscience of it or not—required deciding whose report, or which discrete points from different reports—made the most sense.

Historians use this same judgment when they use primary sources to write history; though in this case there are rules, or at least guidelines, about making those decisions. In order to weigh the value of one source against other sources, we must be as informed as possible about that source's historical context, the outlook of the source's creator, and the circumstances of its creation. Each person involved in an historical situation brings their own cultural biases and preconceived expectations to that situation, and those biases are integral to the sources they leave behind. It is up to the historian to weave these differences together in their analysis in a way that is meaningful to readers. They must compare differences in ideologies, values, behaviors and traditions, as well as take in a multiplicity of perspectives, to create one story. (This includes the historian knowing what their OWN biases and preconceived notions are as well.)

In addition to knowing how to treat their sources, historians must tell a story worth telling, one that helps us as a society to understand who we are and how we got here, and helps us decide where to go next and how. As humans, we want to know what caused a particular outcome, or perhaps whether a past actor or event is as similar to a present-day actor or event as it seems, or where the beginnings of a current movement began. ("What made Martin Luther King, Jr. a leader, when other activists had failed before him?" "Were reactions to the Civil Rights Movement similar to those of the current Black Lives Matter movement?" "How similar is the Coronavirus pandemic to the 1918 flu pandemic?" "Who were the first feminists and what did they believe?") Even small aspects of larger events can help answer important questions. ("How did the suffrage movement (or Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, or the gun rights movement, or whatever else) play out in my Texas hometown?")

The very essence of historical analysis is about analyzing the different cause-and-effect relationships present in each scenario, considering the ways individuals, influential ideas, and different mindsets interact and affect one another. It is about figuring out what facts go together to form a coherent story, one that helps us understand ourselves and each other better. And with that knowledge of what causes tend to lead to what outcomes, we can make more informed decisions about where to go next and how –

it can help people with decisions in terms of their personal actions, how to vote, what they will support or won't, and why, what they believe is that best way to run an economy, etc., all of which help shape the future.

3) How Historians Approach History

Historical Fields

On one hand, history departments throughout the US are dedicated to investigating the totality of the human experience, or at least the past for which we have historical records. But on the other, these departments are also the product of contemporary historical forces. For example, Anglo (white non Latinx generally English speaking people) cultural influence and attention to western culture had a great impact on the history written by Europeans and Americans. In any given department, therefore, you will likely find plenty of faculty specializing in some element of US, European, Western, or Atlantic history.

Political and social movements have impacted how these fields are studied however. Following the Civil Rights movement, newly integrated departments (by race, gender, and sexual orientation) increased attention in scholarship and teaching to “social” histories, or history from below. Histories of laborers, women, people of color, the LGBTQ+ and disabled communities as well as a whole gamut of social movements have caught the interest of historians, and the sub-fields associated with these movements have proliferated.

Of course, most major history departments around the country attempt to also have a faculty member (or sometimes two) from each of the following regional areas: Middle East/North Africa, South Asia, East Asia, Latin American, Sub-Saharan Africa, Australasia. In an increasingly interconnected, globalized world, comparative history has grown in importance and new fields focusing on Atlantic, Pacific, World, transnational, and borderlands history have sometimes supplanted the teaching of history focused on a nation state. With the exception of Atlantic history, which took off during the Cold War and was part of an overarching search for common ground among the allies facing down the Soviet Union, these more expansive fields have become increasingly resonant in the post-Cold War era, which has been characterized by intense globalization and its attendant global labor market, supply chain, and transculturation.

Within these geographic outlines, when pursuing research most historians specialize further in either by approach or time period, or both. Though their teaching subjects can be broader, historians might call themselves experts in the US Civil War, Modern European women's history, or the cultural and intellectual history of the Ming Dynasty. Apart from the requirements of fluency in other languages, the differences between sources that focus on modern military developments differ quite a bit from those concerning Confucian ideology, and rarely would one historian feel comfortable working with both sorts of primary sources or try to keep track of the historiographical developments in two such divergent fields. As a result, historic sub-fields usually have thematic angles as well, including aspects of technological, economic, political, legal, military, diplomatic, environmental, social, intellectual, or cultural history. The latter fields encompass still more sub-specialties based on gender, sex, race, ethnicity, disability, and legal status. The instructor in your US women's history class might actually be a specialist on women, gender, race, and sex in the nineteenth-century US South.

Historical Periodization

Another significant way that historians find entry into the vast amount of human experience is to categorize it by blocks of time, or historical periods. At a basic level the names given to historical periods simply provide other options for historical study, in the same way that a historian might specialize geographically or by methodological approach. Fields such as “Nazi Germany” or “Colonial America” both illustrate how political events often define the blocks of time that historians mark for study and do so without controversy.

But more fundamentally, historians' efforts to identify appropriate historical periods can be very controversial and is at the heart of what they do. Because the point of establishing accepted historical periods is to help facilitate historical analysis, historians hope to identify periods that have stable characteristics.

For example, Victorian England, named after a monarch who ruled from 1837 to 1901, marks a period of rising industrialization, the expansion of British political control around the world, and a transformation and tightening of social rules, especially those concerning women and sex. Scholars of Victorian England suggest that the expansion of empire was in fact related to the increased prudery and expectation of restraint on the part of women. The justification for imperial control rested on ideas of racial superiority,

which in turn rested upon an emerging cultural myth about “English ladies” who were ostensibly quite different from newly colonized women of color who had a more casual approach to sex.

But the scholars who identify historical periods are themselves embedded in a specific point in time. Their biases or limited perspective can lead them to over- or under-estimate the importance of an invention, or cultural event, or a popular person of their own era. Indeed, scholars in the late nineteenth century—Victoria’s own contemporaries—started using the label “Victorian England” while she was still alive. Since then, some British historians have questioned the term, arguing that the characteristics we attribute to the period stretch well beyond the limits of her reign. Other historians have defended the term, emphasizing the link between Queen Victoria herself and the many new cultural and social conventions that marked the era—and so the appropriateness of referring to much of the nineteenth century as “Victorian” remains a topic of debate. Likewise, various other blocks of time—the “twentieth century” or the “Renaissance”—regularly inspire discussion about whether they designate a stable period of time or when exactly a period (such as the Renaissance) began and ended.

Another element of periodization is the effort to identify *watershed moments*. In nature, a watershed is a spot in a river or stream where the lay of the land forces the water to change the direction in which it flows. *Watershed events* are those occurrences that altered human behavior or ideology in significant ways. For example, the invention and deployment of nuclear weapons changed not only diplomacy and politics in the postwar era, but also many Americans’ sense of security and thus family priorities. Both diplomatic and gender historians see the deployment of atomic bombs in the late 1940s as a watershed moment. Or to take an example from your own lives: Adults living through the current Covid-19 pandemic are already referring to “the Before Times” as a shorthand reference to an earlier historical period, one in which our lives operated differently than they do after the spread of the virus. The lasting changes in technology and the workplace alone indicate the pandemic will be a watershed moment and that “pre-pandemic” and “post-pandemic” will almost certainly periodize the history of public health, work, and education—at a minimum—for future historians.

But like the process of defining historical periods, the identification of historical watersheds leads to a great deal of debate. Is an event identified as a watershed really the moment in which everything changed? Was one person—or their ideas about politics or technology—a “game changer”? Whereas one historian might see the increasingly insularity of 1950s family life as stemming from the fears brought on by the watershed event of the atomic bomb, another might see that development in family life as connected to rising affluence, and suggest that the true watershed moment was not the bomb, but rather the decision of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to fund research and development for American businesses after the war. Such is the stuff of history and historical debate.

Evaluating Evidence

One of the preeminent guidelines of historical analysis is that all historians evaluate their sources to determine their quality and accuracy. Beyond determining whether a source is primary or secondary, it is imperative that historians use their knowledge to judge the nature of sources and how they should be used. Remember, each primary source carries with it the biases of its author. These biases alter the presentation of information, as many historical sources are written with clear purpose and intention.

Take for example a newspaper editorial written in Atlanta during the American Civil War. Before even reading this document, we need to understand that such an editorial is most likely written from a pro-Confederate source and will therefore be presenting the best possible version of current situation in the war. This source is still very useful for revealing the attitudes of pro-Confederate actors, but information within it about Union troop movements or Union soldiers’ attitudes cannot be accepted as fact. The author’s bias and the historical context of the source’s creation should be noted up front by anyone looking to analyze such a document.

With the understanding of what biases are likely to be present comes the realization that some claims by historical actors may not be entirely true; that is, they are not agreed upon, verifiable from multiple points of view. But again, just because they are not historical facts, they still offer value to those historians seeking to explain opinions and attitudes of a particular place and time.

Evaluating Primary Sources

A primary source is a document/artifact that is “from the time.” This means, whatever historical era we are studying, a primary source would have been created/said/written in that time period; the person who wrote/said/created the sources was there and lived through the events in question. For example, a soldier writing a letter home during the Civil War, or a girl’s diary about traveling

west, or a speech given by a president, etc. are all primary sources. Primary sources can also be images or artifacts created at the time, such as paintings, cartoons, pottery, etc.

Questions to ask primary source documents:

Part I- The basics

- Is it authentic (not a fraud)?
- What sort of primary source is it? (newspaper, letter, map, image, government report....)
- Who created the document? As noted above, the "who" is very important as it helps to potentially define the person. For example, a letter written by a Klan member vs. a former slave is exceptionally important information. If we do not identify this, we may take the Klan members' words at face value. The "who" allows us to consider possible bias. (All sources have some bias because they were created by human beings!!!!). Just because someone was there, does not mean they have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; what they do have is their perspective and opinion. This does not mean a source from a Klan member, for example, serves no value. It could allow us to see how racism and violence were legitimized and to study how politically violent groups are formed. Thus, even with bias, all primary sources can potentially teach us something.
 - When looking at the author, consider what you already know about this person. Having some background allows you deeper insights into their personality, goals, etc.
- About when? A specific date allows us to consider the wider context. For example, a letter written at the start of the Civil War would read very differently than one written at the end, as the author would have new information. Someone recalling an event is still a primary source. For example, if, in 1990, we interview a veteran who fought at the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945, this would still be a World War II primary source since the person being interviewed was, indeed, there.
- Why (that is, for what audience and purpose)? This helps you do consider the deeper meaning behind their words. Are they trying to convince someone of something, and in doing so exaggerate or romanticize? What is the author's end game? This must be considered to determine how trustworthy the source is.

Part II – Are you reading the document fairly and/or correctly?

- Remember, the past is a different country. Do you need to know something else (the meaning of words, who someone was, the state of technology, etc.) to understand this document? If so, what?
- Is there any information you can infer or “read between the lines” or interpret based on something NOT said/portrayed? Silences are often important.

Part III – Assessing credibility. Keep in mind that your answers to these questions depend on what information you are claiming for the document.

Was creator of the document in a good place to observe or record the event? If not, why not?

- In what way might the creator have been biased? How might that shape the ‘truth’ of this document? Does the testimony/story seem probable?
- Who preserved the document and why? Can you infer anything from that about preservation? (Not always pertinent, but it's worth keeping in mind that some voices get privileged over others in the historical record, and we must make allowances for that in our interpretations. Someone might take care to preserve all the personal papers of a politician, but not the diary of their butler.)
- Where might you find corroboration for any interpretive points you find compelling? (That is, you'll need to solidify support for your argument. What other sorts of primary sources might help do that?)

Questions to ask non-written primary sources:

Primary sources come in all shapes and sizes, which means that the way you go about interpreting them cannot be uniform. Mostly, in non-written sources (including paintings, cartoons, pottery, etc.) you need to be cognizant of visual and aural cues, of placement of subjects in a photograph, of silences in spoken or sung words.

But you also have to know a bit about the technology that shapes the production of those sources. You might think that nineteenth-century Americans were a dour lot, never smiling, if you were not aware of the fact that camera technology in that era enforced rigid stillness, and people were uncomfortable getting caught with a frozen smile. To understand what a map means, you need to

know about the conventions of cartography from the society that created it. Artistic creations—paintings or films, for example—often concern historical events and people. But keep in mind, they speak to the values of the artist's moment, and do not necessarily offer accurate depictions of historical events. (See the *American Progress* picture above for example. Do you see Native Americans? No. Do you see American soldiers killing all the buffalo? No.)

Here are some basic questions to consider when evaluating a non-written source:

- Who (or what entity) created this source? When and where? What in the political and social milieu would have shaped the circumstances?
- Who was the intended audience?
- How was the source created? What were the technological circumstances? Has it been edited or altered since its original creation? If it is a reproduction, how faithful is it to the original?
- For artistic creations, is it possible to discern the artists' meaning? Is it possible to discern what critics thought of its meaning?
- Why does the source still exist? Who thought or thinks it important enough to save? Why?

Evaluating Secondary Sources

A secondary source is written/created "about the time." This means someone, ideally an expert in their field (i.e. an historian), is looking backwards in time, studying the past by reviewing primary sources, and then writing a narrative about what happened. This person did not directly experience the events they are writing about. Historians also rely on the works of other scholars' secondary sources/retellings of the past, making them also "tertiary (third) sources."

Secondary sources can also be images such as new maps, charts, recreated paintings, etc.

But again, as with primary sources, not all are equally reliable. Analysis of secondary sources is also a skill people should practice, as this is the place we most often receive news and information. Many of the questions we need to consider when analyzing a primary source are similar for a secondary source.

Questions to ask yourself when reading a secondary source:

- What type of source is this and where is its published? It is an academic book? A magazine article? A personal website?
- These questions help us determine if the source is academic or not. Because the past explains the present, many people look to the past to support their modern-day politics or other personal beliefs potentially twisting history. Determining whether a source is academic or not, opinioned or not, helps us discern how trustworthy its content is.
- Who wrote or created the document?
- Similar to a primary source, knowing who the author may help to determine if they are a trustworthy source. For example, if you are reading a book written by a conservative media host, you may want to consider why they wrote the book and their real purpose in discussing the past. However, even academics hold bias, and it is good to know their prior research and publishing.
- When was the document written/created?
- The date tells us how recent the source was written. If you are reading a history textbook about the Civil War, written in 1950, it is likely the text does not cover new insights or understandings of the Civil War. (But it could be interesting and helpful still in terms of historiography.)
- What was the author/creator's purpose? What was their goal?
- This helps you do consider the deeper meaning behind their words. As with a primary sources, are they trying to convince someone of something?
- What information does the document provide?
- What do you learn from reading/viewing it?
- Who is the audience?
- Who was this made for? Even academics expect a certain audience – other academics, college students, a political group, etc. Consider how words or phrases are adjusted to meet the perceived audience needs.
- What evidence is provided?
- How does the author attempt to support their thesis? What kind of evidence is provided? Read the footnotes and view their citations. Is the evidence strong? What do they cite?
- How does this source fit into the wider scholarship?

- Consider why we should care about this source and why it matters in understanding history. Historians typically write for one of the following reasons:
 - The historical issue has not been fully analyzed, thus the author is the first to develop an argument on the topic.
 - The historical issue has some gaps in the scholarship.
 - The historical issue is commonly interpreted one way. The author seeks to reinterpret the topic or more accurately understand the topic.
 - The historical issue is overly simplified. The author seeks to identify complexities or other details.
 - The historical issue raises modern-day debates and the author wishes to provide their, or varying, perspectives.

Avoiding Historical Fallacies

Historical fallacies come about due to false reasoning on the part of historians. Their arguments may be built upon shaky logic by not considering the possible biases of their sources or by using incomplete and corrupted evidence. Fallacies can come about by not considering multiple points of view or perspectives in gathering documentary evidence, or from lack of complexity when analyzing causality, or from imposing modern sensibilities upon actors in the past, or from not considering change over time. Presented as rational and well supported conclusions, fallacies are incredibly dangerous as they actively spread misinformation and cover up objective historical arguments. Fallacies can be created both intentionally and unintentionally, depending on their authors, the subject matter, and the influence certain arguments can have.

One powerful example of a historical fallacy is that the American Civil War was fought over the issue of states' rights. This argument clouds the immense role that slavery played as the primary cause of the war. By arguing that it was simply about states' rights, one is presenting an overly simplistic and incorrect version of history that is damaging in countless ways.

Fallacy is incredibly dangerous in historical work as an established and believed fallacy can impede the proper and well-constructed historical analysis from being accepted, sometimes for generations. These historical fallacies can be weaponized and used for political purposes while always slowing the progress of solid historical work. If historians are constantly working to undo the entrenchment of fallacy, they are slowed in progressing their fields. A powerful historical fallacy can be used by interested parties to bring about devastating events and have countless times in world history (think for example of Hitler and the Nazi Party, who used historical fallacies to stir up nationalism and support for war in the German public).

In order to avoid historical fallacy, we must be open-minded to proper historical analysis, understand and view multiple perspectives in any event, and focus on determining the difference between facts and biased opinions masquerading as facts. By allowing the historical analysis process to take place in full, we as a society can push dangerous fallacy aside and arrive at objectively determined historical conclusions.

4) The Stakes of Historical Scholarship

Historians spend a lot of time reading historical monographs, analyzing primary sources, learning the narrative of events that led to a war or new invention or a major social shift. Looking at the work of the professional historian might tempt you to think that historians just do history for other historians and so doing bad history will only affect a small group. But that is simply not true.

What people believe about history is foundational to their identities, worldviews, and the collective consciousness of the groups they belong to. People's worldviews also inform their political opinions and choices. This in turn affects what policies a nation adopts, policies ranging from domestic issues to foreign policy. Getting historical analysis right is, therefore, a very important.

New historical interpretations have helped marginalized groups gain awareness of a past community and a better understanding of their own identity; likewise, good history has aided policymakers in drafting ideas about how they might address social problems. Clearly getting it wrong has an impact as well, leading to misunderstandings, ineffective policies, continuation of inequities, cultural hostilities, etc.

Historical scholarship has had direct impact in this way. In the 2015 SCOTUS decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* (legalizing marriage equality) the court's majority decision was written by Justice Anthony Kennedy. He pointed out that social and legal aspects of marriage have changed over time, and to buttress this point he cited briefs submitted by the two most important historical organizations in the U.S.: The American Historical Association and The Organization of American Historians. Additionally,

lawmakers and executives at all levels of governance often consult historians when trying to understand specialized topics, or when they are wrestling with how to combat long-standing issues.

Some historians subscribe to the notion that their job is to produce scholarship and then allow it to diffuse to the public via incorporation into textbooks and curricula. However, over the last few years with the explosion of social media, blogs, and podcasts, historians have seized upon the opportunities inherent in these platforms. So while “fake news” stories spread on social media, historians and other academics are busy doing their best to flood newspapers, the Twittersphere, blogs, and the airwaves/podwaves with expert opinions.

Many historians have used Twitter to try to educate or correct popular misconceptions. Efforts by historians have been crucial to correcting the media and helping to foster informed debate. In 2019, one popular historian went on NPR’s morning show to say that in her research she found no evidence that women used contraception or abortion services in the nineteenth century, and Lauren MacIvor Thompson, a specialist in female reproductive rights, responded with a Twitter thread and several links to point out how laws, such as the Comstock Law of 1873, made it impossible for women to speak forthrightly about these issues so euphemisms had to be employed. MacIvor Thompson’s thread went viral and NPR quickly posted a correction. MacIvor Thompson’s expertise was quickly recognized, and she was then asked for an interview by [The Atlantic](#) for a piece on suffragists and the birth control issue.

Why Historical Methods Are Important

History is in fact everywhere, because everything has a history. But not all history-based productions are equal. Professional scholars are not the only ones who like to claim the mantle of “historian.” Amateur historians, journalists, politicians, political pundits, and filmmakers also publish/produce works of history of varying sophistication. But they are not always to be trusted. History has rules and good history follows those rules. History that doesn’t is often not reliable history.

A key feature of academia is that anything academics publish must adhere to shared standards of scholarship through a process known as *peer-review*—which is sort of like grading by other professors. Before a scholar can publish a journal article or monograph with an academic press (or trade presses with similar standards), they submit a draft for review. In this process, the editor of the press or journal contacts other historians who specialize in the same field and asks them to read the essay to make sure that the analysis follows the standards for scholarship and if it makes a worthwhile contribution to the field. Academic presses are committed to these standards, and cannot publish material they know violates it, even if they thought the subject was interesting or profitable. “How many books will it sell?” is not a standard for good history.

Rather than wondering simply “Will people buy this book?” academic presses ask a different set of questions: Is the argument clear and supported by verifiable facts in evidence? Are the sources appropriate and sufficient to support the author’s analysis? Has the author avoided faults in logic and plagiarizing other scholars? Does the essay address (and effectively counter) any interpretations that conflict with the one presented? If the peer reviewers believe the essay does not meet these standards, it is returned to the author for revision. Sometimes even if peer reviewers recommend publication, they will ask for improvements. One important result of the peer review process is better written, better explained, better supported essays.

Better written does not necessarily mean more accepted of course, because historians will always find something to debate. But the common ground created by the peer review process means that those debates usually result in some consensus about what we know. Though contemporary historians generally acknowledge that knowledge about the past is partial and that individual perspectives may bias interpretations, most do believe that we can approach the “truth.”

As new research is presented in the form of conference presentations, essays, and books, historians inevitably argue about differing interpretations, leading to a fine-tuning of our understanding of the past. Over time a synthesis develops, as well-supported, convincing explanations emerge, and historians agree on about the causes and impact of a particular event (until the next, more convincing interpretations gets published!).

SOURCES

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6: Political Science

1) Politics and You



Figure 6.1: Students attend a pro-EU rally in Kiev. (credit: “Students are shouting out for the EU” by Ivan Bandura/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Students attend a pro-EU rally in Kiev. (credit: “Students are shouting out for the EU” by Ivan Bandura/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

If you own a smartphone, you are involved with politics and it’s involved with you. Wherever you live, the political decisions your government makes are likely to affect what is on your phone and how you can use it. China has banned apps like Facebook and Google. Before the 2021 Ugandan election, the government simply shut down the internet entirely.¹ In India, the government distributes benefits directly to citizens through their phones.² In the United States, government regulations—one type of rules that are created through political action—touch virtually every aspect of your phone’s production, sale, and communications.³



Figure 6.2: You can engage in politics through your phone, and politics can influence how your phone is designed and operated. (credit: “Mobile Phone” by Marco Verch Professional Photographer/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Your phone also enables you to engage in political action. You can use your phone to talk about politics or to call your local representative to express your views. You can organize a campaign through WhatsApp, share videos of police brutality or of peaceful protest, or Venmo contributions to your favorite political cause.⁴ You can use your phone to learn about politics, political engagement, and what politicians are doing at home and around the world.

The political decisions of local and national governments and international organizations can affect the water you drink, the food you eat, the clothes you wear, and the dwelling you call home. Politics and policy can play a role in the most intimate details of your life, including your reproductive rights, marriage rights, and even how your body will be treated after you die.

Politics is everywhere. Whether or not you care about politics, politics has an interest in you.

When you develop a competent understanding of politics and political science, you are a better-prepared citizen, political actor, and job seeker.

With a more sophisticated understanding of politics and political science, you can better understand questions of who gets what, when, how, and perhaps most important, why. The quality of our politics depends to a large degree on the quality of citizen engagement. Want a better government, with politicians who possess greater integrity and policies that more closely reflect the public interest? These things will not happen automatically or on their own. They will happen if informed citizens work together to make them happen.

When you think like a political scientist, you seek evidence and carefully scrutinize that evidence—in politics as well as in other areas of your life. Doing so helps to inoculate you from misinformation and manipulation. When you are asked “Why did [this political event] happen?” or “What do you think will happen?” you are able to respond “The evidence suggests...” or “Research indicates...” or even “I do not know. But in similar circumstances...” Scientific thinking enables you to navigate the complex political world.

This chapter will introduce you to the world of politics and the systematic study of political science. You will learn some of the fundamental principles of politics as well as core concepts.

2) What is Politics?

Politics has existed as long as humans have faced scarcity, have had different beliefs and preferences, and have had to resolve these differences while allocating scarce resources. It will continue to exist so long as these human conditions persist—that is, forever. Politics are fundamental to the human condition.

Politics means different things to different people. Politics, and related terms like political and politician, can have both positive and negative connotations. The Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that humans were “political animals” in that only by engaging in politics could humans reach their highest potential.⁵ Yet often, the terms political and politician can be used in disparaging ways to refer to individuals using trickery or manipulation to obtain or preserve their status or authority. More formally, a *politician* is someone running for elective office or serving in it or a person who is using the skills of a politician in other social interaction. A *political actor* is anyone who is engaged in political activity.

Politics can be seen as all the actions of government and all the people who work for, serve, or challenge it. But this book takes the broadest view, adopting the guidance of political scientist Harold Lasswell, who defined politics as “*who gets what, when, how.*”⁶ Politics exists wherever people interact with one another to make decisions that affect them collectively. Politics exists within families. When parents decide where the family will live: politics. The family (who) gets a place to live (what) at the point of decision (when) based on the parents’ choice (how). When your school decides what tuition to charge: politics. When the government imposes taxes or funds education: politics. Most generally, politics is any interaction among individuals, groups, or institutions that seek to arrive at a decision about how to make a collective choice, or to solve some collective problem. Political science focuses primarily on these interactions as they involve governments.⁷

Every political event is different. The mass protests in Hong Kong in 2020, inspired by those seeking to protect their political rights, were not exactly the same as the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States or the climate change actions animated by Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg. Yet as varied as political situations can be, there are commonalities across these events and over all political activities. Whenever you seek to understand a political event—whether an election in Tanzania, a protest in Estonia, or a public health program in Indonesia—it is useful to focus on the following:

What are the most important rules? What is the reality of the existing event or environment? What choices do the participants make? Political outcomes—for example, which candidate wins an election—are based on the interaction of these rules, realities, and choices.

Rules

The importance of rules in politics or in life cannot be overstated. In virtually every human endeavor, the most successful individuals are likely to have a keen knowledge of the rules and how to use (or break) the rules to the advantage of their cause. Ignorance of the rules makes accomplishing your goals more difficult.

Rules can be highly precise or open to interpretation. In chess, for example, the rules are completely known to all players: each piece can move in certain directions but in no other ones. Each player takes a turn; that’s the rule. Although chess is highly complex, each player’s options at any given time are known. Chess champions—in fact, all champions—know how to use the rules to their advantage.

College campuses have their own sets of formal and informal rules, and not all of them are as precise as those in chess. The *de jure* (in law) rules are the rules as they are written, the formal rules. The *de facto* (in fact) rules are the ones actually practiced or enforced, the informal rules. For example: a sign might state that the (de jure) speed limit is 55 miles per hour, but if police do not give tickets to drivers unless they are driving 65 miles per hour, then that is the de facto rule. To thrive at college, it is useful to

understand not only the formal rules but also the informal rules, which have been called “the hidden curriculum.”⁸ (For example, that’s it’s expected and encouraged that students come to office hours – they aren’t interrupting the instructors who are doing something “important.”)



Figure 6.3: The de jure speed limit is on the sign, but the de facto speed limit is the speed at which the police are likely to pull you over. (credit: “Signage 55 speed limit” by David Lofink/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The rules in any political environment affect who has power and how they can use it. Consider the rules that determine who can vote and how. These rules can be permissive or strict, making voting either easier or harder to do. The harder it is to vote, the fewer people will actually cast their ballots and vice versa. Voting rules influence who shows up to vote. Politicians who believe they have a better chance of success under permissive voting rules are likely to advocate for such rules, while politicians who believe they are more likely to prevail under restrictive voting rules will advocate for them instead.

Rules might appear to be neutral—that is, they may seem fair and not designed to favor one group over another—but this is not entirely true. Until recently, to become a pilot in the US Air Force, a person had to be no shorter than 5 feet 4 inches and no taller than 6 feet 5 inches: the short and the tall were excluded from this opportunity. The rule might be in place for a reason—in this case, to ensure that pilots can fit properly into their seats—but rules like these allocate opportunities and resources to some while withholding them from others. Because this rule excluded over 40 percent of American women from becoming pilots, it has been modified.⁹

Rules are everywhere in politics. Your family has rules—even if the main rule is “no rules”—as does your school. Rules, such as Robert’s Rules of Order,¹⁰ govern legislatures, and the criminal justice system, the tax system, and the national immigration systems are all based, at least in principle, on rules.

Rules and institutions are closely related. The institution of marriage or the institution of the family, for example, are the sets of rules (rights, roles, and responsibilities) by which those within the marriage or family live. Alternatively, institutions can be organizations, which are groups of people working together for a common purpose whose actions are governed by rules.

Perhaps the most important set of rules for any institution or organization is its constitution. The constitution affirms the most basic legal principles of a country or a state. These principles typically include the structure of the government, its duties, and the rights of the people. Constitutions can be quite general or extremely detailed. The Constitution of Monaco has fewer than 4,000 words, while the Constitution of India has nearly 150,000 words.¹¹ Unlike the United States, some countries, including Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, do not have a single document they call the constitution but instead rely on other written and even unwritten sources. In most countries the constitution is called just that—the constitution—although Germany, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and a few other countries call their constitutions the basic law.¹²

Constitutions define the relationship between people and their government. They give powers to and place limits upon the government and serve as the basis for any other laws or government activities.

Constitutions are perhaps the most important set of rules in a country but, after all, they are just pieces of paper. The true importance of a country’s constitution depends on the politics of that country. In the United States, the Constitution is venerated almost as if it were a religious document. Most of the biggest conflicts throughout US history have involved disputes over what the Constitution requires, allows, or prohibits. When the US Supreme Court rules that a political action is unconstitutional, the violator—whether it be the president, the Congress, or any other group or individual in society—is expected to comply with the ruling and

stop the action.¹³ But this is not always the case. Politicians in any country, including the US, may be tempted to ignore their constitutions, especially when it comes to the rights they ostensibly guarantee. Whether those politicians are allowed to do this depends on whether other political actors are willing and able to uphold the constitution. If a rule or law is not enforced or upheld, its presence in a constitution has very little meaning. Some other political actor, such as the people of the nation themselves, would need to successfully demand it be taken seriously for it to regain meaning.

Because rules affect the allocation of power and other scarce resources, political actors spend substantial time and effort fighting over them. In general, political actors seek to establish rules that benefit them and their allies.



Figure 6.4: Rules are powerful, and those who set them have power. (credit: “Follow the Rules” by pocketcultures/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Reality

Rules guide and constrain behavior, but the reality on the ground at any specific time also impacts political outcomes. Reality—facts—is not a matter of opinion, although people can dispute the nature of reality. Something is a fact, for example, when there is compelling evidence that an event has happened or a condition exists. The sun rises in the East: reality. The United Nations is an international organization: fact (reality).¹⁴ Has the United Nations made the world a better place? That is a matter of opinion, although those who say “yes” or “no” can provide facts that support their views about reality.¹⁵

How candidates can raise and spend money on their electoral campaigns may be limited by campaign finance laws, but if one candidate raises twice as much money as the other candidate, that is an important fact. If one candidate is the *incumbent*—a politician already serving in office and running for reelection—and the other is not, that is an important fact. These are important facts because whether or not a candidate is an incumbent and how much campaign money they raise may affect their chances of winning the election.

In chess, the rules are constant, never changing during the game. The reality changes as play proceeds—at any moment each player has a specific number of pieces in particular places on the board. What happens then depends on the choices the players make. This is as true for politics as for any other game. A key difference between chess and politics is that, in politics, the players themselves can change the rules of the game while they are playing.



Figure 6.5: Politics has many of the characteristics of a game. (credit: “Risk Board Game” by Rob Bertholf/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Politics can be thought of as having the characteristics of a game. The players—anyone involved in political action—make strategic choices, given the rules and the current conditions, in an attempt to “win” the game by obtaining their goals.

Choices

Rules provide constraints and opportunities. Reality presents resources and challenges. The choices participants make in the face of rules and reality determine political outcomes. Choice exists whenever political actors face options, which they always do. If there are two candidates in an election for a single position, the voter has to choose between them, not being able to vote for both. Even if there is only one candidate, the voter still has an option: to vote for the candidate or to abstain.

In a democracy, the winning candidate wins because more voters chose to vote, and vote for that candidate, than for other options. The very definition of democracy is that it is a form of government in which the people have the ability to choose their leaders or, in some cases, the policies that they will adopt.¹⁶

Political outcomes are always contingent; they cannot be predicted with certainty in advance. That does not mean, however, that outcomes are completely unpredictable. By accounting for the rules, how human behavior works, and existing realities, it may be possible to reasonably predict what is likely to happen and explain what does happen.

2) Public Policy and Power

Public policy is one of the main products of politics. *Public policy* includes all the decisions governments make to influence behavior. When a legislature enacts legislation, an executive issues an order, or a court announces a ruling, they are all making public policy.

In making public policy, political actors typically invoke the *public interest* (also called the common good or the general welfare). The public interest is an amorphous concept, although it is generally defined as the well-being of the public.¹⁷ It is invisible to our senses, and it is possible to maintain that it does not exist because there is no interest (or good or welfare) beyond what individuals want for themselves.

Those who claim to seek the public interest typically believe that it is not just what people want, however, but what they should want. It would not be in the public interest, in this view, to create a society in which those in power can exploit others or one that

legitimizes cruelty, even if a majority of the population wanted these things. It is in the public interest to create a good society, one with social justice, in which the government serves the people. Such a society would provide for the common good and promote the general welfare.

Power, a fundamentally important term in the study of politics, can be defined as the ability to compel someone to do something that they would not otherwise choose to do.¹⁸ Those with power are the ones who get to make public policy. Power cannot be counted, weighed, or photographed. Though it is invisible, the trappings of power—for example, being addressed as president of the United States or having people salute you—can often be seen. Some people have a lot of power, while others have very little. Power is not a constant force, as politicians sometimes increase their power, while at other times their power slips away. Power is, in part, a matter of belief: if you believe someone has power over you, they do, at least to the extent that you do what they want.



Figure 6.6: Upon his arrival in Israel, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was greeted with many trappings of power, including military presence, flags, and a red carpet. (credit: “31/03/2019 Cerimônia Oficial de chegada” by Palácio do Planalto/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

The broadest form of power is called sovereign power. If no other entity (person or institution) has authority over a state, that state is said to have *sovereignty*, and the supreme authority in that state is called the sovereign.¹⁹ In many countries, the sovereign is the highest-ranking individual leader, such as the queen or king. In the United States and in other democracies, the people are sovereign, not their elected officials. The people elect their leaders, and the people can unseat them either by selecting others in the next election or by removing them—for example, through impeachment, a legal process for removing elected officials from their posts for misconduct.

The power of any governmental institution depends on the *de jure* and *de facto* rules of the country. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the Consultative Assembly has neither the power to pass nor to enforce laws. Its members are appointed by the king, who is an absolute monarch (the sovereign), and he can remove them at his pleasure.²⁰ In the United States, the Congress has formally stated powers: only it can approve the spending of governmental money or declare war (though both these *de jure* powers have been at times undermined *de facto*). The president can veto legislation approved by Congress, but Congress has the power to override a president’s veto.

Government and the Legitimate Use of Power

The government is the most important institution in any discussion of politics because it is the only one with legal, legitimate authority to use coercive power to compel behavior within a defined geographic area.

The government of a place typically exercises its powers over individuals who live within its borders or who are otherwise subject to its laws (for example, a citizen of the country who is currently living abroad). If you break your family’s rules, your family can punish you, but only your government can imprison you for breaking government laws. Your church may ask you to contribute money, but only the government can compel you to pay taxes. Your business can encourage you to uphold their rules and fight for their interests, but only the government can require you to serve in the military and sit on juries.

A government is one of the four elements that, along with territory, population, and sovereignty, make up a state (or its synonym, country). The United States is a state, and so are the individual territories, from Alabama to Wyoming, within it. Afghanistan and

Zimbabwe are states too, as are all the other 190 some countries between them alphabetically.²¹

State has other meanings that are also relevant to politics and political science. For example, a country might be called a police state. In a *police state*, the government uses force, often imposed by the military or the secret police, to repress dissent and maintain order. In a *welfare state*, the government provides extensive social benefits like child care, education, housing, and pensions. Countries are more or less police and welfare states, as all countries use a police force to maintain order and all countries offer their citizens some social benefits.

North Korea, where the government monitors virtually every aspect of life and imprisons or executes those who oppose its leaders, is perhaps the most extreme example of a police state. Nordic countries, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden, are generally considered to be the most generous welfare states.

The terms country, state, nation, and nation-state are sometimes used synonymously, but they are not at all identical. A *country* is a defined geographic territory with a sovereign government. The term *state* is often used to refer to a smaller area within a country, as in the case of the individual American states, which all together make up the United States of America, the country. The term *state* can also be used to refer to an entire country. For example, India is a state. A *nation*, in contrast, refers to a population connected by history, culture, and beliefs that generally lives in a specific area, such as Kurdistan in the Middle East, where the Kurdish are the dominant ethnic group even though they do not have a country to call their own.²² A nation that also is a country is sometimes called a *nation-state*. The United States, France, Pakistan, China, and many others are generally considered simultaneously to be countries, states, nations, and nation-states.

A government has *authority* when those subject to its power recognize that power. In a class, you accept your teacher's power to give assignments and assign grades—or, at least, your school recognizes these powers. Authority is generally limited to specific circumstances and places where the authority is said to have jurisdiction. As a condition for passing this course, your teacher can require you to read this book but not to do their laundry. Your government can require you to pay your taxes—it has this authority—but it cannot require you to do things that are unlawful.²³

When authority is used in ways that are consistent with the duties or rules of the institution, that authority is said to be *legitimate*. If a police officer pulls your car over because you are speeding, that is a legitimate use of authority; if that officer pulls you over because you are “driving while black,” that would be an illegitimate use.²⁴

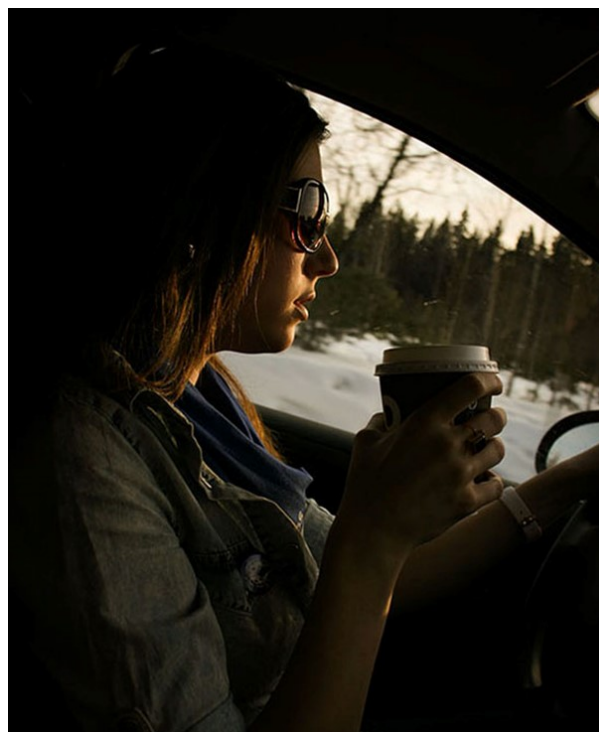


Figure 6.7: Pulling over drivers because of their skin color is an illegitimate use of governmental authority. (credit: “Ride” by Krista Baltroka/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

In politics, there is a continual struggle over which uses of authority are legitimate and which are not, and governments resolve these conflicts in different ways depending on how democratic they are. What can a government compel you to do, allow you to do, or prohibit you from doing? One possible answer is that if a government enacts a policy in accordance with its own rules, then that policy is legitimate. In this view, individuals could enslave others so long as governmental policy allowed this practice, as some countries have. Another answer is that some policies, such as slavery, are fundamentally illegitimate, even if they are lawfully enacted.

Conflict and Bargaining

Disagreement—that is, conflict—is fundamental to politics for two primary reasons. As long as there is desire and people want things they do not have, there will be conflict. Millions of people lack clean air, access to potable water, and even basic necessities such as food and shelter. Scarcity is not limited to human needs. Even if every family in the world was wealthy enough to buy as big a mansion as (they thought) they wanted, differences would still exist that would make some people want what others have—say a better view, a bigger lot, or proximity to certain amenities.

In addition to desire, conflict will always exist because people have differing beliefs and preferences—that is, differing values. Should abortion be legal? A spectrum of passionate views on the subject exists, and there is no way one political decision will satisfy all individuals at every point along that spectrum. Should governments spend taxpayer money on bike trails, mass transportation, or roads? The answer might not be a matter of deep belief, but it still elicits differing preferences. Again, no one political action is likely to satisfy everyone.

Throughout history, the resolution of conflicts has often involved brute force. Violence can resolve conflicts, at least temporarily, with the strong getting what they want through brutality.

Politics is the process for resolving conflicts over scarce resources and differing values without resorting to violence. When violence is used to solve disputes, it represents the failure of politics, or at least the deep frustration of those whose aspirations are thwarted by politics. Politics can determine how scarce resources will be allocated and which values will prevail. Through political processes, a country can decide whether abortions will be allowed in all cases, some cases, or no cases. This does not mean that everyone will now agree on whether the policy is good or not; politics can resolve issues, but it cannot eliminate the underlying conflicts that cause them.

In recent decades the world has gotten richer and more peaceful.²⁵ That does not mean conflict is disappearing; several countries are experiencing open military conflict, and many other countries are experiencing high levels of violence. Even in countries without open, violent conflict, political polarization is increasing.²⁶ *Political polarization* occurs when groups—political parties as well as ethnic or religious groups—become divided (“polarized”) in ways that increase cohesion within the groups and also increase suspicion and distrust across the groups. The United States today is more polarized than it has been in many years.²⁷ The greater the polarization, the greater the difficulty of resolving conflicts: polarization is a risk to peaceful politics.

How does politics resolve conflicts? Most often, through bargaining. When parties involved in a conflict engage in negotiations concerning the status quo—that is, the existing state of things—they are bargaining. *Political bargaining* determines whether existing rules and reality (the status quo) will be changed.



Figure 6.8: Bargaining at the market is like bargaining in politics: each participant wants a solution that benefits themselves. (credit: “Learning to Haggle at the Nubian Market” by Bonnie Ann Cain-Wood/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

In political bargaining, there are three likely outcomes. The first is that those bargaining simply cannot come to any agreement. When this happens, and it often does, the status quo prevails. Negotiations are almost certain to collapse when those bargaining are unwilling to give an inch because they have diametrically opposed goals. If one side seeks to raise taxes, for example, and the other to lower them, then there is no deal that would be acceptable to both sides. In this situation, those who favor the status quo are the winners, so those who favor the status quo have reason to prevent the negotiations from succeeding.

This point bears repeating. Although you might see a world full of problems that obviously need to be fixed, you should always assume that there are those who benefit from the current circumstances who will work to thwart change. This bias in favor of the status quo is one of the reasons political change is often so difficult to achieve. Think of it this way: bargaining seeks to change the rules, and there are almost certainly those who benefit from those rules and want to keep them.

Compromise requires the ability to see gray areas and possible points of connection or overlap. It requires a willingness to accept partial progress toward a desired goal. Increasingly, everyday public discourse has moved in the direction of extremes and oversimplification (think of Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and short online articles), exacerbating political polarization and making compromise increasingly difficult, both for individuals and for their representatives in government.

A second possibility involves compromise, in which the various participants in a conflict give ground on what they seek in order to arrive at an agreement. Compromise is most likely to occur when those bargaining generally agree on the goals but have disagreements on the specific details. If some countries seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit global climate change while other countries seek faster economic growth that increases their emissions, the participants are seeking different goals and compromise is unlikely. However, if all countries want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they are in general agreement about their goals. In this case, compromise is more likely. If no country has the power unilaterally to set emission limits, the countries may have motivation to split the difference. If your country wants to lower emissions by 10 percent and my country wants to lower them by 5 percent, the two countries might make a deal and lower them by 7.5 percent. Each country gets part, but not all, of what they want.

A third outcome results from what is called *logrolling*. If you have something I want and I have something you want, we each have something with which to bargain. In terms of politics, this is often translated into one politician offering to support another's policy in exchange for that politician supporting theirs – Senator Steve will vote for greater pollution controls (which Representative Ruth wants) if Representative Ruth will vote for lower taxes (which Senator Steve wants), for example.

The outcome of political negotiations depends again on the core principles of politics discussed earlier—the rules governing the negotiation, the reality at the time of the negotiation, and the strategic choices those involved in the negotiation make.

Political negotiations are often a combination of high-minded principles and skullduggery. Negotiators will seek to persuade others and, if persuasion does not work, sometimes to bully or buy them. If any participants in a negotiation have the power to force the others to give ground, they very likely will use it.

If the status quo prevails, those participants who sought change may be seen as weak and be blamed for their failure. If compromises are achieved, participants may be criticized for “selling out”—for compromising not only their policies but also their principles. Logrolling can create the impression of impropriety, of corrupt dealmaking, or of unseemly quid pro quo, as in “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”

Yet each outcome has an alternative explanation. If the status quo prevails, those who defended it will laud their accomplishments. When compromises succeed, each side can claim that “it is better to get half a loaf of bread than no loaf at all.” After a successful logroll, the negotiators can say, “We got what we valued most.” Negotiations can produce winners and losers, but they can also produce outcomes that leave the participants at least relatively satisfied with the outcomes.

If all political power were concentrated in a single person, with the government proceeding by fiat, or command, and the supreme leader giving the orders, bargaining might seem unnecessary. Yet even in totalitarian countries the supreme leader will have advisors, and those advisors will negotiate among themselves and the ruler as they seek to influence how power is used.

3) Political Science: The Systematic Study of Politics

The systematic study of the process of who gets what, when, and how—*political science*—investigates the reasons behind the decisions governments make. For example, political scientists investigate the degree of control governments choose to exercise

over various forms of communication, like your smartphone. Political scientists examine both the ways individuals and groups seek to influence governmental action and the ways governmental decisions in turn affect individuals and groups.

Political scientists may not have lab coats or electron microscopes, but like other types of scientists, they use theory, logic, and evidence in an attempt to answer questions, to make predictions, or to arrive at conclusions. Some political scientists strive to understand the fundamental laws of politics in much the same way theoretical physicists seek to comprehend the cosmos for pure knowledge. These political scientists try to uncover the universal principles of how humans and their institutions aim to prevail in political conflicts. But most political scientists accept that human behavior is not entirely deterministic (that is, perfectly predictable), so they instead look for patterns that may enable them to predict in general how humans and their institutions interact.

Other political scientists are more like chemists, who may use their knowledge to develop and improve medicines or create more deadly toxins. These political scientists aspire to improve the institutions or processes of government.

Some uses of political science are not so benign. Motivated actors can and have used political science knowledge to manipulate voters and suppress vulnerable populations. When people understand how political science works, they are less susceptible to such manipulation and suppression.

One way to think about whether politics is “scientific” is to focus on the content of politics. Does political behavior follow general laws—that is, does it align with universal statements about nature, based on empirical observations? Does politics have the equivalent of Isaac Newton’s laws of motion (for example, “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”)? Not precisely, although political scientists have at times claimed that such laws exist.

The sticking point is the word “universal.” For every action there is always an equal and opposite reaction. But in politics, it seems, virtually nothing is always the case. If one defines science as a body of universal laws about an unchanging universe, then politics is not and cannot be a science. Politics is not the same as physics. Empirical political science seeks to identify regularities—what is likely to happen given certain conditions.

Political science is *probabilistic* rather than *deterministic*. An event is deterministic if it is possible to say, “If this happens, that will happen.” Events are probabilistic if one can say only, “If this happens, that is likely to happen.” The sun coming up in the east? Deterministic. Will it rain in the morning? Probabilistic. Will incumbents win their next bid for reelection? Political science gives us the ability to estimate the probability that they will win (again, given the rules, the reality, and the choices those incumbents make).

The scientific method seeks to understand the world by testing hypotheses (for example “The world is round”) by systematically collecting data sufficient to test that hypothesis and by making these hypotheses and data available to others so that your work can be challenged or verified. Political science uses the scientific method to understand the political world; political science carefully and methodically uses logic and evidence to find the answers to political questions.

A hypothesis is a tentative statement about reality that can be tested to determine whether it is true or false—or, in practice, supported or unsupported based on the evidence. “A candidate’s ethnicity influences the likelihood that they will be elected” is an example of a hypothesis: ethnicity either does or does not influence election outcomes. An important task of the political scientist is to determine whether the evidence supports the hypothesis that they test.

The answers scientists find are always tentative, or uncertain. A hypothesis is supported rather than true or unsupported rather than false. Additional research may yield different answers as theories or methods improve or better data emerges, but also because political behavior itself can change in response to what people learn about it. The knowledge, for example, that politicians are likely to act in a certain way given certain circumstances might lead politicians to change their behavior if they believe that doing so will gain them an advantage. The specific knowledge (“politicians in this situation will behave in that way”) may become obsolete even if a broader general principle (“politicians will act strategically to advance their goals”) still appears to be true.

There are two main, interrelated types of political science: normative political science (also called political philosophy or political theory) and empirical political science.

Normative Political Science

In politics, what is good and what is right? How should power be used? What is the public interest? These are tricky questions with multiple answers. One might think of the “good” as that which is beneficial or helpful and “right” as what is true or just. Power

should be used to promote the public interest so that those in power use it to benefit the people. *Normative political science* seeks to understand the meaning, purposes, and goals of politics. It seeks to define how individuals should behave or how institutions should be constituted. Those who study these issues are referred to as political philosophers and share common interests with the broader discipline of philosophy.

Normative political science considers an endless array of questions. What is a good citizen? Do human rights exist and, if so, what are they? Who should rule? What purpose should governments serve? Is there an ideal constitution and, if so, what is it? What is social justice?

These questions cannot be answered by presenting evidence alone: there is no test that would prove beyond a reasonable doubt what a good citizen is or that any constitution is in fact ideal. So normative political science typically proceeds primarily by appealing to logic and reason. Consider the question “What is a good citizen?” Evidence alone cannot tell us what constitutes a good citizen. Is a good citizen the one who always obeys the laws or the one who challenges the laws they see as unjust? Reasonable people can—and do—disagree on this and almost all other questions in political theory. But in order to determine through logic and reason what it means to be a good citizen, evidence can guide judgments of whether citizens are good (for example, if citizens are observed doing bad things, they would not be good citizens).

Normative theorists have tried to answer questions like “What is a good citizen?” in three main ways: focusing on the consequences of behavior, moral rules, or virtue.



Figure 6.9: Figure 1.9 These new American citizens are being sworn in at a naturalization ceremony. What is a good citizen? (credit: “Celebrate Citizenship, Celebrate America’ Naturalization Ceremony at College of DuPage 2015 48” by COD Newsroom/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

One definition of a good citizen is someone who acts in ways that benefit society; that is, the benefits are a consequence of the citizen’s actions. A good citizen votes and pays taxes, for example, because both actions help to create stable and prosperous societies. In contrast, a bad citizen is one who breaks the law, to the extent that breaking the law harms other people. In this view, someone who speeds would be a bad citizen because speeding increases the likelihood of causing a crash and harming others, but someone who commits a “victimless crime,” such as smoking marijuana, would not be a bad citizen because they would not be harming anyone else. According to normative political science, a person should behave in ways that benefit society and do not harm it, and individuals should strive to be good citizens. A good ruler is one who helps the ruled rather than harming them. According to Aristotle, constitutions that “aim at the common advantage are correct and just... whereas those which aim only at the advantage of the rulers are deviant and unjust, because they involve despotic rule which is inappropriate for a community of free persons.”²⁸

Two challenges are central to this type of theorizing. What actions produce more benefit than harm, and what evidence supports these claims? For example, speeding is a risk to the driver and to others, but it may bring pleasure to the driver and enables them to get where they are going faster. Do the costs outweigh the benefits? Moreover, what counts as a benefit or a harm? Is it beneficial or harmful for citizens to monitor one another’s behavior for potential lawbreaking, for example?

Philosophers, and not just political philosophers, attempt to identify a set of moral principles that good citizens should adopt.²⁹ Similarly, they have attempted to identify principles governments should adhere to because those principles are moral. For example, a good citizen would treat others as they themselves would want to be treated (the so-called Golden Rule). A good citizen would not lie because lying is wrong. In practice, it has proven hard to identify rules that are universally consistent or accepted. Is it always wrong to lie? What if a government decides it must lie to an adversary in order to protect its own citizens? Does a good

government not, as a rule, have an obligation to do just that? But does this then create a slippery slope in which governments believe they are justified in lying as a matter of course?

Some normative political scientists seek to identify and understand character traits that are admirable in their own right. Rather than arguing that good citizens should tell the truth because lying harms the public interest or violates a universal moral principle, they argue that good citizens should tell the truth because a good person does not lie. According to this line of thinking, a government protects its citizens because doing so improves their lives and because it fulfills the duties of government, but also because doing so is what makes a good government. That is what good governments do.

Political philosophers studying virtue seek to identify and define the virtues, as well as to discover their limits.³⁰ For example, traits like bravery, integrity, humility, and kindness have been identified as possible sources of virtue. A good person, and a good citizen, is brave enough to stand up for the right, in opposition to the wrong. To do otherwise would be a sign of cowardice. But can a person be too brave, becoming foolhardy or rash, when standing up for what is right?

These three types of normative reasoning—emphasizing consequences, rules, and virtue—overlap, but they represent distinctly different ways of thinking about politics and what ideal politics would be like. Although the questions they raise have been studied since ancient times, they remain relevant for us today and are still worthy of careful reflection.

Empirical Political Science

Unlike normative political science, *empirical political science* is based not on what should be, but on what is. It seeks to describe the real world of politics, distinguishing between what is predictable and what is idiosyncratic. Empirical political science attempts to explain and predict.³¹

Empirical political science assumes that facts exist: actual, genuine, verifiable facts. Empirical questions are ones that can be answered by factual evidence. The number of votes a candidate receives is an empirical matter: votes can be counted. Counting votes accurately so that each candidate receives the actual number of votes that were cast for them can be difficult. Different ways of counting can lead to slightly different counts, but a correct number actually exists.

A fact may be disputed. There may be genuine uncertainty as to what the facts really are—what the evidence really shows. Sometimes it is extremely difficult to gather the facts. Do space aliens exist? That is an empirical question. Either space aliens exist, or they do not. Some researchers claim to have evidence that space aliens are real, but their evidence is not universally, or even broadly, accepted. One side of this argument is correct, however, and the other is not. Evidence has not yet conclusively determined which is correct.³²

Does the Russian government seek to interfere with American elections, and if so, does its interference affect the outcome? The first part of the question is difficult (but not impossible) to answer because when a country interferes in another country's domestic affairs it tries to do so in secret. It is difficult to uncover secrets.³³ But the second part of the question, does the interference affect the outcome, is almost impossible to answer. Because so many factors influence election outcomes, it is extremely challenging to determine which individual factors made any consequential difference.³⁴

There are thus empirical debates in which people of good faith disagree about what the facts are. In many cases, however, people do not want to acknowledge what the evidence shows, and because they do not want to believe what the facts demonstrate, they insist the evidence cannot be true. Humans often use *motivated reasoning*, first deciding what is true—for example, “Gun control makes us safer” or “Gun control makes us less safe”—and then finding evidence that supports this belief while rejecting data that contradicts it.³⁵

Social psychologist Peter Ditto contrasts motivated reasoning with science, where scientists build conclusions based on evidence, and those employing motivated reasoning seek evidence that will support their pre-determined conclusions.

In other cases, individuals and interests may actually know what the facts are, but they are motivated by reasons of self-interest to deny them. The evidence is clear, for example, that nicotine is addictive and harmful to human health. The evidence is also clear that Big Tobacco, the largest cigarette companies, denied these facts for years because to admit them would have put their profits at risk.³⁶

Donald Trump, along with many of his supporters, claimed that he won the 2020 presidential election and that President Joe Biden was declared the victor only because of massive voter fraud. All attempts to prove that fraud led to Biden's victory have failed: no

evidence has been found to support Trump's claims.³⁷ That these claims continue can be attributed to the fact that some individuals are simply unwilling to accept the evidence, while others benefit from denying the validity of it.³⁸

Empirical political science might find—based on the available evidence—that individuals with more education or more income are more likely to vote. Empirical political science would not consider whether this is good or bad; that would be a normative judgement. Empirical political scientists might explain the link between education, income, and voting by positing that better educated, more prosperous individuals are more likely to believe that their views matter and that because of that belief they are more likely to express those views at the ballot box. These political scientists might also use their findings to make a prediction: an individual with more education or higher income is more likely to vote than an individual with less education or lower income.³⁹

Based on this finding, empirical political scientists make no claims as to who should participate in politics. Questions about “should” are the domain of normative political science. Moral judgments cannot be made strictly on the basis of empirical statements. That members of one group vote at higher rates than another group, for example, tells us nothing about whether they deserve to vote at higher rates or whether government policies should be based more on their views as compared to those who vote at lower rates.

From this finding, however, empirical political scientists may infer a *generalization*. Generalizations are based on typical cases, average results, and general findings. Younger adults, for instance, typically vote less often than older adults. This does not mean that any specific young adult does not vote or that any specific older adult does, but that these statements are generally true.⁴⁰



Figure 6.10: Empirical political scientists may study the impact of age, sex, ethnicity, education, and other factors on the likelihood that citizens will vote. (credit: “Super Duper Tuesday” by Josh Thompson/Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Generalizations can be helpful in describing, explaining, or predicting, but there is a downside to generalizations: stereotyping. If the evidence shows that political conservatives in the United States are opposed to higher levels of immigration, this means neither that every conservative holds this belief nor that one must hold this belief to be conservative. If data suggests supporters of abortion rights tend to be women, it is not possible to infer from the evidence that all women seek more permissive abortion laws or that no men do. In using generalizations, it is important to remember that they are descriptive of groups, not individuals. These are empirical statements, not normative ones: they cannot by themselves be used to assign blame or credit.

Empirical political science can be used to make predictions, but predictions are prone to error. Can political science knowledge be useful for predicting the outcome of elections, for example? Yes. Given a set of rules about who is eligible to vote, how votes can be cast, and what different categories of voters believe about the candidates or policy options on the ballot, political science knowledge can be useful in predicting the outcome of the election. Our predictions might be wrong. Maybe people did not tell the truth about who they were planning to vote for. Maybe the people who said they were going to vote did not.

In 2016, most political polls predicted that Hillary Clinton would be elected president of the United States.⁴¹ Clinton did indeed win the popular vote, as the pollsters anticipated, but Donald Trump won the electoral vote, against the pollsters' expectations. Political science is imperfect, but it seeks to learn from and correct its mistakes.

Many of the terms in this book, like incumbent, are relevant mainly for the study of politics. Other terms, like *ceteris paribus*, are useful across a broad range of studies that use the scientific method. *Ceteris paribus* can be translated as “all other things being equal.” If the ethnicity of a political candidate does not influence their probability of getting elected to office, *ceteris paribus*, if there are only two candidates and if they are alike in every relevant aspect (e.g., age, experience, ability to raise campaign funding) except their ethnicity, then the candidate's ethnicity by itself does not affect the outcome of the election.

In real life, however, “all other things” are almost never equal. To the extent that our societies have inequalities of wealth, health, education, and other resources, the inequalities tend to be correlated—that is, mutually related—to each other. For example, wealth and health are correlated with each other in that wealthier people tend to have better health and poorer individuals tend to have poorer health. In the United States, Whites tend on average to have more wealth, health, education, and other social resources than do persons of color.⁴² This does not mean that every White person is wealthier and healthier, but that on average, in general, they tend to be.

Empirical political science and political philosophy (or normative political science) are distinct modes of inquiry. But this is not to say that they are conflicting, that one is better than the other, or that political scientists do not use both in their research. If empirical research discovers that certain groups are systematically disadvantaged in the political process, the researchers may also argue that these disadvantages are harmful or wrong and make a moral argument that the disadvantages should be reduced or eliminated. Empirical research is often inspired by normative concerns. Those who believe that human rights should be better protected may undertake research to understand the political factors that limit the protection of rights.

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7: Economics

1) What is Economics?

One definition of economics is: Economics is a social science that examines how people choose among the alternatives available to them. It is social because it involves people and their behavior. It is a science because it uses, as much as possible, a scientific approach in its investigation of choices.

Let's explore this definition first, then we will examine some other ways of looking at the study of economics.

A. Economics examines how people choose among alternatives

When studying how people make choices, a fundamental concept is that of scarcity. Scarcity means that human desires for goods, services and resources exceed what is available. Resources, such as labor, tools, land, and raw materials are necessary to produce the goods and services we want but they exist in limited supply. Of course, the ultimate scarce resource is time - everyone, rich or poor, has just 24 expendable hours in the day to earn income to acquire goods and services, for leisure time, or for sleep. At any point in time, there is only a finite amount of resources available.

Think about it this way: In 2015 the labor force in the United States contained over 158 million workers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The total land area was 3,794,101 square miles. While these are certainly large numbers, they are not infinite. Because these resources are limited, so are the numbers of goods and services we produce with them. Combine this with the fact that human wants seem to be virtually infinite, and you can see why scarcity is a problem.



Figure 7.1: People experiencing homelessness can be used as an example of scarcity of resources. (Credit: "Pittsburgh Homeless" by "daveyinn"/Flickr Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0)

Here's another way to look at scarcity: Does everyone require food to eat? Does everyone need a decent place to live? Does everyone have access to healthcare? In every country in the world, there are people who are hungry, homeless, and in need of healthcare, just to focus on a few critical goods and services. Why is this the case? It is (at least in part) because of scarcity. Let's delve into the concept of scarcity a little deeper, because it is a key concept in economics.

The Problem of Scarcity

If our resources were also unlimited, we could say yes to each of our wants—and there would be no economics. Because our resources are limited, we cannot say yes to everything. To say yes to one thing requires that we say no to another. Whether we like it or not, we must make choices.

Given this situation of scarcity, every economy must answer the following questions:

- What should be produced? Using the economy's scarce resources to produce one thing requires giving up another. Producing better education, for example, may require cutting back on other services, such as health care. A decision to preserve a wilderness area requires giving up other uses of the land. Every society must decide what it will produce with its scarce resources.

- How should goods and services be produced? There are all sorts of choices to be made in determining how goods and services should be produced. Should a firm employ a few skilled or a lot of unskilled workers? Should it produce in its own country or should it use foreign plants? Should manufacturing firms use new or recycled raw materials to make their products?
- For whom should goods and services be produced? If a good or service is produced, a decision must be made about who will get it. A decision to have one person or group receive a good or service usually means it will not be available to someone else. For example, representatives of the poorest nations on earth often complain that energy consumption per person in the United States is 17 times greater than energy consumption per person in the world's 62 poorest countries. Critics argue that the world's energy should be more evenly allocated. Should it? That is a "for whom" question.

Every economy must determine what should be produced, how it should be produced, and for whom it should be produced. This involves the question of who in that economy has the power to decide those questions – who decides "who gets what."

Opportunity Cost

Another concept in terms of how people make choices is the idea of opportunity cost.

Opportunity cost is the value of the best alternative forgone in making any choice.

The opportunity cost to you of reading the remainder of this chapter will be the value of the best other use to which you could have put your time. If you choose to spend \$20 on a potted plant, you have simultaneously chosen to give up the benefits of spending the \$20 on pizzas or a paperback book or a night at the movies. If the book is the most valuable of those alternatives, then the opportunity cost of the plant is the value of the enjoyment you otherwise expected to receive from the book.

The concept of opportunity cost must not be confused with the purchase price of an item. Consider the cost of a college or university education. That includes the value of the best alternative use of money spent for tuition, fees, and books. But the most important cost of a college education is the value of the forgone alternative uses of time spent studying and attending class instead of using the time in some other endeavor. Students sacrifice that time in hopes of even greater earnings in the future or because they place a value on the opportunity to learn. Or consider the cost of going to the doctor. Part of that cost is the value of the best alternative use of the money required to see the doctor. But, the cost also includes the value of the best alternative use of the time required to see the doctor. The essential thing to see in the concept of opportunity cost is found in the name of the concept. Opportunity cost is the value of the best opportunity forgone in a particular choice. It is not simply the amount spent on that choice.

As the set of available alternatives changes, we expect that the choices individuals make will change. A rainy day could change the opportunity cost of reading a good book; we might expect more reading to get done in bad than in good weather. A high income can make it very costly to take a day off; we might expect highly paid individuals to work more hours than those who are not paid as well. If individuals are maximizing their level of satisfaction and firms are maximizing profits, then a change in the set of alternatives they face may affect their choices in a predictable way.

The concepts of scarcity and opportunity cost are fundamental to how people make choices between alternatives, which is at the heart of economics. The existence of alternative uses forces us to make choices. A good is scarce if the choice of one alternative requires that another be given up. The opportunity cost of any choice is the value of the best alternative forgone in making it.

This idea of opportunity cost can also be linked to the idea of *sunk costs*. Consider the case of Selena, who pays \$8 to see a movie, but after watching the film for 30 minutes, she knows that it is truly terrible. Should she stay and watch the rest of the movie because she paid for the ticket, or should she leave? The money she spent is a sunk cost, and unless the theater manager is feeling kindly, Selena will not get a refund. But staying in the movie still means paying an opportunity cost in time. Her choice is whether to spend the next 90 minutes suffering through a cinematic disaster or to do something—anything—else. The lesson of sunk costs is to forget about the money and time that is irretrievably gone and instead to focus on the costs and benefits of current and future options.

For people and firms alike, dealing with sunk costs can be frustrating. It often means admitting an earlier error in judgment. Many firms, for example, find it hard to give up on a new product that is doing poorly because they spent so much money in creating and launching the product. This is the *sunk cost fallacy* – to continue down an unproductive path because you've already invested resources in it. But the lesson of sunk costs is to ignore them and make decisions based on what will happen in the future.

Motivation

What motivates people as they make choices?

Economists assume that individuals make choices they think will create the maximum value for them. Economists assume that people's objectives will be those that serve their own self-interest. In this sense, people are expected to behave rationally in terms of maximizing what they get. This may seem to make sense – people want all they can get, right?

But in recent years, a new field of *behavioral economics* has been developing, focused on field-testing economic behavior with actual experiments.

For example, if we pass a table with a bowl labeled “free candy”—how many would we take? If the same bowl were labeled ‘candy—\$1 each’—would we buy more or less candy than we took when they were free? From the rationality discussion we just had, you might predict that we would take more of the free candy than the \$1 candy, since the \$1 candy uses up our scarce resources. Not so! When researchers have tried different versions of this experiment, they have found that we act very differently—perhaps irrationally—in response to the word “free.” In many experiments people took less candy when it was free, and bought more when they were actually paying. Maybe they were embarrassed to take too many free candies. Maybe the whole set-up encouraged them to feel considerate of others.

In other experiments, people preferred a higher-priced version of a medication to a cheaper one. They said they believed the higher price tag indicated that it was better, even though the actual medications were identical. Sometimes, when a series of purchase options are set out (buy a 1-year print subscription for \$20, 2-years print and digital for \$45, or 5-years of both for \$90) we tend to pick the middle option, simply because it is positioned in the middle. There is nothing rational about always choosing the middle option, but it's been proven that we often decide that way.

Here's another of our irrational decision-making habits: a company advertises an item—an elliptical exercise machine, for example—by first telling us it retails for \$899. Then they tell us that they're selling this machine for only \$299! If we had no idea what such machines normally cost, and they just presented us with a \$299 price-tag, we might have ignored the ad altogether, thinking that \$299 was a lot to pay for a machine we would never use. But when we are given information on what something might cost, before being shown our ‘special’ price, that earlier price quote anchors our price expectations. Suddenly, it looks like a bargain!

What these behavioral economists have found, is that we are more irrational in our economic decision-making than economists have assumed. This is not big news to the folks in marketing—they've been researching our irrationality for a long time. But it's only recently that economists are exploring the impact of irrationality on conventional economic analysis.

B. It is social because it involves people and their behavior

This comes in two ways: one, economic analyses may be aimed at explaining individual choice or choices in an individual market; such investigations are largely the focus of microeconomics. Two, the analysis of the impact of those individual choices on such aggregates as total output, the level of employment, and the price level is the concern of macroeconomics.

Microeconomics

Microeconomics is the branch of economics that focuses on the choices made by individual decision-making units in the economy—typically consumers and firms—and the impacts those choices have on individual markets.

What determines how households and individuals spend their budgets? What combination of goods and services will best fit their needs and wants, given the budget they have to spend? How do people decide whether to work, and if so, whether to work full time or part time? How do people decide how much to save for the future, or whether they should borrow to spend beyond their current means?

What determines the products, and how many of each, a firm will produce and sell? What determines the prices a firm will charge? What determines how a firm will produce its products? What determines how many workers it will hire? How will a firm finance its business? When will a firm decide to expand, downsize, or even close? In the microeconomics part of this book, we will learn about the theory of consumer behavior, the theory of the firm, how markets for labor and other resources work, and how markets sometimes fail to work properly.

Macroeconomics

Questions that deal with aggregates, or totals, in the economy are problems of *macroeconomics*.

What determines the level of economic activity in a society? In other words, what determines how many goods and services a nation actually produces? What determines how many jobs are available in an economy? What determines a nation's standard of living? What causes the economy to speed up or slow down? What causes firms to hire more workers or to lay them off? What causes the economy to grow over the long term?

We can determine an economy's macroeconomic health by examining a number of goals: growth in the standard of living, low unemployment, and low inflation, to name the most important. How can we use government macroeconomic policy to pursue these goals? A nation's central bank conducts monetary policy, which involves policies that affect bank lending, interest rates, and financial capital markets. For the United States, this is the Federal Reserve. A nation's legislative body determines fiscal policy, which involves government spending and taxes. For the United States, this is the Congress and the executive branch, which originates the federal budget. These are the government's main tools. Americans tend to expect that government can fix whatever economic problems we encounter, but to what extent is that expectation realistic?

C. It is a science because it uses the scientific method

Much of the basic methodology of economics and many of its difficulties are common to every social science—indeed, to every science. This section explores the application of the scientific method to economics.

Researchers often examine relationships between variables. A *variable* is something whose value can change. By contrast, a *constant* is something whose value does not change. The speed at which a car is traveling is an example of a variable. The number of minutes in an hour is an example of a constant.

Research is generally conducted within a framework called the scientific method, a systematic set of procedures through which knowledge is created. In the scientific method, hypotheses are suggested and then tested. A *hypothesis* is an assertion of a relationship between two or more variables that could be proven to be false. A statement is not a hypothesis if no conceivable test could show it to be false.

The statement “Plants like sunshine” is not a hypothesis; there is no way to test whether plants like sunshine or not, so it is impossible to prove the statement false. The statement “Increased solar radiation increases the rate of plant growth” is a hypothesis; experiments could be done to show the relationship between solar radiation and plant growth. If solar radiation were shown to be unrelated to plant growth or to retard plant growth, then the hypothesis would be demonstrated to be false.

If a test reveals that a particular hypothesis is false, then the hypothesis is rejected or modified. In the case of the hypothesis about solar radiation and plant growth, we would probably find that more sunlight increases plant growth over some range but that too much can actually retard plant growth. Such results would lead us to modify our hypothesis about the relationship between solar radiation and plant growth.

If the tests of a hypothesis yield results consistent with it, then further tests are conducted. A hypothesis that has not been rejected after widespread testing and that wins general acceptance is commonly called a *theory*. A theory that has been subjected to even more testing and that has won virtually universal acceptance becomes a *law*.

Testing Hypotheses in Economics

Here is a hypothesis suggested by the model of demand and supply: an increase in the price of gasoline will reduce the quantity of gasoline consumers demand. How might we test such a hypothesis?

Economists try to test hypotheses such as this one by observing actual behavior and using empirical (that is, real-world) data. The average retail price of gasoline in the United States rose from an average of \$2.12 per gallon on May 22, 2005 to \$2.88 per gallon on May 22, 2006. The number of gallons of gasoline consumed by U.S. motorists rose 0.3% during that period.

The small increase in the quantity of gasoline consumed by motorists as its price rose is inconsistent with the hypothesis that an increased price will lead to a reduction in the quantity demanded. Does that mean that we should dismiss the original hypothesis? On the contrary, we must be cautious in assessing this evidence. Several problems exist in interpreting any set of economic data. One problem is that several things may be changing at once; another is that the initial event may be unrelated to the event that follows. The next two sections examine these problems in detail.

The All-Other-Things-Unchanged Problem

The hypothesis that an increase in the price of gasoline produces a reduction in the quantity demanded by consumers carries with it the assumption that there are no other changes that might also affect consumer demand. A better statement of the hypothesis would be: An increase in the price of gasoline will reduce the quantity consumers demand, *ceteris paribus*. *Ceteris paribus* is a Latin phrase that means “all other things unchanged.”

But things changed between May 2005 and May 2006. Economic activity and incomes rose both in the United States and in many other countries, particularly China, and people with higher incomes are likely to buy more gasoline. Employment rose as well, and people with jobs use more gasoline as they drive to work. Population in the United States grew during the period. In short, many things happened during the period, all of which tended to increase the quantity of gasoline people purchased.

Our observation of the gasoline market between May 2005 and May 2006 did not offer a conclusive test of the hypothesis that an increase in the price of gasoline would lead to a reduction in the quantity demanded by consumers. Other things changed and affected gasoline consumption. Such problems are likely to affect any analysis of economic events. We cannot ask the world to stand still while we conduct experiments in economic phenomena. Economists employ a variety of statistical methods to allow them to isolate the impact of single events such as price changes, but they can never be certain that they have accurately isolated the impact of a single event in a world in which virtually everything is changing all the time.

In laboratory sciences such as chemistry and biology, it is relatively easy to conduct experiments in which only selected things change and all other factors are held constant. The economists' laboratory is the real world; thus, economists do not generally have the luxury of conducting controlled experiments.

The Fallacy of False Cause

Hypotheses in economics typically specify a relationship in which a change in one variable causes another to change. We call the variable that responds to the change the *dependent variable*; the variable that induces a change is called the *independent variable*. Sometimes the fact that two variables move together can suggest the false conclusion that one of the variables has acted as an independent variable that has caused the change we observe in the dependent variable.

Consider the following hypothesis: People wearing shorts cause warm weather. Certainly, we observe that more people wear shorts when the weather is warm. Presumably, though, it is the warm weather that causes people to wear shorts rather than the wearing of shorts that causes warm weather; it would be incorrect to infer from this that people cause warm weather by wearing shorts.

Reaching the incorrect conclusion that one event causes another because the two events tend to occur together is called the *fallacy of false cause*. (This is also sometimes discussed as the idea that *correlation is not causation* – just because two things happen at once or appear together does not mean that one thing caused another to happen.) For example, just because you wore your lucky socks, and you won the lottery, it doesn't mean your lucky socks attract money.

Because of the danger of the fallacy of false cause, economists use special statistical tests that are designed to determine whether changes in one thing actually do cause changes observed in another. Given the inability to perform controlled experiments, however, these tests do not always offer convincing evidence that persuades all economists that one thing does, in fact, cause changes in another.

In the case of gasoline prices and consumption between May 2005 and May 2006, there is good theoretical reason to believe the price increase should lead to a reduction in the quantity consumers demand. And economists have tested the hypothesis about price and the quantity demanded quite extensively. They have developed elaborate statistical tests aimed at ruling out problems of the fallacy of false cause. While we cannot prove that an increase in price will, *ceteris paribus*, lead to a reduction in the quantity consumers demand, we can have considerable confidence in the proposition.

Normative and Positive Statements

Two kinds of assertions in economics can be subjected to testing. We have already examined one, the hypothesis. Another testable assertion is a statement of fact, such as “It is raining outside” or “Microsoft is the largest producer of operating systems for personal computers in the world.” Like hypotheses, such assertions can be demonstrated to be false. Unlike hypotheses, they can also be shown to be correct. A statement of fact or a hypothesis is a *positive statement*. Although people often disagree about positive statements, such disagreements can ultimately be resolved through investigation.

There is another category of assertions, however, for which investigation can never resolve differences. A normative statement is one that makes a value judgment. Such a judgment is the opinion of the speaker; no one can “prove” that the statement is or is not correct. Here are some examples of normative statements in economics: “We ought to do more to help the poor.” “People in the United States should save more.” “Corporate profits are too high.” The statements are based on the values of the person who makes them. They cannot be proven false.

Because people have different values, normative statements often provoke disagreement. An economist whose values lead him or her to conclude that we should provide more help for the poor will disagree with one whose values lead to a conclusion that we should not. Because no test exists for these values, these two economists will continue to disagree, unless one persuades the other to adopt a different set of values. Many of the disagreements among economists are based on such differences in values and therefore are unlikely to be resolved.

2) Why Study Economics?

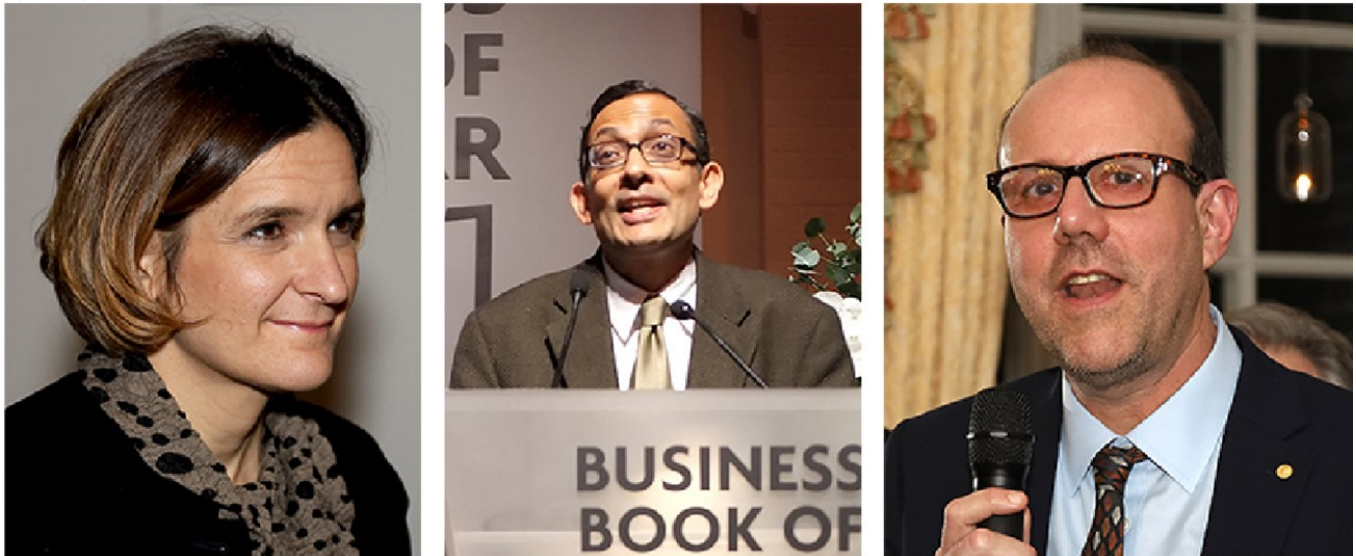


Figure 7.2: Esther Duflo, Abhijit Banerjee, and Michael Kremer Esther Duflo, Abhijit Banerjee (both from Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and Michael Kremer (University of Chicago) were awarded the Nobel Prize for groundbreaking work in which they established experimental methods to understand poverty and outcomes of initiatives to address it. (Credit: modification of work by U.S. Embassy Sweden/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0; Financial Times/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0; U.S. Embassy Sweden/Flickr Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0)

Now that you have an overview on what economics studies, let’s quickly discuss why you are right to study it. Economics is not primarily a collection of facts to memorize, although there are plenty of important concepts to learn. Instead, think of economics as a collection of questions to answer or puzzles to work. Most importantly, economics provides the tools to solve those puzzles.

Consider the complex and critical issue of education barriers on national and regional levels, which affect millions of people and result in widespread poverty and inequality. Governments, aid organizations, and wealthy individuals spend billions of dollars each year trying to address these issues. Nations announce the revitalization of their education programs; tech companies donate devices and infrastructure, and celebrities and charities build schools and sponsor students. Yet the problems remain, sometimes almost as pronounced as they were before the intervention. Why is that the case?

In 2019, three economists—Esther Duflo, Abhijit Banerjee, and Michael Kremer—were awarded the Nobel Prize for their work to answer those questions. They worked diligently to break the widespread problems into smaller pieces, and experimented with small interventions to test success. The award citation credited their work with giving the world better tools and information to address poverty and improve education. Esther Duflo, who is the youngest person and second woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, said, “We believed that like the war on cancer, the war on poverty was not going to be won in one major battle, but in a series of small triumphs... This work and the culture of learning that it fostered in governments has led to real improvement in the lives of hundreds of millions of poor people.”

As you can see, economics affects far more than business. For example:

- Virtually every major problem facing the world today, from global warming, to world poverty, to the conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia, has an economic dimension. If you are going to be part of solving those problems, you need to be able to understand them. Economics is crucial.
- It is hard to overstate the importance of economics to good citizenship. You need to be able to vote intelligently on budgets, regulations, and laws in general. When the U.S. government came close to a standstill at the end of 2012 due to the “fiscal cliff,” what were the issues? Did you know?
- A basic understanding of economics makes you a well-rounded thinker. When you read articles about economic issues, you will understand and be able to evaluate the writer’s argument. When you hear classmates, co-workers, or political candidates talking about economics, you will be able to distinguish between common sense and nonsense. You will find new ways of thinking about current events and about personal and business decisions, as well as current events and politics.

The study of economics does not dictate the answers, but it can illuminate the different choices.

3) Overview of Economic Systems

Think about what a complex system a modern economy is. It includes all production of goods and services, all buying and selling, all employment. The economic life of every individual is interrelated, at least to a small extent, with the economic lives of thousands or even millions of other individuals. Who organizes and coordinates this system? Who ensures that, for example, the number of televisions a society provides is the same as the amount it needs and wants? Who ensures that the right number of employees work in the electronics industry? Who ensures that televisions are produced in the best way possible? How does it all get done?

There are at least three ways that societies organize an economy. The first is the *traditional economy*, which is the oldest economic system and is used in parts of Asia, Africa, and South America. Traditional economies organize their economic affairs the way they have always done (i.e., tradition). Occupations stay in the family. Most families are farmers who grow the crops using traditional methods. What you produce is what you consume. Because tradition drives the way of life, there is little economic progress or development.



Figure 7.3: A Command Economy Ancient Egypt was an example of a command economy. (Credit: "Pyramids at Giza" by Jay Bergesen/Flickr Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0)

Command economies are very different. In a *command economy*, economic effort is devoted to goals passed down from a ruler or ruling class. Ancient Egypt was a good example: a large part of economic life was devoted to building pyramids for the pharaohs. Medieval manor life is another example: the lord provided the land for growing crops and protection in the event of war. In return, vassals provided labor and soldiers to do the lord’s bidding. In the last century, communism emphasized command economies.

In a command economy, the government decides what goods and services will be produced and what prices it will charge for them. The government decides what methods of production to use and sets wages for workers. The government provides many necessities like healthcare and education for free. Currently, Cuba and North Korea have command economies



Figure 7.4 A Market Economy: Nothing says “market” more than The New York Stock Exchange. (Credit: work by Erik Drost/Flickr Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0)

Although command economies have a very centralized structure for economic decisions, market economies have a very decentralized structure. A *market* is an institution that brings together buyers and sellers of goods or services, who may be either individuals or businesses. The New York Stock Exchange is a prime example of a market which brings buyers and sellers together. In a market economy, decision-making is decentralized. *Market economies* are based on private enterprise: the private individuals or groups of private individuals own and operate the means of production (resources and businesses). Businesses supply goods and services based on demand. (In a command economy, by contrast, the government owns resources and businesses.) Supply of goods and services depends on what the demands are. A person’s income is based on their ability to convert resources (especially labor) into something that society values. The more society values the person’s output, the higher the income (think Lady Gaga or LeBron James). In this scenario, market forces, not governments, determine economic decisions.

Most economies in the real world are *mixed economies*. They combine elements of command and market (and even traditional) systems. The U.S. economy is positioned toward the market-oriented end of the spectrum. Many countries in Europe and Latin America, while primarily market-oriented, have a greater degree of government involvement in economic decisions than the U.S. economy. China and Russia, while over the past several decades have moved more in the direction of having a market-oriented system, remain closer to the command economy end of the spectrum.

Regulations: The Rules of the Game

Markets and government regulations are always entangled. There is no such thing as an absolutely free market. *Regulations* always define the “rules of the game” in the economy. Economies that are primarily market-oriented have fewer regulations—ideally just enough to maintain an even playing field for participants (although it very debatable if a level playing field has been reached, can be reached, or how it may be reached). At a minimum, these laws govern matters like safeguarding private property against theft, protecting people from violence, enforcing legal contracts, preventing fraud, and collecting taxes. Conversely, even the most command-oriented economies operate using markets. How else would buying and selling occur? The government heavily regulates decisions of what to produce and prices to charge. Heavily regulated economies often have *underground economies* (or black markets), which are markets where the buyers and sellers make transactions without the government’s approval.

The question of how to organize economic institutions is typically not a straightforward choice between all market or all government, but instead involves a balancing act over the appropriate combination of the two.



Figure 7.5: Globalization Cargo ships are one mode of transportation for shipping goods in the global economy. (Credit: "Cargo Ship" by Raul Valdez/Flickr Creative Commons, CC BY 2.0)

The Rise of Globalization

Recent decades have seen a trend toward *globalization*, which is the expanding cultural, political, and economic connections between people around the world. One measure of this is the increased buying and selling of goods, services, and assets across national borders—in other words, international trade and financial capital flows.

Globalization has occurred for a number of reasons. Improvements in shipping and air cargo have driven down transportation costs. Innovations in computing and telecommunications have made it easier and cheaper to manage long-distance economic connections of production and sales. Many valuable products and services in the modern economy can take the form of information—for example: computer software; financial advice; travel planning; music, books and movies; and blueprints for designing a building. These products and many others can be transported over telephones and computer networks at ever-lower costs. Finally, international agreements and treaties between countries have encouraged greater trade.

However, globalization also has downsides. In recent years we've seen significant pushback against globalization from people across the world concerned about loss of jobs, loss of political sovereignty, environmental degradation, and increased economic inequality.

4) Differing Viewpoints

The information given above is a standard or orthodox view of economics. But critiques of this and other views also exist. Let's take a look.

Are Unlimited Wants (and therefore Scarce Resources) a Fact of Life or a Belief?

Outside of orthodox economics, the issue of scarcity as induced by unlimited wants has been extensively evaluated and re-evaluated. For many theorists, the concept of unlimited/endless want of material items is simply not an immutable fact present in all times and places among all human beings. Among anthropologists, for example, there is a rich history of ethnographic studies documenting ways in which small-scale, non-market oriented economies appear to behave differently than orthodox economists predict.

One such anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, explicitly notes that people residing in hunter-gatherer societies, while viewed as deeply impoverished by the standards of people residing in advanced industrial economies, are actually quite affluent because "all the people's wants are easily satisfied." For Sahlins and other anthropologists, the hunter-gatherer's affluence is not one of vast material abundance, but rather a happiness shaped by being contented with having basic needs and wants met. By having little and demanding little, a successful hunt can yield great want satisfaction.

Borrowing from psychology, there is also a sub-discipline of economics known as *Happiness Economics*. Utilizing survey data, theorists pursuing the study of happiness have repeatedly found that people that focus on the goals of monetary gain and material benefits tend to be less happy than people who are less focused or not focused on those goals. It seems that for every endless maximizer of products, there are many more people that are apt to be content and satisfied with far fewer material items, particularly if fewer material items mean a greater level of interpersonal satisfaction like love, the respect of peers, affection, family

fulfillment, and relationship fulfillment. Apparently, these and other equally non-material but important psychological factors are more important to the pursuit of happiness than is monetary wealth.

Scarcity or Surplus?

There is another fundamental question that Polanyi's critique alludes to: does scarcity as perceived by the mind actually mean there is a scarcity of resources? For Polanyi, the orthodox definition of economics is circular, it has neither a beginning nor an end, just continuous scarcity because of limitless want. After all, if human beings have unlimited wants, then resources have to be scarce, there is simply no way for all wants to be met if wants are endless. Close inspection of the orthodox definition of economics makes it clear that the picture of the homeless man on the bench presented in chapter one is not actually a result of scarcity, at least not as scarcity is defined within the orthodox tradition.

Again, recall that the orthodox definition of economics describes scarcity as resulting from endless "want." Endless want does not mean that there are not enough resources available to fulfill all of humanity's basic needs. Nor does endless "want" mean that many wants cannot be met given available resources. Obviously the man on the park bench may have some very legitimate wants (certainly needs, like adequate shelter), but is he on the bench because there are not enough resources available to make sure his basic needs, such as a home, or other wants, are met? At least in terms of available housing, the answer to this question is an overwhelming no. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on any given night in January of 2015 564,708 people were homeless. At the same time, the number of vacant residential properties in the United States numbered approximately 1.4 million.

The homeless man's lack of housing is not the byproduct of scarcity, at least not by the definition of scarcity that many people are accustomed. Rather, the homeless man on the bench is the byproduct of either misallocated resources or a maldistribution of production.

Homelessness (or house-less-ness) is not the only instance in which the orthodox economic scarcity story breaks down. There are other well documented instances. One particularly disturbing instance relates to malnourishment and general starvation. According to the World Hunger Education Service (WHES) around the world there is enough food produced on an annualized basis to ensure that every person is adequately nourished. In fact, the sheer amount of calories per person generated by global food production has risen since the early 1960s through the mid-2000s, with the amount of per capita calories produced being enough to adequately feed an adult in both developed and developing economies. At the same time, "The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about 795 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world, or one in nine, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016."

Again, this instance of basic needs not being met may be perceived as a situation of scarcity. However, as reported by the WHES, poverty is the overwhelming driver of global malnourishment. While poverty implies a scarcity of income, possibly due to a scarcity of employment possibilities, the actual product that resolves malnourishment, food is produced in enough abundance to adequately feed everyone. Once again, basic human needs are going unmet and this has nothing at all to do with the scarcity of resources.

An interesting outcome of reorienting the definition of economics away from the scarcity story, when evaluated on what is actually available, is not that resources are endless or that all wants can necessarily be met, but that it is apparent that there are often more than enough resources to meet all of humanity's material needs as well as many, many, many of humanity's wants. Reoriented this way the story of economics becomes a story of surplus and abundance, rather than shortfall and hardship. A much less dismal, and likely more realistic, science indeed!*

*Economics is sometimes called "the dismal science."

For those outside of the orthodox economic tradition, many important considerations are seemingly lost by the direction of orthodox economic analysis. Take for example the question of how broader societal norms as a function of social institutions may have influenced the behavior of individuals. By assuming away the social and focusing exclusively on the individual, the orthodox economist will be apt to ignore such issues as how social institutions may have influenced individual behavior such that it is now not prone to maximizing individual acquisition.

In other words, let's say people really don't just look out for themselves all of the time, seeking to acquire as many products for themselves as they can, but instead, people behave such that they are concerned for the well-being of others, maybe because the

norms of their society encourage a less than self-centered set of behaviors. Non-acquisitive, non-self-interested individual behavior tends to be outside of the scope of orthodox economics, but it is not outside the scope of actual human economic interactions. For many non-orthodox economists, the absence of a clear social perspective limits the understandings available to the practitioner of methodological individualism.

Limitless versus Limits: The Implications for the Health of the Planetary Environment

The final critique presented here may be the most important in terms of its implications for the future of humanity. The Earth is a finite biosphere. There is simply only so much atmosphere, land, water, minerals, ores, and other natural resources within the bounds of the planet. In this way, the Earth really is representative of a circumstance of scarcity. Certainly improved efficiency is capable of extending the productive capability of the available natural resources, but this does not change the fact that there is a limit to how much is actually available.

Regardless, for many orthodox economists, the principle of endless growth is unquestionably desirable and it is downright sacrilegious to doubt the merits of endless economic growth. Consider the orthodox definition of economics and its emphasis on the desirability of endless happiness and that happiness being derived from the endless consumption of products. Given the premise of unlimited wants, the need for endless production is obvious and, by continuation, endless production is a synonym for endless, exponential, economic growth. In the simplest sense, more products produced means that the material well-being of society is improved. For orthodox economists, the improved material well-being of society cannot be understated. For example, it is not uncommon for orthodox economists to argue that given enough growth, social maladies such as poverty can be alleviated and, in time, eliminated.

Of course, the orthodox economic perspective leaves aside incredibly important considerations such as whether or not new material products are equitably distributed. Also, if resources are finite, how is endless growth possible? Finally, it is clear that human economic activity nearly inevitably leads to the creation of waste byproducts, pollution. Not only is the Earth's biosphere limited in terms of what it can provide in the way of natural resources toward productive output, it is also limited in terms of how much waste it is capable of absorbing on land, in the sea, and in the air. Clearly, human economic activity, and the associated environmental destruction of the Earth's biosphere as a result of economic growth, does present a powerful challenge to the importance of economic growth.



Figure 7.6: Endless economic growth necessitates endless production. At the expense of rich, biodiverse, rain forest human beings burn and clear cut the forest in order expand agricultural capacity. (Credit: Jami Dwyer, Wikimedia, Public Domain)

Given the above-stated considerations, going forward humanity must consider the possibility of orienting its economic activity within the context of limits. The direction of orthodox economics, as guided by its definition, is not, however, oriented toward accepting limits.

Some critics of the standard orthodox environmental resource economics arguments, through their application and advocacy for ecological economics, have sought to re-orient the relationship between the economy and the environment. Whereas orthodox

economics views the natural environment as an external factor that may be impacted by economic activity, *ecological economists* place the economy in a subordinate role to the natural environment.

Ecological economics generally tends to support the notion that the natural environment must be nurtured and protected, as, without it, an economy and human life cannot function. As such ecological economics has a more cautious perspective regarding economic activity and how it impacts the natural environment. As a result, standard orthodox economic concepts such as endless economic growth and want fulfillment are of secondary importance to long term sustained living made possible through the protection of the natural environment. As such, ecological economics operates outside of the orthodox definition of economics.

Given the problems associated with the orthodox definition of economics, a concerned student may be apt to ask, what does an alternative definition of economics look like? The answer to this question is that there are many possible alternative definitional variations.

The structure of an alternative definition of economics can take many forms, although the overall essence of alternative definitions is frequently similar. With regard to structure, some alternative definitions are apt to simplify economic activity to its most basic form. For example, economics can be the study of how human beings must work together, and with nature, to produce those things that fulfill the material needs and wants of society. In other instances alternative definitions of economics seek to reduce the definition to the essential characteristics of an economy.

For example, economics can be defined as the study of how human beings organize production, distribution, and consumption. Still in other instances alternative definitions of economics focus on interdisciplinary facets of the structure of economic decision making. For instance, economics can be defined as the study of how cultural norms, social institutions, political structures, and general decision making processes influence human behavior toward economic ends.

Importantly, each of the possible definitional structures stipulated above appear to avoid the pitfalls that plague the orthodox definition of economics. First, none of the above alternative definitional possibilities assumes scarcity. Rather, each definition is open to the possibility of differing forms of economic organization and a diversity of ways to meet societal needs and wants. Second, none of the above alternative definitional structures make unprovable assumptions about individual human behavior and motivation. Rather, the social elements of the organization of economic activity are emphasized, opening the door to analyzing how individuals respond to social conditions. Third, none of the above alternative definitional structures predicates endless want and the need and desirability for endless economic growth. Rather, each is open to the possibility of alternative economic structures that can be coordinated to operate within the limits of the natural biosphere.

This lead to another definition of economics for your consideration: Economics is the study of social provisioning, in which an understanding of the development of political economies is rooted in social, political, natural, and cultural processes.

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8: Psychology

1) Psychology – What and Why

Psychology is the scientific study of mind and behavior.

Psychologists study the behavior of both humans and animals. The main purpose of this research is to help us understand people and to improve the quality of human lives. Psychological research is used in a range of important areas, from public policy to driver safety. It guides court rulings with respect to racism and sexism. Psychological research helps us understand how driver behavior affects safety, which methods of educating children are most effective, how to best detect deception, and the causes of terrorism.

Using the methods and tools of science, psychologists have challenged assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma. Founded in 1936, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) has supported research and action on a wide range of social issues. Individually, there have been many psychologists whose efforts have promoted social change.

Helen Thompson Woolley (1874–1947) and Leta S. Hollingworth (1886–1939) were pioneers in research on the psychology of sex differences. Working in the early 20th century, when women's rights were marginalized, Thompson examined the assumption that women were overemotional compared to men and found that emotion did not influence women's decisions any more than it did men's. Hollingworth found that menstruation did not negatively impact women's cognitive or motor abilities. Such work combatted harmful stereotypes and showed that psychological research could contribute to social change (Scarborough & Furumoto, 1987).

In 1957, psychologist Evelyn Hooker (1907–1996) published the paper “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual,” reporting on her research that showed no significant differences in psychological adjustment between homosexual and heterosexual men. Her research helped to de-pathologize homosexuality and contributed to the decision by the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1973 (Garnets & Kimmel, 2003).

In psychology, greater advocacy for issues impacting the African American community were advanced by the creation of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) in 1968.

Psychological science is useful for creating interventions that help people live better lives. A growing body of research is concerned with determining which therapies are the most and least effective for the treatment of psychological disorders.



Figure 8.1: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has shown to be effective in treating a variety of conditions, including depression.[Image: SalFalco, [SalFalco](#) [goo.gl], CC BY-NC 2.0, [CC BY-NC 2.0](#) [goo.gl]]

In organizational psychology, a number of psychological interventions have been found by researchers to produce greater productivity and satisfaction in the workplace. Human factor engineers have greatly increased the safety and utility of the products we use. For example, the human factors psychologist Alphonse Chapanis and other researchers redesigned the cockpit controls of aircraft to make them less confusing and easier to respond to, and this led to a decrease in pilot errors and crashes.

Forensic sciences have made courtroom decisions more valid. We all know of the famous cases of imprisoned persons who have been exonerated because of DNA evidence. Equally dramatic cases hinge on psychological findings. For instance, psychologist Elizabeth Loftus has conducted research demonstrating the limits and unreliability of eyewitness testimony and memory. Thus, psychological findings are having practical importance in the world outside the laboratory. Psychological science has experienced enough success to demonstrate that it works, but there remains a huge amount yet to be learned.

2) Psychology and Non-Science

Of all of the sciences, psychology is probably the one that most non-scientists feel they know the most about. Because psychology is concerned with people and why they do what they do, we are all “intuitive” or “naïve” psychologists. We rely on common sense, experience, and intuition in understanding why people do what they do. We all have an interest in asking and answering questions about our world, and in making sense of ourselves and other people.

The Problem of Intuition

The problem, however, with the way people collect and interpret data in their everyday lives is that they are not always particularly thorough. Often, when one explanation for an event seems “right,” we adopt that explanation as the truth even when other explanations are possible and potentially more accurate. For example, people may become convinced of the existence of extrasensory perception (ESP), or the predictive value of astrology, when there is no evidence for either (Gilovich, 1993). Psychologists have also found that there are a variety of cognitive and motivational biases that frequently influence our perceptions and lead us to draw erroneous conclusions (Fiske & Taylor, 2007; Hsee & Hastie, 2006).

The basic problem with “intuitive” psychology is that people don’t think scientifically. We accept explanations for events without testing them thoroughly and we make many predictable sorts of errors when we try to draw conclusions about our everyday observations. Personal observations, even if accurate, are also not representative of the general population. *Anecdotal evidence* – derived from personal experience and unsystematic observations (e. g., “common sense,”) – is limited by the quality and representativeness of observations, and by memory shortcomings. Well-designed research, on the other hand, relies on observations that are systematically recorded, of high quality, and representative of the population it claims to describe.

There are then various pitfalls associated with *naïve (or intuitive) psychology* – that is, the search for explanations about human behavior and mental processes without the benefit of scientifically gathered evidence.

The following sections outline a few important biases and errors in people’s thinking. A *bias* is a specific tendency, a consistent way of thinking, seeing, believing, or acting. One important source of bias is one’s personal experiences and background. If a bias is applied consistently, eventually it will lead to an error.

So with that in mind, here are a few important types of biases and errors in reasoning:

Statistical reasoning errors. There are many situations in which we try to make some judgment about the frequency or likelihood of something. For example, if we see a man running down the hall at school, we might need to judge how likely it is that he is being chased or fleeing some catastrophe. This is essentially what statisticians do, but, unlike naïve psychologists, they base their conclusions about likelihood on much more data and on the laws of probability. Statistical reasoning errors are poor judgments about likelihoods. Largely because we do not have the time or ability to calculate probabilities in our heads, we use shortcuts when trying to judge likelihood, which leads to many important errors.

Attribution errors. We also tend to make errors in the types of explanations that we come up with for people’s behavior. These are attribution errors. For example, many people are very likely to explain someone’s behavior by attributing it to internal causes—that is, something about the person’s disposition or personality. So, observing someone running through the halls yelling, we are more likely to assume that he is a rude and obnoxious person and less likely to assume that some situational factor, such as an emergency, is responsible.

Overconfidence errors. Making matters worse, we have a set of biases that lead us to think that we are correct more often than we actually are. Some of these are *hindsight bias*, *confirmation bias*, and *false consensus effect*:

Hindsight bias. Once an event has happened, it seems to have been inevitable, and people misremember and believe that they could have predicted the event (Fischhoff, 1982; Lilienfeld, 2012). This has been called the hindsight bias, or the “I knew it all along” bias. For example, on many autumn Monday mornings, football fans across the US engage in what is known as “Monday morning quarterbacking.” Fans complain about the interception that the quarterback for their favorite team threw: “It was obvious that the cornerback was going to blitz; why didn’t he just throw the ball out of bounds?” But the event was not inevitable, it could not have been predicted, and had the fans been questioned before the interception actually occurred, they would not have “known it all along.”

Hindsight bias also works powerfully to make people believe that much research is unnecessary. When told that researchers have made some discovery, many people's response is "I knew that; who needed to do research to find that out?" When people find themselves thinking, "I knew that already!" as a result of the hindsight bias, they often turn out to be overconfident about their beliefs as well.

Confirmation bias. People have a tendency to notice information that confirms what they already believe. It works this way: At some point you may have picked up the belief that older men wearing hats are the worst drivers. Now every time you see an example that confirms that belief—for example, a 70-year-old man in a bowler straddling two lanes while driving 15 miles per hour under the speed limit—you make a mental note of it. "Oh, there is another old man in a hat. They should not be allowed to drive!" The flip side of confirmation bias is that we fail to notice information that disconfirms our belief. So, we might not pay attention to the 18-year old who is driving the Mustang that crossed the yellow line and narrowly avoided a truck trying to pass the older man in the hat.

The confirmation bias is very common in many different situations. For example, people suffering from insomnia may incorrectly recall that they sleep less than they actually do, in part because of the confirmation bias (Harvey and Tang, 2012). The confirmation bias is a particularly dangerous one because it often directly leads us to draw the wrong conclusion while it is simultaneously increasing our confidence in that wrong conclusion.

By the way, according to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, males between 16 and 20 years old have the highest rate of involvement in automobile accidents. Females in the same age group are in second place. There were no data on older men in hats.

False consensus. False consensus is the tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people agree with us. In essence, we tend to think our point of view is more common than it actually is, failing to consider that other people might not see things the same way.

In 2003, approximately 100 General Psychology students were asked to rate their degree of support for the U.S. war with Iraq, which was then near its peak. Then we asked them to estimate how many of their fellow students gave the same rating—that is, how many agreed with them. Ninety percent of the students believed that more people agreed with them than actually did, a very strong false consensus effect (Gray, 2003). Again, this error contributes to our overconfidence and to our belief that research is not necessary. It is all too tempting to believe that we have learned the truth about the whole world by observing ourselves and our small part of the world. Research is important because it helps us find out objectively how common or uncommon our personal beliefs may be.

So between statistical errors, attribution errors, and overconfidence errors, if you see a man running down the hall, not only is there a pretty good likelihood that you will make the wrong judgment about him, there is also a pretty good likelihood that you will be nearly sure that your wrong judgment is correct.

People are bombarded with psychological information from the popular media and other non-academic sources—newspaper and magazine reports, or Facebook posts that summarize some new finding, commercial websites touting some remarkable relationship-saving communication strategy, psychological claims made by "experts" on television and YouTube, claims made by friends and acquaintances during conversations, and so on. It is important that you learn how to make sense of these claims and to evaluate them.

The basic principles of scientific thinking and time-tested research methods and statistical techniques will help you sort out the good from the bad, the sense from the nonsense.

You can use the suggestions from this section as a way to guide you when considering popular psychological information. If the popular claims that you are evaluating do not pass the tests suggested by the following seven tips, you should be very cautious. It might be time for you to take a deep breath and begin wading through the scientific literature to find more authoritative information.

Tip # 1. Be aware of your pre-conceived ideas

If you think about the confirmation bias for a minute, you might realize something important about it. If we go through life typically paying attention only to information that confirms what we already believe, it might be remarkably difficult to change our minds. Indeed, researchers have demonstrated that this is exactly what happens. It is called *belief perseverance* (the tendency to

hold onto beliefs even in the face of contradictory evidence), and it is very common. People sometimes even refuse to change their minds when their beliefs are proven completely wrong (Anderson, 2008; Ross, Lepper, and Hubbard, 1975). As you might realize, the ability to critically challenge your own beliefs is one of the most important thinking skills you can develop. The reason is simple; no one is always right.

One of the greatest dangers we face when evaluating psychological claims, then, is that we tend to be very uncritical about the information that we already believe. Many people have very little interest in and devote very little effort into proving themselves wrong (Browne & Keeley, 2009). If we happen to be wrong, though, we will never find out. If your goal is to find the truth, sometimes you have to admit that your pre-conceived ideas were wrong.

Tip #2. Who is the source?

Although an advanced degree in psychology from a reputable university is certainly not a guarantee that a claim will be correct, the lack of such a degree is a cause for caution. A person who makes psychological claims should be qualified to make those claims. Dr. Laura Schlessinger, for example, is the author of several bestselling books that dispense psychological information, as well as the host of a national call-in radio advice program. She bills herself as America's #1 Relationship Talk Show Host. One problem: Her Ph.D. is in physiology, not psychology. (Physiology is the study of how the human body works.) It seems a bit misleading to dispense psychological information as a "Dr." in physiology.

How about Dr. John Gray, the author of the successful Mars and Venus books? According to his website, MarsVenus.com, the original book in the series, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, has sold more than 15 million copies, and Dr. Gray is the "best-selling relationship author of all time." John Gray does indeed have a Ph.D. in psychology, so he may appear qualified. His degree, however, is from Columbia Pacific University, a school that was ordered by the state of California in 1999 to cease operations because it had been granting Ph.D. degrees to people for very low-quality work.

Organizations can also sometimes deceive us about their true origins and purpose. Have you ever heard of the American College of Pediatricians? According to their website they are an organization of pediatricians (and other healthcare professionals). It was established in 2002 and now has members across the US and in other countries. Sounds like it might be reliable, right? But if you Google them, you might find out that the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled the American College of Pediatricians a hate group. You also might find out that others refer to it as a fringe group of pediatricians with an obvious ideological bias. This doesn't mean a quick Google exercise has definitely unmasked this group as a fraud. But there's certainly have quite a bit more to think about before you automatically accept their information.

When you are faced with the problem of trying to figure out if an individual or group is legitimate, do what fact-checkers do. Do not simply read the "About" section of a website. Do an independent investigation of the person's (or organization's) background, experience, or credentials. You don't have to hire a private detective; just do a bit of a Google search. All we are trying to do is get a sense for someone's background and whether or not they are associated with any controversies. An informal search like this will work quite well for those purposes.

Tip # 3: What is the purpose of the information?

This one might seem obvious, and sometimes it is. When the first thing you see on a website is a Buy Here or Shop Now button, you know that they want to sell you something. Sometimes it is not so obvious, though. A common persuasion technique is to disguise an attempt to persuade as simply supplying information. For example, financial advisors who work on commission often try to sell annuities or other financial products by sponsoring free educational seminars or by publishing "informational booklets" about financial products in general. Other common hidden purposes in "supplying information" include political agendas and obtaining personal information about users for marketing purposes (cough-cough, Facebook).

Tip #4. Is it based on research?

This next tip is critically important. There is only one reason you are allowed to say that something is true in psychology. And that reason is that someone did the research. Not just one someone, but lots of someones. That is what it means to be a scientific discipline. We cannot rely on casual observation or opinion, even expert opinion. We must only draw conclusions when they are warranted by careful research conducted by a number of different researchers.

And this certainly applies to the psychological information to which you are exposed on a regular basis outside of the confines of this course. Consider self-help, for example. Self-help is an enormous industry. There are many excellent self-help resources. Unfortunately, however, there are also many that are, well, not so excellent. The fact that a book has been published, for example, says only that the publisher believes that it will sell; sadly, it says nothing about the quality of the information.

How do you tell the good from the poor resources, then? The task involves several of the tips we have given in this section and more. Pay attention to the qualifications of the author. Look for signs that the author is oversimplifying (Tip #5 below) or relying on persuasion tricks (Tip #7).

Most importantly, does the resource have a good grounding in scientific research? Is there a section somewhere prominent that lists the studies cited in the resource? Are the studies from scientific psychological journals, such as *The Journal of Personality* and *Social Psychology* and *Health Psychology*? Is the underlying research described in the resource itself? Have the authors conducted any of the research themselves? If the answer to most or all of these research questions is no, we would be very cautious about accepting the claims in the resource.

Tip # 5. Beware of oversimplifications

Descriptions of psychological concepts intended for the public must simplify (for that matter, so, too, must undergraduate textbooks). If they presented the information in as much detail as one typically finds in a scientific journal, very few people would ever pay attention, even if they could understand the information (scientific journal articles are notoriously difficult to read because they are typically written for an audience of Ph.D.-level psychologists). So simplification is acceptable, often even necessary. But oversimplification is simplification that goes too far and ends up distorting or misrepresenting the original information.

An expert can usually recognize oversimplification, but how can a non-expert? It would seem that you would need to know the complicated version of the information in order to know if it is being distorted when simplified. To help you recognize oversimplification, you should get in the habit of looking for the common clues that it is occurring. For one thing, there are very few absolutes (such as none, never, always) in psychology. If someone tells you that something is always true, it is a good bet that they are oversimplifying.

Also, be very careful when people make sweeping generalizations that seemingly apply to everyone. These are called *overgeneralizations*, incorrectly concluding that some fact or research finding that is true of one group is also automatically true of a larger or different group.

For example, a headline on an internet site a few years ago trumpeted “This Food Makes Men Aggressive,” a statement that certainly sounds like a sweeping generalization. The article cautioned readers about the potential dangers of eating soy burgers because research had discovered a link between soy and aggression. The actual research, published in the journal *Hormones and Behavior*, reported that monkeys that were fed a diet high in soy isoflavones (125 mg daily) were more aggressive than monkeys fed no isoflavones (Simon et al., 2004). A typical soy burger has 7 mg of soy isoflavones (Heneman et al., 2007). So unless you are eating 18 of them per day and are as small as an average monkey, we recommend waiting before throwing away that package of soy burgers in the freezer.

We call this specific kind of oversimplification *the headline effect*, distorting some research results by creating a very short headline-like summary. Keep in mind, the headline effect does not happen every time someone uses a short summary; it only comes into play when that headline-like summary distorts or hides some important aspects of the larger story.

Another clue that someone may be oversimplifying is when a potential explanation is presented as a strict either/or possibility, as in other words, as resulting from one cause to the exclusion of all others. This type of oversimplification is called creating a *false dichotomy* or *false choice*. For example, the popular media might report that some new research has uncovered a genetic component for personality, implying that environment, therefore, has no influence on personality. In other words, personality is presented as the product of either nature or nurture. Psychological phenomena however appear to be a combination of biological and environmental influences. Few things in psychology have only one cause or explanation. Any report that emphasizes one explanation to the exclusion of everything else is probably oversimplifying.

Tip # 6. Beware of distortions of the research process

Controversies

Science is, by nature, uncertain. For very long periods of time, some theory or claim may be quite controversial, with large groups of psychologists standing on both sides of the issue.

When psychological claims are presented in the media, however, they often skip the disclaimer that not all psychologists agree with the claim, or that the results of a specific study only represent a snapshot: one piece of information at one point in time. An honest and complete view acknowledges that progress in psychological knowledge is more of a back-and-forth process than a straight line and that individual results must be put into the context of all of the research that preceded it (science is self-correcting over time).

More dramatically, the media can sometimes present the opinions of a very small number of scientists (sometimes as few as one) as if they represent the existence of a legitimate scientific controversy. For example, in April 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 quarantine in the United States, two urgent care doctors, Dan Erickson and Artin Massihi, recorded a series of videos on YouTube that asserted (among other things), that the shelter-in-place orders had little to no effect on the spread of the coronavirus. Somehow, they and the millions of supporters of their videos seemed to think that the doctors' conclusions were more valid than the conclusions of the World Health Organization, the Center for Disease Control, and highly credentialed epidemiologists throughout the world.

This can be thought of as *the myth of two equal sides*. Although it is true that there are usually two sides to a story, it does not mean that the two sides are equally good. Two doctors who treat patients in an urgent care facility on one side do not form an equal counterweight to the entire scientific discipline of epidemiology and the most prestigious health organizations in the world. The very strong scientific consensus is that sheltering in place led to a very substantial slowing of the spread of the virus, probably saving millions of lives by largely preventing the overloading of hospitals. In this case, as sometimes happens, supporters began to treat the doctors as if they were some kind of martyrs, shunned and censored because they dared to challenge the accepted wisdom. But as science historian Michael Shermer (2002) has pointed out, you do not get to be a martyr simply by being shunned by establishment science; you must also be correct.

Spurious correlations

As has already been mentioned in this text, just because two things are associated, it does not mean that one thing caused the other one. If you want to find out if the correlation between the two things DOES actually mean one caused the other, you have the ideal research design available to you: experiments. The experimental research design allows causal conclusions precisely because the researcher manipulates one variable and measures the other variable while holding other variables constant to rule out alternative explanations.

Remember, correlation is not causation! Just because two things happen together does not mean one causes the other.

Tip #7. Beware of persuasion tricks

Do you believe that advertising does not affect you? If you said yes, well, that is exactly what they want you to believe. Seriously. In 2019, Facebook earned \$70 *billion* from advertising (this was even after their well-publicized mishaps handling people's private information became public). And Facebook is only one company. There is a simple reason why companies earn incredible amounts of money from advertising. It works. Let's consider some of those techniques here.

Testimonials

A *testimonial* is a report on the quality or effectiveness of some treatment, book, or product by an actual user. For example, diet ads often use testimonials to demonstrate the effectiveness of their plan. It is a persuasive technique because presumably the person giving the testimonial is someone just like you, an unpaid consumer who happened to be so impressed by the performance of the product that they just could not help but thank the company. It can also be persuasive if a celebrity we like sing the praises of the product.

Some testimonials are clearly contrived. But even honest testimonials present a problem: Each testimonial is useful for describing the experiences of one single person only. The individual in question might not be all that typical or all that much like you. Buried in the small print, diet ads may tell you that the "results are not typical." Just because one person lost 75 pounds by eating only the crusts of white bread, it does not mean that everyone, or even most people, will see similar benefits. In terms of the principles of science, a testimonial is not based on rigorous observations, and one person's experience might not be repeatable.

The remainder of the strategies have been adapted from Robert Cialdini's book, *Influence: Science and Practice* (2008).

Reciprocation

Reciprocation might be a universal human norm. In other words in every (or nearly every) culture in the world people are expected to return kindness with kindness. If someone does a favor for you, you are expected to return the favor.

And this kindness to be reciprocated can take many forms. Think about the free samples that grocery stores hand out. They are not only there to allow you to discover what the food taste like. They are a small gift given to you by a pleasant person. The expectation is that you will repay this kindness with a purchase. When a company or charity sends you an unsolicited "free gift" in the mail, they expect you may return that kindness with a purchase or donation. When a website offers you valuable free information (for example, a "white paper" about investment strategies), they intend for this kindness to be repaid by becoming a client. For a large commitment like that however, reciprocation alone is often not enough. That is why they will often use some of these additional strategies.

Commitment and Consistency (Foot-in-the-Door)

People like to appear consistent. So if you get someone to make a commitment, you can use this consistency desire to gradually get them to commit more and more. This technique, *commitment and consistency*, is also known as the *foot-in-the-door technique*, as the initial goal is to get a very small commitment (that is the foot-in-the-door part). Once that is achieved, the persuader will gradually escalate the commitments asked for. For example, a canvasser knocks on the door and asks the resident to sign a petition in favor of some social cause. After a couple more commitments (for example, asking which neighbors are also likely to sign the petition), the canvasser springs the real ask: a donation to support the organization spearheading the effort.

Reject Then Retreat (Door-in-the-Face)

After a demonstration with a potential customer a vacuum cleaner salesperson announces that the price of the vacuum cleaner is \$2000. The customer is aghast! That is way too much money! "Well, let me call my manager, and see what I can do," is the reply. Minutes later, the customer is offered the sale price that is going to be offered next week: \$1000. But the salesperson never expected to get \$2000 (of course, they wouldn't turn it down if the customer accepted the price though!). Rather it was the *reject then retreat technique*: come in with an outrageous opening offer that is expected to be rejected. Then, "give in" and offer what seems like a much more reasonable price. It is like the teenager asking his parents to spend the night in Chicago, knowing that his parents will say no, so he can "settle" for spending the night with his friend across town.

Social Proof

We decide what to do by looking at what others do, or did, in a similar situation. So when advertisements tell us that a particular brand of car, soft drink, or laundry soap is the best-selling brand they are using social proof. Other people bought it, so you should too.

Scarcity

The fact that an item is *scarce* seems to make it desirable and persuaders have found a way to manipulate this to their benefit. Now, we admit this could be completely innocent, but doesn't seem a bit odd that Apple never seems to make enough iPhones when they launch a new model (or, if you like, substitute Nintendo, Sony, Tesla, and any other of the countless companies that somehow can't seem to make enough of their products). Even simple matters like putting a limit on the number of items you are allowed to purchase or telling a consumer that "there are only 3 left!" makes the product seem scarce and increases sales.

Many of these techniques work, in part, because people often go through life on automatic pilot, so to speak. We operate on routine and habit without much thought. Ellen Langer (1992) called it *mindlessness*. When we are operating mindlessly, we are prone to respond to what Cialdini called *trigger features*, environmental cues that lead a specific response without much thought.

For example, when meeting an acquaintance in the hall who says, "Hi, how are you?" many people reply without thinking, almost reflexively, "Fine thanks, how are you?" In this case, the phrase (hi, how are you) is the trigger feature. If you think about it, you can probably recognize many such nearly automatic responses to common trigger features (for example, reaching for your phone when someone else's makes a noise, taking out your notebook when you see your professor enter the room, and so on).

There is no question that a savvy persuader can take advantage of this mindless responding to trigger features. For example, some companies produce private-label store brands that resemble name-brand products, apparently hoping that consumers will respond to the approximate appearance and pick up the look-alike.

Psychology and Science

All psychologists have one thing in common: rather than using intuition or “common sense” or anecdote, they rely on scientific methods. They use empirical methods to collect, analyze, and interpret data. They collaborate and subject their findings to peer review. Research psychologists use scientific methods to create new knowledge about the causes of behavior, and psychologist-practitioners, such as clinical, counselling, industrial-organizational, and school psychologists, use existing research to enhance the everyday life of others. The science of psychology is important for both researchers and practitioners.

Although scientific procedures do not necessarily guarantee that the answers to questions will be objective and unbiased, science is still the best method for drawing objective conclusions about the world around us. When old facts are discarded, they are replaced with new facts based on new and correct data. Although science is not perfect, the requirements of empiricism and objectivity result in a much greater chance of producing an accurate understanding of human behavior than is available through other approaches.

Levels of Explanation in Psychology

The study of psychology spans many different topics at many different levels of explanation. Lower levels of explanation are more closely tied to biological influences, such as genes, neurons, neurotransmitters, and hormones, whereas the middle levels of explanation refer to the abilities and characteristics of individual people, and the highest levels of explanation relate to social groups, organizations, and cultures (Cacioppo, Berntson, Sheridan, & McClintock, 2000).

The same topic can be studied within psychology at different levels of explanation. For instance, the psychological disorder known as depression affects millions of people worldwide and is known to be caused by biological, social, and cultural factors. Studying and helping alleviate depression can be accomplished at low levels of explanation by investigating how chemicals in the brain influence the experience of depression. This approach has allowed psychologists to develop and prescribe drugs, such as Prozac, which may decrease depression in many individuals (Williams, Simpson, Simpson, & Nahas, 2009).

At the middle levels of explanation, psychological therapy is directed at helping individuals cope with negative life experiences that may cause depression. At the highest level, psychologists study differences in the prevalence of depression between men and women and across cultures. The occurrence of psychological disorders, including depression, is substantially higher for women than for men, and it is also higher in Western cultures, such as in Canada, the United States, and Europe, than in Eastern cultures, such as in India, China, and Japan (Chen, Wang, Poland, & Lin, 2009; Seedat et al., 2009). These sex and cultural differences provide insight into the factors that cause depression.

The study of depression in psychology helps remind us that no one level of explanation can explain everything. All levels of explanation, from biological to personal to cultural, are essential for a better understanding of human behavior.

Research Methods

There are many research methods available to psychologists in their efforts to understand, describe, and explain behavior and the cognitive and biological processes that underlie it.

Naturalistic Observation

If you want to understand how behavior occurs, one of the best ways to gain information is to simply observe the behavior in its natural context. However, people might change their behavior in unexpected ways if they know they are being observed. How do researchers obtain accurate information when people tend to hide their natural behavior? As an example, imagine that your professor asks everyone in your class to raise their hand if they always wash their hands after using the restroom. Chances are that almost everyone in the classroom will raise their hand, but do you think hand washing after every trip to the restroom is really that universal?

This is very similar to the phenomenon mentioned earlier: many individuals do not feel comfortable answering a question honestly. But if we are committed to finding out the facts about hand washing, we have other options available to us.

Suppose we send a classmate into the restroom to actually watch whether everyone washes their hands after using the restroom. Will our observer blend into the restroom environment by wearing a white lab coat, sitting with a clipboard, and staring at the sinks? We want our researcher to be inconspicuous—perhaps standing at one of the sinks pretending to put in contact lenses while secretly recording the relevant information. This type of observational study is called naturalistic observation: observing behavior in its natural setting.

It is critical that the observer be as unobtrusive and as inconspicuous as possible: when people know they are being watched, they are less likely to behave naturally. If you have any doubt about this, ask yourself how your driving behavior might differ in two situations: In the first situation, you are driving down a deserted highway during the middle of the day; in the second situation, you are being followed by a police car down the same deserted highway.



Figure 8.2: Seeing a police car behind you would probably affect your driving behavior. (credit: Michael Gil)

It should be pointed out that naturalistic observation is not limited to research involving humans. Indeed, some of the best-known examples of naturalistic observation involve researchers going into the field to observe various kinds of animals in their own environments. As with human studies, the researchers maintain their distance and avoid interfering with the animal subjects so as not to influence their natural behaviors. Scientists have used this technique to study social hierarchies and interactions among animals ranging from ground squirrels to gorillas. The information provided by these studies is invaluable in understanding how those animals organize socially and communicate with one another. The anthropologist Jane Goodall, for example, spent nearly five decades observing the behavior of chimpanzees in Africa



Figure 8.3: Jane Goodall made a career of conducting naturalistic observations of chimpanzee behavior. (credit “Jane Goodall”: modification of work by Erik Hersman; “chimpanzee”: modification of work by “Afrika Force”/Flickr.com)

The greatest benefit of naturalistic observation is the validity, or accuracy, of information collected unobtrusively in a natural setting. Having individuals behave as they normally would in a given situation means that we have a higher degree of ecological validity, or realism, than we might achieve with other research approaches. Therefore, our ability to generalize the findings of the research to real-world situations is enhanced. If done correctly, we need not worry about people or animals modifying their behavior simply because they are being observed. Sometimes, people may assume that reality programs give us a glimpse into authentic human behavior. However, the principle of inconspicuous observation is violated as reality stars are followed by camera crews and are interviewed on camera for personal confessionals. Given that environment, we must doubt how natural and realistic their behaviors are.

The major downside of naturalistic observation is that they are often difficult to set up and control. In our restroom study, what if you stood in the restroom all day prepared to record people’s hand washing behavior and no one came in? Or, what if you have

been closely observing a troop of gorillas for weeks only to find that they migrated to a new place while you were sleeping in your tent? The benefit of realistic data comes at a cost. As a researcher you have no control of when (or if) you have behavior to observe. In addition, this type of observational research often requires significant investments of time, money, and a good dose of luck.

Sometimes studies involve structured observation. In these cases, people are observed while engaging in set, specific tasks. An excellent example of structured observation comes from Strange Situation by Mary Ainsworth. The Strange Situation is a procedure used to evaluate attachment styles that exist between an infant and caregiver. In this scenario, caregivers bring their infants into a room filled with toys. The Strange Situation involves a number of phases, including a stranger coming into the room, the caregiver leaving the room, and the caregiver's return to the room. The infant's behavior is closely monitored at each phase, but it is the behavior of the infant upon being reunited with the caregiver that is most telling in terms of characterizing the infant's attachment style with the caregiver.

Another potential problem in observational research is *observer bias*. Generally, people who act as observers are closely involved in the research project and may unconsciously skew their observations to fit their research goals or expectations. To protect against this type of bias, researchers should have clear criteria established for the types of behaviors recorded and how those behaviors should be classified. In addition, researchers often compare observations of the same event by multiple observers, in order to test inter-rater reliability: a measure of reliability that assesses the consistency of observations by different observers.

Surveys

Often, psychologists develop surveys as a means of gathering data. Surveys are lists of questions to be answered by research participants, and can be delivered as paper-and-pencil questionnaires, administered electronically, or conducted verbally. Generally, the survey itself can be completed in a short time, and the ease of administering a survey makes it easy to collect data from a large number of people.

Surveys allow researchers to gather data from larger samples than may be afforded by other research methods. A sample is a subset of individuals selected from a population, which is the overall group of individuals that the researchers are interested in. Researchers study the sample and seek to generalize their findings to the population through statistical analysis.

Dear Visitor,

Your opinion is important to us.

We would like to invite you to participate in a short survey to gather your opinions and feedback on your news consumption habits.

The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Simply click the "Yes" button below to launch the survey.

Would you like to participate?

YES	NO
------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Figure 8.1: Surveys can be administered in a number of ways, including electronically administered research, like the survey shown here. (credit: Robert Nyman)

There are both pros and cons of a survey in comparison to case studies. By using surveys, we can collect information from a larger sample of people. A larger sample is better able to reflect the actual diversity of the population, thus allowing better generalizability. Therefore, if our sample is sufficiently large and diverse, we can assume that the data we collect from the survey can be generalized to the larger population with more certainty than the information collected through a case study. However, given the greater number of people involved, we are not able to collect the same depth of information on each person that would be collected in a case study.

Another potential weakness of surveys is that people don't always give accurate responses. They may lie, misremember, or answer questions in a way that they think makes them look good. For example, people may report drinking less alcohol than is actually the case.

Archival Research

Some researchers gain access to large amounts of data without interacting with a single research participant. Instead, they use existing records to answer various research questions. This type of research approach is known as *archival research*. Archival research relies on looking at past records or data sets to look for interesting patterns or relationships.

For example, a researcher might access the academic records of all individuals who enrolled in college within the past ten years and calculate how long it took them to complete their degrees, as well as course loads, grades, and extracurricular involvement. Archival research could provide important information about who is most likely to complete their education, and it could help identify important risk factors for struggling students.



Figure 8.1: A researcher doing archival research examines records, whether archived as a (a) hardcopy or (b) electronically. (credit “paper files”: modification of work by “Newtown graffiti”/Flickr; “computer”: modification of work by INPVIC Family/Flickr)

A researcher doing archival research examines records, whether archived as a (a) hardcopy or (b) electronically. (credit “paper files”: modification of work by “Newtown graffiti”/Flickr; “computer”: modification of work by INPVIC Family/Flickr)

In comparing archival research to other research methods, there are several important distinctions. For one, the researcher employing archival research never directly interacts with research participants. Therefore, the investment of time and money to collect data is considerably less with archival research. Additionally, researchers have no control over what information was originally collected. Therefore, research questions have to be tailored so they can be answered within the structure of the existing data sets. There is also no guarantee of consistency between the records from one source to another, which might make comparing and contrasting different data sets problematic.

Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional Research

Sometimes we want to see how people change over time, as in studies of human development and lifespan. When we test the same group of individuals repeatedly over an extended period of time, we are conducting longitudinal research. Longitudinal research is a research design in which data-gathering is administered repeatedly over an extended period of time. For example, we may survey a group of individuals about their dietary habits at age 20, retest them a decade later at age 30, and then again at age 40.

Another approach is cross-sectional research. In cross-sectional research, a researcher compares multiple segments of the population at the same time. Using the dietary habits example above, the researcher might directly compare different groups of people by age. Instead of studying a group of people for 20 years to see how their dietary habits changed from decade to decade, the researcher would study a group of 20-year-old individuals and compare them to a group of 30-year-old individuals and a group of 40-year-old individuals. While cross-sectional research requires a shorter-term investment, it is also limited by differences that exist between the different generations (or cohorts) that have nothing to do with age per se, but rather reflect the social and cultural experiences of different generations of individuals that make them different from one another.

Often longitudinal studies are employed when researching various diseases in an effort to understand particular risk factors. Such studies often involve tens of thousands of individuals who are followed for several decades. Given the enormous number of people involved in these studies, researchers can feel confident that their findings can be generalized to the larger population.

The Cancer Prevention Study-3 (CPS-3) is one of a series of longitudinal studies sponsored by the American Cancer Society aimed at determining predictive risk factors associated with cancer. When participants enter the study, they complete a survey about their lives and family histories, providing information on factors that might cause or prevent the development of cancer. Then every few years the participants receive additional surveys to complete. In the end, hundreds of thousands of participants will be tracked over 20 years to determine which of them develop cancer and which do not.

Clearly, this type of research is important and potentially very informative. For instance, earlier longitudinal studies sponsored by the American Cancer Society provided some of the first scientific demonstrations of the now well-established links between increased rates of cancer and smoking (American Cancer Society, n.d.).

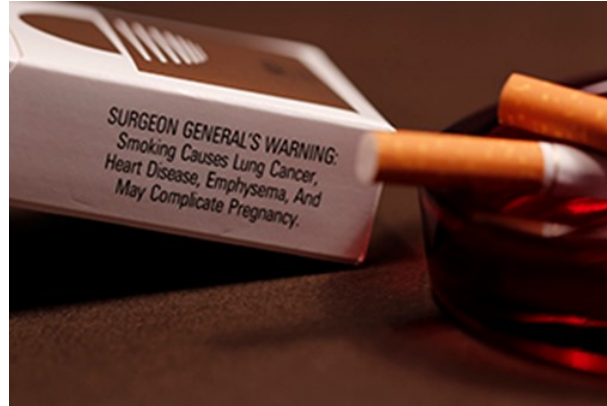


Figure 8.1: Longitudinal research help us to better understand how smoking is associated with cancer and other diseases. (credit: CDC/Debora Cartagena)

As with any research strategy, longitudinal research is not without limitations. For one, these studies require an incredible time investment by the researcher and research participants. Given that some longitudinal studies take years, if not decades, to complete, the results will not be known for a considerable period of time. In addition to the time demands, these studies also require a substantial financial investment. Many researchers are unable to commit the resources necessary to see a longitudinal project through to the end.

Research participants must also be willing to continue their participation for an extended period of time, and this can be problematic. People move, get married and take new names, get ill, and eventually die. Even without significant life changes, some people may simply choose to discontinue their participation in the project. As a result, the attrition rates, or reduction in the number of research participants due to dropouts, in longitudinal studies are quite high and increase over the course of a project. For this reason, researchers using this approach typically recruit many participants fully expecting that a substantial number will drop out before the end. As the study progresses, they continually check whether the sample still represents the larger population, and make adjustments as necessary.

Ethics

Psychology differs somewhat from the natural sciences such as chemistry in that researchers conduct studies with human research participants. Because of this there is a natural tendency to want to guard research participants against potential psychological harm. For example, it might be interesting to see how people handle ridicule but it might not be advisable to ridicule research participants. Scientific psychologists follow a specific set of guidelines for research known as a code of ethics. Following are a few highlights.

1. Informed consent. In general, people should know when they are involved in research, and understand what will happen to them during the study. They should then be given a free choice as to whether to participate.
2. Confidentiality. Information that researchers learn about individual participants should not be made public without the consent of the individual.
3. Privacy. Researchers should not make observations of people in private places such as their bedrooms without their knowledge and consent. Researchers should not seek confidential information from others, such as school authorities, without consent of the participant or his or her guardian.
4. Benefits. Researchers should consider the benefits of their proposed research and weigh these against potential risks to the participants. People who participate in psychological studies should be exposed to risk only if they fully understand these risks and only if the likely benefits clearly outweigh the risks.
5. Deception. Some researchers need to deceive participants in order to hide the true nature of the study. This is typically done to prevent participants from modifying their behavior in unnatural ways. Researchers are required to “debrief” their participants after they have completed the study. Debriefing is an opportunity to educate participants about the true nature of the study.

Unfortunately, the ethical guidelines that exist for research today were not always applied in the past. In 1932, rural, Black men from Tuskegee, Alabama, were recruited to participate in an experiment conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service, with the aim of studying syphilis in Black men. In exchange for free medical care, meals, and burial insurance, 600 men agreed to participate in the study. A little more than half of the men tested positive for syphilis, and they served as the experimental group (given that the researchers could not randomly assign participants to groups, this represents a quasi-experiment). The remaining syphilis-free individuals served as the control group. However, those individuals that tested positive for syphilis were never informed that they had the disease.

While there was no treatment for syphilis when the study began, by 1947 penicillin was recognized as an effective treatment for the disease. Despite this, no penicillin was administered to the participants in this study, and the participants were not allowed to seek treatment at any other facilities if they continued in the study. Over the course of 40 years, many of the participants unknowingly spread syphilis to their wives (and subsequently their children born from their wives) and eventually died because they never received treatment for the disease. This study was discontinued in 1972 when the experiment was discovered by the national press (Tuskegee University, n.d.). The resulting outrage over the experiment led directly to the National Research Act of 1974 and the strict ethical guidelines for research on humans described in this chapter.



Figure 8.1: A participant in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study receives an injection.

A participant in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study receives an injection.

Many psychologists conduct research involving animal subjects. Often, these researchers use rodents or birds as the subjects of their experiments. Because many basic processes in animals are sufficiently similar to those in humans, these animals are acceptable substitutes for research that would be considered unethical in human participants.



Figure 8.1: Rats, like the one shown here, often serve as the subjects of animal research.

This does not mean that animal researchers are immune to ethical concerns. Indeed, the humane and ethical treatment of animal research subjects is a critical aspect of this type of research. Researchers must design their experiments to minimize any pain or distress experienced by animals serving as research subjects.

Whereas IRBs review research proposals that involve human participants, animal experimental proposals are reviewed by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). An IACUC consists of institutional administrators, scientists, veterinarians, and community members. This committee is charged with ensuring that all experimental proposals require the humane treatment of animal research subjects. It also conducts semi-annual inspections of all animal facilities to ensure that the research protocols are being followed. No animal research project can proceed without the committee's approval.

Branches of Psychology

The field of psychology encompasses a wide range of sub-disciplines, each focusing on different aspects of human behavior and mental processes. This section provides an overview of various specialized areas within psychology. These sub-disciplines collectively contribute to our comprehensive understanding of human nature and behavior, and the many ways in which they influence our daily lives. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. It will provide insight into the major areas of research and practice of modern-day psychologists.

Not all of these subfields have existed as long as others. The dominant influence of Western, White, and male academics in the early history of psychology meant that psychology developed with the biases inherent in those individuals, which often had negative consequences for members of society who were not White or male. Women, members of ethnic minorities in both the United States and other countries, and individuals with sexual orientations other than straight had difficulties entering the field of psychology and therefore influencing its development. They also suffered from the attitudes of white male psychologists who were not immune to the nonscientific attitudes prevalent in the society in which they developed and worked.

Until the 1960s, for example few women were able to practice psychology, so they had little influence on what was studied. In addition, the experimental subjects of psychology were mostly men, which resulted from underlying assumptions that gender had no influence on psychology and that women were not of sufficient interest to study.

An article by Naomi Weisstein, first published in 1968 (Weisstein, 1993), stimulated a feminist revolution in psychology by presenting a critique of psychology as a science. She also specifically criticized male psychologists for constructing the psychology of women entirely out of their own cultural biases and without careful experimental tests to verify any of their characterizations of women. Weisstein used, as examples, statements by prominent psychologists in the 1960s, such as this quote by Bruno Bettelheim: "We must start with the realization that, as much as women want to be good scientists or engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers." Weisstein's critique formed the foundation for the subsequent development of a feminist psychology that attempted to be free of the influence of male cultural biases on our knowledge of the psychology of women.

Crawford & Marecek (1989) identify several feminist approaches to psychology that can be described as feminist psychology. These include re-evaluating and discovering the contributions of women to the history of psychology, studying psychological gender differences, and questioning the male bias present across the practice of the scientific approach to knowledge. As you can see from this list, not only feminist but other psychological subfields have also developed that helped make psychology a broader and more scientific discipline.

This list of sub-disciplines of psychology offers us a glimpse into the many ways to explore psychology. Whether it's in examination of individual behaviors, societal influences, biological underpinnings, or the unique challenges of specific environments, each area contributes valuable insights. Together, they form a cohesive understanding that helps us appreciate the complexity of the human mind and behavior in various contexts.

- **Abnormal Psychology:** The study of mental disorders and psychopathology, delving into the causes and treatments of various psychological disorders such as mood, anxiety, and psychotic disorders.
- **Anti-Racism Psychology:** An emerging field, this study focuses on understanding and combating racial prejudice and discrimination.
- **Biopsychology (behavioral neuroscience):** The study of the biological underpinnings of behavior and mental processes, including brain structure, neurotransmitters, and the nervous system, often focusing on neural mechanisms of behavior.
- **Clinical Psychology:** The diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders, using therapeutic interventions to assist individuals in coping with psychological challenges and enhancing well-being.

- **Cognitive Psychology:** The study of mental processes such as perception, memory, biases and problem-solving, and language, that aims to understand how people think, reason, and make decisions.
- **Community Psychology:** The study of the influences that foster positive community change and those that break down communities. This field addresses social justice, poverty, and mental health issues through collaborative strategies for empowerment and social transformation.
- **Comparative Psychology:** The study of the behavior and cognitive processes of non-human animals.
- **Consumer Psychology:** The study of consumer behavior and decision-making processes, which explores the ways in which factors like advertising, branding, and consumer satisfaction influence marketplace choices.
- **Counselling Psychology:** The study of the ways in which therapies support individuals, families, and groups facing personal and emotional challenges, that focuses on improving mental health and well-being.
- **Critical Psychology:** The study of the role of power, privilege, and oppression in psychology, which aims to challenge and change oppressive systems both within psychology and in broader society.
- **Cross-Cultural Psychology:** The comparison of the psychological phenomena across cultures, which aims to identify universal and culture-specific behaviors, and focuses on the ways in which cultural variations influence social behavior and decision-making.
- **Cultural Psychology:** The study of the ways in which cultural beliefs, values, and practices shape thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, which examines the impact of culture on perception, cognition, and social interaction.
- **Cyberpsychology:** The study of the impact of emerging technology, including virtual reality and social media, on human behavior and mental processes.
- **Developmental Psychology:** The study of changes and development across the lifespan, including cognitive and moral development, socialization, and ageing.
- **Educational Psychology:** The study of the psychological processes involved in learning and education, which examines learning theories and the ways in which individuals acquire new behaviors and skills.
- **Engineering Psychology:** The application of psychological principles to enhance the design of technology, equipment, and interfaces for optimal human performance and safety.
- **Environmental Psychology:** The study of the relationship between individuals and their physical environments, which studies the ways in which different settings affect human behavior and well-being.
- **Feminist Psychology:** The study of gender, sexism (sex-based discrimination), and patriarchy and their effects on human development and experiences. This discipline includes advocating for gender equity.
- **Forensic Psychology:** The application of psychological principles to legal and criminal justice systems, which provides expert testimony on psychological factors in legal cases.
- **Gerontology (Psychology of Aging):** The study of the psychological and social aspects of ageing, which explores topics like successful ageing and memory changes.
- **Group Dynamics:** The study of how individuals behave in groups and how group processes affect individual behavior, which examines group cohesion, leadership, and conflict resolution.
- **Health Psychology:** The study of the psychological factors influencing physical health and well-being, which focuses on stress, behavior change, and the mind-body connection.
- **Human Factors Psychology:** The application of psychological principles to designing user-friendly and safe products and systems, considering human abilities and limitations in design and engineering.
- **Indigenous Psychology:** The study of the unique psychological perspectives, practices, and traditions of indigenous communities, which studies their psychological experiences and well-being.
- **Industrial-Organizational Psychology:** The application of psychological principles in the workplace, which addresses employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational behavior.
- **Media Psychology:** the study of the impact of media (e.g., TV, gaming, radio, virtual and augmented reality, etc.) on human behavior and cognition, including the effects of media violence on aggression.
- **Military Psychology:** The study of the mental health and well-being of military personnel and veterans, addressing issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat stress reactions.
- **Motivation and Emotion Psychology:** The study of the factors driving behavior and influencing emotional experiences, which studies motivation theories and emotional regulation.

- Multicultural Psychology: The study of the behavior of individuals in different cultural settings and the ways in which cultural factors influence mental health.
- Music Psychology: The study of the psychological processes involved in music perception and production, and the impact of music on emotions and cognition.
- Neuropsychology: The study of the relationship between brain function and behavior, which assesses cognitive deficits resulting from brain injuries or neurological conditions.
- Personality Psychology: The study of individual differences in personality traits, behaviors, and characteristics, which explores various personality theories and assessment methods.
- Political Psychology: The study of the psychological factors influencing political beliefs, behaviors, and decision-making, which examines political attitudes and voting behavior.
- Positive Psychology: The study of the situations and experiences that promote human strengths, well-being, and happiness, which researches resilience and well-being interventions.
- Psycholinguistics: The study of the development and mechanics of learning and producing language.
- Psychometrics: The development of psychological tests and measurement tools, which ensure that assessments are reliable and valid.
- Rehabilitation Psychology: The application of psychological principles and research evidence to support individuals with disabilities or chronic health conditions, which help them to adapt and improve their quality of life.
- Religious Psychology: The study of the impact of religion and spirituality on mental health and well-being, which explores faith, and religious identity and practices.
- School (Educational) Psychology: The application of psychological principles and research evidence to support students' mental health, academic success, and well-being within educational settings, which focuses on interventions for academic and behavioral challenges.
- Sensation and Perception Psychology: The study of how sensory organs receive and interpret environmental information, which focuses on vision, hearing, and touch perception.
- Social Psychology: The study of how social interactions and group dynamics influence individual behavior and attitudes, which explores topics like prejudice, conformity, and social influence.
- Space Psychology: The study of how astronauts and cosmonauts are psychologically affected by long-duration missions in space travel and environments. This discipline examines factors like isolation, confinement, microgravity, risk, and the effects of a unique and challenging environment on mental health, behavior, and cognitive functioning.
- Sport and Exercise Psychology: The application of psychological and research evidence to support athletes and individuals to enhance performance, motivation, and well-being in sports and physical activity.
- Traffic Psychology: The study of drivers' behaviors and road safety, which works on interventions to promote safe driving and reduce traffic-related accidents.

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9: Introduction to Social Problems and the Issue of Class

1) Introduction - Thinking about Social Problems

Social scientists observe the specific features of society and its organization. These elements include structures, institutions, and role of human agency. Identifying problematic elements in these features then allows us to ponder the question: how should the world look? From question, we may conclude that certain areas of society may need to be re-examined and possibly changed.

One example could be the class structure, where the working class produces profit for the class that owns *the means of production* but benefits from their own work very little. (The means of production are the things you need to produce goods and services, such as factories, machinery, land, commodities, and money.) In other words, workers produce profit, but get a very low percentage of that returned to them in the form of wages and benefits. A solution to this inequitable situation could be to reorganize labor so that those that work receive a fair share of what they have earned.

The job of social scientists is to see past any barriers that prevent positive change and strive for a better world for all. This kind of *blue sky thinking* is what allows societies to progress, by imagining an ideal world without social problems and then endeavoring to get as close as possible.

When seeking to understand and address social problems, an immediate questions emerges for social scientists. What are social problems? The answer to this question depends on how you view the social world, what it means to you, and how you think it could or should be organized differently. It also depends on how the potential problem is represented and framed.

When looking at a social problem, there are six questions you can ask to determine how the problem is represented. Bacchi (2009)

- What's the problem represented to be? (For example, say the "problem" is drug abuse. Is that represented as a problem simply of greater criminal law enforcement, or is it also discussed as a matter of public health, or of social or economic policy?)
- What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem? (Is addiction considered only as stemming from the personal moral failure of the individual addict or as involving greater societal issues such as unemployment or lack of affordable medical care?)
- How has this representation of the problem come about? (Have the media or politicians talked about the problem of drug abuse continually in one way or another? Is scientific evidence one way or the other being presented or is all the talk just for personal or political reasons?)
- What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently? (Does anyone talk about the role of pharmaceutical companies and their aggressive marketing of addictive pain medication as part of the problem, or is that not discussed because it's not being considered as part of the problem? Is the problem of rising addiction in white middle class areas being discussed?)
- What effects are produced by this representation of the problem? (Is policy being made that only goes after "street addicts" as criminals, or does policy address the issue more broadly and therefore possibly more effectively?)
- How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted or replaced? (Has all the talk about this issue come from just a few sources whose views then simply cascaded throughout society? Can that be stopped by encouraging official government or private sector information or scientific education campaigns?)

Another point to consider is that while the media obviously reacts to social issues it can also be active in the creation of social issues. For example,

- media can perpetuate the viewpoint that governments (or others) employ,
- media can leave important information out of its reporting (for example, through active bias on the part of the editor/owner, or through time constraints in getting a story to press), and
- media can have a stake in sensationalizing stories (stories that draw attention or are sensational in nature tend to get more reads and clicks which in turn is good for the profit of the media outlet).

We often rely on other people or institutions such as the media or government to process and select information on our behalf. This means our beliefs are susceptible to being manipulated based on how those people or institutions chose to present information to us

and what information they chose to present and not present. This puts those that process or control information in a position of power.

Good social scientists cast a critical eye over how social issues are framed, either through media or any other way. This helps ensure that all aspects of the issue are examined, all evidence is taken into account, and the best policy decisions can be made.



Figure 9.1: Considering “the frame”

2) Problems of Class

In society, we rank individuals on their wealth, power, and prestige. The calculation of wealth is the addition of one's income and assets minus their debts. Power refers to someone's ability to get others to do their will, regardless of whether those people want to or not. Prestige refers to the reputation or esteem associated with a person's position in society (e.g., if they are educated or not, or in a “prestigious” occupation or not). This social stratification system or ranking creates inequality in society and determines one's social position.

Multiple factors influence social standing, however, people often assume hard work and effort leads to a high status and wealth. Socialization reinforces this idea that social stratification is a result of personal effort or merit (Carl 2013). But while this concept of *meritocracy* says that people occupy the place that they earn through their own effort and skill, no society exists where the determination of social rank is purely on merit.

For example, inheritance alone shows social standing is not always individually earned. Some people have to put little to no effort to inherit social status and wealth. Also, factors such as age, disability, gender, race, and region influence a person's opportunities for obtaining social standing. Another flaw of meritocracy is how society measures social contributions. Janitorial and custodial work is necessary in society to reduce illness and manage waste just as much as surgery is to keep people healthy and alive, but surgeons receive greater rewards than janitors do for their contributions. While some jobs carry a certain amount of respect or esteem or gratitude such as teachers or nurses, they also receive relatively little in terms of pay or power for it.

Each class lifestyle requires a certain level of wealth in order to maintain that lifestyle. A person's standard of living affects their life chances (i.e., opportunities and barriers), which in turn influences their ability to afford food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, other basic needs, and luxury items. Different lifestyles, different standards of living, then affect how much of those needs will be met.

A person's standards of living also effects their cultural identity. People living in impoverished communities have different cultural norms and practices compared to those with middle incomes or families of wealth. For example, the urban poor often sleep on cardboard boxes on the ground or on sidewalks and feed themselves by begging, scavenging, and raiding garbage (Kottak and Kozaitis 2012). Middle income and wealth families tend to sleep in housing structures and nourish themselves with food from supermarkets or restaurants.



Figure 9.2: Man Praying on Sidewalk with Food in Front. (CC BY 4.0; Sergio Omassi).

Language and fashion also vary among these classes because of educational attainment, employment, and income. People will use language like “white trash” or “welfare mom” to marginalize people in the lower class and use distinguished labels to identify the upper class such as “noble” and “elite.” Sometimes people often engage in conspicuous consumption or purchase and use certain products (e.g., buy a luxury car or jewelry) to make a social statement about their status (Henslin 2011). Nonetheless, the experience of poor people is very different in comparison to others in the upper and middle classes and the lives of people within each social class may vary based on their position within other social categories including age, disability, gender, race, region, and religion.

Upper Class

The upper class is at the top of the social hierarchy. In the United States, people with extreme wealth make up one percent of the population, and they own roughly one-third of the country’s wealth according to the Federal Reserve.

Money provides not only access to material goods, but also access to power. As corporate leaders, members of the upper class make decisions that affect the job status of millions of people – from employed at high wage, to employed at low wage, to temporary employment, to unemployment. As media owners of the major network television stations, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses, the upper class has a vast impact on what information people receive and don’t receive and thus on what people believe, which affects their actions both towards themselves and others. As board members of the most influential colleges and universities, they influence cultural attitudes and values in the directions that they favor. As philanthropists, they establish foundations to support social causes they prefer. As campaign contributors and legislation drivers, they sway policymakers towards or against policies and laws that materially affect the lives of millions of people for good or ill.

Sociologists have explored the composition and dynamics of the American elites. American sociologist C. Wright Mills called them the “power elite” (2000). The power elite is the class in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. Mills points to the government, corporations, and the military as the three main institutions in which the elite circulate. As an example, someone who held a high position in the government might go on to serve on the board of a corporation. Someone who was a corporate executive (such as Michael Bloomberg, Mitt Romney, or Donald Trump) might then be elected to a high position in the government. This interconnectedness of the power elite also takes place outside of formal institutions due to overlapping social networks and connected groups.

Mills suggests that the power elite use a particular ideology to justify their position. They promote the belief that they have a finer moral character and that there is something about them that makes them “naturally” elite. In doing so, they downplay the importance of shared experiences and training in reproducing elite statuses. Furthermore, the power elite in the United States tend to deny that they are powerful.

American sociologist G. William Domhoff also studied elites in the United States. He found that they developed separate social institutions to help create social cohesion and mold wealthy people into the upper class (Domhoff 2021). This social cohesion develops from both common membership in specific institutions and friendships based on social interaction within the institutions. Domhoff focuses on education and social clubs as areas where the upper class builds their cohesion and can reproduce itself.

In terms of education, children of the upper class receive a distinctive education that socializes them into their privileged class position. This education starts in preschool and elementary school, with the kids of the upper class going to local private schools. As the children of the upper class get older, there is a strong chance that they will spend a few years away at a boarding school in a rural setting (Cookson and Persell 1985; Khan 2011). In terms of higher education, those from the upper class generally go to a small number of private colleges and universities (Karabel 2006; Stevens 2011). Wealth can also generate nonwork income (such as interest or dividend income) without time spent working, which frees up parental time to be invested in enriching interactions with children (Miller et al., 2021).

Private social clubs also play an important role in the lives of upper-class adults. These clubs are formed around a variety of activities, with many families belonging to several types of clubs in different cities (Domhoff 2021).

Middle Class

Many people consider themselves middle class, but there are differing ideas about what that means. People with annual incomes of \$150,000 call themselves middle class, as do people who annually earn \$30,000. That helps explain why, in the United States, the middle class is broken into upper and lower subcategories.

Lower-middle-class members tend to complete a two-year associate's degree from community or technical colleges or a four-year bachelor's degree. Upper-middle-class people tend to continue to postgraduate degrees. They've studied subjects such as business, management, law, or medicine.



Figure 9.3: How is social class connected to housing? What might you be able to assume about this suburban subdivision in Colorado Springs?

How is social class connected to housing? What might you be able to assume about this suburban subdivision in Colorado Springs?

Middle-class people work hard and live fairly comfortable lives. Upper-middle-class people tend to pursue careers, own their homes, and travel on vacation. Their children receive high-quality education and healthcare. Parents can better support the specialized needs and interests of their children, such as more extensive tutoring, art lessons, and athletic efforts, which can lead to greater social mobility for the next generation. Families within the middle class may have access to some wealth, but they must also work to earn an income to maintain this lifestyle.

In the lower-middle class, people hold jobs supervised by members of the upper-middle class. They fill technical, lower-level management, or administrative support positions. Compared to lower-class work, lower-middle-class jobs carry more prestige and come with slightly higher paychecks. With these incomes, people can afford a decent, mainstream lifestyle, but they struggle to maintain it. They generally don't have enough income to build significant savings. In addition, their class standing is more precarious than those in the upper tiers of the class system. When companies need to save money, lower-middle-class people are often the ones to lose their jobs.

Sociologists have conducted a variety of studies on the middle class. In one influential study, sociologist Michèle Lamont (1992) explored the symbolic boundaries that middle-class men drew to determine who was part of the middle class and who was not. Lamont found that the men drew boundaries based on cultural, socioeconomic, and moral criteria. Focusing on the socioeconomic criteria, she discovered that they associated money with freedom, control, and security. Money provided a certain comfort level that became a symbol and reward of professional success. It also provided cars, homes, and vacations.

The middle-class men also valued membership in prestigious groups and associations, including churches, chambers of commerce, political parties, and alumni associations. All of these organizations provide additional opportunities to meet other middle-class people and build connections with them. Furthermore, belonging to such groups and associations provides information on socioeconomic status, signaling that members have achieved a certain income level and that they've been accepted by the right kinds of people.

The middle class tends to raise their children in a particular way. They engage in what sociologist Annette Lareau calls "concerted cultivation." Concerted cultivation is when parents "deliberately try to stimulate their children's development and foster their cognitive and social skills" (Lareau 2003:5). To accomplish this, middle-class parents encourage their children to become involved in activities outside the home. This leads middle-class children to develop a set of skills and dispositions that help them navigate institutions that value such skills. As a result, the children start developing a sense of *entitlement*, the belief that they deserve these benefits.

Lower or Working Class

The lower class is also referred to as the working class. Just like the middle and upper classes, the lower class can be divided into subsets: the working class, the working poor, and the underclass. Compared to the lower-middle class, people from the lower economic class have less formal education and earn smaller incomes. They work jobs that require less training or experience than middle-class occupations and often do routine tasks under close supervision.

Working-class people, the highest subcategory of the lower class, often land steady jobs. The work is hands-on and often physically demanding, such as landscaping, cooking, cleaning, or building.

Michèle Lamont (2000) also conducted a study looking at the boundaries drawn by working-class men. She found that, unlike men from the middle class, working-class men placed a stronger emphasis on moral boundaries. Emphasizing morality helped the workers maintain a sense of self-worth. The moral boundaries allowed them to affirm their dignity independently of their relatively low social status and to locate themselves above others. Particularly, they drew a line between themselves and the more economically advantaged whom they perceived as less morally pure.

Working-class families tend to engage in the “accomplishment of natural growth” method of child-rearing. In this approach, families provide the basic necessities, which is an accomplishment given the harsh economic conditions they face. Parents assume that their children’s growth will occur naturally. As a result, there is less emphasis placed on participating in after-school activities. Instead, the children engage in child-initiated play with friends and family (Lareau 2003).

While there are benefits to this approach to raising children, our institutions tend to favor middle-class child-rearing techniques. For example, schools tend to expect heavy parental involvement. For working-class kids, this disconnect between their socialization and what institutions expect from them leads to a sense of constraint (Lareau 2003; Calarco 2018).

Working Poor

Beneath the working class is the working poor. They have unskilled, low-paying employment. Their jobs rarely offer benefits such as healthcare or retirement planning, and their positions are often seasonal or temporary. They may work as migrant farm workers, house cleaners, or day laborers. Member education is limited. Some lack a high school diploma.

How can people work full-time and still be poor? Even working full-time, millions of the working poor earn incomes too meager to support a family. The government requires employers to pay a minimum wage that varies from state to state but that wage often leaves individuals and families below the poverty line. In addition to low wages, the value of the minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation. “The real value of the federal minimum wage has dropped 17 percent since 2009 and 31 percent since 1968” (Cooper, Gould, and Zipperer 2019). Furthermore, the living wage, the amount necessary to meet minimum standards, differs across the country because the cost of living differs. Therefore, the amount of income necessary to survive in an area such as New York City differs dramatically from a small town in Oklahoma (Glasmeier 2020).

Models of family stress show that economic strain leads to increased psychological distress and interparental conflict (Miller et al. 2021). Parental distress and conflict are linked to harsher, more detached, and less nurturing, stimulating, and responsive parenting, which in turn predicts worse outcomes for children, such as increased internalizing and externalizing problems and less advanced cognitive and academic skills (Miller et al., 2021).

Much research finds that poor children are at increased risk for behavioral, psychological, and health problems not only during childhood and adolescence but also well into their adult years (Wagmiller & Adelman, 2009). In a type of vicious cycle, children growing up in poor households are at greater risk of continuing to live in poverty after they reach adulthood.



Figure 9.4: Downtown Aspen, Colorado. How does wealth change the dynamics of small towns?

A Closer Look: Wealth and Inequality in the Western United States

Recently, some sociologists explored class disparities in small towns across the Western United States. In his book *Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West* (2020), Justin Farrell examines the class relationships between billionaires/millionaires and working-class people in Jackson, Wyoming. He found that billionaires and millionaires were attracted to Wyoming not only because they wanted to be “closer to nature” and authentic rural communities but also because living in Wyoming offered significant tax breaks. The resulting high concentration of wealthy people created the “richest county in the United States and the county with the nation’s highest level of income inequality” (Farrell 2020:3).

For the billionaires, the natural environment provided “therapeutic” experiences and became the focus of their engagement with the community. Instead of supporting organizations that provided social services, the ultra-wealthy turned their philanthropic efforts toward environmental and arts organizations, or what Farrell calls “gilded green philanthropy.” The billionaires and millionaires adopted some of the fashion of the working class and used working-class people to help navigate the stigma they thought they faced. In contrast, the working class, which was largely Latinx, struggled to get by, especially when it came to finding affordable housing.

Focusing on a similarly wealthy community, Jenny Stuber (2021) explored Aspen, Colorado, in her book *Aspen and the American Dream: How One Town Manages Inequality in the Era of Supergentrification*. In the book, Stuber begins with a contradiction, asking “How is it possible for a town to exist where the median household income is \$73,000, but the median home price is about \$4 million?” (Stuber 2021:1). She found that the unique place-based class culture of Aspen allowed the middle class to survive. In Aspen, its history of progressiveness, a priority on “Keeping Aspen, Aspen,” and an extensive affordable housing program made it possible for middle-class families to continue to live in the community. Families making up to \$300,000 per year were eligible for subsidized housing (Stuber 2021:55). The city used a variety of tax policies to help fund the program and land use codes to help control the growth of the town.

In her book *Dividing Paradise: Rural Inequality and the Diminishing American Dream*, Jennifer Sherman examined a rural valley in Eastern Washington that was close to a variety of natural amenities. While the wealth disparities were not as vast as those in Jackson or Aspen, there still existed a complicated class dynamic. She documented the influx of “newcomers,” who tended to be wealthier and have higher amounts of economic, cultural, and social capital than the existing working-class community, called the “old timers.”

The newcomers felt a sense of community and connected to what was going on in the valley. They also had better access to housing, well-paying jobs, and social support. In contrast, old-timers felt increasingly isolated and struggled to get by. They faced an unstable and unaffordable housing market, while working low-wage and seasonal jobs. The newcomers displayed “class

blindness,” the inability to comprehend how their class advantages worked for them, while blaming the struggles of old timers on their individual characteristics (Sherman 2021:63).

As you reflect on these three studies, what similarities can you identify between the locations? What are some major differences in these places? How might the characteristics of these places contribute to wealth inequality?

Hidden Rules of Class

Could you survive in poverty, middle class, or wealth? In her book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005), Dr. Ruby K Payne presents lists of survival skills needed by different societal classes. Test your skills by answering the following questions:

Could you survive in . . . (mark all that apply)

POVERTY

- ☐ find the best rummage sales.
- ☐ locate grocery stores’ garbage bins that have thrown away food.
- ☐ bail someone out of jail.
- ☐ get a gun, even if I have a police record.
- ☐ keep my clothes from being stolen at the laundromat.
- ☐ sniff out problems in a used car.
- ☐ live without a checking account.
- ☐ manage without electricity and a phone.
- ☐ entertain friends with just my personality and stories.
- ☐ get by when I don’t have money to pay the bills.
- ☐ move in half a day.
- ☐ get and use food stamps.
- ☐ find free medical clinics.
- ☐ get around without a car.
- ☐ use a knife as scissors.

MIDDLE CLASS know how to....

- ☐ get my children into Little League, piano lessons, and soccer.
- ☐ set a table properly.
- ☐ find stores that sell the clothing brands my family wears.
- ☐ use a credit card, checking and /or savings account.
- ☐ evaluate insurance: life, disability, 20/80 medical, homeowners, and personal-property.
- ☐ talk to my children about going to college.
- ☐ get the best interest rate on my car loan.
- ☐ help my children with homework and don’t hesitate to make a call if I need more information.

WEALTH, check if you....

- ☐ can read a menu in French, English and another language.
- ☐ have favorite restaurants in different countries around the world.
- ☐ know how to hire a professional decorator to help decorate your home during the holidays.

- _____ can name your preferred financial advisor, lawyer, designer, hairdresser, or domestic-employment service.
- _____ have at least two homes that are staffed and maintained.
- _____ know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty with domestic staff.
- _____ use two or three “screens” that keep people whom you don’t wish to see away from you
- _____ fly in your own plane, the company plane, or the Concorde.
- _____ know how to enroll your children in the preferred private schools.
- _____ are on the boards of at least two charities.
- _____ know the hidden rules of the Junior League.
- _____ know how to read a corporate balance sheet and analyze your own financial statements.
- _____ support or buy the work of a particular artist.

Advantages of Being Upper Class/Disadvantages of Being Lower Class

Tangible advantages are associated with high socioeconomic status. People in the upper class likely have better access to healthcare, marry people of higher social status, attend more prestigious schools, and are more influential in politics than people in the middle class or working class. People in the upper class are members of elite social networks, effectively meaning that they have access to people in powerful positions who have specialized knowledge. These social networks confer benefits ranging from advantages in seeking education and employment to leniency by police and the courts. The higher up the class hierarchy one is in America, the better health, educational, and professional outcomes one is likely to have. Below are some examples of this.

Health

A person’s social class has a significant impact on their physical health, their ability to receive adequate medical care and nutrition, and their life expectancy. While gender and race play significant roles in explaining healthcare inequality in the United States, socioeconomic status (SES) is the greatest social determinant of an individual’s health outcome. Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status. *Social determinants* are environmental, meaning that they are risk factors found in one’s living and working conditions (including the distribution of income, wealth, influence, and power), rather than individual factors (such as behavioral risk factors or genetics). Social determinants can be used to predict one’s risk of contracting a disease or sustaining an injury, and can also indicate how vulnerable one is to the consequences of a disease or injury. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status have lower levels of overall health, less insurance coverage, and less access to adequate healthcare than those of higher SES.

Individuals with a low SES in the United States experience a wide array of health problems as a result of their economic position. They are unable to use healthcare as often as people of higher status and when they do, it is often of lower quality. Additionally, people with low SES tend to experience a much higher rate of health issues than those of high SES. Many social scientists hypothesize that the higher rate of illness among those with low SES can be attributed to environmental hazards. For example, poorer neighborhoods tend to have fewer grocery stores and more fast food chains than wealthier neighborhoods, increasing nutrition problems and the risk of conditions, such as heart disease. Similarly, poorer neighborhoods tend to have fewer recreational facilities and higher crime rates than wealthier ones, which decreases the feasibility of routine exercise.

In addition to having an increased level of illness, lower socioeconomic classes have lower levels of health insurance than the upper class. Much of this disparity can be explained by the tendency for middle and upper class people to work in professions that provide health insurance benefits to employees, while lower status occupations often do not provide benefits to employees. For many employees who do not have health insurance benefits through their job, the cost of insurance can be prohibitive. Without insurance, or with inadequate insurance, the cost of healthcare can be extremely high. Consequently, many uninsured or poorly insured individuals do not have access to preventative care or quality treatment. This group of people has higher rates of infant mortality, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and disabling physical injuries than are seen among the well insured.

Health inequality refers to the unequal distribution of environmental health hazards and access to health services between demographic groups, including social classes. For example, poor and affluent urban communities in the United States are geographically close to each other and to hospitals. Still, the affluent communities are more likely to have access to fresh produce,

recreational facilities for exercise, preventative healthcare programs, and routine medical visits. Consequently, affluent communities are likely to have better health outcomes than nearby impoverished ones. Affluent communities are also not likely to be located next to undesirable health factors such as landfills, hazardous waste, incinerators, sewage treatment plants, lead smelters, refineries and other noxious facilities. Poor ones are. This in turn has led to the *environmental justice* movement which recognizes that exposure to environmental harm is unequally distributed and seeks to redress the injustice that occurs when poor communities are harmed by hazardous waste, pollution, and other environmental factors.

The role of socioeconomic status in determining health results in health inequality between the upper, middle, and lower or working classes, with the higher classes having more positive health outcomes.



Figure 9.5: Farmers Market: Farmers markets are visible sources of fresh produce and healthy foods. These markets are concentrated in middle to upper income neighborhoods and are not found in food deserts.

Mental Health

Different classes have different levels of access to treatment and encounter different mental health stressors.

Mental health describes a level of psychological well-being or the presence/absence of a mental disorder. From the perspective of “positive psychology” or “holism,” mental health may include an individual’s ability to enjoy life and to demonstrate psychological resilience when confronted with challenges. The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

What counts as healthy enjoyment and resilience depends upon one’s class perspective. Members of different classes encounter different stressors—lower class people face more financial stress in terms of meeting basic day to day needs – food, rent, clothes, medicine, school fees, transportation, etc. Upper class people might experience stress from the social pressures associated with elite circles. The evaluation of which mental states can be considered healthy and which require medical intervention also varies by class.

Definitions of mental health depend on cultural understandings in addition to biological and neurological findings. Members of different social classes often hold different views on mental health. Different social classes also have different levels of access to mental health interventions and to information about mental health. Thus, the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders varies widely by social class.

Due to less access to primary and secondary mental health care people from lower social classes appear to access treatment later than those of the upper class, experiencing crisis level intervention such as inpatient admission more often than people from higher social classes, who have more frequent contact with primary and secondary care providers such as GPs and counselling services. People in the lower class also may not receive the same type of care, for example, being more frequently treated with drugs rather than non-medication approaches. (Barnett et al 2022)

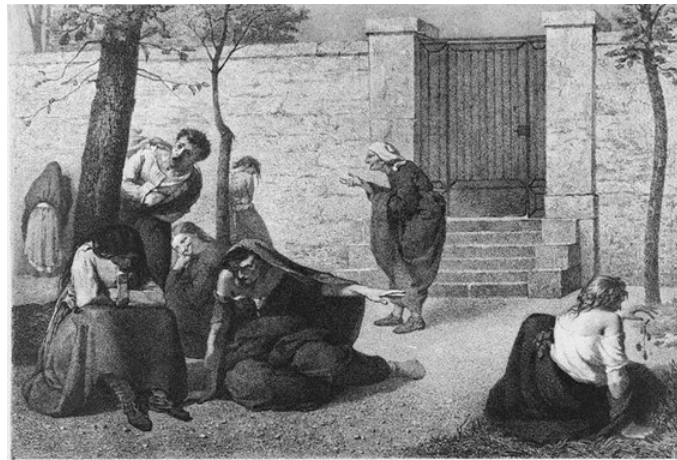


Figure 9.6: Mental Disorders (1837): To say that mental health is socially constructed means that its definition and criteria can change across time and culture. This lithograph illustrates the eight mental health disorders that were thought to be prominent in England during the early-19th century: dementia, megalomania, acute mania, melancholia, idiocy, hallucination, erotic mania, and paralysis. Since 1837, many of those disorders have been erased from medical textbooks or modified in light of changing social norms.

Education

Educational attainment is tied to social class, with upper class individuals acquiring higher degrees from more prestigious schools.

Education is a major component of social class, both directly and indirectly. Directly, individuals from higher social classes are more likely to have the means to attend more prestigious schools, and are therefore more likely to receive higher educations. Indirectly, individuals who benefit from such higher education are more likely to land prestigious jobs, and in turn, higher salaries. Just as education and social class are closely intertwined, stratification in education contributes to stratification in social class.

Educational attainment refers to the level of schooling a person completes — for instance, high school, some college, college, or a graduate degree. Upper class individuals are likely to attend schools of higher quality and of greater prestige than those attended by their lower class counterparts. Because members of high social classes tend to be better educated and have higher incomes, they are able to offer greater educational advantages, such as private schooling, to their children as well.

Upper-class parents are better able to send their children not only to exclusive private schools, but also to public state-funded schools. Such schools are likely to be of higher quality in affluent areas than in impoverished ones, since they are funded by property taxes within the school district. Wealthy areas will provide more property taxes as revenue, which leads to higher quality schools. Educational inequality is one factor that perpetuates the class divide across generations.

Such educational inequality is further reinforced by legacy admission, the preference given by educational institutions to applicants who are related to alumni of that institution. Practiced in university and college admissions (particularly in the United States), this practice emerged after World War I, primarily in response to the resulting immigrant influx. Ivy League institutions admit roughly 10% to 30% of students from each incoming class based on this factor.



Figure 9.7: Harvard Hall at Harvard University, an Ivy League institution (public domain)

Politics

The higher one's social class, the higher their levels of political participation and political influence.

Social class impacts one's level of political participation and political influence. *Political participation* refers to whether or not a person votes in elections, donates to campaigns, or attends public forums where decisions are made, such as town meetings or city council meetings, for example. *Political influence* refers to the extent to which one's political participation achieves its desired results. For example, if one attends a public forum, is their opinion likely to be heard, or if they donate money, is a politician likely to support their desired policy?



Figure 9.8: Voting location in Alabama

Wealthy, well-educated Americans are more likely to vote and to donate money to politicians than lower class individuals. This trend means that middle and upper class individuals have greater political participation and greater political influence than those in lower positions. Additionally, higher status people are more likely to hold political positions than lower class people. An illustration of this is the presidential election between George W. Bush and John Kerry in 2004. Both had millions of dollars of accumulated wealth, and they both had higher degrees from prestigious institutions – Bush from Harvard and Kerry from Yale.

While the class system in the United States limits our potential, it does not have to remain that way. The stratification system is something that was created by people, so it can be altered and challenged by people. This is an area that social scientists, as well as non-social scientists, can study and work to improve.

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10: The Issue of Poverty

Why Care?

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 (Rank, 2011) 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” (Rank, 2011). 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). 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 (Rank, 2011) 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 (Iceland, 2006) 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.

Measuring Poverty

In the United States, poverty is most often referred to as a relative rather than an absolute measurement. Absolute poverty is an economic condition in which a family or individual cannot afford basic necessities, such as food and shelter, so day-to-day survival is in jeopardy. Relative poverty is an economic condition in which the income of a family or individual is less than 50 percent of the average median income. This is sometimes called the poverty level or the *poverty line*.

Table 10.1: U.S. poverty lines by family/household size, 2024

Persons in family/household	Poverty line
1	\$15,060
2	\$20,440
3	\$25,820
4	\$31,200
5	\$36,580
6	\$41,960
7	\$47,340
8	\$52,720
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$5,380 for each additional person	

The Social Security Administration established the official poverty line in the 1960s as a way to measure the number of people living in poverty and to assess how much it changed. In the United States, the government uses the poverty line to indicate the total annual income below which a family would be impoverished. It is based on a minimum family food budget and assumes the average low-income family spends a third of their income on food. The official U.S. poverty rate in 2020 was 11.4 percent, which equates to about 37.2 million people (Shrider et al. 2021)



Figure 10.1: The poverty line refers to the minimum amount of money a person needs to fulfill the basic necessities of life. How is poverty patterned across the country? County-level poverty rates based on the American Community Survey 2016–2020.

There has been a continuing debate about the poverty line. Conservatives argue that if benefits provided to poor people, such as Medicaid, subsidized housing, and reduced-price school lunches, are included in the measure, then the extent of poverty is much less than reported. Liberals argue the federal poverty line underestimates poverty and that the thresholds are too low. They point to costs other than food, such as childcare, heating, and housing, that should be incorporated into the measure. There are also regional differences in the cost of living, and therefore the poverty line neglects poor people in expensive cities.

Demographically, some groups are more likely to experience poverty than others. These include (Shrider et al. 2021):

- **Single-parent families:** For female-headed single-parent households, the poverty rate was 23.4 percent in 2020. For male-headed single-parent households, the poverty rate was 11.5 percent. For married couples, the poverty rate was 4.7 percent. With a couple, there is the potential for dual incomes and more childcare options.
- **Children:** In 2020, 16.1 percent of children under the age of 18 were living in poverty. The United States generally has lower-quality childcare services than other developed countries. Without high-quality, affordable childcare, it can become difficult for a parent to work steadily.
- **Minority groups:** While White people make up the largest group of people living in poverty (15.9 million people), minority groups disproportionately experience poverty. In 2020, 19.5 percent of Black people experienced poverty, and 17 percent of Hispanics experienced poverty. This can be traced to numerous factors, such as low wages, discrimination (in housing, education, health care), and differences in education level.
- **People with disabilities:** In 2020, 25 percent of adults (18 to 64) with a disability lived in poverty. Significant numbers of those who are poor have struggled with disabilities since childhood. A serious disability can make it hard to get a job and can hamper other aspects of life. It is important to note that poverty can lead to and worsen disabilities, but disabilities are not unique to poor families.
- **Women:** Women in the US and globally are more likely to live in poverty than men in a trend known as *the feminization of poverty*. This is related to the gender wage gap, the gender wealth gap, their segregation into low-paying jobs, greater family responsibilities, domestic violence, and other factors. See [AmericanProgress](https://www.americanprogress.org) [www.americanprogress.org] (Start with the section headed “Why More Women Live in Poverty.”)
- **LGBTQ people** are more likely to be living in poverty than straight and cisgender people. Low wage jobs, discrimination, and lack of coverage by policies that cover traditional families play a role in this.

In addition, we should take into account the intersectionality of these groups, for example a black woman, or Hispanic LGBTQ person, as facing additional obstacles.

Explanations of Poverty

One of the basic debates about poverty turns on whether poverty arises from problems within the poor themselves or in the society in which they live (Rank, 2011). The first type of explanation may be considered an *individualistic explanation* (i.e., the poor themselves are to blame for their poverty). The second type of explanation is a *structural explanation* (i.e., problems in American society produce poverty). As the chart below shows, the individualistic explanation assumes that poverty results from the fact that poor people lack the motivation to work and have certain belief and values that contribute to their poverty. The structural explanation assumes that poverty results from problems in society that lead to a lack of opportunity and a lack of jobs.

Table 10.2: 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 observes, “beliefs about the causes of poverty shape attitudes toward the poor.” (Davidson, 2009) In other words, the particular explanation of poverty 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 to believe that the government should do more to help the poor than those who attribute poverty to deficiencies among the poor (Bradley & Cole, 2002). The explanation for poverty we favor presumably affects the amount of sympathy we have for the poor, and our sympathy, or lack of sympathy, in turn affects our views about the government’s role in helping the poor. With this backdrop in mind, what do the individualistic and structural explanations of poverty say?

Individualistic Explanation

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

Individualistic explanation is a blaming-the-victim approach. 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). 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 structural explanation, 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. This is a which is a blaming-the-system approach rather than a blaming-the-individual approach.

As Rank (Rank, 2011) summarizes this view, “American poverty is largely the result of failings at the economic and political levels, rather than at the individual level...In contrast to [the individualistic] perspective, the basic problem lies in a shortage of viable opportunities for all Americans.” Rank points out that the US economy during the past few decades has created more low-

paying and part-time jobs and jobs without benefits, meaning that Americans increasingly find themselves in jobs that barely lift them out of poverty, if at all.

Sociologist Fred Block and colleagues share this critique of the individualistic perspective: “Most of our policies incorrectly assume that people can avoid or overcome poverty through hard work alone. Yet this assumption ignores the realities of our failing urban schools, increasing employment insecurities, and the lack of affordable housing, health care, and child care. It ignores the fact that the American Dream is rapidly becoming unattainable for an increasing number of Americans, whether employed or not.” (Block, et. al., 2006). Most sociologists favor the structural explanation. Racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of adequate schooling and health care, and other problems make it difficult to rise out of poverty.

Some sociologists have also adopted a relational perspective to understand poverty. Rather than being something that is individually determined or the product of social forces, poverty is seen as emerging through interactions between those who have resources and those who do not (Desmond and Western 2018). Exploitation is one of the transactional mechanisms between people that helps produce poverty. This could be owners exploiting workers or landlords exploiting tenants. Discrimination and violence also play a role in producing poverty.

There are a number of misconceptions when it comes to understanding the experience of poverty and who lives in poverty. Mark Rank, a well-known sociologist who studies poverty, has identified several myths that people tend to believe about poverty. Read the six myths and facts about poverty here: [Confronting Poverty](https://confrontingpoverty.org) [confrontingpoverty.org].

Consequences of Poverty

Family Problems

The poor are at greater risk for family problems, including divorce and domestic violence. 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.

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.

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



Figure 10.2: Poor children are more likely to have inadequate nutrition and to experience health, behavioral, and cognitive problems. (Kelly Short – Poverty: “Damaged Child,” Oklahoma City, OK, USA, 1936. (Colorized). – CC BY-SA 2.0.)

A recent study used government data to follow children born between 1968 and 1975 until they were ages 30 to 37 (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011). 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).

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) 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).

One way poverty gets “under children’s skin” is as follows (Evans, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 2011). 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) 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) 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. As noted above, 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, and many have to visit health clinics that are overcrowded and understaffed.

According to research, poverty is responsible for almost 150,000 deaths annually, a figure about equal to the number of deaths from lung cancer (Bakalar, 2011).

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. 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.

Crime and Victimization

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.

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).

Homelessness is defined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as being unsheltered, having inadequate shelter, not having a permanent fixed residence, and/or lacking the resources to secure stable housing (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2012). HUD uses four categories of homelessness:

1) Literally Homeless

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; or
- Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, and local government programs); or
- Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

Note: An individual or family only needs to meet one of the three subcategories to qualify

2) Imminent Risk of Homelessness

An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:

- Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;
- No subsequent residence has been identified; and
- The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

Note: Includes individuals and families who are within 14 days of losing their housing, including housing they own, rent, are sharing with others, or are living in without paying rent.

3) Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age or families with Category three children and youth who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition but who:

- Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;
- Have not had a lease or ownership interest in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;
- Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the preceding 60 days; and
- Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers

Note: Includes individuals and families who are within 14 days of losing their housing, including housing they own, rent, are sharing with others, or are living in without paying rent.

4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Any individual or family who:

- Is fleeing or is attempting to flee domestic violence;
- Has no other residence; and
- Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing

Note: Domestic Violence includes dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or family member that either takes place in or him or her afraid to return to, their primary nighttime residence (including human trafficking).

Who is Unhoused?

Shelter is a basic human need. Surviving unsheltered takes a toll on physical and mental health, both in terms of increased health risks and decreased access to adequate healthcare services (Kushel et al. 2006). Having safe and stable shelter supports our basic psychological needs, anchors our social relationships, and is necessary for economic stability. In 1992, the United Nations declared that adequate housing is a human right. The value of shelter to the quality of human life is clear. However, rates of homelessness in the United States are growing.



Figure 10.3: Sidewalk tent camps in Northeast Portland, Oregon, United States.

Encampments of unhoused people, sometimes called tent cities, can be seen in the US. Because many encampments are not officially legal, people living in them lack stability and live under the threat of being “swept” or evicted. In 2017, 255 encampments were reported across the United States, ranging in size from 10 to over 100 people living in them, but that number does not include many more illegal encampments. Encampments are a response to the fact that shelters constantly operate at maximum capacity, and communities do not have enough affordable housing (Tent Cities in America 2022).

Shelters provide needed temporary immediate service to over 1.5 million Americans each year. Many nonprofit organizations also provide additional supportive services and housing assistance for families and individuals. Day shelters also offer support and food to unhoused people. Some churches allow people to car-camp and/or erect tents on the church property and have provided hygiene centers that include showers, hand-washing, laundry, and food services.

Tensions exist between tent dwellers, staff, and users of shelters, and the business and home-owning communities since being unhoused is messy, and people who are unhoused are vulnerable to crime and abuse. Advocates for people who are unhoused argue for a location close to needed city services; accessibility is important when walking, bicycling, and public transportation are the primary modes of getting around.

Who is Housing Insecure?

Housing insecurity is a broad set of challenges, such as the inability to pay rent or utilities or the need to move frequently (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019). According to government definitions, if a person or a family are within 14 days of losing their housing and does not have the resources “to obtain permanent housing,” they are considered by HUD to be “at imminent risk of homelessness.” Housing instability can be harder to see than homelessness. Signs of housing instability include missing a rent or utility payment, having a place to live but not having certainty about meeting basic needs, experiencing formal or informal evictions, foreclosures, couch surfing, and frequent moves. It can also include exposure to health and safety risks such as mold, vermin, lead, overcrowding, and personal safety fears such as abuse.

Of all Americans, 10–15 percent are housing insecure. A cost burdened household is a household in which 30% or more of a household’s monthly gross income is dedicated to housing, making it difficult to pay for necessities. Households that pay more than 30% of their income on housing face housing instability and insecurity. One study used a residual-income approach, which estimates whether households have enough money left after paying rent and utilities to afford a decent standard of living, and found that 19.2 million (62.1%) were cost burdened. However we measure it, the cost burden puts people at risk for being homeless (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2022).

The College and University Basic Needs Insecurity Report found that being female, transgender, Native American, Black, Latinx, and 21 or older increased your chances of being housing insecure or homeless. Although men, people who are White, young White students (18–20), and athletes were less likely to experience homelessness or housing insecurity, they still did so in double-digit percentages (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2019). College students are another group of people who are often housing insecure.

Rural communities have unique housing pressures, especially in resort areas where housing stock tends to be inadequate. Even when work is plentiful, homelessness can be only a step away. One job loss, one major illness, or commonly, one landlord who chooses to sell their property rather than continue to rent, and homelessness occurs.

Confronting the Problem

It is common for people concerned with problems of housing insecurity and houselessness to focus resources and programming on fixing the personal problems of people who are unhoused. Many shelter and housing programs offer social support, motivational coaching, counseling, and even “life skills” classes. When we consider that many people who are unhoused have experienced trauma, mental health crises, and substance use disorder before becoming homeless, this approach makes sense. It makes even more sense when we become aware of the trauma, alienation, mental health crises, and substance use patterns that can develop while people are unsheltered. Many people who are unhoused are often in need of robust social and therapeutic support as they make their way back to stability.

However, many housing advocates and unhoused people view the “what’s-wrong-with-the-homeless” perspective as deficit-based, focusing on the problems or limits of people who are houseless. They argue that this approach obscures the real reasons for our current housing crisis—not enough affordable housing. For every 100 extremely low-income renters, there are just 31 affordable units (National Coalition for the Homeless 2020).

Unlike “what’s wrong with the homeless” narratives, sociologists most commonly look for structural reasons to explain who has a home. These structural explanations depend on a solid understanding of social stratification. Social class, race, and gender relate to housing instability. Black people are disproportionately houseless, as are Native Americans. 40% of unaccompanied, unhoused youth identify as LGBTQIA+ Socially constructed ideas of normal or acceptable identities hinder many people from accessing shelter, housing, and many other services. Specifically, in the case of houseless shelters, transgender women may be refused admittance by the women’s shelter and are at risk of violence at the men’s shelter (National Center for Transgender Equality 2019). Many of the structural causes of poverty also impact whether a person has a home.

A relatively new and innovative approach to addressing houselessness is the Housing First model. Simply put, the idea is that if people have stable housing, solving other problems becomes more likely. Having a secure home, consistent access to schooling, transportation, and support services means that people can be more successful in addressing overlapping issues such as mental health, addiction, and seeking employment.

Many communities and housing service providers have adopted the Housing First approach. Utah’s Housing First approach is a model for how these services can be made available. Through the collaboration of many local organizations and donations from local churches, real permanent semi-communal housing and services such as counseling are provided. One location, Grace Mary Manor, provides affordable housing for 84 formerly houseless people. Through programs like this, Utah decreased its houseless population by 91 percent (McEvers 2015).

Community Efforts

Individuals and communities are taking the initiative to improve neighborhood livability by increasing resources that benefit families, such as informal libraries, green spaces, and art houses.

Understanding, acknowledging, and repairing past injustices are critical steps toward making homes equitably available to everyone. Tenants unions are working to empower renters and reduce evictions. Housing advocates, many of whom have been unhoused, are lobbying for more funding for affordable housing. Nonprofit housing service providers continue developing and delivering trauma-informed services that support the social and emotional needs of people striving for housing stability. In addition, community-based efforts resource and support residents of historically marginalized neighborhoods. Each of these interdependent solutions creates stable housing, a component of social justice.

Lessons from Other Societies

Poverty and Poverty Policy in Other Western Democracies

There is typically more poverty in the US than in other western democracies. Why is this? Several differences between the United States and the other nations stand out (Brady, 2009; Russell, 2011). 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) 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).

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). While the British child poverty rate fell dramatically because of these strategies, the US child poverty rate stagnated.

In short, the United States has 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) 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.”

Applying Social Research

Unintended Consequences of Welfare Reform

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was a major US 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 set a shorter time to receive funds, 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. 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 simply excluded from funding because of TANF’s strict requirements. The reduced payments and lower number of funded families indicate the failure of TANF, they say, not its success.

Several problems explain why TANF has had these unintended consequences. First, many families are poor for many more than five years, and the five-year time limit under TANF means that they receive financial help for only some of the years they live in poverty. Second, because the federal and state governments provide relatively little financial aid for child care, many parents

simply cannot afford to work, and if they don't work, they lose their TANF payments. Third, jobs are certainly difficult to find, especially if, as is typical, a poor parent has relatively little education and few job skills, and if parents cannot find a job, they again lose their TANF payments. Fourth, many parents cannot work because they have physical or mental health problems or because they are taking care of a family member or friend with a health problem; these parents, too, become ineligible for TANF payments.

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

Ironically, some studies suggest that welfare reform impaired the health of black women for several reasons. Many ended up with jobs with long bus commutes and odd hours, leading to sleep deprivation and less time for medical visits. Many of these new workers also suddenly had to struggle to find affordable day care for their children. These problems are thought to have increased their stress levels and, in turn, harmed their health.

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

The United States greatly reduced poverty during the 1960s through a series of programs and policies that composed The War on Poverty, passed under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

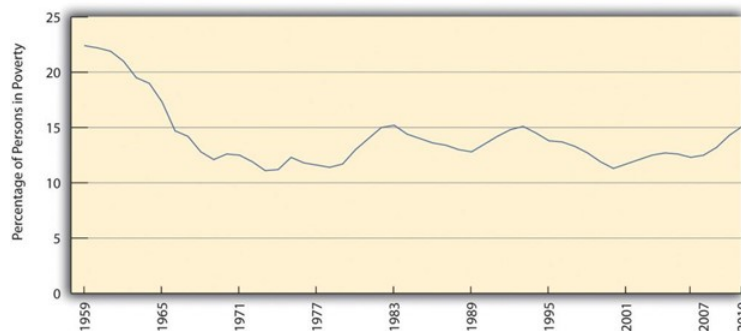


Figure 10.4: Source: Data from US Census Bureau. (2011). Historical poverty tables: People. Retrieved from www.census.gov/hhes/www/pover...al/people.html.

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. Other democracies have much lower poverty rates than the United States because, as many scholars believe, they have better funded and more extensive programs to help their poor (Brady, 2009; Russell, 2011).

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

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

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

To renew the US effort to help the poor, it is essential that the actual facts about poverty become better known so that a fundamental shift in thinking about poverty and the poor can occur. Rank (Rank, 2011) says that one aspect of this shift must include the recognition, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, that “poverty affects us all” because it costs so many tax dollars to help the poor and because a majority of the public can expect to be poor or near poor at some point in their lives.

A second aspect of this shift in thinking, adds Rank, is the recognition (following a blaming-the-system approach) that poverty stems much more from the lack of opportunity, lack of jobs, declining government help for the poor, and other structural failings of American society than from individual failings of the poor themselves. A third aspect of this shift in thinking, he concludes, is that poverty must become seen as a “moral problem” and as “an injustice of a substantial magnitude” (Rank, 2011). As he forcefully argues, “Something is seriously wrong when we find that, in a country with the most abundant resources in the world, there are children without enough to eat, families who cannot afford health care, and people sleeping on the streets for lack of shelter” (Rank, 2011). This situation, he says, must become seen as a “moral outrage” (Rank, 2011).

Sociologist Joe Soss (Soss, 2011) argues that a change in thinking is not enough for a renewed antipoverty effort to occur. What is needed, he says, is political protest and other political activity by the poor and on behalf of the poor. Soss notes that “political conflict and mass mobilization played key roles” in providing the impetus for social-welfare programs in the 1930s and 1960s in the United States, and he adds that the lower poverty rates of Western European democracies “are products of labor movements, unions, and parties that mobilized workers to demand more adequate social supports.”

These twin histories lead Soss to conclude that the United States will not increase its antipoverty efforts unless a new wave of political activity by and on behalf of the poor arises. As he argues, “History suggests that major antipoverty victories can be achieved. But they won’t be achieved by good will and smart ideas alone. They’ll be won politically, when people—in poor communities, in advocacy groups, in government, in the academy, and elsewhere—mobilize to advance antipoverty agendas in ways that make politics as usual untenable.”



Figure 10.5: Helping poor parents pay for child care can help reduce poverty. Herald Post – Family Child Care – CC BY-NC 2.0. [Flickr \[www.flickr.com\]](https://www.flickr.com/photos/heraldpost/10000000000/)

If a renewed antipoverty effort does occur for whatever reason, what types of programs and policies show promise for effectively reducing poverty? Efforts to reduce poverty must address first and foremost the structural basis for poverty while not ignoring certain beliefs and practices of the poor that also make a difference. An extensive literature on poverty policy outlines many types of policies and programs that follow this dual approach (Cancian & Danziger, 2009; Greenberg, et. al., 2007; Iceland, 2006; Lindsey, 2009; Moore et al., 2009; Rank, 2004). If these were fully adopted, funded, and implemented, as they are in many other democracies, they would offer great promise for reducing poverty.

As two poverty experts recently wrote, “We are optimistic that poverty can be reduced significantly in the long term if the public and policymakers can muster the political will to pursue a range of promising antipoverty policies” (M. Cancian & S. Danziger, 2009, p. 32). 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:

- 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.

- Increase federal aid for the working poor, including higher earned income credits and child-care subsidies for those with children.
- Establish well-funded early childhood intervention programs, including home visitations by trained professionals, for poor families.
- Provide poor families with enough income to enable them to pay for food and housing.
- Increase the supply of affordable housing.
- Improve the schools that poor children attend and the schooling they receive and expand early childhood education programs for poor children.
- Provide better nutrition and health services for poor families with young children.
- Establish universal health insurance.
- Increase Pell Grants and other financial aid for higher education.

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11: The Issues of Gender and Sexuality Part One

Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence. These include both *primary sex characteristics* (the reproductive system) and *secondary characteristics* such as height and muscularity.

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. It refers to behaviors, personal traits, and social positions that society attributes to being female or male. 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 person's sex, as determined by their biology, does not always correspond with their gender. Therefore, the terms sex and gender are not interchangeable. A baby who is born with male genitalia will most likely be identified as male. This person is someone who is "assigned male at birth" or AMAB. A child born with female genitalia is someone who is "assigned female at birth" or AFAB. As a child or adult, however, the AMAB person may identify with the feminine aspects of culture and the AFAB person with the masculine aspects of culture.

Since the term sex refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. For example, generally persons of the female sex, regardless of culture, will eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate. Characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary greatly between different societies. For example, in U.S. culture, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. However, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, sarongs, robes, or gowns are considered masculine. The kilt worn by a Scottish man does not make him appear feminine in that culture.

Gender identity is a person's deeply held internal perception of their gender. *Gender expression*, or *gender presentation*, is a person's behavior, mannerisms, interests, and appearance that are associated with gender, specifically with the categories of femininity or masculinity. The ways in which people express their gender identity are both particular to each individual and variable across cultures. The risks of nonconformity in gender presentation can be high. More than being perceived as "weird" or unpopular, a person may for example lose the support of friends and family or experience discrimination in the workplace based on their gender presentation.

The *binary view of gender* or the *gender binary* is the notion that someone is either male or female and no other genders exist. This view is specific to certain cultures and is not universal. In some cultures gender is viewed as fluid. In the past, some anthropologists used the term *berdache* to refer to individuals who occasionally or permanently dressed and lived as a different gender. The practice has been noted among certain Native American tribes (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997). Samoan culture accepts what Samoans refer to as a "third gender." Fa'afafine, which translates as "the way of the woman," is a term used to describe individuals who are born biologically male but embody both masculine and feminine traits. Fa'afafines are considered an important part of Samoan culture. Individuals from other cultures may mislabel their sexuality because fa'afafines have a varied sexual life that may include men and women (Poasa 1992). The Native Americans known as the Mohave, recognize four genders: a woman, a woman who acts like a man, a man, and a man who acts like a woman.

Transgender people's sex assigned at birth and their gender identity are not necessarily the same. A *transgender woman* is a person who was assigned male at birth but who identifies and/or lives as a woman; a *transgender man* was assigned female at birth but lives as a man. The term "transgender" does not indicate sexual orientation or a particular gender expression, and we should avoid making assumptions about people's sexual orientation based on knowledge about their gender identity (GLAAD 2021). (In other words, a transgender woman may not conform or even try to conform with all the traits we associate with "women" and a transgender person can have any of the same sexual orientations as a non-transgender person – straight, lesbian, gay, etc.)



Figure 11.1: Actress Laverne Cox is the first openly transgender person to play a transgender character on a major show. She won a producing Emmy and was nominated four times for the Best Actress Emmy. She is also an advocate for LGBTQ issues outside of her career, such as in this "Ain't I a Woman?" speaking tour. (Credit: modification of work by "KOMUnews_Flickr"/Flickr)

Some transgender individuals may undertake a process of transition, in which they move from living in a way that is more aligned with the sex assigned at birth to living in a way that is aligned with their gender identity. Transitioning may take the form of social, legal or medical aspects of someone's life, but not everyone undertakes any or all types of transition. Social transition may involve the person's presentation, name, pronouns, and relationships. Legal transition can include changing their gender on government or other official documents, changing their legal name, and so on. Some people may undergo a physical or medical transition, in which they change their outward, physical, or sexual characteristics in order for their physical being to better align with their gender identity (UCSF Transgender Care 2019).

Not all transgender individuals choose to alter their bodies: many will maintain their original anatomy but may present themselves to society as another gender. This is typically done by adopting the dress, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other characteristic typically assigned to another gender. It is important to note that people who cross-dress, or wear clothing that is traditionally assigned to a gender different from their biological sex, are not necessarily transgender. Cross-dressing is typically a form of self-expression or personal style, and it does not indicate a person's gender identity or that they are transgender (TSER 2021).



Figure 11.2: The most widely known transgender pride flag was designed by transgender woman and U.S. Navy veteran Monica Helms. Other designers have different interpretation of the transgender flag, and other groups within the LGBTQ community have their own flags and symbols. Interestingly, Gilbert Baker, the designer of the first widely adopted pride flag, made a point to avoid trademark or other limits on the flag, so that it could be reinterpreted and reused by others. (Credit: crudmucosa/flickr)

There is no single, conclusive explanation for why people are transgender. The diversity of transgender expression and experiences argues against any simple or unitary explanation. Many experts believe that biological factors such as genetic influences and prenatal hormone levels, early experiences, and experiences later in adolescence or adulthood may all contribute to the development of transgender identities (APA 2023).

Those who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth are often referred to as *cisgender*, utilizing the Latin prefix "cis," which means "on the same side." (The prefix "trans" means "across.") Because they are in the majority and do not have a potential component to transition, many cisgender people do not self-identify as such. As with transgender people, the term or usage of cisgender does not indicate a person's sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression (TSER 2021). Many societies are *cisnormative*, which is the assumption or expectation that everyone is cisgender, and that anything other than cisgender is not normal.

When individuals do not feel comfortable identifying with the gender associated with their biological sex, then they may experience *gender dysphoria*. Gender dysphoria is a diagnostic category in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) that describes a deep sense of unease, anxiety, or discomfort that may occur in people whose gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth. This dysphoria must persist for at least six months and result in significant distress or dysfunction to meet DSM-5 diagnostic criteria. In order for people to be assigned this diagnostic category, they must verbalize their desire to become the other gender.

It is important to note that not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria, and that its diagnostic categorization is not universally accepted. Some contend that the diagnosis inappropriately pathologizes *gender noncongruence* (i.e., when a person's gender is different to the sex they were assigned at birth) and should be eliminated. In 2019, the World Health Organization reclassified "gender identity disorder" as "gender incongruence," and categorized it under sexual health rather than a mental disorder in order to reduce the potential for negative stigma. However, some health and mental health professionals indicate that the presence of the diagnostic category helps ensure access to care and assists in supporting those who need treatment or help.

People become aware that they may be transgender at different ages. Even if someone does not have a full (or even partial) understanding of gender terminology and its implications, they can still develop an awareness that their gender assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity. Society, particularly in the United States, has been reluctant to accept transgender identities at any age, but we have particular difficulty accepting those identities in children. Many people feel that children are too young to understand their feelings, and that they may "grow out of it." And it is true that some children who verbalize their identification or desire to live as another gender may ultimately decide to live in alignment with their assigned gender. But if a child consistently describes themselves as a gender (or as both genders, without binary gender, or another expression of their gender) and/or expresses themselves as that gender over a long period of time, their feelings cannot be attributed to going through a "phase" (Mayo Clinic 2021).

Some children, like many transgender people, may feel pressure to conform to social norms, which may lead them to suppress or hide their identity. Experts find evidence of gender dysphoria in children as young as seven (Zaliznyak 2020). Again, most children have a limited understanding of the social and societal impacts of being transgender, but they can feel strongly that they are not aligned with their assigned sex. And considering that many transgender people do not come out or begin to transition until much later in life—well into their twenties—they may live for a long time under that distress.

Intersex is a general term used to describe people whose sex traits, reproductive anatomy, hormones, or chromosomes are different from the usual two ways human bodies develop. Some intersex traits are recognized at birth, while others are not recognizable until puberty or later in life (interACT 2021). While some intersex people have physically recognizable features that are described by specific medical terms, intersex people and newborns are healthy. Most in the medical and intersex community reject unnecessary surgeries intended to make a baby conform to a specific gender assignment; medical ethicists indicate that any surgery to alter intersex characteristics or traits—if desired—should be delayed until an individual can decide for themselves (Behrens 2021). If a physical trait or medical condition prohibits a baby from urinating or performing another bodily function (which is very rare), then a medical procedure such as surgery will be needed; in other cases, hormonal issues related to intersex characteristics may require medical intervention.

Intersex and transgender are not interchangeable terms; many transgender people have no intersex traits, and many intersex people do not consider themselves transgender. Some intersex people believe that intersex people should be included within the LGBTQ community, while others do not (Koyama n.d.).

Queer is a term used to describe gender and sexual identities other than cisgender and heterosexual. The term queer has been used in different ways and has many different meanings. Originally a term meaning "strange" or "peculiar," queer came to be used in a derogatory way toward those with same-sex desires or relations in the nineteenth century. Starting in the late 1980s, queer activists

began to reclaim the word and embraced it as a politically radical alternative to other LGBTQIA+ identities (Sycamore 2008). The Universalist Unitarian Association does a good job of capturing some of the common ways queer is used today, so explore Queer 101 <https://www.uua.org/lgbtq/identity/queer> if you wish.

The language of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression is continually changing and evolving. In order to get an overview of some of the most commonly used terms, explore the Trans Student Educational Resources Online Glossary: <http://openstax.org/r/tsero>

Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

A person's *sexuality* is their capacity to experience sexual feelings and attraction. Each society interprets sexuality and sexual activity in different ways, with different attitudes about premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation, and other sexual behaviors (Widmer 1998).

A person's *sexual orientation* is their physical, mental, emotional, and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male and/or female). Sexual orientation is typically divided into several categories: heterosexuality, the attraction to individuals of the other sex; homosexuality, the attraction to individuals of the same sex; bisexuality, the attraction to individuals of either sex; asexuality, a lack of sexual attraction or desire for sexual contact; pansexuality, an attraction to people regardless of sex, gender, gender identity, or gender expression; omnisexuality, an attraction to people of all sexes, genders, gender identities, and gender expressions that considers the person's gender, and queer, an umbrella term used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Other categories may not refer to a sexual attraction, but rather a romantic one. For example, an aromantic person does not experience romantic attraction; this is different from asexuality, which refers to a lack of sexual attraction. And some sexual orientations do not refer to gender in their description, though those who identify as having that orientation may feel attraction to a certain gender. For example, demisexual refers to someone who feels a sexual attraction to someone only after they form an emotional bond; the term itself doesn't distinguish among gender identities, but the person may feel attraction based on gender (PFLAG 2021). It is important to acknowledge and understand that many of these orientations exist on a spectrum, and there may be no specific term to describe how an individual feels. Some terms have been developed to address this—such as graysexual or grayromantic—but their usage is a personal choice (Asexual Visibility and Education Network 2021).

People who are attracted to others of a different gender are typically referred to as "straight," and people attracted to others of the same gender are typically referred to as "gay" for men and "lesbian" for women. As discussed, above, however, there are many more sexual and romantic orientations, so the term "gay," for example, should not be used to describe all of them. Proper terminology includes the acronyms LGBT and LGBTQ, which stands for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender" (and "Queer" or "Questioning" when the Q is added). In other cases, people and organizations may add "I" to represent Intersex people and "A" for Asexual or Aromantic people (or sometimes for "Allies"), as well as one "P" to describe Pansexual people (who can be attracted to people of any gender, or regardless of gender). Finally, some people and organizations add a plus sign (+) to represent other possible identities or orientations ("LGBTQ+").

Sexuality and gender terminology are constantly changing, and may mean different things to different people; they are not universal, and each individual defines them for themselves (UC Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center 2020). A person who does not fully understand all of these terms (and they can be confusing) can still be supportive of people who have those orientations or others; in fact, advocacy and support organizations indicate it is much better to admit you don't know something than to make assumptions or apply an incorrect label to someone (GLAAD 2021).

While the descriptions above are evidence of a vast degree of diversity, the United States and many other countries remain *heteronormative* societies, meaning that heterosexuality is the preferred or "normal" mode of sexual orientation (Harris and White 2018). While awareness and acceptance of different sexual orientations and identities seems to be increasing, the influence of a heteronormative society can lead LGBTQ people to be treated like "others," even by people who do not deliberately seek to cause them harm. This can lead to significant distress (Boyer 2020). These heteronormative behaviors and expectations can be especially harmful for children and young adults (Tompkins 2017).

An examination of popular culture highlights the prevalence of compulsive heterosexuality. For example, what types of relationships are commonly displayed in movies and television shows? While more diverse representations are making their way

into mainstream media, most visual and textual representations of relationships center on heterosexuality, leading to the continuing dominance of heteronormativity. For example, take a moment to review the heterosexual questionnaire https://www.uwgb.edu/UWGBCMS/media/pride-center/files/pdf/Heterosexual_Questionnaire.pdf and think about how the questions sound. The dominance of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality in mainstream culture makes it difficult for those who do not fit into these expected categories.

There is not a wealth of research describing exactly when people become aware of their sexual orientation. According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence (American Psychological Association 2008). They do not have to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation, and may have very different experiences of discovering and accepting their sexual orientation. Some studies have shown that a percentage of people may start to have feelings related to attraction or orientation at ages nine or ten, even if these feelings are not sexual (Calzo 2018). At the point of puberty, some may be able to announce their sexual orientation, while others may be unready or unwilling to make their sexual orientation or identity known since it goes against society's historical norms (APA 2008). And finally, some people recognize their true sexual orientation later in life—in their 30s, 40s, and beyond.

There is no scientific consensus regarding the exact reasons why an individual holds a specific sexual orientation. Research has been conducted to study the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, but there has been no evidence that links sexual orientation to one factor (APA 2008). According to the APA, "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation"

Although the exact origins of sexual orientation remain unknown, the APA's last statement is perhaps the most important conclusion from research on this issue: Most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation. Because, as mentioned earlier, people are more likely to approve of or tolerate homosexuality when they believe it is not a choice, efforts to educate the public about this research conclusion – that it is not in fact a choice - should help the public become more accepting of LGBT behavior and individuals.

Because of the deeply personal nature of sexual orientation, as well as the societal biases against certain orientations, many people may question their sexual orientation before fully accepting it themselves. In a similar way, parents may question their children's sexual orientation based on certain behaviors. Simply viewing the many web pages and discussion forums dedicated to people expressing their questions makes it very clear that sexual orientation is not always clear. Feelings of guilt, responsibility, rejection, and simple uncertainty can make the process and growth very challenging.

For example, a woman married to a man who recognizes that she is asexual, or a man married to a woman who recognizes that he is attracted to men, may both have extreme difficulty coming to terms with their sexuality, as well as disclosing it to others. At younger ages, similarly challenging barriers and difficulties exist. For example, adolescence can be a difficult and uncertain time overall, and feelings of different or changing orientation or nonconformity can only add to the challenges (Mills-Koonce 2018).

Sexuality and Socialization

The spoken and unspoken "rules" of sexuality are learned through socialization. Socialization is an ongoing and life-long process; however, you may not have thought about how this practice connects to our understanding of sexuality. *Sexual socialization* refers to the process of social interaction and communication in which individuals learn and internalize the sexuality associated with their gender role and biological sex. Through sexual socialization, you develop ideas about what types of desires, bodies, acts, identities, and communities are acceptable. These "rules" are bound to sexual scripts which reflect social norms that promote heteronormativity.

A *sexual script* is the social rules that guide sexual interaction (Gagnon and Simon 1973). Sexual scripts come from our culture and are like a set of rules that society gives us to guide how we behave when it comes to sex. These rules tell us who we should have sex with, when and where we should do it, and in what order. We learn that there are rules for whom we should be attracted to,

what is attractive, how to be sexual, and what we should and shouldn't do with one another. When we start having sex or when we're with a new partner, we often follow these rules closely because they help us know what to expect and how to interact. For example, we might expect to kiss someone before touching them in more intimate ways. The predictability of sexual scripts helps us move from less intimate to more intimate behaviors. We may resist or engage in some activities over others, but there are patterns to our behavior that go beyond individual choice/preference.

The sexual behaviors we participate in are also embedded in a larger power dynamic because sexual scripts are gendered (Endendijk et al. 2020). Given the conflation of masculinity and power, the masculine role in sex is perceived as the assertive role. The feminine role is perceived as primarily responsive. This conflation of sexual power, desire, and masculinity leads to the *push-and-resist dynamic* (Gavey 2005). The push-and-resist dynamic refers to the idea that it's normal and expected for men to push for more sexual activity, while women are tasked with stopping or slowing sexual activity. Rather than focusing on consent, there is a gender imbalance as one gender is expected to push for activity, while another gender becomes the keeper of consent. In practice, we know that masculinity and femininity can be performed by anyone, so we don't always think of this as directly tied to a particular sex but rather as reflecting who might be participating in masculine or feminine roles.

Sexual scripts for gay men can also reflect this. Sexual scripts for gay men in the United States tend to differentiate between the roles of tops, bottoms, and versatiles (Moskowitz and Roloff 2017; Moskowitz et al. 2021). These roles are gendered, with topping being perceived as masculine and bottoming as feminine. Given the dynamics between sex, gender, and power in the United States, people tend to think of topping, or men who identify as tops, as being not only masculine but also more dominating. Men who identify as bottoms often have to deal with stereotypes that perceive them as feminine. Other gay men will avoid replicating sexual scripts or reject labels completely by adopting a versatile identity, engaging in both penetrative and receptive roles in their sexual encounters.

While there is less research on lesbian sexual scripts, we know that women who have sex with other women have the least scripted sexual relationships. Research suggests that lesbians do not have a single standard they use to define encounters as sex, unlike many of their heterosexual counterparts who often use penile-vaginal intercourse as a way to define the occurrence of a sexual encounter (Sewell et al. 2017).

Society and LGBTQ People

The LGBT community continues to experience many types of problems. In this regard, sexual orientation is a significant source of social inequality, just as race/ethnicity, gender, and social class are sources of social inequality. Much of this discrimination is based on stereotypes and misinformation. Some is based on *heterosexism*, which Herek (1990) suggests is both an ideology and a set of institutional practices that privilege straight people and heterosexuality over other sexual orientations. Much like racism and sexism, heterosexism is a systematic disadvantage embedded in our social institutions, offering power to those who conform to heterosexual orientation while simultaneously disadvantaging those who do not. *Homophobia*, an extreme or irrational aversion to gay, lesbian, bisexual, or all LGBTQ people, which often manifests as prejudice and bias. *Transphobia* is a fear, hatred, or dislike of transgender people, and/or prejudice and discrimination against them by individuals or institutions.

In 2025, one of President Trump's first actions upon becoming President in 2024 was to declare that the federal government would no longer recognize the legal existence of transgender or nonbinary people. This was embodied in the order titled "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government," which defines sex as strictly male or female based on the "immutable biological reality of sex" characteristics at birth. Among other things, this means that no gender marker on any government ID could be anything but male or female, a person's correct pronouns no longer have to be honored, shelters and workplaces that receive federal funding will no longer be required to accommodate transgender individuals' gender identities. In prisons and detention centers, the order directs that transgender women be housed with men, regardless of their safety or lived identity.

Ripple effects from this order are many, some on the state and local level, with laws proposed or passed against LGBTQ people, and companies ceasing DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) policies, some on the federal level in terms of the actions and policies of federal agencies (such as the Department of Homeland Security eliminating the ban on surveillance based on sexual orientation and gender identity), and some of which are noted below.

Violence and Hate Crimes

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in 2024 there were 2,554 hate crimes (violence and/or property destruction) based on sexual orientation bias. This number, which includes anti-heterosexual, and anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender hate crimes, is likely an underestimate because many victims do not report their victimization to the police. Anti-trans and anti-gender-nonconforming hate crimes (identity-based, rather than sexual orientation based) totaled 1,710. These numbers both represent an upward trend over the past few years. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

In other countries LGBTQ people can face even more danger. Reports from the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and the International Lesbian, Gay, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) indicate that many countries impose penalties for same-sex relationships, gender nonconformity, and other acts deemed opposed to the cultural or religious observances of the nation. As of 2020, six United Nations members imposed the death penalty for consensual same-sex acts, and another 61 countries penalized same sex acts, through jail time, corporal punishment (such as lashing), or other measures. These countries include prominent United States allies such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (both of which can legally impose the death penalty for same-sex acts).



Figure 11.3: This candlelight vigil honored the memory of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, who was tortured, tied, to a fence, and left to die in Wyoming in 1998. He was in a coma when he was found and died a few days later. Image courtesy of Elvert Barnes, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/perspective/15010502/>.

Teens and School

Gay teenagers and straight teenagers thought to be gay are very often the targets of taunting, bullying, physical assault, and other abuse in schools and elsewhere (Denizet-Lewis, 2009).

In a Washington state study of school-age youths, researchers found that youth who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual or perceived as LGBTQIA+ are often the targets of taunting, bullying, physical assault, and other abuse in schools (Patrick et al. 2013). Survey evidence indicates that 76 percent of LGBTQIA+ students report being verbally harassed at school, 31 percent report being physically harassed (pushed or shoved), and 12.5 percent report being physically assaulted based on sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender. Over 60 percent of students who were harassed or assaulted did not report the incident to school staff because they did not think the staff would do anything about the behavior (Kosciw, Clark, and Menard 2021).

Generally, survey evidence indicates that 85 percent of LGBT students report being verbally harassed at school, and 40 percent report being verbally harassed; 72 percent report hearing antigay slurs frequently or often at school; 61 percent feel unsafe at school, with 30 percent missing at least one day of school in the past month for fear of their safety; and 17 percent are physically assaulted to the point they need medical attention (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).

The bullying, violence, and other mistreatment experienced by gay teens have significant educational and mental health effects. The most serious consequence is suicide, as a series of suicides by gay teens in fall 2010 reminded the nation. During that period, three male teenagers in California, Indiana, and Texas killed themselves after reportedly being victims of antigay bullying, and a male college student also killed himself after his roommate broadcast a live video of the student making out with another male (Talbot, 2010).

In other effects, LGBT teens are much more likely than their straight peers to skip school; to do poorly in their studies; to drop out of school; and to experience depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Mental Health America, 2011). These mental health

problems tend to last at least into their twenties (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011) According to a 2011 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), LGBT teens are also much more likely to engage in risky and/or unhealthy behaviors such as using tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, having unprotected sex, and even not using a seatbelt (Kann et al., 2011). Commenting on the report, a CDC official said, “This report should be a wake-up call. We are very concerned that these students face such dramatic disparities for so many different health risks” (Melnick, 2011).

Ironically, despite the bullying and other mistreatment that LBGT teens receive at school, they are much more likely to be disciplined for misconduct than straight students accused of similar misconduct. This disparity is greater for girls than for boys. The reasons for the disparity remain unknown but may stem from unconscious bias against gays and lesbians by school officials. As a scholar in educational psychology observed, “To me, it is saying there is some kind of internal bias that adults are not aware of that is impacting the punishment of this group” (St. George, 2010).

More recently, President Trump also issued an executive order to eliminate federal funding for K-12 schools that engage in so-called “anti-American ideologies,” including education that it deems is “based on gender ideology and discriminatory equity ideology.” In addition, another executive order was issued that bans transgender women athletes of all ages from competing on girls and women’s sports teams, including in school. It threatens to revoke federal funding from any elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institution that allows transgender girls to play on girls’ teams. It does not disallow transgender boys or men from competing on men’s teams. Legislation to more generally ban transgender youth participation in sports however did not pass (March 2025).

Teens and Homelessness

Mistreatment at school affects LGBTQ teens’ school performance and psychological well-being, and some drop out of school as a result. We often think of the home as a haven from the realities of life, but the lives of many gay teens are often no better at home. If they come out (disclose their sexual orientation) to their parents, one or both parents often reject them. Sometimes they kick their teen out of the home, and sometimes the teen leaves because the home environment has become intolerable. Regardless of the reason, a large number of LGBT teens become homeless. They may be living in the streets, but they may also be living with a friend, at a homeless shelter, or at some other venue. But the bottom line is that they are not living at home with a parent.

The actual number of homeless LGBTQ teens will probably never be known, but a study in Massachusetts of more than 6,300 high school students was the first to estimate the prevalence of their homelessness using a representative sample. The study found that 25 percent of gay or lesbian teens and 15 percent of bisexual teens are homeless in the state, compared to only 3 percent of heterosexual teens. Fewer than 5 percent of the students in the study identified themselves as LGBTQ, but they accounted for 19 percent of all the homeless students who were surveyed. Regardless of their sexual orientation, some homeless teens live with a parent or guardian, but the study found that homeless LGBTQ teens were more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to be living without a parent.

Being homeless adds to the problems that many LGBTQ teens already experience. Regardless of sexual orientation, homeless people of all ages are at greater risk for victimization by robbers and other offenders, hunger, substance abuse, and mental health problems.

The study noted that LGBTQ teen homelessness may be higher in other states because attitudes about LGBTQ status are more favorable in Massachusetts than in many other states. Because the study was administered to high school students, it may have undercounted LGBTQ teens, who are more likely to be absent from school.

These methodological limitations should not obscure the central message of the study as summarized by one of its authors: “The high risk of homelessness among sexual minority teens is a serious problem requiring immediate attention. These teens face enormous risks and all types of obstacles to succeeding in school and are in need of a great deal of assistance.”

Employment Discrimination

In 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees from employment discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Nevertheless, national survey evidence shows that many LGBTQ people have, in fact, experienced workplace discrimination. In the workplace, almost half of LGBTQIA+ individuals reported some form of discrimination in the year 2019–2020 (Sears et al. 2022). LGBTQIA+ workers are often excluded from benefits and protections extended to their non-LGBTQIA colleagues (HRC 2021).

According to a 2024 report, employment discrimination against LGBTQ people continues to be persistent and widespread. Almost half (47%) of LGBTQ employees reported experiencing discrimination or harassment at work (including being fired, not hired, not promoted, or being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed) because of their sexual orientation or gender identity during their lifetime. Within this, trans and non-binary employees reported higher rates than cisgender employees, and those who were out (i.e., open about their gender identity and/or sexual orientation) reported higher rates than those who were out to no one in the workplace. (Sears et al 2024)

Further, in 2025 President Trump issued an executive order revoking non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ federal employees and employees of federal contractors originally declared and reinforced by executive orders from the Clinton, Obama, and Biden administrations. These earlier executive orders not only explicitly prohibited sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination but provided additional enforcement mechanisms and remedies for federal employees and employees of contractors and subcontractors. The Trump order also revokes non-discrimination protections for employees of federal contractors based on race, national origin, sex, and religion, which dates back to the Lyndon Johnson administration in the 1960s. This leaves thousands and thousands of LGBTQ workers (as well as others) more vulnerable to discrimination and harassment. (Sears 2025)

Under Trump, executive orders were also issued to block transgender people from serving in the military.

Health

LGBTQ adults have higher rates than straight adults of other physical health problems and also of mental health problems (Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2011; Institute of Medicine, 2011). These problems are thought to stem from the stress that the LGBTQ community experiences from living in a society in which they frequently encounter verbal and physical harassment, job discrimination, a need for some to conceal their sexual identity, and lack of equal treatment arising from the illegality of same-sex marriage. We saw earlier that LGBT secondary school students experience various kinds of educational and mental health issues because of the mistreatment they encounter. By the time LGBT individuals reach their adult years, the various stressors they have experienced at least since adolescence have begun to take a toll on their physical and mental health.

Because stress is thought to compromise immune systems, LGBTQ individuals on the average have lower immune functioning and lower perceived physical health than straight individuals. Because stress impairs mental health, they are also more likely to have higher rates of depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, and other psychiatric and psychological problems, including a tendency to attempt suicide (Sears & Mallory, 2011). Among all LGBTQ individuals, those who have experienced greater levels of stress related to their sexual orientation have higher levels of physical and mental health problems than those who have experienced lower levels of stress. It is important to keep in mind that these various physical and mental health problems do not stem from an LGBTQ sexual orientation in and of itself, but rather from the experience of living as an LGBTQ individual in a homophobic society.

Despite the health problems that LGBTQ people experience, medical students do not learn very much about these problems. A recent survey of medical school deans found that one-third of medical schools provide no clinical training about these health issues, and that students in the medical schools that do provide training still receive only an average of five hours of training (Obedin-Maliver et al., 2011). The senior author of the study commented on its findings, “It’s great that a lot of schools are starting to teach these topics. But the conversation needs to go deeper. We heard from the deans that a lot of these important LGBTQ health topics are completely off the radar screens of many medical schools” (White, 2011).

More than half of LGBTQ adults and 70 percent of those who are transgender or gender nonconforming report experiencing discrimination from a health care professional; this leads to delays or reluctance in seeking care or preventative visits, which has negative health outcomes (American Heart Association 2020). Similarly, elderly LGBTQ people are far less likely to come out to healthcare professionals than are straight or cisgender people, which may also lead to healthcare issues at an age that is typically highly reliant on medical care (Foglia 2014).

In 2025, Trump issued an executive order that directs agencies of the federal government to take action to prevent gender-affirming care in various ways, including by removing coverage for gender-affirming care from federal health insurance policies, modifying requirements under the Affordable Care Act, and preventing hospitals or other medical providers who accept Medicare or Medicaid, or who receive federal funding for research or education, from providing gender-affirming care of any kind to people under the age of 19. This is despite the fact that gender-affirming care is supported by every major medical association, including the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, and others (Wolf, HRC 2025).

Heterosexual Privilege

In earlier chapters, we discussed the related concepts of white privilege and male privilege. To recall, simply because they are white, whites can go through their daily lives without worrying about or experiencing the many kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle negative events that people of color experience. Moreover, simply because they are male, men can go through their daily lives without worrying about or experiencing the many kinds of subtle and not-so-subtle negative events that women experience. Whether or not they are conscious of it, therefore, whites and men are automatically privileged compared to people of color and women, respectively.

An analogous concept exists in the study of sexual orientation and inequality. This concept is heterosexual privilege, which refers to the many advantages that heterosexuals (or people perceived as heterosexuals) enjoy simply because their sexual orientation is not LGBTQ. There are many such advantages, as seen below:

- I am not identified or labeled — politically, socially, economically, or otherwise — by my sexual orientation.
- No one questions the “normality” of my sexuality or believes my sexuality was “caused” by psychological trauma, sin, or abuse.
- I do not have to fear that my family, friends, or co-workers will find out about my sexual orientation, and that their knowing will have negative consequences for me.
- My sexual orientation (if known to others) is not used to exclude me from any profession or organization (teaching, coaching, the military, Boy Scouts).
- I am not accused of being deviant, warped, perverted, or psychologically confused, or dysfunctional because of my sexual orientation.
- People don’t ask me why I chose my sexual orientation, and why I choose to be so open about it.
- I can walk in public, holding my partner’s hand, hug my partner, and even kiss my partner in front of others without disapproval, comments, laughter, harassment, or the threat of violence.
- I can easily find a religious community that will welcome me and my partner.
- I am guaranteed to find sexuality education materials for couples of my sexual orientation.
- I can work with young children and not fear being accused of molesting, corrupting, or recruiting them to my sexual orientation.
- I can talk about my sexual orientation in casual conversation and not be accused of flaunting it, or pushing it on others.
- When I rent a movie, watch TV, listen to music, or go to the theater, I can be sure that my sexual orientation will be represented often and accurately.
- I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented in the school curriculum.
- People of my sexual orientation are well-represented in the positions of power in my workplace.
- My individual behavior does not reflect on all people of my sexual orientation.
- People do not assume that I am promiscuous or sex-focused because of my sexual orientation.
- I am identified by my profession or interests rather than my sexual orientation (I am a teacher, not a gay teacher; I am a musician, not a lesbian musician).
- My sexual orientation is not used as a synonym for “bad,” “stupid,” or “disgusting.” (“That’s so gay.” “What a fag.” “She’s a lezzy”).
- I can raise children without threats of state intervention and without my children having to be worried about which friends might reject them because of their parents’ sexual orientation. I don’t have to prepare my children for the people who may treat them badly because of their parents’ sexual orientation.
- I feel secure that few hate crimes are targeted at people like me because of our sexual orientation.
- I don’t ever have to justify my identity, my life, or my sexual orientation to people who think I shouldn’t exist.

(Adapted from “Examples of Heterosexual Privilege” at https://queer.ucmerced.edu/sites/queer.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/queer_ally_homework.pdf)



Figure 11.4: Hashtags, pride parades, and other activism are important elements of supporting LGBTQ people, but most experts and advocates agree that some of the most important steps are ones taken internally to better educate ourselves, and on interpersonal levels with friends, coworkers, and family members. (Credit: Lars Verket/flickr)

Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation have not come into effect until recent years. In 2011, President Obama overturned “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a controversial policy that required gay and lesbian people in the US military to keep their sexuality undisclosed. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Obberfell vs. Hodges* that the right to civil marriage was guaranteed to same-sex couples. And, as discussed above, in the landmark 2020 Supreme Court decision added sexual orientation and gender identity as categories protected from employment discrimination by the Civil Rights Act. At the same time, laws passed in several states permit some level of discrimination against same-sex couples and other LGBTQ people based on a person’s individual religious beliefs or prejudices, and the current administration is actively trying to roll back civil rights and protections for LGBTQ people.

Supporting LGTBQ people requires effort to better understand them without making assumptions. Understand people by listening, respecting them, and by remembering that every person—LGBTQ or otherwise— is different. Being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual is not a choice, but the way a person expresses or reveals that reality is their choice. Your experience or knowledge of other LGBTQ people (even your own experience if you are LGBTQ) cannot dictate how another person feels or acts. Finally, intersectionality means that people are defined by more than their gender identity and sexual orientation. People from different age groups, races, abilities, and experiences within the LGTBQ community have different perspectives and needs.

While each individual has their own perspective, respecting their feelings and protecting their equality and wellbeing does have some common elements. These include referring to a person as they would like to be referred to, including the avoidance of abbreviations or slang terms unless you are sure they accept them. For example, many people and organizations (including those referenced in this chapter) use the abbreviation “trans” to represent transgender people, but a non-transgender person should not use that abbreviation unless they know the person or subject is comfortable with it.

Respect also includes people’s right to privacy: One person should never out a person to someone else or assume that someone is publicly out. LGBTQ allies can support everyone’s rights to be equal and empowered members of society, including within organizations, institutions, and even individual classrooms.

Supporting others may require a change in mindset and practice. For example, if a transgender person wants to be referred to by a different name, or use different pronouns, it might take some getting used to, especially if you have spent years referring to the person by another name or by other pronouns. However, making the change is worthwhile and not overly onerous.

You can learn more about being an ally through campus, government, and organizational resources like the Human Rights Campaign’s guide <https://www.hrc.org/resources/being-an-lgbtq-ally>

Language is an important part of culture, and it has been evolving to better include and describe people who are not gender-binary. In many languages, including English, pronouns are gendered. That is, pronouns are intended to identify the gender of the individual being referenced. English has traditionally been binary, providing only “he/him/his,” for male subjects and “she/her/hers,” for female subjects.

This binary system excludes those who identify as neither male nor female. The word “they,” which was used for hundreds of years as a singular pronoun, is more inclusive. As a result, in fact, Merriam Webster selected this use of “they” as Word of the Year for

2019. “They” and other pronouns are now used to reference those who do not identify as male or female on the spectrum of gender identities. It’s important to keep inclusivity in mind when referring to a group of people – “Honored Guests” being more inclusive than “Ladies and Gentleman” for example, our “siblings” instead of “brothers and sisters.”

Gender inclusive language has impacts beyond personal references. In biology, anatomy, and healthcare, for example, people commonly refer to organs or processes with gender associations. However, more accurate and inclusive language avoids such associations. For example, women do not produce eggs; ovaries produce eggs. Men are not more likely to be color-blind; those with XY chromosomes are more likely to be color blind (Gender Inclusive Biology 2019).

Beyond the language of gender, the language of society and culture itself can be either a barrier or an opening to inclusivity. Societal norms are important sociological concepts, and behaviors outside of those norms can lead to exclusion. By disassociating gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation from the concept of norms, we can begin to eliminate the implicit and explicit biases regarding those realities. In everyday terms, this can take the form of avoiding references to what is normal or not normal in regard to sexuality or gender (Canadian Public Health Association 2019).

Despite the advances this movement has made and despite the improvement in public attitudes about LGBTQ issues, we have seen in this chapter that LGBTQ people continue to experience many types of inequality and other problems. As with inequality based on race and/or ethnicity, social class, and gender, there is much work still to be done to reduce inequality based on sexual orientation.

For such inequality to be reduced, it is certainly essential that heterosexuals do everything possible in their daily lives to avoid any form of mistreatment of LGBTQ individuals and to treat them as they would treat any heterosexual. Work to block, challenge, and overturn harmful legislation is also needed.

Gender Roles

Socialization and Gender Roles

As we grow, we learn how to behave in a particular way as dictated by societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. In this *socialization* process, children are introduced to certain roles that are typically linked to their biological sex. The term *gender role* refers to society’s concept of how men and women are expected to look and how they should behave. These roles are based on norms, or standards, created by society. In U.S. culture, masculine roles are usually associated with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles are usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination. Today it is largely believed that most gender differences are attributed to differences in socialization, rather than genetic and biological factors.

Socialization and the Family

Role learning starts with socialization at birth. There is considerable evidence that parents socialize sons and daughters differently. Even today, our society is quick to outfit male infants in blue and girls in pink, even applying these color-coded gender labels while a baby is in the womb. 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). 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.



Figure 11.5: Gender socialization begins from birth © Thinkstock.

Another way children learn gender roles is through play. Parents typically supply boys with trucks, toy guns, and superhero paraphernalia, which are active toys that promote motor skills, aggression, and solitary play. Daughters are often given dolls and dress-up apparel that foster nurturing, social proximity, and role play. Studies have shown that children will most likely choose to play with “gender appropriate” toys (or same-gender toys) even when cross-gender toys are available because parents give children positive feedback (in the form of praise, involvement, and physical closeness) for gender normative behavior (Caldera, Huston, and O’Brien 1998). Some parents and experts become concerned about young people becoming too attached to these stereotypical gender roles.

The different ways that girls and boys are socialized tend to result in more privileges for boys. For instance, boys are allowed more autonomy and independence at an earlier age than daughters. They may be given fewer restrictions on appropriate clothing, dating habits, or curfews. Sons are also often free from cleaning or cooking and other household tasks that are considered feminine. Daughters are limited by their expectation to be obedient, passive, and nurturing. They are expected to take on many of the domestic responsibilities. Sons may be expected to help mow the lawn, a household task that is typically completed a few times a month, while a mother and daughter prepare meals in the kitchen, a chore that is completed daily.

Even when parents set gender equality as a goal, there may be underlying indications of inequality. For example, boys may be asked to take out the garbage or perform other tasks that require strength or toughness, while girls may be asked to fold laundry or perform duties that require neatness and care. It has been found that fathers are firmer in their expectations for gender conformity than are mothers, and their expectations are stronger for sons than they are for daughters (Kimmel 2000).

Continued Socialization

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)

Children become agents who actively facilitate and apply normative gender expectations to those around them. When children do not conform to the appropriate gender role, they may face negative sanctions such as being criticized or marginalized by their peers. Though many of these sanctions are informal, they can be quite severe. For example, a girl who wishes to take karate class instead of dance lessons may be called a “tomboy” and face difficulty gaining acceptance from both male and female peer groups (Ready 2001). Boys, especially, are subject to intense ridicule for gender nonconformity (Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000).

Peggy Orenstein (2012) describes how her two-year-old daughter happily wore her engineer outfit and took her Thomas the Tank Engine lunchbox to the first day of preschool. It only took one little boy to say to her that “girls don’t like trains!” for her to ditch Thomas and move on to more gender “appropriate” concerns like princesses. “Doing gender” — performing tasks based upon the gender assigned by society — is learned through interaction with others. Children learn gender through direct feedback from others, particularly when they are censured for violating gender norms. Gender is in this sense an accomplishment rather than an innate trait. This does not mean that the gender roles that are learned are permanent, however, as would be suggested by a

biological or hard-wired model of gender. Physical expressions of gender such as “throwing like a girl” can be transformed into a new stable gender schema when the little girl joins a softball league.



Figure 11.6: Childhood activities and instruction, like this father-daughter duck-hunting trip, can influence people's lifelong views on gender roles. (Credit: Tim Miller, USFWS Midwest Region/flickr)

Adult Socialization

The drive to adhere to masculine and feminine gender roles continues later in life, in a tendency sometimes referred to as "occupational sorting" (Gerdeman 2019). Men tend to outnumber women in professions such as law enforcement, the military, and politics. Women tend to outnumber men in care-related occupations such as childcare, healthcare (even though the term “doctor” still conjures the image of a man), and social work. These occupational roles are examples of typical U.S. male and female behavior, derived from our culture’s traditions. Adherence to these roles demonstrates fulfillment of social expectations but not necessarily personal preference (Diamond 2002); sometimes, people work in a profession because of societal pressure and/or the opportunities afforded to them based on their gender.

Historically, women have had difficulty shedding the expectation that they cannot be a "good mother" and a "good worker" at the same time, which results in fewer opportunities and lower levels of pay (Ogden 2019). Generally, men do not share this difficulty. Since the assumed role of men as fathers does not seem to conflict with their perceived work role, men who are fathers (or who are expected to become fathers) do not face the same barriers to employment or promotion (González 2019). This is sometimes referred to as the "motherhood penalty" versus the "fatherhood premium," and is prevalent in many higher income countries (Bygren 2017). These concepts and their financial and societal implications will be discussed later in the chapter.

Mass Media and Socialization

Gender socialization also occurs through the mass media (Renzetti, Curran, & Maier, 2012). On children’s television shows, the major characters are male. In adult prime-time television, more men than women continue to fill more major roles in weekly shows, despite notable women’s roles in some shows. Women are also often portrayed as unintelligent or frivolous individuals who are there more for their looks than for anything else. When women are given a lead role, it often falls into one of two extremes: a wholesome, saint-like figure or a malevolent, hypersexual figure (Etaugh and Bridges 2003).

Television commercials reinforce this image. Cosmetics ads abound, suggesting not only that a major task for women is to look good but also that their sense of self-worth stems from looking good. Other commercials show women becoming ecstatic over achieving a clean floor or sparkling laundry. Judging from the world of television commercials, then, women’s chief goals in life are to look good and to have a clean house. At the same time, men’s chief goals, judging from many commercials, are to drink beer and drive cars.



Figure 11.7: Women's magazines reinforce the view that women need to be slender and wear many cosmetics in order to be considered beautiful. © Thinkstock

Women's and men's magazines reinforce these gender images (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Milillo, 2008). Most of the magazines intended for teenaged girls and adult women are filled with pictures of thin, beautiful models; advice on dieting; cosmetics ads; and articles on how to win and please your man. Conversely, the magazines intended for teenaged boys and men are filled with ads and articles on cars and sports, advice on how to succeed in careers and other endeavors, and pictures of thin, beautiful (and sometimes nude) women. These magazine images again suggest that women's chief goals are to look good and to please men and that men's chief goals are to succeed, win over women, and live life in the fast lane.

Religion and Socialization

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). 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).

Gender Policing

As an addition to socialization, gender roles can also be enforced through gender policing. *Gender policing* refers to the responses someone receive when they violate gender rules. A "tomboy" (a girl who acts masculine) is usually regarded more positively than a "sissy" (a boy who acts feminine). However, this does not mean that women are free of gender policing. Instead, the approval reflects how masculinity is perceived as more highly valued in a patriarchal society. Even so, women engaging in what others consider too much masculinity will receive the same gender policing as men who participate in a little femininity receive.

The expectation that women learn to balance their interest in “masculine” activities and traits with a feminine gender performance is called the *feminine apologetic* (Wade and Ferree 2015). For example, women athletes often participate in the feminine apologetic by making efforts to appear feminine, apologizing for aggression, or displaying themselves as heterosexual to counter their success in sports, an arena that is often considered masculine (Davis-Delano et al. 2009). The strategy of using the feminine apologetic enables women to benefit from participating in masculinity without attracting violent gender policing (Hardy 2014). Gender policing reinforces gender order and promotes inequality.



Figure 11.8: Representations of emphasized femininity on magazine covers and in advertisements. Women athletes like Candace Parker and Anna Rawson are often posed in ways that have little to do with their sport. Photo by ESPN Magazine is included under fair use. Photo by Golfpunk is included under fair use.

Gender and Biology

Biological evidence for gender differences exists, but its interpretation remains very controversial. It must be weighed against the evidence of cultural variations in the experience of gender and of socialization differences by gender. Also, as sociologist Linda L. Lindsey (2011, p. 52) notes, “Biological arguments are consistently drawn upon to justify gender inequality and the continued oppression of women.” Anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists tend to view gender as a social construction. Cultural and social explanations of gender differences and gender inequality promise some hope for change. 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.

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[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/Cosumnes_River_College/SOC_301%3A_Social_Problems_\(Lugo\)/](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/Cosumnes_River_College/SOC_301%3A_Social_Problems_(Lugo)/)

<https://2012books.lardbucket.org/boo...cial-problems/>

<https://openpress.usask.ca/soc112/>

<https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/soceveryday1e/>

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12: The Issues of Gender and Sexuality Part Two

Gender Stratification and Inequality

Stratification refers to a system in which groups of people experience unequal access to basic, yet highly valuable, social resources. There is a long history of gender stratification in the United States. When looking to the past, it would appear that society has made great strides in terms of abolishing some of the most blatant forms of gender inequality (see timeline below) but underlying effects of male dominance still permeate society (as the last line shows).

Before 1809—Women could not execute a will

Before 1840—Women were not allowed to own or control property

Before 1920—Women were not permitted to vote

Before 1963—Employers could legally pay a woman less than a man for the same work

Before 1973—Women did not have the right to a safe and legal abortion

Before 1981—No woman had served on the U.S. Supreme Court

Before 2009—No African American woman had been CEO of a U.S. Fortune 500 corporation

Before 2016—No Latina had served as a U.S. Senator

Before 2017—No openly transgender person had been elected in a state legislature

After 2022—Women did not have a right to a safe and legal abortion

Household Inequality

Gender inequality occurs within families and households. Here we'll briefly discuss 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). This disparity holds true even when women work outside the home, leading sociologist Arlie Hochschild (Hochschild, 1989) to observe 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). In the realm of household work, then, gender inequality persists.

Health Care Inequality

In January of 2012, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, announced that all health care plans were required to provide coverage for contraceptives approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The effective meaning of Secretary Sebelius' announcement was that contraceptives are considered by the Obama administration to be a requisite component of health care.

The premise of the contraceptive mandate demonstrates present inequities in the American health care industry for male and female patients. Whereas services for male reproductive health, such as Viagra, are considered to be a standard part of health care, women's reproductive health services are called into question. In the context of the 2012 contraceptive mandate debate, health care professionals' assessments that contraception is an integral component for women's health care, regardless of sexual activity, went largely unaddressed. Instead, insurance coverage of contraception was framed as a government subsidy for sexual activity. This framing revealed inherent social inequalities for women in the domain of sexual health.

Furthermore, a 2020 Supreme Court ruling stated that employers with a sincere religious or moral objection also can choose not to cover birth control. Also, private plans may or may not cover the option for birth control that best fits the person who needs it,

resulting again in additional costs to that person.

Women also experience other difficulties in health care due to biased views of gender. According to a 2018 study, men with chronic pain are viewed by doctors as “brave” or “stoic,” while view women with chronic pain are viewed as “emotional” or “hysterical.” Health care professionals are more apt to dismiss or diminish women’s description of their symptoms such as pain. This can lead to delayed or incorrect diagnoses, continued suffering, and health damage. It can also lead to inadequate management of symptoms. Distrust of health professionals due to negative experiences with them can also lead to the avoidance of medical care.

The Pay Gap

Despite making up nearly half (49.8 percent) of payroll employment, men vastly outnumber women in authoritative, powerful, and, therefore, high-earning jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Even when a woman’s employment status is equal to a man’s, she will generally make only 81 cents for every dollar made by her male counterpart (Payscale 2020). Women in the paid labor force also still do the majority of the unpaid work at home. On an average day, 84 percent of women (compared to 67 percent of men) spend time doing household management activities (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). This double duty keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure (Hochschild and Machung 1989). For additional, optional information, you can learn more at AAUW <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/>.

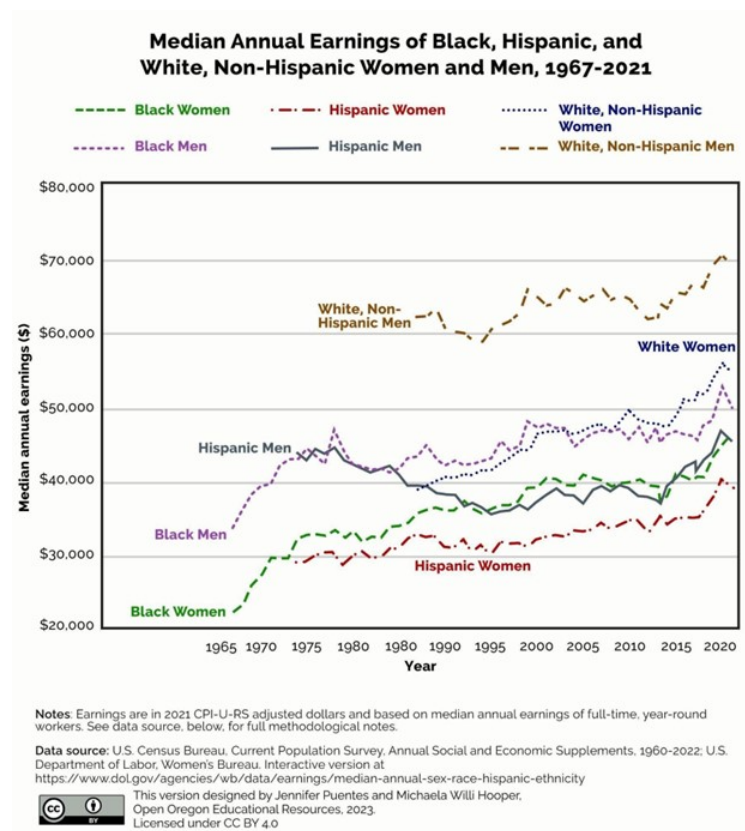


Figure 12.1: Median annual earnings of men and women in different ethnic groups



Figure 12.2: In some cultures, women do all of the household chores with no help from men, as doing housework is a sign of weakness, considered by society as a feminine trait. (Credit: Evil Erin/flickr)

One reason for these differences, and for women's lower earnings in general, is their caregiving responsibilities (Chang, 2010). 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) 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."

Research interviewing women shows that women in leadership positions experience ageism at every age in the workplace. Older women are routinely discounted as outdated and not worthy of advancement, while younger women's credibility is questioned (Diehl, Dzubinski, and Stephenson 2023).

Another reason is sex segregation in the workplace, which accounts for up to 45 percent of the gender gap (Kelley, 2011; Reskin & Padavic, 2002). 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. 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).

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? 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).

Studies of *comparable worth* support this argument (Levanon, England, & Allison, 2009). 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.

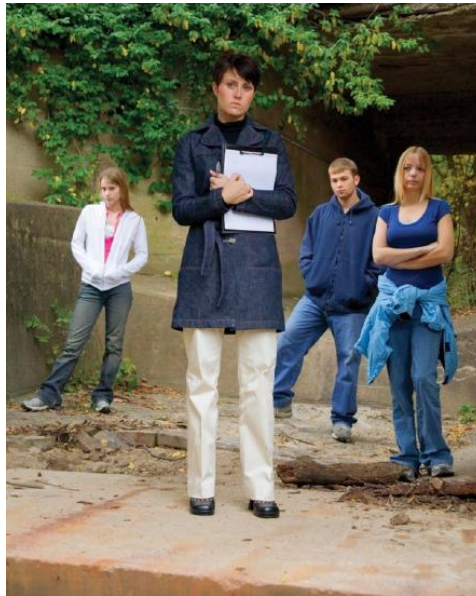


Figure 12.3: Some women's jobs pay less than men's jobs even though their comparable worth is equal to or even higher than the men's jobs. For example, a social worker, depicted here, may earn less money than a probation officer, even though calculations based on comparable worth would predict that a social worker should earn at least as much. © Thinkstock

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).

Feminization of Poverty

Women disproportionately make up the majority of individuals who live in poverty across the world. The gender wage gap, the higher proportion of single mothers compared to single fathers, and the high cost of childcare create a gendered experience when it comes to living in poverty. Considering the economic situation produced by these factors, women (11 percent) are more likely to live in poverty than men (8 percent) (Fins 2020). Women in all racial and ethnic groups are more likely than White men to live in poverty. United States census data shows that poverty rates are higher for Black women (18 percent), Native American women (18 percent), Latinx women (15 percent), and Asian women (8 percent) (Fins 2020).

The Glass Ceiling

The idea that women are unable to reach the executive suite is known as the glass ceiling. It is an invisible barrier that women encounter when trying to win jobs in the highest level of business. At the beginning of 2021, for example, a record 41 of the world's largest 500 companies were run by women. While a vast improvement over the number twenty years earlier – where only

two of the companies were run by women – these 41 chief executives still only represent eight percent of those large companies (Newcomb 2020).

Why do women have a more difficult time reaching the top of a company? One idea is that there is still a stereotype in the United States that women aren't aggressive enough to handle the boardroom or that they tend to seek jobs and work with other women (Reiners 2019). Other issues stem from the gender biases based on gender roles and motherhood discussed above.

Another idea is that women lack mentors, executives who take an interest and get them into the right meetings and introduce them to the right people to succeed (Murrell & Blake-Beard 2017).

Part of the problem keeping women out of the highest paying, most prestigious positions is that they have historically not held these positions. As a result, recruiters for high- status jobs are predominantly white males, and tend to hire similar people in their networks. Their networks are made up of mostly white males from the same socio-economic status, which helps perpetuate their over-representation in the best jobs.

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).

Sexual Dynamics

Social stigmas surround women's sexuality in ways that are highly restrictive and contradictory. After sexual encounters, men are praised for their actions and for “scoring.” In contrast, women are often criticized and labeled negatively by peers and society regardless of how they handle sexual advances. If they turn down advances, they are called a “prude” or “bitch,” but if they accept advances, they are labeled as “easy” or a “slut.” Recent research on hookup culture shows that women are being criticized less than they were previously, but the stigma and social responses are still frequently negative, regardless of a hookup attempt's outcome (Armstrong et al. 2014).

Women's and men's experiences with online dating demonstrate differences when it comes to sexual harassment and fear of assault when arranging face to face meetings. Women are more often the recipients of sexually explicit photos and unwanted contact (see below). Men receive unwanted sexually explicit photos or conversations, but the social norms are gendered and reflect a power dynamic in which unwanted contact with women may lead to fear and concerns for safety. Women are twice as likely to say that they are concerned about their physical and emotional risks in dating (Pew Research Center 2020).

Data from PEW research center shows that younger women who use dating sites or apps are likely to report negative interactions with others on platforms. Women were more likely than others to be contacted after they said they were not interested, sent sexually explicit messages or images they didn't request, called offensive names and threatened to be physically harm. Numbers were highest for women in 18-34 age range.

Younger women who have used dating sites or apps are especially likely to report having negative interactions with others on these platforms

% of online dating users in each group who say someone ____ on a dating site or app

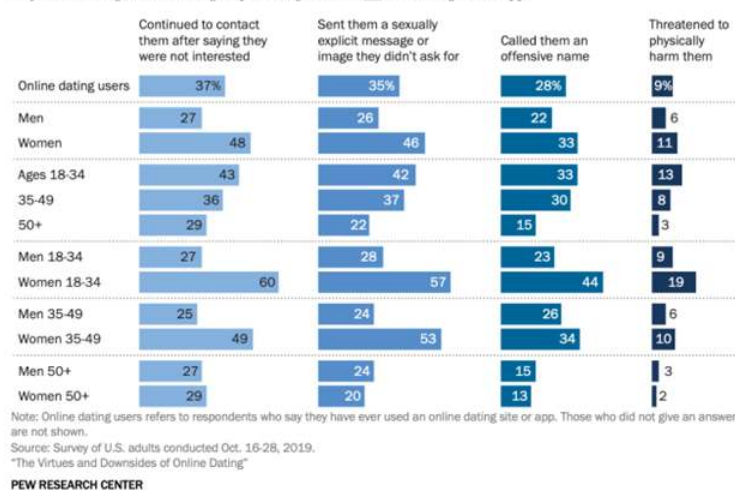


Figure 12.4: Gender differences and the downside of online dating. Younger women report higher incidences of being harassed or sent sexually explicit messages.

Dating apps have expanded to reach a broader audience. There are apps for queer women, gay men, trans people, Black people, religiously affiliated, kink, etcetera. Apps like Bumble have been developed to put the “power” in the hands of women as they control who can and can’t message them. Her, Lex, and Grindr are specifically made for lesbian, gay, trans, nonbinary, and queer people and attempt to create a safe and accepting space that may not be accessible in other apps like Tinder, Bumble, Match, and Hinge.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

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) 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).

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.

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.

Women of Color: A Triple Burden

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. This is an example of the concept of *intersectionality*, first highlighted by sociologist Kimberlé Crenshaw. This is the idea that various categories, including gender, race, class and ethnicity, interact and contribute towards systematic social inequality. Various forms of oppression, such as racism or sexism, do not act independently of one another; instead these forms of oppression are interrelated, forming a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination. In light of this theory, the oppression and marginalization of women is shaped not only by gender, but by other factors such as race and class.

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.

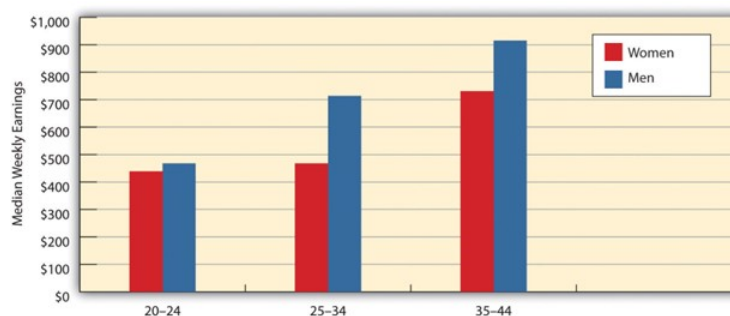


Figure 12.5: The Gender Gap in Annual Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 2010 Source: US Department of Labor. (2011). Highlights of women's earnings in 2010. Washington, DC: Author.

These differences in income mean that African American and Latina women are poorer than white women. We noted earlier that almost 32 percent of all female-headed families are poor. This figure masks race/ethnic differences among such families: 24.8 percent of families headed by non-Latina white women are poor, compared to 41.0 percent of families headed by African American women and also 44.5 percent of families headed by Latina women (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011). While white women are poorer than white men, African American and Latina women are clearly poorer than white women.

Gender-Based Violence

Rape is a type of sexual assault in which one or more individuals forces sexual contact on another individual without consent. Rape is often thought of as a crime committed by a man against a woman, but increasingly, social and legal definitions of rape recognize that this does not have to be the case. In 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation updated its definition of rape, which had originally been instituted in 1972, and which previously limited rape to a crime against women. This definition, considered outdated and overly narrow, was replaced by a new definition, which recognizes that rape can be perpetrated by a person of any gender against a victim of any gender. The new definition also broadens the instances in which a victim is unable to give consent. These instances now include temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity, and incapacity caused by the use of drugs or alcohol.

Rape, then is not *always* against women. But this 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. Also, 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. Rape, 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.

The definition of rape rests on the notion of consent. In modern legal understanding, consent may be explicit or implied by context, but the absence of objection never itself constitutes consent, and consent can be withdrawn at any time. Consent cannot be forced and it cannot be given by certain categories of people considered incapable of consent (e.g., minors and the cognitively disabled).

Sexually violent acts are acts of power, not of sex. This can be seen most clearly when considering war rape and prison rape. War rape is the type of sexual pillaging that occurs in the aftermath of a war, typically characterized by the male soldiers of the victorious military raping the women of the towns they have just taken over. Prison rape is the type of rape that is common (and seriously under reported) in prisons all over the world, including the United States, in which inmates will force sex upon one another as a demonstration of power.

Sexual violence is not mainly about sex; it's more about control and dominance. In situations of sexual assault, sex is used as a weapon to gain power over another person. The images in the picture below show how violence is excused and victims are unfairly blamed. These victims can be anyone.



Figure 12.6: In the first image, a woman uses makeup to conceal marks of violence. In the second, the idea of “blaming the victim” is shown.

Effects of Gender-Based Violence

Rape can cause devastating physical and psychological trauma. In the aftermath of an attack, many victims develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a severe anxiety disorder. Rape victims may also confront a number of emotions related to shame. Often,

victims blame themselves for rape. Some victims come to believe they somehow deserved the assault, while others become preoccupied thinking about how the rape could have been avoided.

Although self-blame might seem like an unusual, intensely individual response to rape, it is rooted in social conceptions of rape and victimhood. In the case of rape, victim blaming generally refers to the belief that certain behaviors on the part of the victim, like flirting or wearing provocative clothing, encourage assault. Legal systems may perpetuate victim blaming. For example, in the United States, defendants are guaranteed an opportunity to explain their actions and motivations, which may allow them to instigate conversations about their victims' sexual past or physical presentation. Lawyers and activists are aware of the negative consequences of this type of conversation in courtrooms, and many have encouraged state legislators to enact rape shield laws, which would prohibit testimony about a victim's sexual behavior. Nevertheless, victims are often reluctant to report rape because of these social pressures.

There are challenges people face in reporting and dealing with the trauma after such events. Victims often face criticism, rejection, disbelief, and blame and are made to feel like the events they experienced either were not real or were their fault. Others may say or imply that the victim should have been stronger, said no more forcefully, or behaved or dressed differently. Our responses to acts of violence send messages about what types of behaviors and language are acceptable.

The Extent and Context of Rape and Sexual Assault

Rates of sexual violence in the LGBTQIA+ community are the same or higher than in heterosexuals (Human Rights Campaign 2024). Sexual violence will be experienced by about half of all trans individuals and bisexual women during their lifetimes (Flanders, Anderson, and Tarasoff 2020). Their experiences relate to having higher risk factors such as poverty, stigma, and marginalization. Another factor is hate-motivated violence, which can often take the form of sexual assault and sexual violence. There are also high rates of intimate partner violence and sexual assault by partners within the LGBTQIA+ community (Human Rights Campaign 2024).

Transphobia and homophobia are evident in the rates of sexual assault experienced by transgender individuals, with almost half experiencing such assaults in their lifetime. People who are trans and BIPOC experiencing even higher rates (Griffiths and Armstrong 2023). Another concerning trend is that people identifying with the LGBTQIA+ community are less likely to access services, and if they do attempt to get help, they may be denied services due to their sexual or gender identity (Kumar and Joseph 2021). This lack of access further adds to the barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals. The next section of this chapter will examine a few of the other ways that policies and social institutions create barriers for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

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), 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.



Figure 12.7: Up to one-third of US women experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, at least once in their lives. Wikimedia Commons – public domain. Words say: While we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.”

According to the UCR, which are compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from police reports, 88,767 reported rapes (including attempts, and defined as forced sexual intercourse) occurred in the United States in 2010 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011). Because women often do not tell police they were raped, the NCVS, which involves survey interviews of thousands of people nationwide, probably yields a better estimate of rape; the NCVS also measures sexual assaults in addition to rape, while the UCR measures only rape. According to the NCVS, 188,380 rapes and sexual assaults occurred in 2010 (Truman, 2011). Other research indicates that up to one-third of US women will experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, at least once in their lives (Barkan, 2012). A study of a random sample of 420 Toronto women involving intensive interviews yielded an even higher figure: Two-thirds said they had experienced at least one rape or sexual assault, including attempts. The researchers, Melanie Randall and Lori Haskell (1995, p. 22), concluded that “it is more common than not for a woman to have an experience of sexual assault during their lifetime.”

Studies of college students also find a high amount of rape and sexual assault. About 20–30 percent of women students in anonymous surveys report being raped or sexually assaulted (including attempts), usually by a male student they knew beforehand (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006). Thus at a campus of 10,000 students of whom 5,000 are women, about 1,000–1,500 women will be raped or sexually assaulted over a period of four years, or about 10 per week in a four-year academic calendar.

Sexual violence is particularly difficult to track because it is severely under reported. Records from police and government agencies are often incomplete or limited. Most victims of sexual violence do not report it because they are ashamed, afraid of being blamed, concerned about not being believed, or are simply afraid to relive the event by reporting it. Most countries and many NGOs are undertaking efforts to try to increase the reporting of sexual violence as it so obviously has serious physical and psychological impacts on its victims.

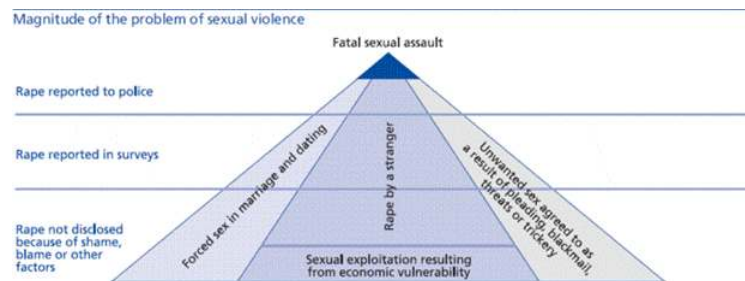


Figure 12.8: Sexual Violence Reporting: Sexual violence is severely under reported. This graphic illustrates the magnitude of the underreporting of sexual violence

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). A woman is thus two to four times more likely to be raped by someone she knows than by a stranger.

Rape Culture

Language, norms, and everyday behaviors contribute to a culture that permits sexual violence. Sexual violence is normalized through environments that promote an unequal distribution of power and value toxic masculinity. From these environments springs rape culture, which justifies, naturalizes, and may glorify sexual pressure, coercion, and violence (Marcus 1992; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Rape culture facilitates sexual assault and is perpetuated through the presence of persistent gender inequalities and attitudes about gender and sexuality. As you learned in Chapter 9, gender norms organize social institutions in our society, including power structures and institutional discrimination. Sexuality works to structure our world similarly.

One way rape culture is normalized is through displays of sexual violence in popular culture. Campaigns and advertisements are meant to grab attention, but is there a point at which they can go too far? View the images in the picture below. What messages are being conveyed about bodies, gender relations, and consent in these Dolce & Gabbana ads? How do these messages shape our culture?

Left: A woman in black outfit and high heels lays on the ground while a shirtless man in sunglasses crouches over her and holds down her arms. Three men, one shirtless, one with an unbuttoned shirt watch. Center: Topless man with bare legs exposed lays on floor arching back. Man in white unbuttoned shirt stands next to him unzipping his white pants. Three men are in the background, two are watching the naked man, one is looking away fixing his tie. Right: A woman in a white top and skirt lays on a tiled floor while men and women crouch over her body. One man with an open shirt watches from the background.

A series of ads from Dolce and Gabbana that have since been banned in some countries. They explicitly depict sexual violence in several ways.



Figure 12.9: Another way rape culture is perpetuated is by teaching young girls and women to minimize their discomfort to avoid hostile situations with men to protect themselves. Normalizing this behavior occurs in several ways. For an optional closer look at this topic, read the article “The Thing All Women Do That You Don’t Know About [Website].” https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-thing-all-women-do-you-dont-know-about_b_8630416

The ideas and norms that are part of rape culture also serve as barriers to reporting sexual violence. In U.S. culture, there is a great deal of uncertainty around the types of consequences perpetrators of sexual violence will experience. Influenced by how the media portrays such cases, people may not report incidents of sexual violence due to fears of not being believed. Concerns include doubts about men’s ability to control themselves, mistrust in authority figures’ responses, embarrassment, self-blame, and lack of support from others. These fears create barriers for survivors seeking help and justice.

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). 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.

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).

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).

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). 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). 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).

Reducing Rape and Sexual Assault

As we have seen, gender inequality manifests itself in many ways, one being in the form of violence against women. A sociological perspective tells us that cultural myths and economic and gender inequality help lead to rape, and that the rape problem goes far beyond a few psychopathic men who rape women. A sociological perspective thus tells us that our society cannot just stop at doing something about these men. Instead it must make more far-reaching changes by changing people’s beliefs about rape and by making every effort to reduce poverty and to empower women. This last task is especially important, for, as Randall and Haskell (1995, p. 22) observed, a sociological perspective on rape “means calling into question the organization of sexual inequality in our society.” To put it in other words, solving the problem of rape is NOT about controlling the men who do it – it’s about making structural changes in society. Just as many other issues, rape is not an individual problem, it’s a systemic one.

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 Indigenous people reservations. This meant that women of color who experienced sexual violence lacked the kinds of help available to their white, middle-class counterparts (Matthews, 1989), and despite some progress, this is still true today.

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...rators-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...02-1130454.stm>

Movements for Change

Feminism

One of the underlying issues that continues to plague women in the United States is *misogyny*. This is the hatred of or, aversion to, or prejudice against, women. Over the years misogyny has evolved as an ideology that men are superior to women in all aspects of life. This is tied to the idea of *patriarchy*, or male domination of society. In a patriarchal society characteristics associated with men and masculinity have more power and authority and women are ranked lower than men. Even the valued supposed characteristics of women, such as empathy, nurturance, and care for others, are ranked lower. Men and boys are held in higher social regard than women and girls and are granted additional advantages and rights.

There have been multiple movements to try and fight these ideas. *Feminism* argues that women and men should have equal legal and political rights. The movement advocates for economic, political, and social equality regardless of the sex one is assigned at birth. It also argues that the systematic oppression of people based on gender is problematic and should be changed.

There have been several “waves” of feminism in US history. The first wave was the suffrage movement, organized to get women the right to vote. It lasted from the 1800s–1920s. However, legally achieving the right to vote did not mean feminism had achieved the goal of equality.

The second wave was fueled by activism centered on gaining equal access to education and employment for women and in general make possible women’s participation in all aspects of American life and to gain for them all the rights enjoyed by men.

Feminists engaged in protests and actions designed to bring awareness and change. For example, the New York Radical Women demonstrated at the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City to bring attention to the contest’s—and society’s—exploitation of women. The protestors tossed instruments of women’s oppression, including high-heeled shoes, curlers, girdles, and bras, into a “freedom trash can.” News accounts incorrectly described the protest as a “bra burning,” which at the time was a way to demean and trivialize the issue of women’s rights (Gay 2018).

Other protests gave women a more significant voice in a male-dominated social, political, and entertainment climate. For decades, *Ladies Home Journal* had been a highly influential women’s magazine, managed and edited almost entirely by men. Men even wrote the advice columns and beauty articles. In 1970, protesters held a sit-in at the magazine’s offices, demanding that the company hire a woman editor-in-chief, add women and non-White writers at fair pay, and expand the publication’s focus.

Feminists in the 1970s also opened battered women’s shelters and successfully fought for protection from employment discrimination for pregnant women, reform of rape laws (such as the abolition of laws requiring a witness to corroborate a woman’s report of rape), criminalization of domestic violence, and funding for schools that sought to counter sexist stereotypes of women. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* invalidated a number of state laws under which abortions obtained during the first three months of pregnancy were illegal. This made a nontherapeutic abortion a legal medical procedure nationwide.

Many advances in women’s rights were the result of women’s greater engagement in politics. For example, Patsy Mink, the first Asian American woman elected to Congress, was the co-author of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, Title IX of which prohibits sex discrimination in education.

The involvement of more women outside the home transformed feminism. It was no longer just about women as a single group. Feminism began to encompass diverse topics such as women and civil rights, women and work, and women and rural labor, among others. By the 1990s, feminism had consolidated as a social movement with a global reach. These years marked the end of the second wave and the beginning of the third. A different conceptual framework emerged to change how we understand grassroots feminism and its diversification, including queer theory.

The third wave (1990s-2008) emerged out of the feminist criticisms that the first two waves primarily focused on the needs of women who were mostly White and middle class. Previous feminist movements often marginalized and overlooked the concerns of women of color, lesbians, and working-class individuals. One of the goals we see in the third wave is to work toward social justice and equity along the lines of race, social class, sex, gender, and sexuality. By centering the experiences of women of color, the third wave is also concerned with globalization and women’s rights in all countries, as well as the concept of intersectionality.

However, third wave feminism's focus on identity and the blurring of boundaries did not effectively address many persistent macrosociological issues such as sexual harassment and sexual assault, which will become a focus of fourth wave feminists.

The fourth and current wave of feminism maintains a focus on intersectionality and empowering women by removing the stigma associated with experiences with sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture. Social media and the internet play important roles in building awareness around social injustices, particularly through internet activism. The fourth wave critically examines gender norms and the marginalization of women, while seeking gender equity.

During this wave, social media has offered women an opportunity to speak up and share their experiences with sexual harassment, sexual violence, and sexism in the workplace. Within a matter of seconds, the internet provided a tool for women to speak freely about topics in their own words.

Accusations against men in powerful positions—from Hollywood directors to Supreme Court justices to the president of the United States, have catalyzed feminists in a way that appears to be fundamentally different from previous movements. We can already see the impact of this movement on some laws. Initially, some states banned nondisclosure agreements that cover sexual harassment and expanded protections for workers that are not covered by federal sexual harassment and state laws, such as independent contractors (North 2019). The passing of the Speak Out Act in 2022 prohibits the enforcement of non-disclosure agreements when there are allegations of workplace sexual harassment or sexual assault as a way to provide increased options for people to bring their claims in court.

Will the next generation of activists help us move into the fifth wave of feminism? How might this movement intertwine with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022? How will leaders of a new movement continue to draw on the work of their predecessors? Time will tell.

Women and Politics

One of the most important places for women to help other women is in politics. Historically in the United States, like many other institutions, political representation has been mostly made up of White men. By not having women in government, their issues are being decided by people who don't share their perspective. The number of women elected to serve in Congress has increased over the years, but does not yet accurately reflect the general population. In 2021, the population of the United States was 49 percent male and 51 percent female (Census.gov 2022), but the population of Congress was 72.3 percent male and 27.7 percent female (Manning 2022). Until the number of women in the federal government accurately reflects the population, there will be inequalities in our laws.

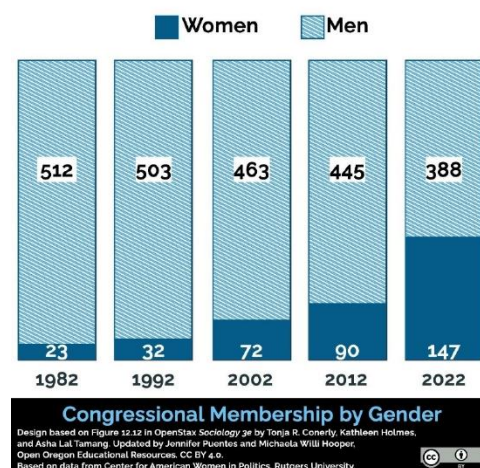


Figure 12.10: Breakdown of congressional membership by gender. In 2021, there were a record number of women in Congress, with 120 women serving in the House and 24 serving in the Senate. Gender representation has been steadily increasing over time, but it is not close to being equal. Image description.: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/soceveryday1e/back-matter/image-descriptions/#oofig9-20>

Women's bodies are often brought into political conversations. Often, decisions are made regarding what is appropriate for women with little feedback from the group that is directly affected. For example, there is the issue of abortion, and the recent court decision that greatly affects some women's decision-making abilities today.

On June 24, 2022, in a 6-to-3 decision, the Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade ruling that protected women's autonomy to choose abortion. The due process clause added to the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that provided a "right to privacy" and protected pregnant women's rights to an abortion has changed. This decision comes at a time when data from the PEW Research Center shows that 61 percent of adults believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases (Pew Research Center 2022a, 2022b).



Figure 12.11: States where the right to an abortion is not restricted, is restricted, or is completely banned. What do restrictions look like in your state? Image description: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/soceveryday1e/back-matter/image-descriptions/#oofig9-21>

States where the right to an abortion is not restricted, is restricted, or is completely banned. What do restrictions look like in your state? Image description: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/soceveryday1e/back-matter/image-descriptions/#oofig9-21>

A decision made by nine individuals appointed by a handful of (male) presidents impacts the lives of families and fundamentally restricts women's autonomy and choices. Now, individual states and government officials have the power to determine women's reproductive rights. Current laws and policies within individual states will make accessing safe medical procedures difficult. Several states already had laws banning abortion that predated Roe v. Wade, and others had trigger laws (bans on abortion that would go into effect with the overturning of Roe v. Wade) (Mangan 2022a). Some states have bans on abortions after six weeks of gestation. At such an early stage, many women might not be aware that they are pregnant. Others might not be able to secure doctor's appointments within the narrow timeframe.

Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett, argued that the 1973 ruling was an error made on weak arguments and an "abuse of judicial authority" (Totenberg and McCammon 2022). Dissenting Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan said that the court decision means that "young women today will come of age with fewer rights than their mothers and grandmothers . . . from the very moment of fertilization, a woman has no rights to speak of. A state can force her to bring a pregnancy to term even at the steepest personal and familial costs" (Totenberg and McCammon 2022). This ruling has significant implications for women's positions in society—or at least for some women. Affluent women have always and will continue to have options when it comes to seeking medical care.

There are many reasons a woman may choose to get an abortion. Rather than questioning why someone might want control over their reproductive rights and bodies, it is interesting from a sociological perspective to understand how complicated this court decision becomes when we examine our current social institutions. As the dissenting justices pointed out, women will be expected (and can be forced) to carry pregnancies to term when our current work and family policies do not uniformly support family life.

In the United States, parental leave policies are limited. If workplaces offer parental leave, it is often unpaid. This can either create an additional financial burden or make time off inaccessible at a time when new parents and guardians need to adjust to the mental and physical demands that come with newborns. If eligible, employees may need to take short-term disability or use the Family and Medical Leave Act. Government programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) attempt to offer financial

support for low-income families with children, but there is still a stigma associated with participating in welfare programs (McLaughlin 2021). Eligibility requirements are restrictive and benefits are low. For example, in Oregon the current maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is \$503. We also should consider how this decision will impact the growing fertility industry.

Keep in mind that this discussion is intended to point out how women's rights are now restricted. This decision disproportionately affects women of color and those with lower socioeconomic status (Dehlendorf, Harris, and Weitz 2013; Johnson 2022). The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* also brings into question other rulings where it was used as precedent. For example, Justice Clarence Thomas has mentioned that we need to reexamine marriage equality and contraceptive rights (Mangan 2022b). This single court decision demonstrates that gender organizes our daily lives, from how we learn to interact with others to how our laws serve to protect us.

Benefits and Costs of Being Male in a Sexist Society

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. We've talked about white privilege, or the advantages that whites automatically have in a racist society whether or not they realize they have these advantages. Many scholars also talk about male privilege, or the advantages that males automatically have in a patriarchal society whether or not they realize they have these advantages (McIntosh, 2007).

A few examples illustrate male privilege. Men can usually walk anywhere they want or go into any bar they want without having to worry about being raped or sexually harassed. Susan Griffin was able to write "I have never been free of the fear of rape" because she was a woman; it is no exaggeration to say that few men could write the same thing and mean it. Although some men are sexually harassed, most men can work at any job they want without having to worry about sexual harassment. Men can walk down the street without having strangers make crude remarks about their looks, dress, and sexual behavior. Men can ride the subway system in large cities without having strangers grope them, flash them, or rub their bodies against them. Men can apply for most jobs without worrying about being rejected because of their gender, or, if hired, not being promoted because of their gender. More examples of male privilege are given below

- If you have a bad day or are in a bad mood, people aren't going to blame it on your gender.
- You can be careless with your money and not have people blame it on your gender.
- You can be a careless driver and not have people blame it on your gender.
- You can be confident that your coworkers won't assume you were hired because of your gender.
- You can expect to be paid equitably for the work you do and not paid less because of your gender.
- If you are unable to succeed in your career, that won't be seen as evidence against your gender in the workplace.
- A decision to hire you won't be based on whether the employer assumes you will be having children in the near future.
- You can decide not to have children and not have your masculinity questioned.
- If you choose to have children, you will be praised for caring for your children instead of being expected to be the full-time caretaker.
- You can balance a career and a family without being called selfish for not staying at home (or being constantly pressured to stay at home).
- If you are straight and decide to have children with your partner, you can assume this will not affect your career.
- If you rise to prominence in an organization/role, no one will assume it is because you slept your way to the top.
- You can seek political office without having your gender be a part of your platform.
- You can seek political office without fear of your relationship with your children, or whom you hire to take care of them, being scrutinized by the press.
- Most political representatives share your gender, particularly the higher-ups.
- Your political officials fight for issues that pertain to your gender, or at least don't dismiss your issues as "special interest."
- You can ask for the "person in charge" and will likely be greeted by a member of your gender.

- As a child, you were able to find plenty of non-limiting, non-gender-role-stereotyped media to view.
- You can disregard your appearance without worrying about being criticized at work or in social situations.
- You can spend time on your appearance without being criticized for upholding unhealthy gender norms.
- If you're not conventionally attractive (or in shape), you don't have to worry as much about it negatively affecting your social or career potential.
- You're not expected to spend excessive amounts of money on grooming, style, and appearance to fit in, while making less money.
- You can have promiscuous sex and be viewed positively for it.
- You can go to a car dealership or mechanic and assume you'll get a fair deal and not be taken advantage of.
- Colloquial phrases and conventional language reflect your gender (e.g., mailman, "all men are created equal").
- Every major religion in the world is led by individuals of your gender.
- You can practice religion without subjugating yourself or thinking of yourself as less because of your gender.
- You are unlikely to be interrupted in conversations because of your gender.

Adapted from <https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/11/30-examples-of-male-privilege/>

Costs

Yet it is also true that men pay a price for living in a patriarchy. Without trying to claim that men have it as bad as women, scholars are increasingly pointing to the problems men face in a society that promotes male domination and traditional standards of masculinity such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and toughness (Kimmel & Messner, 2010). Socialization into masculinity is thought to underlie many of the emotional problems men experience, which stem from a combination of their emotional inexpressiveness and reluctance to admit to, and seek help for, various personal problems (Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Sometimes these emotional problems build up and explode, as mass shootings by males at schools and elsewhere indicate, or express themselves in other ways. Compared to girls, for example, boys are much more likely to be diagnosed with emotional disorders, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorder, and they are also more likely to commit suicide and to drop out of high school.

Men experience other problems that put themselves at a disadvantage compared to women. They commit much more violence than women do and, apart from rape and sexual assault, also suffer a much higher rate of violent victimization. They die earlier than women and are injured more often. Because men are less involved than women in child rearing, they also miss out on the joy of parenting that women are much more likely to experience.

Growing recognition of the problems males experience because of their socialization into masculinity has led to increased concern over what is happening to American boys. Citing the strong linkage between masculinity and violence, some writers urge parents to raise their sons differently in order to help our society reduce its violent behavior (Corbett, 2011). In all these respects, boys and men—and our nation as a whole—are also paying a price for living in a patriarchal society.

Reducing Gender Inequality

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, 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:

- Reduce socialization by parents and other adults of girls and boys into traditional gender roles.

- Confront gender stereotyping by the popular and news media.
- Increase public consciousness of the reasons for, extent of, and consequences of rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.
- Increase enforcement of existing laws against gender-based employment discrimination and against sexual harassment.
- Increase funding of rape-crisis centers and other services for girls and women who have been raped and/or sexually assaulted.
- 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.
- 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.

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13: The Issue of Race

What is Race?

Race and Biology

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.

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).

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).

First, 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.



Figure 13.1: 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. (Steve Jurvetson – Barak Obama on the Primary – CC BY 2.0.)

A second 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). 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). Yet in many Latin American nations, this person would be considered white. With such arbitrary designations, race is more of a social category than a biological one.

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). 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). 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.

The idea of "race" implies that skin color correlates biologically with distinctive behavioral and mental traits. (To put it another way, it teaches that because ancestry confers distinctive patterns of physical traits, such as eye color and skin color, ancestry must also confer distinctive patterns of other traits, such as intelligence.) However, those links don't exist.

The practice of assigning traits, abilities, and psychological profiles to people based on race has no basis in biological fact. Yet the mistaken assumption that there are racial patterns for these things tends to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy. People stereotyped as less intelligent due to their racial classification might put less effort into education; they may internalize the stereotype as a part of their personal identity and doubt their own ability to do well in school. At the same time, teachers may put less effort into their education because the social identity of these individuals predicts that the effort will be wasted.

To break the cycle of harmful consequences of racial classification, it is crucial for everyone to understand that racial identity is a social construct and therefore not fixed in anyone's "blood," ancestry, or genetic makeup.

Race as a Social Construction

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). 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).

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).

Although race is a social construction, it is also true that race has real consequences because people still perceive race as something real. This in turn leads them 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.

Viewing and Interacting with “Others”

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are oversimplified generalizations about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation—almost any characteristic. They may be positive (usually about one’s own group) but are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn’t take individual differences into account.

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

Once they become established, stereotypes tend to persevere. We begin to respond to members of stereotyped categories as if we already knew what they were like. Yaacov Trope and Eric Thompson (1997) found that individuals addressed fewer questions to members of categories about which they had strong stereotypes (as if they already knew what these people were like) and that the questions they did ask were likely to confirm the stereotypes they already had.

Stereotypes are maintained because information that confirms our stereotypes is better remembered than information that disconfirms them. When we see members of social groups perform behaviors, we tend to better remember information that confirms our stereotypes than we remember information that disconfirms our stereotypes (Fyock & Stangor, 1994). If we believe that Hispanics are poor students and we see an Hispanic student doing poorly, then we tend to remember it, but when we see an Hispanic student who is getting straight As, we tend to forget it. This is an example of the general principle of *assimilation*—we tend to perceive the world in ways that make it fit our existing beliefs more easily than we change our beliefs to fit the reality around us.

Stereotypes become difficult to change because they are so important to us—they become an integral and important part of our everyday lives in our culture. Stereotypes are frequently expressed on TV, in movies, and in chat rooms and blogs, and we learn a lot of our beliefs from these sources. Our friends also tend to hold beliefs similar to ours, and we talk about these beliefs when we

get together with them (Schaller & Conway, 1999). In short, stereotypes and prejudice are powerful largely because they are important social norms that are part of our culture (Guimond, 2000).

Because they are so highly cognitively accessible, and because they seem so “right,” our stereotypes easily influence our judgments of and responses to those we have categorized. The social psychologist John Bargh once described stereotypes as “cognitive monsters” because their activation was so powerful and because the activated beliefs had such insidious influences on social judgment (Bargh, 1999). Making things even more difficult, stereotypes are strongest for the people who are in most need of change—the people who are most prejudiced (Lepore & Brown, 1997).

Stereotyping is problematic when the stereotypes we hold about a social group are inaccurate overall, and particularly when they do not apply to the individual who is being judged (Stangor, 1995).

Stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies, such that our expectations about the group members make the stereotypes come true (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Once we believe that men make better leaders than women, we tend to behave toward men in ways that makes it easier for them to lead. And we behave toward women in ways that makes it more difficult for them to lead. The result? Men find it easier to excel in leadership positions, whereas women have to work hard to overcome the false beliefs about their lack of leadership abilities (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). And self-fulfilling prophecies are ubiquitous—even teachers’ expectations about their students’ academic abilities can influence the students’ school performance (Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009).

Of course, you may think that you personally do not behave in these ways, and you may not. But research has found that stereotypes are often used out of our awareness, which makes it very difficult for us to correct for them. Even when we think we are being completely fair, we may nevertheless be using our stereotypes to condone discrimination (Chen & Bargh, 1999). And when we are distracted or under time pressure, these tendencies become even more powerful (Stangor & Duan, 1991).

Furthermore, attempting to prevent our stereotype from coloring our reactions to others takes effort. We experience more negative affect (particularly anxiety) when we are with members of other groups than we do when we are with people from our own groups, and we need to use more cognitive resources to control our behavior because of our anxiety about revealing our stereotypes or prejudices (Butz & Plant, 2006; Richeson & Shelton, 2003). When we know that we need to control our expectations so that we do not unintentionally stereotype the other person, we may try to do so—but doing so takes effort and may frequently fail (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994).

Prejudice

While stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of groups and the members of those groups, *prejudice* refers to unjustifiable negative attitude, thoughts, and beliefs toward a group. A prejudice is not based on personal experience; instead, it is a prejudgment, originating outside actual experience. The criminalization of “marijuana” (deliberately called that rather than “cannabis” because of the racist Hispanic overtones) was based on anti-immigrant sentiment. Proponents of criminalization used fictional, fear-instilling stories of “reefer madness” and rampant immoral and illegal activities among Spanish-speaking people to justify new laws and harsh treatment of marijuana users. Many people who supported criminalizing marijuana had never met any of the new immigrants who were rumored to use it; the ideas were based in prejudice.

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

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

Culture of prejudice refers to the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture. We grow up surrounded by images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Consider the casually racist imagery on grocery store shelves or the stereotypes that fill popular movies and advertisements. It is easy to see how someone living in the Northeastern United States, who may know

no Mexican Americans personally, might gain a stereotyped impression from such sources as Speedy Gonzalez or Taco Bell's talking Chihuahua. Because we are all exposed to these images and thoughts, it is impossible to know to what extent they have influenced our thought processes.



Figure 13.2: Stereotypes and prejudices are persistent and apply to almost every category of people. They are also subject to confirmation bias, in which any bit of supporting evidence gives a person more confidence in their belief. For example, if you think older people are bad drivers, every time you see an accident involving an older driver, it's likely to increase your confidence in your stereotype. Even if you hear the statistics that younger drivers cause more accidents than older drivers, the fulfillment of your stereotype is difficult to overcome. (Credit: Chris Freser/flickr)

Sources of Prejudice

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).

Examples of distorted media coverage abound. Even though poor people are more likely to be white than any other race or ethnicity, 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).

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). 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). 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).

Prejudice can also be the result of socialization from parents, peers, and other various aspects of culture. 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). People in the South today continue to be more prejudiced than those outside the South, even though legal segregation ended more than four decades ago. Less educated people also seem to tend more towards racist attitudes. (Krysan, 2000).

However, to say that people pick up on the prejudice around them, either from the media or other sources, does not answer the question of where the original prejudice people are picking up on comes from. For that, we need to look towards theories such as the idea of economic and political competition.

According to this idea, prejudice comes from economic and political competition (Quillian, 2006). Prejudice arises from competition over jobs and other resources and from disagreement over various political issues. When groups compete with each other over issues of wealth and power, they often become hostile toward each other. Amid such hostility, it is easy to become prejudiced toward the group that threatens (or appears to threaten) your economic or political standing or ambitions. A popular version of this basic explanation is Susan Olzak's (1992) 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.

In this view, 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). 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).



Figure 13.3: 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, [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/) [commons.wikimedia.org].

Discrimination

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

While the form and severity of discrimination vary significantly, discrimination is considered a form of oppression.

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

Institutional Discrimination

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

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.



Figure 13.4: Institutional discrimination can occur even if this type of discrimination is not intended. Police forces used to have height requirements, but these were deemed by courts to discriminate against women, Latinos, and other individuals. In response, police forces lowered their height requirements. © Thinkstock

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. 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). 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.

Examples of Institutional Discrimination

Health Care

People of color have higher rates of disease and illness than whites. 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).

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).

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

As an example of how racism is embedded in institutions, let us consider race in relation to housing patterns and changes in law. *Housing segregation* refers to residential segregation or the grouping of people in residential areas by a defining characteristic such as age, socioeconomic status, religion, race, or ethnicity. In the United States, the government and banking institutions have played a role in racial housing segregation through discriminatory practices such as *redlining*.



Figure 13.5: Segregated neighborhoods did not come about organically but rather through deliberate planning of policies and practices. Public domain.

Redlining is the discriminatory practice of refusing loans to creditworthy applicants in neighborhoods that banks deem undesirable or racially occupied. Although homeownership became an emblem of American citizenship and the American dream during the twentieth century, Black people and other nationalities were specifically limited in their abilities to purchase homes. Both the federal government, which created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation in 1933 and the Federal Housing Association (FHA) in 1934, and the real estate industry worked to segregate Whites from other groups to preserve property values.

Lending institutions and the federal government did this by creating maps in which the places where people of color and/or foreign-born individuals lived were colored red or yellow. Then those areas were designated to be "dangerous" or "risky" in terms of loaning practices.

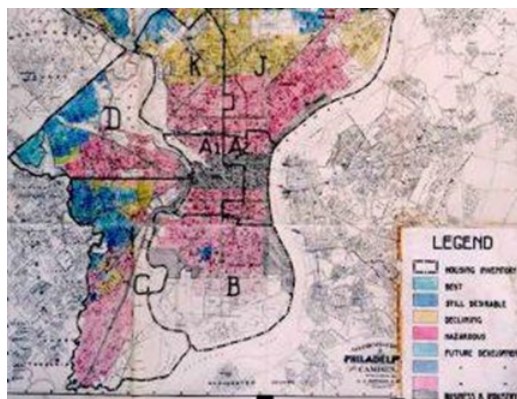


Figure 13.6: Lending institutions and the federal government created maps in which the places where people of color and/or foreign-born lived were colored red.

It was then less likely that loans with favorable terms could be secured in the red and yellow neighborhoods. As a result, because Black and foreign-born families were often denied access to the neighborhoods designated to be “good” or “the best,” they were forced to take loans that required higher down payments and/or higher interest rates. Unscrupulous private lenders used this opportunity to create unfair practices, often with devastating consequences for missed or partial payments, such as the homeowner losing their home and all equity that had been earned (Coates 2014).

In 1968, these practices were outlawed by the Fair Housing Act, which was part of the Civil Rights Act. The Fair Housing Act is an attempt at providing equitable housing to all. Still, much damage was done before its passage. For decades, the federal government poured tax monies into home loans that almost exclusively favored White families. Home ownership is the most accessible way to build equity and wealth, and it was denied to many minority families for decades. Even after the Fair Housing Act passed, local governments, residential covenants, and deed modifications continued to discriminate well into the 2000s, and families in minoritized groups still had less success in achieving home loans.

The result of these institutionalized efforts resulted in residential segregation, the physical separation of two or more groups into different neighborhoods. Many times this is associated with race, but it can also be associated with income. Segregated neighborhoods did not come about organically but through deliberate planning of policies and practices that have systematically denied equal opportunity to minority populations. Segregation has been present in the United States for many years, and while now it is illegal, it has been institutionalized in neighborhood patterns. From information collected in the 2010 census, we see that a typical White person lives in a neighborhood that is 75 percent White and 8 percent Black, while a typical African-American person lives in a neighborhood that is 35 percent White and 45 percent Black (Frey 2020).

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).

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). 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).

Employment

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.

Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial discrimination in employment, including hiring, wages, and firing. Despite Title VII, however, people of color continue to face discrimination in hiring and promotion (Hirsh & Cha, 2008). 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) 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.

Pager and sociologists Bruce Western and Bart Bonikowski also investigated racial discrimination in another field experiment in New York City (Pager, Bonikowski, & Western, 2009). 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). 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).

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.

As can be seen from the above, 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) all play a role in shaping the lives of people of color. 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. This phenomenon, which has operated in the US since the end of the Civil War, leads to the problem of *generational poverty* – minorities, failing to receive access to the benefits of government policies, homeownership, good education, and other avenues to wealth that whites access, are thus unable to pass wealth down to the next generation, keeping their communities in poverty while others rise in socioeconomic standing.

Privilege

Institutional discrimination can also include the promotion of a group's status, such in the case of *privilege*, which is the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group.

Most people have some level of privilege, whether it has to do with health, ability, race, or gender. When discussing race, the focus is often on white privilege, which is the societal privilege that benefits white people, or those perceived to be white, over non-white people in some societies, including the United States.

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.

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 to as long as they can afford the rent or mortgage. They generally do not have to fear being passed up for a 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) 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 are 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). 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.

Most white people are willing to admit that non-white people live with a set of disadvantages due to the color of their skin. But until they gain a good degree of self-awareness, few people are willing to acknowledge the benefits they themselves receive by being a part of the dominant group – on other words, their privilege. Why not?

Some may feel it lessens their accomplishments, others may feel a degree of guilt, and still others may feel that admitting to privilege makes them seem like a bad or mean person. But White (or other dominant) privilege is an institutional condition, not a personal one. It exists whether the person asks for it or not. In fact, a pioneering thinker on the topic, Peggy McIntosh, noted that she didn't recognize privilege because, in fact, it was not based in meanness. Instead, it was an "invisible weightless knapsack full of special provisions" that she didn't ask for, yet from which she still benefitted (McIntosh 1989). As the reference indicates, McIntosh's first major publication about White privilege was released in 1989; many people have only become familiar with the term in recent years.

White privilege does not mean you have no problems in your life or you can just sail through things because you are white. It just means you have fewer issues because of your whiteness. Here is a list of examples of white privilege from McIntosh’s work:

- I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.

- I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
- Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
- I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
- I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
- If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.
- I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.
- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
- I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
- I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
- If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
- I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more less match my skin.

Racism

Racism is a stronger type of prejudice and discrimination used to justify inequalities between groups by maintaining that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others. Racism empowers a racial dominant group to maximize advantages for itself by disadvantaging racial minority groups. Racist practices have affected wealth gap, employment, housing discrimination, government surveillance, incarceration, drug arrests, immigration arrests, infant mortality and much more (Race Forward 2021). Racism operates by using socially-constructed racial categories to defend the “naturalness” of social inequalities.

Jamelle Bouie has recently summarized the logic of racism in this way:

If some groups are simply meant to be at the bottom, then there are no questions to ask about their deprivation, isolation and poverty. There are no questions to ask about the society which produces that deprivation, isolation and poverty. And there is nothing to be done, because nothing can be done: Those people are just the way they are. (Bouie 2023)

In other words, racism is in place when the dominant group makes a non-dominant group a target for systematic, unequal, discriminatory treatment and justifies that treatment by reference to race.

Broadly, individuals belonging to minority groups experience both individual racism and systemic racism during their lifetime.

- Individual or Interpersonal Racism refers to prejudice and discrimination executed by individuals consciously and unconsciously that occurs between individuals. Examples include telling a racist joke and believing in the superiority of White people.

- Systemic Racism, also called structural racism or institutional racism, is systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantages racial minority groups. Systemic racism occurs in organizations as discriminatory treatments and unfair policies based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for White people over people of color. For example, a school system where students of color are distributed into underfunded schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.
- Racial Profiling is a type of systemic racism that involves the singling out of racial minorities for differential treatment, usually harsher treatment. The disparate treatment of racial minorities by law enforcement officials is a common example of racial profiling in the United States. For example, a study on the Driver's License Privilege to All Minnesota Residents from 2008 to 2010 found that the percentage of Latinos arrested was disproportionately high (Feist 2013). Similarly, the disproportionate number of Black men arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes reflect racial profiling.
- Historical Racism is economic inequality or social disparity caused by past racism. For example, African-Americans have had their opportunities in wealth, education and employment adversely affected due to the mistreatment of their ancestors during the slavery and post-slavery period (Wilson 2012).
- Cultural Racism occurs when the assumption of inferiority of one or more races is built into the culture of a society. For example, the European culture is considered supposedly more mature, evolved and rational than other cultures (Blaut 1992). A study showed that White and Asian American students with high GPAs experience greater social acceptance while Black and Native American students with high GPAs are rejected by their peers (Fuller-Rowell and Doan 2010).
- Colorism is a form of racism, in which someone believes one type of skin tone is superior or inferior to another within a racial group. For example, if an employer believes a Black employee with a darker skin tone is less capable than a Black employee with lighter skin tone, that is colorism. Studies suggest that darker skinned African Americans experience more discrimination than lighter skinned African Americans (Herring, Keith, and Horton 2004; Klonoff and Landrine 2000).
- Color-Avoidance Racism (sometimes referred to as "colorblind racism") is an avoidance of racial language by European-Americans that ignores the fact that racism continues to be an issue. The U.S. cultural narrative that typically focuses on individual racism fails to recognize systemic racism. It has arisen since the post-Civil Rights era and supports racism while avoiding any reference to race (Bonilla-Silva 2015).

The Myths of Racism

Sociologists Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer (2009) identify five common misconceptions about racism in the United States:

- Individualistic fallacy: A person assumes that racism is a byproduct of the ideas and prejudices a "racist individual" has about a group. (Assumes that racism is just the feeling certain individuals have for personal individual reasons.)
- Legal fallacy: A person assumes removing racist laws eliminates racism in practice. (Assumes that since there's a law against a certain type of racist or discriminatory behavior that this behavior no longer exists.)
- Tokenistic fallacy: A person assumes that having a few people of color in influential positions means that there are no longer racial obstacles. (Assumes, for example, that just because the US has had a Black president that this means there is no longer any kind of discrimination or racism in the US any more, or at least, very little.)
- Ahistorical fallacy: A person overlooks the way that racial discrimination created blocked opportunities that continue to affect people today. (Assumes that past policies and practices of discrimination and racism have no bearing on the status of minorities today – as if the past has no bearing on the present for them.)

Fixed fallacy: A person tends to view racism as something that does not change, instead of acknowledging that the ways racism is experienced and embodied changes over time. (2009:342) (Assuming that racism remains somehow fixed while conditions around it are constantly in flux.)

These five myths show that racism is more than racial violence. Rather than focusing on questions like "Has racism increased or decreased in the past decade?" Desmond and Emirbayer suggest it is more useful to understand how racism has changed over generations (2009:344).

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). 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).

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 one 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).

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.

How to Be an Antiracist

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

Racist attitudes and beliefs are often more insidious and harder to pin down than specific racist practices. They become more complex due to *implicit bias* (also referred to as *unconscious bias*) which is the process of associating stereotypes or attitudes towards categories of people without conscious awareness – which can result in unfair actions and decisions that are at odds with one's conscious beliefs about fairness and equality (Osta and Vasquez 2021).

For example, in schools we often see "honors" and "gifted" classes quickly filled with white students while the majority of Black and Latino students are placed in the lower track classes. As a result, our mind consciously and unconsciously starts to associate Black and Latino students with being less intelligent, less capable. Osta and Vasquez (2021) argue that placing the student of color into a lower and less rigorous track, we reproduce the inequity and the vicious cycle of structural racism and implicit bias continues.

Below we can see the cycle at work. At the center are implicit bias and structural racism, with arrows circling in order to show they connect. Around them are the three groups of words. The first is priming, associations and assumptions. This means that dominant narratives about race coupled with racialized structural arrangements prime us to believe that people of color are inferior to white people. The second is history, policies, practices. Race was created to justify enslaving people from Africa. Politics and practices that consolidate and protect power bestow unearned economic, cultural, and political advantage to people called white and disadvantage to people of color. The third is inequitable outcomes and racial disparities. This refers to the inequitable outcomes and experiences resulting from policy decisions in health, housing, employment, education, and life expectancy.

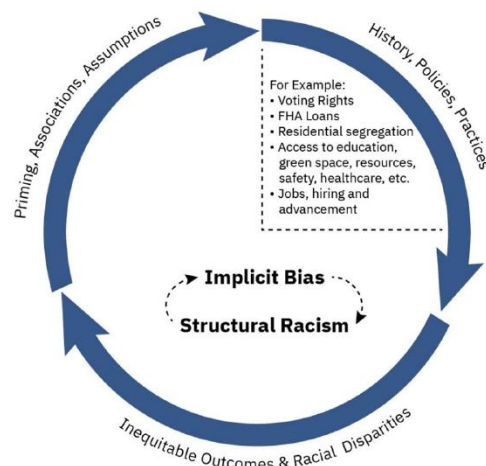


Figure 13.7: Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization (Osta and Vasquez 2021)

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

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

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

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

Minority Groups in the US

Indigenous Peoples/Native Americans

Native Americans are Indigenous peoples, the only nonimmigrant people in the United States. According to the National Congress of American Indians, Native Americans are “All Native people of the United States and its trust territories (i.e., American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Chamorros, and American Samoans), as well as persons from Canadian First Nations and Indigenous communities in Mexico and Central and South America who are U.S. residents (NCAI 2020, p. 11).” Indigenous peoples once numbered in the millions but today they are a small fraction of the U.S. populace. Counting those who identify themselves as either entirely or even partially of Indigenous ancestry, the total is just under 3% of the population (Rezal 2021). Given how systematically the U.S. relocated its Indigenous peoples westward as the nation expanded, the majority of them now live west of the Mississippi River, and in Alaska. Today, the largest groups are the Cherokee Nation (mostly in Oklahoma) and the Navajo Nation (mostly in New Mexico).



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

flickr
)

Indigenous culture prior to European settlement is referred to as Pre-Columbian: that is, prior to the coming of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Mistakenly believing that he had landed in the East Indies, Columbus named the indigenous people “Indians,” a name that has persisted for centuries despite being a geographical misnomer and one used to blanket hundreds of sovereign tribal nations (NAI 2020). The phrase “Native American” can also be considered undesirable because “native” can suggest people who are uncivilized or primitive. In contrast, “Indigenous” is a neutral term that designates a presence prior to the arrival of colonizers.

The history of intergroup relations between European colonists and Indigenous peoples is a brutal one. The effect of European settlement of the Americas was to nearly destroy the indigenous population. And although Indigenous peoples’ lack of immunity to European diseases caused the most deaths, overt mistreatment and massacres of Indigenous peoples by Europeans were devastating as well.

From the first Spanish colonists to the French, English, and Dutch who followed, European settlers took what land they wanted and expanded across the continent at will. If indigenous people tried to retain their stewardship of the land, Europeans fought them off with superior weapons. Even when a treaty had been made, it never stood against European’s desire for Native American land. The US Congress has never, in its entire history, kept any treaty it has made with any American Indian tribe.

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

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

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

The eradication of Indigenous culture continued until the 1960s, when Indigenous peoples began to participate in and benefit from the civil rights movement. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 guaranteed Indian tribes most of the rights of the United States Bill of Rights. New laws like the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 and the Education Assistance Act of the same year recognized tribal governments and gave them more power. Indian boarding schools have dwindled to only a few, and Native American cultural groups are striving to preserve and maintain old traditions to keep them from being lost forever. Today, Native Americans are citizens of three sovereigns: their tribal nations, the United States, and the state in which they reside (NCAI 2020).

However, Indigenous peoples still suffer the effects of centuries of degradation. Long-term poverty, inadequate education, cultural dislocation, and high rates of unemployment contribute to Native American populations falling to the bottom of the economic spectrum. Indigenous peoples also suffer disproportionately with lower life expectancies than most groups in the United States.

Black Americans

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

The U.S. Census Bureau (2020) estimates that 13.6 percent of the United States' population is Black.

Black Americans are the exemplar minority group in the United States whose ancestors did not come here by choice. A Dutch sea captain brought the first Africans to the Virginia colony of Jamestown in 1619 and sold them as indentured servants. Indentured servants are people who are committed to work for a certain period of time, typically without formal pay. The practice was extended to both Blacks and whites, and meant to be voluntary, however, the Africans had been kidnapped. For the next century, Black and white indentured servants worked side by side. But the growing agricultural economy demanded greater and cheaper labor, and by 1705, Virginia passed the slave codes. At first, the laws said that only a foreign-born non-Christian could be a slave. Over time, the laws were amended so that slaves were considered permanent property, and the laws were also changed to allow Christians to enslave Christians of African descent. Chattel slavery in the Americas was a historically new approach to slavery. It was hereditary bondage, which was lifelong, inherited, and race-based. New World slavery was unlike anything the world had practiced before.

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

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

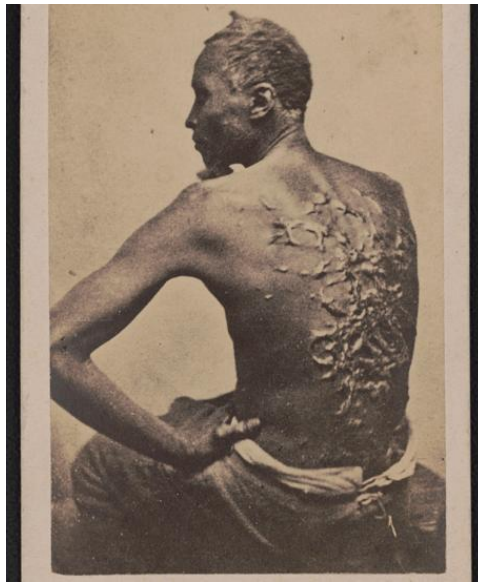


Figure 13.9: Escaped slave Gordon, showing scars from whippings, 1863. Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs, Library of Congress. Public Domain.

Slavery eventually became an issue over which the nation divided into geographically and ideologically distinct factions, leading to the Civil War. Slavery was abolished in 1865. The era of “reconstruction” of the country followed the war, and at first it seemed to promise greater equality for Black Americans. However, the former slave-holding states pushed back with a series of laws permitting and even requiring segregation of the races in public places, marriage, education, housing, and in most practices that involve social interaction. Some northern states and cities followed. In practice, many Black people found themselves in a situation little better than slavery.

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

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

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

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

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Figure 13.10: This gathering at the site of George Floyd's death took place five days after he was killed. The location, at Chicago Avenue and 38th Street in Minneapolis, became a memorial. (Credit: Fibbonacci Blue/flickr)



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

Asian Americans

Asian Americans represent a great diversity of cultures and backgrounds. The experience of a Japanese American whose family has been in the United States for three generations will be drastically different from a Laotian American who has only been in the United States for a few years. This section primarily discusses Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants and shows the differences between their experiences.

A recent estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) suggests that about 6 percent of the population identify themselves as having Asian ancestry. At the same time, 86 percent of this group rejects the label “Asian American.” They generally identify instead with their specific ethnic group, such as Hmong, or Korean-American (Hernandez, 2023). Another complication is that the United States regards Native Hawaiians as Asian Americans. However, Hawaii was involuntarily taken over by the U.S. in 1898. So, not all ethnic groups that the United States identifies as Asian are due to immigration.

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

The first Asian immigrants to come to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were Chinese. These immigrants were primarily men whose intention was to work for several years in order to earn incomes to support their families in China. Their main destination was the American West, where the Gold Rush was drawing people with its lure of abundant money. The construction of

the Transcontinental Railroad was underway at this time, and the Central Pacific section hired thousands of migrant Chinese men to complete the laying of rails across the rugged Sierra Nevada mountain range. Chinese men also engaged in other manual labor like mining and agricultural work. The work was grueling and underpaid, but like many immigrants, they persevered.

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

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



Figure 13.11: Thirty-five Vietnamese refugees wait to be taken aboard the amphibious USS Blue Ridge (LCC-19). They are being rescued from a thirty-five-foot fishing boat 350 miles northeast of Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, after spending eight days at sea. (Credit: U.S. Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

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

Chinese immigration came to an abrupt end with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act was a result of anti-Chinese sentiment burgeoned by a depressed economy and loss of jobs. White workers blamed Chinese migrants for taking jobs, and the passage of the Act meant the number of Chinese workers decreased. Chinese men did not have the funds to return to China or to bring their families to the United States, so they remained physically and culturally segregated in the Chinatowns of large cities.

Later legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924, further curtailed Chinese immigration. The Act included the race-based National Origins Act, which was aimed at keeping U.S. ethnic stock as undiluted as possible by reducing “undesirable” immigrants. It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Chinese immigration again increased, and many Chinese families were reunited.

Although Japanese Americans have deep, long-reaching roots in the United States, their history here has not always been smooth. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 was aimed at them and other Asian immigrants, and it prohibited immigrants from owning land. An even uglier action was the Japanese internment camps of World War II where people of Japanese descent, about two-thirds of them native-born citizens of the US, were forced to sell their homes and businesses quickly and move to remote camps for the duration of the war.

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

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



Figure 13.12: In response to widespread attacks against Asian people, partly linked to incorrect associations regarding Asian people and the COVID-19 pandemic, groups around the country and world held Stop Asian Hate rallies like this one in Canada. (Credit: GoToVan/flickr)

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

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

Many Asian Americans feel their communities have long been ignored by mainstream politics, media and entertainment although they are considered as a “model minority.” Recently, Asian American journalists are sharing their own stories of discrimination on social media and a growing chorus of federal lawmakers are demanding actions.

Arab Americans



Figure 13.13: The Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan is the largest mosque, or Islamic religious place of worship, in the United States. Muslim women and girls often wear head coverings, which sometimes makes them a target of harassment. (Credit A: Ryan Ready/flickr; B: U.S. Department of Agriculture/flickr)

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

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

The U.S. Census has struggled with the issue of Arab identity. The 2020 Census, as in previous years, did not offer a (MENA) category under the question of race. The US government rejected a push by Arab American advocates and organizations to add the new category, meaning that people stemming from the Arab region will be counted as "white" (Harb 2018). According to the best estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau, the Arabic population in the United States is about 3.7 million people.

Hispanic Americans

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cuban Americans, perhaps because of their relative wealth and education level at the time of immigration, have fared better than many immigrants. Further, because they were fleeing a Communist country, they were given refugee status and offered protection and social services. The Cuban Migration Agreement of 1995 has curtailed legal immigration from Cuba, leading many Cubans to try to immigrate illegally by boat. According to a 2009 report from the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. government applied a “wet foot/dry foot” policy toward Cuban immigrants; Cubans who were intercepted while still at sea were returned to Cuba, while those who reached the shore were permitted to stay in the United States. This policy ended in 2017.

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

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



Figure 13.14: Protesters in Arizona dispute an anti-immigration law. (Credit: rprathap/flickr)

As both legal and illegal immigrants, and with high population numbers, Mexican Americans are often the target of stereotyping, racism, and discrimination.

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14: The Issue of Crime

What is crime?

Before we can measure crime, understand its causes, or think about policy solutions to prevent and reduce crime, it is important to take a step back and ask a fundamental question: What is crime? In the simplest terms, a crime is an illegal act or action. That however only takes us so far. What is made illegal and is therefore considered a crime varies over time and space. There are numerous examples of actions that were once illegal that are now not widely considered to be crimes. For example, various laws have been created and nullified against homosexuality, bullying, and drug use depending on public perception. There are crimes in some countries that are not considered crimes in others. So to ask what crime is depends on who is defining crime and how that decision is being made. In the United States, laws are typically passed by local, state, and federal legislatures by elected representatives. Thus, the attitudes, including the biases, of voters and policymakers may become embedded in the law.

The Social Construction of Crime

The social construction of crime refers to the idea that crime is not an objective concept. Instead, society, through its institutions, norms, values, and laws, constructs the definition of what is considered criminal behavior, how that the behavior will be viewed, and how severe the punishment will be for it.

For example, the laws and punishments for different forms of cocaine. Crack cocaine is produced from powder cocaine, but the amount of crack cocaine that triggered eligibility for a mandatory minimum sentence was 1/100th the amount of powder cocaine. This disparity embodied racial biases, as the majority of individuals (more than 80%) of those convicted for crack cocaine offenses were African American, compared to a third of those convicted for powder cocaine and other drugs. In response to outcry around the bias in sentencing, this ratio was changed to set a minimum sentence for crack cocaine at 1/20th the amount of powder cocaine. However, the law still embodies biases that disproportionately harm African-American communities. (Bjerk 2016; Vagins and McCurdy 2006)

As another example, people understand property theft clearly as a crime, as when an employee steals goods from an employer, or a customer shoplifts. But what is less well known and less seen as a crime is wage theft. Wage theft can come in many forms: paying less than minimum wage, not paying overtime, not granting sick leave, not giving tips to workers who are supposed to receive them, asking for “off the clock” work before or after a shift begins, denying meal breaks, taking illegal deductions from checks, or misclassifying workers as independent contractors to avoid paying minimum wage or overtime. Wage theft is worth billions of dollars to employers, yet people are much less likely to know about it, talk about it, or hear about it in the news or other media, especially as it mostly impacts low-wage workers, immigrants, minorities, and women. Wage theft is not constructed as a crime in the way other property theft is.

Society generally socializes its members to view certain crimes as more severe than others. For example, when people think of violent and non-violent crime, they often picture street crime, or offenses committed by ordinary people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces (for example, mugging as violent crime or car theft as non-violent crime). An often overlooked category of both violent and non-violent crime however is corporate crime. There is nonviolent corporate crime (or “suite crime”), crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment. Embezzlement, insider trading, Ponzi schemes, false advertising, price-fixing and fraud are all types of corporate crime. Although these types of offences rarely receive the same amount of media coverage as street crimes, they can be far more damaging. ~~The 2008 world economic recession was the ultimate result of a financial collapse triggered by corporate crime.~~

There is also corporate violence, actions by corporations that kill or maim people or leave them ill. The victims of corporate violence include corporate employees, consumers of corporate goods, and the public as a whole. These involve unsafe work places, which cause illness and death, and unsafe products that kill or maim consumers. The toll of white-collar crime dwarfs the toll of street crime, even though the latter worries us much more than white-collar crime. Despite the harm that white-collar crime causes, the typical corporate criminal receives much more lenient punishment, if any, than the typical street criminal (Rosoff et al., 2010).

The media can play into this. One reason is that violent crime lends itself to spectacular media coverage that distorts its actual threat to the public. Television news broadcasts frequently begin with chaos news — crime, accidents, natural disasters — that present an image of society as a dangerous and unpredictable place. However, the image of crime presented in the headlines does

not accurately represent the types of crime that actually occur. The issue is that the news is a commercial product used to sell newspapers and advertising. “If it bleeds, it leads” is the adage that describes the financial motivation to publish the most dramatic crime news because it sells more subscriptions and receives more views. Czerny and Swift (1988) argue that the commercial media distort the content of the news in a number of ways. Typically stories emphasize:

- the intense (stories are selected to play up drama and action)
- the unambiguous (complex issues and lived experiences are simplified into straightforward moral stories of good and bad)
- the familiar (stories are made to fit in with common sense understandings and prejudices)
- the marketable (stories are packaged to appeal to consumer tastes, often with sex and violence imagery)

This distortion is amplified by the use of on-line sources where many people get their news most of the time. Emotional responses to stories rather than critical analysis influence people’s decisions to “retweet” a story (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Emotions have also been shown to be contagious in on-line environments and are linked to rumor spreading behavior (Kramer et al., 2014; Oh et al. 2013; Pröllochs et al., 2021). Vosoughi et al.’s (2018) research showed that on social media platforms like Twitter “falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information.”

The media tends 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.



Figure 14.1: The news media feature violent crime, even though violent crime comprises only a small portion of all crime. (Darla Hueske – did not cross – CC BY-ND 2.0.)

Why Does Crime Occur?

Explanations rooted in the individual biology or psychology of criminal offenders do not stand up as explanations of crime. 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 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. Sociologists have developed theories attempting to explain what causes deviance and crime and what they mean to society. These theories can be grouped into three areas: positivism, critical sociology and interpretive sociology.

Positivist types of theory focus on identifying the background variables in an offender’s social environment that determine or predict criminal and deviant behavior. In this view, both crime and environmental factors are easy to define. Crime is simply rule-breaking or law-breaking acts. How or why those acts became to be considered criminal is not considered. The environmental factors that affect a person’s likelihood to commit crime are also seen as straightforward in this view - positivism focuses on identifying factors that are directly observable or measurable.

In positivism, the reason why a person commits crime is not usually individual defects (a person commits crime because they are “just degenerate”) but rather the reason is “social defects” – something is wrong in their social environment. Crime is not the result of a defective human being but a defective social environment, and the factors that make a defective social environment are considered to be observable and measurable facts. Going into all of the ways the social environment can be defective and encourage crime is beyond the scope of this chapter. The key understanding here is that in this view, crime is largely result of social factors, not individual ones, and both crime and social factors are considered relatively easy to define and observe.

Another view is *critical sociology*. Critical sociology examines structural inequalities based on class, gender, race, other power relations in society to explain crime and deviance. This view takes into consideration what crime is and the meaning of crime. Why are certain acts punished as criminal or deviant and certain acts not? Why are certain types of crime or deviance prevalent in one community, gender or social strata and not in others?

Like positivists, critical sociologists examine social and economic factors as the causes of crime and deviance. Unlike positivists, however, critical sociologists do not see these factors as objective social facts, but as evidence of operations of power and entrenched social inequalities. What is seen as crime and the criminal justice system are not simply neutral mechanisms designed to further the best societal order. Law and the criminal justice system are mechanisms that actively maintain a particular political and economic power structure that favors some over others.

The rich, the powerful, and the privileged have unequal influence on who and what gets labelled deviant or criminal behavior, particularly in instances where it is their privilege or interests that are being challenged by that behavior. As capitalist society is based on the institution of private property, for example, it is not surprising that theft is a major category of crime, and theft from business is more focused on than theft by business. By the same token, when street people, addicts, or hippies drop out of society, they are labelled deviant and are subject to police harassment because they have refused to participate in the productive labor that is the basis of capital accumulation and profit.

Richard Quinney (1977) examined the role of law, policing and punishment in modern society. He argued that, as a result of inequality, many crimes can be understood as *crimes of accommodation*, or ways in which individuals cope with conditions of inequality and oppression. Predatory crimes like break and enter, robbery, and drug dealing are often simply economic survival strategies. Defensive crimes like economic sabotage, illegal strikes, civil disobedience, and eco-terrorism are direct political challenges to social injustice.

On the other hand, crimes committed by people in power are often *crimes of domination*. Crimes of control are committed by police and law enforcement, such as violations of rights, over-policing minority communities, illegal surveillance and use of excessive force. Crimes of government are committed by elected and appointed officials of the state through misuse of state powers, including corruption, misallocation of funds, political assassinations and illegal wars. Crimes of economic domination comprise white collar and corporate crime, including embezzlement, fraud, price-fixing, insider trading, tax evasion, unsafe work conditions, wage theft, pollution, and marketing of hazardous products. Crimes of social injury include practices of institutional racism and economic exploitation, violations of basic human rights, or denials of gender, sexual and racial equality, that are often not considered unlawful.

Those in power define what crime is and who is excluded from full participation in society as a matter of course. Quinney pointed out that crimes of domination are not criminalized and policed to the degree that crimes of accommodation are, even though the harms they pose to society are greater and affect more people.

This perspective also plays out in gender, especially in a patriarchal society where men have the most power. Women who are regarded as criminally deviant are often seen as being doubly deviant. They have broken the law but they have also broken gender norms about appropriate female behavior, whereas men’s criminal behavior is seen as consistent with their aggressive, self-assertive character. This double standard explains the tendency to medicalize women’s deviance, to see it as the product of physiological or psychiatric pathology. In other words, women are more likely to be seen as having committed crimes because they are experiencing individual mental or psychological issues, and not because of any broader social or political or economic reality.

Feminist analysis focuses on the way gender inequality influences the opportunities to commit crime and the definition, detection, and prosecution of crime. Why is abortion no longer a Constitutional right in the US and thus a crime in many states? This reflects the gendered nature of the “crime” (only people with a uterus have abortions) and the attitudes of those in power that have made it a crime. Why, on the other hand, is the crime of rape still so difficult for women to report and prosecute? Why is domestic violence

still considered to be a “private” problem? Again, because of the gendered notions of these crimes and the people in power who control the legal mechanisms that surround them.

Finally, *interpretive sociology* focus on how the meanings of criminality or deviance get established. Key to understanding crime and deviance is not simply the objective fact of law-breaking or rule-breaking, but the process whereby that happens and what the act of law breaking means to the person doing it.

For example, having a social milieu in which most of one’s contacts encourage or normalize criminality predicts the likelihood of becoming criminal, whereas a social milieu where one’s contacts discourage criminality predict the opposite. A teenager whose friends shoplift is more likely to view shoplifting as acceptable or even desirable to remain within the norms of that circle of friends.

Procurement into prostitution involves a similar process, one which is manipulated by the procurers or pimps. Hodgson (1997) describes two methods of procurement that pimps use to draw girls into a life of prostitution. After judging a girl’s level of vulnerability, they deploy either a seduction method, providing affection, attention and emotional support for the most isolated girls, or a stratagem method, promising wealth, glamour and excitement for those who are less vulnerable. After a girl has “chosen” to stay with the “family,” they are socialized step by step to comply to the roles, rules and expectations of the world of prostitution. Their former identity is neutralized and attachment to previously learned values and norms is weakened through a process that begins with (a) training in the rules of the sex trade by the pimp’s “wife-in-law” or “main lady,” (b) turning the first trick, which deepens the girl’s identification with street culture and the other prostitutes, and (c) the use of violence to enforce compliance when the girl has second thoughts and the relationship with the pimp deteriorates.

At each stage the girl finds herself more deeply entrenched in a world of norms, values and behaviors that are strongly stigmatized in the dominant culture. While various levels of coercion are also present, the process of learning, internalizing and acknowledging the deviant self-image and social role of the prostitute is necessary for continued participation in prostitution.

Here also we see the phenomenon of *labeling*, whereby people gradually come to believe they are deviant because they been labelled “deviant” by society. A person’s self-concept and behavior begin to change after their actions are labelled as deviant by members of society. The person may begin to take on and fulfill the role of a “deviant” as an act of rebellion against the society that has labelled that individual as such. For example, consider a high school student who often cuts class and gets into fights. The student is reprimanded frequently by teachers and school staff, and soon enough, develops a reputation as a “troublemaker.” As a result, the student might take these reprimands as a mark of status and start acting out even more, breaking more rules, adopting the troublemaker label and embracing this deviant identity.

The criminal justice system is ironically one of the primary agencies of socialization into the criminal “career path.” The labels “juvenile delinquent” or “criminal” are not automatically applied to individuals who break the law. A teenager who is picked up by the police for a minor misdemeanor might be labelled as a “good kid” who made a mistake and who then is released after a stern talking to, or they might be labelled a juvenile delinquent and processed as a young offender. In the first case, the incident may not make any impression on the teenager’s personality or on the way others react to them. In the second case, being labelled a juvenile delinquent sets up a set of responses to the teenager by police and authorities that lead to criminal charges, more severe penalties, and a process of socialization into the criminal identity. Which of the two scenarios happens is influenced by the teenager’s race, class, and gender.

Once a label is applied it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-fulfilling prophecies refer to the mechanisms put in play by the act of labeling, which tend to shape the person into what the label says they are. A person may or may not initially fit the label given, but through a series of processes eventually does.

The Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system typically has three main parts: (1) the police, who identify and apprehend those considered to be criminals, (2) the courts, who decide the guilt or innocence of those accused of crimes and sentence them, and (3) corrections institutions, such as prisons, that carry out the penalty determined by the courts.

Police are a civil force in charge of enforcing laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level. No unified national police force exists in the United States, although there are federal law enforcement officers. Once a crime has been committed and a violator has been identified by the police, the case goes to court. A court is a system that has the authority to make decisions

based on law. The U.S. judicial system is divided into federal courts and state courts. The corrections system is charged with supervising individuals who have been arrested, convicted, and sentenced for a criminal offense, plus people detained while awaiting hearings, trials, or other procedures.

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.

Policing and Race

People of color, Black, and Latinx Americans along with Indigenous people, are disproportionately surveilled and killed by the police. Between 1980 and 2018, police killed an estimated 30,800 people. Black and Latinx Americans were significantly more likely to be killed than White Americans (Sharara et al. 2021). Public opinion studies from the Pew Research Center show that Black Americans are more likely to report having been stopped unfairly by police. It is obvious that Black Americans have very different interactions with police than White Americans, which is reflected in their differences in opinion about the police. They are also less likely to have a positive view of how officers treat different racial and ethnic groups, and they see fatal police shootings as signs of broader issues with the criminal justice system (Desilver, Lipka, and Fahmy 2020).

What is causing the disproportionate impact? There are a few factors that contribute to these trends. The first explanation for racial disparities in policing is the role of spatial profiling. Compared to low-crime, middle and upper-class neighborhoods, high-crime, low-income neighborhoods are more heavily surveilled by the police. It is in these neighborhoods that Black and Latinx Americans are more likely to live, exposing them to more significant contact with the police.

Police training may also play a significant role. For example, only a few training hours are dedicated to topics such as ethics, de-escalation tactics, and providing social services. Instead, using firearms, defensive tactics, and police procedures comprise most of the training. Consequently, it is not surprising that police are more adept at using their weapons when a situation escalates rather than turning to nonviolent options.

The next explanation is bias—both explicit and implicit. (Explicit bias refers to the biased attitudes people know they hold, whereas implicit bias refers to the biased attitudes people hold but might not be consciously aware of and may actually contradict their stated beliefs.) Explicit bias is still an issue with at least some proportion of law enforcement officers. A recent study analyzing 40 years of General Social Survey data has shown that police, unlike most Americans, believe that they should receive more funding and have the right to use physical force against citizens (Roscigno and Preto-Hodge 2021). They also found that White male officers were, in particular, more racist than the general population or those in similar occupations (Roscigno and Preto-Hodge 2021). Implicit bias is also an issue among law enforcement, as it is in the broader American population. Studies have found that implicit bias plays a role in decisions about whether officers will use deadly force (Fridell and Lim 2016).

Racism and discrimination have a direct role in creating explicit and implicit biases, which is evident when looking at the history of the institution of policing. Historically, in both the North and the South, police have been used as a tool of social control to manage “unruly” populations. In the North, police intended to control the growing poor European immigrant population and quell labor protests. In the South, the earliest manifestations of police were slave patrols. While these institutions became more bureaucratic over time and looked more like northern police agencies, they still enforced Jim Crow laws and were not afraid to beat and arrest anyone who dared protest these racially discriminatory laws and practices. Given this history, it is not surprising that there is distrust between Black communities and police departments.

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.

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).

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.

Although poor defendants 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.

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).

A final problem is the system of bail. If a person is arrested, wrongfully or not, they are in almost all jurisdictions required to pay bail to leave jail and return home to fight the charges. The original idea behind this was to make sure that people returned to court to face the charges against them. However, this system now perpetuates widespread wealth-based incarceration. Poorer Americans and people of color often can't afford bail, leaving them incarcerated in jail sometimes for months or even years while they await trial, losing their jobs and unable to care for their families. Meanwhile, wealthy people accused of the same crime can pay the bail, obtain their freedom, and return home. This practice may be considered unconstitutional, because it violates the rights to due process and equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, the prohibition against excessive bail found in the Eighth Amendment, and the right to a speedy trial guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment. These practices do, however, make money for the for-profit bail bond companies and the insurance companies who back them.

The Death Penalty

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 half of Americans in national surveys favor the death penalty (Death Penalty Information Center, 2025).

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; also see Death Penalty Information Center, 2025). Although this difference is not intended, it suggests that the criminal justice system values white lives more than African American lives.



Figure 14.2: Thomas Hawk – Miami Police – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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 they were actually innocent of any capital crime. 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).

Fourth, executions are expensive. In 2020, keeping a murderer in prison for life cost about \$1 million 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. Capital trials (in which the defendant, if found guilty, would face the death penalty) are also much more expensive than non-capital trials. (Death Penalty Information Center, 2025).

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.”

<https://asc41.org/about-asc/policy-page/>

Correctional Institutions

Costs – and Benefits?

According to the ACLU, incarceration costs the nation at least \$80 billion annually. (<https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/mass-incarceration>). 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). 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).

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. Once free 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).

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).

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.

Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration refers to the overwhelming size and scale of the U.S. prison population.

Some of this dramatic increase was due to the public portrayal of crack cocaine as a highly addictive drug sweeping its way through America. Politicians capitalized on the resulting hysteria and passed policies that rapidly increased the prison population. Even so, the vast majority of arrests and enforcement were not of high-level, violent dealers but, more often, small-time dealers or people struggling with addiction. In fact, during the 1990s, the period of the largest increase in the U.S. prison population, the vast majority of prison growth came from cannabis arrests (King and Mauer 2005).

The 1980s and 1990s were also an era during which states turned to partnerships with private companies to meet the booming demand for facilities, leading to the rise of private prisons. Private prisons are for-profit incarceration facilities run by private companies that contract with local, state, and federal governments. The business model of private prisons incentivizes them to keep their prisons as full as possible, while spending as little as possible on care for inmates. Down 16 percent from its peak in 2012, private prisons still held 8 percent of all people incarcerated at the state and federal level as of 2019 (The Sentencing Project 2021). Still, it is essential to note that the use of these facilities varies by local context. For instance, Oregon has no private prison facilities in the state, while Texas has the highest number of people incarcerated in private prisons.

From the inception of the war on drugs, racial biases were at the center of these policy changes. For instance, John Erlichman, one of Richard Nixon’s top advisors, explicitly admitted to this in a 2016 interview:

“You want to know what this [war on drugs] was really all about? The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with cannabis and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.” (Baum 2016)

Even as the racial gap in incarceration has narrowed in recent years, the United States disproportionately incarcerates Black Americans. While Black Americans make up 13 percent of the population, they make up over 30 percent of incarcerated individuals (Gramlich 2019). Similar trends exist among Latinx Americans: while Latinx people comprise 16 percent of the U.S. population, they account for over 20 percent of incarcerated individuals (Gramlich 2019). In contrast, while White Americans comprise 64 percent of the population, they only make up 30 percent of those incarcerated (Gramlich 2019).

This network of policies and unequal institutional practices led to what scholar Michelle Alexander terms the *New Jim Crow*. The New Jim Crow refers to the network of laws and practices that disproportionately funnel Black Americans into the criminal justice system, stripping them of their constitutional rights as a punishment for their offenses in the same way that Jim Crow laws did in previous eras. Because of these new mass incarceration policies, a new iteration of the racial caste system has emerged: one in which Black Americans can legally be denied public benefits, housing, the right to vote, and participation on juries because of a criminal conviction.

The detention of immigrants also intersects with the system of mass incarceration. Recently, attention has been brought to how immigration law and criminal law have been combined in the form of “cimmigration” (Hernandez 2022). The combination of these laws has had a detrimental effect on immigrants. The same companies that run private prisons also play a role in running

immigrant detention centers. To learn more about this, you can watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UttL8utsvLA&t=1s>

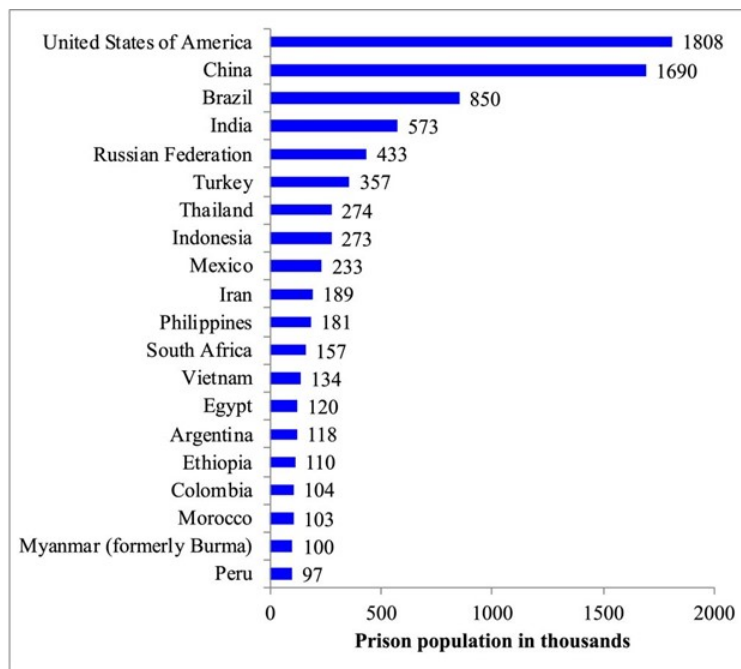


Figure 14.3: Prison populations by country, in thousands

The table above demonstrates the degree to which countries use imprisonment as a form of criminal justice. The United States has by far the largest number of individuals imprisoned, 1.8 million (as of 2022). It is important to note that the United States also has a large population, but even in terms of the rate of imprisonment (prisoners per thousand individuals), the United States has one of the highest rate of imprisonment of any major nation (Institute for Criminal Policy Research 2024).

While racial disparities are one of the most pressing and continuing concerns in the criminal justice system, other marginalized groups face similar institutional inequalities. Recently, there has been an rise in incarceration rates of women and folks who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Between 1980 and 2019, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 700 percent (The Sentencing Project 2022). Furthermore, while the United States incarcerates more men than women, the rate of growth of women's incarceration has been twice as high as that of men since 1980 (The Sentencing Project 2022).

This increase in women's incarceration is also directly connected to the disproportionate involvement of the LGBTQIA+ population in the criminal justice system. As of 2019, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals were over two times as likely to be arrested in the past 12 months than straight individuals (Jones 2021). This disparity particularly impacts lesbian and bisexual women, who are four times as likely to be arrested as straight women (Jones 2021). The high rates of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people behind bars can, in part, be attributed to the longer sentences courts impose on them (Meyer et al. 2017). Transgender individuals also report high arrest and incarceration rates and uncomfortable encounters with the police, with one in six transgender individuals having spent time incarcerated (Grant et al. 2011).

Individuals marginalized as a result of their sexual or gender identity may also face issues when incarcerated. These groups are more likely to be sexually victimized while incarcerated, placed into solitary confinement, and report current psychological distress (Meyer et al. 2017). Similarly, transgender and gender nonconforming individuals lack the same civil rights protections as other groups, which leads to poor treatment in incarceration facilities. For instance, President Trump revoked Obama-era federal guidance, which stated that people who are transgender and incarcerated should be held in facilities matching their gender identity and have access to gender-affirming healthcare services. Then, when President Biden took office, he again instituted the Obama-era guidance. When Trump was re-elected, he sent out an executive order denying the existence of trans people altogether, thus the possibility of treatment according to their gender. This reversal from administration to administration is just one example of how contested federal and state political issues directly impact the lives of individuals.

Finally, the criminal justice system has significant problems with how it addresses mental health issues. In terms of policing, people with mental health issues are more vulnerable to experiencing violence at the hands of police. In 2015, 27 percent of police shootings involved a mental health crisis (Oberholtzer 2017). These inequalities by ability—whether due to disability or mental illness—are pervasive throughout the criminal justice system, including in incarceration.

Jails and prisons have been called modern-day asylums because of the high concentration of individuals with mental illnesses. About one-third of people in all federal or state prisons have been diagnosed with a mental illness, most of whom are not receiving treatment (Wang 2022). In some areas, these issues are even more acute. For instance, in Chicago’s Cook County jail, nearly 50 percent of the people incarcerated had some form of mental illness (Cook County Sheriff’s Office 2022).

Incarceration facilities rarely have the resources to address these mental health needs. More than 60 percent of people with a history of mental illness do not receive mental health treatment while incarcerated in state and federal prisons (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017). Even those on treatment regimens before incarceration often cannot continue that treatment once incarcerated. Over 50 percent of individuals taking medication for mental health conditions at admission did not continue to receive their medication once in prison (Reingle Gonzalez and Connell 2014).

It’s important to remember that we cannot talk about how identity impacts individuals’ experiences without taking an intersectional approach to these conversations. For instance, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx transgender people have significantly higher incarceration rates than White transgender people (Jones 2021). This is just one example of how identity is intersectional. To better understand how the criminal justice system impacts people, we must look at all of the different aspects of their identity—gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, citizenship, ability, and other forms of group membership.

Reducing 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). 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. Some of these many strategies are highlighted here.

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).

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). 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).

A third and very important strategy involves expansion of early childhood intervention (ECI) programs and nutrition services for poor mothers and their children. 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). 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). 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). 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). 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).

Other Models

One way to think about different possibilities for this system is by looking at how other countries have tackled these problems. Using our sociological imagination, we can critically examine our institutions and think more deeply about what we could learn from the different ways crime is addressed around the globe.

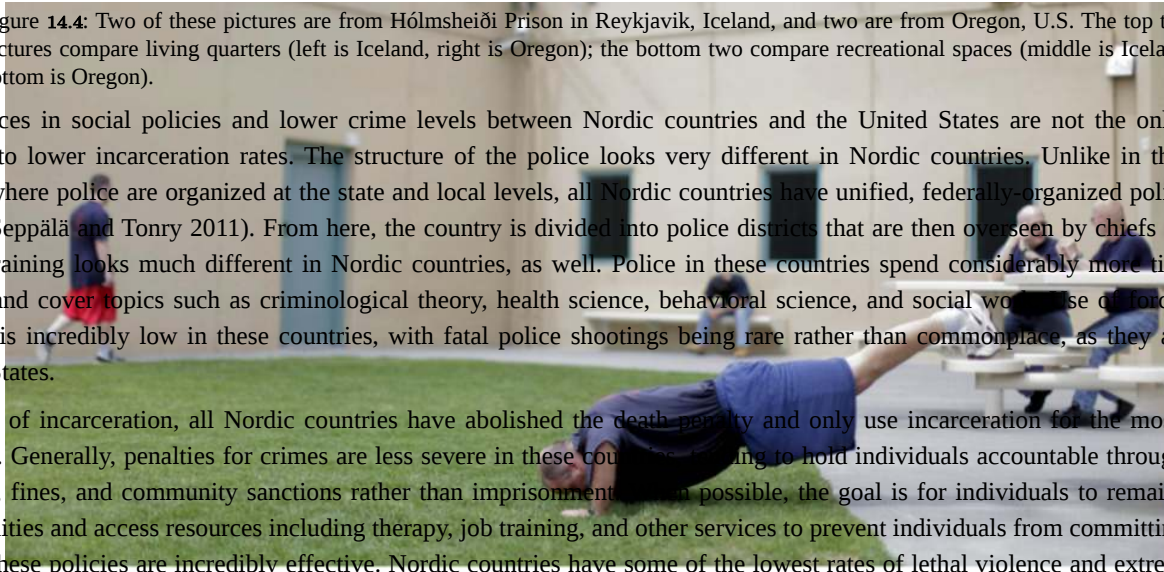
Next, we explore three examples of how other countries have addressed criminal justice issues. In these examples, we'll look at how countries have reformed their systems, effectively addressed recidivism, and created cultures of rehabilitation rather than punishment. In each system, crime is taken seriously, especially violent crime. At the same time, these systems address many of the issues we have examined in the U.S. system.

Policing and Prison in Nordic Countries

Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway) have very different systems of policing and imprisonment compared to other wealthy Western nations. While there are differences between each country's political system, there are many more commonalities in their approach to criminal justice. Foremost, compared to other wealthy Western nations, they have much lower punishment severity, imprisonment rates, and violence rates. The primary focus of these systems is preventing crime from occurring in the first place. When crime does occur, the goal of these systems is to reduce recidivism and restore justice rather than simply punitively punishing an individual for an offense. Nordic countries have strong welfare states. By providing the essential resources that individuals need to survive, fewer individuals turn to criminal activities to make ends meet (Lappi-Seppälä and Tonry 2011). The top picture below shows comparisons between a prison in Iceland and Oregon prisons.



Figure 14.4: Two of these pictures are from Hólmsheiði Prison in Reykjavik, Iceland, and two are from Oregon, U.S. The top two pictures compare living quarters (left is Iceland, right is Oregon); the bottom two compare recreational spaces (middle is Iceland, bottom is Oregon).



Differences in social policies and lower crime levels between Nordic countries and the United States are not the only factors leading to lower incarceration rates. The structure of the police looks very different in Nordic countries. Unlike in the United States, where police are organized at the state and local levels, all Nordic countries have unified, federally-organized police forces (Lappi-Seppälä and Tonry 2011). From here, the country is divided into police districts that are then overseen by chiefs of police. Police training looks much different in Nordic countries, as well. Police in these countries spend considerably more time being trained and cover topics such as criminological theory, health science, behavioral science, and social work. Use of force against citizens is incredibly low in these countries, with fatal police shootings being rare rather than commonplace, as they are in the United States.

In terms of incarceration, all Nordic countries have abolished the death penalty and only use incarceration for the most serious offenses. Generally, penalties for crimes are less severe in these countries, preferring to hold individuals accountable through formal warning, fines, and community sanctions rather than imprisonment. When possible, the goal is for individuals to remain in their communities and access resources including therapy, job training, and other services to prevent individuals from committing crimes again. These policies are incredibly effective. Nordic countries have some of the lowest rates of lethal violence and extremely low levels of recidivism.

Decriminalization of Drugs

There have been multiple countries around the world that have decriminalized drugs, aiming to address inequality created by criminalization policies and to focus on addressing drug addiction as a health issue. Uruguay has decriminalized personal possession of all drugs since 1974. Uruguay took this one step further in 2013, becoming the first country in the world to fully legalize cannabis and establish a regulatory framework for its sale. Similar policies can be seen in places like Portugal, where drugs have been decriminalized since 2001. In the decades since, there have been significant increases in the number of people voluntarily entering drug treatment, while they have seen decreases in several negative drug-related outcomes, such as overdoses, HIV infections, problematic drug use, and incarceration. In both of these countries, drug trafficking is still heavily criminalized, but people who use drugs every day are now more likely to be connected to health resources or (at the very least) not face the prospect of incarceration for possession of a personal stash of drugs. These examples of policy interventions helped inspire Measure 110 in Oregon, which established similar decriminalization, meaning people possessing a personal amount would not face serious criminal charges and could more easily gain access to drug treatment.

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15: Global Issues

Global Stratification and Poverty

Global stratification describes how worldwide patterns or structures of social inequality persist through time. There are two dimensions to this stratification: gaps between nations and gaps within nations. Further, when it comes to global inequality, both economic inequality and social inequality concentrate the burden of poverty among certain segments of the Earth's population (Myrdal, 1970).

Measuring Stratification

One measure of global stratification compares the quality of life of different countries' populations. Simple indicators of this are infant mortality rates and life expectancy.

Another way to evaluate stratification is to consider how many people live in poverty, and particularly extreme poverty, which has been defined as needing to survive on less than \$2.15 per day (Filmer, Fu & Sanchez-Paramo, 2022). Relative poverty is a state of living where people can afford necessities, but cannot meet their society's average standard of living. For example, in the US, the experience of living without a car to drive to and from work, without any money for a safety net should a family member fall ill, or without any "extras" beyond just making ends meet, effectively limits participation in society and makes life precarious. On the other hand, contrary to relative poverty, people who live in extreme or absolute poverty lack even the basic necessities, which typically include adequate food, clean water, safe housing, and access to healthcare.

The positive news is that, until the COVID-19 pandemic impacted economies in 2020, the extreme poverty rate had been on a 30-year decline. In 1990, 1 in 3 people lived in extreme poverty, compared to approximately 1 in 10 in 2019 (World Bank, 2022). In 2015, 10.8% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. In 2019, that number had dropped an entire percentage point to 8.4%. While this is positive, 8.4% is still equivalent to 648 million people living on less than \$2.15 a day. The same year (2019), 23.5% of the world lived on less than \$3.65 per day, and 46.7% on less than \$6.85 per day (Schoch et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the pandemic ended this trend with an estimated spike in poverty rates of 11% in 2022. Followed by the invasion of Ukraine and climate impacts on the world's biggest food producers, the goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030 seems unreachable (World Bank, 2022).

As seen in Table 15.1. The differences between countries are clear when considering their extreme poverty rates. For the most part, the selected countries show disparities even within countries from the same regions. All data is from 2018 (Hasell et al., 2022).

Table 15.1: Percentage of poverty in low income countries

Country	Percentage of people living on less than \$2.15	Percentage of people living on less than \$3.65	Percentage of people living on less than \$6.85
Colombia	4.5	12.2	33.9
Costa Rica	1.5	4	13.9
Georgia	5.6	19.6	53.9
Kyrgyzstan	0.7	13.2	66.1
Sierra Leone	26.1	64.3	89.9
Angola	31.1	52.9	78
Lithuania	0.9	1.3	2.9
Ukraine	0.0	0.5	9.4
Vietnam	1.2	5.3	22.2
Indonesia	5.4	26.4	62.8

A third measure of income inequality tries to capture the two dimensions of global stratification — gaps between countries and gaps within countries — by comparing standardized income distributions. Figure 15.1 compares income distribution in 16 different countries from different regions of the world based on percentiles. To be in the top 1% of income earners in the United States in 2021, one had to earn \$336,953 before taxes (about \$140,000 more than in Canada (\$193,036)), whereas in Ethiopia one only had to earn about \$24,297. This means that top 1% in the U.S. were the highest income earners in the world, while Ethiopia is overall one of the poorest countries in the world. On the other hand, the income gap within Columbia in which the 99th percentile earner earns 192 times more than the 10th percentile earner is much higher than in the U.S. where the 99th percentile earner earns 83 times more than the 10th percentile earner (Mathisen, 2022).

Most people are accustomed to thinking of global stratification as economic inequality. Social inequality, however, is just as harmful as economic discrepancies. Prejudice and discrimination — whether against a certain race, ethnicity, religion, or the like — can create and aggravate conditions of economic equality, both within and between nations. Think about the inequity that existed for decades within the nation of South Africa. Apartheid, one of the most extreme cases of institutionalized and legal racism, created a social inequality that earned it the world's condemnation. When looking at inequity between states, one can think also about the disregard of the civil war in Yemen by most Western nations (Center for Preventive Action, 2022). Since few citizens of Western nations identified with the impoverished, non-white victims of the resulting humanitarian crisis, there has been little push to provide aid or resolve the conflict.

Gender inequity is another global concern. Women continue to have less access to the labour market (and especially to the most rewarding occupations) in many countries and this exacerbates the gender inequality in earnings and access to positions of power and status (Chancel et al., 2022). Women's inequality can also be measured in terms of degrees of agency, defined as the “ability to define one's goals and act on them” (Kabeer, 1999). Women are often at a systematic disadvantage in their ability to make effective choices in a range of spheres, from making decisions at home, deciding what kind of work to do, to choosing whether or when to get married and how many children to have to becoming politically active (World Bank Group, 2014).

Inequalities based on sexual orientation and gender identity also exist around the globe. According to Amnesty International (2012), a number of types of crimes are committed against individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles or sexual orientations (however those are culturally defined). From culturally sanctioned rape to state-sanctioned executions, the abuses are serious. These legalized and culturally accepted forms of prejudice and discrimination exist everywhere — from the United States to Somalia to Tibet — restricting the freedom of individuals and often putting their lives at risk. As of March 2019, 70 global states continue to criminalize same-sex consensual activity. The death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual acts is imposed in 6 UN member states (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria) (Mendos, 2019).

Wealth and Poverty of Nations

While the World Bank is often criticized, both for its policies and its method of calculating data, it is still a common source for global economic data. Along with tracking the economy, the World Bank tracks demographics and environmental health to provide a complete picture of whether a nation is high income, middle income, or low income.

The World by Income (FY 2018)

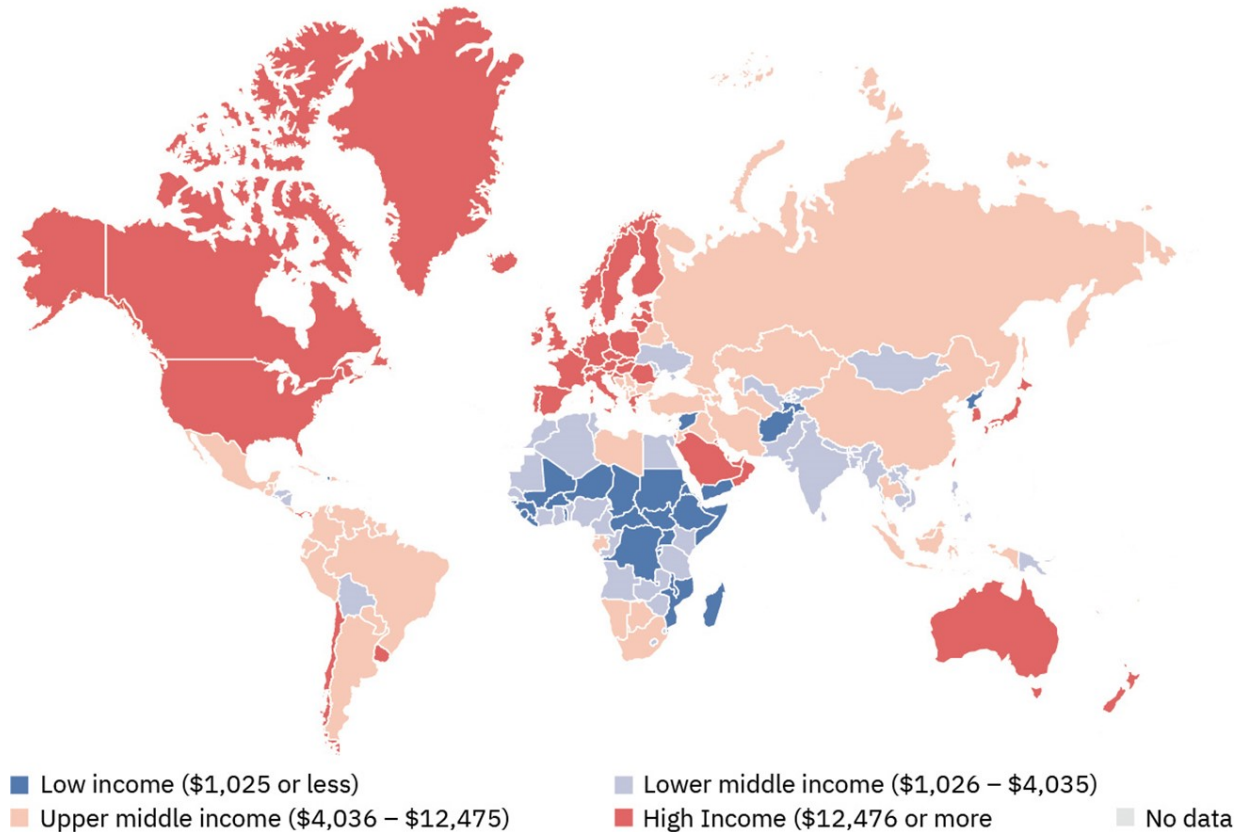


Figure 15.1: This world map shows advanced, transitioning, less, and least developed countries. Note that the data in this map is one year older than the data presented in the text below. (Credit: Sbw01f, data obtained from the CIA World Factbook/Wikimedia Commons)

This world map shows advanced, transitioning, less, and least developed countries. Low income countries are those with an annual income of \$1025 or less per capita, and include Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Madagascar, and many central African nations. Lower middle income countries have an annual income between \$1026 and \$4035 per capita, and include India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Burma, Papua New Guinea, Ukraine, Moldova, Bolivia, and many countries on the African coastal areas. Upper middle income countries have an income between \$4036 and \$12075, and include Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Romania, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mexico, and most South American countries as well as the nations in the very south of Africa. High income countries have an income over \$12076 per capita and include Saudi Arabia, Oman, Australia, Japan, South Korea, most of Europe, Chile, Uruguay, The United States, and Canada.

High-Income Nations

The World Bank defines high-income nations as having a gross national income of at least \$12,536 per capita. in 2019 (World Bank 2021). (Note that the classifications will always lag by a couple of years so that analysts can evaluate the true income of the nations.) Examples include Belgium, Canada, Japan, Oman, Puerto Rico, and the United States.

High-income countries face two major issues: capital flight and deindustrialization. Capital flight refers to the movement (flight) of capital from one nation to another, as when General Motors automotive company closed U.S. factories in Michigan and opened factories in Mexico.

Deindustrialization, a related issue, occurs as a consequence of capital flight, as no new companies open to replace jobs lost to foreign nations. As expected, global companies move their industrial processes to the places where they can get the most production with the least cost, including the building of infrastructure, training of workers, shipping of goods, and, of course, paying employee wages. This means that as emerging economies create their own industrial zones, global companies see the opportunity for existing infrastructure and much lower costs. Those opportunities lead to businesses closing the factories that provide jobs to the middle class within core nations and moving their industrial production to peripheral and semi-peripheral nations.

In other words, as services are relocated, so are jobs. In the United States, many college-educated people are unable to find work, and those with only a high school diploma are in even worse shape. We have, as a country, outsourced ourselves out of jobs, and not just menial jobs, but white-collar work as well. But before we complain too bitterly, we must look at the culture of

consumerism that we embrace. A flat screen television that might have cost \$1,000 a few years ago is now \$250. That cost savings has to come from somewhere. When consumers seek the lowest possible price, shop at big box stores for the biggest discount they can get, and generally ignore other factors in exchange for low cost, they are building the market for outsourcing. And as the demand is built, the market will ensure it is met, even at the expense of the people who wanted it in the first place.



Figure 15.2: Factories and stores in places like the Detroit metro area have been closed and abandoned as companies go out of business. (Credit: Joe Nuxoll/flickr)

Middle-Income Nations

The World Bank divides middle-income economies into two categories. Lower middle income areas are those with a GNI per capita of more than \$1,036 but less than \$4,045. Upper middle income areas are those with a GNI per capita between \$4,046 and \$12,535. Democratic Republic of Congo, Tunisia, Philippines, El Salvador, and Nepal are examples of lower-middle-income countries. And Argentina, Mexico, China, Iran, Turkey, and Namibia are examples of upper-middle-income nations (World Bank 2021).

Perhaps the most pressing issue for middle-income nations is the problem of debt accumulation. As the name suggests, debt accumulation is the buildup of external debt, wherein countries borrow money from other nations to fund their expansion or growth goals. As the uncertainties of the global economy make repaying these debts, or even paying the interest on them, more challenging, nations can find themselves in trouble. Once global markets have reduced the value of a country's goods, it can be very difficult to ever manage the debt burden. Such issues have plagued middle-income countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as East Asian and Pacific nations (Dogruel and Dogruel 2007).

Low-Income Nations

The World Bank defines low-income countries as nations whose per capita GNI was \$1,035 per capita or less in 2019. For example, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Yemen are considered low-income countries. Low-income economies are primarily found in Asia and Africa (World Bank 2021), where most of the world's population lives. There are two major challenges that these countries face: women are disproportionately affected by poverty (in a trend toward a global feminization of poverty) and much of the population lives in absolute poverty.

Nations' classifications often change as their economies evolve and, sometimes, when their political positions change. Nepal, Indonesia, and Romania all moved up to a higher status based on improved economies. While Sudan, Algeria, and Sri Lanka moved down a level. A few years ago, Myanmar was a low-income nation, but now it has moved into the middle-income area. With Myanmar's 2021 coup, the massive citizen response, and the military's killing of protesters, its economy may go through a downturn again, returning it to the low-income nation status.

The Reality of Wealth and Poverty



Figure 15.3: This young girl was begging for food in the street in Vietnam, holding a younger child as she was doing so. (Credit: Augapfel/flickr)

What does it mean to be poor? Does it mean being a single mother with two kids in New York City, waiting for the next paycheck in order to buy groceries? Does it mean living with almost no furniture in your apartment because your income doesn't allow for extras like beds or chairs? Or does it mean having to live with the distended bellies of the chronically malnourished throughout the peripheral nations of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia? Poverty has a thousand faces and a thousand gradations; there is no single definition that pulls together every part of the spectrum. You might feel you are poor if you can't afford cable television or buy your own car. Every time you see a fellow student with a new laptop and smartphone you might feel that you, with your ten-year-old desktop computer, are barely keeping up. However, someone else might look at the clothes you wear and the calories you consume and consider you rich.

Types of Poverty

Social scientists define global poverty in different ways and take into account the complexities and the issues of relativism described above. Relative poverty is a state of living where people can afford necessities but are unable to meet their society's average standard of living. People often disparage "keeping up with the Joneses"—the idea that you must keep up with the neighbors' standard of living to not feel deprived. But it is true that you might feel "poor" if you are living without a car to drive to and from work, without any money for a safety net should a family member fall ill, and without any "extras" beyond just making ends meet.

Contrary to relative poverty, people who live in extreme poverty lack even the basic necessities, which typically include adequate food, clean water, safe housing, and access to healthcare. Extreme poverty occurs when someone lives on less than 1.90 U.S dollars per day.

In prior years, the World Bank—the primary organization analyzing these trends—focused heavily on the number of people under that extreme poverty level of \$1.90 per day. (The previous term was "absolute poverty.") In 2018, the World Bank added two more measures to consider: people living on less than \$3.20 and people living on less than \$5.50. As the number of people in that extreme category continues to decline, these two new categories will be important to recognize the population that lives above the \$1.90 line, but still remains vulnerable to extreme poverty. Someone who begins to earn enough to live on more than \$1.90 is still in severe poverty and should be considered as such (Schoch 2020).

If you were forced to live on \$1.90 a day, or even \$5.50, how would you do it? What would you deem worthy of spending money on, and what could you do without? How would you manage the necessities—and how would you make up the gap between what you need to live and what you can afford?

Dilapidated slum dwellings are shown from above.



Figure 15.4: Slums in many countries illustrate absolute poverty all too well. (Credit: Ninara/flickr)

Subjective poverty describes poverty that is composed of many dimensions; it is subjectively present when your actual income does not meet your expectations and perceptions. With the concept of subjective poverty, the poor themselves have a greater say in recognizing when it is present. In short, subjective poverty has more to do with how a person or a family defines themselves. This means that a family subsisting on a few dollars a day in Nepal might think of themselves as doing well, within their perception of normal. However, a westerner traveling to Nepal might visit the same family and see extreme need.

Who Are the Impoverished?

Who are the impoverished? Who is living in absolute poverty? The truth that most of us would guess is that the richest countries are often those with the least people. Compare the United States, which possesses a relatively small slice of the population pie and owns by far the largest slice of the wealth pie, with India. These disparities have the expected consequence. The poorest people in the world are women and those in peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. For women, the rate of poverty is particularly worsened by the pressure on their time. In general, time is one of the few luxuries the very poor have, but study after study has shown that women in poverty, who are responsible for all family comforts as well as any earnings they can make, have less of it. The result is that women are suffering more in terms of overall wellbeing (Buvinic 1997). It is harder for females to get credit to expand businesses, to take the time to learn a new skill, or to spend extra hours improving their craft so as to be able to earn at a higher rate.

Global Feminization of Poverty

In almost all societies, women have higher rates of poverty than men. More women and girls live in poor conditions, receive inadequate healthcare, bear the brunt of malnutrition and inadequate drinking water, and so on. This situation goes back decades, and led University of Michigan sociologist Diana Pearce to coin the term "feminization of poverty" in 1978. Throughout the 1990s, data indicated that while overall poverty rates were rising, especially in peripheral nations, the rates of impoverishment increased for women nearly 20 percent more than for men (Mogadham 2005). More recently, as extreme poverty rates continue to fall, women still make up a disproportionate amount of the world's poor. Gender differences are sometimes difficult to discern in international poverty data, but researchers have undertaken efforts to define the makeup of those affected by poverty. Of people aged 25-34, the world has 122 women living in poverty for every 100 men living in poverty. The world's elderly below the poverty line are also more likely to be women (World Bank 2018).

Why is this happening? While myriad variables affect women's poverty, research specializing in this issue identifies three causes (Mogadham 2005):

- The expansion in the number of female-headed households
- The persistence and consequences of intra-household inequalities and biases against women
- The implementation of neoliberal economic policies around the world

While women are living longer and healthier lives today compared to ten years ago, around the world many women are denied basic rights, particularly in the workplace. In peripheral nations, they accumulate fewer assets, farm less land, make less money, and face restricted civil rights and liberties. Women can stimulate the economic growth of peripheral nations, but they are often undereducated and lack access to credit needed to start small businesses. When women are able to attain higher levels of education, they account for significant economic growth within their nations (OECD 2012).

A wide range of organizations undertake programs or provide support in order to improve opportunity, safety, education, equality, and financial outcomes for women. Some of these efforts involve diplomacy, such as one government (or a coalition) working to secure greater rights and improve circumstances of women in other countries. Key areas of focus are reducing institutional and cultural discrimination, ending domestic violence, providing women more agency in decision making, and increasing education for children (Scott 2012). Other programs focus on more immediate needs and opportunities. Microcredit and women's collective savings accounts are ways to provide financial resources for women and families to make important investments, such as building a well at their home to improve health and reduce time spent obtaining clean water. Other uses may involve starting a business, paying a debt, or buying an important appliance or equipment. Unfortunately, these microfinance programs don't have a track record of alleviating poverty, and in some cases they can lead to negative outcomes such as trapping women in a cycle of debt, or increasing domestic violence. Collective savings programs—where local people pool their resources and extend credit within their group—have shown some more positive outcomes (Aizenman 2016 and Niner 2018). The UN has emphasized that microfinance and cultural empowerment would both be more successful if they were used in concert with each other (Scott 2012).

Africa

The majority of the poorest countries in the world are in Africa. That is not to say there is not diversity within the countries of that continent; countries like South Africa and Egypt have much lower rates of poverty than Angola and Ethiopia, for instance. Overall, African income levels have been dropping relative to the rest of the world, meaning that Africa as a whole is getting relatively poorer. Making the problem worse, 2014 saw an outbreak of the Ebola virus in western Africa, leading to a public health crisis and an economic downturn due to loss of workers and tourist dollars.

Why is Africa in such dire straits? Much of the continent's poverty can be traced to the availability of land, especially arable land (land that can be farmed). Centuries of struggle over land ownership have meant that much useable land has been ruined or left unfarmed, while many countries with inadequate rainfall have never set up an infrastructure to irrigate. Many of Africa's natural resources were long ago taken by colonial forces, leaving little agricultural and mineral wealth on the continent.

Further, African poverty is worsened by civil wars and inadequate governance that are the result of a continent re-imagined with artificial colonial borders and leaders. Consider the example of Rwanda. There, two ethnic groups cohabitated with their own system of hierarchy and management until Belgians took control of the country in 1915 and rigidly confined members of the population into two unequal ethnic groups. While, historically, members of the Tutsi group held positions of power, the involvement of Belgians led to the Hutu seizing power during a 1960s revolt. This ultimately led to a repressive government and genocide against Tutsis that left hundreds of thousands of Rwandans dead or living in diaspora (U.S. Department of State 2011c). The painful rebirth of a self-ruled Africa has meant many countries bear ongoing scars as they try to see their way towards the future (World Poverty 2012a). In 2020, armed conflicts were underway in regions of nations including the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, the Kamwina Nsapo rebellion in Democratic Republic of Congo, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and neighboring countries, and several more. While most of the ongoing conflicts are considered minor, they are both dangerous and disruptive to the people living in those regions, and several have included ethnic cleansing, mass kidnapping, extensive sexual violence, and use of child soldiers.

Asia



Figure 15.5: For children who have homes in slums like this one in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, survival and safety are often the primary and immediate concerns. Longer-term goals, such as education and social mobility, may not be available options. (Credit: ND Strupler)

A young person is pictured in a small structure without complete walls or doors. A pot sits over an open flame, and a few bowls and buckets are arrayed on shelves and on the floor.

While the majority of the world's poorest countries are in Africa, the majority of the world's poorest people are in Asia. As in Africa, Asia finds itself with disparity in the distribution of poverty, with Japan and South Korea holding much more wealth than India and Cambodia. In fact, most poverty is concentrated in South Asia. One of the most pressing causes of poverty in Asia is simply the pressure that the size of the population puts on its resources. Unlike Africa, many people living in poverty reside in urban areas, often in crowded, unhygienic conditions with limited access to water and resources. Estimates indicate that Asia has 60 percent of the world's people who live in slums (WorldVision 2019). Those who find work often do so in garment factories or other manufacturing facilities, where pay is very low and the demands are incredibly high. (See the feature below on sweatshop labor.) Children are sent to work in these conditions as well.

Asia is also frequently impacted by natural disasters. Countries like India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines experience frequent typhoons (hurricanes) and flooding. For those living in insecure structures—often constructed from various leftover materials and not subject to any type of building codes—such events can leave entire swaths of the population homeless and vulnerable to disease or injury (WorldVision 2019).

MENA

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) includes oil-rich countries in the Gulf, such as Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, but also countries that are relatively resource-poor in relationship to their populations, such as Morocco and Yemen. These countries are predominately Islamic. For the last quarter-century, economic growth was slower in MENA than in other developing economies, and almost a quarter of the 300 million people who make up the population live on less than \$2.00 a day (World Bank 2013).

The International Labour Organization tracks the way income inequality influences social unrest. The two regions with the highest risk of social unrest are Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East-North Africa region (International Labour Organization 2012). Increasing unemployment and high socioeconomic inequality in MENA were major factors in the Arab Spring, which—beginning in 2010—toppled dictatorships throughout the Middle East in favor of democratically elected government. Unemployment and income inequalities are still being blamed on immigrants, foreign nationals, and ethnic/religious minorities.

Sweatshops and Student Protests: Who's Making Your Team Spirit?



Figure 15.6: These protesters seek to bring attention to the issue of sweatshop labor in producing clothing. (Credit: Jo Guldi/flickr)

Most of us don't pay too much attention to where our favorite products are made. And certainly when you're shopping for a college sweatshirt or ball cap to wear to a school football game, you probably don't turn over the label, check who produced the item, and then research whether or not the company has fair labor practices. But for the members of USAS—United Students Against Sweatshops—that's exactly what they do. The organization, which was founded in 1997, has waged countless battles against both apparel makers and other multinational corporations that do not meet what USAS considers fair working conditions and wages. USAS also focuses on ensuring safe and non-exploitative conditions as well as improved pay and benefits for campus workers, including dining hall staff, security guards, and adjuncts (USAS 2021).

How do clothes get made, and why are garment workers among the most commonly mistreated? In many cases, large apparel companies—including Nike, Lululemon, H&M, Urban Outfitters (owner of Anthropologie and Free People), Zara, and most other major brands—outsource their manufacturing to factories around the world. The apparel companies negotiate prices and schedules with the local manufacturers, and often push for the lowest possible manufacturing cost and the fastest schedule. In order to keep up with demand and manufacture the clothing at the required cost, the factories may pay their employees less, force them to work longer hours, and may maintain unsafe conditions. All of those tactics are associated with sweatshop practices (Chan 2019). In response to action from organizations like USAS, many apparel companies have undertaken steps to ensure that the factories they

use are treating workers properly, but in reality, it is very difficult to know for sure. Often, the brands work through subcontractors and subsidiaries, and may not know exactly which factories are producing their products.

Members of USAS helped form the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), which monitors working conditions for a wide array of companies and their affiliated factories. WRC conducts regular reviews of worldwide manufacturing facilities and publishes the results. The WRC also studies and reports on overall economic conditions and their effect on employment. For example, in 2020, as the global economy went through a rapid downturn, apparel companies demanded lower prices while they also reduced their orders, which put workers at risk of exploitation or job loss (Karim 2020).

Consequences of Poverty



Figure 15.7: For this child, who is being assessed for malnutrition at a clinic in Kenya, risks associated with poverty and lack of food were exacerbated by a massive drought that hit the region. (Credit: DFID - UK Department for International Development/flickr)

Not surprisingly, the consequences of poverty are often also causes. The poor often experience inadequate healthcare, limited education, and the inaccessibility of birth control. But those born into these conditions are incredibly challenged in their efforts to break out since these consequences of poverty are also causes of poverty, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

According to sociologists Neckerman and Torche (2007) in their analysis of global inequality studies, the consequences of poverty are many. Neckerman and Torche have divided them into three areas. The first, termed “the sedimentation of global inequality,” relates to the fact that once poverty becomes entrenched in an area, it is typically very difficult to reverse. As mentioned above, poverty exists in a cycle where the consequences and causes are intertwined. The second consequence of poverty is its effect on physical and mental health. Poor people face physical health challenges, including malnutrition and high infant mortality rates. Mental health is also detrimentally affected by the emotional stresses of poverty, with relative deprivation carrying the most robust effect. Again, as with the ongoing inequality, the effects of poverty on mental and physical health become more entrenched as time goes on. Neckerman and Torche’s third consequence of poverty is the prevalence of crime. Cross-nationally, crime rates are higher, particularly for violent crime, in countries with higher levels of income inequality (Fajnzylber 2002).

While most of us are accustomed to thinking of slavery in terms of the antebellum South, modern day slavery goes hand-in-hand with global inequality. In short, slavery refers to any situation in which people are sold, treated as property, or forced to work for little or no pay. Just as in the pre-Civil War United States, these humans are at the mercy of their employers. Chattel slavery, the form of slavery once practiced in the American South, occurs when one person owns another as property. Child slavery, which may include child prostitution, is a form of chattel slavery. In debt bondage, or bonded labor, the poor pledge themselves as servants in exchange for the cost of basic necessities like transportation, room, and board. In this scenario, people are paid less than they are charged for room and board. When travel is required, they can arrive in debt for their travel expenses and be unable to work their way free, since their wages do not allow them to ever get ahead.

The global watchdog group Anti-Slavery International recognizes other forms of slavery: human trafficking (in which people are moved away from their communities and forced to work against their will), child domestic work and child labor, and certain forms of servile marriage, in which women are little more than enslaved people (Anti-Slavery International 2012). For more on this you can visit websites such as: <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>

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. The table below summarizes the two sets of explanations.

Table 15.2: Theories about how nations become prosperous or poor

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

Modernization Theory

The individualistic explanation is called modernization theory (Rostow, 1990). 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.



Figure 15.8: According to modernization theory, poor nations are poor because their people never developed values such as an emphasis on hard work. © Thinkstock

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

According to modernization theory, low-income countries are affected by their lack of industrialization and can improve their global economic standing through (Armer and Katsillis 2010):

- an adjustment of cultural values and attitudes to work
- industrialization and other forms of economic growth

Critics point out the inherent ethnocentric bias of this theory. It supposes all countries have the same resources and are capable of following the same path. In addition, it assumes that the goal of all countries is to be as “developed” as possible. There is no room within this theory for the possibility that industrialization and technology are not the best goals.

There is, of course, some basis for this assumption. Data show that core nations tend to have lower maternal and child mortality rates, longer life spans, and less absolute poverty. It is also true that in the poorest countries, millions of people die from the lack of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, which are benefits most of us take for granted. At the same time, the issue is more complex than the numbers might suggest. Cultural equality, history, community, and local traditions are all at risk as modernization pushes into peripheral countries. The challenge, then, is to allow the benefits of modernization while maintaining a cultural sensitivity to what already exists.

Dependency Theory

The structural explanation for global stratification is called dependency theory. 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 mount 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). Often the corporations work hand-in-hand with corrupt officials in the poor nations to strengthen their economic stake in the countries.

Wallerstein’s (1979) world systems approach provided a systematic and historical framework for dependency theory.

According to world systems theory as articulated by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, core countries are at the top of the global hierarchy. Historically these core nations were imperialist nations, willing to use their power to extract resources, physical and economic, from other nations, and exert political control over them.

Core nations are dominant capitalist countries, highly industrialized, technological, and urbanized. They own most of the world’s capital and technology, and have great control over world trade and economic agreements. The US is an example of a core nation.

Semiperipheral countries (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa) generally provide labor and materials to core countries. For example, Mexico provides abundant cheap agricultural labour to the United States and Canada, and supplies goods to the North American market at a rate dictated by U.S. consumers without the labor laws and constitutional protections offered to U.S. workers. They also provide an expanding middle class marketplace for the products of core nations.

Peripheral nations (e.g., most African countries and low income countries in South America) have little industrialization; what they do have often represents the outdated castoffs of core nations, the factories and means of production owned by core nations, or the resources exploited by core nations. Peripheral countries are generally indebted to wealthy nations, and their land and populations are often exploited for the gain of other countries, first as colonies and then as sites for multinational corporations. They typically have unstable governments, poor labor standards and inadequate social programs. They are economically dependent on core nations for jobs, loans, and foreign aid.

Because of this hierarchy, individuals living in core countries generally have higher standards of living than those in semiperipheral or peripheral countries.



Figure 15.9: French Pith Helmet: The pith helmet is a symbol of French colonialism in tropical regions, as it was worn by colonial officers.

At first glance, it seems the dependency theory ignores the formerly low-income nations that are now considered middle-income nations and are on their way to becoming high-income nations and major players in the global economy, such as China. It does not explain how some former colonies like Singapore and Sri Lanka have been able to develop while others in Sub-Saharan Africa have not. This makes it seem as if aspect of modernization theory might be plausible. This again though assumes that becoming like core nations and following that model is, or should be, the goal of every nation. It also doesn't necessarily show the whole picture.

China is an interesting case in this regard because since 1978, 800 million people, or approximately half the population have been lifted out of poverty, meaning that China is now an upper-middle-income country (World Bank, 2022b). Yet at the same time, 25% of the population in China live under the \$6.85 a day poverty cut-off line for middle-income countries (compared to 0.75% in Canada, adjusted for inflation and for differences in the cost of living) (Hasell et al., 2022). This suggests a disjuncture in people's standard of living within the same country. In fact, from a critical sociology perspective, it becomes more interesting to examine the way development and underdevelopment occur side by side within the core nations, peripheral nations, and semi-peripheral nations. The idea of "nations" as containers of national economies and the unit of analysis for understanding global inequality might not be the most effective way to analyse the configurations of power, wealth, and poverty in an increasingly globalized world.

Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Continuing Inequality

Economic globalization refers to any economic activity that is global in scope. As economic activity has become less confined to a single nation and more likely to be operate on a transnational or global level, new policies have arisen that tend to increase global inequality. These policies are sometimes referred to as *neoliberalism*. Put simply, neoliberal policies means core nations have turned from caring for and managing their own nations' quality of life through government means things like business regulations, social welfare policies, and support for public institutions (such as education and health) to supporting "free markets," "free trade," and relying solely on "market mechanisms" to decide where money is directed. This means for example the dismantling of government regulations that govern businesses and entrepreneurs, the conversion of public services to private ownership, and opening up the domestic market to international competition.

Core nations also promote these policies globally. One way this was done was to use international bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank. If nations (such as peripheral nations) needed loans, these institutions would insist those nations adjust their economic policies to reflect neoliberal guidelines – decreasing social spending, for example. Governments of these nations then slashed spending on areas like healthcare, education, subsidies on food and energy, and police forces. The costs of these policies were borne by the most vulnerable segments of the society. Reducing public spending can also mean the elimination of subsidies for basic goods such as gas or unemployment for public servants.

Additionally, governments were expected to implement policies that allowed for foreign competition, such as allowing for foreign hotel companies to operate within their borders. It also involved the privatization of state-owned sectors of the economy, such as oil and natural gas, fisheries, transportation, and communications. (This means core nations could then invest in those industries and make profit.) One major consequence of this involved the weakening of labor protections, including safe working environments, guaranteed retirement benefits, protected contract and collective bargaining rights, and workers' compensation protections. Furthermore, increased foreign competition negatively impacted local employment patterns by displacing local industries. In sum, the compound effect of these structural changes contributed to the general instability of the national economy. Additionally, the

deregulation of a country's natural resources industry unintentionally damaged the environment, both locally and transnationally. The worsening economic conditions brought on by these policies encouraged mass migration in the Twentieth Century. Many of these economic migrants left their home in search of a better life, including job opportunities, access to education, and for general financial stability.

In one example of neoliberal policies gone awry, the World Bank recommended the privatization of water in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, and its environs. City officials complied. When the city's water system was auctioned in 1999, the sole bidder was a global consortium, Aguas del Tunari, which represented various British, U.S., Spanish, and Bolivian firms. The sale was followed by price hikes that were felt most keenly by the poor, who organized a grassroots movement opposing the consortium. Protests broke out in 2000. The government responded with force, resulting in hundreds of arrests and the death of a teenage protester. Eventually the consortium withdrew and a settlement was finally reached, but Cochabamba's 2000 Water War highlights the simmering conflicts over neoliberal policies.

Of note here though is that populist movements like MAGA (Make America Great Again) that seek to decouple some aspects of national economies from globalization, indicate that global capitalism still retains some national characteristics.

In 2023, the World Inequality Database reports that the top 10 percent of countries control nearly three-quarters of the world's wealth, while half of the global population has little to no wealth at all. While income and wealth are different, the picture is still quite clear - that a large proportion of income and wealth are in the hands of a global few. According to the Brookings Institute, the already-high level of inequality is likely to persist or, worse, increase without some kind of responsive policy intervention. This type of intervention often includes taxing wealth, with the most prominent being the inheritance tax, which is defined as the tax someone pays on assets inherited from a deceased person, such as a relative.

Making Connections: Big Picture

The True Cost of a T-Shirt



Figure 15.10: Where did your t-shirts come from? (Photo courtesy of Mika Meskanen/Flickr.) CC BY-NC 2.0

Most people do not pay too much attention to where their favourite products are made. Certainly, when they are shopping for a cheap T-shirt, they probably do not turn over the label, check who produced the item, and then research whether or not the company has fair labour practices. In fact, it can be extremely difficult to discover where exactly the items people use every day have come from. Nevertheless, the purchase of a T-shirt involves the consumer in a series of social relationships that tie them to the lives and working conditions of people around the world.

On April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed killing 1,129 garment workers. The building, like 90% of Dhaka's 4,000 garment factories, was structurally unsound. News reports soon emerged that the factory owners had ignored ominous warning signs, such as visible cracks in the wall, and had illegally added several stories to the top of the building, creating a weight the building could not bear. Rescue workers struggled for over a week to reach trapped survivors, while hospitals tended

to the over 2,500 workers who had escaped, many with severe injuries. Survivors told heart-rending tales of having lost mothers and sisters who had worked in the same factories.

Many of the factories operating in the building were producing apparel for well-known Western brands, such as Walmart, Joe Fresh, and Mango. Garment workers in Bangladesh work under unsafe conditions for as little as \$38 a month so that North American consumers can purchase T-shirts in the fashionable colours of the season for as little as \$5.

Having been put on the defensive for their overseas sweatshop practices, companies like Loblaw have pledged to improve working conditions in their suppliers' factories, but compliance has proven difficult to ensure because of the increasingly complex web of globalized production (MacKinnon and Strauss, 2013).



Figure 15.11: A relative reacts with a picture of a garment worker, who has been missing, during a protest to demand capital punishment for those responsible for the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar, outside Dhaka April 29, 2013. (Photo courtesy of Coolloud/Flickr.) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The fair trade movement has pushed back against the hyper-exploitation of global workers and forced stores like Loblaw to try to address the unsafe conditions in garment factories like Rana Plaza. Organizations like the Better Factories Cambodia program inspect garment production regularly in Cambodia, enabling stores like Mountain Equipment Co-op to purchase reports on the factory chains it relies on. After the Rana Plaza disaster, Loblaw signed an Accord of Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh to try to ensure safety compliance of their suppliers. However, the bigger problem seems to originate with people's desire to be able to purchase a T-shirt for \$5 in the first place.

Health

Global Health Disparities

Global health disparities are evident within the Global North (i.e., first-world or developed countries, which are also the richest countries in the world), yet even the poorest person in the Global North tends to have a longer life expectancy than a person that lives in the Global South (i.e., the world's developing and least developed countries).

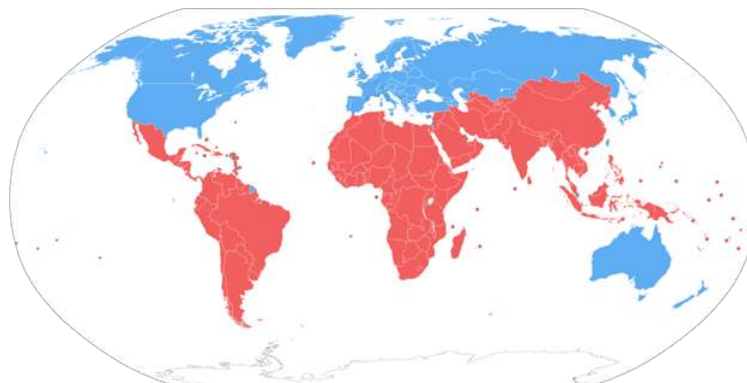


Figure 15.12: Map showing the Global North (blue) and Global South (red)

The CIA (2023 estimate) reports that the following countries have the highest and lowest life expectancy rates:

Table 15.3: The top ten countries for life expectancy

Country Ranking	Name of the Country	Life Expectancy (yrs)
1.	Monaco	89.6
2.	Singapore	86.5
3.	Macau	85.2
4.	Japan	85
5.	San Marino	84.1
6.	Canada	84
7.	Switzerland	83.8
8.	Hong Kong	83.8
9.	Iceland	83.8
10.	Andorra	83.6

SOURCE: CIA (2023). Life Expectancy at Birth. [https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbo...ancy-at-birth/](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/series/indicators/indicators-at-a-glance/life-expectancy-at-birth/).

According to the CIA (2023), the United States is number 48 in life expectancy, as the average American lives 80.8 years.

Table 15.4: Countries with the Lowest Life Expectancy

Country Ranking	Name of the Country	Life Expectancy (yrs)
227.	Afghanistan	54.1
226.	Central African Republic	56
225.	Somalia	56.1
224.	Mozambique	57.7
223.	Sierra Leone	59.1
222.	Chad	59.6
221.	South Sudan	59.7
220.	Lesotho	59.9
219.	Eswatini	60.2
218.	Niger	60.5

SOURCE: CIA (2023). Life Expectancy at Birth. [https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbo...ancy-at-birth/](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/series/indicators/indicators-at-a-glance/life-expectancy-at-birth/).

Most of the countries with the lowest life expectancy are located within Africa and South Asia. This is due to a myriad of issues. On one side, it is economic in nature, these countries have some of the lowest gross domestic products (GDPs) in the world. Political considerations can also effect life expectancy. One ramification of the United States leaving Afghanistan was reasserting the complete control of the Taliban. The effects of a Taliban government is a lack of healthcare that has left everyone vulnerable, especially women. Many people are dying due to lack of medicine, as the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that two-thirds of the Afghan population need some sort of health aid (Abbasi 2022). The population is plagued with not only COVID-19, but they are so malnourished that other conditions, such as measles and diarrhea, are rampant (Abbasi 2022). Economics and politics can also collide, as Afghan health workers can often go for months without being paid.

These kinds of health problems are not just limited to Afghanistan. In the Central African Republic there are 56 million people waiting to have surgery, and it is estimated that 25 percent of all people under the age of 15 will die due to health problems

(African Mission Healthcare 2024). Due to the lack of funding and global financial support, countries such as these, as well as many others see their populations continuously on the brink of one health crisis or another. These countries are also experiencing a great deal of political unrest, which further exacerbates global health inequalities because it makes it difficult to adequately implement international financial assistance that would help keep every citizen healthy.

Pandemics and Health Crises

Global health crises are a cyclical part of history. The world has experienced a number of them, with the earliest documented in 430 BCE. A global pandemic is different, and is defined as a health crisis that can lead not only to illness, but also the possible death of individuals across the world. A global health crisis concerns illnesses that have the potential of spreading, but do not risk the death of a large number of individuals around the world.

Currently we are living under two major pandemics, HIV/AIDS and COVID-19. Both of these pandemics have had devastating effects on a variety of countries, which is directly connected with global health care disparities. Since 1981, there have been 36 million people who have died from HIV or AIDS. For decades, contracting HIV or AIDS would lead to death, but due to medical discoveries, people can now live a long life with the disease. Additionally, mothers no longer have to worry about passing it to their child in utero and the spread of the disease can be prevented even if infected individuals are engaged in sexual activity. Yet, all of these medical advancements are extremely expensive. More developed countries, such as the United States, provided aid to countries to help tackle the devastating effects of AIDS/HIV on populations. In 2003, President George Bush created the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that provided treatment to 2 million people living in Africa south of the Sahara. This program, among others, has contributed to saving millions of lives, and show the importance of global cooperation in the realm of health.

People are still being globally effected from the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As you can see from the United Nations report in 2022, 39 million people are still living with HIV/AIDS.

Table 15.4: World Health Organization Estimate of the Number of People Living with HIV by Region

Name of Region	Number of People Living with HIV (estimate)
Africa	25.6 million
Americas	3.8 million
South-East Asian	3.9 million
Europe	3 million
Western Pacific	2.2 million
Eastern Mediterranean	490,000

Statistics are from the WHO (2023), HIV Data and Stats.

Just as AIDS/HIV revealed massive global health inequities around the world, COVID-19 revealed that global health disparities still exist. Communities that were underserved struggled to find the resources to tackle the disease. Thus, they determined that the best way to handle it was through the isolation of the public. However, even quarantining became a privilege, as some people had no place to quarantine. Additionally, some people's livelihood is based on physical and social interaction. Therefore, people had two options - risk their lives to work or experience further financial distress through not working and isolating to prevent contracting COVID-19. These binary options further revealed how fiscally and physically fragile people are when it comes to withstanding a major health crisis. To exacerbate the disparity the already overwhelmed medical community had to deal with the growing number of sick patients. Health systems around the world were suffering from the drastic increase of sick patients, while some countries were able to combat these issues through allocating more funds for medical equipment, personnel, and research, others were not.

Global health pandemics and other health crises are inevitable. We need to realize what role we all play in protecting ourselves from fiscal and physical harm. As a global community, we have to ask, what role do we all play in protecting our fellow humans from experiencing preventable illnesses?

Theories and Concepts

Global health inequities expose many intersections of other societal issues. Disparities in income and wealth and access to food and technology all enhance health inequality. There are three major theoretical perspectives that help to understand these inequalities.

Theory of Unintended Consequences of Social Action

Sociologist Robert Merton illustrated the theory of unintended consequences of social action by examining how medical advancements can have unintended consequences. The medical community vows to do no harm to anyone, but medical decisions have in fact harmed individuals and sometimes entire communities. Kleinman (2010) provides an example of the smallpox vaccination campaign in India, which resulted in the disease becoming more resistant to the vaccine. There are similar issues within the United States, as there is an overuse of antibiotics which cause a viruses to mutate and become more resistant to antibiotics. This creates so-called superbugs, which include some strands of gonorrhea, urinary tract infections, pneumonia, and skin infections. Due to antibiotics being overly prescribed to people and animals because of its effectiveness, antibiotics have lost the potency in the fight against certain viruses. Due to this, the National Institute of Health now recommends washing hands and sanitizing the areas you come into contact with as a means to prevent the spread of bacteria, rather than taking antibiotics for everything. Scientists are trying to find new ways to combat viral infections without utilizing antibiotics. The problem is, advancements in medicine often come at a price. This is a price that not all communities can afford. Vaccines and antibiotics were developed as a means of helping humanity, but unintentionally they have made some illnesses and medical conditions worse.

Theory of Social Construction of Reality

In the 1960s, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann developed the theory of the social construction of reality. This theory asserts that the real world is socially and culturally constructed through our interactions and communications with others. How this is understood in the discussion of health inequality, is that certain viruses and diseases become stigmatized based on country of origin and/or the countries that are most affected. Kleinman (2010) provides the example of the scientifically named H1N1 influenza strain which in the media is popularized as the swine flu epidemic and then associated with its origins in China. Due to the challenges in the geo-political relationship between the U.S. and China, all of a sudden the innocuous H1N1 becomes the much more threatening swine flu.

We have continued to witness this stigma during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the disease was labeled as a Chinese (and in some cases, an Asian) disease. Do to people attributing the spread of COVID-19 to members of the Asian community, this led to a significant growth in hate crimes toward Asians within the United States. In response, on May 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed S.937 - COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act that was to protect all minority groups and the LGBTQ+ community from harm. Though its protections were aimed broadly, the bill was labeled the anti-Asian hate crimes bill due to 3,800 reported cases of hate crimes against Asian-American and Pacific Islanders.

Legislation does not mean an end to socially-constructed negativity though. In an attack in 2023, in Monterey Park, California eleven people were killed and another nine injured during Chinese New Year celebrations. This development of socially constructed negativity can also include certain medical procedures, such as abortion. From a cultural perspective, abortion is a controversial topic in the United States of America especially in rural areas that tend to lean towards social conservatism, whereas, in Japan, abortion is not controversial at all. This means that due to how abortion is seen culturally, not medically, it becomes less available to those that might need it in the U.S.

Theory of Social Suffering

The third theory, social suffering, explores how social, political, economic, and institutional forces can cause, worsen, or alleviate human suffering. It argues that socioeconomic and sociopolitical forces can actually cause disease or at least exacerbates the spread of disease. For example, poverty causes many people to not have access to medical care, which causes people to die of curable viruses and diseases. In the U.S., we see this often with dental care. Even though dental care costs much less than most medical procedures, dental insurance tends to be more restrictive that causes the co-pay to be much higher. Thus, many Americans neglect their teeth, and their overall health, due to these restrictions. The way the system is set up keeps people from getting the care that they need.

Through the theory of social suffering we can also see that social institutions can be barriers to executing healthcare. Globally, this could large institutions, such as the United Nations, or even non-profit organizations that disburse aid. Within the U.S., the Veterans

Administration has harmed veterans due to the bureaucracy that often stands between veterans and the ability to receive care. We can also see this more generally in the population with health-care bureaucracies who may have to approve certain procedures and/or have policies that patients may have to follow before the care can be executed. We have to remember that pain and suffering effects much more than just the individual. Everyone in the patients' network experiences the pain and suffering as well. Families and friends are also effected after a family member is diagnosed with a major illness, such as cancer or Alzheimer's.

Health problems and social problems are so intertwined that it is often difficult to untangle the two. Those who live in impoverished areas have a higher propensity to be malnourished. Malnourishment makes the population more susceptible to disease. However, these areas also tend to be the regions that have inadequate, or non-existent, health infrastructure in place. It is hard to provide medicine when people also need a well-balanced meal on a consistent basis. All the medicine in the world will not help if the population cannot fight off new illnesses in the future. It is very onerous to tackle health problems when the societal issues need to be addressed first. But it is hard to address societal issues when a population is dying from illness.

Political can also either help or hinder access to health care. Governments assert their influence over their citizens through determining the types of services that they will provide. In this case, some countries provide more access to healthcare; whereas, other countries will provide no access. Thus, those with money will be able to see a doctor, as the rest of the population will depend on the benevolence of other countries to provide aid, or receive no aid at all. There are also exceptions to this dichotomy. The U.S. is a wealthy state, however, it primarily depends on private health care companies to service the needs of its population. In this way, wealthy Americans are like the wealthy in poorer countries, those with more money have access to better healthcare. The U.S. also struggles with healthcare inequities based on state. Some states provide more health and social services to their residents than other states. It is a system that favors those with wealth, and highlights that health inequality exists even in the wealthiest countries.

Health Care in Industrial Nations

<https://2012books.lardbucket.org/boo...alth-care.html>

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). Although their health-care systems differ in several respects, their governments pay all or most of the costs for health care, drugs, and other health needs. In Denmark, for example, the government provides free medical care and hospitalization for the entire population and pays for some medications and some dental care. In France, the government pays for some of the medical, hospitalization, and medication costs for most people and all these expenses for the poor, unemployed, and children under the age of 10. In Great Britain, the National Health Service pays most medical costs for the population, including medical care, hospitalization, prescriptions, dental care, and eyeglasses. In Canada, the National Health Insurance system also pays for most medical costs. Patients do not even receive bills from their physicians, who instead are paid by the government.

Although these national health insurance programs are not perfect—for example, people sometimes must wait for elective surgery and some other procedures—they are commonly credited with reducing infant mortality, extending life expectancy, and, more generally, for enabling their citizenries to have relatively good health. Their populations are generally healthier than Americans, even though health-care spending is much higher per capita in the United States than in these other nations. In all these respects, these national health insurance systems offer several advantages over the health-care model found in the United States (Reid, 2010).

Climate/Environment

Climate Change and Society <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology3rdedition/chapter/20-3-the-environment-and-society/>
No references in this book! I'll just put in the overall one.

This section adapted from Islam and Kieu (2021). CC BY-NC 4.0 Islam, M. S. & Kieu, E. (2021). Sociological perspectives on climate change and society : a review. *Climate*, 9(1). <https://dx.doi.org/10.3390/cli9010007>

Map of the globe showing temperature anomalies for January 1, 2023. The Northern Hemisphere is covered by exceptional warmth marked by dark red areas on the map.

Figure 20.25 Map of the globe illustrating average temperature anomalies for January 1, 2023. The Northern Hemisphere was covered by exceptional warmth. (Image courtesy of ClimateReanalyzer.org.) CC BY-NC 4.0

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures due to human activity, particularly the release of greenhouse gases into the environment. It is a critical problem, spanning across societal boundaries and socioeconomic divisions. While the planet as a whole is on average warming—hence the term global warming—short-term variations of climate change can include both higher or lower temperatures and tendencies more extreme weather. There are increasingly more record-breaking weather phenomena, from “atmospheric rivers” of torrential rain causing flooding to “heat domes” causing periods of dangerously high temperatures and forest fires.

Due to the wide-ranging and deep-seated nature of its causes, researchers and policymakers face a massive task coordinating effective and developing policies to mitigate its impacts.

Causes and Impacts of Climate Change

Two dominant types of sociological explanation of these processes include the treadmill of production theory and ecological modernization theory. Proponents of the treadmill of production theory have argued that the capitalist system has prioritized economic growth over social equality and environmental protection. But advocates of ecological modernization theory say that as society modernizes, people will realize the need to protect the environment from the strains of human development.

The latter may seem to be supported by emerging policies to reduce environmental harm in developed nations. However, deeper assessment has revealed that the more developed nations have been able to export the effects of their environmental problems to less developed nations, supporting the treadmill theory. Also, this theory ignores some cultural aspects to climate change, as will be discussed below.

Two Types of Sociological Explanation for Climate Change

Treadmill of Production Theory

- The carrying capacity of the planet is finite.
- Industrialism and development cause ecological and environmental damage.
- Rates of resource extraction is unsustainable.

Ecological Modernization Theory

- Modernization can evolve to find sustainable solutions.
- Possible to increase the productivity of resources.
- Societies will be able to develop while the environment remains viable for the future.

Dealing with climate change is caught up in the underlying power dynamics and self-interest inherent in international relations. Less developed nations have feared international restraints on their efforts to grow economically to meet their own needs, while the more powerful developed nations, which are responsible for 60% of GHG emissions, have refused to curtail their own emissions. Accordingly, the less developed nations have become less willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the environment (Roberts and Parks, 2006).

Consumption patterns have also had direct and indirect impacts on climate change and create a perception of climate injustice, especially when they have been driven by the desire for social status, conspicuous consumption, and leisure that secure one’s position in society (Bell, 2004; Veblen, 1994).

For example, there is the issue of monster trucks and “petro masculinity.”



Figure 15.13: The phenomenon of “rolling coal” as a display of petro-masculinity. Rolling coal means retro-fitting a diesel truck so that its engine can be flooded with excess gas, producing thick plumes of black smoke (Dagget, 2018). (Image courtesy of Salvatore Arnone/Wikimedia Commons.) [CC BY 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

Ford’s launch of its four-door F-150 pickup truck in the late 1990s allowed families to replace sedans and minivans with vehicles that seemed to have more utility, but it started the trend towards larger, more aggressively styled trucks with 4 door cabs, massive front ends and smaller beds. The dominance of “light” trucks in Canada’s new vehicle sales has increased significantly, with these vehicles representing almost 75% of the total (Bubbers, 2019). Since 1990, the average weight of pickups has increased by 1,256 lbs or 32% (Davis and Boundy, 2020). In 2019, there were 25 models of vans, trucks and SUVs that weighed at least 5,500 pounds, approximately double the weight of a Honda Civic.

Despite the advancements in engine fuel efficiency, the overall emissions from light-duty trucks, including pickups, SUVs, and vans, have more than doubled in Canada since 1990. This increase is primarily due to the sheer increase in the number of light trucks on the roads.

There is a certain irrationality to buying monster trucks, especially given people’s awareness of climate change. The majority of truck owners live in cities where trucks are used for local commutes rather than hauling bales of hay, towing trailers or off-roading. Many consumers choose big trucks because they make them feel safer and less vulnerable on the road, which is ironic because pickups and SUVs account for about a quarter of all collisions with pedestrians and bikes, but nearly half of all the deaths (Edwards and Leonard, 2022).

But the size and styling of trucks is also part of North American truck culture in which trucks serve as important signifiers of race, class and gender identity. Dagget (2018) describes the formation of petro-masculinity as an exaggerated expression of masculinity tied to a backlash against climate change discourse. This manifests as a malicious pride in the burning of fossil fuels, the desire for ever larger and more “aggressive” trucks, climate denial, and even truck-centric “Freedom Convoy” style protests against measures to reduce emissions. In all of this, beleaguered masculine identity is the core component of reaction. It is a species of politicized hypermasculinity which “arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity” (Agathangelou and Ling, 2004).

For much of the 20th and 21st centuries the privileges and affluence of the North American way of life was centred around intensive fossil fuel consumption and jobs (mostly white and male) reliant upon fossil fuel systems. While “the planet is telling us that there are limits to human freedom; there are freedoms and political choices we can no longer have” (Burke et al., 2016), extracting and burning fuel has been a core component of white, male breadwinner/provider identity. As irrational as it may be, fossil fuels and monster trucks become potent symbols that represent autonomy, self-sufficiency, and a nostalgia for unconstrained male power. As Dagget (2018) says, “it is no coincidence that white, conservative American men — regardless of class — appear to be among the most vociferous climate deniers, as well as leading fossil fuel proponents in the West.”

The concept of petro-masculinity suggests that cultural and political identities also play into fossil fuel use. These cultural and political identities can override the the ecological modernization theory’s assertion that says renewable energy solutions will simply displace fossil fuels as cost, efficiency, and capacity improve. Fossil fuel use is also driven by powerful forces of nostalgia, desire, anxiety, and beleaguered masculine identity, which poses problems for finding consensus on post-carbon energy solutions.

Recently, policies to lower carbon emissions have pushed automakers to redesign their vehicles from fuel to battery power. As a result, monster trucks have also begun to be redesigned as full EV (Electric Vehicle) models. People can have their monster trucks with half the lifetime emissions of comparable gas-powered model (Vermes, 2023). However, it is not clear what effect petrol-masculinity will have on their acceptance in the marketplace.

Climate Justice

Within nations, toxic and polluting industries have been located in the poorer districts, because properties in such locations have been considered less valuable (Roberts and Toffolon-Weiss, 2001). Almost all hazardous waste sites are located in or near neighborhoods and communities that are largely populated by low-income and racialized people. Likewise, between core and peripheral societies, ecologically unequal exchanges occur due to resource plundering (which leaves the plundered nation environmentally damaged while the plundering nation reaps economic benefits) and pollution from the side effects of transnational industrial operations (e.g., oil spills and mercury poisoning that affect the peripheral nations most.) (Jorgenson et al., 2011; Pellow, 2009).

While there is great urgency to address climate change, it needs to be done with the idea of *climate justice* in mind. The populations and groups most impacted by climate change have been, are, and will continue to be those who contributed least to the problem, raising questions of fairness. Highly impacted groups tend to be historically marginalized and lack access to resources. The climate justice movement seeks to ensure that the concerns and needs of disproportionately impacted, under-resourced groups are addressed in the fight against climate change. Solutions must not be made on the backs of the disadvantaged – for example, policies made to address climate change that mean decreased access to affordable energy for the poor.

The wealthy live lives of privilege where increased consumption and frequent travel produce the bulk of greenhouse gases globally, and the poor bear the brunt of the climate change impacts. Fossil fuel companies continue to make immense profits that benefit a small percentage of people in the world at the expense of the many, and at particular expense of vulnerable populations such as people of color and other marginalized communities. Moreover, in many countries fossil fuel production and consumption are still subsidised from public funds.

The world has been experiencing rising numbers of climate migrants, and within-country migration is projected to increase to over 200 million by 2050 (Clement et al., 2021). People will be pushed from their land due to rising sea levels and more intense weather events, combined with decreases in availability of potable water and productivity of the land. The World Bank estimates that in the worst-hit areas, nearly 3 percent of the populations of Africa south of the Sahara, South Asia, and Latin America will become climate migrants. Additionally, the state of infectious diseases around the world will worsen due to climate change, and these shifts will outpace the ability of societies to adapt (Mora et al., 2022). All of this stems from the root problem of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, so devising energy reforms based on justice remains a foundational task to stave off the worst of these projections.



Figure 15.14: Nigerian environmental activist Kenule Beeson “Ken” Saro-Wiwa used nonviolent tactics to protest degradation of the land by the Nigerian government and global oil companies. He was a member of the Ogoni ethnic minority, whose traditional homeland is in the oil-rich Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa was tried and executed by the Nigerian government in 1995. (CC BY-NC 2.0; Thomas Hawk via Flickr)

Social Movements and Change

Climate change is a deeply controversial subject, despite decades of scientific research and a high degree of scientific consensus that supports its existence. Out of a data set of 88125 climate-related papers published since 2012, Lynas et al (2021) found 99% consensus that contemporary climate change is human-caused.

Environmental social movements have been effective in changing policy through three actions: policy advocacy, policy research, and opening space for political reforms (IPCC, 2018). There have been indications of an increasing trend toward greater awareness and understanding of climate change. This understanding has included greater concerns over climate change and general support for policies that have addressed the associated problems.

On the other hand, conservative movements and those with neoliberal agendas have largely been blocking climate change policymaking largely by denying the science behind it. One key strategy is to manufacture uncertainty about climate science and undermine scientific reports by claiming inadequacy of evidence and contesting methodologies and analyses, tactics that take advantage of the complexities of scientific investigation. The challenges from conservative challengers have had two aims: (1) to undermine the validity and legitimacy of climate change and (2) to attack the authority and integrity of individuals or other groups of scientists.

Listening to these arguments can make life simpler, and lessen guilt or concern about the issue, which can be a relief. To change can often be time consuming or costly, and sometimes both. For example, sorting through your garbage bin to separate the various recyclable materials takes more time and energy than just throwing it all ‘away’ in the trash. It is more expensive to buy an electric vehicle than a regular gas-guzzling automobile, and it is costly to install a solar photovoltaic energy system onto the roof of a house. This helps makes these arguments popular, as do the cultural issues described above regarding monster trucks.

The renewable energy transition is fundamentally, at its core, a political struggle between current dominant systems of power and privilege and those advocating for new energy systems and a more secure future for all.

The lack of political will is the primary reason why fossil fuel production and consumption have not slowed. While the IPCC, UNEP, and other major world organizations, have called on governments from around the world to limit and decrease fossil fuel production, to place sanctions or a moratorium on explorative drilling for fossil fuels, many countries, states, and cities, are still subsidizing and incentivizing the continued production of fossil fuels, denying that climate change is caused by humans, and refusing to invest in renewable energy technology.

Fossil fuels are a source of immense profit and political power. The amassment of wealth in fossil fuel extraction and production over many decades has allowed some people to become very powerful. These powerhouse businessmen have for years set up right wing think tanks, schools and non-profit foundations that either directly preach neoliberal thought or fund its dissemination. Big business, big money, and big oil have convinced governments to grant them social and political license to continue to profit from fossil fuel extraction and production. They have created massive and well-coordinated public relations campaigns that try to discredit scientific findings about climate change and financed deceptive efforts to promote false 'skepticism', using the same tactics (and specialists) that were employed by the tobacco lobby before (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). A recent analysis indicated that climate change deniers enjoy a 49% higher media visibility compared to expert scientists (Petersen et al., 2019).

Still, the movement advocating for climate justice now spans the globe. Divestment from fossil fuel is steadily increasing. Even some politicians are embracing ideas that were once considered fringe, such as US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's inclusion of an ambitious stimulus package that at once addressed climate change as well as economic inequality in her platform — in other words, it strove to achieve climate justice.

Global Security

Introduction

What is security? Security is defined as the condition of being exempt from peril or threat. Generally speaking, when one hears about security, it can be understood at several different levels: the individual level (human security), the national level (national security) and the global level (global security). Each level is interrelated, with security at the individual level most dependent on security at the national level and ultimately the global level. The table below briefly describes each level of analysis.

Table 15.5: Levels of Analysis in Security

Level of Analysis	Definition
Individual (human)	Looks at the human rights of individuals in the analysis of security policy.
National (state or domestic)	Looks at the internal processes of a state in the analysis of security policy.
Global (international or systemic)	Looks at attributes of the global system that influence conduct in the analysis of security policy.

Levels of Analysis in Security Level of Analysis

Human Security

The first level of security is at the individual or personal level. This is often referred to as human security, and it centers on the physical safety of an individual regardless of where they live. At times, individual peoples, or entire groups, such as those based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, tribe, or class status, can be targets of physical violence. This violence can occur at the hands of other individuals or groups or can be at the direction of the national government or of a governmental entity, such as a country's military. The seven dimensions of human security as first given by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1994 report are listed in the table below.

Table 15.6: Seven Dimensions of Human Security Dimensions of Human Security

Dimensions of Human Security	Description
Economic Security	Freedom from poverty
Food Security	Access to food
Health Security	Access to health care and protection from diseases
Environmental Security	Protection from such dangers as environmental pollution and depletion
Personal Security	Physical safety from such things as torture, war, criminal attacks, domestic violence, drug use, suicide, and even traffic accidents
Community Security	Survival of traditional cultures and ethnic groups as well as the physical security of these groups
Political Security	Enjoyment of civil and political rights, and freedom from political oppression

National Security

The second level and the more traditional approach to security is national security. National security is defined as a state's capacity to safeguard its interests, confidential information, and populace against both external and internal perils that have the potential to jeopardize its existence. National security is an important aspect of any country's objectives and has been traditionally measured through the strength of a country's military forces. National security is now bifurcated into protecting the country from external threats, national defense, and from internal threats, homeland security. External threats could include threats of invasions from neighboring countries to intercontinental attacks by guided missiles. Internal threats could include terrorist attacks by non-state actors and acts of rebellion by guerilla groups.

Global Security

The third, and final, level of analysis is the global level. Global security is grounded in the principle that the security of any individual nation is inseparable from the security of all nations. It differs from international security which refers to the actions taken by nations to secure the well-being and defense of their citizens, boundaries, and strategic concerns through cooperation amongst states. Thus, international security primarily addresses conventional military threats and interstate conflicts, while global security encompasses non-traditional threats that extend beyond national boundaries.

Global security has been extensively nurtured by the United Nations, particularly since the end of the Cold War. The predominant emphasis is now on striving to eradicate conflicts by means of international law, humanitarian aid, fostering trust, and bolstering global governance. From the perspective of this lens, the employment of force should, therefore, be predominantly reserved for international peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and safeguarding innocent civilians from violence, with such actions being determined and coordinated by the United Nations.

Theories and Approaches to Global Security

There are two traditional theories that help in contextualizing global security: realism and liberal internationalism. Realism and liberal internationalism are often considered oppositional, as realists focus on competition between actors, whereas liberal institutionalism focuses on cooperation. However, both theories share some assumptions that make them comparable. Alternatively, several newer approaches have developed, most notably social constructivism, which focuses on the relational aspects of identities to understand how one state views another state. There are also critical theories, which places primacy on the role of economics in explaining global phenomena, and a final theoretical framework we will examine is feminism.

Realism and Security

Realism draws upon a complex and rich theoretical perspective. As a theory, it utilizes the work of noted historical scholars, such as Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes. As such, there are quite a few variants and interpretations, including realpolitik, structured realism, and neorealism. Despite this variety, realism as a worldview has certain characteristics. For example, proponents of realism view security as the key issue in global affairs. Realists dismiss economic concerns, issues of development,

and internal domestic situations, such as civil rights, education, and health care, referring to these topics as second-tier concerns. Thus, for realists, providing for one's own security becomes the most important responsibility. Realists have a pessimistic view of human nature and recognize the inevitability of war.

Realists are state-centered and heavily focus on national security as the most important level of analysis. For realists, states act out of self-interest, often at the expense of other states. They contend that states act this way because the global system is anarchical, where no superior power exists to which an aggrieved national power can appeal to. Given this, realists doubt the power of international law or the ability of the international community to stop conflict. For example, realists point out that United Nations General Assembly resolutions are merely recommendations and UN Security Council resolutions are difficult to produce & require a country willing to enforce them. If we were to give realists a motto, they would follow the Latin phrase *Si vis pacem, para bellum* ("let them who desire peace prepare for war"). Thus, realists see security in a zero-sum world. Military preparation is key and there is no trust in diplomatic measures.

For realists, the key is that a state must have enough power to establish its own security to remain free from another state's control. This maximization of power is the paramount pursuit. This approximates what Thucydides said close to 2,500 years ago, "the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must". State power can be understood in two different approaches. The first is through absolute gains, which refers to how much power one state can gain for itself. The second is through relative gains, which refers to how much more power one state gains over another state. This concern for relative gains could lead to a security dilemma, or when a state is driven by its security and seeks to acquire more power than its rivals. This leads to insecurity in other countries, which prompts these countries to acquire more power, which in turn drives the original country to seek more power. This spiral can continue unabated.

Realists contend that countries can also try to manage power through balancing. Balancing denotes the act of forming alliances with other states as a strategic measure to counterbalance the influence or dominance of more powerful states. Such actions can develop into a balance-of-power system where a state of equilibrium develops among powerful countries. In this system, no country is permitted to become so powerful that it can threaten the security of another major power. Countries therefore create short-term alliances based on advantage and not on ideology. In other words, creating an alliance because both countries share the same majority religion would be secondary to creating security. In this type of an arrangement, countries are the most important actors. Non-state actors, such as multinational corporations or humanitarian organizations, lack importance.

Though security is a fundamental driver of international relations for realists, several variants on how to achieve this security have been proposed. In defensive realism, states seek to maximize power to ensure their own security and contend that wars with other states are unlikely to be beneficial. In this variant, war is understood to be a last resort and a breakdown in the international order. Thus, states are quick to respond to any security dilemma by increasing their defensive capabilities and balancing against potential aggression. The other variant is offensive realism, or aggressive realism, where states seek to maximize power to achieve dominance. This is often accomplished by increasing their offensive capabilities. In this variant, war may actually be the preferred option, particularly if used against a predator state that threatens the international order.

Liberal Internationalism and Security

Liberalism is the antithesis to realism with a focus on cooperation, rather than power competition to resolve conflict. Liberalists also draw upon a plethora of scholars, mostly from the Enlightenment, including Immanuel Kant, Baron de Montesquieu, Hugo Grotius, and John Locke. As a theory, there are quite a few variants and interpretations, including neoliberal institutionalism, economic liberalism (which focuses on market behavior), and democratic peace theory. Despite this variety, liberalism as a worldview has certain characteristics. For example, proponents of liberalism also view security as a key issue in global affairs. Though unlike realists, liberalists incorporate economic concerns, issues of development, and internal domestic situations. For liberalists, non-state actors are just as important as the states themselves. All actors are responsible for security, and it should not just be up to each individual state. Liberalists have an optimistic view of human nature. They believe that war is not inevitable, but the product of a failure to compromise and cooperate.

For liberalists, the promotion of global norms and values is important. States' interests are not limited to survival and security is not zero-sum. Security can be ensured through positive means and can be accomplished through transparency, communication, cooperation, and burden sharing. This reduces the need for armed conflict and instead can lead to expanded trade, which in turn can raise the costs of conflict, making it even less attractive. Cooperation is thus at the heart of liberalism. Liberalists do not suggest

that competition will disappear, but that the relative gains from states cooperating are greater than the alternative. Ultimately, if such cooperation could become global, this could then lead to a system that ensures global peace. This is often referred to as collective security, an arrangement where an act of aggression against any individual state is regarded as aggression against all other states. In response, these states collaborate to collectively thwart and repel the aggressor.

Given this, institution building becomes paramount. Referred to as neoliberal institutionalism, this branch of liberalism stresses the importance of international institutions and international law in shaping behavior as a better way to ensure the survival of the state. For liberalists the international system is still anarchical, but international organizations could help create a global framework of cooperation. Newer theorists, such as Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye define this cooperation in their idea of complex interdependence. This concept involves increasing interconnection among transnational actors and highlights the intricate dynamics wherein they develop mutual dependencies, become susceptible to each other's actions, and attuned to each other's needs.

International institutions play a key role in international politics and efforts. Examples include UN actions such as peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peace enforcement. It also involves the adoption of important international treaties and conventions that guide global behavior such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the incorporation of the Laws of War. Other efforts include the development of international regimes, defined by Keohane (1984) as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.” International regimes on arms proliferation and arms control have become an integral part of the global discourse.

Alternative Theories and Security

Since the 1970s, scholars have worked on developing alternative IR explanation. These alternatives are not quite theories, but more broad perspectives. Given this, scholars have organized such approaches into two overarching categories: social constructivism and critical or radical perspectives. Constructivists focus significant attention on the role of identities in IR. Identities shape a state’s interests and can influence the country’s foreign policy goals, tactics, and strategies. A good example includes Switzerland’s identification as a neutral actor in international affairs. Switzerland chooses not to align with another country. This can explain why Switzerland was not invaded in the Second World War and why the country has not joined any military alliances, such as the U.S. led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and economic associations, such as the European Union (EU).

Constructivists emphasize the relational aspects of identities, which are understood as the way one state views another state. This is shaped in important ways by the interactions that they have had and can create perceptions of similarities and differences between states. Thus, threats are socially constructed. For example, nationalism has led to the creation of conflicting identities and the right to self-determination has led to war. Constructivists challenge nearly all realist assumptions, particularly in that states must shape the international system. And so, constructivists would contend that anarchy is not the default understanding of international affairs and that there is no zero-sum world. Security then is how a state defines the system they live in. Thus, securitization is less about actual threats, but in naming someone or something, such as communism or terrorism, as a threat. How a state defines that threat is ultimately what could lead to conflict. Constructivists argue that the focus should be on tangible threats, such as those posed by poverty and disenfranchisement.

Critical or radical approaches to global security are not as prominent, however they are important as they highlight the potential sources of conflict, economic and gender-based. For example, as first described in Marxism, conflict originates in economics, particularly the evolution of capitalism. This idea contend that the industrialization of a society leads to two main economic classes: the group of people who owns the means of production (land, factories, resources, etc), and the workers that provides the labor. This labor is exploited by the owners and over time structures are built (for example, in law) to keep this manipulation in place. The growing levels of inequality between the two classes will inevitably lead to conflict between them within the nation and in the world - in the nations, as workers try to better their situation against oppression, and in the world, as their oppression leaks out into foreign affairs.

How does this happen? Because workers’ wages are kept low, they cannot buy what business produces. This means business has to look elsewhere to sell its goods. So the nation tries ways to force other nations to buy its goods (rather than pay workers at home more so they could buy them). They do this through imperialism and colonization. Even when these nation break free of this control, former colonial countries find themselves still dependent on their imperial rulers, which still dominate the economic relationships between the two, even decades after independence. This is used to explain why certain states, particularly postcolonial countries, stay underdeveloped and in a state of weakened security.

The other major category involves feminist critiques which focuses on conflict that originates in social divisions such as gender. Feminists argue for women's empowerment as they view women as not having equal rights and opportunities. As men created the cultural and legal rules for a society, these patriarchal systems produced policies that discriminate against women. Globally, feminists point to several relevant examples. First is the reduced role that women have in foreign policy-making. Second is the masculinization of conflict, where war and violence are glorified and treated as an acceptable approach. Finally, there is a high rate of violence against women, especially during conflict, where as a group they are often targeted by belligerent forces. Overall, women are negatively impacted by many global trends, such as human trafficking and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Women are more likely to be victims of the global sex slave trade and lack protection from the AIDS pandemic. By focusing on these issues, and giving women a louder voice, security can be strengthened.

Hunger

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