Chapter 1

The Sociological Perspective
Chapter Outline

- Using the Sociological Imagination
- The Sociological Perspective
- Uses of the Sociological Perspective
- The Social Sciences
- Founders of Sociology
- Theoretical Perspectives
- Theoretical Perspectives and Sport
Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways does observation of a parade help us better understand society?

2. What were the important aspects of a parade that the sociologists pointed out to help us understand the relationships observed?
Defining Sociology

- Sociology is the scientific study of social structure.
- Maintains a group focus.
- Emphasizes patterned social relationships between members.
- Uses social factors to explain human social behavior.
Two Key Aspects of the Sociological Perspective

1. The interaction between social structure and the individual.
2. Perspective may be different if considering it from a personal stance (micro) versus looking at an issue from a broader systems perspective (macro).
Without turning this map upside down, locate the United States. Do you find it more difficult than usual? Do you find this view of the world disorienting? Because you are so used to the conventional representation of the Earth, you may reject this worldview. So it is with any perspective.

In this book, you will be asked to abandon the typical American psychological perspective in favor of the sociological perspective.

1. How would you feel if this map were universally substituted for the one you know? Describe your feelings, and explain why you feel this way.

2. What does your reaction to this map tell you about the power of the perspective you bring to a situation?
Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways does looking at this map change your perspective on where the U.S. is in relationship to other countries in the world?

2. How might this change our perspective of international relationships, world occurrences, etc.?
Sociologists focus...

- on the group, more than the individual.
- on patterns of social behavior.
- on social forces that encourage patterns of conformity.
- on the effects people have on social structure.
Question for Consideration

Can you think of an example, or examples, of “patterned” social behavior within your own society? ...within other societal groups?
Levels of Analysis

- **Microsociology** – interest in the interaction of people “within” social structures; investigates relationships within groups

- **Macrosociology** – interest in the “intersection” of social structures; focuses on groups as a whole
Application of Levels of Analysis to Gang Warfare

Microsociologists would want to understand the relationships between members of the gang; the relationships between gang leaders and followers, or between gang members and the police.

Macrosociologists would focus on the social structures in society that promote poverty; the interrelations between the police, education/schools, employment, and deviance as systems.
Benefits of Sociology

- Provides a vision of social life that extends beyond one’s limited personal experience.
- Research contributes to public policies and programs.
- Enhances the development of occupational skills, whether this is one’s major or not.
- Enables us to understand the effects of social forces on our lives.
Intellectual Liberation of Sociology

- Task of sociology is to reveal the nature of human social behavior so it often leads us to question our assumptions.
- Sociology provides a window to the social world outside of our own.
- Provides a mechanism for framing important questions about social issues.
There has been a continual disagreement within the discipline as to whether sociology should be a social problem-solving discipline (as it was at its origins) or be a nonsocially involved science.

Science is seen as “value neutral” which has dominated sociological thought for a long time.

Humanistic sociology and liberation sociology have gained considerable prominence.
Employers are interested in four types of skills:
- The ability to work well with others.
- The ability to write and speak fluently.
- The ability to solve problems.
- The ability to analyze information.

A basic requirement for these skills is a 4th grade reading level or higher.
Employment with a Sociology Degree

- Social Services
- Community Work
- Corrections
- Business
- College Settings
- Health Services
- Publishing, Journalism
- Government Services
- Teaching
Sociology & Other Social Sciences

- How is sociology different from other social sciences?
- Anthropology – very closely related to sociology; yet concentrates on the study of “primitive” or nonliterate societies.
- Psychology -- focuses on the development and function of mental-emotional processes in human beings.
Sociology & Other Social Sciences

- Economics - studies the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
- Political Science - studies the organization, administration, history, and theory of government.
- History - examines past events in human societies.
Questions for Consideration

1. For what institutions in society, other than the family, (such as education) can you outline distinctive social science approaches?

2. How would you illustrate the different social sciences’ approaches to this institution?
Origins of Sociology

- Born out of social upheaval created by the French and Industrial Revolutions.
- In an attempt to understand the chaos of their time, early sociologists emphasized social stability and social change.
Questions for Consideration

1. In what ways are “social change” and “sociology” connected?

2. Why is the “scientific method” important to sociology?
Early Sociologists

- Auguste Comte
  - Believed society could advance only if studied scientifically.
  - Considered the “father of sociology.”
- Harriet Martineau
  - Contributed to research methods, political theory, and feminism.
  - Translated Comte’s work.
Herbert Spencer

- Social progress occurs if people do not interfere with natural processes.
- Introduced a theory of social change called “Social Darwinism”; believed evolutionary social change led to progress.
- Society is a set of interrelated parts that promoted its own welfare.
Karl Marx

- History unfolds according to the outcome of class conflict.
- Believed sociologists and other social scientists should not merely observe and study the world, but seek to change it.
- Was passionately concerned with the poverty and inequality suffered by the working class.
Emile Durkheim

- Two major contributions:
  - The psychological explanation of social life.
  - Introduction of statistical techniques in social research.
- Social and moral order were of major concern to Durkheim.
  - Mechanical Solidarity
  - Organic Solidarity
Max Weber

- Method of *verstehen* assumed an understanding of human social behavior based on putting oneself in the place of others. Such practice would lead to *value-free research*.

- Explored the process of rationalization in the transition from traditional to industrial society.

- Author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. 
American Sociology

- Born during a time of social upheaval (following the Civil War), 1892.
- From the late 1800s to World War II, the center of American sociology was the University of Chicago.
- After World War II, sociology departments in the East and Midwest rose to prominence.
Early American Sociologists (often overlooked)

- Jane Addams
  - Female social reformer who co-founded Hull House.
  - Focused on the imbalance of power among the social classes.
  - Awarded Nobel Peace Prize 1931.

- W.E.B. DuBois
  - Educator and social activist
  - Studied the social structure of black communities.
Early American Sociologists

At the University of Chicago
- George Herbert Mead
- John Dewey
- William I. Thomas
- Dorothy Swane Thomas
- Robert E. Park
- Ernest Burgess
- Erving Goffman
Early American Sociologists

- Female sociologists who collaborated with male sociologists at the University of Chicago:
  - Edith Abbott
  - Sophinista Breckenridge
  - Marion Talbott
Early American Sociologists

- Talcott Parsons
- Robert K. Merton
- C. Wright Mills
There are three basic theoretical perspectives in sociology. Each theory provides its perspective on describing how society operates. Each can be placed within the context of macrosociology (functionalism and conflict theory) or microsociology (symbolic interaction).
## Contributors to Each Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Originator(s)/Major Contributors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functionalism</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Durkheim</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merton</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parsons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict Theory</td>
<td>Marx</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weber</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Simmel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic Interaction</td>
<td>Cooley</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mead</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thomas</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Goffman</td>
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Assumptions of Functionalism

1. A society is a relatively integrated whole.
2. A society tends to seek relative stability.
3. Most aspects of a society contribute to the society’s well-being and survival.
4. Society rests on the consensus of its members (consensus of values).
5. Emphasizes the contributions/impacts of the functions of the social structures within a society (i.e., family provides the function of reproduction)
Questions for Consideration

1. What values do you think most Americans would agree are central to U.S. society?
2. How do these work to promote stability?
3. What do you think are intended and unintended functions of education?
Assumptions of the Conflict Perspective

1. A society experiences inconsistency and conflict everywhere.
2. A society is continually subjected to change.
3. A society involves the constraint and coercion of some members by others.
4. Groups and societies compete to promote and preserve their own values and interests (e.g., wealthy are able to manipulate income tax laws).

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest 20%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest 20%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>241%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions for Consideration

1. How would a conflict theorist interpret this data?

2. In what way(s) might a functionalist agree or disagree with the conflict theorist’s perspective?
Conflict Theory & Social Change

- Assumes change is continual due to the shifting balance of power between groups.
- Men have historically had more power in the U.S. The women’s movement has shifted that power where more women are earning money, in the workplace, getting higher education degrees, etc.
Feminist Theory

- A branch of conflict theory.
- Focuses on gender relationships within society.
- Two common themes among its three frameworks:
  - Believe that sociology carries a historical bias shared by white middle class males from Western Europe and North America.
  - Believe gender and gender relationships are sociological (not psychological) as they are embedded in the social structures of society.
Feminist Theory – Three Frameworks

- Liberal feminism – equal opportunity for women and heightened public awareness of women’s rights.
- Radical feminism – oppression of women is traced to male domination in societies (patriarchal societies).
- Social feminism – capitalism is the source of female oppression; power relations of the class structure combined with patriarchy create and maintain male oppression of women.
Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism

1. People’s interpretations of symbols are based on meanings they learn from others.
2. People base interaction on their interpretations of symbols.
3. People can gear their interaction to the behavior they think others expect of them and they expect of others.
Dramaturgy

- Goffman’s approach to depict human interaction as a theatrical performance.
- People present themselves through dress, gestures, tone of voice, etc. just like actors on a stage.
- *Impression management* is a concept applicable in this analysis.
Questions for Consideration

1. How might you apply the dramaturgical approach to your behavior during the past week?

2. What are some symbols that are important to the interaction between students, between students and faculty, between students and administrators?
# Theoretical Criticisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Criticisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Functionalism           | • Tends to legitimize the status quo.  
• Neglects social change.  
• Assumes that society benefits everyone. |
| Conflict Theory         | • Overlooks forces of stability in society.  
• Assumes that only the ruling class benefits from the way society operates.  
• Assumes the working class does not know it is subordinate. |
| Symbolic Interaction    | • Sometimes fails to take the larger picture into account.  
• Does not consider the impact of social forces and/or social structures. |
Theoretical Perspectives and Sport: Functionalism

1. Socializes people to the basic beliefs, norms, and values of society.
2. Promotes a sense of social identification.
3. Offers a safe release of aggressive feelings generated by the frustrations, anxieties, and strains of modern life.
4. Promotes the development of physical fitness and sound character.
Theoretical Perspectives and Sport: Conflict Theory

- Sport is a social institution in which the most powerful oppress, coerce, and exploit others.
- Reflects the unequal distribution of power and money.
- Prepares people for a world full of stopwatches, time schedules, and production quotas.
Theoretical Perspectives and Sport: Symbolic Interactionism

- Concerned with meanings assigned to symbols of sports activities.
- Meanings and interpretations affect the self-concepts of the participants as well as the relationships among those involved.
## Paradoxes In Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social integration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Can unite social classes and racial/ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Can heighten barriers between groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Paradoxes In Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fair play</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Promotes fair play through adherence to rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Emphasis on winning induces cheating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paradoxes In Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical fitness</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Promotes strength, weight control, endurance, and coordination.</td>
<td>Can lead to drug use, excess weight loss or gain, and injuries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Paradoxes In Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Contributes to education through scholarships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Emphasizes athletics over the classroom and graduation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Paradoxes In Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Mobility</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Allows athletes to obtain an education who might otherwise not attend college.</td>
<td>Promises of fame and wealth in the professional ranks after graduation can be kept only for a few.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions for Consideration

1. How can you apply each theoretical perspective when analyzing the Super Bowl?

2. Which theoretical perspective do you think best helps you analyze a community soccer team for 5-year-old girls? Explain its application.