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1 B **2** C **3** B **4** A **5** C **6** C **7** A **8** C **9** D **10** A **11** B **12**
B **13** C **14** B **15** B **16** D **17** A **18** C **19** A **20** D

14 Marriage and Family

Figure 14.1 What constitutes a family nowadays? (Photo courtesy of Michael/flickr)

Learning Objectives

14.1. What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?
- Describe society's current understanding of family
- Recognize changes in marriage and family patterns
- Differentiate between lines of decent and residence

14.2. Variations in Family Life
- Recognize variations in family life
- Understand the prevalence of single parents, cohabitation, same-sex couples, and unmarried individuals
- Discuss the social impact of changing family structures

14.3. Challenges Families Face
- Understand the social and interpersonal impact of divorce
- Describe the social and interpersonal impact of family abuse

Introduction to Marriage and Family

Rebecca and John were having a large church wedding attended by family and friends. They had been living together their entire senior year of college and planned on getting married right after graduation.

Rebecca's parents were very traditional in their life and family. They had married after college at which time Rebecca's mother was a stay-at-home mother and Rebecca's father was a Vice President at a large accounting firm. The marriage was viewed as very strong by outsiders.

John's parents had divorced when John was five. He and his younger sister lived with his financially struggling mother. The mother had a live-in boyfriend that she married when John was in high school. The Asian step father was helpful in getting John summer jobs and encouraged John to attend the local community college before moving to the four-year university.

Rebecca's maid of honor, Susie, attended college with Rebecca but had dropped out when finding out she was pregnant. She chose not to marry the father and was currently raising the child as a single parent. Working and taking care of the child made college a remote possibility.

The best man, Brad, was in and out of relationships. He was currently seeing a woman with several children of different parentage. The gossip had this relationship lasting about the same amount of time as all the previous encounters.

Rebecca and John had a gay couple as ushers. Steve and Roger had been in a monogamous relationship for almost ten years, had adopted a minority daughter and were starting a web-based business together. It was obvious they both adored their child, and they planned on being married at a Washington destination ceremony later in the year.

This scenario may be complicated, but it is representative of the many types of families in today's society.

Between 2006 and 2010, nearly half of heterosexual women (48 percent) ages fifteen to forty-four said they were not married to their spouse or partner when they first lived with them, the report says. That's up from 43 percent in 2002, and 34 percent in 1995 (Rettner 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of unmarried couples has grown from fewer than one million in the 1970s to 8.1 million in 2011. Cohabitating, but unwed, couples account for 10 percent of all opposite-sex couples in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Some may never choose to wed (Gardner 2013). With fewer couples marrying, the traditional U.s. family structure is becoming less common.

14.1 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

(a)

(b)

Figure 14.2 The modern concept of family is far more encompassing than in past decades. What do you think constitutes a family? (Photo (a) courtesy Gareth Williams/flickr; photo (b) courtesy Guillaume Paumier/ Wikimedia Commons)

Marriage and family are key structures in most societies. While the two institutions have historically been closely linked in U.S. culture, their connection is becoming more complex. The relationship between marriage and family is an interesting topic of study to sociologists.

What is marriage? Different people define it in different ways. Not even sociologists are able to agree on a single meaning. For our purposes, we'll define **marriage** as a legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union. In practicing cultural relativism, we should also consider variations, such as whether a legal union is required (think of "common law" marriage and its equivalents), or whether more than two people can be involved (consider polygamy). Other variations on the definition of marriage might include whether spouses are of opposite sexes or the same sex and how one of the traditional expectations of marriage (to produce children) is understood today.

Sociologists are interested in the relationship between the institution of marriage and the institution of family because, historically, marriages are what create a family, and families are the most basic social unit upon which society is built. Both marriage and family create status roles that are sanctioned by society.

So what is a family? A husband, a wife, and two children—maybe even a pet—has served as the model for the traditional U.S. family for most of the twentieth century. But what about families that deviate from this model, such as a single-parent household or a homosexual couple without children? Should they be considered families as well?

The question of what constitutes a family is a prime area of debate in family sociology, as well as in politics and religion. Social conservatives tend to define the family in terms of structure with each family member filling a certain role (like father, mother, or child). Sociologists, on the other hand, tend to define family more in terms of the manner in which members relate to one another than on a strict configuration of status roles. Here, we'll define **family** as a socially recognized group (usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation, or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. Sociologists identify different types of families based on how one enters into them. A **family of orientation** refers to the family into which a person is born. A **family of procreation** describes one that is formed through marriage. These distinctions have cultural significance related to issues of lineage.

Drawing on two sociological paradigms, the sociological understanding of what constitutes a family can be explained by symbolic interactionism as well as functionalism. These two theories indicate that families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly. In other words, families are groups in which people come together to form a strong primary group connection and maintain emotional ties to one another over a long period of time. Such families may include groups of close friends or teammates. In addition, the functionalist perspective views families as groups that perform vital roles for society—both internally (for the family itself) and externally (for society as a whole). Families provide for one another's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Parents care for and socialize children. Later in life, adult children often care for elderly parents. While interactionism helps us understand the subjective experience of belonging to a "family," functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society (Parsons and Bales 1956). We will go into more detail about how these theories apply to family in.

Challenges Families Face

People in the United States as a whole are somewhat divided when it comes to determining what does and what does not constitute a family. In a 2010 survey conducted by professors at the University of Indiana, nearly all participants (99.8 percent) agreed that a husband, wife, and children constitute a family. Ninety-two percent stated that a husband and a wife without children still constitute a family. The numbers drop for less traditional structures: unmarried couples with children (83 percent), unmarried couples without children (39.6 percent), gay male couples with children (64 percent), and gay male couples without children (33 percent) (Powell et al. 2010). This survey revealed that children tend to be the key indicator in establishing "family" status: the percentage of individuals who agreed that unmarried couples and gay couples constitute a family nearly doubled when children were added.

The study also revealed that 60 percent of U.S. respondents agreed that if you consider yourself a family, you are a family (a concept that reinforces an interactionist perspective) (Powell 2010). The government, however, is not so flexible in its definition of "family." The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together" (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). While this structured definition can be used as a means to consistently track family-related patterns over several years, it excludes individuals such as cohabitating unmarried heterosexual and homosexual couples. Legality aside, sociologists would argue that the general concept of family is more diverse and less structured than in years past. Society has given more leeway to the design of a family making room for what works for its members (Jayson 2010).

Family is, indeed, a subjective concept, but it is a fairly objective fact that family (whatever one's concept of it may be) is very important to people in the United States. In a 2010 survey by Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, 76 percent of adults surveyed stated that family is "the most important" element of their life—just one percent said it was "not important" (Pew Research Center 2010). It is also very important to society. President Ronald Regan notably stated, "The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation of our freedoms" (Lee 2009). While the design of the family may have changed in recent years, the fundamentals of emotional closeness and support are still present. Most responders to the Pew survey stated that their family today is at least as close (45 percent) or closer (40 percent) than the family with which they grew up (Pew Research Center 2010).

Alongside the debate surrounding what constitutes a family is the question of what people in the United States believe constitutes a marriage. Many religious and social conservatives believe that marriage can only exist between a man and a woman, citing religious scripture and the basics of human reproduction as support. Social liberals and progressives, on the other hand, believe that marriage can exist between two consenting adults—be they a man and a woman, or a woman and a woman—and that it would be discriminatory to deny such a couple the civil, social, and economic benefits of marriage.

Marriage Patterns

With single parenting and **cohabitation** (when a couple shares a residence but not a marriage) becoming more acceptable in recent years, people may be less motivated to get married. In a recent survey, 39 percent of respondents answered "yes" when asked whether marriage is becoming obsolete (Pew Research Center 2010). The institution of marriage is likely to continue, but some previous patterns of marriage will become outdated as new patterns emerge. In this context, cohabitation contributes to the phenomenon of people getting married for the first time at a later age than was typical in earlier generations (Glezer 1991). Furthermore, marriage will continue to be delayed as more people place education and career ahead of "settling down."

One Partner or Many?

People in the United States typically equate marriage with **monogamy**, when someone is married to only one person at a time. In many countries and cultures around the world, however, having one spouse is not the only form of marriage. In a majority of cultures (78 percent), **polygamy**, or being married to more than one person at a time, is accepted (Murdock 1967), with most polygamous societies existing in northern Africa and east Asia (Altman and Ginat 1996). Instances of polygamy are almost exclusively in the form of polygyny. **Polygyny** refers to a man being married to more than one woman at the same time. The reverse, when a woman is married to more than one man at the same time, is called **polyandry**. It is far less common and only occurs in about 1 percent of the world's cultures (Altman and Ginat 1996). The reasons for the overwhelming prevalence of polygamous societies are varied but they often include issues of population growth, religious ideologies, and social status.

While the majority of societies accept polygyny, the majority of people do not practice it. Often fewer than 10 percent (and no more than 25–35 percent) of men in polygamous cultures have more than one wife; these husbands are often older, wealthy, high-status men (Altman and Ginat 1996). The average plural marriage involves no more than three wives. Negev Bedouin men in Israel, for example, typically have two wives, although it is acceptable to have up to four (Griver 2008). As urbanization increases in these cultures, polygamy is likely to decrease as a result of greater access to mass media, technology, and education (Altman and Ginat 1996).

In the United States, polygamy is considered by most to be socially unacceptable and it is illegal. The act of entering into marriage while still married to another person is referred to as **bigamy** and is considered a felony in most states. Polygamy in the United States is often associated with those of the Mormon faith, although in 1890 the Mormon Church officially renounced polygamy. Fundamentalist Mormons, such as those in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), on the other hand, still hold tightly to the historic Mormon beliefs and practices and allow polygamy in their sect.

The prevalence of polygamy among Mormons is often overestimated due to sensational media stories such as the Yearning for Zion ranch raid in Texas in 2008 and popular television shows such as HBO's *Big Love* and TLC's *Sister Wives*. It is estimated that there are about 37,500 fundamentalist Mormons involved in polygamy in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but that number has shown a steady decrease in the last 100 years (Useem 2007).

U.S. Muslims, however, are an emerging group with an estimated 20,000 practicing polygamy. Again, polygamy among U.S. Muslims is uncommon and occurs only in approximately 1 percent of the population (Useem 2007). For now polygamy among U.S. Muslims has gone fairly unnoticed by mainstream society, but like fundamentalist Mormons whose practices were off the public's radar for decades, they may someday find themselves at the center of social debate.

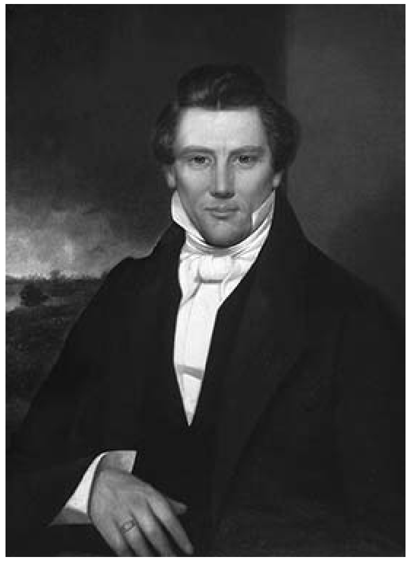

Figure 14.3 Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism, is said to have practiced polygamy. (Photo courtesy of public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

Residency and Lines of Descent

When considering one's lineage, most people in the United States look to both their father's and mother's sides. Both paternal and maternal ancestors are considered part of one's family. This pattern of tracing kinship is called **bilateral descent**. Note that **kinship**, or one's traceable ancestry, can be based on blood or marriage or adoption. Sixty percent of societies, mostly modernized nations, follow a bilateral descent pattern. **Unilateral descent** (the tracing of kinship through one parent only) is practiced in the other 40 percent of the world's societies, with high concentration in pastoral cultures (O'Neal 2006).

There are three types of unilateral descent: **patrilineal**, which follows the father's line only; **matrilineal**, which follows the mother's side only; and **ambilineal**, which follows either the father's only or the mother's side only, depending on the situation. In partrilineal societies, such as those in rural China and India, only males carry on the family surname. This gives males the prestige of permanent family membership while females are seen as only temporary members (Harrell 2001). U.S. society assumes some aspects of partrilineal decent. For instance, most children assume their father's last name even if the mother retains her birth name.

In matrilineal societies, inheritance and family ties are traced to women. Matrilineal descent is common in Native American societies, notably the Crow and Cherokee tribes. In these societies, children are seen as belonging to the women and, therefore, one's kinship is traced to one's mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and so on (Mails 1996). In ambilineal societies, which are most common in Southeast Asian countries, parents may choose to associate their children with the kinship of either the mother or the father. This choice maybe based on the desire to follow stronger or more prestigious kinship lines or on cultural customs such as men following their father's side and women following their mother's side (Lambert 2009).

Tracing one's line of descent to one parent rather than the other can be relevant to the issue of residence. In many cultures, newly married couples move in with, or near to, family members. In a **patrilocal residence** system it is customary for the wife to live with (or near) her husband's blood relatives (or family or orientation). Patrilocal systems can be traced back thousands of years. In a DNA analysis of 4,600-year-old bones found in Germany, scientists found indicators of patrilocal living arrangements (Haak et al 2008). Patrilocal residence is thought to be disadvantageous to women because it makes them outsiders in the home and community; it also keeps them disconnected from their own blood relatives. In China, where patrilocal and patrilineal customs are common, the written symbols for maternal grandmother (*wáipá*) are separately translated to mean "outsider" and "women" (Cohen 2011).

Similarly, in **matrilocal residence** systems, where it is customary for the husband to live with his wife's blood relatives (or her family of orientation), the husband can feel disconnected and can be labeled as an outsider. The Minangkabau people, a matrilocal society that is indigenous to the highlands of West Sumatra in Indonesia, believe that home is the place of women and they give men little power in issues relating to the home or family (Joseph and Najmabadi 2003). Most societies that use patrilocal and patrilineal systems are patriarchal, but very few societies that use matrilocal and matrilineal systems are matriarchal, as family life is often considered an important part of the culture for women, regardless of their power relative to men.

Stages of Family Life

As we’ve established, the concept of family has changed greatly in recent decades. Historically, it was often thought that many families evolved through a series of predictable stages. Developmental or “stage” theories used to play a prominent role in family sociology (Strong and DeVault 1992). Today, however, these models have been criticized for their linear and conventional assumptions as well as for their failure to capture the diversity of family forms. While reviewing some of these once-popular theories, it is important to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time is referred to as the **family life cycle**. One of the first designs of the family life cycle was developed by Paul Glick in 1955. In Glick’s original design, he asserted that most people will grow up, establish families, rear and launch their children, experience an “empty nest” period, and come to the end of their lives. This cycle will then continue with each subsequent generation (Glick 1989). Glick’s colleague, Evelyn Duvall, elaborated on the family life cycle by developing these classic stages of family (Strong and DeVault 1992):

Table 14.1 Stage Theory This table shows one example of how a “stage” theory might categorize the phases a family goes through.

Stage	Family Type	Children
1	Marriage Family	Childless
2	Procreation Family	Children ages 0 to 2.5
3	Preschooler Family	Children ages 2.5 to 6
4	School-age Family	Children ages 6–13
5	Teenage Family	Children ages 13–20
6	Launching Family	Children begin to leave home
7	Empty Nest Family	“Empty nest”; adult children have left home

The family life cycle was used to explain the different processes that occur in families over time. Sociologists view each stage as having its own structure with different challenges, achievements, and accomplishments that transition the family from one stage to the next. For example, the problems and challenges that a family experiences in Stage 1 as a married couple with no children are likely much different than those experienced in Stage 5 as a married couple with teenagers. The success of a family can be measured by how well they adapt to these challenges and transition into each stage. While sociologists use the family life cycle to study the dynamics of family overtime, consumer and marketing researchers have used it to determine what goods and services families need as they progress through each stage (Murphy and Staples 1979).

As early “stage” theories have been criticized for generalizing family life and not accounting for differences in gender, ethnicity, culture, and lifestyle, less rigid models of the family life cycle have been developed. One example is the **family life course**, which recognizes the events that occur in the lives of families but views them as parting terms of a fluid course rather than in consecutive stages (Strong and DeVault 1992). This type of model accounts for changes in family development, such as the fact that in today’s society, childbearing does not always occur with marriage. It also sheds light on other shifts in the way family life is practiced. Society’s modern understanding of family rejects rigid “stage” theories and is more accepting of new, fluid models.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

The Evolution of Television Families

Whether you grew up watching the Cleavers, the Waltons, the Huxtables, or the Simpsons, most of the iconic families you saw in television sitcoms included a father, a mother, and children cavorting under the same roof while comedy ensued. The 1960s was the height of the suburban U.S. nuclear family on television with shows such as *The Donna Reed Show* and *Father Knows Best*. While some shows of this era portrayed single parents (*My Three Sons* and *Bonanza*, for instance), the single status almost always resulted from being widowed—not divorced or unwed.

Although family dynamics in real U.S. homes were changing, the expectations for families portrayed on television were not. The United States' first reality show, *An American Family* (which aired on PBS in 1973) chronicled Bill and Pat Loud and their children as a "typical" U.S. family. During the series, the oldest son, Lance, announced to the family that he was gay, and at the series' conclusion, Bill and Pat decided to divorce. Although the Loud's union was among the 30 percent of marriages that ended in divorce in 1973, the family was featured on the cover of the March 12 issue of *Newsweek* with the title "The Broken Family" (Ruoff 2002).

Less traditional family structures in sitcoms gained popularity in the 1980s with shows such as *Diff'rent Strokes* (a widowed man with two adopted African American sons) and *One Day at a Time* (a divorced woman with two teenage daughters). Still, traditional families such as those in *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show* dominated the ratings. The late 1980s and the 1990s saw the introduction of the dysfunctional family. Shows such as *Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, and *The Simpsons* portrayed traditional nuclear families, but in a much less flattering light than those from the 1960s did (Museum of Broadcast Communications 2011).

Over the past ten years, the nontraditional family has become somewhat of a tradition in television. While most situation comedies focus on single men and women without children, those that do portray families often stray from the classic structure: they include unmarried and divorced parents, adopted children, gay couples, and multigenerational households. Even those that do feature traditional family structures may show less-traditional characters in supporting roles, such as the brothers in the highly rated shows *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *Two and Half Men*. Even wildly popular children's programs as Disney's *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody* feature single parents.

In 2009, ABC premiered an intensely nontraditional family with the broadcast of *Modern Family*. The show follows an extended family that includes a divorced and remarried father with one stepchild, and his biological adult children—one of who is in a traditional two-parent household, and the other who is a gay man in a committed relationship raising an adopted daughter. While this dynamic may be more complicated than the typical "modern" family, its elements may resonate with many of today's viewers. "The families on the shows aren't as idealistic, but they remain relatable," states television critic Maureen Ryan. "The most successful shows, comedies especially, have families that you can look at and see parts of your family in them" (Respers France 2010).

14.2 Variations in Family Life

The combination of husband, wife, and children that 99.8 percent of people in the United States believe constitutes a family is not representative of 99.8 percent of U.S. families. According to 2010 census data, only 66 percent of children under seventeen years old live in a household with two married parents. This is a decrease from 77 percent in 1980 (U.S. Census 2011). This two-parent family structure is known as a **nuclear family**, referring to married parents and children as the nucleus, or core, of the group. Recent years have seen a rise in variations of the nuclear family with the parents not being married. Three percent of children live with two cohabiting parents (U.S. Census 2011).

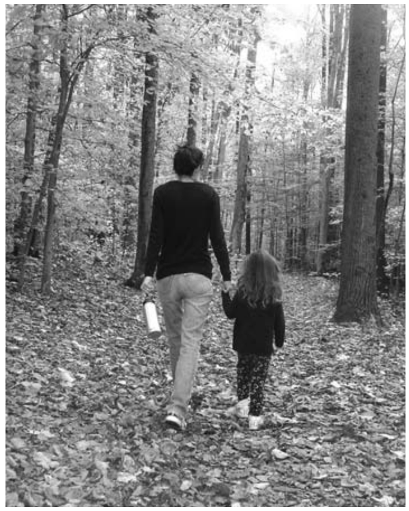

Figure 14.4 More than one quarter of U.S. children live in a single-parent household. (Photo courtesy of Ross Griff/flickr)

Single Parents

Single-parent households are on the rise. In 2010, 27 percent of children lived with a single parent only, up from 25 percent in 2008. Of that 27 percent, 23 percent live with their mother and three percent live with their father. Ten percent of children living with their single mother and 20 percent of children living with their single father also live with the cohabitating partner of their parent (for example, boyfriends or girlfriends).

Stepparents are an additional family element in two-parent homes. Among children living in two-parent households, 9 percent live with a biological or adoptive parent and a stepparent. The majority (70 percent) of those children live with their biological mother and a stepfather. Family structure has been shown to vary with the age of the child. Older children (fifteen to seventeen years old) are less likely to live with two parents than adolescent children (six to fourteen years old) or young children (zero to five years old). Older children who do live with two parents are also more likely to live with stepparents (U.S. Census 2011).

In some family structures a parent is not present at all. In 2010, three million children (4 percent of all children) lived with a guardian who was neither their biological nor adoptive parent. Of these children, 54 percent live with grandparents, 21 percent live with other relatives, and 24 percent live with nonrelatives. This family structure is referred to as the **extended family**, and may include aunts, uncles, and cousins living in the same home. Foster parents account for about a quarter of nonrelatives. The practice of grandparents acting as parents, whether alone or in combination with the child's parent, is becoming widespread among today's families (De Toledo and Brown 1995). Nine percent of all children live with a grandparent, and in nearly half those cases, the grandparent maintains primary responsibility for the child (U.S. Census 2011). A grandparent functioning as the primary care provider often results from parental drug abuse, incarceration, or abandonment. Events like these can render the parent incapable of caring for his or her child.

Changes in the traditional family structure raise questions about how such societal shifts affect children. U.S. Census statistics have long shown that children living in homes with both parents grow up with more financial and educational advantages than children who are raised in single-parent homes (U.S. Census 1997). Parental marital status seems to be a significant indicator of advancement in a child's life. Children living with a divorced parent typically have more advantages than children living with a parent who never married; this is particularly true of children who live with divorced fathers. This correlates with the statistic that never-married parents are typically younger, have fewer years of schooling, and have lower incomes (U.S. Census 1997). Six in ten children living with only their mother live near or below the poverty level. Of those being raised by single mothers, 69 percent live in or near poverty compared to 45 percent for divorced mothers (U.S. Census 1997). Though other factors such as age and education play a role in these differences, it can be inferred that marriage between parents is generally beneficial for children.

Cohabitation

Living together before or in lieu of marriage is a growing option for many couples. Cohabitation, when a man and woman live together in a sexual relationship without being married, was practiced by an estimated 7.5 million people (11.5 percent of the population) in 2011, which shows an increase of 13 percent since 2009 (U.S. Census 2010). This surge in cohabitation is likely due to the decrease in social stigma pertaining to the practice. In a 2010 National Center for Health Statistics survey, only 38 percent of the 13,000-person sample thought that cohabitation negatively impacted society (Jayson 2010). Of those who cohabitate, the majority are non-Hispanic with no high school diploma or GED and grew up in a single-parent household (U.S. Census 2010).

Cohabitating couples may choose to live together in an effort to spend more time together or to save money on living costs. Many couples view cohabitation as a "trial run" for marriage. Today, approximately 28 percent of men and women cohabitated before their first marriage. By comparison, 18 percent of men and 23 percent of women married without ever cohabitating (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The vast majority of cohabitating relationships eventually result in marriage; only 15 percent of men and women cohabitate only and do not marry. About one half of cohabitators transition into marriage within three years (U.S. Census 2010).

While couples may use this time to "work out the kinks" of a relationship before they wed, the most recent research has found that cohabitation has little effect on the success of a marriage. In fact, those who do not cohabitate before marriage have slightly better rates of remaining married for more than ten years (Jayson 2010). Cohabitation may contribute to the increase in the number of men and women who delay marriage. The median age for marriage is the highest it has ever been since the U.S. Census kept records—age twenty-six for women and age twenty-eight for men (U.S. Census 2010).

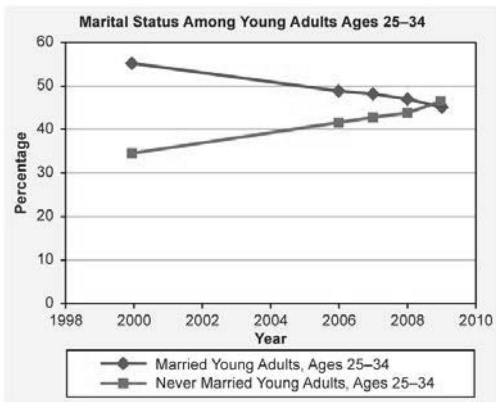

Figure 14.5 As shown by this graph of marital status percentages among young adults, more young people are choosing to delay or opt out of marriage. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and American Community Survey)

Same-Sex Couples

The number of same-sex couples has grown significantly in the past decade. The U.S. Census Bureau reported 594,000 same-sex couple households in the United States, a 50 percent increase from 2000. This increase is a result of more coupling, the growing social acceptance of homosexuality, and a subsequent increase in willingness to report it. Nationally, same-sex couple households make up 1 percent of the population, ranging from as little as 0.29 percent in Wyoming to 4.01 percent in the District of Columbia (U.S. Census 2011). Legal recognition of same-sex couples as spouses is different in each state, as only six states and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. The 2010 U.S. Census, however, allowed same-sex couples to report as spouses regardless of whether their state legally recognizes their relationship. Nationally, 25 percent of all same-sex households reported that they were spouses. In states where same-sex marriages are performed, nearly half (42.4 percent) of same-sex couple households were reported as spouses.

In terms of demographics, same-sex couples are not very different from opposite-sex couples. Same-sex couple households have an average age of 52 and an average household income of $91,558; opposite-sex couple households have an average age of 59 and an average household income of $95,075. Additionally, 31 percent of same-sex couples are raising children, not far from the 43 percent of opposite-sex couples (U.S. Census 2009). Of the children in same-sex couple households, 73 percent are biological children (of only one of the parents), 21 percent are adopted only, and 6 percent are a combination of biological and adopted (U.S. Census 2009).

While there is some concern from socially conservative groups regarding the well-being of children who grow up in same-sex households, research reports that same-sex parents are as effective as opposite-sex parents. In an analysis of 81 parenting studies, sociologists found no quantifiable data to support the notion that opposite-sex parenting is any better than same-sex parenting. Children of lesbian couples, however, were shown to have slightly lower rates of behavioral problems and higher rates of self-esteem (Biblarz and Stacey 2010).

Staying Single

Gay or straight, a new option for many people in the United States is simply to stay single. In 2010, there were 99.6 million unmarried individuals over age eighteen in the United States, accounting for 44 percent of the total adult population (U.S. Census 2011). In 2010, never-married individuals in the twenty-five to twenty-nine age bracket accounted for 62 percent of women and 48 percent of men, up from 11 percent and 19 percent, respectively, in 1970 (U.S. Census 2011). Single, or never-married, individuals are found in higher concentrations in large cities or metropolitan areas, with New York City being one of the highest.

Although both single men and single women report social pressure to get married, women are subject to greater scrutiny. Single women are often portrayed as unhappy “spinsters” or “old maids” who cannot find a man to marry them. Single men, on the other hand, are typically portrayed as lifetime bachelors who cannot settle down or simply “have not found the right girl.” Single women report feeling insecure and displaced in their families when their single status is disparaged (Roberts 2007). However, single women older than thirty-five years old report feeling secure and happy with their unmarried status, as many women in this category have found success in their education and careers. In general, women feel more independent and more prepared to live a large portion of their adult lives without a spouse or domestic partner than they did in the 1960s (Roberts 2007).

The decision to marry or not to marry can be based a variety of factors including religion and cultural expectations. Asian individuals are the most likely to marry while African Americans are the least likely to marry (Venugopal 2011). Additionally, individuals who place no value on religion are more likely to be unmarried than those who place a high value on religion. For black women, however, the importance of religion made no difference in marital status (Bakalar 2010). In general, being single is not a rejection of marriage; rather, it is a lifestyle that does not necessarily include marriage. By age forty, according to census figures, 20 percent of women and 14 of men will have never married (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

Figure 14.6 More and more people in the United States are choosing lifestyles that don’t include marriage. (Photo courtesy of Glenn Harper/flickr)

Making Connections: Sociological Research

Deceptive Divorce Rates

It is often cited that half of all marriages end in divorce. This statistic has made many people cynical when it comes to marriage, but it is misleading. Let’s take a closer look at the data.

Using National Center for Health Statistics data from 2003 that show a marriage rate of 7.5 (per 1000 people) and a divorce rate of 3.8, it would appear that exactly one half of all marriages failed (Hurley 2005). This reasoning is deceptive, however, because instead of tracing actual marriages to see their longevity (or lack thereof), this compares what are unrelated statistics: that is, the number of marriages in a given year does not have a direct correlation to the divorces occurring that same year. Research published in the *New York Times* took a different approach—determining how many people had ever been married, and of those, how many later divorced. The result? According to this analysis, U.S. divorce rates have only gone as high as 41 percent (Hurley 2005). Another way to calculate divorce rates would be through a cohort study. For instance, we could determine the percentage of marriages that are intact after, say, five or seven years, compared to marriages that have ended in divorce after five or seven years. Sociological researchers must remain aware of research methods and how statistical results are applied. As illustrated, different methodologies and different interpretations can lead to contradictory, and even misleading, results.

Theoretical Perspectives on Marriage and Family

Sociologists study families on both the macro and micro level to determine how families function. Sociologists may use a variety of theoretical perspectives to explain events that occur within and outside of the family.

Functionalism

When considering the role of family in society, functionalists uphold the notion that families are an important social institution and that they play a key role in stabilizing society. They also note that family members take on status roles in a marriage or family. The family—and its members—perform certain functions that facilitate the prosperity and development of society.

Sociologist George Murdock conducted a survey of 250 societies and determined that there are four universal residual functions of the family: sexual, reproductive, educational, and economic (Lee 1985). According to Murdock, the family (which for him includes the state of marriage) regulates sexual relations between individuals. He does not deny the existence or impact of premarital or extramarital sex, but states that the family offers a socially legitimate sexual outlet for adults (Lee 1985). This outlet gives way to reproduction, which is a necessary part of ensuring the survival of society.

Once children are produced, the family plays a vital role in training them for adult life. As the primary agent of socialization and enculturation, the family teaches young children the ways of thinking and behaving that follow social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents teach their children manners and civility. A well-mannered child reflects a well-mannered parent.

Parents also teach children gender roles. Gender roles are an important part of the economic function of a family. In each family, there is a division of labor that consists of instrumental and expressive roles. Men tend to assume the instrumental roles in the family, which typically involve work outside of the family that provides financial support and establishes family status. Women tend to assume the expressive roles, which typically involve work inside of the family which provides emotional support and physical care for children (Crano and Aronoff 1978). According to functionalists, the differentiation of the roles on the basis of sex ensures that families are well balanced and coordinated. When family members move outside of these roles, the family is thrown out of balance and must recalibrate in order to function properly. For example, if the father assumes an expressive role such as providing daytime care for the children, the mother must take on an instrumental role such as gaining paid employment outside of the home in order for the family to maintain balance and function.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists are quick to point out that U.S. families have been defined as private entities, the consequence of which has been to leave family matters to only those within the family. Many people in the United States are resistant to government intervention in the family: parents do not want the government to tell them how to raise their children or to become involved in domestic issues. Conflict theory highlights the role of power in family life and contends that the family is often not a haven but rather an arena where power struggles can occur. This exercise of power often entails the performance of family status roles. Conflict theorists may study conflicts as simple as the enforcement of rules from parent to child, or they may examine more serious issues such as domestic violence (spousal and child), sexual assault, marital rape, and incest.

The first study of marital power was performed in 1960. Researchers found that the person with the most access to value resources held the most power. As money is one of the most valuable resources, men who worked in paid labor outside of the home held more power than women who worked inside the home (Blood and Wolfe 1960). Conflict theorists find disputes over the division of household labor to be a common source of marital discord. Household labor offers no wages and, therefore, no power. Studies indicate that when men do more housework, women experience more satisfaction in their marriages, reducing the incidence of conflict (Coltrane 2000). In general, conflict theorists tend to study areas of marriage and life that involve inequalities or discrepancies in power and authority, as they are reflective of the larger social structure.

Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionists view the world in terms of symbols and the meanings assigned to them (LaRossa and Reitzes 1993). The family itself is a symbol. To some, it is a father, mother, and children; to others, it is any union that involves respect and compassion. Interactionists stress that family is not an objective, concrete reality. Like other social phenomena, it is a social construct that is subject to the ebb and flow of social norms and ever-changing meanings.

Consider the meaning of other elements of family: “parent” was a symbol of a biological and emotional connection to a child; with more parent-child relationships developing through adoption, remarriage, or change in guardianship, the word “parent” today is less likely to be associated with a biological connection than with whoever is socially recognized as having the responsibility for a child’s upbringing. Similarly, the terms “mother” and “father” are no longer rigidly associated with the meanings of caregiver and breadwinner. These meanings are more free-flowing through changing family roles.

Interactionists also recognize how the family status roles of each member are socially constructed, playing an important part in how people perceive and interpret social behavior. Interactionists view the family as a group of role players or “actors” that come together to act out their parts in an effort to construct a family. These roles are up for interpretation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a “good father,” for example, was one who worked hard to provided financial security for his children. Today, a “good father” is one who takes the time outside of work to promote his children’s emotional well-being, social skills, and intellectual growth—in some ways, a much more daunting task.

14.3 Challenges Families Face

As the structure of family changes over time, so do the challenges families face. Events like divorce and remarriage present new difficulties for families and individuals. Other long-standing domestic issues such as abuse continue to strain the health and stability of today’s families.

Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce, while fairly common and accepted in modern U.S. society, was once a word that would only be whispered and was accompanied by gestures of disapproval. In 1960, divorce was generally uncommon, affecting only 9.1 out of every 1,000 married persons. That number more than doubled (to 20.3) by 1975 and peaked in 1980 at 22.6 (Popenoe 2007). Over the last quarter century, divorce rates have dropped steadily and are now similar to those in 1970. The dramatic increase in divorce rates after the 1960s has been associated with the liberalization of divorce laws and the shift in societal make up due to women increasingly entering the workforce (Michael 1978). The decrease in divorce rates can be attributed to two probable factors: an increase in the age at which people get married, and an increased level of education among those who marry—both of which have been found to promote greater marital stability.

Divorce does not occur equally among all people in the United States; some segments of the U.S. population are more likely to divorce than others. According the American Community Survey (ACS), men and women in the Northeast have the lowest rates of divorce at 7.2 and 7.5 per 1,000 people. The South has the highest rate of divorce at 10.2 for men and 11.1 for women. Divorce rates are likely higher in the South because marriage rates are higher and marriage occurs at younger-than-average ages in this region. In the Northeast, the marriage rate is lower and first marriages tend to be delayed; therefore, the divorce rate is lower (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

The rate of divorce also varies by race. In a 2009 ACS study, American Indian and Alaskan Natives reported the highest percentages of currently divorced individuals (12.6 percent) followed by blacks (11.5 percent), whites (10.8 percent), Pacific Islanders (8 percent), Latinos (7.8 percent) and Asians (4.9 percent) (ACS 2011). In general those who marry at a later age, have a college education have lower rates of divorce.

Table 14.2 Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United States, 2000–2011 There has been a steady decrease in divorce over the past decade. (National Center for Health Statistics, CDC)

[1]Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota.

[2]Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana.

[3]Excludes data for California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

[4]Excludes data for California, Indiana, and Oklahoma.

[5]Excludes data for California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Note: Rates for 2001-2009 have been revised and are based on intercensal population estimates from the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Populations for 2010 rates are based on the 2010 census.

Year	Divorces and annulments	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2011[1]	877,000	246,273,366	3.6
2010[1]	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
2009[1]	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
2008[1]	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
2007[1]	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
2006[1]	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
2005[1]	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
2004[2]	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
2003[3]	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
2002[4]	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
2001[5]	940,000	236,416,762	4.0
2000[5]	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

So what causes divorce? While more young people are choosing to postpone or opt out of marriage, those who enter into the union do so with the expectation that it will last. A great deal of marital problems can be related to stress, especially financial stress. According to researchers participating in the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project, couples who enter marriage without a strong asset base (like a home, savings, and a retirement plan) are 70 percent more likely to be divorced after three years than are couples with at least $10,000 in assets. This is connected to factors such as age and education level that correlate with low incomes.

The addition of children to a marriage creates added financial and emotional stress. Research has established that marriages enter their most stressful phase upon the birth of the first child (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). This is particularly true for couples who have multiples (twins, triplets, and so on). Married couples with twins or triplets are 17 percent more likely to divorce than those with children from single births (McKay 2010). Another contributor to the likelihood of divorce is a general decline in marital satisfaction over time. As people get older, they may find that their values and life goals no longer match up with those of their spouse (Popenoe and Whitehead 2004).

Divorce is thought to have a cyclical pattern. Children of divorced parents are 40 percent more likely to divorce than children of married parents. And when we consider children whose parents divorced and then remarried, the likelihood of their own divorce rises to 91 percent (Wolfinger 2005). This might result from being socialized to a mindset that a broken marriage can be replaced rather than repaired (Wolfinger 2005). That sentiment is also reflected in the finding that when both partners of a married couple have been previously divorced, their marriage is 90 percent more likely to end in divorce (Wolfinger 2005).

Figure 14.7 A study from Radford University indicated that bartenders are among the professions with the highest divorce rates (38.4 percent). Other traditionally low-wage industries (like restaurant service, custodial employment, and factory work) are also associated with higher divorce rates. (Aamodt and McCoy 2010). (Photo courtesy of Daniel Lobo/flickr)

People in a second marriage account for approximately 19.3 percent of all married persons, and those who have been married three or more times account for 5.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). The vast majority (91 percent) of remarriages occur after divorce; only 9 percent occur after death of a spouse (Kreider 2006). Most men and women remarry within five years of a divorce, with the median length for men (three years) being lower than for women (4.4 years). This length of time has been fairly consistent since the 1950s. The majority of those who remarry are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four (Kreider 2006). The general pattern of remarriage also shows that whites are more likely to remarry than black Americans.

Marriage the second time around (or third or fourth) can be a very different process than the first. Remarriage lacks many of the classic courtship rituals of a first marriage. In a second marriage, individuals are less likely to deal with issues like parental approval, premarital sex, or desired family size (Elliot 2010). In a survey of households formed by remarriage, a mere 8 percent included only biological children of the remarried couple. Of the 49 percent of homes that include children, 24 percent included only the woman’s biological children, 3 percent included only the man’s biological children, and 9 percent included a combination of both spouse’s children (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

Children of Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce and remarriage can been stressful on partners and children alike. Divorce is often justified by the notion that children are better off in a divorced family than in a family with parents who do not get along. However, long-term studies determine that to be generally untrue. Research suggests that while marital conflict does not provide an ideal childrearing environment, going through a divorce can be damaging. Children are often confused and frightened by the threat to their family security. They may feel responsible for the divorce and attempt to bring their parents back together, often by sacrificing their own well-being (Amato 2000). Only in high-conflict homes do children benefit from divorce and the subsequent decrease in conflict. The majority of divorces come out of lower-conflict homes, and children from those homes are more negatively impacted by the stress of the divorce than the stress of unhappiness in the marriage (Amato 2000). Studies also suggest that stress levels for children are not improved when a child acquires a stepfamily through marriage. Although there may be increased economic stability, stepfamilies typically have a high level of interpersonal conflict (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Children’s ability to deal with a divorce may depend on their age. Research has found that divorce may be most difficult for school-aged children, as they are old enough to understand the separation but not old enough to understand the reasoning behind it. Older teenagers are more likely to recognize the conflict that led to the divorce but may still feel fear, loneliness, guilt, and pressure to choose sides. Infants and preschool-age children may suffer the heaviest impact from the loss of routine that the marriage offered (Temke 2006).

Proximity to parents also makes a difference in a child’s well-being after divorce. Boys who live or have joint arrangements with their fathers show less aggression than those who are raised by their mothers only. Similarly, girls who live or have joint arrangements with their mothers tend to be more responsible and mature than those who are raised by their fathers only. Nearly three-fourths of the children of parents who are divorced live in a household headed by their mother, leaving many boys without a father figure residing in the home (U.S. Census Bureau 2011b). Still, researchers suggest that a strong parent-child relationship can greatly improve a child’s adjustment to divorce (Temke 2006).

There is empirical evidence that divorce has not discouraged children in terms of how they view marriage and family. A blended family has additional stress resulting from yours/mine/ours children.

The blended family also has a ex-parent that has different discipline techniques. In a survey conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, about three-quarters of high school seniors said it was “extremely important” to have a strong marriage and family life. And over half believed it was “very likely” that they would be in a lifelong marriage (Popenoe and Whitehead 2007). These numbers have continued to climb over the last twenty-five years.

Violence and Abuse

Violence and abuse are among the most disconcerting of the challenges that today’s families face. Abuse can occur between spouses, between parent and child, as well as between other family members. The frequency of violence among families is a difficult to determine because many cases of spousal abuse and child abuse go unreported. In any case, studies have shown that abuse (reported or not) has a major impact on families and society as a whole.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a significant social problem in the United States. It is often characterized as violence between household or family members, specifically spouses. To include unmarried, cohabitating, and same-sex couples, family sociologists have created the term **intimate partner violence (IPV)**. Women are the primary victims of intimate partner violence. It is estimated that one in four women has experienced some form of IPV in her lifetime (compared to one in seven men) (Catalano 2007). IPV may include physical violence, such as punching, kicking, or other methods of inflicting physical pain; sexual violence, such as rape or other forced sexual acts; threats and intimidation that imply either physical or sexual abuse; and emotional abuse, such as harming another’s sense of self-worth through words or controlling another’s behavior. IPV often starts as emotional abuse and then escalates to other forms or combinations of abuse (Centers for Disease Control 2012).

Figure 14.8 Thirty percent of women who are murdered are killed by their intimate partner. What does this statistic reveal about societal patterns and norms concerning intimate relationships and gender roles? (Photo courtesy of Kathy Kimpel/flickr)

In 2010, of IPV acts that involved physical actions against women, 57 percent involved physical violence only; 9 percent involved rape and physical violence; 14 percent involved physical violence and stalking; 12 percent involved rape, physical violence, and stalking; and 4 percent involved rape only (CDC 2011). This is vastly different than IPV abuse patterns for men, which show that nearly all (92 percent) physical acts of IVP take the form of physical violence and fewer than 1 percent involve rape alone or in combination (Catalano 2007). IPV affects women at greater rates than men because women often take the passive role in relationships and may become emotionally dependent on their partners. Perpetrators of IPV work to establish and maintain such dependence in order to hold power and control over their victims, making them feel stupid, crazy, or ugly—in some way worthless.

IPV affects different segments of the population at different rates. The rate of IPV for black women (4.6 per 1,000 persons over the age of twelve) is higher than that for white women (3.1). These numbers have been fairly stable for both racial groups over the last ten years. However, the numbers have steadily increased for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (up to 11.1 for females) (Catalano 2007).

Those who are separated report higher rates of abuse than those with other marital statuses, as conflict is typically higher in those relationships. Similarly, those who are cohabitating are more likely than those who are married to experience IPV (Stets and Straus 1990). Other researchers have found that the rate of IPV doubles for women in low-income disadvantaged areas when compared to IPV experienced by women who reside in more affluent areas (Benson and Fox 2004). Overall, women ages twenty to twenty-four are at the greatest risk of nonfatal abuse (Catalano 2007).

Accurate statistics on IPV are difficult to determine, as it is estimated that more than half of nonfatal IPV goes unreported. It is not until victims choose to report crimes that patterns of abuse are exposed.

Most victims studied stated that abuse had occurred for at least two years prior to their first report (Carlson, Harris, and Holden 1999).

Sometimes abuse is reported to police by a third party, but it still may not be confirmed by victims. A study of domestic violence incident reports found that even when confronted by police about abuse, 29 percent of victims denied that abuse occurred. Surprisingly, 19 percent of their assailants were likely to admit to abuse (Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher 2005). According to the National Criminal Victims Survey, victims cite varied reason why they are reluctant to report abuse, as shown in the table below.

Table 14.3 This chart shows reasons that victims give for why they fail to report abuse to police authorities (Catalano 2007).

Reason Abuse Is Unreported	% Females	% Males
Considered a Private Matter	22	39
Fear of Retaliation	12	5
To Protect the Abuser	14	16
Belief That Police Won’t Do Anything	8	8

Two-thirds of nonfatal IPV occurs inside of the home and approximately 10 percent occurs at the home of the victim’s friend or neighbor. The majority of abuse takes place between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and nearly half (42 percent) involves alcohol or drug use (Catalano 2007). Many perpetrators of IVP blame alcohol or drugs for their abuse, though studies have shown that alcohol and drugs do not cause IPV, they may only lower inhibitions (Hanson 2011). IPV has significant long-term effects on individual victims and on society. Studies have shown that IPV damage extends beyond the direct physical or emotional wounds. Extended IPV has been linked to unemployment among victims, as many have difficulty finding or holding employment. Additionally, nearly all women who report serious domestic problems exhibit symptoms of major depression (Goodwin, Chandler, and Meisel 2003).

Female victims of IPV are also more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, suffer from eating disorders, and attempt suicide (Silverman et al. 2001). IPV is indeed something that impacts more than just intimate partners. In a survey, 34 percent of respondents said they have witnessed IPV, and 59 percent said that they know a victim personally (Roper Starch Worldwide 1995). Many people want to help IPV victims but are hesitant to intervene because they feel that it is a personal matter or they fear retaliation from the abuser—reasons similar to those of victims who do not report IPV.

Child Abuse

Children are among the most helpless victims of abuse. In 2010, there were more than 3.3 million reports of child abuse involving an estimated 5.9 million children (Child Help 2011). Three-fifths of child abuse reports are made by professionals, including teachers, law enforcement personal, and social services staff. The rest are made by anonymous sources, other relatives, parents, friends, and neighbors.

Child abuse may come in several forms, the most common being neglect (78.3 percent), followed by physical abuse (10.8 percent), sexual abuse (7.6 percent), psychological maltreatment (7.6 percent), and medical neglect (2.4 percent) (Child Help 2011). Some children suffer from a combination of these forms of abuse. The majority (81.2 percent) of perpetrators are parents; 6.2 percent are other relatives.

Infants (children less than one year old) were the most victimized population with an incident rate of 20.6 per 1,000 infants. This age group is particularly vulnerable to neglect because they are entirely dependent on parents for care. Some parents do not purposely neglect their children; factors such as cultural values, standard of care in a community, and poverty can lead to hazardous level of neglect. If information or assistance from public or private services are available and a parent fails to use those services, child welfare services may intervene (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Figure 14.9 The Casey Anthony trial, in which Casey was ultimately acquitted of murder charges against her daughter, Caylee, created public outrage and brought to light issues of child abuse and neglect across the United States. (Photo courtesy of Bruce Tuten/flickr)

Infants are also often victims of physical abuse, particularly in the form of violent shaking. This type of physical abuse is referred to as **shaken-baby syndrome**, which describes a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or causing impact to an infant's head. A baby's cry is the number one trigger for shaking. Parents may find themselves unable to soothe a baby's concerns and may take their frustration out on the child by shaking him or her violently. Other stress factors such as a poor economy, unemployment, and general dissatisfaction with parental life may contribute this type of abuse. While there is no official central registry of shaken-baby syndrome statistics, it is estimated that each year 1,400 babies die or suffer serious injury from being shaken (Barr 2007).

Making Connections: Social Policy & Debate

Corporal Punishment

Physical abuse in children may come in the form of beating, kicking, throwing, choking, hitting with objects, burning, or other methods. Injury inflicted by such behavior is considered abuse even if the parent or caregiver did not intend to harm the child. Other types of physical contact that are characterized as discipline (spanking, for example) are not considered abuse as long as no injury results (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2008).

This issue is rather controversial among modern-day people in the United States. While some parents feel that physical discipline, or corporal punishment, is an effective way to respond to bad behavior, others feel that it is a form of abuse. According to a poll conducted by ABC News, 65 percent of respondents approve of spanking and 50 percent said that they sometimes spank their child.

Tendency toward physical punishment may be affected by culture and education. Those who live in the South are more likely than those who live in other regions to spank their child. Those who do not have a college education are also more likely to spank their child (Crandall 2011). Currently, 23 states officially allow spanking in the school system; however, many parents may object and school officials must follow a set of clear guidelines when administering this type of punishment (Crandall 2011). Studies have shown that spanking is not an effective form of punishment and may lead to aggression by the victim, particularly in those who are spanked at a young age (Berlin 2009).

Child abuse occurs at all socioeconomic and education levels and crosses ethnic and cultural lines. Just as child abuse is often associated with stresses felt by parents, including financial stress, parents who demonstrate resilience to these stresses are less likely to abuse (Samuels 2011). Young parents are typically less capable of coping with stresses, particularly the stress of becoming a new parent. Teenage mothers are more likely to abuse their children than their older counterparts. As a parent's age increases, the risk of abuse decreases. Children born to mothers who are fifteen years old or younger are twice as likely to be abused or neglected by age five than are children born to mothers ages twenty to twenty-one (George and Lee 1997).

Drug and alcohol use is also a known contributor to child abuse. Children raised by substance abusers have a risk of physical abuse three times greater than other kids, and neglect is four times as prevalent in these families (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2011). Other risk factors include social isolation, depression, low parental education, and a history of being mistreated as a child. Approximately 30 percent of abused children will later abuse their own children (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006).

The long-term effects of child abuse impact the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of a child. Injury, poor health, and mental instability occur at a high rate in this group, with 80 percent meeting the criteria of one or more psychiatric disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal behavior, by age twenty-one. Abused children may also suffer from cognitive and social difficulties. Behavioral consequences will affect most, but not all, of child abuse victims. Children of abuse are 25 percent more likely, as adolescents, to suffer from difficulties like poor academic performance and teen pregnancy, or to engage in behaviors like drug abuse and general delinquency. They are also more likely to participate in risky sexual acts that increase their chances of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006). Other risky behaviors include drug and alcohol abuse. As these consequences can affect the health care, education, and criminal systems, the problems resulting from child abuse do not just belong to the child and family, but to society as a whole.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

ambilineal: a type of unilateral descent that follows either the father’s or the mother’s side exclusively

bigamy: the act of entering into marriage while still married to another person

bilateral descent: the tracing of kinship through both parents’ ancestral lines

cohabitation: the act of a couple sharing a residence while they are not married

extended family: a household that includes at least one parent and child as well as other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins

family life course: a sociological model of family that sees the progression of events as fluid rather than as occurring in strict stages

family life cycle: a set of predictable steps and patterns families experience over time

family of orientation: the family into which one is born

family of procreation: a family that is formed through marriage

family: socially recognized groups of individuals who may be joined by blood, marriage, or adoption and who form an emotional connection and an economic unit of society

intimate partner violence (IPV): violence that occurs between individuals who maintain a romantic or sexual relationship

kinship: a person’s traceable ancestry (by blood, marriage, and/or adoption)

marriage: a legally recognized contract between two or more people in a sexual relationship who have an expectation of permanence about their relationship

matrilineal descent: a type of unilateral descent that follows the mother’s side only

matrilocal residence: a system in which it is customary for a husband to live with the his wife’s family

monogamy: the act of being married to only one person at a time

nuclear family: two parents (traditionally a married husband and wife) and children living in the same household

patrilineal descent: a type of unilateral descent that follows the father’s line only

patrilocal residence: a system in which it is customary for the a wife to live with (or near) the her husband's family

polyandry: a form of marriage in which one woman is married to more than one man at one time

polygamy: the state of being committed or married to more than one person at a time

polygyny: a form of marriage in which one man is married to more than one woman at one time

shaken-baby syndrome: a group of medical symptoms such as brain swelling and retinal hemorrhage resulting from forcefully shaking or impacting an infant's head

unilateral descent: the tracing of kinship through one parent only.

Section Summary

14.1 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

Sociologists view marriage and families as societal institutions that help create the basic unit of social structure. Both marriage and a family may be defined differently—and practiced differently—in cultures across the world. Families and marriages, like other institutions, adapt to social change.

14.2 Variations in Family Life

People's concepts of marriage and family in the United States are changing. Increases in cohabitation, same-sex partners, and singlehood are altering of our ideas of marriage. Similarly, single parents, same-sex parents, cohabitating parents, and unwed parents are changing our notion of what it means to be a family. While most children still live in opposite-sex, two-parent, married households, that is no longer viewed as the only type of nuclear family.

14.3 Challenges Families Face

Today's families face a variety of challenges, specifically to marital stability. While divorce rates have decreased in the last twenty-five years, many family members, especially children, still experience the negative effects of divorce. Children are also negatively impacted by violence and abuse within the home, with nearly 6 million children abused each year.

Section Quiz

14.1 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

1. Sociologists tend to define family in terms of

a. how a given society sanctions the relationships of people who are connected through blood, marriage, or adoption
b. the connection of bloodlines
c. the status roles that exist in a family structure
d. how closely members adhere to social norms

2. Research suggests that people generally feel that their current family is ________ than the family they grew up with.

a. less close
b. more close
c. at least as close
d. none of the above

3. A woman being married to two men would be an example of:

a. monogamy
b. polygyny
c. polyandry
d. cohabitation

4. A child who associates his line of descent with his father's side only is part of a ______ society.

a. matrilocal
b. bilateral
c. matrilineal
d. patrilineal

5. Which of the following is a criticism of the family life cycle model?
  a. It is too broad and accounts for too many aspects of family.
  b. It is too narrowly focused on a sequence of stages.
  c. It does not serve a practical purpose for studying family behavior.
  d. It is not based on comprehensive research.

14.2 Variations in Family Life

6. The majority of U.S. children live in:
  a. two-parent households
  b. one-parent households
  c. no-parent households
  d. multigenerational households

7. According to the study cited by the U.S. Census Bureau, children who live with married parents grow up with more advantages than children who live with:
  a. a divorced parent
  b. a single parent
  c. a grandparent
  d. all of the above

8. Couples who cohabitate before marriage are ______ couples who did not cohabitate before marriage to be married at least ten years.
  a. far more likely than
  b. far less likely than
  c. slightly less likely than
  d. equally as likely as

9. Same-sex couple households account for _____ percent of U.S. households.
  a. 1
  b. 10
  c. 15
  d. 30

10. The median age of first marriage has ______ in the last fifty years.
  a. increased for men but not women
  b. decreased for men but not women
  c. increased for both men and women
  d. decreased for both men and women

14.3 Challenges Families Face

11. Current divorce rates are:
  a. at an all-time high
  b. at an all-time low
  c. steadily increasing
  d. steadily declining

12. Children of divorced parents are _______ to divorce in their own marriage than children of parents who stayed married.
  a. more likely
  b. less likely
  c. equally likely

13. In general, children in ______ households benefit from divorce.
  a. stepfamily
  b. multigenerational
  c. high-conflict
  d. low-conflict

14. Which of the following is true of intimate partner violence (IPV)?
  a. IPV victims are more frequently men than women.
  b. One in ten women is a victim of IPV.
  c. Nearly half of instances of IPV involve drugs or alcohol.
  d. Rape is the most common form of IPV.

15. Which type of child abuse is most prevalent in the United States?
  a. Physical abuse

b. Neglect
c. Shaken-baby syndrome
d. Verbal mistreatment

Short Answer

14.1 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

1. According to research, what are people's general thoughts on family in the United States? How do they view nontraditional family structures? How do you think these views might change in twenty years?

2. Explain the difference between bilateral and unilateral descent. Using your own association with kinship, explain which type of descent applies to you?

14.2 Variations in Family Life

3. Explain the different variations of the nuclear family and the trends that occur in each.

4. Why are some couples choosing to cohabitate before marriage? What effect does cohabitation have on marriage?

14.3 Challenges Families Face

5. Explain how financial status impacts marital stability. What other factors are associated with a couple's financial status?

6. Explain why more than half of IPV goes unreported? Why are those who are abused unlikely to report the abuse?

Further Research

14.1 What Is Marriage? What Is a Family?

For more information on family development and lines of descent, visit the New England Historical Genealogical Society's web site, American Ancestors, and find out how genealogies have been established and recorded since 1845. http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American_Ancestors (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/American_Ancestors)

14.2 Variations in Family Life

For more statistics on marriage and family, see the Forum on Child and Family Statistics at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_family_statistics (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_family_statistics) , as well as the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, and the U.S. Census decennial survey at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Census (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Census) .

14.3 Challenges Families Face

To find more information on child abuse, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services web site at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_welfare (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/child_welfare) to review documents provided by the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

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1 A 2 C 3 C 4 D 5 B 6 A 7 B 8 C 9 A 10 C 11 D 12
A 13 C 14 C 15 B

15 Religion

Figure 15.1 Religions come in many forms, such as this large megachurch. (Photo courtesy of ToBeDaniel/Wikimedia Commons)

Learning Objectives

15.1. The Sociological Approach to Religion

- Discuss the historical view of religion from a sociological perspective
- Understand how the major sociological paradigms view religion

15.2. World Religions

- Explain the differences between various types of religious organizations
- Understand classifications of religion, like animism, polytheism, monotheism, and atheism
- Describe several major world religions

15.3. Religion in the United States

- Give examples of religion as an agent of social change
- Describe current U.S. trends including megachurches and secularization

Introduction to Religion

Why do sociologists study religion? For centuries, humankind has sought to understand and explain the "meaning of life." Many philosophers believe this contemplation and the desire to understand our place in the universe are what differentiate humankind from other species. Religion, in one form or another, has been found in all human societies since human societies first appeared. Archaeological digs have revealed ritual objects, ceremonial burial sites, and other religious artifacts. Social conflict and even wars often result from religious disputes. To understand a culture, sociologists must study its religion.

What is religion? Pioneer sociologist Émile Durkheim described it with the ethereal statement that it consists of "things that surpass the limits of our knowledge" (1915). He went on to elaborate: Religion is "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them" (1915). Some people associate religion with places of worship (a synagogue or church), others with a practice (confession or meditation), and still others with a concept that guides their daily lives (like dharma or sin). All these people can agree that **religion** is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds sacred or considers to be spiritually significant.

Does religion bring fear, wonder, relief, explanation of the unknown or control over freedom and choice? How do our religious perspectives affect our behavior? These are questions sociologists ask and are reasons they study religion. What are peoples' conceptions of the profane and the sacred? How do religious ideas affect the real-world reactions and choices of people in a society?

Religion can also serve as a filter for examining other issues in society and other components of a culture. For example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it became important for teachers, church leaders, and the media to educate Americans about Islam to prevent stereotyping and to promote religious tolerance. Sociological tools and methods, such as surveys, polls, interviews, and analysis of historical data, can be applied to the study of religion in a culture to help us better understand the role religion plays in people’s lives and the way it influences society.

15.1 The Sociological Approach to Religion

From the Latin *religio* (respect for what is sacred) and *religare* (to bind, in the sense of an obligation), the term religion describes various systems of belief and practice that define what people consider to be sacred or spiritual (Fasching and deChant 2001; Durkheim 1915). Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religious narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and understand the universe. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practiced in a public way by a group. The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, intercession with God or gods, marriage and funeral services, music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of culture.

While some people think of religion as something individual because religious beliefs can be highly personal, religion is also a social institution. Social scientists recognize that religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviors, and norms centered on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a cultural universal found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way, although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person’s death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition, and ceremony or ritual. These universals, and the differences in the way societies and individuals experience religion, provide rich material for sociological study.

In studying religion, sociologists distinguish between what they term the experience, beliefs, and rituals of a religion. **Religious experience** refers to the conviction or sensation that we are connected to “the divine.” This type of communion might be experienced when people are pray or meditate. **Religious beliefs** are specific ideas members of a particular faith hold to be true, such as that Jesus Christ was the son of God, or that reincarnation exists. Another illustration of religious beliefs is the creation stories we find in different religions. **Religious rituals** are behaviors or practices that are either required or expected of the members of a particular group, such as bar mitzvah or confession of sins (Barkan and Greenwood 2003).

The History of Religion as a Sociological Concept

In the wake of nineteenth century European industrialization and secularization, three social theorists attempted to examine the relationship between religion and society: Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. They are among the founding thinkers of modern sociology.

As stated earlier, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (1915). To him, sacred meant extraordinary—something that inspired wonder and that seemed connected to the concept of “the divine.” Durkheim argued that “religion happens” in society when there is a separation between the profane (ordinary life) and the sacred (1915). A rock, for example, isn’t sacred or profane as it exists. But if someone makes it into a headstone, or another person uses it for landscaping, it takes on different meanings—one sacred, one profane.

Durkheim is generally considered the first sociologist who analyzed religion in terms of its societal impact. Above all, he believed religion is about community: It binds people together (social cohesion), promotes behavior consistency (social control), and offers strength during life’s transitions and tragedies (meaning and purpose). By applying the methods of natural science to the study of society, Durkheim held that the source of religion and morality is the collective mind-set of society and that the cohesive bonds of social order result from common values in a society. He contended that these values need to be maintained to maintain social stability.

But what would happen if religion were to decline? This question led Durkheim to posit that religion is not just a social creation but something that represents the power of society: When people celebrate sacred things, they celebrate the power of their society. By this reasoning, even if traditional religion disappeared, society wouldn't necessarily dissolve.

Whereas Durkheim saw religion as a source of social stability, German sociologist and political economist Max Weber (1864–1920) believed it was a precipitator of social change. He examined the effects of religion on economic activities and noticed that heavily Protestant societies—such as those in the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and Germany—were the most highly developed capitalist societies and that their most successful business leaders were Protestant. In his writing *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), he contends that the Protestant work ethic influenced the development of capitalism. Weber noted that certain kinds of Protestantism supported the pursuit of material gain by motivating believers to work hard, be successful, and not spend their profits on frivolous things. (The modern use of "work ethic" comes directly from Weber's Protestant ethic, although it has now lost its religious connotations.)

Making Connections: the Big Picture

The Protestant Work Ethic in the Information Age

Max Weber (1904) posited that, in Europe in his time, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to value capitalist ideology, and believed in hard work and savings. He showed that Protestant values directly influenced the rise of capitalism and helped create the modern world order. Weber thought the emphasis on community in Catholicism versus the emphasis on individual achievement in Protestantism made a difference. His century-old claim that the Protestant work ethic led to the development of capitalism has been one of the most important and controversial topics in the sociology of religion. In fact, scholars have found little merit to his contention when applied to modern society (Greeley 1989).

What does the concept of work ethic mean today? The work ethic in the information age has been affected by tremendous cultural and social change, just as workers in the mid- to late nineteenth century were influenced by the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Factory jobs tend to be simple, uninvolved, and require very little thinking or decision making on the part of the worker. Today, the work ethic of the modern workforce has been transformed, as more thinking and decision making is required. Employees also seek autonomy and fulfillment in their jobs, not just wages. Higher levels of education have become necessary, as well as people management skills and access to the most recent information on any given topic. The information age has increased the rapid pace of production expected in many jobs.

On the other hand, the "McDonaldization" of the United States (Hightower 1975; Ritzer 1993), in which many service industries, such as the fast-food industry, have established routinized roles and tasks, has resulted in a "discouragement" of the work ethic. In jobs where roles and tasks are highly prescribed, workers have no opportunity to make decisions. They are considered replaceable commodities as opposed to valued employees. During times of recession, these service jobs may be the only employment possible for younger individuals or those with low-level skills. The pay, working conditions, and robotic nature of the tasks dehumanizes the workers and strips them of incentives for doing quality work.

Working hard also doesn't seem to have any relationship with Catholic or Protestant religious beliefs anymore, or those of other religions; information age workers expect talent and hard work to be rewarded by material gain and career advancement.

German philosopher, journalist, and revolutionary socialist Karl Marx (1818–1883) also studied the social impact of religion. He believed religion reflects the social stratification of society and that it maintains inequality and perpetuates the status quo. For him, religion was just an extension of working-class (proletariat) economic suffering. He famously argued that religion "is the opium of the people" (1844).

For Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, who were reacting to the great social and economic upheaval of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Europe, religion was an integral part of society. For Durkheim, religion was a force for cohesion that helped bind the members of society to the group, while Weber believed religion could be understood as something separate from society. Marx considered religion inseparable from the economy and the worker. Religion could not be understood apart from the capitalist society that perpetuated inequality. Despite their different views, these social theorists all believed in the centrality of religion to society.

Theoretical Perspectives on Religion

Figure 15.2 Functionalists believe religion meets many important needs for people, including group cohesion and companionship. (Photo courtesy of James Emery/flickr)

Modern-day sociologists often apply one of three major theoretical perspectives. These views offer different lenses through which to study and understand society: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory. Let's explore how scholars applying these paradigms understand religion.

Functionalism

Functionalists contend that religion serves several functions in society. Religion, in fact, depends on society for its existence, value, and significance, and vice versa. From this perspective, religion serves several purposes, like providing answers to spiritual mysteries, offering emotional comfort, and creating a place for social interaction and social control.

In providing answers, religion defines the spiritual world and spiritual forces, including divine beings. For example, it helps answer questions like, "How was the world created?" "Why do we suffer?" "Is there a plan for our lives?" and "Is there an afterlife?" As another function, religion provides emotional comfort in times of crisis. Religious rituals bring order, comfort, and organization through shared familiar symbols and patterns of behavior.

One of the most important functions of religion, from a functionalist perspective, is the opportunities it creates for social interaction and the formation of groups. It provides social support and social networking and offers a place to meet others who hold similar values and a place to seek help (spiritual and material) in times of need. Moreover, it can foster group cohesion and integration. Because religion can be central to many people's concept of themselves, sometimes there is an "in-group" versus "out-group" feeling toward other religions in our society or within a particular practice. On an extreme level, the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and anti-Semitism are all examples of this dynamic. Finally, religion promotes social control: It reinforces social norms such as appropriate styles of dress, following the law, and regulating sexual behavior.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists view religion as an institution that helps maintain patterns of social inequality. For example, the Vatican has a tremendous amount of wealth, while the average income of Catholic parishioners is small. According to this perspective, religion has been used to support the "divine right" of oppressive monarchs and to justify unequal social structures, like India's caste system.

Conflict theorists are critical of the way many religions promote the idea that believers should be satisfied with existing circumstances because they are divinely ordained. This power dynamic has been used by Christian institutions for centuries to keep poor people poor and to teach them that they shouldn't be concerned with what they lack because their "true" reward (from a religious perspective) will come after death. Conflict theorists also point out that those in power in a religion are often able to dictate practices, rituals, and beliefs through their interpretation of religious texts or via proclaimed direct communication from the divine.

Figure 15.3 Many religions, including the Catholic faith, have long prohibited women from becoming spiritual leaders. Feminist theorists focus on gender inequality and promote leadership roles for women in religion. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The feminist perspective is a conflict theory view that focuses specifically on gender inequality. In terms of religion, feminist theorists assert that, although women are typically the ones to socialize children into a religion, they have traditionally held very few positions of power within religions. A few religions and religious denominations are more gender equal, but male dominance remains the norm of most.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Rational Choice Theory: Can Economic Theory Be Applied to Religion?

How do people decide which religion to follow, if any? How does one pick a church or decide which denomination "fits" best? Rational choice theory (RCT) is one way social scientists have attempted to explain these behaviors. The theory proposes that people are self-interested, though not necessarily selfish, and that people make rational choices—choices that can reasonably be expected to maximize positive outcomes while minimizing negative outcomes. Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (1988) first considered the use of RCT to explain some aspects of religious behavior, with the assumption that there is a basic human need for religion in terms of providing belief in a supernatural being, a sense of meaning in life, and belief in life after death. Religious explanations of these concepts are presumed to be more satisfactory than scientific explanations, which may help to account for the continuation of strong religious connectedness in countries such as the United States, despite predictions of some competing theories for a great decline in religious affiliation due to modernization and religious pluralism.

Another assumption of RCT is that religious organizations can be viewed in terms of "costs" and "rewards." Costs are not only monetary requirements, but are also the time, effort, and commitment demands of any particular religious organization. Rewards are the intangible benefits in terms of belief and satisfactory explanations about life, death, and the supernatural, as well as social rewards from membership. RCT proposes that, in a pluralistic society with many religious options, religious organizations will compete for members, and people will choose between different churches or denominations in much the same way they select other consumer goods, balancing costs and rewards in a rational manner. In this framework, RCT also explains the development and decline of churches, denominations, sects, and even cults; this limited part of the very complex RCT theory is the only aspect well supported by research data.

Critics of RCT argue that it doesn't fit well with human spiritual needs, and many sociologists disagree that the costs and rewards of religion can even be meaningfully measured or that individuals use a rational balancing process regarding religious affiliation. The theory doesn't address many aspects of religion that individuals may consider essential (such as faith) and further fails to account for agnostics and atheists who don't seem to have a similar need for religious explanations. Critics also believe this theory overuses economic terminology and structure and point out that terms such as "rational" and "reward" are unacceptably defined by their use; they would argue that the theory is based on faulty logic and lacks external, empirical support. A scientific explanation for *why* something occurs can't reasonably be supported by the fact that it *does* occur. RCT is widely used in economics and to a lesser extent in criminal justice, but the application of RCT in explaining the religious beliefs and behaviors of people and societies is still being debated in sociology today.

Symbolic Interactionism

Rising from the concept that our world is socially constructed, symbolic interactionism studies the symbols and interactions of everyday life. To interactionists, beliefs and experiences are not sacred unless individuals in a society regard them as sacred. The Star of David in Judaism, the cross in Christianity, and the crescent and star in Islam are examples of sacred symbols. Interactionists are interested in what these symbols communicate. Because interactionists study one-on-one, everyday interactions between individuals, a scholar using this approach might ask questions focused on this dynamic. The interaction between religious leaders and practitioners, the role of religion in the ordinary components of everyday life, and the ways people express religious values in social interactions—all might be topics of study to an interactionist.

15.2 World Religions

Figure 15.4 The symbols of fourteen religions are depicted here. In no particular order, they represent Judaism, Wicca, Taoism, Christianity, Confucianism, Baha'i, Druidism, Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Can you match the symbol to the religion? What might a symbolic interactionist make of these symbols? (Photo courtesy of ReligiousTolerance.org (http://ReligiousTolerance.org))

The major religions of the world (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Taoism, and Judaism) differ in many respects, including how each religion is organized and the belief system each upholds. Other differences include the nature of belief in a higher power, the history of how the world and the religion began, and the use of sacred texts and objects.

Types of Religious Organizations

Religions organize themselves—their institutions, practitioners, and structures—in a variety of fashions. For instance, when the Roman Catholic Church emerged, it borrowed many of its organizational principles from the ancient Roman military and turned senators into cardinals, for example. Sociologists use different terms, like ecclesia, denomination, and sect, to define these types of organizations. Scholars are also aware that these definitions are not static. Most religions transition through different organizational phases. For example, Christianity began as a cult, transformed into a sect, and today exists as an ecclesia.

Cults, like sects, are new religious groups. In the United States today this term often carries pejorative connotations. However, almost all religions began as cults and gradually progressed to levels of greater size and organization. The term cult is sometimes used interchangeably with the term new religious movement (NRM). In its pejorative use, these groups are often disparaged as being secretive, highly controlling of members' lives, and dominated by a single, charismatic leader.

Controversy exists over whether some groups are cults, perhaps due in part to media sensationalism over groups like polygamous Mormons or the Peoples Temple followers who died at Jonestown, Guyana. Some groups that are controversially labeled as cults today include the Church of Scientology and the Hare Krishna movement.

A **sect** is a small and relatively new group. Most of the well-known Christian denominations in the United States today began as sects. For example, the Methodists and Baptists protested against their parent Anglican Church in England, just as Henry VIII protested against the Catholic Church by forming the Anglican Church. From “protest” comes the term Protestant.

Occasionally, a sect is a breakaway group that may be in tension with larger society. They sometimes claim to be returning to “the fundamentals” or to contest the veracity of a particular doctrine. When membership in a sect increases over time, it may grow into a denomination. Often a sect begins as an offshoot of a denomination, when a group of members believes they should separate from the larger group.

Some sects dissolve without growing into denominations. Sociologists call these **established sects**. Established sects, such as the Amish or Jehovah’s Witnesses fall halfway between sect and denomination on the ecclesia–cult continuum because they have a mixture of sect-like and denomination-like characteristics.

A **denomination** is a large, mainstream religious organization, but it does not claim to be official or state sponsored. It is one religion among many. For example, Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist are all Christian denominations.

The term **ecclesia**, originally referring to a political assembly of citizens in ancient Athens, Greece, now refers to a congregation. In sociology, the term is used to refer to a religious group that most all members of a society belong to. It is considered a nationally recognized, or official, religion that holds a religious monopoly and is closely allied with state and secular powers. The United States does not have an ecclesia by this standard; in fact, this is the type of religious organization that many of the first colonists came to America to escape.

Figure 15.5 How might you classify the Mennonites? As a cult, a sect, or a denomination? (Photo courtesy of Frenkieb/flickr)

One way to remember these religious organizational terms is to think of cults, sects, denominations, and ecclesia representing a continuum, with increasing influence on society, where cults are least influential and ecclesia are most influential.

Types of Religions

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have strived to classify religions. One widely accepted categorization that helps people understand different belief systems considers what or who people worship (if anything). Using this method of classification, religions might fall into one of these basic categories, as shown in Table 15.1.

Table 15.1 One way scholars have categorized religions is by classifying what or who they hold to be divine.

Religious Classification	What/Who Is Divine	Example
Polytheism	Multiple gods	Belief systems of the ancient Greeks and Romans
Monotheism	Single god	Judaism, Islam
Atheism	No deities	Atheism
Animism	Nonhuman beings (animals, plants, natural world)	Indigenous nature worship (Shinto)
Totemism	Human-natural being connection	Ojibwa (Native American) beliefs

Note that some religions may be practiced—or understood—in various categories. For instance, the Christian notion of the Holy Trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit) defies the definition of **monotheism**, which is a religion based on belief in a single deity, to some scholars. Similarly, many Westerners view the multiple manifestations of Hinduism's godhead as **polytheistic**, which is a religion based on belief in multiple deities,, while Hindus might describe those manifestations are a monotheistic parallel to the Christian Trinity. Some Japanese practice Shinto, which follows **animism**, which is a religion that believes in the divinity of nonhuman beings, like animals, plants, and objects of the natural world, while people who practice **totemism** believe in a divine connection between humans and other natural beings.

It is also important to note that every society also has nonbelievers, such as **atheists**, who do not believe in a divine being or entity, and agnostics, who hold that ultimate reality (such as God) is unknowable. While typically not an organized group, atheists and agnostics represent a significant portion of the population. It is important to recognize that being a nonbeliever in a divine entity does not mean the individual subscribes to no morality. Indeed, many Nobel Peace Prize winners and other great humanitarians over the centuries would have classified themselves as atheists or agnostics.

The World's Religions

Religions have emerged and developed across the world. Some have been short-lived, while others have persisted and grown. In this section, we will explore seven of the world's major religions.

Hinduism

The oldest religion in the world, Hinduism originated in the Indus River Valley about 4,500 years ago in what is now modern-day northwest India and Pakistan. It arose contemporaneously with ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures. With roughly one billion followers, Hinduism is the third-largest of the world's religions. Hindus believe in a divine power that can manifest as different entities. Three main incarnations—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—are sometimes compared to the manifestations of the divine in the Christian Trinity.

Multiple sacred texts, collectively called the Vedas, contain hymns and rituals from ancient India and are mostly written in Sanskrit. Hindus generally believe in a set of principles called dharma, which refer to one's duty in the world that corresponds with "right" actions. Hindus also believe in karma, or the notion that spiritual ramifications of one's actions are balanced cyclically in this life or a future life (reincarnation).

Figure 15.6 Hindu women sometimes apply decorations of henna dye to their hands for special occasions such as weddings and religious festivals. (Photo courtesy of Akash Mazumdar)

Figure 15.7 Buddhism promotes peace and tolerance. The 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso) is one of the most revered and influential Tibetan Buddhist leaders. (Photo courtesy of Nancy Pelosi/flickr)

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama around 500 B.C.E. Siddhartha was said to have given up a comfortable, upper-class life to follow one of poverty and spiritual devotion. At the age of thirty-five, he famously meditated under a sacred fig tree and vowed not to rise before he achieved enlightenment (*bodhi*). After this experience, he became known as Buddha, or "enlightened one." Followers were drawn to Buddha's teachings and the practice of meditation, and he later established a monastic order.

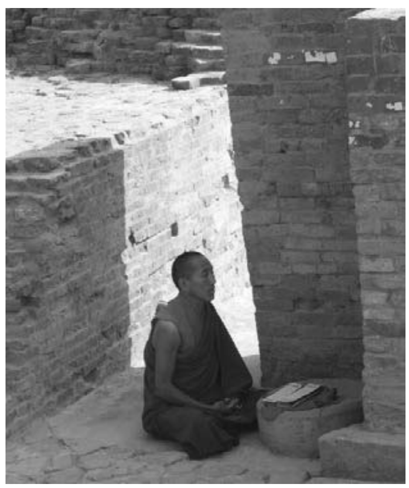

Figure 15.8 Meditation is an important practice in Buddhism. A Tibetan monk is shown here engaged in solitary meditation. (Photo courtesy of Prince Roy/flickr)

Buddha's teachings encourage Buddhists to lead a moral life by accepting the four Noble Truths: 1) life is suffering, 2) suffering arises from attachment to desires, 3) suffering ceases when attachment to desires ceases, and 4) freedom from suffering is possible by following the "middle way." The concept of the "middle way" is central to Buddhist thinking, which encourages people to live in the present and to practice acceptance of others (Smith 1991). Buddhism also tends to deemphasize the role of a godhead, instead stressing the importance of personal responsibility (Craig 2002).

Confucianism

Confucianism was the official religion of China from 200 B.C.E. until it was officially abolished when communist leadership discouraged religious practice in 1949. The religion was developed by Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius), who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. An extraordinary teacher, his lessons—which were about self-discipline, respect for authority and tradition, and *jen* (the kind treatment of every person)—were collected in a book called the *Analects*.

Some religious scholars consider Confucianism more of a social system than a religion because it focuses on sharing wisdom about moral practices but doesn't involve any type of specific worship; nor does it have formal objects. In fact, its teachings were developed in context of problems of social anarchy and a near-complete deterioration of social cohesion. Dissatisfied with the social solutions put forth, Kung Fu-Tzu developed his own model of religious morality to help guide society (Smith 1991).

Taoism

In Taoism, the purpose of life is inner peace and harmony. Tao is usually translated as “way” or “path.” The founder of the religion is generally recognized to be a man named Laozi, who lived sometime in the sixth century B.C.E. in China. Taoist beliefs emphasize the virtues of compassion and moderation.

The central concept of *tao* can be understood to describe a spiritual reality, the order of the universe, or the way of modern life in harmony with the former two. The ying-yang symbol and the concept of polar forces are central Taoist ideas (Smith 1991). Some scholars have compared this Chinese tradition to its Confucian counterpart by saying that “whereas Confucianism is concerned with day-to-day rules of conduct, Taoism is concerned with a more spiritual level of being” (Feng and English 1972).

Judaism

After their Exodus from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C.E., Jews, a nomadic society, became monotheistic, worshipping only one God. The Jews’ covenant, or promise of a special relationship with Yahweh (God), is an important element of Judaism, and their sacred text is the Torah, which Christians also follow as the first five books of the Bible. Talmud refers to a collection of sacred Jewish oral interpretation of the Torah. Jews emphasize moral behavior and action in this world as opposed to beliefs or personal salvation in the next world.

Figure 15.9 The Islamic house of worship is called a mosque. (Photo courtesy of David Stanley/flickr)

Islam

Islam is monotheistic religion and it follows the teaching of the prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 C.E. Muhammad is seen only as a prophet, not as a divine being, and he is believed to be the messenger of Allah (God), who is divine. The followers of Islam, whose U.S. population is projected to double in the next twenty years (Pew Research Forum 2011), are called Muslims.

Islam means “peace” and “submission.” The sacred text for Muslims is the Qur’an (or Koran). As with Christianity’s Old Testament, many of the Qur’an stories are shared with the Jewish faith. Divisions exist within Islam, but all Muslims are guided by five beliefs or practices, often called “pillars”: 1) Allah is the only god, and Muhammad is his prophet, 2) daily prayer, 3) helping those in poverty, 4) fasting as a spiritual practice, and 5) pilgrimage to the holy center of Mecca.

Figure 15.10 cornerstones of Muslim practice is journeying to the religion’s most sacred place, Mecca. (Photo courtesy of Raeky/flickr)

Christianity

Today the largest religion in the world, Christianity began 2,000 years ago in Palestine, with Jesus of Nazareth, a charismatic leader who taught his followers about *caritas* (charity) or treating others as you would like to be treated yourself.

The sacred text for Christians is the Bible. While Jews, Christians, and Muslims share many of same historical religious stories, their beliefs verge. In their shared sacred stories, it is suggested that the son of God—a messiah—will return to save God’s followers. While Christians believe that he already appeared in the person of Jesus Christ, Jews and Muslims disagree. While they recognize Christ as an important historical figure, their traditions don’t believe he’s the son of God, and their faiths see the prophecy of the messiah’s arrival as not yet fulfilled.

Different Christian groups have variations among their sacred texts. For instance, Mormons, an established Christian sect, also use the Book of Mormon, which they believe details other parts of Christian doctrine and Jesus’ life that aren’t included in the Bible. Similarly, the Catholic Bible includes the Apocrypha, a collection that, while part of the 1611 King James translation, is no longer included in Protestant versions of the Bible. Although monotheistic, Christians often describe their god through three manifestations that they call the Holy Trinity: the father (God), the son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a term Christians often use to describe religious experience, or how they feel the presence of the sacred in their lives. One foundation of Christian doctrine is the Ten Commandments, which decry acts considered sinful, including theft, murder, and adultery.

15.3 Religion in the United States

In examining the state of religion in the United States today, we see the complexity of religious life in our society, plus emerging trends like the rise of the megachurch, secularization, and the role of religion in social change.

Religion and Social Change

Religion has historically been an impetus to social change. The translation of sacred texts into everyday, nonscholarly language empowered people to shape their religions. Disagreements between religious groups and instances of religious persecution have led to wars and genocides. The United States is no stranger to religion as an agent of social change. In fact, the United States' first European arrivals were acting largely on religious convictions when they were compelled to settle in the United States.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America, and it combines Christian principles with political activism. It uses the church to promote social change via the political arena, and it is most often seen in attempts to reduce or eliminate social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. A list of proponents of this kind of social justice (although some pre-date liberation theory) could include Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu.

Although begun as a moral reaction against the poverty caused by social injustice in that part of the world, today liberation theology is an international movement that encompasses many churches and denominations. Liberation theologians discuss theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed, and some interpret the scriptures as a call to action against poverty and injustice. In Europe and North America, feminist theology has emerged from liberation theology as a movement to bring social justice to women.

Making Connections: Social Policy & Debate

Religious Leaders and the Rainbow of Gay Pride

What happens when a religious leader officiates a gay marriage against denomination policies? What about when that same minister defends the action in part by coming out and making her own lesbian relationship known to the church?

In the case of the Reverend Amy DeLong, it meant a church trial. Some leaders in her denomination assert that homosexuality is incompatible with their faith, while others feel this type of discrimination has no place in a modern church (Barrick 2011).

As the LBGT community increasingly advocates for, and earns, basic civil rights, how will religious communities respond? Many religious groups have traditionally discounted LBGT sexualities as “wrong.” However, these organizations have moved closer to respecting human rights by, for example, increasingly recognizing females as an equal gender. The Roman Catholic Church drew controversial attention to this issue in 2010 when the Vatican secretary of state suggested homosexuality was in part to blame for pedophilic sexual abuse scandals that have plagued the church (Beck 2010). Because numerous studies have shown there to be no relationship between homosexuality and pedophilia, nor a higher incidence of pedophilia among homosexuals than among heterosexuals (Beck 2010), the Vatican’s comments seem suspect. More recently Pope Francis has been pushing for a more open church, and some Catholic bishops have been advocating for a more "gay-friendly" church (McKenna, 2014). This has not come to pass, but some scholars believe these changes are a matter of time.

No matter the situation, most religions have a tenuous (at best) relationship with practitioners and leaders in the gay community. As one of the earliest Christian denominations to break barriers by ordaining women to serve as pastors, will Amy DeLong’s United Methodist denomination also be a leader in LBGT rights within Christian churchgoing society?

Megachurches

A **megachurch** is a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services. As of 2009, the largest megachurch in the United States was in Houston Texas, boasting an average weekly attendance of more than 43,000 (Bogan 2009). Megachurches exist in other parts of the world, especially in South Korea, Brazil, and several African countries, but the rise of the megachurch in the United States is a fairly recent phenomenon that has developed primarily in California, Florida, Georgia, and Texas.

Since 1970 the number of megachurches in this country has grown from about fifty to more than 1,000, most of which are attached to the Southern Baptist denomination (Bogan 2009). Approximately six million people are members of these churches (Bird and Thumma 2011). The architecture of these church buildings often resembles a sport or concert arena. The church may include jumbotrons (large-screen televisual technology usually used in sports arenas to show close-up shots of an event). Worship services feature contemporary music with drums and electric guitars and use state-of-the-art sound equipment. The buildings sometimes include food courts, sports and recreation facilities, and bookstores. Services such as child care and mental health counseling are often offered.

Typically, a single, highly charismatic pastor leads the megachurch; at present, all are male. Some megachurches and their preachers have a huge television presence, and viewers all around the country watch and respond to their shows and fundraising.

Besides size, U.S. megachurches share other traits, including conservative theology, evangelism, use of technology and social networking (Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, blogs), hugely charismatic leaders, few financial struggles, multiple sites, and predominantly white membership. They list their main focuses as youth activities, community service, and study of the Scripture (Hartford Institute for Religion Research b).

Critics of megachurches believe they are too large to promote close relationships among fellow church members or the pastor, as could occur in smaller houses of worship. Supporters note that, in addition to the large worship services, congregations generally meet in small groups, and some megachurches have informal events throughout the week to allow for community-building (Hartford Institute for Religion Research a).

Secularization

Historical sociologists Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud anticipated secularization and claimed that the modernization of society would bring about a decrease in the influence of religion. Weber believed membership in distinguished clubs would outpace membership in Protestant sects as a way for people to gain authority or respect.

Conversely, some people suggest secularization is a root cause of many social problems, such as divorce, drug use, and educational downturn. One-time presidential contender Michele Bachmann even linked Hurricane Irene and the 2011 earthquake felt in Washington D.C. to politicians' failure to listen to God (Ward 2011).

While some scholars see the United States becoming increasingly secular, others observe a rise in fundamentalism. Compared to other democratic, industrialized countries, the United States is generally perceived to be a fairly religious nation. Whereas 65 percent of U.S. adults in a 2009 Gallup survey said religion was an important part of their daily lives, the numbers were lower in Spain (49 percent), Canada (42 percent), France (30 percent), the United Kingdom (27 percent), and Sweden (17 percent) (Crabtree and Pelham 2009). Secularization interests social observers because it entails a pattern of change in a fundamental social institution.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Thank God for that Touchdown: Separation of Church and State

Imagine three public universities with football games scheduled on Saturday. At University A, a group of students in the stands who share the same faith decide to form a circle amid the spectators to pray for the team. For fifteen minutes, people in the circle share their prayers aloud among their group. At University B, the team ahead at halftime decides to join together in prayer, giving thanks and seeking support from God. This lasts for the first ten minutes of halftime on the sidelines of the field while spectators watch. At University C, the game program includes, among its opening moments, two minutes set aside for the team captain to share a prayer of his choosing with the spectators.

In the tricky area of separation of church and state, which of these actions is allowed and which is forbidden? In our three fictional scenarios, the last example is against the law while the first two situations are perfectly acceptable.

In the United States, a nation founded on the principles of religious freedom (many settlers were escaping religious persecution in Europe), how stringently do we adhere to this ideal? How well do we respect people's right to practice any belief system of their choosing? The answer just might depend on what religion you practice.

In 2003, for example, a lawsuit escalated in Alabama regarding a monument to the Ten Commandments in a public building. In response, a poll was conducted by *USA Today*, CNN, and Gallup. Among the findings: 70 percent of people approved of a Christian Ten Commandments monument in public, while only 33 percent approved of a monument to the Islamic Qur'an in the same space. Similarly, survey respondents showed a 64 percent approval of social programs run by Christian organizations, but only 41 percent approved of the same programs run by Muslim groups (Newport 2003).

These statistics suggest that, for most people in the United States, freedom of religion is less important than the religion under discussion. And this is precisely the point made by those who argue for separation of church and state. According to their contention, any state-sanctioned recognition of religion suggests endorsement of one belief system at the expense of all others—contradictory to the idea of freedom of religion.

So what violates separation of church and state and what is acceptable? Myriad lawsuits continue to test the answer. In the case of the three fictional examples above, the issue of spontaneity is key, as is the existence (or lack thereof) of planning on the part of event organizers.

The next time you're at a state event—political, public school, community—and the topic of religion comes up, consider where it falls in this debate.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

animism: the religion that believes in the divinity of nonhuman beings, like animals, plants, and objects of the natural world

atheism: the belief in no deities

cults: religious groups that are small, secretive, and highly controlling of members and have a charismatic leader

denomination: a large, mainstream religion that is not sponsored by the state

ecclesia: a religion that is considered the state religion

established sects: sects that last but do not become denominations

liberation theology: the use of a church to promote social change via the political arena

megachurch: a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services

monotheism: a religion based on belief in a single deity

polytheism: a religion based on belief in multiple deities

religion: a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds to be sacred or spiritually significant

religious beliefs: specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true

religious experience: the conviction or sensation that one is connected to "the divine"

religious rituals: behaviors or practices that are either required for or expected of the members of a particular group

sect: a small, new offshoot of a denomination

totemism: the belief in a divine connection between humans and other natural beings

Section Summary

15.1 The Sociological Approach to Religion

Religion describes the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns. Social theorist Émile Durkheim defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" (1915). Max Weber believed religion could be a force for social change. Karl Marx viewed religion as a tool used by capitalist societies to perpetuate inequality. Religion is a social institution, because it includes beliefs and practices that serve the needs of society. Religion is also an example of a cultural universal, because it is found in all societies in one form or another. Functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism all provide valuable ways for sociologists to understand religion.

15.2 World Religions

Sociological terms for different kinds of religious organizations are, in order of decreasing influence in society, ecclesia, denomination, sect, and cult. Religions can be categorized according to what or whom its followers worship. Some of the major, and oldest, of the world's religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

15.3 Religion in the United States

Liberation theology combines Christian principles with political activism to address social injustice, discrimination, and poverty. Megachurches are those with a membership of more than 2,000 regular attendees, and they are a vibrant, growing and highly influential segment of U.S. religious life. Some sociologists believe levels of religiosity in the United States are declining (called secularization), while others observe a rise in fundamentalism.

Section Quiz

15.1 The Sociological Approach to Religion

1. In what ways does religion serve the role of a social institution?
  a. Religions have a complex and integrated set of norms.
  b. Religious practices and beliefs are related to societal values.
  c. Religions often meet several basic needs.
  d. All of the above

2. A cultural universal is something that:
  a. addresses all aspects of a group's behavior
  b. is found in all cultures
  c. is based on social norms
  d. may or may not be of value in meeting social needs

3. Which of the main theoretical perspectives would approach religion from the micro-level, studying how religion impacts an individual's sense of support and well-being?
  a. Functionalism
  b. Symbolic interactionism
  c. Conflict theory
  d. Feminism

4. Which perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps keep the social system running smoothly?
  a. Functional perspective
  b. Symbolic interactionist perspective
  c. Conflict perspective
  d. Feminist perspective

5. Which socialist perspective most emphasizes the ways in which religion helps to maintain social inequalities within a society?
  a. Functional
  b. Symbolic interactionist
  c. Conflict theory
  d. Feminist perspective

6. Which of the following do the functionalist and conflict perspectives share?
  a. Position that religion relates to social control, enforcing social norms
  b. Emphasis on religion as providing social support
  c. Belief that religion helps explain the mysteries of life
  d. None of the above

7. The Protestant work ethic was viewed in terms of its relationship to:
  a. evolution and natural selection
  b. capitalism
  c. determinism
  d. prejudice and discrimination

15.2 World Religions

8. What are some denominations of the Christian Protestant church?
  a. Catholic and Jewish
  b. Jehovah's Witnesses and Presbyterians

c. Scientology and Hare Krishna
d. Methodist and Seventh-day Adventist

9. A sect:
a. has generally grown so large that it needs new buildings and multiple leaders
b. often believes it must split from the larger group to return to important fundamentals
c. is another term for a cult
d. All of the above

10. The main difference between an ecclesia and a denomination is:
a. the number of followers or believers is much larger for denominations
b. the geographical location varies for ecclesia versus denominations
c. ecclesia are state-sponsored and considered an official religion
d. there are no important differences; the terms are interchangeable

11. Some controversial groups that may be mislabeled as cults include:
a. Scientology and the Hare Krishna
b. the Peoples Temple and Heaven's Gate
c. the Branch Davidians and the Manson Family
d. Quakers and Pentecostals

12. In what part of the world have Confucianism and Taoism been primarily practiced?
a. India
b. Europe
c. China
d. The Middle East

13. Many stories in the sacred text of Judaism are:
a. referred to as the Apocrypha
b. oral traditions only because Judaism has no sacred text
c. shared by Christianity and Islam
d. no longer part of the Torah

14. What do Christianity and Islam have in common?
a. Both believe in a single supreme god.
b. Both share many of the same stories in their central religious texts.
c. Both believe in an afterlife.
d. All of the above

15.3 Religion in the United States

15. Social scientists refer to the use of a church to combat social injustice in the political realm as:
a. the protestant work ethic
b. conflict management
c. liberation theology
d. justice work

16. Megachurches tend to have:
a. a variety of male and female clergy
b. numerous buildings in which to meet
c. high attendance for only a limited time
d. large arenas where services are held

Short Answer

15.1 The Sociological Approach to Religion

1. List some ways that you see religion having social control in the everyday world.

2. What are some sacred items that you're familiar with? Are there some objects, such as cups, candles, or clothing, that would be considered profane in normal settings but are considered sacred in special circumstances or when used in specific ways?

3. Consider a religion that you are familiar with, and discuss some of its beliefs, behaviors, and norms. Discuss how these meet social needs. Then, research a religion that you don't know much about. Explain how its beliefs, behaviors, and norms are like/unlike the other religion.

15.2 World Religions

4. Consider the different types of religious organizations in the United States. What role did ecclesia play in the history of the United States? How have sects tended to change over time? What role do cults have today?

5. What is your understanding of monotheism versus polytheism? How might your ideology be an obstacle to understanding the theism of another religion you're unfamiliar with?

6. In U.S. society, do you believe there is social stratification that correlates with religious beliefs? What about within the practitioners of a given religion? Provide examples to illustrate your point.

15.3 Religion in the United States

7. Do you believe the United States is becoming more secularized or more fundamentalist? Comparing your generation to that of your parents or grandparents, what differences do you see in the relationship between religion and society? What would popular media have you believe is the state of religion in the United States today?

Further Research

15.1 The Sociological Approach to Religion

For more discussion on the study of sociology and religion, check out the following blog: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent_frame/ (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/immanent_frame) . The Immanent Frame is a forum for the exchange of ideas about religion, secularism, and society by leading thinkers in the social sciences and humanities.

Read more about functionalist views on religion at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell_functionalism (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Grinnell_functionalism) , symbolic interactionist view on religion at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat_Earth (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/flat_Earth) , and women in the clergy at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_clergy (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_clergy) .

Some would argue that the Protestant work ethic is still alive and well in the United States. Read British historian Niall Ferguson's view at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant_work_ethic (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Protestant_work_ethic) .

15.2 World Religions

PBS's *Frontline* explores "the life of Jesus and the rise of Christianity" in this in-depth documentary. View the piece in its entirety here: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_Frontline (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_Frontline) .

For more insight on Confucianism, read the Analects by Confucius, at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Confucius_Analects (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Confucius_Analects) . For a primer on Judaism, read Judaism 101 at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Jew_FAQ (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Jew_FAQ) .

Sorting through the different Christian denominations can be a daunting task. To help clarify these groups, go to http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Christian_denominations (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Christian_denominations) .

15.3 Religion in the United States

What is a megachurch and how are they changing the face of religion? Read "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context" at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/megachurch (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/megachurch) .

Curious about the LGBT religious movement? Visit the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and Human Rights Campaign (HRC) web sites for current news about the growing inclusion of LGBT citizens into their respective religious communities, both in the pews and from the pulpit: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/GLAAD (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/GLAAD) and http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_rights_campaign (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_rights_campaign) .

How do Christians feel about gay marriage? How many Mormons are there in the United States? Check out http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew_Forum (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Pew_Forum/) , the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a research institute examining U.S. religious trends.

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1 D **2** B **3** B **4** A **5** C **6** A **7** B **8** D **9** B **10** C **11** A **12** C **13** C **14** D **15** C **16** D

16 Education

Figure 16.1 Students who do graduate from college are likely to begin a career in debt. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Dooley/flickr)

Learning Objectives

16.1. Education around the World
- Identify differences in educational resources around the world
- Describe the concept of universal access to education

16.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Education
- Define manifest and latent functions of education
- Explain and discuss how functionalism, conflict theory, feminism, and interactionism view issues of education

16.3. Issues in Education
- Identify and discuss historical and contemporary issues in education

Introduction to Education

"What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves" (Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed). David Simon, in his book *Social Problems and the Sociological Imagination: A Paradigm for Analysis* (1995), points to the notion that social problems are, in essence, contradictions—that is, statements, ideas, or features of a situation that are opposed to one another. Consider then, that one of the greatest expectations in U.S. society is that to attain any form of success in life, a person needs an education. In fact, a college degree is rapidly becoming an expectation at nearly all levels of middle-class success, not merely an enhancement to our occupational choices. And, as you might expect, the number of people graduating from college in the United States continues to rise dramatically.

The contradiction, however, lies in the fact that the more necessary a college degree has become, the harder it has become to achieve it. The cost of getting a college degree has risen sharply since the mid-1980s, while government support in the form of Pell Grants has barely increased. The net result is that those who do graduate from college are likely to begin a career in debt. As of 2013, the average of amount of a typical student's loans amounted to around $29,000. Added to that is that employment opportunities have not met expectations. The *Washington Post* (Brad Plumer May 20, 2013) notes that in 2010, only 27 percent of college graduates had a job related to their major. The business publication

Bloomberg News states that among twenty-two-year-old degree holders who found jobs in the past three years, more than half were in roles not even requiring a college diploma (Janet Lorin and Jeanna Smialek, June 5, 2014).

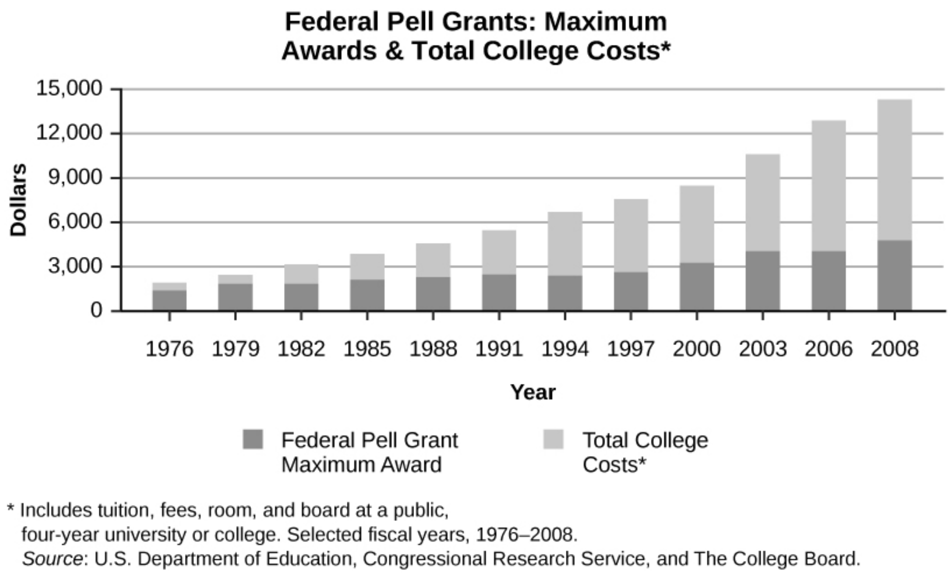

Figure 16.2 As can be seen by the trend in the graph, while the Federal Pell Grant maximum has risen slightly between 1976 and 2008, it has not been able to keep pace with the total cost of college.

Is a college degree still worth it? All this is not to say that lifetime earnings among those with a college degree are not, on average, still much higher than for those without. But even with unemployment among degree-earners at a low of 3 percent, the increase in wages over the past decade has remained at a flat 1 percent. And the pay gap between those with a degree and those without has continued to increase because wages for the rest have fallen (David Leonhardt, New York Times, The Upshot, May 27, 2014).

But is college worth more than money?

Generally, the first two years of college are essentially a liberal arts experience. The student is exposed to a fairly broad range of topics, from mathematics and the physical sciences to history and literature, the social sciences, and music and art through introductory and survey-styled courses. It is in this period that the student's world view is, it is hoped, expanded. Memorization of raw data still occurs, but if the system works, the student now looks at a larger world. Then, when he or she begins the process of specialization, it is with a much broader perspective than might be otherwise. This additional "cultural capital" can further enrich the life of the student, enhance his or her ability to work with experienced professionals, and build wisdom upon knowledge. Two thousand years ago, Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." The real value of an education, then, is to enhance our skill at self-examination.

16.1 Education around the World

Figure 16.3 These children are at a library in Singapore, where students are outperforming U.S. students on worldwide tests. (Photo courtesy of kodomut/flickr)

Education is a social institution through which a society’s children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms. Every nation in the world is equipped with some form of education system, though those systems vary greatly. The major factors that affect education systems are the resources and money that are utilized to support those systems in different nations. As you might expect, a country’s wealth has much to do with the amount of money spent on education. Countries that do not have such basic amenities as running water are unable to support robust education systems or, in many cases, any formal schooling at all. The result of this worldwide educational inequality is a social concern for many countries, including the United States.

International differences in education systems are not solely a financial issue. The value placed on education, the amount of time devoted to it, and the distribution of education within a country also play a role in those differences. For example, students in South Korea spend 220 days a year in school, compared to the 180 days a year of their United States counterparts (Pellissier 2010). As of 2006, the United States ranked fifth among twenty-seven countries for college participation, but ranked sixteenth in the number of students who receive college degrees (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2006). These statistics may be related to how much time is spent on education in the United States.

Then there is the issue of educational distribution within a nation. In December 2010, the results of a test called the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is administered to fifteen-year-old students worldwide, were released. Those results showed that students in the United States had fallen from fifteenth to twenty-fifth in the rankings for science and math (National Public Radio 2010). Students at the top of the rankings hailed from Shanghai, Finland, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Analysts determined that the nations and city-states at the top of the rankings had several things in common. For one, they had well-established standards for education with clear goals for all students. They also recruited teachers from the top 5 to 10 percent of university graduates each year, which is not the case for most countries (National Public Radio 2010).

Finally, there is the issue of social factors. One analyst from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the organization that created the test, attributed 20 percent of performance differences and the United States’ low rankings to differences in social background. Researchers noted that educational resources, including money and quality teachers, are not distributed equitably in the United States. In the top-ranking countries, limited access to resources did not necessarily predict low performance. Analysts also noted what they described as “resilient students,” or those students who achieve at a higher level than one might expect given their social background. In Shanghai and Singapore, the proportion of resilient students is about 70 percent. In the United States, it is below 30 percent. These insights suggest that the United States’ educational system may be on a descending path that could detrimentally affect the country’s economy and its social landscape (National Public Radio 2010).

Making Connections: the Big Picture

Education in Finland

With public education in the United States under such intense criticism, why is it that Singapore, South Korea, and especially Finland (which is culturally most similar to us), have such excellent public education? Over the course of thirty years, the country has pulled itself from among the lowest rankings by the Organization of Economic Cooperation (OEDC) to first in 2012, and remains, as of 2014, in the top five. Contrary to the rigid curriculum and long hours demanded of students in South Korea and Singapore, Finnish education often seems paradoxical to outside observers because it appears to break a lot of the rules we take for granted. It is common for children to enter school at seven years old, and children will have more recess and less hours in school than U.S. children—approximately 300 less hours. Their homework load is light when compared to all other industrialized nations (nearly 300 fewer hours per year in elementary school). There are no gifted programs, almost no private schools, and no high-stakes national standardized tests (Laukkanen 2008; LynNell Hancock 2011).

Prioritization is different than in the United States. There is an emphasis on allocating resources for those who need them most, high standards, support for special needs students, qualified teachers taken from the top 10 percent of the nation's graduates and who must earn a Master's degree, evaluation of education, balancing decentralization and centralization.

"We used to have a system which was really unequal," stated the Finnish Education Chief in an interview. "My parents never had a real possibility to study and have a higher education. We decided in the 1960s that we would provide a free quality education to all. Even universities are free of charge. Equal means that we support everyone and we’re not going to waste anyone’s skills." As for teachers, "We don’t test our teachers or ask them to prove their knowledge. But it’s true that we do invest in a lot of additional teacher training even after they become teachers" (Gross-Loh 2014).

Yet over the past decade Finland has consistently performed among the top nations on the PISA. Finland’s school children didn’t always excel. Finland built its excellent, efficient, and equitable educational system in a few decades from scratch, and the concept guiding almost every educational reform has been equity. The Finnish paradox is that by focusing on the bigger picture for all, Finland has succeeded at fostering the individual potential of most every child.

"We created a school system based on equality to make sure we can develop everyone’s potential. Now we can see how well it’s been working. Last year the OECD tested adults from twenty-four countries measuring the skill levels of adults aged sixteen to sixty-five on a survey called the PIAAC (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies), which tests skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Finland scored at or near the top on all measures."

Formal and Informal Education

As already mentioned, education is not solely concerned with the basic academic concepts that a student learns in the classroom. Societies also educate their children, outside of the school system, in matters of everyday practical living. These two types of learning are referred to as formal education and informal education.

Formal education describes the learning of academic facts and concepts through a formal curriculum. Arising from the tutelage of ancient Greek thinkers, centuries of scholars have examined topics through formalized methods of learning. Education in earlier times was only available to the higher classes; they had the means for access to scholarly materials, plus the luxury of leisure time that could be used for learning. The Industrial Revolution and its accompanying social changes made education more accessible to the general population. Many families in the emerging middle class found new opportunities for schooling.

The modern U.S. educational system is the result of this progression. Today, basic education is considered a right and responsibility for all citizens. Expectations of this system focus on formal education, with curricula and testing designed to ensure that students learn the facts and concepts that society believes are basic knowledge.

In contrast, **informal education** describes learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors by participating in a society. This type of learning occurs both through the formal education system and at home. Our earliest learning experiences generally happen via parents, relatives, and others in our community. Through informal education, we learn how to dress for different occasions, how to perform regular life routines like shopping for and preparing food, and how to keep our bodies clean.

Figure 16.4 Parents teaching their children to cook provide an informal education. (Photo courtesy of eyeliam/flickr)

Cultural transmission refers to the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture. Both informal and formal education include cultural transmission. For example, a student will learn about cultural aspects of modern history in a U.S. History classroom. In that same classroom, the student might learn the cultural norm for asking a classmate out on a date through passing notes and whispered conversations.

Access to Education

Another global concern in education is **universal access**. This term refers to people's equal ability to participate in an education system. On a world level, access might be more difficult for certain groups based on class or gender (as was the case in the United States earlier in the nation's history, a dynamic we still struggle to overcome). The modern idea of universal access arose in the United States as a concern for people with disabilities. In the United States, one way in which universal education is supported is through federal and state governments covering the cost of free public education. Of course, the way this plays out in terms of school budgets and taxes makes this an often-contested topic on the national, state, and community levels.

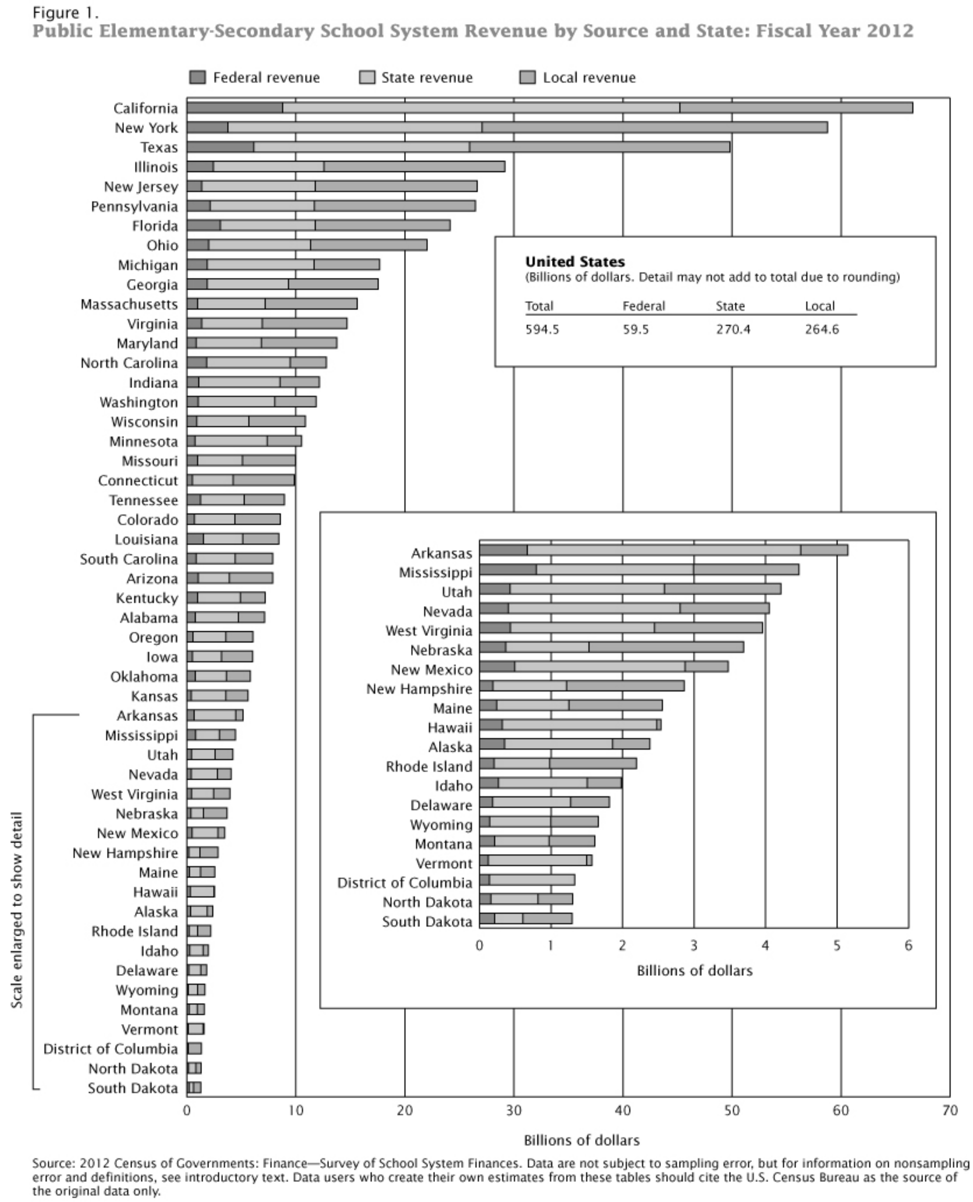

Figure 16.5 How has your state's revenue affected your educational opportunities? (Graph courtesy of Census of Governments: Survey of School System Finances 2012)

A precedent for universal access to education in the United States was set with the 1972 U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia's decision in *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*. This case was brought on the behalf of seven school-age children with special needs who argued that the school board was denying their access to free public education. The school board maintained that the children's "exceptional" needs, which included mental retardation and mental illness, precluded their right to be educated for free in a public school setting. The board argued that the cost of educating these children would be too expensive and that the children would therefore have to remain at home without access to education.

This case was resolved in a hearing without any trial. The judge, Joseph Cornelius Waddy, upheld the students' right to education, finding that they were to be given either public education services or private education paid for by the Washington, D.C., board of education. He noted that

> Constitutional rights must be afforded citizens despite the greater expense involved … the District of Columbia's interest in educating the excluded children clearly must outweigh its interest in preserving its financial resources. … The inadequacies of the District of Columbia Public School System whether occasioned by insufficient funding or administrative inefficiency, certainly cannot be permitted to bear more heavily on the "exceptional" or handicapped child than on the normal child (*Mills v. Board of Education* 1972).

Today, the optimal way to include differently abled students in standard classrooms is still being researched and debated. “Inclusion” is a method that involves complete immersion in a standard classroom, whereas “mainstreaming” balances time in a special-needs classroom with standard classroom participation. There continues to be social debate surrounding how to implement the ideal of universal access to education.

16.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Education

While it is clear that education plays an integral role in individuals’ lives as well as society as a whole, sociologists view that role from many diverse points of view. Functionalists believe that education equips people to perform different functional roles in society. Conflict theorists view education as a means of widening the gap in social inequality. Feminist theorists point to evidence that sexism in education continues to prevent women from achieving a full measure of social equality. Symbolic interactionists study the dynamics of the classroom, the interactions between students and teachers, and how those affect everyday life. In this section, you will learn about each of these perspectives.

Functionalism

Functionalists view education as one of the more important social institutions in a society. They contend that education contributes two kinds of functions: manifest (or primary) functions, which are the intended and visible functions of education; and latent (or secondary) functions, which are the hidden and unintended functions.

Manifest Functions

There are several major manifest functions associated with education. The first is socialization. Beginning in preschool and kindergarten, students are taught to practice various societal roles. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who established the academic discipline of sociology, characterized schools as “socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles” (Durkheim 1898). Indeed, it seems that schools have taken on this responsibility in full.

This socialization also involves learning the rules and norms of the society as a whole. In the early days of compulsory education, students learned the dominant culture. Today, since the culture of the United States is increasingly diverse, students may learn a variety of cultural norms, not only that of the dominant culture.

School systems in the United States also transmit the core values of the nation through manifest functions like social control. One of the roles of schools is to teach students conformity to law and respect for authority. Obviously, such respect, given to teachers and administrators, will help a student navigate the school environment. This function also prepares students to enter the workplace and the world at large, where they will continue to be subject to people who have authority over them. Fulfillment of this function rests primarily with classroom teachers and instructors who are with students all day.

Figure 16.6 The teacher’s authority in the classroom is a way in which education fulfills the manifest functions of social control. (Photo courtesy of Tulane Public Relations/flickr)

Education also provides one of the major methods used by people for upward social mobility. This function is referred to as **social placement**. College and graduate schools are viewed as vehicles for moving students closer to the careers that will give them the financial freedom and security they seek. As a result, college students are often more motivated to study areas that they believe will be advantageous on the social ladder. A student might value business courses over a class in Victorian poetry because she sees business class as a stronger vehicle for financial success.

Latent Functions

Education also fulfills latent functions. As you well know, much goes on in a school that has little to do with formal education. For example, you might notice an attractive fellow student when he gives a particularly interesting answer in class—catching up with him and making a date speaks to the latent function of courtship fulfilled by exposure to a peer group in the educational setting.

The educational setting introduces students to social networks that might last for years and can help people find jobs after their schooling is complete. Of course, with social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, these networks are easier than ever to maintain. Another latent function is the ability to work with others in small groups, a skill that is transferable to a workplace and that might not be learned in a homeschool setting.

The educational system, especially as experienced on university campuses, has traditionally provided a place for students to learn about various social issues. There is ample opportunity for social and political advocacy, as well as the ability to develop tolerance to the many views represented on campus. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement swept across college campuses all over the United States, leading to demonstrations in which diverse groups of students were unified with the purpose of changing the political climate of the country.

Table 16.1 Manifest and Latent Functions of Education According to functionalist theory, education contributes both manifest and latent functions.

Manifest Functions: Openly stated functions with intended goals	Latent Functions: Hidden, unstated functions with sometimes unintended consequences
Socialization	Courtship
Transmission of culture	Social networks
Social control	Group work
Social placement	Creation of generation gap
Cultural innovation	Political and social integration

Functionalists recognize other ways that schools educate and enculturate students. One of the most important U.S. values students in the United States learn is that of individualism—the valuing of the individual over the value of groups or society as a whole. In countries such as Japan and China, where the good of the group is valued over the rights of the individual, students do not learn as they do in the United States that the highest rewards go to the “best” individual in academics as well as athletics. One of the roles of schools in the United States is fostering self-esteem; conversely, schools in Japan focus on fostering social esteem—the honoring of the group over the individual.

In the United States, schools also fill the role of preparing students for competition in life. Obviously, athletics foster a competitive nature, but even in the classroom students compete against one another academically. Schools also fill the role of teaching patriotism. Students recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning and take history classes where they learn about national heroes and the nation’s past.

Figure 16.7 Starting each day with the Pledge of Allegiance is one way in which students are taught patriotism. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Turner/flickr)

Another role of schools, according to functionalist theory, is that of **sorting**, or classifying students based on academic merit or potential. The most capable students are identified early in schools through testing and classroom achievements. Such students are placed in accelerated programs in anticipation of successful college attendance.

Functionalists also contend that school, particularly in recent years, is taking over some of the functions that were traditionally undertaken by family. Society relies on schools to teach about human sexuality as well as basic skills such as budgeting and job applications—topics that at one time were addressed by the family.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists do not believe that public schools reduce social inequality. Rather, they believe that the educational system reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities that arise from differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Where functionalists see education as serving a beneficial role, conflict theorists view it more negatively. To them, educational systems preserve the status quo and push people of lower status into obedience.

Figure 16.8 Conflict theorists see the education system as a means by which those in power stay in power. (Photo courtesy Thomas Ricker/flickr)

The fulfillment of one’s education is closely linked to social class. Students of low socioeconomic status are generally not afforded the same opportunities as students of higher status, no matter how great their academic ability or desire to learn. Picture a student from a working-class home who wants to do well in school. On a Monday, he’s assigned a paper that’s due Friday. Monday evening, he has to babysit his younger sister while his divorced mother works. Tuesday and Wednesday, he works stocking shelves after school until 10:00 p.m. By Thursday, the only day he might have available to work on that assignment, he’s so exhausted he can’t bring himself to start the paper. His mother, though she’d like to help him, is so tired herself that she isn’t able to give him the encouragement or support he needs. And since English is her second language, she has difficulty with some of his educational materials. They also lack a computer and printer at home, which most of his classmates have, so they have to rely on the public library or school system for access to technology. As this story shows, many students from working-class families have to contend with helping out at home, contributing financially to the family, poor study environments and a lack of support from their families. This is a difficult match with education systems that adhere to a traditional curriculum that is more easily understood and completed by students of higher social classes.

Such a situation leads to social class reproduction, extensively studied by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He researched how **cultural capital**, or cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency that helps us navigate a culture, alters the experiences and opportunities available to French students from different social classes. Members of the upper and middle classes have more cultural capital than do families of lower-class status. As a result, the educational system maintains a cycle in which the dominant culture's values are rewarded. Instruction and tests cater to the dominant culture and leave others struggling to identify with values and competencies outside their social class. For example, there has been a great deal of discussion over what standardized tests such as the SAT truly measure. Many argue that the tests group students by cultural ability rather than by natural intelligence.

The cycle of rewarding those who possess cultural capital is found in formal educational curricula as well as in the **hidden curriculum**, which refers to the type of nonacademic knowledge that students learn through informal learning and cultural transmission. This hidden curriculum reinforces the positions of those with higher cultural capital and serves to bestow status unequally.

Conflict theorists point to **tracking**, a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced versus low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities. While educators may believe that students do better in tracked classes because they are with students of similar ability and may have access to more individual attention from teachers, conflict theorists feel that tracking leads to self-fulfilling prophecies in which students live up (or down) to teacher and societal expectations (Education Week 2004).

To conflict theorists, schools play the role of training working-class students to accept and retain their position as lower members of society. They argue that this role is fulfilled through the disparity of resources available to students in richer and poorer neighborhoods as well as through testing (Lauen and Tyson 2008).

IQ tests have been attacked for being biased—for testing cultural knowledge rather than actual intelligence. For example, a test item may ask students what instruments belong in an orchestra. To correctly answer this question requires certain cultural knowledge—knowledge most often held by more affluent people who typically have more exposure to orchestral music. Though experts in testing claim that bias has been eliminated from tests, conflict theorists maintain that this is impossible. These tests, to conflict theorists, are another way in which education does not provide opportunities, but instead maintains an established configuration of power.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory aims to understand the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education, as well as their societal repercussions. Like many other institutions of society, educational systems are characterized by unequal treatment and opportunity for women. Almost two-thirds of the world's 862 million illiterate people are women, and the illiteracy rate among women is expected to increase in many regions, especially in several African and Asian countries (UNESCO 2005; World Bank 2007).

Women in the United States have been relatively late, historically speaking, to be granted entry to the public university system. In fact, it wasn't until the establishment of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972 that discriminating on the basis of sex in U.S. education programs became illegal. In the United States, there is also a post-education gender disparity between what male and female college graduates earn. A study released in May 2011 showed that, among men and women who graduated from college between 2006 and 2010, men out-earned women by an average of more than $5,000 each year. First-year job earnings for men averaged $33,150; for women the average was $28,000 (Godofsky, Zukin, and van Horn 2011). Similar trends are seen among salaries of professionals in virtually all industries.

When women face limited opportunities for education, their capacity to achieve equal rights, including financial independence, are limited. Feminist theory seeks to promote women's rights to equal education (and its resultant benefits) across the world.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?

Consider a large-city newspaper publisher. Ten years ago, when culling résumés for an entry-level copywriter, they were well assured that if they selected a grad with a GPA of 3.7 or higher, they'd have someone with the writing skills to contribute to the workplace on day one. But over the last few years, they've noticed that A-level students don't have the competency evident in the past. More and more, they find themselves in the position of educating new hires in abilities that, in the past, had been mastered during their education.

This story illustrates a growing concern referred to as **grade inflation**—a term used to describe the observation that the correspondence between letter grades and the achievements they reflect has been changing (in a downward direction) over time. Put simply, what used to be considered C-level, or average, now often earns a student a B, or even an A.

Why is this happening? Research on this emerging issue is ongoing, so no one is quite sure yet. Some cite the alleged shift toward a culture that rewards effort instead of product, i.e., the amount of work a student puts in raises the grade, even if the resulting product is poor quality. Another oft-cited contributor is the pressure many of today's instructors feel to earn positive course evaluations from their students—records that can tie into teacher compensation, award of tenure, or the future career of a young grad teaching entry-level courses. The fact that these reviews are commonly posted online exacerbates this pressure.

Other studies don't agree that grade inflation exists at all. In any case, the issue is hotly debated, with many being called upon to conduct research to help us better understand and respond to this trend (National Public Radio 2004; Mansfield 2005).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism sees education as one way that labeling theory is seen in action. A symbolic interactionist might say that this labeling has a direct correlation to those who are in power and those who are labeled. For example, low standardized test scores or poor performance in a particular class often lead to a student who is labeled as a low achiever. Such labels are difficult to "shake off," which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968).

In his book *High School Confidential*, Jeremy Iverson details his experience as a Stanford graduate posing as a student at a California high school. One of the problems he identifies in his research is that of teachers applying labels that students are never able to lose. One teacher told him, without knowing he was a bright graduate of a top university, that he would never amount to anything (Iverson 2006). Iverson obviously didn't take this teacher's false assessment to heart. But when an actual seventeen-year-old student hears this from a person with authority over her, it's no wonder that the student might begin to "live down to" that label.

The labeling with which symbolic interactionists concern themselves extends to the very degrees that symbolize completion of education. **Credentialism** embodies the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications. These certificates or degrees serve as a symbol of what a person has achieved, and allows the labeling of that individual.

Indeed, as these examples show, labeling theory can significantly impact a student's schooling. This is easily seen in the educational setting, as teachers and more powerful social groups within the school dole out labels that are adopted by the entire school population.

16.3 Issues in Education

As schools strive to fill a variety of roles in their students' lives, many issues and challenges arise. Students walk a minefield of bullying, violence in schools, the results of declining funding, plus other problems that affect their education. When Americans are asked about their opinion of public education on the Gallup poll each year, reviews are mixed at best (Saad 2008). Schools are no longer merely a place for learning and socializing. With the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling in

1954, schools became a repository of much political and legal action that is at the heart of several issues in education.

Equal Education

Until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, schools had operated under the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which allowed racial segregation in schools and private businesses (the case dealt specifically with railroads) and introduced the much maligned phrase “separate but equal” into the U.S. lexicon. The 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision overruled this, declaring that state laws that had established separate schools for black and white students were, in fact, unequal and unconstitutional.

While the ruling paved the way toward civil rights, it was also met with contention in many communities. In Arkansas in 1957, the governor mobilized the state National Guard to prevent black students from entering Little Rock Central High School. President Eisenhower, in response, sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to uphold the students’ right to enter the school. In 1963, almost ten years after the ruling, Governor George Wallace of Alabama used his own body to block two black students from entering the auditorium at the University of Alabama to enroll in the school. Wallace’s desperate attempt to uphold his policy of “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,” stated during his 1963 inauguration (PBS 2000) became known as the “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door.” He refused to grant entry to the students until a general from the Alabama National Guard arrived on President Kennedy’s order.

Figure 16.9 President Eisenhower sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to escort black students into Little Rock Central High School after the governor of Arkansas tried to deny them entry. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Presently, students of all races and ethnicities are permitted into schools, but there remains a troubling gap in the equality of education they receive. The long-term socially embedded effects of racism—and other discrimination and disadvantage—have left a residual mark of inequality in the nation’s education system. Students from wealthy families and those of lower socioeconomic status do not receive the same opportunities.

Today’s public schools, at least in theory, are positioned to help remedy those gaps. Predicated on the notion of universal access, this system is mandated to accept and retain all students regardless of race, religion, social class, and the like. Moreover, public schools are held accountable to equitable per-student spending (Resnick 2004). Private schools, usually only accessible to students from high-income families, and schools in more affluent areas generally enjoy access to greater resources and better opportunities. In fact, some of the key predictors for student performance include socioeconomic status and family background. Children from families of lower socioeconomic status often enter school with learning deficits they struggle to overcome throughout their educational tenure. These patterns, uncovered in the landmark Coleman Report of 1966, are still highly relevant today, as sociologists still generally agree that there is a great divide in the performance of white students from affluent backgrounds and their nonwhite, less affluent, counterparts (Coleman 1966).

Head Start

The findings in the Coleman Report were so powerful that they brought about two major changes to education in the United States. The federal **Head Start program**, which is still active and successful today, was developed to give low-income students an opportunity to make up the preschool deficit discussed in Coleman’s findings. The program provides academic-centered preschool to students of low socioeconomic status.

Busing

The second major change brought about after the release of the Coleman Report was less successful than the Head Start program and has been the subject of a great deal of controversy. With the goal of further desegregating education, courts across the United States ordered some school districts to begin a program that became known as “busing.” This program involved bringing students to schools outside their neighborhoods (and therefore schools they would not normally have the opportunity to attend) to bring racial diversity into balance. This practice was met with a great deal of public resistance from people on both sides dissatisfied with white students traveling to inner city schools and minority students bring transported to schools in the suburbs.

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, the Bush administration passed the **No Child Left Behind Act**, which requires states to test students in designated grades. The results of those tests determine eligibility to receive federal funding. Schools that do not meet the standards set by the Act run the risk of having their funding cut. Sociologists and teachers alike have contended that the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act is far more negative than positive, arguing that a “one size fits all” concept cannot apply to education.

Teaching to the Test

The funding tie-in of the No Child Left Behind Act has led to the social phenomenon commonly called “teaching to the test,” which describes when a curriculum focuses on equipping students to succeed on standardized tests, to the detriment of broader educational goals and concepts of learning. At issue are two approaches to classroom education: the notion that teachers impart knowledge that students are obligated to absorb, versus the concept of student-centered learning that seeks to teach children not facts, but problem solving abilities and learning skills. Both types of learning have been valued in the U.S. school system. The former, to critics of “teaching to the test,” only equips students to regurgitate facts, while the latter, to proponents of the other camp, fosters lifelong learning and transferable work skills.

Bilingual Education

New issues of inequality have entered the national conversation in recent years with the issue of bilingual education, which attempts to give equal opportunity to minority students through offering instruction in languages other than English. Though it is actually an old issue (bilingual education was federally mandated in 1968), it remains one of hot debate. Supporters of bilingual education argue that all students deserve equal opportunities in education—opportunities some students cannot access without instruction in their first language. On the other side, those who oppose bilingual education often point to the need for English fluency in everyday life and in the professional world.

Common Core

"The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade." Included in the list of standards is that they be evidence-based, clear, understandable, consistent, aligned with college and career expectations, include the application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills, and are informed by other top-performing countries (The Common Core State Standards Initiative 2014).

The primary controversy over the Common Core State Standards, or simply the Common Core, from the standpoint of teachers, parents and students, and even administrators, is not so much the standards themselves, but the assessment process and the high stakes involved. Both the national teacher's unions in the United States initially agreed to them, at least in principle. But both have since become strong voices of criticism. Given a public education system that is primarily funded by local property taxes, rather than by state and federal funds distributed to all schools equally, we see a wide disparity of funding per student throughout the country, with the result that students in schools funded by well-to-do communities are clearly better off than those who are not, sometimes only a few miles away.

What gets measured?

Much has been said about the quality, usefulness, and even accuracy of many of the standardized tests. Math questions have been found to be misleading and poorly phrased; for instance, “Tyler made 36 total snowfalls with is a multiple of how triangular snowflakes he made. How many triangular snowflakes could he have made?”

Some of the essays had questions that made little sense to the students. One notable test question in 2014 that dominated the Internet for a time was about "The Hare and the Pineapple." This was a parody on the well-known Aesop fable of the race between the hare and the tortoise that appeared on a standardized test for New York's eighth-grade exam, with the tortoise changed into a talking pineapple. With the pineapple clearly unable to participate in a race and the hare winning, "the animals ate the pineapple." "Moral: Pineapples don’t have sleeves."

At the end of the story, questions for the student included, "Which animal spoke the wisest words?" and "Why did the animals eat the talking fruit?"

Charter Schools

Charter schools are self-governing public schools that have signed agreements with state governments to improve students when poor performance is revealed on tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act. While such schools receive public money, they are not subject to the same rules that apply to regular public schools. In return, they make agreements to achieve specific results. Charter schools, as part of the public education system, are free to attend, and are accessible via lottery when there are more students seeking enrollment than there are spots available at the school. Some charter schools specialize in certain fields, such as the arts or science, while others are more generalized.

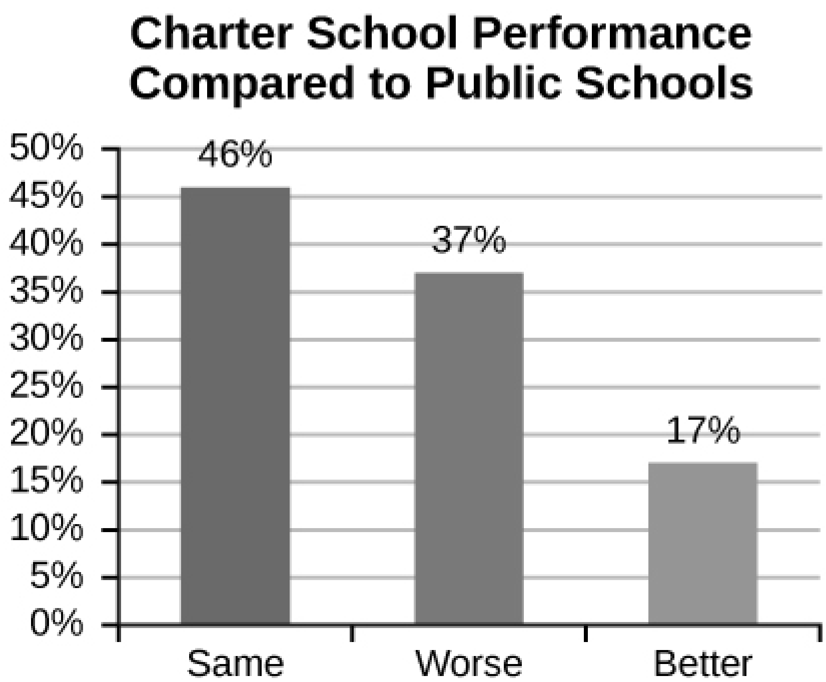

Figure 16.10 The debate over the performance of charter schools vs. public schools is a charged one. Dozens of studies have been made on the topic, and some, as reflected in Stanford's CREDO study above, do not support the claim that charter schools always outperform public schools. (Source: Based on the CREDO study Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States)

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Money as Motivation in Charter Schools

Public school teachers typically find stability, comprehensive benefits packages, and long-term job security. In 2011, one charter school in New York City set out to learn if teachers would give up those protections if it meant an opportunity to make much more money than the typical teacher’s salary. The Equity Project is a privately run charter school that offered teachers positions paying $125,000 per year (more than twice the average salary for teachers). The school’s founder and principal, Zeke Vanderhoek, explained that this allows him to attract the best and brightest teachers to his school—to decide whom he hires and how much they are paid—and build a school where “every teacher is a great teacher” (CBS News 2011). He sees attracting top teachers as a direct road to student achievement. A nationwide talent search resulted in the submission of thousands of applications. The final round of interviews consisted of a day-long trial run. The school looks for teachers who can show evidence of student growth and achievement. They also must be highly engaging.

The majority of students at the school are African American and Hispanic, from poor families, and reading below grade level. The school faces the challenge faced by schools all over the United States: getting poor, disadvantaged students to perform at the same level as their more affluent counterparts. Vanderhoek believes his team of dream teachers can help students close their learning gaps by several grade levels within one year.

This is not an affluent school. It is publicly funded and classes are held in trailers. Most of the school's budget goes into the teachers' salaries. There are no reading or math aides; those roles are filled by the regular classroom teachers.

The experiment may be working. Students who were asked how they feel about their education at The Equity Project said that their teachers care if they succeed and give them the attention they need to achieve at high levels. They cite the feeling that their teachers believe in them as a major reason for liking school for the first time.

Of course, with the high salary comes high risk. Most public schools offer contracts to teachers. Those contracts guarantee job security. But The Equity Project is an at-will employer. Those who don't meet the standards set by the school will lose their jobs. Vanderhoek does not believe in teacher tenure, which he feels gives teachers "a job for life no matter how they perform" (CBS News 2011). With a teaching staff of roughly fifteen, he terminated two teachers after the first year. In comparison, in New York City as a whole, only seven teachers out of 55,000 with tenure have been terminated for poor performance.

One of those two teachers who was let go said she was relieved, citing eighty- to ninety-hour work weeks and a decline in the quality of her family life. Meanwhile, there is some question as to whether the model is working. On one hand, there are individual success stories, such as a student whose reading skills increased two grade levels in a single year. On the other, there is the fact that on the state math and reading exams taken by all fifth graders, the Equity Project students remained out-scored by other district schools (CBS News 2011). Do charter schools actually work? A Stanford CREDO study in 2009 found "there is a wide variance in the quality of the nation's several thousand charter schools with, in the aggregate, students in charter schools not faring as well as students in traditional public schools" (CREDO 2009).

Teacher Training

Schools face an issue of teacher effectiveness, in that most high school teachers perceive students as being prepared for college, while most college professors do not see those same students as prepared for the rigors of collegiate study. Some feel that this is due to teachers being unprepared to teach. Many teachers in the United States teach subject matter that is outside their own field of study. This is not the case in many European and Asian countries. Only eight percent of United States fourth-grade math teachers majored or minored in math, compared with 48 percent in Singapore. Further, students in disadvantaged American schools are 77 percent more likely to be educated by a teacher who didn't specialize in the subject matter than students who attend schools in affluent neighborhoods (Holt, McGrath, and Seastrom 2006).

Social Promotion

Social promotion is another issue identified by sociologists. This is the concept of passing students to the next grade regardless of their meeting standards for that grade. Critics of this practice argue that students should never move to the next grade if they have not mastered the skills required to "graduate" from the previous grade. Proponents of the practice question what a school is to do with a student who is three to four years older than other students in his or her grade, saying this creates more issues than the practice of social promotion.

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action has been a subject of debate, primarily as it relates to the admittance of college students. Opponents suggest that, under affirmative action, minority students are given greater weighted priorities for admittance. Supporters of affirmative action point to the way in which it grants opportunities to students who are traditionally done a disservice in the college admission process.

Rising Student Loan Debt

In a growing concern, the amount of college loan debt that students are taking on is creating a new social challenge. As of 2010, the debts of students with student loans averaged $25,250 upon graduation, leaving students hard-pressed to repay their education while earning entry-level wages, even at the professional level (Lewin 2011). With the increase in unemployment since the 2008 recession, jobs are scarce and make this burden more pronounced. As recent grads find themselves unable to meet their financial obligations, all of society is affected.

Home Schooling

Homeschooling refers to children being educated in their own homes, typically by a parent, instead of in a traditional public or private school system. Proponents of this type of education argue that it provides an outstanding opportunity for student-centered learning while circumventing problems that plague today’s education system. Opponents counter that homeschooled children miss out on the opportunity for social development that occurs in standard classroom environments and school settings.

Proponents say that parents know their own children better than anyone else and are thus best equipped to teach them. Those on the other side of the debate assert that childhood education is a complex task and requires the degree teachers spend four years earning. After all, they argue, a parent may know her child’s body better than anyone, yet she seeks out a doctor for her child’s medical treatment. Just as a doctor is a trained medical expert, teachers are trained education experts.

The National Center for Education Statistics shows that the quality of the national education system isn’t the only major concern of homeschoolers. While nearly half cite their reason for homeschooling as the belief that they can give their child a better education than the school system can, just under 40 percent choose homeschooling for “religious reasons” (NCES 2008).

To date, researchers have not found consensus in studies evaluating the success, or lack thereof, of homeschooling.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

credentialism: the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications

cultural capital: cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency to help one navigate a culture

cultural transmission: the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture

education: a social institution through which a society’s children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms

formal education: the learning of academic facts and concepts

grade inflation: the idea that the achievement level associated with an A today is notably lower than the achievement level associated with A-level work a few decades ago

Head Start program: a federal program that provides academically focused preschool to students of low socioeconomic status

hidden curriculum: the type of nonacademic knowledge that people learn through informal learning and cultural transmission

informal education: education that involves learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors through participation in a society

No Child Left Behind Act: an act that requires states to test students in prescribed grades, with the results of those tests determining eligibility to receive federal funding

social placement: the use of education to improve one's social standing

sorting: classifying students based on academic merit or potential

tracking: a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced, low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities

universal access: the equal ability of all people to participate in an education system

Section Summary

16.1 Education around the World

Educational systems around the world have many differences, though the same factors—including resources and money—affect every educational system. Educational distribution is a major issue in many nations, including in the United States, where the amount of money spent per student varies greatly by state. Education happens through both formal and informal systems; both foster cultural transmission. Universal access to education is a worldwide concern.

16.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Education

The major sociological theories offer insight into how we understand education. Functionalists view education as an important social institution that contributes both manifest and latent functions. Functionalists see education as serving the needs of society by preparing students for later roles, or functions, in society. Conflict theorists see schools as a means for perpetuating class, racial-ethnic, and gender inequalities. In the same vein, feminist theory focuses specifically on the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education. The theory of symbolic interactionism focuses on education as a means for labeling individuals.

16.3 Issues in Education

As schools continue to fill many roles in the lives of students, challenges arise. Historical issues include the racial desegregation of schools, marked by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling. In today's diverse educational landscape, socioeconomic status and diversity remain at the heart of issues in education, with programs such as the Head Start program attempting to give students equal footing. Other educational issues that impact society include charter schools, teaching to the test, student loan debt, and homeschooling.

One hot topic is the Common Core State Standards, or the Common Core. The primary controversy over the Common Core, from the standpoint of teachers, parents and students, and even administrators, is not so much the standards themselves, but the assessment process and the high stakes involved

Section Quiz

16.1 Education around the World

1. What are the major factors that affect education systems throughout the world?
  a. Resources and money
  b. Student interest
  c. Teacher interest
  d. Transportation

2. What do nations that are top-ranked in science and math have in common?
  a. They are all in Asia.
  b. They recruit top teachers.
  c. They spend more money per student.
  d. They use cutting-edge technology in classrooms.

3. Informal education _________________.
  a. describes when students teach their peers
  b. refers to the learning of cultural norms
  c. only takes place at home
  d. relies on a planned instructional process

4. Learning from classmates that most students buy lunch on Fridays is an example of ________.
  a. cultural transmission
  b. educational access

c. formal education
d. informal education

5. The 1972 case *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* set a precedent for __________.
a. access to education
b. average spending on students
c. desegregation of schools
d. teacher salary

16.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Education

6. Which of the following is *not* a manifest function of education?
a. Cultural innovation
b. Courtship
c. Social placement
d. Socialization

7. Because she plans on achieving success in marketing, Tammie is taking courses on managing social media. This is an example of ________.
a. cultural innovation
b. social control
c. social placement
d. socialization

8. Which theory of education focuses on the ways in which education maintains the status quo?
a. Conflict theory
b. Feminist theory
c. Functionalist theory
d. Symbolic interactionism

9. Which theory of education focuses on the labels acquired through the educational process?
a. Conflict theory
b. Feminist theory
c. Functionalist theory
d. Symbolic interactionism

10. What term describes the assignment of students to specific education programs and classes on the basis of test scores, previous grades, or perceived ability?
a. Hidden curriculum
b. Labeling
c. Self-fulfilling prophecy
d. Tracking

11. Functionalist theory sees education as serving the needs of _________.
a. families
b. society
c. the individual
d. all of the above

12. Rewarding students for meeting deadlines and respecting authority figures is an example of ________.
a. a latent function
b. a manifest function
c. informal education
d. transmission of moral education

13. What term describes the separation of students based on merit?
a. Cultural transmission
b. Social control
c. Sorting
d. Hidden curriculum

14. Conflict theorists see sorting as a way to ________.
a. challenge gifted students
b. perpetuate divisions of socioeconomic status
c. help students who need additional support
d. teach respect for authority

15. Conflict theorists see IQ tests as being biased. Why?

a. They are scored in a way that is subject to human error.
b. They do not give children with learning disabilities a fair chance to demonstrate their true intelligence.
c. They don't involve enough test items to cover multiple intelligences.
d. They reward affluent students with questions that assume knowledge associated with upper-class culture.

16.3 Issues in Education

16. *Plessy v. Ferguson* set the precedent that ______________.

a. racial segregation in schools was allowed
b. separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional
c. students do not have a right to free speech in public schools
d. students have a right to free speech in public schools

17. Public schools must guarantee that ____________.

a. all students graduate from high school
b. all students receive an equal education
c. per-student spending is equitable
d. the amount spent on each student is equal to that spent regionally

18. Key predictors for student success include _____________.

a. how many school-age siblings the student has
b. socioeconomic status and family background
c. the age of the student when she or he enters kindergarten
d. how many students attend the school

19. Allowing a student to move to the next grade regardless of whether or not they have met the requirements for that grade is called _____________.

a. affirmative action
b. social control
c. social promotion
d. socialization

Short Answer

16.1 Education around the World

1. Has there ever been a time when your formal and informal educations in the same setting were at odds? How did you overcome that disconnect?

2. Do you believe free access to schools has achieved its intended goal? Explain.

16.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Education

3. Thinking of your school, what are some ways that a conflict theorist would say that your school perpetuates class differences?

4. Which sociological theory best describes your view of education? Explain why.

5. Based on what you know about symbolic interactionism and feminist theory, what do you think proponents of those theories see as the role of the school?

16.3 Issues in Education

6. Is busing a reasonable method of serving students from diverse backgrounds? If not, suggest and support an alternative.

Further Research

16.1 Education around the World

Though it's a struggle, education is continually being improved in the developing world. To learn how educational programs are being fostered worldwide, explore the Education section of the Center for Global Development's website: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_global_development (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_global_development)

16.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Education

Can tracking actually improve learning? This 2009 article from *Education Next* explores the debate with evidence from Kenya. http://openstaxcollege.org/l/education_next (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/education_next)

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) is committed to ending the bias and other flaws seen in standardized testing. Their mission is to ensure that students, teachers, and schools are evaluated fairly. You can learn more about their mission, as well as the latest in news on test bias and fairness, at their website: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/fair_test (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/fair_test)

16.3 Issues in Education

Whether or not students in public schools are entitled to free speech is a subject of much debate. In the public school system, there can be a clash between the need for a safe learning environment and the guarantee to free speech granted to U.S. citizens. You can learn more about this complicated issue at the Center for Public Education. http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_public_education (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_public_education)

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1 A **2** B **3** B **4** A **5** A **6** B **7** C **8** A **9** D **10** D **11**
D **12** D **13** C **14** B **15** D **16** A **17** C **18** B **19** C

17 Government and Politics

Figure 17.1 In 2011, thousands of Egyptian citizens demonstrated in the streets and protested political repression by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (Photo courtesy of Jonathan Rashad/flickr)

Learning Objectives

17.1. Power and Authority
- Define and differentiate between power and authority
- Identify and describe the three types of authority

17.2. Forms of Government
- Define common forms of government, such as monarchy, oligarchy, dictatorship, and democracy
- Compare common forms of government and identify real-life examples of each

17.3. Politics in the United States
- Explain the significance of “one person, one vote” in determining U.S. policy
- Discuss how voter participation affects politics in the United States
- Explore the influence of race, gender, and class issues on the voting process

17.4. Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power
- Understand how functionalists, conflict theorists, and interactionists view government and politics

Introduction to Government and Politics

Hosni Mubarak had been the President of Egypt for nearly thirty years when massive public uprisings caused him to step down in 2011. Gaining the presidency in 1981 when President Anwar Sadat was assassinated, Mubarak had maintained his regime through a series of “monopoly” elections in which he was the only candidate. Popular unrest first drew significant notice in 2004, and by early 2011 thousands of Egyptians had begun protesting political oppression through demonstrations in the streets of several Egyptian cities, including the capital city of Cairo. There was sporadic violence between demonstrators and the military, but eventually Mubarak resigned and left the country. Within a year, a free, multicandidate election was held in Egypt.

The "Arab Spring" refers to a series of uprisings in various countries throughout the Middle East, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Syria, Tunisia, Qatar, and Yemen. The extent of protest has varied widely among these countries, as have the outcomes, but all were based on popular uprisings of the people, who were dissatisfied with their respective government leaders but were unable to create change by less extreme methods. In countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, revolution did involve some violence, but relatively less than in other Middle Eastern countries. In Libya, the repressive regime of Muammar Gaddafi was brought to an end after forty-two years. The number of causalities reported differs depending on the source; the exact number is still unknown, but it is estimated to be in the thousands.

17.1 Power and Authority

Figure 17.2 The White House, one of the world's most widely recognized state buildings, symbolizes the authority of the U.S. presidency. (Courtesy U.S. National Archives/Wikimedia Commons)

Despite the differences between government systems in the Middle East and the United States, their governments play the same fundamental role: in some fashion, they exert control over the people they govern. The nature of that control—what we will define as power and authority—is an important feature of society.

Sociologists have a distinctive approach to studying governmental power and authority that differs from the perspective of political scientists. For the most part, political scientists focus on studying how power is distributed in different types of political systems. They would observe, for example, that the United States' political system is divided into three distinct branches (legislative, executive, and judicial), and they would explore how public opinion affects political parties, elections, and the political process in general. Sociologists, however, tend to be more interested in the influences of governmental power on society and in how social conflicts arise from the distribution of power. Sociologists also examine how the use of power affects local, state, national, and global agendas, which in turn affect people differently based on status, class, and socioeconomic standing.

What Is Power?

Figure 17.3 Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was one of the most powerful and destructive dictators in modern history. He is pictured here with fascist Benito Mussolini of Italy. (Photo courtesy of U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

For centuries, philosophers, politicians, and social scientists have explored and commented on the nature of power. Pittacus (c. 640–568 B.C.E.) opined, “The measure of a man is what he does with power,” and Lord Acton perhaps more famously asserted, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely” (1887). Indeed, the concept of power can have decidedly negative connotations, and the term itself is difficult to define.

Many scholars adopt the definition developed by German sociologist Max Weber, who said that **power** is the ability to exercise one’s will over others (Weber 1922). Power affects more than personal relationships; it shapes larger dynamics like social groups, professional organizations, and governments. Similarly, a government’s power is not necessarily limited to control of its own citizens. A dominant nation, for instance, will often use its clout to influence or support other governments or to seize control of other nation states. Efforts by the U.S. government to wield power in other countries have included joining with other nations to form the Allied forces during World War II, entering Iraq in 2002 to topple Saddam Hussein’s regime, and imposing sanctions on the government of North Korea in the hopes of constraining its development of nuclear weapons.

Endeavors to gain power and influence do not necessarily lead to violence, exploitation, or abuse. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, for example, commanded powerful movements that effected positive change without military force. Both men organized nonviolent protests to combat corruption and injustice and succeeded in inspiring major reform. They relied on a variety of nonviolent protest strategies such as rallies, sit-ins, marches, petitions, and boycotts.

Modern technology has made such forms of nonviolent reform easier to implement. Today, protesters can use cell phones and the Internet to disseminate information and plans to masses of protesters in a rapid and efficient manner. In the Arab Spring uprisings, for example, Twitter feeds and other social media helped protesters coordinate their movements, share ideas, and bolster morale, as well as gain global support for their causes. Social media was also important in getting accurate accounts of the demonstrations out to the world, in contrast to many earlier situations in which government control of the media censored news reports. Notice that in these examples, the users of power were the citizens rather than the governments. They found they had power because they were able to exercise their will over their own leaders. Thus, government power does not necessarily equate to absolute power.

Figure 17.4 Young people and students were among the most ardent supporters of democratic reform in the recent Arab Spring. Social media also played an important role in rallying grassroots support. (Photo courtesy of cjb22/flickr)

Making Connections: the Big Picture

Social Media as a Terrorist Tool

British aid worker, Alan Henning, was the fourth victim of the Islamic State (known as ISIS or ISIL) to be beheaded before video cameras in a recording titled, “Another Message to America and Its Allies,” which was posted on YouTube and pro-Islamic state Twitter feeds in the fall of 2014. Henning was captured during his participation in a convoy taking medical supplies to a hospital in conflict-ravaged northern Syria. His death was publicized via social media, as were the earlier beheadings of U.S. journalists Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff and British aid worker David Haines. The terrorist groups also used social media to demand an end to intervention in the Middle East by U.S., British, French, and Arab forces.

An international coalition, led by the United States, has been formed to combat ISIS in response to this series of publicized murders. France and the United Kingdom, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Belgium are seeking government approval through their respective parliaments to participate in airstrikes. The specifics of target locations are a key point, however, and they emphasize the delicate and political nature of current conflict in the region. Due to perceived national interest and geopolitical dynamics, Britain and France are more willing to be a part of airstrikes on ISIS targets in Iran and likely to avoid striking targets in Syria. Several Arab nations are a part of the coalition, including Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey, another NATO member, has not announced involvement in airstrikes, presumably because ISIS is holding forty-nine Turkish citizens hostage.

U.S. intervention in Libya and Syria is controversial, and it arouses debate about the role of the United States in world affairs, as well as the practical need for, and outcome of, military action in the Middle East. Experts and the U.S. public alike are weighing the need for fighting terrorism in its current form of the Islamic State and the bigger issue of helping to restore peace in the Middle East. Some consider ISIS a direct and growing threat to the United States if left unchecked. Others believe U.S. intervention unnecessarily worsens the Middle East situation and prefer that resources be used at home rather than increasing military involvement in an area of the world where they believe the United States has intervened long enough.

Types of Authority

The protesters in Tunisia and the civil rights protesters of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s day had influence apart from their position in a government. Their influence came, in part, from their ability to advocate for what many people held as important values. Government leaders might have this kind of influence as well, but they also have the advantage of wielding power associated with their position in the government. As this example indicates, there is more than one type of authority in a community.

Authority refers to accepted power—that is, power that people agree to follow. People listen to authority figures because they feel that these individuals are worthy of respect. Generally speaking, people perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable and beneficial, or true.

A citizen’s interaction with a police officer is a good example of how people react to authority in everyday life. For instance, a person who sees the flashing red and blue lights of a police car in his rearview mirror usually pulls to the side of the road without hesitation. Such a driver most likely assumes that the police officer behind him serves as a legitimate source of authority and has the right to pull him over. As part of her official duties, the police officer then has the power to issue a speeding ticket if the driver was driving too fast. If the same officer, however, were to command the driver to follow her home and mow her lawn, the driver would likely protest that the officer does not have the authority to make such a request.

Not all authority figures are police officers, elected officials or government authorities. Besides formal offices, authority can arise from tradition and personal qualities. Economist and sociologist Max Weber realized this when he examined individual action as it relates to authority, as well as large-scale structures of authority and how they relate to a society’s economy. Based on this work, Weber developed a classification system for authority. His three types of authority are traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority (Weber 1922).

Table 17.1 Weber's Three Types of Authority Max Weber identified and explained three distinct types of authority:

	Traditional	Charismatic	Legal-Rational
Source of Power	Legitimized by long-standing custom	Based on a leader's personal qualities	Authority resides in the office, not the person
Leadership Style	Historic personality	Dynamic personality	Bureaucratic officials
Example	Patriarchy (traditional positions of authority)	Napoleon, Jesus Christ, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr.	U.S. presidency and Congress Modern British Parliament

Traditional Authority

According to Weber, the power of **traditional authority** is accepted because that has traditionally been the case; its legitimacy exists because it has been accepted for a long time. Britain's Queen Elizabeth, for instance, occupies a position that she inherited based on the traditional rules of succession for the monarchy. People adhere to traditional authority because they are invested in the past and feel obligated to perpetuate it. In this type of authority, a ruler typically has no real force to carry out his will or maintain his position but depends primarily on a group's respect.

A more modern form of traditional authority is **patrimonialism**, which is traditional domination facilitated by an administration and military that are purely personal instruments of the master (Eisenberg 1998). In this form of authority, all officials are personal favorites appointed by the ruler. These officials have no rights, and their privileges can be increased or withdrawn based on the caprices of the leader. The political organization of ancient Egypt typified such a system: when the royal household decreed that a pyramid be built, every Egyptian was forced to work toward its construction.

Traditional authority can be intertwined with race, class, and gender. In most societies, for instance, men are more likely to be privileged than women and thus are more likely to hold roles of authority. Similarly, members of dominant racial groups or upper-class families also win respect more readily. In the United States, the Kennedy family, which has produced many prominent politicians, exemplifies this model.

Charismatic Authority

Followers accept the power of **charismatic authority** because they are drawn to the leader's personal qualities. The appeal of a charismatic leader can be extraordinary, and can inspire followers to make unusual sacrifices or to persevere in the midst of great hardship and persecution. Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of crisis and offer innovative or radical solutions. They may even offer a vision of a new world order. Hitler's rise to power in the postwar economic depression of Germany is an example.

Charismatic leaders tend to hold power for short durations, and according to Weber, they are just as likely to be tyrannical as they are heroic. Diverse male leaders such as Hitler, Napoleon, Jesus Christ, César Chávez, Malcolm X, and Winston Churchill are all considered charismatic leaders. Because so few women have held dynamic positions of leadership throughout history, the list of charismatic female leaders is comparatively short. Many historians consider figures such as Joan of Arc, Margaret Thatcher, and Mother Teresa to be charismatic leaders.

Rational-Legal Authority

According to Weber, power made legitimate by laws, written rules, and regulations is termed **rational-legal authority**. In this type of authority, power is vested in a particular rationale, system, or ideology and not necessarily in the person who implements the specifics of that doctrine. A nation that follows a constitution applies this type of authority. On a smaller scale, you might encounter rational-legal authority in the workplace via the standards set forth in the employee handbook, which provides a different type of authority than that of your boss.

Of course, ideals are seldom replicated in the real world. Few governments or leaders can be neatly categorized. Some leaders, like Mohandas Gandhi for instance, can be considered charismatic *and* legal-rational authority figures. Similarly, a leader or government can start out exemplifying one type of authority and gradually evolve or change into another type.

17.2 Forms of Government

Figure 17.5 Former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein used fear and intimidation to keep citizens in check. (Photo courtesy of Brian Hillegas/flickr)

Most people generally agree that **anarchy**, or the absence of organized government, does not facilitate a desirable living environment for society, but it is much harder for individuals to agree upon the particulars of how a population should be governed. Throughout history, various forms of government have evolved to suit the needs of changing populations and mindsets, each with pros and cons. Today, members of Western society hold that democracy is the most just and stable form of government, although former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once declared to the House of Commons, “Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Shapiro 2006).

Monarchy

Even though people in the United States tend to be most aware of Great Britain’s royals, many other nations also recognize kings, queens, princes, princesses, and other figures with official royal titles. The power held by these positions varies from one country to another. Strictly speaking, a **monarchy** is a government in which a single person (a monarch) rules until he or she dies or abdicates the throne. Usually, a monarch claims the rights to the title by way of hereditary succession or as a result of some sort of divine appointment or calling. As mentioned above, the monarchies of most modern nations are ceremonial remnants of tradition, and individuals who hold titles in such sovereignties are often aristocratic figureheads.

A few nations today, however, are run by governments wherein a monarch has absolute or unmitigated power. Such nations are called **absolute monarchies**. Although governments and regimes are constantly changing across the global landscape, it is generally safe to say that most modern absolute monarchies are concentrated in the Middle East and Africa. The small, oil-rich nation of Oman, for instance, is an example of an absolute monarchy. In this nation, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said has ruled since the 1970s. Recently, living conditions and opportunities for Oman’s citizens have improved, but many citizens who live under the reign of an absolute ruler must contend with oppressive or unfair policies that are installed based on the unchecked whims or political agendas of that leader.

In today’s global political climate, monarchies far more often take the form of **constitutional monarchies**, governments of nations that recognize monarchs but require these figures to abide by the laws of a greater constitution. Many countries that are now constitutional monarchies evolved from governments that were once considered absolute monarchies. In most cases, constitutional monarchies, such as Great Britain and Canada, feature elected prime ministers whose leadership role is far more involved and significant than that of its titled monarchs. In spite of their limited authority, monarchs endure in such governments because people enjoy their ceremonial significance and the pageantry of their rites.

Figure 17.6 Queen Noor of Jordan is the dowager queen of this constitutional monarchy and has limited political authority. Queen Noor is American by birth, but relinquished her citizenship when she married. She is a noted global advocate for Arab-Western relations. (Photo courtesy of Skoll World Forum/flickr)

Oligarchy

The power in an **oligarchy** is held by a small, elite group. Unlike in a monarchy, members of an oligarchy do not necessarily achieve their statuses based on ties to noble ancestry. Rather, they may ascend to positions of power because of military might, economic power, or similar circumstances.

The concept of oligarchy is somewhat elusive; rarely does a society openly define itself as an oligarchy. Generally, the word carries negative connotations and conjures notions of a corrupt group whose members make unfair policy decisions in order to maintain their privileged positions. Many modern nations that claim to be democracies are really oligarchies. In fact, some prominent journalists, such as Paul Krugman, who won a Nobele laureate prize in economics, have labeled the United States an oligarchy, pointing to the influence of large corporations and Wall Street executives on U.S. policy (Krugman 2011). Other political analysts assert that all democracies are really just “elected oligarchies,” or systems in which citizens must vote for an individual who is part of a pool of candidates who come from the society’s elite ruling class (Winters 2011).

Oligarchies have existed throughout history, and today many consider Russia an example of oligarchic political structure. After the fall of communism, groups of business owners captured control of this nation’s natural resources and have used the opportunity to expand their wealth and political influence. Once an oligarchic power structure has been established, it can be very difficult for middle- and lower-class citizens to advance their socioeconomic status.

Making Connections: Social Policy & Debate

Is the United States an Oligarchy?

Figure 17.7 The American Gilded Age was one of lavish dinner parties hosted for pampered pets, such as this bejeweled pooch. (Photo courtesy of Seniju/flickr)

The American Gilded Age saw the rise and dominance of ultra-rich families such as the Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and Carnegies, and the wealthy often indulged in absurd luxuries. One example is a lavish dinner party hosted for a pampered pet dog who attended wearing a $15,000 diamond collar (PBS Online 1999). At the same time, most Americans barely scraped by, living below what was considered the poverty level.

Some scholars believe that the United States has now embarked on a second gilded age, pointing out that the “400 wealthiest American families now own more than the ‘lower’ 150 million Americans put together" (Schultz 2011), and “the top 10% of earners took in more than half of the country’s overall income in 2012, the highest proportion recorded in a century of government record keeping” (Lowery 2014).

Many of the super–rich use their economic clout to purchase more than luxury items; wealthy individuals and corporations are major political donors. Based on campaign finance reform legislation in 1971 and 2002, political campaign contributions were regulated and limited; however, the 2012 Supreme Court decision in the case of Citizen’s United versus the Federal Election Commission repealed many of those restrictions. The Court ruled that contributions of corporations and unions to Political Action Committees (PACs) are a form of free speech that cannot be abridged and so cannot be limited or disclosed. Opponents believe this is potentially a step in promoting oligarchy in the United States; the ultra-wealthy and those who control the purse strings of large corporations and unions will, in effect, be able to elect their candidate of choice through their unlimited spending power, as well as influence policy decisions, appointments to nonelected government jobs, and other forms of political power. Krugman (2011) says, “We have a society in which money is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few people, and in which that concentration of income and wealth threatens to make us a democracy in name only.”

Figure 17.8 Support from prominent Russian oligarchs propelled leader Vladimir Putin to power. (Photo courtesy of Kremlin.ru/Wikimedia Commons)

Dictatorship

Power in a **dictatorship** is held by a single person (or a very small group) that wields complete and absolute authority over a government and population. Like some absolute monarchies, dictatorships may be corrupt and seek to limit or even eradicate the liberties of the general population. Dictators use a variety of means to perpetuate their authority. Economic and military might, as well as intimidation and brutality are often foremost among their tactics; individuals are less likely to rebel when they are starving and fearful. Many dictators start out as military leaders and are conditioned to the use of violence against opposition.

Some dictators also possess the personal appeal that Max Weber identified with a charismatic leader. Subjects of such a dictator may believe that the leader has special ability or authority and may be willing to submit to his or her authority. The late Kim Jong-Il, North Korean dictator, and his successor, Kim Jong-Un, exemplify this type of charismatic dictatorship.

Some dictatorships do not align themselves with any particular belief system or ideology; the goal of this type of regime is usually limited to preserving the authority of the dictator. A **totalitarian dictatorship** is even more oppressive and attempts to control all aspects of its subjects’ lives; including occupation, religious beliefs, and number of children permitted in each family. Citizens may be forced to publicly demonstrate their faith in the regime by participating in marches and demonstrations.

Some “benevolent” dictators, such as Napoleon and Anwar Sadat, are credited with advancing their people’s standard of living or exercising a moderate amount of evenhandedness. Others grossly abuse their power. Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Cambodia’s Pol Pot, and Zimbabwe’s Robert

Mugabe, for instance, are heads of state who earned a reputation for leading through fear and intimidation.

Figure 17.9 Dictator Kim Jong-Il of North Korea was a charismatic leader of an absolute dictatorship. His followers responded emotionally to the death of their leader in 2011. (Photo courtesy of babeltrave/flickr)

Democracy

A **democracy** is a form of government that strives to provide all citizens with an equal voice, or vote, in determining state policy, regardless of their level of socioeconomic status. Another important fundamental of the democratic state is the establishment and governance of a just and comprehensive constitution that delineates the roles and responsibilities of leaders and citizens alike.

Democracies, in general, ensure certain basic rights for their citizens. First and foremost, citizens are free to organize political parties and hold elections. Leaders, once elected, must abide by the terms of the given nation's constitution and are limited in the powers they can exercise, as well as in the length of the duration of their terms. Most democratic societies also champion freedom of individual speech, the press, and assembly, and they prohibit unlawful imprisonment. Of course, even in a democratic society, the government constrains citizens' total freedom to act however they wish. A democratically elected government does this by passing laws and writing regulations that, at least ideally, reflect the will of the majority of its people.

Although the United States champions the democratic ideology, it is not a "pure" democracy. In a purely democratic society, all citizens would vote on all proposed legislation, and this is not how laws are passed in the United States. There is a practical reason for this: a pure democracy would be hard to implement. Thus, the United States is a constitution-based federal republic in which citizens elect representatives to make policy decisions on their behalf. The term **representative democracy**, which is virtually synonymous with *republic*, can also be used to describe a government in which citizens elect representatives to promote policies that favor their interests. In the United States, representatives are elected at local and state levels, and the votes of the Electoral College determine who will hold the office of president. Each of the three branches of the U.S. government—the executive, judicial, and legislative—is held in check by the other branches.

17.3 Politics in the United States

Figure 17.10 Americans' voting rights are a fundamental element of the U.S. democratic structure. (Photo courtesy of David Goehring/flickr)

When describing a nation's politics, we should define the term. We may associated the term with freedom, power, corruption, or rhetoric. Political science looks at politics as the interaction between citizens and their government. Sociology studies **politics** as a means to understand the underlying social norms and values of a group. A society's political structure and practices provide insight into the distribution of power and wealth, as well as larger philosophical and cultural beliefs. A cursory sociological analysis of U.S. politics might suggest that Americans' desire to promote equality and democracy on a theoretical level is at odds with the nation's real-life capitalist orientation.

Lincoln's famous phrase "of the people, by the people, for the people" is at the heart of the U.S. system and sums up its most essential aspect: that citizens willingly and freely elect representatives they believe will look out for their best interests. Although many Americans take free elections for granted, it is a vital foundation of any democracy. When the U.S. government was formed, however, African Americans and women were denied the right to vote. Each of these groups struggled to secure the same suffrage rights as their white male counterparts, yet this history fails to inspire some Americans to show up at the polls and cast their ballots. Problems with the democratic process, including limited voter turnout, require us to more closely examine complex social issues that influence political participation.

Voter Participation

Voter participation is essential to the success of the U.S. political system. Although many Americans are quick to complain about laws and political leadership, in any given election year roughly half the population does not vote (United States Elections Project 2010). Some years have seen even lower turnouts; in 2010, for instance, only 37.8 percent of the population participated in the electoral process (United States Elections Project 2011). Poor turnout can skew election results, particularly if one age or socioeconomic group is more diligent in its efforts to make it to the polls.

Certain voting advocacy groups work to improve turnout. Rock the Vote, for example, targets and reaches out to America's youngest potential voters to educate and equip them to share their voice at the polls. Public service promos from celebrity musicians support their cause. Native Vote is an organization that strives to inform American Indians about upcoming elections and encourages their participation. America's Hispanic population is reached out to by the National Council of La Raza, which strives to improve voter turnout among the Latino population. William Frey, author of Diversity Explosion, points out that Hispanics, Asians, and multiracial populations is expected to double in the next forty years (Balz 2014).

Race, Gender, and Class Issues

Although recent records have shown more minorities voting now than ever before, this trend is still fairly new. Historically, African Americans and other minorities have been underrepresented at the polls. Black men were not allowed to vote at all until after the Civil War, and black women gained the right to vote along with other women only with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. For years, African Americans who were brave enough to vote were discouraged by discriminatory legislation, passed in many southern states, which required poll taxes and literacy tests of prospective voters. Literacy tests were not outlawed until 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

The 1960s saw other important reforms in U.S. voting. Shortly before the Voting Rights Act was passed, the 1964 U.S. Supreme Court case *Reynolds v. Sims* changed the nature of elections. This landmark decision reaffirmed the notion of " **one person, one vote**," a concept holding that all people's votes should be counted equally. Before this decision, unequal distributions of population enabled small groups of people in sparsely populated rural areas to have as much voting power as the denser populations of urban areas. After *Reynolds v. Sims*, districts were redrawn so that they would include equal numbers of voters.

Unfortunately, in June 2013 the Supreme Court repealed several important aspects of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, ruling that southern states no longer need the stricter scrutiny that was once required to prohibit racial discrimination in voting practices in the South. Following this decision, several states moved forward with voter identification laws that had previously been banned by federal courts. Officials in Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama claim that new identification (ID) laws are needed to reduce voter fraud. Opponents point to the Department of Justice statics indicating that only twenty-six voters, of 197 million voters in federal elections, were found guilty of voter fraud between 2002 and 2005. "Contemporary voter identification laws are trying to solve a problem that hasn’t existed in over a century” (Campbell, 2012). Opponents further note that new voter ID laws disproportionately affect minorities and the poor, potentially prohibiting them from exercising their right to vote.

Evidence suggests that legal protection of voting rights does not directly translate into equal voting power. Relative to their presence in the U.S. population, women and racial/ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the U.S. Congress. White males still dominate both houses. For example, there is only a single Native American legislator currently in Congress. And until the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009, all U.S. presidents had been white men.

Like race and ethnicity, social class also has influenced voting practices. Voting rates among lower-educated, lower-paid workers are lower than for people with higher socioeconomic status that fosters a system in which people with more power and access to resources have the means to perpetuate their power. Several explanations have been offered to account for this difference (Raymond 2010). Workers in low-paying service jobs might find it harder to get to the polls because they lack flexibility in their work hours and quality daycare to look after children while they vote. Because a larger share of racial and ethnic minorities is employed in such positions, social class may be linked to race and ethnicity influencing voting rates. New requirements for specific types of voter identification in some states are likely to compound these issues, because it may take additional time away from work, as well as additional child care or transportation, for voters to get the needed IDs. The impact on minorities and the impoverished may cause a further decrease in voter participation. Attitudes play a role as well. Some people of low socioeconomic status or minority race/ethnicity doubt their vote will count or voice will be heard because they have seen no evidence of their political power in their communities. Many believe that what they already have is all they can achieve.

As suggested earlier, money can carry a lot of influence in U.S. democracy. But there are other means to make one’s voice heard. Free speech can be influential, and people can participate in the democratic system through volunteering with political advocacy groups, writing to elected officials, sharing views in a public forum such as a blog or letter to the editor, forming or joining cause-related political organizations and interest groups, participating in public demonstrations, and even running for a local office.

The Judicial System

The third branch of the U.S. government is the judicial system, which consists of local, state, and federal courts. The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States, and it has the final say on decisions about the constitutionality of laws that citizens challenge. As noted earlier, some rulings have a direct impact on the political system, such as recent decisions about voter identification and campaign financing. Other Supreme Court decisions affect different aspects of society, and they are useful for sociological study because they help us understand cultural changes. One example is a recent and highly controversial case that dealt with the religious opposition of Hobby Lobby Stores Inc. to providing employees with specific kinds of insurance mandated by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Another example is same-sex marriage cases, which were expected to be heard by the Court; however, the Court denied review of these cases in the fall of 2014. For now, the rulings of federal district courts stand, and states can continue to have differing outcomes on same-sex marriage for their citizens.

17.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

Sociologists rely on organizational frameworks or paradigms to make sense of their study of sociology; already there are many widely recognized schemas for evaluating sociological data and observations. Each paradigm looks at the study of sociology through a unique lens. The sociological examination of government and power can thus be evaluated using a variety of perspectives that help the evaluator gain a broader perspective. Functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism are a few of the more widely recognized philosophical stances in practice today.

Functionalism

According to functionalism, the government has four main purposes: planning and directing society, meeting social needs, maintaining law and order, and managing international relations. According to functionalism, all aspects of society serve a purpose.

Functionalists view government and politics as a way to enforce norms and regulate conflict. Functionalists see active social change, such as the sit-in on Wall Street, as undesirable because it forces change and, as a result, undesirable things that might have to be compensated for. Functionalists seek consensus and order in society. Dysfunction creates social problems that lead to social change. For instance, functionalists would see monetary political contributions as a way of keeping people connected to the democratic process. This would be in opposition to a conflict theorist who would see this financial contribution as a way for the rich to perpetuate their own wealth.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory focuses on the social inequalities and power difference within a group, analyzing society through this lens. Philosopher and social scientist Karl Marx was a seminal force in developing the conflict theory perspective; he viewed social structure, rather than individual personality characteristics, as the cause of many social problems, such as poverty and crime. Marx believed that conflict between groups struggling to either attain wealth and power or keep the wealth and power they had was inevitable in a capitalist society, and conflict was the only way for the underprivileged to eventually gain some measure of equality.

C. Wright Mills (1956) elaborated on some of Marx's concepts, coining the phrase **power elite** to describe what he saw as the small group of powerful people who control much of a society. Mills believed the power elite use government to develop social policies that allow them to keep their wealth. Contemporary theorist G. William Domhoff (2011) elaborates on ways in which the power elite may be seen as a subculture whose members follow similar social patterns such as joining elite clubs, attending select schools, and vacationing at a handful of exclusive destinations.

Conflict Theory in Action

Figure 17.11 Although military technology has evolved considerably over the course of history, the fundamental causes of conflict among nations remain essentially the same. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Even before there were modern nation-states, political conflicts arose among competing societies or factions of people. Vikings attacked continental European tribes in search of loot, and, later, European explorers landed on foreign shores to claim the resources of indigenous groups. Conflicts also arose among competing groups within individual sovereignties, as evidenced by the bloody French Revolution. Nearly all conflicts in the past and present, however, are spurred by basic desires: the drive to protect or gain territory and wealth, and the need to preserve liberty and autonomy.

According to sociologist and philosopher Karl Marx, such conflicts are necessary, although ugly, steps toward a more egalitarian society. Marx saw a historical pattern in which revolutionaries toppled elite power structures, after which wealth and authority became more evenly dispersed among the population, and the overall social order advanced. In this pattern of change through conflict, people tend to gain greater personal freedom and economic stability (1848).

Modern-day conflicts are still driven by the desire to gain or protect power and wealth, whether in the form of land and resources or in the form of liberty and autonomy. Internally, groups within the U.S. struggle within the system, by trying to achieve the outcomes they prefer. Political differences over budget issues, for example, led to the recent shutdown of the federal government, and alternative political groups, such as the Tea Party, are gaining a significant following.

The Arab Spring exemplifies oppressed groups acting collectively to change their governmental systems, seeking both greater liberty and greater economic equity. Some nations, such as Tunisia, have successfully transitioned to governmental change; others, like Egypt, have not yet reached consensus on a new government.

Unfortunately, the change process in some countries reached the point of active combat between the established government and the portion of the population seeking change, often called revolutionaries or rebels. Libya and Syria are two such countries; the multifaceted nature of the conflict, with several groups competing for their own desired ends, makes creation of a peaceful resolution more challenging.

Popular uprisings of citizens seeking governmental change have occurred this year in Bosnia, Brazil, Greece, Iran, Jordan, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and most recently in Hong Kong. Although much smaller in size and scope, demonstrations took place in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, where people protested the local government's handling of a controversial shooting by the police.

The internal situation in the Ukraine is compounded by military aggression from neighboring Russia, which forcibly annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a geographic region of Ukraine, in early 2014 and threatens further military action in that area. This is an example of conflict driven by a desire to gain wealth and power in the form of land and resources. The United States and the European Union are watching the developing crisis closely and have implemented economic sanctions against Russia.

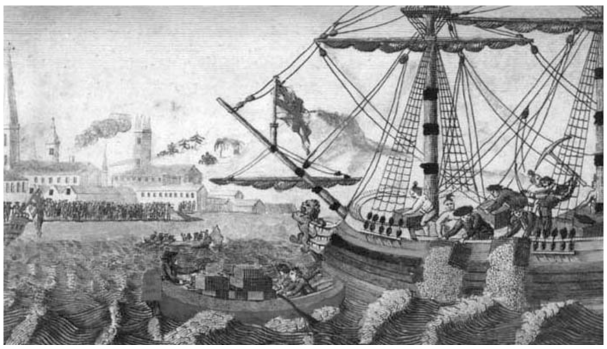

Figure 17.12 What symbols of the Boston Tea Party are represented in this painting? How might a symbolic interactionist explain the way the modern-day Tea Party has reclaimed and repurposed these symbolic meanings? (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Symbolic Interactionism

Other sociologists study government and power by relying on the framework of symbolic interactionism, which is grounded in the works of Max Weber and George H. Mead.

Symbolic interactionism, as it pertains to government, focuses its attention on figures, emblems, or individuals that represent power and authority. Many diverse entities in larger society can be considered symbolic: trees, doves, wedding rings. Images that represent the power and authority of the United States include the White House, the eagle, and the American flag. The Seal of the President of the United States, along with the office in general, incites respect and reverence in many Americans.

Symbolic interactionists are not interested in large structures such as the government. As micro-sociologists, they are more interested in the face-to-face aspects of politics. In reality, much of politics consists of face-to-face backroom meetings and lobbyist efforts. What the public often sees is the front porch of politics that is sanitized by the media through gatekeeping.

Symbolic interactionists are most interested in the interaction between these small groups who make decisions, or in the case of some recent congressional committees, demonstrate the inability to make any decisions at all. The heart of politics is the result of interaction between individuals and small groups over periods of time. These meetings produce new meanings and perspectives that individuals use to make sure there are future interactions.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

absolute monarchies: governments wherein a monarch has absolute or unmitigated power

anarchy: the absence of any organized government

authority: power that people accept because it comes from a source that is perceived as legitimate

charismatic authority: power legitimized on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities

constitutional monarchies: national governments that recognize monarchs but require these figures to abide by the laws of a greater constitution

democracy: a form of government that provides all citizens with an equal voice or vote in determining state policy

dictatorship: a form of government in which a single person (or a very small group) wields complete and absolute authority over a government or populace after the dictator rises to power, usually through economic or military might

monarchy: a form of government in which a single person (a monarch) rules until that individual dies or abdicates the throne

oligarchy: a form of government in which power is held by a small, elite group

one person, one vote: a concept holding that each person's vote should be counted equally

patrimonialism: a type of authority wherein military and administrative factions enforce the power of the master

politics: a means of studying a nation's or group's underlying social norms as values as evidenced through its political structure and practices

power elite: a small group of powerful people who control much of a society

power: the ability to exercise one's will over others

rational-legal authority: power that is legitimized by rules, regulations, and laws

representative democracy: a government wherein citizens elect officials to represent their interests

totalitarian dictatorship: an extremely oppressive form of dictatorship in which most aspects of citizens' lives are controlled by the leader

traditional authority: power legitimized on the basis of long-standing customs

Section Summary

17.1 Power and Authority

Sociologists examine government and politics in terms of their impact on individuals and larger social systems. Power is an entity or individual's ability to control or direct others, while authority is influence that is predicated on perceived legitimacy. Max Weber studied power and authority, differentiating between the two concepts and formulating a system for classifying types of authority.

17.2 Forms of Government

Nations are governed by different political systems, including monarchies, oligarchies, dictatorships, and democracies. Generally speaking, citizens of nations wherein power is concentrated in one leader or a small group are more likely to suffer violations of civil liberties and experience economic inequality. Many nations that are today organized around democratic ideals started out as monarchies or dictatorships but have evolved into more egalitarian systems. Democratic ideals, although hard to implement and achieve, promote basic human rights and justice for all citizens.

17.3 Politics in the United States

The success and validity of U.S. democracy hinges on free, fair elections that are characterized by the support and participation of diverse citizens. In spite of their importance, elections have low participation. In the past, the voice of minority groups was nearly imperceptible in elections, but recent trends have shown increased voter turnout across many minority races and ethnicities. In the past, the creation and sustenance of a fair voting process has necessitated government intervention, particularly on the legislative level. The *Reynolds v. Sims* case, with its landmark “one person, one vote” ruling, is an excellent example of such action.

17.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

Sociologists use frameworks to gain perspective on data and observations related to the study of power and government. Functionalism suggests that societal power and structure is predicated on cooperation, interdependence, and shared goals or values. Conflict theory, rooted in Marxism, asserts that societal structures are the result of social groups competing for wealth and influence. Symbolic interactionism examines a smaller realm of sociological interest: the individual’s perception of symbols of power and their subsequent reaction to the face-to-face interactions of the political realm.

Section Quiz

17.1 Power and Authority

1. Which statement best expresses the difference between power and authority?
  a. Authority involves intimidation.
  b. Authority is more subtle than power.
  c. Authority is based on the perceived legitimacy of the individual in power.
  d. Authority is inherited, but power is seized by military force.

2. Which of the following types of authority does *not* reside primarily in a leader?
  a. Dictatorial
  b. Traditional
  c. Charismatic
  d. Legal-rational

3. In the U.S. Senate, it is customary to assign each senator a seniority ranking based on years of government service and the population of the state he or she represents. A top ranking gives the senator priority for assignments to office space, committee chair positions, and seating on the senate floor. What type of authority does this example best illustrate?
  a. Dictatorial
  b. Traditional
  c. Charismatic
  d. Legal-rational

4. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his public speaking abilities and magnetism to inspire African Americans to stand up against injustice in an extremely hostile environment. He is an example of a(n) ___________ leader.
  a. traditional
  b. charismatic
  c. legal-rational
  d. illegitimate

5. Which current world figure has the least amount of political power?
  a. President Barack Obama
  b. Queen Elizabeth II
  c. British Prime Minister David Cameron
  d. North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un

6. Which statement best expresses why there have been so few charismatic female leaders throughout history?
  a. Women have different leadership styles than men.
  b. Women are not interested in leading at all.
  c. Few women have had the opportunity to hold leadership roles over the courseof history.
  d. Male historians have refused to acknowledge the contributions of female leaders in their records.

17.2 Forms of Government

7. Many constitutional monarchies started out as:
  a. oligarchies
  b. absolute monarchies
  c. dictatorships
  d. democracies

8. Which nation is an absolute monarchy?
  a. Oman
  b. Great Britain
  c. Denmark
  d. Australia

9. Which of the following present and former government leaders is generally considered a dictator?
  a. David Cameron
  b. Barack Obama
  c. Qaboos bin Said Al Said
  d. Kim Jong-Un

10. A(n) _________________ is an extremely oppressive government that seeks to control all aspects of its citizens' lives.
  a. oligarchy
  b. totalitarian dictatorship
  c. anarchy
  d. absolute monarchy

11. Which is *not* a characteristic of a democracy?
  a. People vote to elect officials.
  b. A king or queen holds the majority of governmental control.
  c. One goal of this type of government is to protect citizens' basic rights.
  d. A constitution typically outlines the foundational ideas of how this government should operate.

12. Which statement best expresses why the United States is not a true democracy?
  a. Many politicians are corrupt.
  b. Special-interest groups fund political campaigns.
  c. Citizens elect representatives who vote on their behalf to make policy.
  d. Ancient Greece was the only true democracy.

17.3 Politics in the United States

13. In the past, Southern states discouraged African Americans from voting by requiring them to take a _____________________ test.
  a. blood
  b. literacy
  c. lie detector
  d. citizenship

14. Which president signed the Voting Rights Act?
  a. Lyndon Johnson
  b. John F. Kennedy Jr.
  c. Barack Obama
  d. Franklin D. Roosevelt

15. Which factor does not influence voting practices?
  a. Race
  b. Social class
  c. Ethnicity
  d. Voting booths

16. The U.S. Supreme Court case ________________ led to the revision of voting districts to account for differences in population density.

a. *Roe v. Wade*
b. *Reynolds v. Sims*
c. *Brown v. Board of Education*
d. *Marbury v. Madison*

17. Which statement best explains the meaning of “one person, one vote”?

a. One person should not be allowed to vote twice.
b. A voter deserves one chance to vote.
c. A voter should vote only once a year.
d. All people's votes should count equally.

17.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

18. Which concept corresponds best to functionalism?

a. Happiness
b. Interdependence
c. Revolution
d. Symbolism

19. Which sociologist is not associated with conflict theory?

a. C. Wright Mills
b. G. William Domhoff
c. Karl Marx
d. George H. Mead

20. Karl Marx believed social structures evolve through:

a. supply and demand
b. enlightenment
c. conflict
d. cooperation

21. The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street protests, and the Tea Party movement have the following in common:

a. They sought to destroy central government.
b. They are examples of conflict theory in action.
c. They can only occur in a representative democracy.
d. They used violence as the means of achieving their goals.

22. Which is not one of functionalism’s four main purposes of government?

a. Maintaining law and order
b. Meeting social needs
c. Equally distributing resources
d. Planning and directing society

23. Sociologist G. William Domhoff’s *Who Rules America?* asserts that wealth is often necessary to exert the most influence over social and political systems. This is a ____ perspective.

a. conflict theory
b. symbolic interactionist
c. functionalist
d. feminist

24. Which of the following paradigms would consider movements such as Occupy Wall Street undesirable and unnecessarily forcing social change?

a. Symbolic interactionism
b. Functionalism
c. Feminism
d. Conflict theory

Short Answer

17.1 Power and Authority

1. Explain why leaders as divergent as Hitler and Jesus Christ are both categorized as charismatic authorities.

2. Why do people accept traditional authority figures even though these types of leaders have limited means of enforcing their power?

3. Charismatic leaders are among the most fascinating figures in history. Select a charismatic leader about whom you wish to learn more and conduct online research to find out about this individual. Then write a paragraph describing the personal qualities that led to this person's influence, considering the society in which he or she emerged.

17.2 Forms of Government

4. Do you feel the United States has become an oligarchy? Why, or why not?

5. Explain how an absolute monarchy differs from a dictatorship.

6. In which form of government do average citizens have the least political power? What options might they have for exerting political power under this type of regime?

17.3 Politics in the United States

7. If the percentage of Asian Americans in Congress is far below the percentage of Asian Americans in the United States, does that mean Asian Americans lack political power? Why or why not?

8. Explain how a voter's social class can affect his or her voting practices.

9. Besides voting, how can U.S. citizens influence political processes and outcomes? Which of these strategies have you personally used?

17.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

10. What is one criticism of functionalism?

11. Explain what is meant by the term *power elite*. Consider its original intention as coined by C. Wright Mills as well as your understanding of it.

Further Research

17.1 Power and Authority

Want to learn more about sociologists at work in the real world? Read this blog posting to learn more about the roles sociology scholars played in the midst of the Arab Spring uprising: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology_Arab_Spring (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology_Arab_Spring)

17.2 Forms of Government

The Tea Party is among the highest-profile grassroots organizations active in U.S. politics today. What is its official platform? Examine the Tea Party website to find out more information at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/2eTeaPartygov (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/2eTeaPartygov) .

17.3 Politics in the United States

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was preceded by Lyndon Johnson's signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Both articles were instrumental in establishing equal rights for African Americans. Check out Cornell University's website on this topic to learn more about this civil rights legislation: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell_civil_rights (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell_civil_rights)

17.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

Functionalism is a complex philosophical theory that pertains to a variety of disciplines beyond sociology. Visit the entry devoted to this intriguing topic on Stanford University's *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a more comprehensive overview: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford_functionalism (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford_functionalism)

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1 C **2** D **3** B **4** B **5** B **6** C **7** B **8** A **9** D **10** B **11** B **12**
C **13** B **14** A **15** D **16** B **17** D **18** B **19** D **20** C **21** B **22**
C **23** A **24** B

18 Work and the Economy

Figure 18.1 Today, employees are working harder than ever in offices and other places of employement. (Photo courtesy of Juhan Sonin/flickr)

Learning Objectives

18.1. Economic Systems
- Understand types of economic systems and their historical development
- Describe capitalism and socialism both in theory and in practice
- Discussion how functionalists, conflict theorists, and symbolic interactionists view the economy and work

18.2. Globalization and the Economy
- Define globalization and describe its manifestation in modern society
- Discuss the pros and cons of globalization from an economic standpoint

18.3. Work in the United States
- Describe the current U.S. workforce and the trend of polarization
- Explain how women and immigrants have changed the modern U.S. workforce
- Understand the basic elements of poverty in the United States today

Introduction to Work and the Economy

What if the U.S. economy thrived solely on basic bartering instead of its bustling agricultural and technological goods? Would you still see a busy building like the one shown in Figure 18.1?

In sociology, **economy** refers to the social institution through which a society's resources are exchanged and managed. The earliest economies were based on trade, which is often a simple exchange in which people traded one item for another. While today's economic activities are more complex than those early trades, the underlying goals remain the same: exchanging goods and services allows individuals to meet their needs and wants. In 1893, Émile Durkheim described what he called "mechanical" and “organic” solidarity that correlates to a society’s economy. **Mechanical solidarity** exists in simpler societies where social cohesion comes from sharing similar work, education, and religion. **Organic solidarity** arises out of the mutual interdependence created by the specialization of work. The complex U.S. economy, and the economies of other industrialized nations, meet the definition of organic solidarity. Most individuals perform a specialized task to earn money they use to trade for goods and services provided by others who perform different specialized tasks. In a simplified example, an elementary school teacher relies on farmers for food, doctors for healthcare, carpenters to build shelter, and so on. The farmers, doctors, and carpenters all rely on the teacher to educate their children. They are all dependent on each other and their work.

Economy is one of human society’s earliest social structures. Our earliest forms of writing (such as Sumerian clay tablets) were developed to record transactions, payments, and debts between merchants. As societies grow and change, so do their economies. The economy of a small farming community is very different from the economy of a large nation with advanced technology. In this chapter, we will examine different types of economic systems and how they have functioned in various societies.

Detroit, once the roaring headquarters of the country’s large and profitable automotive industry, had already been in a population decline for several decades as auto manufacturing jobs were being outsourced to other countries and foreign car brands began to take increasing portions of U.S. market share. According to State of Michigan population data (State of Michigan, n.d.), Detroit was home to approximately 1.85 million residents in 1950, which dwindled to slightly more than 700,000 in 2010 following the economic crash. The drastic reduction took its toll on the city. It is estimated that a third of the buildings in Detroit have been abandoned. The current average home price hovers around $7,000, while homes nationwide sell on average for around $200,000. The city has filed for bankruptcy, and its unemployment rate hovers around 30 percent.

The Wage Gap in the United States

The Equal Pay Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1963, was designed to reduce the wage gap between men and women. The act in essence required employers to pay equal wages to men and women who were performing substantially similar jobs. However, more than fifty years later, women continue to make less money than their male counterparts. According to a report released by the White House (National Equal Pay Taskforce 2013), “On average, full-time working women make just 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. This significant gap is more than a statistic—iit has real-life consequences. When women, who make up nearly half the workforce, bring home less money each day, it means they have less for the everyday needs of their families, and over a lifetime of work, far less savings for retirement.” While the Pew Research Center contends that women make 84 cents for every dollar men make, countless studies that have controlled for work experience, education, and other factors unanimously demonstrate that disparity between wages paid to men and to women still exists (Pew Research Center 2014).

As shocking as it is, the gap actually widens when we add race and ethnicity to the picture. For example, African American women make on average 64 cents for every dollar a Caucasian male makes. Latina women make 56 cents, or 44 percent less, for every dollar a Caucasian male makes. African American and Latino men also make notably less than Caucasian men. Asian Americans tend to be the only minority that earns as much as or more than Caucasian men.

Recent Economic Cconditions

In 2015, the United States continued its recovery from the “Great Recession,” arguably the worst economic downturn since the stock market collapse in 1929 and the Great Depression that ensued.

The recent recession was brought on, at least in part, by the lending practices of the early twenty-first. During this time, banks provided adjustable-rate mortgages (ARM) to customers with poor credit histories at an attractively low introductory rate. After the introductory rate expired, the interest rate on these ARM loans rose, often dramatically, creating a sizable increase in the borrower’s monthly mortgage payments. As their rates adjusted upward, many of these “subprime” mortgage customers were unable to make their monthly payments and stopped doing so, known as defaulting. The massive rate of loan defaults put a strain on the financial institutions that had made the loans, and this stress rippled throughout the entire economy and around the globe.

The United States fell into a period of high and prolonged unemployment, extreme reductions in wealth (except at the very top), stagnant wages, and loss of value in personal property (houses and land). The S&P 500 Index, which measures the overall share value of selected leading companies whose shares are traded on the stock market, fell from a high of 1565 in October 2007 to 676 by March 2009.

Today, however, unemployment rates are down in many areas of the United States, the Gross Domestic Product increased 4.6 percent in the second quarter of 2014 (US Department of Commerce–Bureau of Economic Analysis), property owners have noted a slight increase in the valuation of housing, and the stock market appears to be reinvigorated.

While these and several other factors indicate the United States is on the road to recovery, many people are still struggling. For most segments of the population, median income has not increased, and in fact it has receded in many cases. The size, income, and wealth of the middle class have been declining since the 1970s— effects that were perhaps hastened by the recession. Today, wealth is distributed inequitably at the top. Corporate profits have increased more than 141 percent, and CEO pay has risen by more than 298 percent.

G. William Domhoff (University of California at Santa Cruz) reports that “In 2010, the top 1% of households (the upper class) owned 35.4% of all privately held wealth, and the next 19% (the managerial, professional, and small business stratum) had 53.5%, which means that just 20% of the people owned a remarkable 89%, leaving only 11% of the wealth for the bottom 80% (wage and salary workers).”

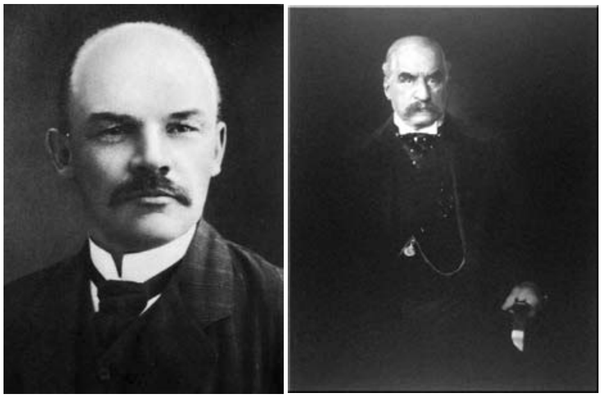
Economic Impact of the Recession on Different Segments of Population: Most U.S. citizens have struggled financially as a result of the nearly decade-long recession. As noted above, many workers lost their jobs as unemployment rates soared, housing prices—which represent the wealth of the average person—declined sharply, and the cost of living increased significantly. Meanwhile income for the average U.S. worker remains stagnant.

One indicator of general economic conditions is the rate at which individuals are accessing the country’s safety net or social welfare programs. Between 2000 and 2013, the number of people relying on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the “food stamp” program), climbed from 17,194,000 to more than 47,636,000. The sharpest increase paralleled the subprime mortgage crisis of 2009, with the rolls rising from 28,000,000 to more than 40,000,000 individuals receiving food assistance in a span of two years (United States Department of Agriculture 2014).

The economic downturn had a rippling effect throughout the economy. For instance, it delivered a significant blow to the once-vibrant U.S. automotive industry. While consumers found loans harder to get due to the subprime mortgage lending crisis and increasing fuel costs, they also grew weary of large, gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles (SUVs) that were once the bread-and-butter product of U.S. automakers. As customers became more aware of the environmental impact of such cars and the cost of fuel, the large SUV ceased to be the status symbol it had been during the 1990s and 2000s. It became instead a symbol of excess and waste. All these factors created the perfect storm that nearly decimated the U.S. auto industry. To prevent mass job loss, the government provided emergency loans funded by taxpayer dollars, as well as other forms of financial support, to corporations like General Motors and Chrysler. While the companies survived, the landscape of the U.S. auto industry was changed as result of the economic decline.

To realign their businesses in the face of decreased sales and lower manufacturing outputs, many large automotive companies severed their ties with hundreds of dealerships, which affected the dealers’ local economies around the country.

18.1 Economic Systems



(a) (b)

Figure 18.2 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was one of the founders of Russian communism. J.P. Morgan was one of the most influential capitalists in history. They have very different views on how economies should be run. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

The dominant economic systems of the modern era are capitalism and socialism, and there have been many variations of each system across the globe. Countries have switched systems as their rulers and economic fortunes have changed. For example, Russia has been transitioning to a market-based economy since the fall of communism in that region of the world. Vietnam, where the economy was devastated by the Vietnam War, restructured to a state-run economy in response, and more recently has been moving toward a socialist-style market economy. In the past, other economic systems reflected the societies that formed them. Many of these earlier systems lasted centuries. These changes in economies raise many questions for sociologists. What are these older economic systems? How did they develop? Why did they fade away? What are the similarities and differences between older economic systems and modern ones?

Economics of Agricultural, Industrial, and Postindustrial Societies

(a) (b)

Figure 18.3 In an agricultural economy, crops and seeds are the most important commodity. In a postindustrial society, information is the most valuable resource. (Photo (a) courtesy of Edward S. Curtis/Wikimedia Commons. Photo (b) courtesy of Kārlis Dambrāns/flickr)

Our earliest ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers. Small groups of extended families roamed from place to place looking for subsistence. They would settle in an area for a brief time when there were abundant resources. They hunted animals for their meat and gathered wild fruits, vegetables, and cereals. They ate what they caught or gathered their goods as soon as possible, because they had no way of preserving or transporting it. Once the resources of an area ran low, the group had to move on, and everything they owned had to travel with them. Food reserves only consisted of what they could carry. Many sociologists contend that hunter-gatherers did not have a true economy, because groups did not typically trade with other groups due to the scarcity of goods.

The Agricultural Revolution

The first true economies arrived when people started raising crops and domesticating animals. Although there is still a great deal of disagreement among archeologists as to the exact timeline, research indicates that agriculture began independently and at different times in several places around the world. The earliest agriculture was in the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East around 11,000–10,000 years ago. Next were the valleys of the Indus, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers in India and China, between 10,000 and 9,000 years ago. The people living in the highlands of New Guinea developed agriculture between 9,000 and 6,000 years ago, while people were farming in Sub-Saharan Africa between 5,000 and 4,000 years ago. Agriculture developed later in the western hemisphere, arising in what would become the eastern United States, central Mexico, and northern South America between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago (Diamond 2003).

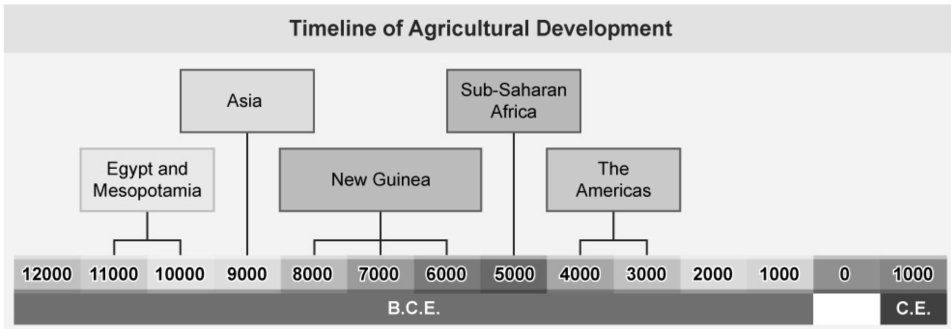


Figure 18.4 Agricultural practices have emerged in different societies at different times. (Information courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Agriculture began with the simplest of technologies—for example, a pointed stick to break up the soil—but really took off when people harnessed animals to pull an even more efficient tool for the same task: a plow. With this new technology, one family could grow enough crops not only to feed themselves but also to feed others. Knowing there would be abundant food each year as long as crops were tended led people to abandon the nomadic life of hunter-gatherers and settle down to farm.

The improved efficiency in food production meant that not everyone had to toil all day in the fields. As agriculture grew, new jobs emerged, along with new technologies. Excess crops needed to be stored, processed, protected, and transported. Farming equipment and irrigation systems needed to be built and maintained. Wild animals needed to be domesticated and herds shepherded. Economies begin to develop because people now had goods and services to trade. At the same time, farmers eventually came to labor for the ruling class.

As more people specialized in nonfarming jobs, villages grew into towns and then into cities. Urban areas created the need for administrators and public servants. Disputes over ownership, payments, debts, compensation for damages, and the like led to the need for laws and courts—and the judges, clerks, lawyers, and police who administered and enforced those laws.

At first, most goods and services were traded as gifts or through bartering between small social groups (Mauss 1922). Exchanging one form of goods or services for another was known as **bartering**. This system only works when one person happens to have something the other person needs at the same time. To solve this problem, people developed the idea of a means of exchange that could be used at any time: that is, money. **Money** refers to an object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged for payment. In early economies, money was often objects like cowry shells, rice, barley, or even rum. Precious metals quickly became the preferred means of exchange in many cultures because of their durability and portability. The first coins were minted in Lydia in what is now Turkey around 650–600 B.C.E. (Goldsborough 2010). Early legal codes established the value of money and the rates of exchange for various commodities. They also established the rules for inheritance, fines as penalties for crimes, and how property was to be divided and taxed (Horne 1915). A symbolic interactionist would note that bartering and money are systems of symbolic exchange. Monetary objects took on a symbolic meaning, one that carries into our modern-day use of cash, checks, and debit cards.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

The Woman Who Lives without Money

Imagine having no money. If you wanted some french fries, needed a new pair of shoes, or were due to get an oil change for your car, how would you get those goods and services?

This isn't just a theoretical question. Think about it. What do those on the outskirts of society do in these situations? Think of someone escaping domestic abuse who gave up everything and has no resources. Or an immigrant who wants to build a new life but who had to leave another life behind to find that opportunity. Or a homeless person who simply wants a meal to eat.

This last example, homelessness, is what caused Heidemarie Schwermer to give up money. She was a divorced high school teacher in Germany, and her life took a turn when she relocated her children to a rural town with a significant homeless population. She began to question what serves as currency in a society and decided to try something new.

Schwermer founded a business called *Gib und Nimm*—in English, "give and take." It operated on a moneyless basis and strived to facilitate people swapping goods and services for other goods and services—no cash allowed (Schwermer 2007). What began as a short experiment has become a new way of life. Schwermer says the change has helped her focus on people's inner value instead of their outward wealth. She wrote two books that tell her story (she's donated all proceeds to charity) and, most importantly, a richness in her life she was unable to attain with money.

How might our three sociological perspectives view her actions? What would most interest them about her unconventional ways? Would a functionalist consider her aberration of norms a social dysfunction that upsets the normal balance? How would a conflict theorist place her in the social hierarchy? What might a symbolic interactionist make of her choice not to use money—such an important symbol in the modern world?

What do *you* make of *Gib und Nimm*?

As city-states grew into countries and countries grew into empires, their economies grew as well. When large empires broke up, their economies broke up too. The governments of newly formed nations sought to protect and increase their markets. They financed voyages of discovery to find new markets and resources all over the world, which ushered in a rapid progression of economic development.

Colonies were established to secure these markets, and wars were financed to take over territory. These ventures were funded in part by raising capital from investors who were paid back from the goods obtained. Governments and private citizens also set up large trading companies that financed their enterprises around the world by selling stocks and bonds.

Governments tried to protect their share of the markets by developing a system called mercantilism. **Mercantilism** is an economic policy based on accumulating silver and gold by controlling colonial and foreign markets through taxes and other charges. The resulting restrictive practices and exacting demands included monopolies, bans on certain goods, high tariffs, and exclusivity requirements. Mercantilistic governments also promoted manufacturing and, with the ability to fund technological improvements, they helped create the equipment that led to the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution

Until the end of the eighteenth century, most manufacturing was done by manual labor. This changed as inventors devised machines to manufacture goods. A small number of innovations led to a large number of changes in the British economy. In the textile industries, the spinning of cotton, worsted yarn, and flax could be done more quickly and less expensively using new machines with names like the Spinning Jenny and the Spinning Mule (Bond 2003). Another important innovation was made in the production of iron: Coke from coal could now be used in all stages of smelting rather than charcoal from wood, which dramatically lowered the cost of iron production while increasing availability (Bond 2003). James Watt ushered in what many scholars recognize as the greatest change, revolutionizing transportation and thereby the entire production of goods with his improved steam engine.

As people moved to cities to fill factory jobs, factory production also changed. Workers did their jobs in assembly lines and were trained to complete only one or two steps in the manufacturing process. These advances meant that more finished goods could be manufactured with more efficiency and speed than ever before.

The Industrial Revolution also changed agricultural practices. Until that time, many people practiced **subsistence farming** in which they produced only enough to feed themselves and pay their taxes. New technology introduced gasoline-powered farm tools such as tractors, seed drills, threshers, and combine harvesters. Farmers were encouraged to plant large fields of a single crop to maximize profits. With improved transportation and the invention of refrigeration, produce could be shipped safely all over the world.

The Industrial Revolution modernized the world. With growing resources came growing societies and economies. Between 1800 and 2000, the world's population grew sixfold, while per capita income saw a tenfold jump (Maddison 2003).

While many people's lives were improving, the Industrial Revolution also birthed many societal problems. There were inequalities in the system. Owners amassed vast fortunes while laborers, including young children, toiled for long hours in unsafe conditions. Workers' rights, wage protection, and safe work environments are issues that arose during this period and remain concerns today.

Postindustrial Societies and the Information Age

Postindustrial societies, also known as information societies, have evolved in modernized nations. One of the most valuable goods of the modern era is information. Those who have the means to produce, store, and disseminate information are leaders in this type of society.

One way scholars understand the development of different types of societies (like agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial) is by examining their economies in terms of four sectors: primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary. Each has a different focus. The primary sector extracts and produces raw materials (like metals and crops). The secondary sector turns those raw materials into finished goods. The tertiary sector provides services: child care, healthcare, and money management. Finally, the quaternary sector produces ideas; these include the research that leads to new technologies, the management of information, and a society's highest levels of education and the arts (Kenessey 1987).

In underdeveloped countries, the majority of the people work in the primary sector. As economies develop, more and more people are employed in the secondary sector. In well-developed economies, such as those in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, the majority of the workforce is employed in service industries. In the United States, for example, almost 80 percent of the workforce is employed in the tertiary sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

The rapid increase in computer use in all aspects of daily life is a main reason for the transition to an information economy. Fewer people are needed to work in factories because computerized robots now handle many of the tasks. Other manufacturing jobs have been outsourced to less-developed countries as a result of the developing global economy. The growth of the Internet has created industries that exist almost entirely online. Within industries, technology continues to change how goods are produced. For instance, the music and film industries used to produce physical products like CDs and DVDs for distribution. Now those goods are increasingly produced digitally and streamed or downloaded at a much lower physical manufacturing cost. Information and the means to use it creatively have become commodities in a postindustrial economy.

Capitalism

Figure 18.5 The New York Stock Exchange is where shares of stock in companies that are registered for public trading are traded (Photo courtesy of Ryan Lawler/Wikimedia Commons)

Scholars don’t always agree on a single definition of capitalism. For our purposes, we will define **capitalism** as an economic system in which there is private ownership (as opposed to state ownership) and where there is an impetus to produce profit, and thereby wealth. This is the type of economy in place in the United States today. Under capitalism, people invest capital (money or property invested in a business venture) in a business to produce a product or service that can be sold in a market to consumers. The investors in the company are generally entitled to a share of any profit made on sales after the costs of production and distribution are taken out. These investors often reinvest their profits to improve and expand the business or acquire new ones. To illustrate how this works, consider this example. Sarah, Antonio, and Chris each invest $250,000 into a start-up company that offers an innovative baby product. When the company nets $1 million in profits its first year, a portion of that profit goes back to Sarah, Antonio, and Chris as a return on their investment. Sarah reinvests with the same company to fund the development of a second product line, Antonio uses his return to help another start-up in the technology sector, and Chris buys a small yacht for vacations.

To provide their product or service, owners hire workers to whom they pay wages. The cost of raw materials, the retail price they charge consumers, and the amount they pay in wages are determined through the law of supply and demand and by competition. When demand exceeds supply, prices tend to rise. When supply exceeds demand, prices tend to fall. When multiple businesses market similar products and services to the same buyers, there is competition. Competition can be good for consumers because it can lead to lower prices and higher quality as businesses try to get consumers to buy from them rather than from their competitors.

Wages tend to be set in a similar way. People who have talents, skills, education, or training that is in short supply and is needed by businesses tend to earn more than people without comparable skills. Competition in the workforce helps determine how much people will be paid. In times when many people are unemployed and jobs are scarce, people are often willing to accept less than they would when their services are in high demand. In this scenario, businesses are able to maintain or increase profits by not increasing workers' wages.

Capitalism in Practice

As capitalists began to dominate the economies of many countries during the Industrial Revolution, the rapid growth of businesses and their tremendous profitability gave some owners the capital they needed to create enormous corporations that could monopolize an entire industry. Many companies controlled all aspects of the production cycle for their industry, from the raw materials, to the production, to the stores in which they were sold. These companies were able to use their wealth to buy out or stifle any competition.

In the United States, the predatory tactics used by these large monopolies caused the government to take action. Starting in the late 1800s, the government passed a series of laws that broke up monopolies and regulated how key industries—such as transportation, steel production, and oil and gas exploration and refining—could conduct business.

The United States is considered a capitalist country. However, the U.S. government has a great deal of influence on private companies through the laws it passes and the regulations enforced by government agencies. Through taxes, regulations on wages, guidelines to protect worker safety and the environment, plus financial rules for banks and investment firms, the government exerts a certain amount of control over how all companies do business. State and federal governments also own, operate, or control large parts of certain industries, such as the post office, schools, hospitals, highways and railroads, and many water, sewer, and power utilities. Debate over the extent to which the government should be involved in the economy remains an issue of contention today. Some criticize such involvements as socialism (a type of state-run economy), while others believe intervention is necessary to protect the rights of workers and the well-being of the general population.

Socialism

Figure 18.6 The economies of China and Russia after World War II are examples of one form of socialism. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Socialism is an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as “state run”) of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society. Under socialism, everything that people produce, including services, is considered a social product. Everyone who contributes to the production of a good or to providing a service is entitled to a share in any benefits that come from its sale or use. To make sure all members of society get their fair share, governments must be able to control property, production, and distribution.

The focus in socialism is on benefitting society, whereas capitalism seeks to benefit the individual. Socialists claim that a capitalistic economy leads to inequality, with unfair distribution of wealth and individuals who use their power at the expense of society. Socialism strives, ideally, to control the economy to avoid the problems inherent in capitalism.

Within socialism, there are diverging views on the extent to which the economy should be controlled. One extreme believes all but the most personal items are public property. Other socialists believe only essential services such as healthcare, education, and utilities (electrical power, telecommunications, and sewage) need direct control. Under this form of socialism, farms, small shops, and businesses can be privately owned but are subject to government regulation.

The other area on which socialists disagree is on what level society should exert its control. In communist countries like the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, and North Korea, the national government exerts control over the economy centrally. They had the power to tell all businesses what to produce, how much to produce, and what to charge for it. Other socialists believe control should be decentralized so it can be exerted by those most affected by the industries being controlled. An example of this would be a town collectively owning and managing the businesses on which its residents depend.

Because of challenges in their economies, several of these communist countries have moved from central planning to letting market forces help determine many production and pricing decisions. **Market socialism** describes a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demands. This could involve situations like profits generated by a company going directly to the employees of the company or being used as public funds (Gregory and Stuart 2003). Many Eastern European and some South American countries have mixed economies. Key industries are nationalized and directly controlled by the government; however, most businesses are privately owned and regulated by the government.

Organized socialism never became powerful in the United States. The success of labor unions and the government in securing workers' rights, joined with the high standard of living enjoyed by most of the workforce, made socialism less appealing than the controlled capitalism practiced here.

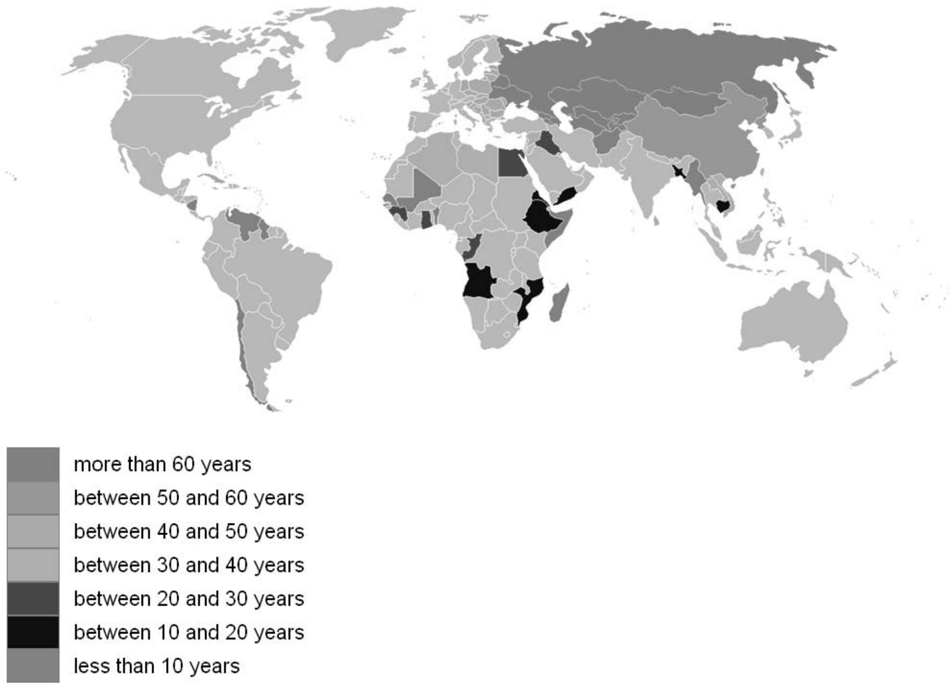


Figure 18.7 This map shows countries that have adopted a socialist economy at some point. The colors indicate the duration that socialism prevailed. (Map courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Socialism in Practice

As with capitalism, the basic ideas behind socialism go far back in history. Plato, in ancient Greece, suggested a republic in which people shared their material goods. Early Christian communities believed in common ownership, as did the systems of monasteries set up by various religious orders. Many of the leaders of the French Revolution called for the abolition of all private property, not just the estates of the aristocracy they had overthrown. Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, imagined a society with little private property and mandatory labor on a communal farm. A *utopia* has since come to mean an imagined place or situation in which everything is perfect. Most experimental utopian communities had the abolition of private property as a founding principle.

Modern socialism really began as a reaction to the excesses of uncontrolled industrial capitalism in the 1800s and 1900s. The enormous wealth and lavish lifestyles enjoyed by owners contrasted sharply with the miserable conditions of the workers.

Some of the first great sociological thinkers studied the rise of socialism. Max Weber admired some aspects of socialism, especially its rationalism and how it could help social reform, but he worried that letting the government have complete control could result in an "iron cage of future bondage" from which there is no escape (Greisman and Ritzer 1981).

Pierre-Joseph Proudon (1809−1865) was another early socialist who thought socialism could be used to create utopian communities. In his 1840 book, *What Is Property?*, he famously stated that "property is theft" (Proudon 1840). By this he meant that if an owner did not work to produce or earn the property, then the owner was stealing it from those who did. Proudon believed economies could work using a principle called **mutualism**, under which individuals and cooperative groups would exchange products with one another on the basis of mutually satisfactory contracts (Proudon 1840).

By far the most important influential thinker on socialism is Karl Marx. Through his own writings and those with his collaborator, industrialist Friedrich Engels, Marx used a scientific analytical process to show that throughout history, the resolution of class struggles caused changes in economies. He saw the relationships evolving from slave and owner, to serf and lord, to journeyman and master, to worker and owner. Neither Marx nor Engels thought socialism could be used to set up small utopian communities. Rather, they believed a socialist society would be created after workers rebelled against capitalistic owners and seized the means of production. They felt industrial capitalism was a necessary step that raised the level of production in society to a point it could progress to a socialist and then communist state (Marx and Engels 1848). These ideas form the basis of the sociological perspective of social conflict theory.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Obama and Socialism: A Few Definitions

In the 2008 presidential election, the Republican Party latched onto what is often considered a dirty word to describe then-Senator Barack Obama's politics: socialist. It may have been because the president was campaigning by telling workers it's good for everybody when wealth gets spread around. But whatever the reason, the label became a weapon of choice for Republicans during and after the campaign. In 2012, Republican presidential contender Rick Perry continued this battle cry. A *New York Times* article quotes him as telling a group of Republicans in Texas that President Obama is "hell bent on taking America towards a socialist country" (Wheaton 2011). Meanwhile, during the first few years of his presidency, Obama worked to create universal healthcare coverage and pushed forth a partial takeover of the nation's failing automotive industry. So does this make him a socialist? What does that really mean, anyway?

There is more than one definition of socialism, but it generally refers to an economic or political theory that advocates for shared or governmental ownership and administration of production and distribution of goods. Often held up in counterpoint to capitalism, which encourages private ownership and production, socialism is not typically an all-or-nothing plan. For example, both the United Kingdom and France, as well as other European countries, have socialized medicine, meaning that medical services are run nationally to reach as many people as possible. These nations are, of course, still essentially capitalist countries with free-market economies.

So is Obama a socialist because he wants universal healthcare? Or is the word a lightning rod for conservatives who associate it with a lack of personal freedom? By almost any measure, the answer is more the latter.

Convergence Theory

We have seen how the economies of some capitalist countries such as the United States have features that are very similar to socialism. Some industries, particularly utilities, are either owned by the government or controlled through regulations. Public programs such as welfare, Medicare, and Social Security exist to provide public funds for private needs. We have also seen how several large communist (or formerly communist) countries such as Russia, China, and Vietnam have moved from state-controlled socialism with central planning to market socialism, which allows market forces to dictate prices and wages and for some business to be privately owned. In many formerly communist countries, these changes have led to economic growth compared to the stagnation they experienced under communism (Fidrmuc 2002).

In studying the economies of developing countries to see if they go through the same stages as previously developed nations did, sociologists have observed a pattern they call convergence. This describes the theory that societies move toward similarity over time as their economies develop.

Convergence theory explains that as a country's economy grows, its societal organization changes to become more like that of an industrialized society. Rather than staying in one job for a lifetime, people begin to move from job to job as conditions improve and opportunities arise. This means the workforce needs continual training and retraining. Workers move from rural areas to cities as they become centers of economic activity, and the government takes a larger role in providing expanded public services (Kerr et al. 1960).

Supporters of the theory point to Germany, France, and Japan—countries that rapidly rebuilt their economies after World War II. They point out how, in the 1960s and 1970s, East Asian countries like Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan converged with countries with developed economies. They are now considered developed countries themselves.

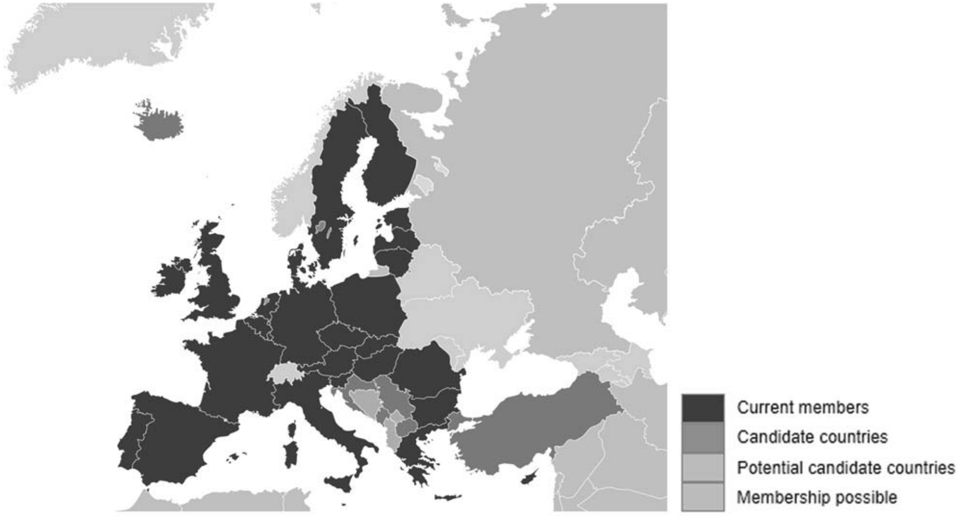


Figure 18.8 Sociologists look for signs of convergence and divergence in the societies of countries that have joined the European Union. (Map courtesy of the European Union)

To experience this rapid growth, the economies of developing countries must to be able to attract inexpensive capital to invest in new businesses and to improve traditionally low productivity. They need access to new, international markets for buying the goods. If these characteristics are not in place, then their economies cannot catch up. This is why the economies of some countries are diverging rather than converging (Abramovitz 1986).

Another key characteristic of economic growth regards the implementation of technology. A developing country can bypass some steps of implementing technology that other nations faced earlier. Television and telephone systems are a good example. While developed countries spent significant time and money establishing elaborate system infrastructures based on metal wires or fiber-optic cables, developing countries today can go directly to cell phone and satellite transmission with much less investment.

Another factor affects convergence concerning social structure. Early in their development, countries such as Brazil and Cuba had economies based on cash crops (coffee or sugarcane, for instance) grown on large plantations by unskilled workers. The elite ran the plantations and the government, with little interest in training and educating the populace for other endeavors. This restricted economic growth until the power of the wealthy plantation owners was challenged (Sokoloff and Engerman 2000). Improved economies generally lead to wider social improvement. Society benefits from improved educational systems and allowed people more time to devote to learning and leisure.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Economy

Now that we've developed an understanding of the history and basic components of economies, let's turn to theory. How might social scientists study these topics? What questions do they ask? What theories do they develop to add to the body of sociological knowledge?

Functionalist Perspective

Someone taking a functional perspective will most likely view work and the economy as a well-oiled machine that is designed for maximum efficiency. The Davis-Moore thesis, for example, suggests that some social stratification is a social necessity. The need for certain highly skilled positions combined with the relative difficulty of the occupation and the length of time it takes to qualify will result in a higher reward for that job and will provide a financial motivation to engage in more education and a more difficult profession (Davis and Moore 1945). This theory can be used to explain the prestige and salaries that go with careers only available to those with doctorates or medical degrees.

The functionalist perspective would assume that the continued health of the economy is vital to the health of the nation, as it ensures the distribution of goods and services. For example, we need food to travel from farms (high-functioning and efficient agricultural systems) via roads (safe and effective trucking and rail routes) to urban centers (high-density areas where workers can gather). However, sometimes a dysfunction—a function with the potential to disrupt social institutions or organization (Merton 1968)—in the economy occurs, usually because some institutions fail to adapt quickly enough to changing social conditions. This lesson has been driven home recently with the bursting of the housing bubble. Due to risky lending practices and an underregulated financial market, we are recovering from the after-effects of the Great Recession, which Merton would likely describe as a major dysfunction.

Some of this is cyclical. Markets produce goods as they are supposed to, but eventually the market is saturated and the supply of goods exceeds the demands. Typically the market goes through phases of surplus, or excess, inflation, where the money in your pocket today buys less than it did yesterday, and **recession**, which occurs when there are two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline. The functionalist would say to let market forces fluctuate in a cycle through these stages. In reality, to control the risk of an economic **depression** (a sustained recession across several economic sectors), the U.S. government will often adjust interest rates to encourage more lending—and consequently more spending. In short, letting the natural cycle fluctuate is not a gamble most governments are willing to take.

Conflict Perspective

For a conflict perspective theorist, the economy is not a source of stability for society. Instead, the economy reflects and reproduces economic inequality, particularly in a capitalist marketplace. The conflict perspective is classically Marxist, with the bourgeoisie (ruling class) accumulating wealth and power by exploiting and perhaps oppressing the proletariat (workers), and regulating those who cannot work (the aged, the infirm) into the great mass of unemployed (Marx and Engels 1848). From the symbolic (though probably made up) statement of Marie Antoinette, who purportedly said, “Let them eat cake” when told that the peasants were starving, to the Occupy Wall Street movement that began during the Great Recession, the sense of inequity is almost unchanged. Conflict theorists believe wealth is concentrated in the hands of those who do not deserve it. As of 2010, 20 percent of Americans owned 90 percent of U.S. wealth (Domhoff 2014). While the inequality might not be as extreme as in pre-revolutionary France, it is enough to make many believe that the United States is not the meritocracy it seems to be.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Those working in the symbolic interaction perspective take a microanalytical view of society. They focus on the way reality is socially constructed through day-to-day interaction and how society is composed of people communicating based on a shared understanding of symbols.

One important symbolic interactionist concept related to work and the economy is **career inheritance**. This concept means simply that children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents, which is a correlation that has been demonstrated in research studies (Antony 1998). For example, the children of police officers learn the norms and values that will help them succeed in law enforcement, and since they have a model career path to follow, they may find law enforcement even more attractive. Related to career inheritance is career socialization—learning the norms and values of a particular job.

Finally, a symbolic interactionist might study what contributes to job satisfaction. Melvin Kohn and his fellow researchers (1990) determined that workers were most likely to be happy when they believed they controlled some part of their work, when they felt they were part of the decision-making processes associated with their work, when they have freedom from surveillance, and when they felt integral to the outcome of their work. Sunyal, Sunyal, and Yasin (2011) found that a greater sense of vulnerability to stress, the more stress experienced by a worker, and a greater amount of perceived risk consistently predicted a lower worker job satisfaction.

18.2 Globalization and the Economy

Figure 18.9 Instant communications have allowed many international corporations to move parts of their businesses to countries such as India, where their costs are lowest. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

What Is Globalization?

Globalization refers to the process of integrating governments, cultures, and financial markets through international trade into a single world market. Often, the process begins with a single motive, such as market expansion (on the part of a corporation) or increased access to healthcare (on the part of a nonprofit organization). But usually there is a snowball effect, and globalization becomes a mixed bag of economic, philanthropic, entrepreneurial, and cultural efforts. Sometimes the efforts have obvious benefits, even for those who worry about cultural colonialism, such as campaigns to bring clean-water technology to rural areas that do not have access to safe drinking water.

Other globalization efforts, however, are more complex. Let us look, for example, at the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The agreement is among the countries of North America, including Canada, the United States, and Mexico and allows much freer trade opportunities without the kind of tariffs (taxes) and import laws that restrict international trade. Often, trade opportunities are misrepresented by politicians and economists, who sometimes offer them up as a panacea to economic woes. For example, trade can lead to both increases and decreases in job opportunities. This is because while easier, more lax export laws mean there is the potential for job growth in the United States, imports can mean the exact opposite. As the United States import more goods from outside the country, jobs typically decrease, as more and more products are made overseas.

Many prominent economists believed that when NAFTA was created in 1994 it would lead to major gains in jobs. But by 2010, the evidence showed an opposite impact; the data showed 682,900 U.S. jobs lost across all states (Parks 2011). While NAFTA did increase the flow of goods and capital across the northern and southern U.S. borders, it also increased unemployment in Mexico, which spurred greater amounts of illegal immigration motivated by a search for work.

There are several forces driving globalization, including the global economy and multinational corporations that control assets, sales, production, and employment (United Nations 1973). Characteristics of multinational corporations include the following: A large share of their capital is collected from a variety of different nations, their business is conducted without regard to national borders, they concentrate wealth in the hands of core nations and already wealthy individuals, and they play a key role in the global economy.

We see the emergence of **global assembly lines**, where products are assembled over the course of several international transactions. For instance, Apple designs its next-generation Mac prototype in the United States, components are made in various peripheral nations, they are then shipped to another peripheral nation such as Malaysia for assembly, and tech support is outsourced to India.

Globalization has also led to the development of **global commodity chains**, where internationally integrated economic links connect workers and corporations for the purpose of manufacture and marketing (Plahe 2005). For example, in *maquiladoras*, mostly found in northern Mexico, workers may sew imported precut pieces of fabric into garments.

Globalization also brings an international division of labor, in which comparatively wealthy workers from core nations compete with the low-wage labor pool of peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. This can lead to a sense of **xenophobia**, which is an illogical fear and even hatred of foreigners and foreign goods. Corporations trying to maximize their profits in the United States are conscious of this risk and attempt to “Americanize” their products, selling shirts printed with U.S. flags that were nevertheless made in Mexico.

Aspects of Globalization

Globalized trade is nothing new. Societies in ancient Greece and Rome traded with other societies in Africa, the Middle East, India, and China. Trade expanded further during the Islamic Golden Age and after the rise of the Mongol Empire. The establishment of colonial empires after the voyages of discovery by European countries meant that trade was going on all over the world. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution led to even more trade of ever-increasing amounts of goods. However, the advance of technology, especially communications, after World War II and the Cold War triggered the explosive acceleration in the process occurring today.

One way to look at the similarities and differences that exist among the economies of different nations is to compare their standards of living. The statistic most commonly used to do this is the domestic process per capita. This is the gross domestic product, or GDP, of a country divided by its population. The table below compares the top 11 countries with the bottom 11 out of the 228 countries listed in the *CIA World Factbook*.

Table 18.1 Gross Domestic Product Per Capita Not every country is benefitting from globalization. The GDP per capita of the poorest country is 255 times less than that of the wealthiest country. (Table courtesy of the CIA, World Factbook 2014)

Rank	Country	GDP - per capita (PPP)
1	Qatar	$102,100
2	Liechtenstein	$89,400
3	Macau	$88,700
4	Bermuda	$86,000
5	Monaco	$85,500
6	Luxembourg	$77,900
7	Singapore	$62,400
8	Jersey	$57,000
9	Norway	$55,400
10	Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)	$55,400
11	Switzerland	$54,800
218	Guinea	$1,100
219	Tokelau	$1,000
220	Madagascar	$1,000
221	Malawi	$900
222	Niger	$800
223	Liberia	$700
224	Central African Republic	$700
225	Burundi	$600
226	Somalia	$600
227	Zimbabwe	$600
228	Congo, Democratic Republic of the	$400

There are benefits and drawbacks to globalization. Some of the benefits include the exponentially accelerated progress of development, the creation of international awareness and empowerment, and the potential for increased wealth (Abedian 2002). However, experience has shown that countries can also be weakened by globalization. Some critics of globalization worry about the growing influence of enormous international financial and industrial corporations that benefit the most from free trade and unrestricted markets. They fear these corporations can use their vast wealth and resources to control governments to act in their interest rather than that of the local population (Bakan 2004). Indeed, when looking at the countries at the bottom of the list above, we are looking at places where the primary benefactors of mineral exploitation are major corporations and a few key political figures.

Other critics oppose globalization for what they see as negative impacts on the environment and local economies. Rapid industrialization, often a key component of globalization, can lead to widespread economic damage due to the lack of regulatory environment (Speth 2003). Further, as there are often no social institutions in place to protect workers in countries where jobs are scarce, some critics state that globalization leads to weak labor movements (Boswell and Stevis 1997). Finally, critics are concerned that wealthy countries can force economically weaker nations to open their markets while protecting their own local products from competition (Wallerstein 1974). This can be particularly true of agricultural products, which are often one of the main exports of poor and developing countries (Koroma 2007). In a 2007 article for the United Nations, Koroma discusses the difficulties faced by “least developed countries” (LDCs) that seek to participate in globalization efforts. These countries typically lack the infrastructure to be flexible and nimble in their production and trade, and therefore are vulnerable to everything from unfavorable weather conditions to international price volatility. In short, rather than offering them more opportunities, the increased competition and fast pace of a globalized market can make it more challenging than ever for LDCs to move forward (Koroma 2007).

The increasing use of outsourcing of manufacturing and service-industry jobs to developing countries has caused increased unemployment in some developed countries. Countries that do not develop new jobs to replace those that move, and train their labor force to do them, will find support for globalization weakening.

18.3 Work in the United States

Figure 18.10 Many people attend job fairs looking for their first job or for a better one. (Photo courtesy of Daniel Ramirez/flickr)

The American Dream has always been based on opportunity. There is a great deal of mythologizing about the energetic upstart who can climb to success based on hard work alone. Common wisdom states that if you study hard, develop good work habits, and graduate high school or, even better, college, then you'll have the opportunity to land a good job. That has long been seen as the key to a successful life. And although the reality has always been more complex than suggested by the myth, the worldwide recession that began in 2008 took its toll on the American Dream. During the recession, more than 8 million U.S. workers lost their jobs, and unemployment rates surpassed 10 percent on a national level. Today, while the recovery is still incomplete, many sectors of the economy are hiring, and unemployment rates have receded.

Making Connections: Sociology in the Real World

Real Money, Virtual Worlds

Figure 18.11 In a virtual world, living the good life still costs real money. (Photo courtesy of Juan Pablo Amo/flickr)

If you are not one of the tens of millions gamers who enjoy World of Warcraft or other online virtual world games, you might not even know what MMORPG stands for. But if you made a living playing massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), as a growing number of enterprising gamers do, then massive multiplayer online role-playing games might matter a bit more. According to an article in *Forbes* magazine, the online world of gaming has been yielding very real profits for entrepreneurs who are able to buy, sell, and manage online real estate, currency, and more for cash (Holland and Ewalt 2006). If it seems strange that people would pay real money for imaginary goods, consider that for serious gamers the online world is of equal importance to the real one.

These entrepreneurs can sell items because the gaming sites have introduced scarcity into the virtual worlds. The game makers have realized that MMORPGs lack tension without a level of scarcity for needed resources or highly desired items. In other words, if anyone can have a palace or a vault full of wealth, then what's the fun?

So how does it work? One of the easiest ways to make such a living is called gold farming, which involves hours of repetitive and boring play, hunting, and shooting animals like dragons that carry a lot of wealth. This virtual wealth can be sold on eBay for real money: a timesaver for players who don't want to waste their playing time on boring pursuits. Players in parts of Asia engage in gold farming and play eight hours a day or more to sell their gold to players in Western Europe or North America. From virtual prostitutes to power levelers (people who play the game logged in as you so your characters get the wealth and power), to architects, merchants, and even beggars, online players can offer to sell any service or product that others want to buy. Whether buying a magic carpet in World of Warcraft or a stainless-steel kitchen appliance in Second Life, gamers have the same desire to acquire as the rest of us—never mind that their items are virtual. Once a gamer creates the code for an item, she can sell it again and again for real money. And finally, you can sell yourself. According to *Forbes*, a University of Virginia computer science student sold his World of Warcraft character on eBay for $1,200, due to the high levels of powers and skills it had gained (Holland and Ewalt 2006).

So should you quit your day job to make a killing in online games? Probably not. Those who work hard might eke out a decent living, but for most people, grabbing up land that doesn't really exist or selling your body in animated action scenes is probably not the best opportunity. Still, for some, it offers the ultimate in work-from-home flexibility, even if that home is a mountain cave in a virtual world.

Polarization in the Workforce

The mix of jobs available in the United States began changing many years before the recession struck, and, as mentioned above, the American Dream has not always been easy to achieve. Geography, race, gender, and other factors have always played a role in the reality of success. More recently, the increased **outsourcing**—or contracting a job or set of jobs to an outside source—of manufacturing jobs to developing nations has greatly diminished the number of high-paying, often unionized, blue-collar positions available. A similar problem has arisen in the white-collar sector, with many low-level clerical and support positions also being outsourced, as evidenced by the international technical-support call centers in Mumbai, India, and Newfoundland, Canada. The number of supervisory and managerial positions has been reduced as companies streamline their command structures and industries continue to consolidate through mergers. Even highly educated skilled workers such as computer programmers have seen their jobs vanish overseas.

The **automation** of the workplace, which replaces workers with technology, is another cause of the changes in the job market. Computers can be programmed to do many routine tasks faster and less expensively than people who used to do such tasks. Jobs like bookkeeping, clerical work, and repetitive tasks on production assembly lines all lend themselves to automation. Envision your local supermarket's self-scan checkout aisles. The automated cashiers affixed to the units take the place of paid employees. Now one cashier can oversee transactions at six or more self-scan aisles, which was a job that used to require one cashier per aisle.

Despite the ongoing economic recovery, the job market is actually growing in some areas, but in a very polarized fashion. **Polarization** means that a gap has developed in the job market, with most employment opportunities at the lowest and highest levels and few jobs for those with midlevel skills and education. At one end, there has been strong demand for low-skilled, low-paying jobs in industries like food service and retail. On the other end, some research shows that in certain fields there has been a steadily increasing demand for highly skilled and educated professionals, technologists, and managers. These high-skilled positions also tend to be highly paid (Autor 2010).

The fact that some positions are highly paid while others are not is an example of the class system, an economic hierarchy in which movement (both upward and downward) between various rungs of the socioeconomic ladder is possible. Theoretically, at least, the class system as it is organized in the United States is an example of a meritocracy, an economic system that rewards merit—typically in the form of skill and hard work—with upward mobility. A theorist working in the functionalist perspective might point out that this system is designed to reward hard work, which encourages people to strive for excellence in pursuit of reward. A theorist working in the conflict perspective might counter with the thought that hard work does not guarantee success even in a meritocracy, because social capital—the accumulation of a network of social relationships and knowledge that will provide a platform from which to achieve financial success—in the form of connections or higher education are often required to access the high-paying jobs. Increasingly, we are realizing intelligence and hard work aren't enough. If you lack knowledge of how to leverage the right names, connections, and players, you are unlikely to experience upward mobility.

With so many jobs being outsourced or eliminated by automation, what kind of jobs are there a demand for in the United States? While fishing and forestry jobs are in decline, in several markets jobs are increasing. These include community and social service, personal care and service, finance, computer and information services, and healthcare. The chart below, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, illustrates areas of projected growth.

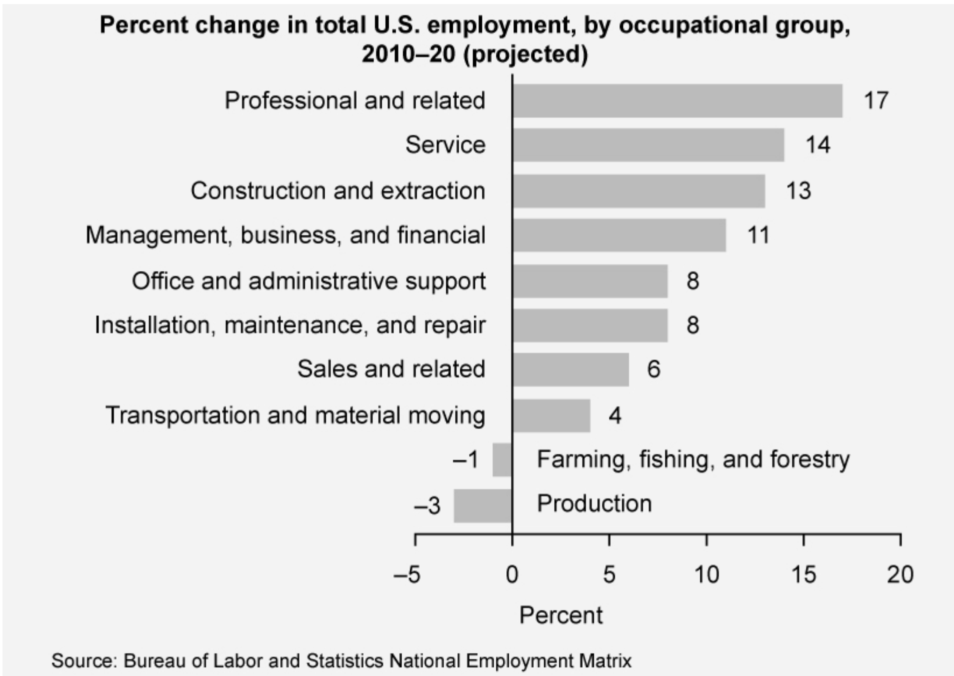


Figure 18.12 This chart shows the projected growth of several occupational groups. (Graph courtesy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook)

The professional and related jobs, which include any number of positions, typically require significant education and training and tend to be lucrative career choices. Service jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, can include everything from jobs with the fire department to jobs scooping ice cream (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). There is a wide variety of training needed, and therefore an equally large wage potential discrepancy. One of the largest areas of growth by industry, rather than by occupational group (as seen above), is in the health field. This growth is across occupations, from associate-level nurse's aides to management-level assisted-living staff. As baby boomers age, they are living longer than any generation before, and the growth of this population segment requires an increase in capacity throughout our country's elder care system, from home healthcare nursing to geriatric nutrition.

Notably, jobs in farming are in decline. This is an area where those with less education traditionally could be assured of finding steady, if low-wage, work. With these jobs disappearing, more and more workers will find themselves untrained for the types of employment that are available.

Another projected trend in employment relates to the level of education and training required to gain and keep a job. As the chart below shows us, growth rates are higher for those with more education. Those with a professional degree or a master's degree may expect job growth of 20 and 22 percent respectively, and jobs that require a bachelor's degree are projected to grow 17 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, jobs that require a high school diploma or equivalent are projected to grow at only 12 percent, while jobs that require less than a high school diploma will grow 14 percent. Quite simply, without a degree, it will be more difficult to find a job. It is worth noting that these projections are based on overall growth across all occupation categories, so obviously there will be variations within different occupational areas. However, once again, those who are the least educated will be the ones least able to fulfill the American Dream.

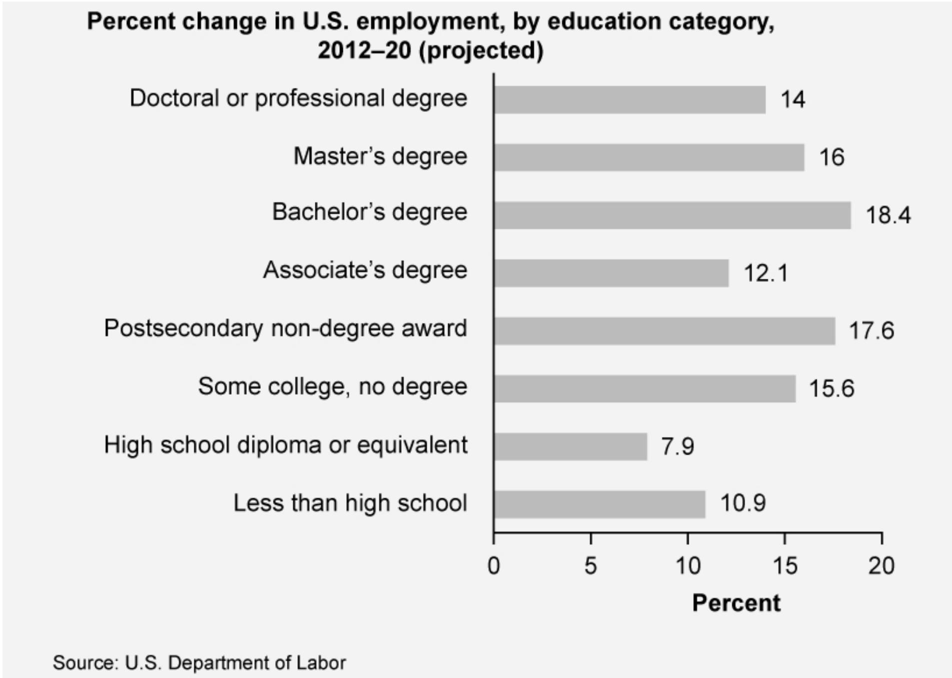


Figure 18.13 More education means more jobs (generally). (Graph courtesy of the U.S. Department of Labor)

In the past, rising education levels in the United States had been able to keep pace with the rise in the number of education-dependent jobs. However, since the late 1970s, men have been enrolling in college at a lower rate than women, and graduating at a rate of almost 10 percent less. The lack of male candidates reaching the education levels needed for skilled positions has opened opportunities for women, minorities, and immigrants (Wang 2011).

Women in the Workforce

Women have been entering the workforce in ever-increasing numbers for several decades. They have also been finishing college and going on to earn higher degrees at higher rate than men do. This has resulted in many women being better positioned to obtain high-paying, high-skill jobs (Autor 2010).

While women are getting more and better jobs and their wages are rising more quickly than men's wages are, U.S. Census statistics show that they are still earning only 77 percent of what men are for the same positions (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Immigration and the Workforce

Simply put, people will move from where there are few or no jobs to places where there are jobs, unless something prevents them from doing so. The process of moving to a country is called immigration. Due to its reputation as the land of opportunity, the United States has long been the destination of all skill levels of workers. While the rate decreased somewhat during the economic slowdown of 2008, immigrants, both legal and illegal, continue to be a major part of the U.S. workforce.

In 2005, before the recession arrived, immigrants made up a historic high of 14.7 percent of the workforce (Lowell et al. 2006). During the 1970s through 2000s, the United States experienced both an increase in college-educated immigrants and in immigrants who lacked a high school diploma. With this range across the spectrum, immigrants are well positioned for both the higher-paid jobs and the low-wage low-skill jobs that are predicted to grow in the next decade (Lowell et al. 2006). In the early 2000s, it certainly seemed that the United States was continuing to live up to its reputation of opportunity. But what about during the recession of 2008, when so many jobs were lost and unemployment hovered close to 10 percent? How did immigrant workers fare then?

The answer is that as of June 2009, when the National Bureau of Economic Research (NEBR) declared the recession officially over, "foreign-born workers gained 656,000 jobs while native-born workers lost 1.2 million jobs" (Kochhar 2010). As these numbers suggest, the unemployment rate that year decreased for immigrant workers and increased for native workers. The reasons for this trend are not entirely clear. Some Pew research suggests immigrants tend to have greater flexibility to move from job to job and that the immigrant population may have been early victims of the recession, and thus were quicker to rebound (Kochhar 2010). Regardless of the reasons, the 2009 job gains are far from enough to keep them inured from the country's economic woes. Immigrant earnings are in decline, even as the number of jobs increases, and some theorize that increase in employment may come from a willingness to accept significantly lower wages and benefits.

While the political debate is often fueled by conversations about low-wage-earning immigrants, there are actually as many highly skilled—and high-earning—immigrant workers as well. Many immigrants are sponsored by their employers who claim they possess talents, education, and training that are in short supply in the U.S. These sponsored immigrants account for 15 percent of all legal immigrants (Batalova and Terrazas 2010). Interestingly, the U.S. population generally supports these high-level workers, believing they will help lead to economic growth and not be a drain on government services (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). On the other hand, illegal immigrants tend to be trapped in extremely low-paying jobs in agriculture, service, and construction with few ways to improve their situation without risking exposure and deportation.

Poverty in the United States

When people lose their jobs during a recession or in a changing job market, it takes longer to find a new one, if they can find one at all. If they do, it is often at a much lower wage or not full time. This can force people into poverty. In the United States, we tend to have what is called relative poverty, defined as being unable to live the lifestyle of the average person in your country. This must be contrasted with the absolute poverty that is frequently found in underdeveloped countries and defined as the inability, or near-inability, to afford basic necessities such as food (Byrns 2011).

We cannot even rely on unemployment statistics to provide a clear picture of total unemployment in the United States. First, unemployment statistics do not take into account **underemployment**, a state in which a person accepts a lower paying, lower status job than their education and experience qualifies them to perform. Second, unemployment statistics only count those:

1. who are actively looking for work
2. who have not earned income from a job in the past four weeks
3. who are ready, willing, and able to work

The unemployment statistics provided by the U.S. government are rarely accurate, because many of the unemployed become discouraged and stop looking for work. Not only that, but these statistics undercount the youngest and oldest workers, the chronically unemployed (e.g., homeless), and seasonal and migrant workers.

A certain amount of unemployment is a direct result of the relative inflexibility of the labor market, considered **structural unemployment**, which describes when there is a societal level of disjuncture between people seeking jobs and the available jobs. This mismatch can be geographic (they are hiring in California, but most unemployed live in Alabama), technological (skilled workers are replaced by machines, as in the auto industry), or can result from any sudden change in the types of jobs people are seeking versus the types of companies that are hiring.

Because of the high standard of living in the United States, many people are working at full-time jobs but are still poor by the standards of relative poverty. They are the working poor. The United States has a higher percentage of working poor than many other developed countries (Brady, Fullerton and Cross 2010). In terms of employment, the Bureau of Labor Statistics defines the working poor as those who have spent at least 27 weeks working or looking for work, and yet remain below the poverty line. Many of the facts about the working poor are as expected: Those who work only part time are more likely to be classified as working poor than those with full-time employment; higher levels of education lead to less likelihood of being among the working poor; and those with children under 18 are four times more likely than those without children to fall into this category. In 2009, the working poor included 10.4 million Americans, up almost 17 percent from 2008 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

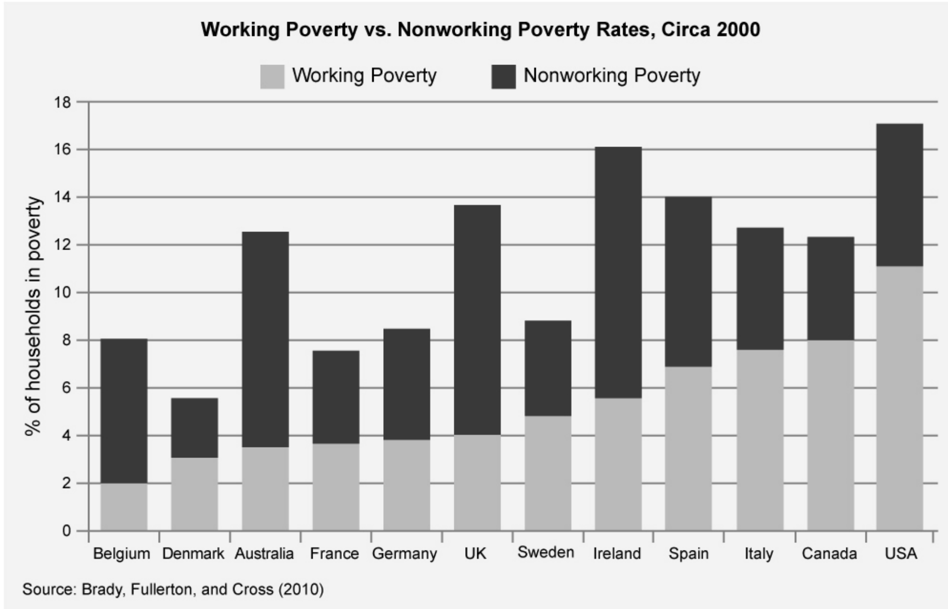


Figure 18.14 A higher percentage of the people living in poverty in the United States have jobs compared to other developed nations.

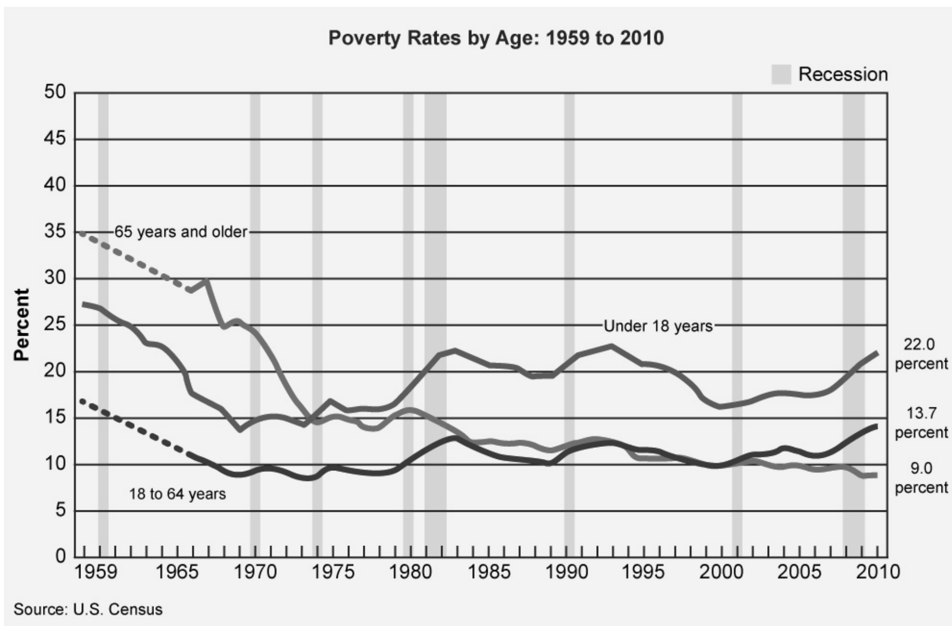


Figure 18.15 Poverty Rates by Age: 1959 to 2010 While poverty rates among the elderly have fallen, an increasing number of children are living in poverty. (Graph courtesy of the U.S. Census Burea/Carmen DeNavas-Walt and Bernadette D. Proctor, Income and Poverty in the United States 2010)

Most developed countries such as the United States protect their citizens from absolute poverty by providing different levels of social services such as unemployment insurance, welfare, food assistance, and so on. They may also provide job training and retraining so that people can reenter the job market. In the past, the elderly were particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty after they stopped working; however, pensions, retirement plans, and Social Security were designed to help prevent this. A major concern in the United States is the rising number of young people growing up in poverty. Growing up poor can cut off access to the education and services people need to move out of poverty and into stable employment. As we saw, more education was often a key to stability, and those raised in poverty are the ones least able to find well-paying work, perpetuating a cycle.

There is great debate about how much support local, state, and federal governments should give to help the unemployed and underemployed. The decisions made on these issues will have a profound effect on working in the United States.

Chapter Review

Key Terms

automation: workers being replaced by technology

bartering: a process where people exchange one form of goods or services for another

capitalism: an economic system in which there is private ownership (as opposed to state ownership) and where there is an impetus to produce profit, and thereby wealth

career inheritance: a practice where children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents

convergence theory: a sociological theory to explain how and why societies move toward similarity over time as their economies develop

depression: a sustained recession across several economic sectors

economy: the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed

global assembly lines: a practice where products are assembled over the course of several international transactions

global commodity chains: internationally integrated economic links that connect workers and corporations for the purpose of manufacture and marketing

market socialism: a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demand

mechanical solidarity: a form of social cohesion that comes from sharing similar work, education, and religion, as might be found in simpler societies

mercantilism: an economic policy based on national policies of accumulating silver and gold by controlling markets with colonies and other countries through taxes and customs charges

money: an object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged as payment

mutualism: a form of socialism under which individuals and cooperative groups exchange products with one another on the basis of mutually satisfactory contracts

organic solidarity: a form of social cohesion that arises out of the mutual interdependence created by the specialization of work

outsourcing: a practice where jobs are contracted to an outside source, often in another country

polarization: a practice where the differences between low-end and high-end jobs become greater and the number of people in the middle levels decreases

recession: two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline

socialism: an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as "state run") of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society

structural unemployment: a societal level of disjuncture between people seeking jobs and the jobs that are available

subsistence farming: farming where farmers grow only enough to feed themselves and their families

underemployment: a state in which a person accepts a lower paying, lower status job than his or her education and experience qualifies him or her to perform

xenophobia: an illogical fear and even hatred of foreigners and foreign goods

Section Summary

18.1 Economic Systems

Economy refers to the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed. The Agricultural Revolution led to development of the first economies that were based on trading goods. Mechanization of the manufacturing process led to the Industrial Revolution and gave rise to two major competing economic systems. Under capitalism, private owners invest their capital and that of others to produce goods and services they can sell in an open market. Prices and wages are set by supply and demand and competition. Under socialism, the means of production is commonly owned, and the economy is controlled centrally by government. Several countries' economies exhibit a mix of both systems. Convergence theory seeks to explain the correlation between a country's level of development and changes in its economic structure.

18.2 Globalization and the Economy

Globalization refers to the process of integrating governments, cultures, and financial markets through international trade into a single world market. There are benefits and drawbacks to globalization. Often the countries that fare the worst are those that depend on natural resource extraction for their wealth. Many critics fear globalization gives too much power to multinational corporations and that political decisions are influenced by these major financial players.

18.3 Work in the United States

The job market in the United States is meant to be a meritocracy that creates social stratifications based on individual achievement. Economic forces, such as outsourcing and automation, are polarizing the workforce, with most job opportunities being either low-level, low-paying manual jobs or high-level, high-paying jobs based on abstract skills. Women's role in the workforce has increased, although women have not yet achieved full equality. Immigrants play an important role in the U.S. labor market. The changing economy has forced more people into poverty even if they are working. Welfare, Social Security, and other social programs exist to protect people from the worst effects of poverty.

Section Quiz

18.1 Economic Systems

1. Which of these is an example of a commodity?
  a. A restaurant meal
  b. Corn
  c. A college lecture
  d. A book, blog entry, or magazine article

2. When did the first economies begin to develop?
  a. When all the hunter-gatherers died
  b. When money was invented
  c. When people began to grow crops and domesticate animals
  d. When the first cities were built

3. What is the most important commodity in a postindustrial society?
  a. Electricity
  b. Money
  c. Information
  d. Computers

4. In which sector of an economy would someone working as a software developer be?
  a. Primary
  b. Secondary
  c. Tertiary
  d. Quaternary

5. Which is an economic policy based on national policies of accumulating silver and gold by controlling markets with colonies and other countries through taxes and customs charges?
a. Capitalism
b. Communism
c. Mercantilism
d. Mutualism

6. Who was the leading theorist on the development of socialism?
a. Karl Marx
b. Heidimarie Schwermer
c. Émile Durkheim
d. Adam Smith

7. The type of socialism now carried on by Russia is a form of ______ socialism.
a. centrally planned
b. market
c. utopian
d. zero-sum

8. Among the reasons socialism never developed into a political movement in the United States was that trade unions _________.
a. secured workers' rights
b. guaranteed health care
c. broke up monopolies
d. diversified the workforce

9. Which country serves as an example of convergence?
a. Singapore
b. North Korea
c. England
d. Canada

18.2 Globalization and the Economy

10. Ben lost his job when General Motors closed U.S. factories and opened factories in Mexico. Now, Ben is very anti-immigration and campaigns for large-scale deportation of Mexican nationals, even though, logically, their presence does not harm him and their absence will not restore his job. Ben might be experiencing _____________.
a. xenophobia
b. global commodity chains
c. xenophilia
d. global assembly line

11. Which of the following is *not* an aspect of globalization?
a. Integrating governments through international trade
b. Integrating cultures through international trade
c. Integrating finance through international trade
d. Integrating child care through international trade

12. One reason critics oppose globalization is that it:
a. has positive impacts on world trade
b. has negative impacts on the environment
c. concentrates wealth in the poorest countries
d. has negative impacts on political stability

13. All of the following are characteristics of global cities, *except*:
a. headquarter multinational corporations
b. exercise significant international political influence
c. host headquarters of international NGOs
d. host influential philosophers

14. Which of the following is *not* a characteristic of multinational corporations?
a. A large share of their capital is collected from a variety of nationalities.
b. Their business is conducted without regard to national borders.
c. They concentrate wealth in the hands of core nations.
d. They are headquartered primarily in the United States.

18.3 Work in the United States

15. Which is evidence that the United States workforce is largely a meritocracy?
  a. Job opportunities are increasing for highly skilled jobs.
  b. Job opportunities are decreasing for midlevel jobs.
  c. Highly skilled jobs pay better than low-skill jobs.
  d. Women tend to make less than men do for the same job.

16. If someone does not earn enough money to pay for the essentials of life he or she is said to be _____ poor.
  a. absolutely
  b. essentially
  c. really
  d. working

17. About what percentage of the workforce in the United States are legal immigrants?
  a. Less than 1%
  b. 1%
  c. 16%
  d. 66%

Short Answer

18.1 Economic Systems

1. Explain the difference between state socialism with central planning and market socialism.

2. In what ways can capitalistic and socialistic economies converge?

3. Describe the impact a rapidly growing economy can have on families.

4. How do you think the United States economy will change as we move closer to a technology-driven service economy?

18.2 Globalization and the Economy

5. What impact has globalization had on the music you listen to, the books you read, or the movies or television you watch?

6. What effect can immigration have on the economy of a developing country?

7. Is globalization a danger to local cultures? Why, or why not?

18.3 Work in the United States

8. As polarization occurs in the U.S. job market, this will affect other social institutions. For example, if midlevel education won't lead to employment, we could see polarization in educational levels as well. Use the sociological imagination to consider what social institutions may be impacted, and how.

9. Do you believe we have a true meritocracy in the United States? Why, or why not?

Further Research

18.1 Economic Systems

Green jobs have the potential to improve not only your prospects of getting a good job, but the environment as well. To learn more about the green revolution in jobs go to http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenjobs (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenjobs)

One alternative to traditional capitalism is to have the workers own the company for which they work. To learn more about company-owned businesses check out: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/company-owned (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/company-owned)

18.2 Globalization and the Economy

The World Social Forum (WSF) was created in response to the creation of the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WSF is a coalition of organizations dedicated to the idea of a worldwide civil society and presents itself as an alternative to WEF, which it says is too focused on capitalism. To learn more about the WSF, check out http://openstaxcollege.org/l/WSF (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/WSF)

18.3 Work in the United States

The role of women in the workplace is constantly changing. To learn more, check out http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_workplace (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_workplace)

The Employment Projections Program of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics looks at a ten-year projection for jobs and employment. To see some trends for the next decade, check out http://openstaxcollege.org/l/BLS (http://openstaxcollege.org/l/BLS)

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