

## sociology

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a social science that studies human societies, their interactions, and the processes that preserve and change them. It does this by examining the dynamics of constituent parts of societies such as institutions, communities, populations, and gender, racial, or age groups. Sociology also studies social status or stratification, social movements, and social change, as well as societal disorder in the form of crime, deviance, and revolution.

Social life overwhelmingly regulates the behaviour of humans, largely because humans lack the instincts that guide most animal behaviour. Humans therefore depend on social institutions and organizations to inform their decisions and actions. Given the important role organizations play in influencing human action, it is sociology's task to discover how organizations affect the behaviour of persons, how they are established, how organizations interact with one another, how they decay, and, ultimately, how they disappear. Among the most basic organizational structures are economic, religious, educational, and political institutions, as well as more specialized institutions such as the family, the community, the military, peer groups, clubs, and volunteer associations.

Sociology, as a generalizing social science, is surpassed in its breadth only by anthropology—a discipline that encompasses archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics. The broad nature of sociological inquiry causes it to overlap with other social sciences such as economics, political science, psychology, geography, education, and law. Sociology's distinguishing feature is its practice of drawing on a larger societal context to explain social phenomena.

Sociologists also utilize some aspects of these other fields. Psychology and sociology, for instance, share an interest in the subfield of social psychology, although psychologists traditionally focus on individuals and their mental mechanisms. Sociology devotes most of its attention to the collective aspects of human behaviour, because sociologists place greater emphasis on the ways external groups influence the behaviour of individuals.

The field of social anthropology has been historically quite close to sociology. Until about the first quarter of the 20th century, the two subjects were usually combined in one department (especially in Britain), differentiated mainly by anthropology's emphasis on the sociology of preliterate peoples. Recently, however, this distinction has faded, as social anthropologists have turned their interests toward the study of modern culture.

Two other social sciences, political science and economics, developed largely from the practical interests of nations. Increasingly, both fields have recognized the utility of sociological concepts and methods. A comparable synergy has also developed with respect to law, education, and religion and even in such contrasting fields as engineering and architecture. All of these fields can benefit from the study of institutions and social interaction.

### **Historical development of sociology**

Though sociology draws on the Western tradition of rational inquiry established by the ancient Greeks, it is specifically the offspring of 18th- and 19th-century philosophy and has been viewed, along with economics and political science, as a reaction against speculative philosophy and folklore. Consequently, sociology separated from moral philosophy to become a specialized discipline. While he is not credited with the founding of the discipline of sociology, French philosopher Auguste Comte is recognized for having coined the term *sociology*.

The founders of sociology spent decades searching for the proper direction of the new discipline. They tried several highly divergent pathways, some driven by methods and contents borrowed from other sciences, others invented by the scholars themselves. To better view the various turns the discipline has taken, the development of sociology may be divided into four periods: the establishment of the discipline from the late 19th century until World War I, interwar consolidation, explosive growth from 1945 to 1975, and the subsequent period of segmentation.

### **Founding the discipline**

Some of the earliest sociologists developed an approach based on Darwinian evolutionary theory. In their attempts to establish a scientifically based academic discipline, a line of creative thinkers, including Herbert Spencer, Benjamin Kidd, Lewis H. Morgan, E.B. Tylor, and L.T. Hobhouse, developed analogies between human society and the biological organism. They introduced into sociological theory such biological concepts as variance, natural selection, and inheritance—asserting that these evolutionary factors resulted in the progress of societies from stages of savagery and barbarism to civilization by virtue of the survival of the fittest. Some writers believed that these stages of society could be seen in the developmental stages of each individual. Strange customs were explained by assuming that they were throwbacks to useful practices of an earlier period, such as the make-believe struggle sometimes enacted between the bridegroom and the bride's relatives reflecting the earlier custom of bride capture.

In its popular period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social Darwinism, along with the doctrines of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, touted unrestricted competition and laissez-faire so that the “fittest” would survive and civilization would continue to advance. Although the popularity of social Darwinism waned in the 20th century, the ideas on competition and analogies from biological ecology were appropriated by the Chicago School of sociology (a University of Chicago program focusing on urban studies, founded by Albion Small in 1892) to form the theory of human ecology that endures as a viable study approach.

#### **Replacing Darwinist determinism**

Since the initial interest in evolutionary theory, sociologists have considered four deterministic theories to replace social Darwinism. This search for new approaches began prior to World War I as emphasis shifted from economic theory to geographic, psychological, and cultural theory—roughly in that order.

#### **Economic determinism**

The first theory, economic determinism, reflects the interest many sociologists had in the thought of Karl Marx, such as the idea that social differentiation and class conflict resulted from economic factors. This approach had its greatest popularity in Europe, where it remained a strong influence on some sociologists until the 1980s. It did not gain a significant foothold in the United States, because American society was thought to be socially mobile, classless, and oriented to the individual. This neglect of Marxism by American sociologists, however, was not due to scholarly ignorance. Sociologists of all periods had read Marx as well as Charles A. Beard's economic interpretation of American history and the work of Werner Sombart (who had been a Marxist in his early career). Instead, in the 1960s, neo-Marxism—an amalgam of theories of stratification by Marx and Max Weber—gained strong support among a minority of sociologists. Their enthusiasm lasted about 30 years, ebbing with the breakup of the Soviet system and the introduction of postindustrial doctrines that linked class systems to a bygone industrial era. The persistence of social and economic inequality is now explained as a complex outcome of factors, including gender, race, and region, as well as global trade and national politics.

#### **Human ecology**

Representing the second theoretical area, human geographers—Ellsworth Huntington, Ellen Semple, Friedrich Ratzel, Paul Vidal de La Blache, Jean Brunhes, and others—emphasized the impact of climate and geography on the evolution of those societies that flourished in temperate zones. Their theories found no place in

mainstream sociological thought, however, except for a brief period in the 1930s when human ecology sought to explain social change by linking environmental conditions with demographic, organizational, and technological factors. Human ecology remains a small but vital part of sociology today.

#### **Social psychology**

Psychological theories emphasized instincts, drives, motives, temperament, intelligence, and human sociability in social behaviour and societal evolution. Social psychology modifies these concepts to explain the broader phenomena of social interaction or small group behaviour. Although American sociology even today retains an individualistic (and therefore psychological) bias, by the 1930s sociologists had concluded that psychological factors alone could not explain the behaviour of larger groups and societies.

#### **Cultural theory**

Finally, cultural theories of the 1930s emphasized human ability to innovate, accumulate, and diffuse culture. Heavily influenced by social and cultural anthropology, many sociologists concluded that culture was the most important factor in accounting for its own evolution and that of society. By 1940 cultural and social explanations of societal growth and change were accepted, with economic, geographic, and biopsychological factors playing subsidiary roles.

#### **Early schools of thought**

##### **Early functionalism**

Scholars who established sociology as a legitimate social science were careful to distinguish it from biology and psychology, fields that had also begun to generalize about human behaviour. They did this by developing specific methods for the study of society. French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), prominent in this regard, argued that various kinds of interactions between individuals bring about certain new properties (*sui generis*) not found in separate individuals. Durkheim insisted that these “social facts,” as he called them—collective sentiments, customs, institutions, nations—should be studied and explained on a distinctly societal level (rather than on an individual level). To Durkheim the interrelations between the parts of society contributed to social unity—an integrated system with life characteristics of its own, exterior to individuals yet driving their behaviour. By positing a causal direction of social influence (from group to individual rather than the reverse, the model accepted by most biologists and psychologists of the time), Durkheim gave a much-needed framework to the new science of sociology. Some writers called this view “functionalism,” although the term

later acquired broader meanings.

Durkheim pointed out that groups can be held together on two contrasting bases: mechanical solidarity, a sentimental attraction of social units or groups that perform the same or similar functions, such as preindustrial self-sufficient farmers; or organic solidarity, an interdependence based on differentiated functions and specialization as seen in a factory, the military, government, or other complex organizations. Other theorists of Durkheim's period, notably Henry Maine and Ferdinand Tönnies, made similar distinctions—status and contract (Maine) and *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tönnies)—and predicted that civilization would progress along the lines of specialization, contractual relations, and *Gesellschaft*.

Later anthropologists, especially Bronisław Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, developed a doctrine of functionalism that emphasized the interrelatedness of all parts of society. They theorized that a change in any single element would produce a general disturbance in the whole society. This doctrine eventually gained such a following among social anthropologists that some advocated a policy of complete noninterference, even with objectionable practices in preliterate societies (such as cannibalism or head-hunting), for fear that eliminating the practice might produce far-reaching social disorganization.

#### **The functionalist-conflict debate**

American sociology began undergoing significant development in the 1940s. The monumental growth of university enrollment and research after World War II was fueled by generous federal and private funding of research. Sociologists sought to enhance their status as scientists by pursuing empirical research and by conducting qualitative analysis of significant social problems. Many universities developed large research organizations that spurred important advances in survey research application, measurement, and social statistics. At the forefront were Columbia University (focusing on cultural surveys) and the University of Chicago (specializing in quantitative analysis of social conditions and detailed studies of urban problems). The struggle over the meaningful use of statistics and theory in research began at this time and remained a continuing debate in the discipline.

The gap between empirical research and theory persisted, in part because functionalist theory seemed divorced from the empirical research programs that defined mid-20th-century sociology. Functionalism underwent some modification when sociologist Talcott Parsons enunciated the “functional prerequisites” that any social system must meet in order to survive: developing routinized

interpersonal arrangements (structures), defining relations to the external environment, fixing boundaries, and recruiting and controlling members. Along with Robert K. Merton and others, Parsons classified such structures on the basis of their functions. This approach, called structural-functional analysis (and also known as systems theory), was applied so broadly that Marion Levy and Kingsley Davis suggested it was synonymous with the scientific study of social organization.

That structural-functional emphasis changed in the 1960s, however, with new challenges to the functionalist notion that a society's survival depended on institutional practices. This belief, along with the notion that the stratification system selected the most talented and meritorious individuals to meet society's needs, was seen by some as a conservative ideology that legitimated the status quo and thereby prevented social reform. It also ignored the potential of the individual within society. In a response to the criticism of structural-functionalism, some sociologists proposed a "conflict sociology." In this view, the dominant institutions repress the weaker groups. This view gained prominence in the United States with the social turmoil of the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam War over the 1960s and '70s and prompted many younger sociologists to adopt this neo-Marxist view. Their interpretation of class conflict seemed consistent with the principal tenet of general conflict theory: that conflict pervades all of society, including the family, the economy, polity, and education.

#### **Rising segmentation of the discipline**

The early schools of thought each presented a systematic formulation of sociology that implied possession of exclusive truth and that involved a conviction of the need to destroy rival systems. By 1975 the era of growth, optimism, and surface consensus in sociology had come to an end. The functionalist-conflict debate signaled further and permanent divisions in the discipline, and virtually all textbooks presented it as the main theoretical divide, despite Lewis A. Coser's widely known proposition that social conflict, while divisive, also has an integrating and stabilizing effect on society. Conflict is not necessarily negative, argued Coser in *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1936), because it can ultimately foster social cohesiveness by identifying social problems to be overcome. In the late 1970s, however, attention to other, everyday social processes such as those elaborated by the Chicago School (competition, accommodation, and assimilation) ceased appearing in textbooks. In its extreme form, conflict theory helped revive the critical theory of the Frankfurt School that wholly rejected all sociological theories of the time as proponents of the status quo. These theoretical divisions themselves became institutionalized in the study and practice of sociology, which suggested that debates on

approach would likely remain unresolved.

### **Major modern developments**

One of the consequences of the functionalist-conflict divide, recognized by the 1970s as unbridgeable, was a decline in general theory building. Others were growing specialization and controversy over methodology and approach. Communication between the specialties also diminished, even as ideological disputes and other disagreements persisted within the specialty areas. New academic journals were introduced to meet the needs of the emerging specializations, but this further obscured the core of the discipline by causing scholars to focus on microsociological issues. Interestingly, theory building grew within the specialties—fractured as they were—especially as international comparative research increased contact with other social sciences.

### **Social stratification**

Since social stratification is the most binding and central concern of sociology, changes in the study of social stratification reflect trends in the entire discipline. The founders of sociology—including Weber—thought that the United States, unlike Europe, was a classless society with a high degree of upward mobility. During the Great Depression, however, Robert and Helen Lynd, in their famous Middletown (1937) studies, documented the deep divide between the working and the business classes in all areas of community life. W. Lloyd Warner and colleagues at Harvard University applied anthropological methods to study the *Social Life of a Modern Community* (1941) and found six social classes with distinct subcultures: upper upper and lower upper, upper middle and lower middle, and upper lower and lower lower classes. In 1953 Floyd Hunter's study of Atlanta, Georgia, shifted the emphasis in stratification from status to power; he documented a community power structure that controlled the agenda of urban politics. Likewise, C. Wright Mills in 1956 proposed that a “power elite” dominated the national agenda in Washington, a cabal comprising business, government, and the military.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, research in social stratification was influenced by the attainment model of stratification, initiated at the University of Wisconsin by William H. Sewell. Designed to measure how individuals attain occupational status, this approach assigned each occupation a socioeconomic score and then measured the distance between sons' and fathers' scores, also using the educational achievement of fathers to explain intergenerational mobility. Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan used this technique in the study published as *The American Occupational Structure* (1967).

Attempting to build a general theory, Gerhard Lenski shifted attention to whole societies and proposed an evolutionary theory in *Power and Privilege* (1966) demonstrating that the dominant forms of production (hunting and gathering, horticulture, agriculture, and industry) were consistently associated with particular systems of stratification. This theory was enthusiastically accepted, but only by a minority of sociologists. Addressing the contemporary world, Marion Levy theorized in *Modernization and the Structures of Societies* (1960) that underdeveloped nations would inevitably develop institutions that paralleled those of the more economically advanced nations, which ultimately would lead to a global convergence of societies. Challenging the theory as a conservative defense of the West, Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974) proposed a more pessimistic world-system theory of stratification. Wallerstein averred that advanced industrial nations would develop most rapidly and thereby widen global inequality by holding the developing nations in a permanent state of dependency.

Having been challenged as a male-dominated approach, traditional stratification theory was massively reconstructed in the 1970s to address the institutional gender inequalities found in all societies. Rae Lesser Blumberg, drawing on the work of Lenski and economist Esther Boserup, theorized the basis of persistent inequality in *Stratification, Socioeconomic, and Sexual Inequality* (1978). Janet Saltzman Chafetz took economic, psychological, and sociological factors into account in *Gender Equity: An Integrated Theory of Stability and Change* (1990). Traditional theories of racial inequality were challenged and revised by William Julius Wilson in *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987). His book uncovered mechanisms that maintained segregation and disorganization in African American communities. Disciplinary specialization, especially in the areas of gender, race, and Marxism, came to dominate sociological inquiry.

For example, Eric Olin Wright, in *Classes* (1985), introduced a 12-class scheme of occupational stratification based on ownership, supervisory control of work, and monopolistic knowledge. Wright's book, an attack on the individualistic bias of attainment theory written from a Marxist perspective, drew on the traits of these 12 classes to explain income inequality. The nuanced differences between social groups were further investigated in *Divided We Stand* (1985) by William Form, whose analysis of labour markets revealed deep permanent fissures within working classes previously thought to be uniform.

Some investigative specializations, however, were short-lived. Despite their earlier popularity, ethnographic studies of communities, such as those by Hunter, Warner, and the Lynds, were increasingly abandoned in the 1960s and virtually forgotten by the

1970s. Intensive case studies of bureaucracies begun in the '70s followed a similar path. Like economists, sociologists have increasingly turned to large-scale surveys and government data banks as sources for their research. Social stratification theory and research continue to undergo change and have seen substantive reappraisal ever since the breakup of the Soviet system.

#### **Interdisciplinary influences**

The significant growth of sociological inquiry after World War II prompted interest in historical and political sociology. Charles Tilly in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), Jack Goldstone in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies* (1993), and Arthur Stinchcombe in *Constructing Social Theories* (1987) made comparative studies of revolutions and proposed structural theories to explain the origins and spread of revolution. Sociologists who brought international and historical perspectives to their study of institutions such as education, welfare, religion, the family, and the military were forced to reconsider long-held theories and methodologies. As was the case in almost all areas of specialization, new journals were founded.

Sociological specialties were enriched by contact with other social sciences, especially political science and economics. Political sociology, for example, studied the social basis of party voting and partisan politics, spurring comparison of decision-making processes in city, state, and national governments. Still, sociologists split along ideological lines, much as they had in the functionalist-conflict divide, with some reporting that decisions were made pluralistically and democratically and others insisting that decisions were made by economic and political elites. Eventually, voting and community power studies were abandoned by sociologists, and those areas were left largely to political scientists.

From its inception, the study of social movements looked closely at interpersonal relations formed in the mobilization phase of collective action. Beginning in the 1970s, scholars focused more deeply on the long-term consequences of social movements, especially on evaluating the ways such movements have propelled societal change. The rich area of historical and international research that resulted includes the study of social turmoil's influence on New Deal legislation; the rise, decline, and resurrection of women's rights movements; analysis of both failed and successful revolutions; the impact of government and other institutions on social movements; national differences in how social movements spur discontent; the response of nascent movements to political changes; and variations in the rates of growth and decline of movements over time and in different nations. In short, countering the general trend, social movement research became better

integrated into other specialties, especially in political and organizational sociology.

Stratification studies and organizational sociology were broadened to include economic phenomena such as labour markets and the behaviour of businesses. Econometric methods were also introduced from economics. Thus, to predict income, sociologists would examine status variables (such as race, ethnicity, or gender) or group affiliations (looking at degree of unionization, whether groups are licensed or unlicensed, and the type of industry, community, or firm involved). Other economic variables tapped by sociologists include human capital (education, training, and experience) and economic segmentation. As a result of his interaction with economists, for example, James S. Coleman was the first sociologist since Parsons to build a comprehensive social theory. Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990), based on economic models, suggests that the individual makes rational choices in all phases of social life.

**The historical divide: qualitative and establishment sociology**

Paradoxically, American sociology, unlike its European counterpart, has been marked by an individualistic (psychological) orientation, even though early sociologists fought to establish a discipline distinct from psychology. Most specialized research in American sociology still uses the individual as the unit of analysis. The standard practice is to collect data from or about individuals, categorize their social characteristics into “groups,” and relate them to other categories of individuals such as income classes, occupations, and age groups. These intergroup relations are often examined with complex statistical tools. This practice is not generally recognized as social-psychological in nature, yet neither is it regarded as social structural analysis. (See social structure.) Only a minority of sociologists in fields such as demography, human ecology, and historical or comparative institutional study use actual groups, organizations, and social structures as units of analysis.

As the field developed in the United States, many early 20th-century sociologists rejected instinctivist psychology and the classical behaviourism of John B. Watson. One group, however, emphasized the study of individuals in an approach called symbolic interaction, which took root at the University of Chicago early in the 20th century and remains prominent in contemporary sociology. John Dewey, George H. Mead, and Charles H. Cooley argued that the self is the individual's internalization of the wider society as revealed through interaction, the accumulated perceptions of how others see them. In other words, the mind and human self are not innate human equipment but constructions of the “person” (the socialized individual) derived from experience and intimate interpersonal

interaction in small groups. This constructed self, however changing, functions as a guide to social behaviour. Social reality is thus made up of constructed symbols and meanings that are exchanged with others through daily interaction.

William I. Thomas and Ellsworth Faris used symbolic interaction theory to guide their empirical research in the tradition of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess by using personal documents, life histories, and autobiographies. The two revealed how people attach meanings to their experience and to the broader social world. This research tradition was enriched after 1960 by several innovations. The most sophisticated small-group research was devised by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman insisted that the most meaningful individual behaviour occurs in the chance, intimate encounters of each day. These encounters include greeting people, appearing in public, and reacting to the physical appearance of others. Such encounters have structures of their own that can be researched by carefully constructing the “frames” (points of reference) people use to interpret and “stage” interactions. The structures are thought to represent true reality as opposed to the artificially constructed concepts that sociologists impose on the subjects they study.

In *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967), Harold Garfinkel coined the term *ethnomethodology* to designate the methods individuals use in daily life to construct their reality, primarily through intimate exchanges of meanings in conversation. These constructions are available through new methods of conversational analysis, detailed or “thick” descriptions of behaviour, “interpretive frames,” and other devices. Proponents of this view have favoured the work of earlier European phenomenology, *Verstehen* (historical understanding), and interpretive sociology. More recently, qualitative sociologists have drawn on French structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism to emphasize ways the “deeper” sources of hidden meanings in culture and language can affect the behaviour of individuals or of whole societies.

Since World War II, sociology has exported much of its theory, methodology, and findings to other divisions of the university, sometimes to its disadvantage. The study of human relations and formal organizations was transferred to business schools. The study of socialization, institutions, and stratification was absorbed by departments of education. Outside the university, the empirical methods and sociological theory prompted government agencies to adopt a behavioral perspective. Economists widened the scope of their research by introducing social variables to the analysis of economic behaviour. In short, although contemporary sociology is divided, it remains a vibrant field whose innovations contribute to its

own development and that of social science in general.

#### **Methodological considerations in sociology**

Much 19th-century sociology had no system for gathering and analyzing data, but over time the inadequacies of speculative methods became increasingly evident, as did the need for obtaining reliable and verifiable knowledge. Like his contemporaries, Herbert Spencer assembled vast stores of observations made by others and used these to illustrate and support generalizations he had already formulated. Early social surveys like those conducted by Charles Booth in a monumental series on the social problems of London produced masses of data without regard to their theoretical relevance or reliability. Frédéric Le Play made similar use of the French case studies he drew on for his extensive investigations of family budgets.

Early exploitation of statistical materials, such as official records of birth, death, crime, and suicide, provided only moderate advances in knowledge. Data were easily manipulated, often to support preconceived ideas (the status quo). Among the most successful of such studies was that on suicide rates by Durkheim in *Le Suicide* (1897). Moreover, his *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) had begun to meet the standards of scientific inquiry. In gathering data on suicides, Durkheim considered the social characteristics of individuals (e.g., religious affiliation, rural-urban residence) that reflected the degree of their social integration in the community, and he related these variables statistically.

#### **Methodological development in contemporary sociology**

At the beginning of the 20th century, interest in developing a sociological methodology grew steadily. Methodological approaches outlined in W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (vol. 5, 1918-20) were recognized as an important advance, not so much in methodology as in committing sociologists to the task of improving methodology. Thomas and Znaniecki systematically gathered longitudinal data through letters, diaries, life histories, and other relevant documents. Intended to gather specific data to help planners solve social problems, this approach soon became popular. The most ambitious of these "community social surveys" was the two-volume work *Great Depression, Recent Social Trends* (1933), edited by sociologists W.F. Ogburn and H.W. Odum.

Significant advances in scientific methodology occurred at the University of Chicago in the 1920s. Many studies of the metropolis and its subareas were conducted under the leadership of Robert E. Park, Ernest Burgess, and their colleagues. Most important,

hypotheses were developed during the research rather than being imposed a priori (a practice later replaced by theoretically guided research). Many students took part in the studies and contributed to methods and findings.

#### **Ecological patterning**

A critical aspect of the Chicago School's urban research involved mapping locations. These included locations of land values, specific populations (racial, ethnic, or occupational), ethnic succession in neighbourhoods, residences of persons who committed certain crimes, or zones with a high incidence of divorce and desertion. Data-collection methods included participant observation, life histories, case studies, historical information, and life cycles of social movements. Sociologists at the University of Chicago paid equal attention to the improvement of methodology as they developed this approach. Here, for the first time, was a large-scale effort in which theory, methodology, and findings evolved together in an inductive process. Growing from its success in the American Midwest, urban research and zone mapping spread throughout the United States and influenced sociology abroad.

Ecological methods such as urban mapping were also first developed at Chicago, having grown out of the research on the metropolitan region, especially that regarding nonsocial patterns that resulted from the movement of populations, businesses, industries, residences, and institutions as each sought more advantageous locations. Most early urban studies mapped distributions that revealed relationships in general patterns of urban ecology. Because of this, multiple indicators of disorganization, stratification, vertical mobility, and population phenomena were found to follow regularities and could actually be considered predictable to some degree (see demography).

#### **Experiments**

Experimental methods, once limited to the domain of psychologists and considered inapplicable to social research, were eventually applied to the study of groups. By the 1930s, social psychologists Kurt Lewin, Muzafer Sherif, and their colleagues had begun conducting experiments on social interaction. Sociologists soon followed their example and set up research laboratories. Notably, Robert F. Bales at Harvard systematically observed interaction in small artificial groups, producing useful results that were replicated elsewhere.

As a rule, successful experiments tend to occur in simple situations in which the variables are limited or controlled. Complex experiments, however, are possible. At Stanford, for example, a

series of experiments over 30 years contributed to a formal theory of social status building and maintenance set forth by Joseph Berger and Morris Zelditch in *Status, Rewards, and Influence* (1985). At the University of Iowa, two decades of laboratory and computer-simulated research on power and exchange in small groups advanced theory in networks and decision making summarized by Barry Markovsky in *Social Psychology of Small Groups* (1993).

#### **Statistics and mathematical analysis**

Sociologists have increasingly borrowed statistical methods from other disciplines. Statistician Karl Pearson's "coefficient of correlation," for example, introduced an important concept for measuring associations between continuous variables without necessarily defining the nature of the connection. Later, statistical estimates of causal relations were probed by "multiple regression analysis," employing techniques that estimate the degree to which any particular variable influences a particular outcome.

Patterns of responses to interview questions, once thought to be purely qualitative, have also been subject to mathematical scaling. A method devised by psychologist L.L. Thurstone in the late 1920s gained popular use in sociology. In this approach a list of items is presented to a number of judges who individually relist them in order of importance or of interest. Items on which there is substantial agreement are then reordered to form a scale. Another technique asks participants to respond to statements by strength of agreement (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree). Social distance may be measured by asking respondents whether they would accept members of other groups as spouses, close friends, fellow employees, neighbours, or citizens.

A method called sociometry, introduced by J.L. Moreno in the 1930s, collects and tabulates information on group interactions. The interactions studied can appear trivial—for example, who confides in whom, which friends each lunch together—or they may be more businesslike, such as who might be appointed as a group spokesperson. The data may be gathered by direct observation, interviews, or questionnaires. The preferences each individual has for specific others are then mapped with arrows from sender to receiver, and this results in a diagram of choices for the entire group. The person chosen most often is labeled a "star" or, less often, an "isolate."

The patterns may be quantified and supplemented with other data to reveal a group's informal structure. A powerful application of the approach, often mathematized, called network analysis, maps different types of interactions between organizations over extended

periods and thus exposes a substructure not revealed from organizational charts or public documents.

Factor analysis, an elaboration of Pearson's coefficient of correlation, significantly reduces the number of complex variables to be considered. For instance, 50 different questions or measures of work alienation may in fact represent only seven or eight dimensions of alienation. Factor analysis reduces the variables to a more practical number of common factors and then determines each factor's relative contribution to the outcome variables.

Many other statistical methods have been devised to suit the purposes of such specialties as demography, ecology, social stratification, organizational analysis, mass communication, and social movements. Statistical methods have developed so rapidly that they sometimes outstrip scholars' ability to find data worthy of their application. Computers have accelerated the application of complex measures that were previously limited by the amount of time required for performing the mathematics. Progress in measurement has been so significant that the American Sociological Association in 1969 established an annual volume entitled *Sociological Methodology*.

#### **Data collection**

Research techniques vary depending on the social phenomena studied. Data-collection techniques differ from participant observation, content analysis, interviewing, and documentary analysis. In this approach each problem studied requires a specific unit of observation, be it an individual, an organization, a city, a relationship between units, or a statistical rate. Even the way a concept is defined can affect data collection. For instance, when measuring occupational mobility, the definition of occupation is critical.

Steps must be taken to collect valid data. Many obstacles can arise, especially on sensitive subjects such as alcohol consumption in a community that prohibits or looks down upon it. In this instance the problem of gathering valid data might be circumvented by counting liquor bottles in trash receptacles or in the town dump. Similarly, a decline in the number of fictional works checked out of libraries has been used to estimate television-watching habits. Unfortunately, questionnaires, while useful for gathering information from large numbers of respondents, are marked by methodological problems. The wording of questions must be intelligible to the uneducated or uninterested as well as to the sophisticated respondent. Topics that provoke resistance must be presented in a way that yields a complete and unbiased response while keeping the interviewee engaged with the questions.

In face-to-face interviewing, it may be necessary to consider the interviewer's sex or race, appearance, manner, and approach. Questions must be posed in a way that does not influence the response. Interviewers must have steps for handling resistance or refusal. Indirect questioning, for example, may yield information that respondents would hesitate to provide in answers to direct questioning. Because of this, information collected through "canned" telephone interviews often leads to lower-quality data and poorer response rates.

Sampling errors and bias both constitute a continuing concern, especially since so much sociological knowledge is derived from samples of a larger universe. Where bias cannot be controlled, its extent may sometimes be estimated by various methods, including intensive analysis of smaller samples. For example, the population undercount in the United States is well known, as are the methods to estimate its extent, but political obstacles prevent the U.S. Bureau of the Census from revealing the undercount. Possibilities for errors arise in every stage of research, and the methods for reducing them constitute a continuing program of study in sociology.

#### **National methodological preferences**

Research approaches vary from country to country. All the methods described above are used by sociologists around the world, but their relative popularity depends somewhat on the sources of funding for the research and the relevance the subject may have to a particular country's interests. Where agricultural problems are of critical importance, as in developing countries, rural sociology and community studies are generally popular, especially when they can be conducted inexpensively by one or a few investigators. In France, Italy, and several other European nations, industrial sociology is understandably important, much of it based on case studies of industries and the experiences of workers. Sociology in Britain, the Scandinavian countries, and Japan covers most of the fields mentioned above. For most Western European countries, interest focuses on social stratification and its political implications.

In fact, general differences between the sociologies of European countries and that of the United States were established early in the 20th century. The European approach favoured broad sociological theory based on philosophical methods, while the American approach favoured induction and empiricism. Such differences have diminished somewhat in recent years, with remaining disparities stemming in part from ways that this expensive research is funded.

Sociology in Russia and eastern European countries is also becoming more similar to its Western counterparts. Research in the former Soviet-bloc nations, previously shaped by the concepts and methods

of Marxist sociology, has shifted to approaches influenced by European and American sociology.

More important than national preference is the methodological divide between scientific sociology and applied sociology; scholars interested in applied sociology tend to deprecate the methods and findings of the scientific sociologists as either irrelevant or ideologically biased. Issues of ethics have also been raised, particularly regarding observations and experiments in which the privacy of subjects may be felt to be invaded.

Finally, the divide between mainstream sociologists and those devoted to qualitative analysis seems deep and unbridgeable. Qualitative sociologists feel that their work is underrecognized and marginalized, even though it deals more with social reality than does standard sociology. Classical sociologists, in turn, feel that qualitative work can be trivial, philosophical, ideologically driven, or difficult to research. In addition, some members of groups who feel exploited (women, blacks, homosexuals, and the working class) assert that social observations cannot be made by outsiders; they believe that only victims have true insight into other victims and that they alone are equipped to do meaningful research in these areas. Minorities and other groups that locate themselves at the margins of society sometimes come together—often by organizing movements within professional societies—to challenge “establishment sociologists.” This results in the direction of more attention, funding, and research to the more highly focused topics.

### **Status of contemporary sociology**

#### **Academic status**

The Greek philosophers and their European successors discussed much of the subject matter of sociology without thinking of it as a distinct discipline. In the early 19th century, the subject matter of the social sciences was discussed under the heading of moral philosophy. Even after Comte introduced the word *sociology* in 1838, sociological studies were combined with other subjects for some 60 years. Not until universities undertook a commitment to the subject could one make a living as a full-time sociologist. This commitment had to be made first by scholars in other fields such as history and economics.

As early as 1876, at the newly established Johns Hopkins University, some sociology was taught in the department of history and politics. In 1889 at the University of Kansas, the word appeared in the title of the department of history and sociology. In 1890 at Colby College, historian Albion Small taught a course called sociology, as did Franklin H. Giddings in the same year at Bryn Mawr College. But the

first real commitment to the creation of a field of sociology took place in 1892 at the then new University of Chicago, where the recently arrived Albion Small received permission to create a department of sociology—the first such in the world. Within two years sociology departments had been founded at Columbia, Kansas, and Michigan, and shortly thereafter they were begun at Yale, Brown, and many other universities. By the late 1890s nearly all higher-educational institutions in the United States either had departments of sociology or offered courses in the subject.

In 1895 the *American Journal of Sociology* began publication at the University of Chicago; in time a large number of journals followed in many other countries. Ten years later the American Sociological Society was organized, also to be followed by a large number of national, regional, international, and specialized sociological organizations. These groups institutionalized the subject and continue to guide its directions and define its boundaries. Eventually in 1949 the International Sociological Association was established under the sponsorship of UNESCO, and Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago was elected its first president.

The rapid increase of full-time sociologists, along with the growth of sociology publications, allowed the content of the discipline also to expand rapidly. Research grew throughout the 20th century at an accelerated pace, especially after World War II, partly because of strong financial support from foundations, government, commercial sources, and individuals. This period was also marked by the rising popularity of anthropology, and many universities formed joint anthropology-sociology departments. By the 1960s, however, growing interest in anthropology had resulted in the formation of separate anthropology departments at the larger research universities. At the same time, interest in sociological research continued to develop. By 1970 there were more than a dozen important sociological journals and an indefinite number of minor journals worldwide. Along with this growth came a flourishing of research institutions—some affiliated with university departments and some independent—which allowed a small but increasing number of sociologists to pursue full-time research free from teaching responsibilities.

In France, where Comte and later Durkheim gave early impetus to sociology, sociological research developed in a number of fields. The two world wars slowed that development somewhat, but after 1945 a strong revival of interest in sociology took place, during which the French government established a number of research institutes in the social sciences parallel to those in the natural sciences, including several in Paris—notably the Centre d'Études Sociologiques, the Institut National d'Études Démographiques, and the Maison des

Sciences de l'Homme. These government-funded institutes employ many full-time sociologists, some of them among the more prominent scholars in the nation. The growth of sociological research at French universities has been somewhat more conservative; the Sorbonne, for example, in 1970 had only one chair officially assigned to sociology. The University of Nanterre, however, established a department with four professorships.

German sociology had a strong base in the late 19th century and afterward, and the writings of Tönnies, Weber, Georg Simmel, and others had an international impact. By the early 1930s, however, official Nazi hostility had impeded German sociology's development, and by the time of World War II the Nazis had destroyed sociology as an academic subject. Immediately after the war a new generation of scholars, aided by visiting sociologists, imported the new empirical research methods and began to develop a style of German sociology much different from the earlier theoretical and philosophical traditions. At the University of Frankfurt, Max Horkheimer's Institut für Sozialforschung (social research), established by private financing before the war, was revived. The University of Cologne also established a department notable for its survey research. West German universities remained conservative for a time, but two newly created ones—the Free University of Berlin and the University of Constance—made sociology one of their major disciplines. By 1970 most West German universities had at least one chair in sociology. National needs received special emphasis, including studies of unemployment, youth problems, and delinquency. A significant amount of German research also is published in such fields as rural sociology, political sociology, and the family.

Despite the early prominence of Herbert Spencer and L.T. Hobhouse, the leading universities of the United Kingdom virtually ignored sociology until the mid-20th century. Before World War II, Britain excelled in anthropology, especially in the study of the British Empire's nonwhite societies. British sociology concentrated on studies of the poor, and much of it was undertaken by people with experience in social work rather than social research. The major prewar sociology department, at the London School of Economics, prioritized social reform over scientific research. In the postwar period, however, a considerable revival of sociology took place; Oxford and Cambridge recognized the subject by creating positions for sociologists, and various new universities established chairs and departments. Significant work in Britain has emerged in such fields as population and demography, sociology of organization, politics and industry, social stratification, and general sociology. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London has become world famous and concentrates on human relations in the family, the work group, and organizations.

A parallel growth took place in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Canada, with some apparent reluctance, allowed itself to be much influenced by American sociology and has built many new departments with sociologists trained in the United States.

To a considerable extent Scandinavia and The Netherlands have also adopted the methods and some of the content of American sociology, and the subject has developed rapidly at universities and research institutes. There is also a considerable exchange between sociologists in these countries, because their works are typically published regionally as well as in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany.

Japanese interest in sociology dates back to the 1870s. The Japanese Sociological Society (Nippon Shakai Gakkai), headquartered at the University of Tokyo, was founded in 1923; by 1960 there were about 150 universities and colleges with courses in the subject. In the early period sociology was nearly all imported; Comte and Spencer, and later Giddings and Gabriel Tarde, were the most influential theorists. After World War II there were rapid changes in sociology in Japan, with empirical research methods largely replacing the earlier philosophical approach. Importations from American sociology were abundant. Popular among these were industrial sociology, social stratification, educational sociology, public opinion research, and the study of mass communication.

Sociology in the former Soviet Union was long held back by the perceived incompatibility of the subject with Marxist theory. Eventually it was permitted to develop, and the number of sociological institutes and chairs of sociology increased. By 1970 the Soviet Sociological Association had more than a thousand members. Leading research interests included labour productivity, education, crime, and alcoholism. Soviet sociology generally avoided issues that might have implied conflict with Marxist thought, concentrating for a time on demography and time-budget studies.

The nations of the Soviet bloc were also periodically inhospitable to sociology, but the strong interest of younger scholars alleviated some of this opposition, and in the second half of the 20th century sociology made considerable progress in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

In Israel the dominant department of sociology is at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where there are also several research institutes. Departments were also established at the University of Haifa and Tel Aviv University. Israeli sociology maintains continuous close contacts with American sociology, and many of the leading Israeli sociologists have trained or taught in the United States.

Among the specialties of Israeli sociology are research in methodology, communication, and criminology. Similarly prominent is the study of collective settlements (kibbutzim), in which new forms of custom and social organization are observed as they develop. Studies of stratification and the labour market have also explored the inequality between Israelis and Arabs.

In Italy, interest in sociology developed in the mid-20th century at several universities, and academic chairs and research institutes gradually increased. Of particular interest to Italian sociology are studies of industrial efficiency, social movements, and social mobility. The model of centralized control over universities, however, has hindered the development of the discipline, both in Italy and in Spain.

In Latin America objective sociology was long resisted, partly because it was viewed as a threat to the political and social order but also because of meagre financial support for research and the low salary level of professors, many of whom were forced to supplement their earnings by engaging in other occupations. In the 1960s, however, the number of full-time chairs increased, and a number of research institutes, some financed by U.S. funds, were established. Political instability in some countries remains a major hindrance, and in such countries able scholars continue to be forced from their university positions from time to time.

Little by little, sociology has penetrated some of the less-developed nations. A number of African universities have formed departments, and the subject is gaining in importance in the Philippines, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Some of the more significant developments have occurred in India, where a number of important research institutes have been established.

#### **Scientific status**

Sociology has not achieved triumphs comparable to those of the older and more heavily supported sciences. Several interpretations have been offered to explain the difference—most frequently, that the growth of sociological knowledge is more random than cumulative. Yet, in some parts of the discipline—such as methodology, human ecology, demography, social differentiation and mobility, attitude research, small-group interaction, public opinion, and mass communication—a slow but significant accumulation of organized and tested knowledge has taken hold. By comparison, some other fields lack this expanding volume of literature. Still, the slow development of published sociological research may stem from a variety of factors: excess use of jargon, a disposition for pseudoquantification, excessive imitation of natural science methodology, and overdependence on interview data,

questionnaires, or informal observations. Contemporary sociology is indeed marked by all these shortcomings, but in general there has been progress toward clearer communication and improved methodology, both of which yield more reliable data. As a result, conclusions are drawn from research methods applied to replicated studies that are, in turn, less dependent on the strength of one particular methodological device.

Bias is sometimes presumed to be a chronic affliction of sociology. This may arise in part from the fact that the subject matter of sociology is familiar and important in everyone's daily life. As a result, variations in philosophical outlook and individual preferences can contribute to an irrational bias. Thus, critics have expressed disapproval of the sociologists' skepticism on various matters of faith, of their amoral relativism concerning customs, of their apparent oversimplifications of some principles, and of their particular fashions in categorization and abstraction. But skepticism toward much of the content of folk knowledge is a characteristic of all science, and relativism can be interpreted as merely an avoidance of antiscientific ethnocentrism. Furthermore, abstraction, categorization, and simplification are necessary to the advancement of knowledge, and no one system satisfies everyone.

The dispute about the main purpose of sociology—whether it works to understand behaviour or to cause social change—is a dispute found in every pursuit of scientific knowledge, and such polarization is far from absolute. Scholars differ in the degree to which they regard the value of science as an intellectual understanding of the cosmos or as an instrument for immediate improvement of the human lot. Since even the “purest” scientist conceives of his work as benefiting mankind, the issue narrows to a difference in preference between an ad hoc attack on immediate human problems and a long-run trust that basic knowledge, gathered without reference to present urgencies, is even more valuable. In some countries there is much pressure toward early practicality of results; in others, including the United States, the larger number of scholars and the principal sociological associations have shown preference for “basic science.”

A degree of polarization has also arisen over the proper strategy for research—whether research should take its direction from the needs of society and humankind or from the evolving theoretical corpus of sociology. In nations that allow academic freedom, such disputes are usually of low intensity, because scholars select research interests on any basis they prefer, including that of personal taste. In this way presumably the motivation of the investigator is maximized.

Sociologists most interested in action express impatience at the

claims of others who prefer to separate their research from personal values. Much of the dispute prevails only because the two sides argue past each other. There can be wide agreement that no human being is without personal values, that research forced to confirm a particular set of values is not good science, and that there can be scientific issues toward which a particular investigator is value-neutral. In research that is susceptible to contamination by the values of the worker, it is generally possible to minimize the damage by employing methodological devices that prevent the researcher from imposing his or her wishes on a particular outcome. These devices include objective observational techniques, measurement methods, and independent or blind analysis of results.

#### **Current trends**

Sociology will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Among present trends contributing to this growth are the increase in public appreciation of the subject, the continuing growth of funds for teaching and research, the steady reduction of sectarian opposition to study of social institutions, the refinement of methodologies that permit statistical analysis, and the growth of acceptance from scientists in other fields. Although factors such as extreme nationalism and internal conflict can inhibit growth in sociology, such conditions have impeded development only locally and temporarily.

Furthermore, it appears likely that public interest in the development of sociological knowledge will increase as more people come to realize what sociology can contribute to human safety and welfare. Advances in science and technology will always be accompanied by unforeseen and unintended consequences. Progress can indeed diminish the effects of natural catastrophes such as famine and disease, but progress can also bring about a wide range of new problems. These are not the menaces of an impersonal nature but dangers that arise from imperfection in human behaviour, particularly in organized human relations. In addition, wars have shown a tendency to become larger and ever more destructive, and the causes, though far from being understood, clearly lie, in large measure, in the complexities of social organization, in the interaction of great corporate national bodies. It can be argued that politics, unaided by social science and other disciplines, cannot reverse this trend.

Problems within nations are seen as increasing sources of human troubles. There is a general rise in the severity of ethnic hostilities and of internal conflicts between generations, political factions, and other divisions of the populations. Human welfare is also threatened by widespread poverty, crime, vice, political corruption, and breakdowns in the family and in other institutions. Contemporary

sociology does not yet provide the solutions, but its practitioners believe that the prospects for human betterment depend in large part on the increasing application of social science knowledge to these enduring problems.

Applications of sociology also appear to be spreading in several directions. Many sociologists are employed by national and international bodies to recommend programs, evaluate their progress and effects, gather data for planning, and propose methods for initiating change. Sociologists aid industry by obtaining data on clients and workers. Some of this work includes social surveys, offering advice on personnel or public relations problems, providing labour unions with advice, helping communities undertake reform, counseling families, and donating or selling advice to consumer groups. As long as organizations need information on their various publics, there will be strong demand for sociological knowledge.

Progress into the deeper sociological questions will require greater resources, larger research teams, and special research agencies. This compares to the increased complexity of research organization that occurred in the older sciences. In addition, large-scale sociological research will continue to be enhanced by the availability of computers, by complex statistical techniques, and by the storage capacity of data banks.

#### **Emerging roles for sociologists**

The principal employment of sociologists has been in academic institutions, but other employment possibilities have opened in recent decades. Social welfare agencies have long employed sociologists, and government organizations of all types—from bureaus dealing with population, budgets, and education to departments concentrating on crime, agriculture, and health matters—have tapped sociologists for help in research, planning, and administration. Other directions of sociological activity include the roles of consultant, social critic, social activist, and even revolutionary. When the activity diverges far enough from true scholarship and traditional academic sociology, it may cease to be regarded as sociological, but it appears likely that sociologists will continue to spread their activities over an ever-widening region of national or global concern.

Robert E.L. Faris

William Form

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