

# *Intersections*

*Readings in Sociology*

A Custom Publication

**INTERSECTIONS:  
READINGS IN SOCIOLOGY**

**A CUSTOMIZED  
SOCIOLOGY READER**

**COMPILED BY**

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Introduction to Sociology**

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## Preface

*The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspectives make us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives . . .*

*Peter Berger*

Pearson Custom Publishing and General Editors Ralph McNeal and Kathleen Tiemann are proud to bring you *Intersections: Readings in Sociology*.

Our highest goal in the creation of *Intersections* is that it does, in fact, assist you in capturing that 'fascination of sociology' Peter Berger refers to above and which so many of us, as teachers, want to impart to our students. A traditional way of doing this has been to expose students to central sociological ideas and examples of sociology in action through a book of readings. While *Intersections* is a reader, it is anything but traditional due to the way it is being provided to you.

With *Intersections*, we have endeavored to provide you with a rich and diverse archive of high quality readings in such a way that both professors and students will have easy and cost-effective access to the minds and ideas that illuminate and help explain some of the central ideas and issues of sociology. Within *Intersections* you will find over 300 readings and 19 topical introductions—both of which we will be updated and expanded yearly—from which you can choose *only* those readings and introductions that are germane to your particular course. No longer will you and your students have to be dependent on the standard large and expensive 'one-size-fits-all' college reader, which often includes more material than will be covered in the course, yet often also lacks those particular pieces that are viewed as essential by individual instructors. In addition, a classification system for each selection provides helpful information on how the selections might be organized to allow the various perspectives on the course to be pursued. Although the primary course for which *Intersections* was developed is the introductory sociology course, the size and quality of the database may also make it a good resource for a variety of other courses such as social problems, marriage and family, and gender studies.

However it is used, it is our ultimate hope that you will find *Intersections* to be an essential source of readings in sociology—a source noted for its depth, breadth, and flexibility—that meets the highest scholarly and pedagogical standards.

### **Acknowledgements**

A project of this scope cannot be undertaken without the assistance and advice of our colleagues. We wish to thank the following people who helped us tremendously in the development of *Intersections*.

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We welcome your feedback at any time on *Intersections*. Please send comments and suggestions to [www.dbasepub@pearsoncustom.com](mailto:www.dbasepub@pearsoncustom.com).

# **INTERSECTIONS: READINGS IN SOCIOLOGY**

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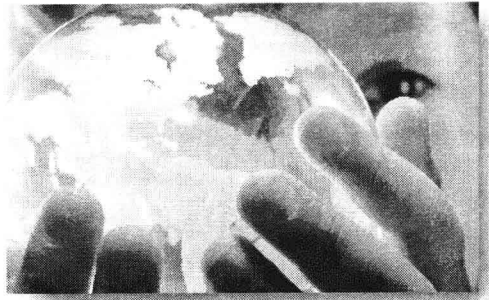
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# ☺ Contents ☺

<b>Sociological Perspectives: An Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>An Idea Whose Time Has Come</b>	
<i>Earl Babbie</i> .....	7
<b>Why Don't College Students Participate?</b>	
<i>David A. Karp &amp; William C. Yoels</i> .....	28
<b>An Accidental Journey: Becoming a Sociologist</b>	
<i>William Form</i> .....	46
<b>Engagement and Ethical Responsibility in Field Work</b>	
<i>Arlene K. Daniels</i> .....	59
<b>The Mysterious Fall of Nacirema</b>	
<i>Neil B. Thompson</i> .....	67
<b>Television Violence: The Power and the Peril</b>	
<i>George Gerbner</i> .....	77
<b>Suspended Identity: Identity Transformation in a Maximum Security Prison</b>	
<i>Thomas J. Schmid &amp; Richard S. Jones</i> .....	89
<b>Behavioral Study of Obedience</b>	
<i>Stanley Milgram</i> .....	106
<b>If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably.</b>	
<i>Philip Meyer</i> .....	123
<b>... And The Poor Get Prison</b>	
<i>Jeffrey Reiman</i> .....	135
<b>Topless Dancers: Managing Stigma in a Deviant Occupation</b>	
<i>William E. Thompson &amp; Jackie L. Harred</i> .....	161

<b>Why the Rich Are Getting Richer and the Poor Poorer</b> <i>Robert Reich</i> .....	179
<b>Barbie Doll Culture and the American Waistland</b> <i>Kamy Cunningham</i> .....	189
<b>Prevalence of Female Circumcision in Two Nigerian Communities</b> <i>Ehigie Ebomoyi</i> .....	195
<b>The Language of Sexism</b> <i>Haig Bosmajian</i> .....	204
<b>Racism and the English Language</b> <i>Robert B. Moore</i> .....	215
<b>When Work Disappears</b> <i>William Julius Wilson</i> .....	227
<b>The Way We Weren't: The Myth and Reality of the "Traditional" Family</b> <i>Stephanie Coontz</i> .....	246
<b>A Brief History of the Liberation Theology Movement</b> <i>Christian Smith</i> .....	255
<b>The Lifestyle Enclave</b> <i>Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler &amp; Steven M. Tipton</i> .....	276
<b>Ambivalent Communities: How Americans Understand Their Localities</b> <i>Claude S. Fischer</i> .....	282
<b>When Activists Win: The Renaissance of Dudley St.</b> <i>Jay Walljasper</i> .....	294
<b>Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital</b> <i>Robert D. Putnam</i> .....	306





# Sociological Perspectives



“The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives” (Berger, 1963, p. 21).

**W**hat exactly is sociology? As the above quotation by Peter Berger suggests, sociology is the study of the everyday world that most people take for granted. Sociologists learn to view the world differently than the average casual observer does. They are curious about everyday life and have an urgent need to understand the forces behind human behavior.

For example, consider the circumstances under which people might help others. Let's say it's ten o'clock at night on a crowded New York City street. Suddenly, a woman screams, “Help! He's got my purse!” You might think that since there are a lot of people around, some of them will help the woman. You might also think that the more people who are around, the less likely it is that a would-be criminal will commit a crime. Surprisingly, however, research done by John M. Darley and Bibb Latané (1968) showed that these assumptions are actually incorrect. Through a series of experiments, Darley and Latané demonstrated that an individual in need is *less*

likely to receive help when many people are around. The reason for this is simple: Bystanders expect that someone else will offer help, so they feel no personal obligation to take action.

Another example is the progress our society has made in overcoming traditional gender-role stereotypes. Many of us would assert that women are no longer seen only as “decorative” objects by men, and that men are no longer measured solely by the size of their wallets by women. Sociologist Simon Davis examined this issue in a study he conducted in 1990. He asked: Do single people today still seek mates that meet traditional stereotypes; i.e., men as “success objects” and women as “sex objects”? To find out, he analyzed the personal ads that appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper. Surprisingly, he found that despite increased flexibility in gender roles for men and women alike, those who submitted ads to the personals still sought partners who met stereotypical gender-role descriptions.

These and other research results (Darley & Latane, 1968; Davis, 1990) run counter to our common-sense explanations of how the world works. This is why sociology can be both exciting and somewhat unsettling. To make sense of our social world, sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) argued that social-science researchers (and students) must develop a quality of mind that he called the sociological imagination. As he explained, this frame of mind provides a unique vantage point from which we can view and understand social phenomena. Our sociological imagination helps us grasp how social, historical, cultural, economic, and political factors guide the choices we make, how we perceive and make sense of our world, and how we live our lives. It also reveals that phenomena we interpret as personal troubles may actually stem from larger public issues that affect many people.

## ☉ Three Perspectives

That said, how do sociologists actually study human social interaction? Unlike casual observers, sociologists design and conduct sys-

tematic studies guided by theoretical frameworks. These frameworks not only help them determine what kinds of phenomena to study; they also influence the focus of studies.

The three primary theoretical perspectives that sociologists use are (1) the structural functionalist perspective, (2) the conflict perspective, and (3) the symbolic interactionist perspective. Each provides a different vantage point from which to understand our social world. Although different in certain key respects, the structural functionalist perspective and the conflict perspective are macro-theories; that is, they look at society from the viewpoint of social structures. Hence, both of these perspectives allow us to analyze whole societies and social institutions. More specifically, structural functionalists focus on how the various parts of a social system work together so as to support that system's order and stability. In contrast, the conflict perspective sees social order and stability as the results of domination of weaker societal members by more powerful members. From the conflict perspective, while these sorts of social arrangements may create stability, they also spawn division, hostility, and inequality.

In stark contrast to these macro-level orientations, the symbolic interactionist perspective is a micro-theory. It lets us concentrate on the more personal, individual aspects of social life. Instead of concentrating on societies and institutions, symbolic interactionists focus on phenomena such as face-to-face interactions and the meanings we give them.

Taken together, the three theoretical orientations help us gain a rich, multifaceted understanding of social life.

## ◎ *Sociology in Action:* Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Sociologists conduct research on a wide mix of diverse topics. The research method they select hinges on the question they want to answer and the theoretical perspective that has generated the question. Some sociological research is best described as quantitative.

That is, the researcher analyzes only those things that he or she can count or otherwise measure.

For example, a quantitative approach made sense for the research done by sociologists Scott J. South and Glenna Spitze (1994). South and Spitze were interested in the amount of time men and women spent on male-typed tasks (mowing the lawn, fixing things), female-typed tasks (cleaning the house, doing laundry), and gender-neutral tasks (paying bills, running errands) around the house. The two researchers learned that, while both male and female study participants spent more time on female-typed tasks, the amount of time they spent on housework and the types of tasks they did depended on their living arrangement. Specifically, never-married men who live with their parents seem to spend more time doing female-typed tasks than doing male-typed or gender-neutral tasks. Such men in this study averaged 15 hours of housework per week. Their female counterparts (that is, never-married women living with their parents) contributed an additional four hours per week. For men, it seems that living at home is a “good deal” because it minimizes the time they spend on household activities. For women, the “best deal” in terms of housework is apparently living with parents, and the “worst deal” is being married. In this research project, married women averaged 36 hours of housework per week, compared to their husbands’ 18 hours.

Not all sociological research is quantitative, however. Much of it is qualitative. To grasp the difference between these terms, imagine researching how many *times* someone does something, versus exploring *how* someone does something. Donald Chambliss (1989) illustrated the contributions of both quantitative and qualitative research when he investigated the differences in athletic performance between Olympic-caliber swimmers and other swimmers. While it may seem easy to explain performance differences by arguing that Olympic-level swimmers are more talented or gifted than other athletes, Chambliss was not satisfied with this common-sense explanation. Instead, he drew on six years of observations he had made of swimmers of diverse levels of ability. He noted that the number of hours practiced (a quantitative measure) between the groups was similar,

but that the *way* in which the swimmers practiced (a qualitative difference) was enormous. Specifically, during practice sessions, the technique, discipline, and attitude of the best swimmers differed qualitatively from those of lesser swimmers. For example, Olympic swimmers arrived at practice on time and demonstrated a professional attitude. While at practice, they made every turn, every dive, and every stroke as if they were participating in a live competition. The result was a qualitative difference in performance between the two groups.

## ☉ *A Code of Ethics*

Because sociologists study human social behavior, they must take extreme care not to harm their research participants. To help them in this goal, the American Sociological Association (the professional organization for American sociologists) has developed a code of ethics for its members. This code sets the standard for ethical behavior in the profession. For example, it requires researchers to provide their subjects with an “informed consent” form that explains subjects’ rights, outlines the purpose of the study, describes how the data collected will be used, states whether the subjects’ names and other identifying information will be kept confidential, explains what risks participation in the study may entail, and lists some expected outcomes of the research. Based on this information, a potential subject can make an informed decision about whether to participate in a research project.

No code of ethics can cover every conceivable situation a researcher might encounter, but it can provide fairly comprehensive guidelines. That certainly was true for sociologist Ric Scarce. In 1991, intruders took research animals from a laboratory on the campus of Washington State University and damaged about \$100,000 worth of property in the laboratory. At the time, Scarce was a doctoral student in sociology at the university. Two years later, he was called before a federal grand jury to answer questions about his research on the animal-rights movement and animal-rights activists. Scarce refused to

release the names of those he had interviewed because he had promised his informants confidentiality. He paid dearly for his adherence to the code of ethics, spending over five months in jail for refusing to comply with the grand jury's request. His professional behavior, however, remained above reproach.

The selections in this book may challenge some of your assumptions about how the world works. In fact, what you read within these pages will likely challenge, disturb, amuse, or surprise you. Whatever you find, be prepared for the impact that you may feel when you begin looking at the world you know—or thought you knew—in a new and different way.

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# An Idea Whose Time Has Come

EARL BABBIE

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*In the lively essay below, Earl Babbie shows how sociology is “an idea whose time has come.” Babbie describes a set of tools essential for critical thinkers and provides examples of how to use them. These tools—sociological paradigms and research methods—help us refine our often erroneous common-sense understandings of the world with empirical evidence. As Babbie puts it, “Sociology is more than just an opinion about the way things are.” This reading reveals how to become a more savvy consumer of media messages, and shows how sociology can shed important light on the causes of social phenomena.*

There is a more pressing need for sociological insights today than at any time in history. In 1822, the French philosopher Auguste Comte first proclaimed the possibility of studying society scientifically. A century and a half later, sociology is an idea whose time has come, and not a minute too soon.

...

## © The Domain of Sociology

Sociology involves the study of human beings. More specifically, it is the study of interactions and relations *among* human beings. Whereas

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psychology is the study of what goes on inside individuals, sociology addresses what goes on between them. Sociology addresses simple, face-to-face interactions such as conversations, dating behavior, and students asking a professor to delay the term paper deadline. Equally, sociology is the study of formal organizations, the functioning of whole societies, and even relations among societies.

Sociology is the study of how human beings live together—in both the good times and the bad. It is no more a matter of how we cooperate and get along than of how we compete and conflict. Both are fundamental aspects of our living together and, hence, of sociology.

You might find it useful to view sociology as the study of our *rules for living together*. Let's take a minute to look at that.

To begin, let's consider some of the things that individuals need or want out of life: food, shelter, companionship, security, satisfaction—the list could go on and on. My purpose in considering such a list is to have us see that the things you and I need or want out of life create endless possibilities for conflict and struggle. When food is scarce, for example, I can only satisfy my need at your expense. Even in the case of companionship—where both people get what they want—you and I may fight over a particular companion.

The upshot of all this is that human beings do not seem to be constructed in a way that ensures cooperation. Bees and ants, by contrast, just seem to be wired that way. As a consequence, human beings *create rules* to establish order in the face of chaos. Sometimes we agree on the rules voluntarily, and other times some people impose the rules on everyone else. In part, sociology is the study of how rules come into existence.

Sociology is also the study of how rules are *organized* and *perpetuated*. It would be worth taking a minute to reflect on the extent and complexity of the rules by which you and I live. There is a rule, for example, that Americans must pay taxes to the government. But it doesn't end there. The rule for paying taxes has been elaborated on by a great many more specific rules indicating how much, when, and to whom taxes are to be paid. In recent years, the index to the IRS tax



code has run more than 1,000 pages long, which should give you some idea of the complexity of that set of rules. The much-touted tax simplification of 1986 was 1,855 pages long.

The rules governing our lives are not all legal ones. There are rules about shaking hands when you meet someone, rules about knives and forks at dinner, rules about how long to wear your hair, and rules about what to wear to class, to the symphony, and to mud-wrestling. There are rules of grammar, rules of good grooming, and rules of efficient computer programming.

Many of the rules we've been considering were here long before you and I showed up, and many will still be here after we've left. Moreover, I doubt that you have the experience of having taken part in creating any of the rules I've listed. Nobody asked you to vote on the rules of grammar, for example. But in a critical way, you *did* vote on those rules: you voted by obeying them.

Consider the rule about not going naked in public. Even though you don't recall being asked what you thought about that one, there was a public referendum on that issue this morning—and you voted in favor of clothes. So did I. If this seems silly, by the way, realize that there are other societies in which people voted to accept a different rule this morning.

Sometime today you are likely to be asked to vote on a set of rules about eating. Some of the possibilities are eating spaghetti with a knife, pouring soup on your dessert, and throwing your food against the wall. Let's see how you vote.

The persistence of our rules is largely a function of one generation teaching them to the next generation. We speak of socialization as the process of learning the rules, and it becomes apparent that we are all socializing each other at the time through the use of positive and negative sanctions—rewards and punishments.

All the rules we've been discussing are fundamentally *arbitrary*—that is, different rules would work just as well. Although Americans have a rule that cars must be driven on the right side of the road, other societies (e.g., England, Japan) manage equally well with people driving on the left side.