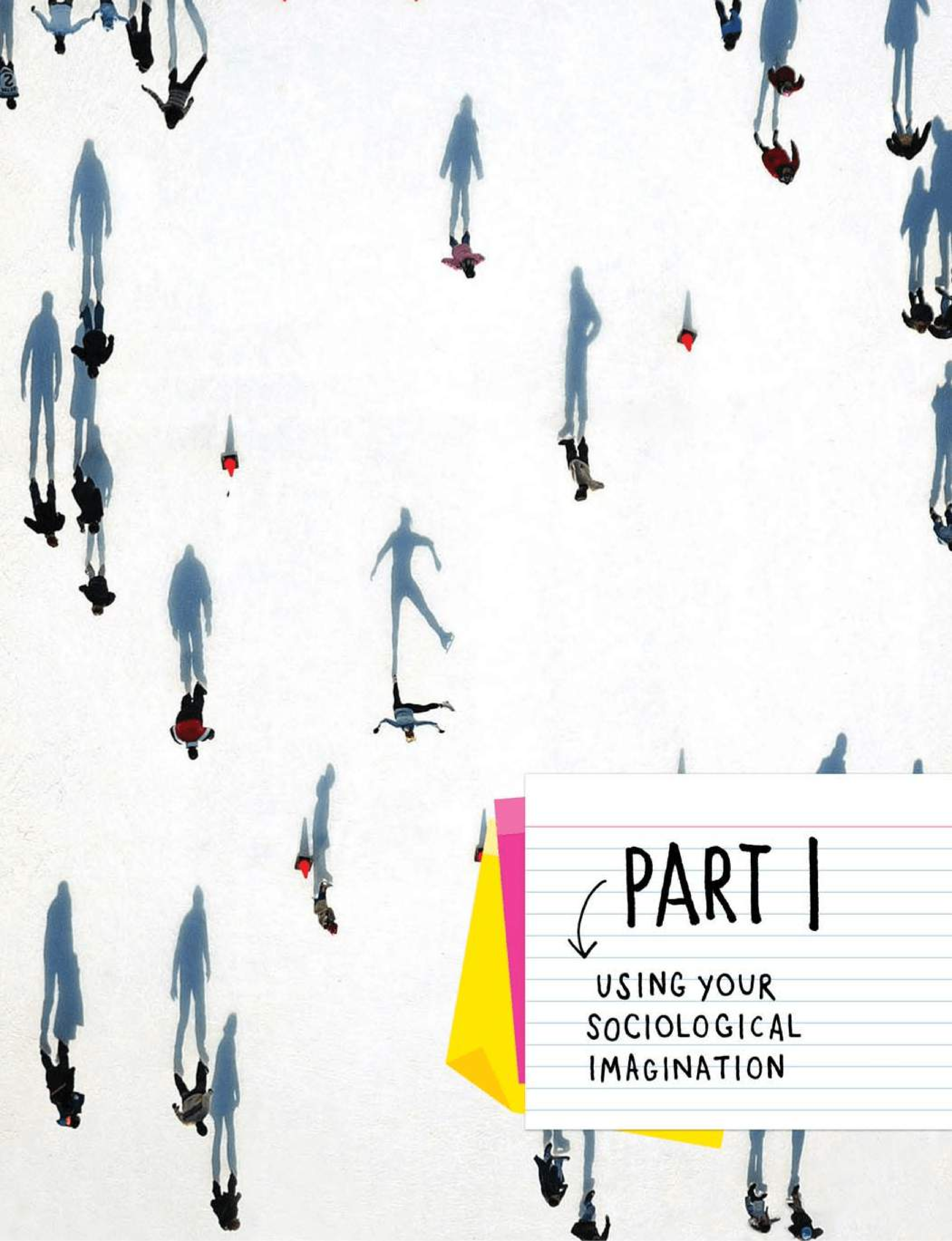
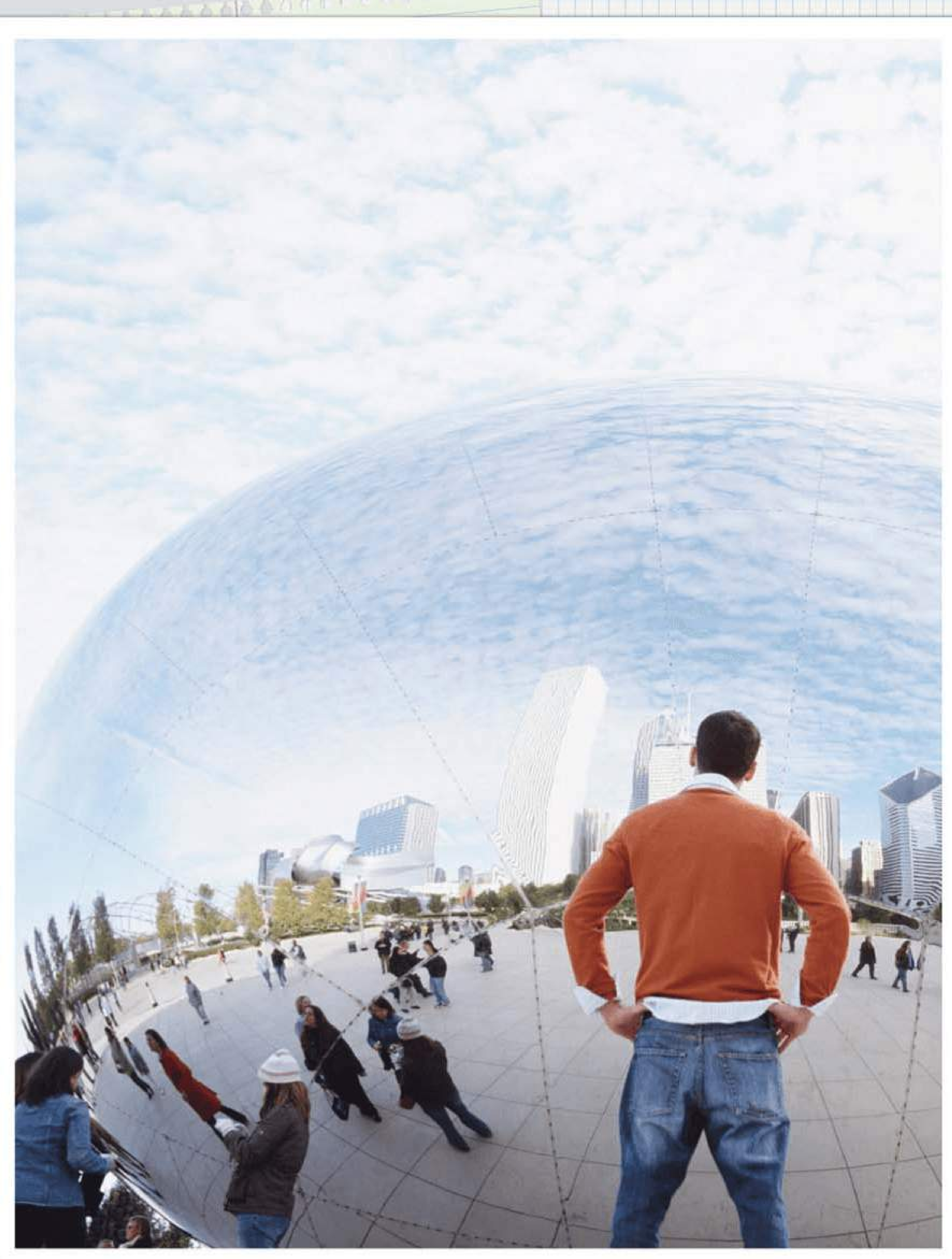


PART I

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION



Thinking like a sociologist means looking at the world around you in a new way. Challenge conventional wisdom and question what most people take for granted.

1 The Sociological Imagination: An Introduction

PARADOX

A SUCCESSFUL SOCIOLOGIST MAKES THE FAMILIAR STRANGE.

QUESTION EVERYTHING

If you want to understand sociology, why don't we start with you. Why are you taking this class and reading this textbook? It's as good a place to start as any—after all, sociology is the study of human society, and there is the sociology of sports, of religion, of music, of medicine, even a sociology of sociologists. So why not start, by way of example, with the sociology of an introduction to sociology?

For example, why are you bent over this page? Take a moment to write down the reasons. Maybe you have heard of sociology and want to learn about it. Maybe you are merely following the suggestion of a parent, guidance counselor, or academic advisor. The course syllabus probably indicates that for the first week of class, you are required to read this chapter. So there are at least two good reasons to be reading this introduction to sociology text.

Let's take the first response, "I want to educate myself about sociology." That's a fairly good reason, but may I then ask why you are taking the class rather than simply reading the book on your own? Furthermore, assuming that you're paying tuition, why are you doing so? If you really are here for the education, let me suggest an alternative: Grab one of the course schedules at your college, decide which courses to take, and just show up! Most introductory classes are so large that nobody notices if an extra student attends. If it is a smaller, more advanced seminar, ask the professor if you can audit it. I have never known a faculty member who checks that all class attendees are legitimate students at the college—in fact, we're happy when students *do* show up to class. An auditor, someone who is there for the sake of pure learning,

Sociology the study of human society.

and who won't be grade grubbing or submitting papers to be marked, is pure gold to any professor interested in imparting knowledge for learning's sake.

You know the rest of the drill: Do all the reading (you can usually access the required texts for free at the library), do your homework, and participate in class discussion. About the only thing you won't get at the end of the course is a grade. So give yourself one. As a matter of fact, once you have compiled enough credits and written a senior thesis, award yourself a diploma. Why not? You will probably have received a better education than most students—certainly better than I did in college.

But what are you going to do with a homemade diploma? You are not just here to learn; you wish to obtain an actual college degree. Why exactly do you want a college degree? Students typically answer that they have to get one in order to earn more money. Others may say that they need credentials to get the job they want. And some students are in college because they don't know what else to do. Whatever your answer, the fact that you asked yourself a question about something you may have previously taken for granted is the first step in thinking like a sociologist. "Thinking like a sociologist" means applying analytical tools to something you have always done without much conscious thought—like opening this book or taking this class. It requires you to reconsider your assumptions about society and question what you have taken for granted in order to better understand the world around you. In other words, thinking like a sociologist means *making the familiar strange*.

This chapter introduces you to the sociological approach to the world. Specifically, you will learn about the *sociological imagination*, a term coined by C. Wright Mills. We'll return to the question "Why go to college?" and apply our sociological imaginations to it. You will also learn what a social institution is. The chapter concludes by looking at the sociology of sociology—that is, the history of sociology and where it fits within the social sciences.

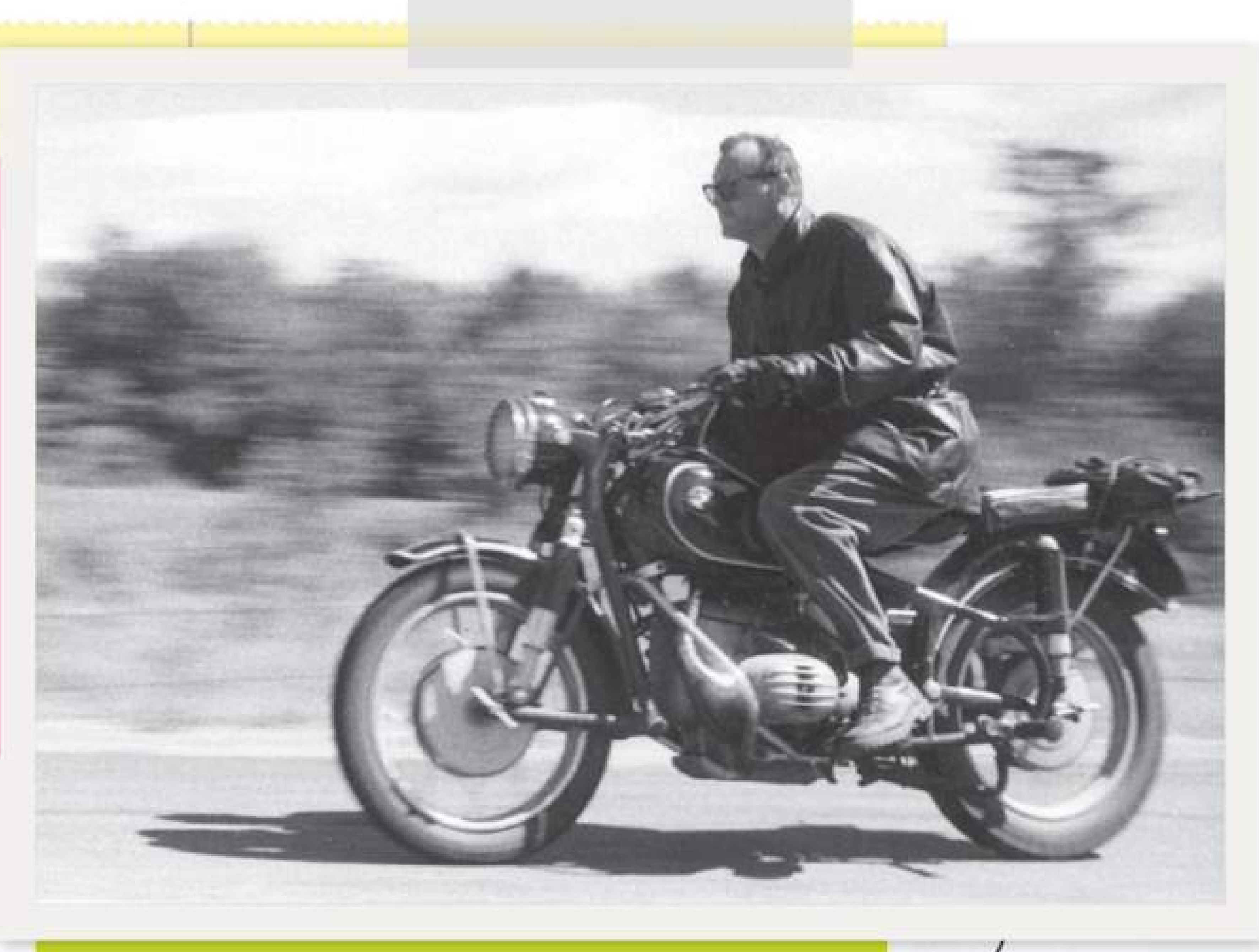
The Sociological Imagination

Sociological imagination the ability to connect the most basic, intimate aspects of an individual's life to seemingly impersonal and remote historical forces.

More than 50 years ago, the sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that in the effort to think critically about the social world around us, we need to use our sociological imagination, the ability to see the connections between our personal experience and the larger forces of history. This is just what we are doing when we question this textbook, this course, and college in general. In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills describes it this way: "The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent

one." The terrible part of the lesson is to make our own lives ordinary—that is, to see our intensely personal, private experience of life as typical of the period and place in which we live. This can also serve as a source of comfort, however, helping us to realize that we are not alone in our experiences, whether they involve our alienation from the increasingly dog-eat-dog capitalism of modern America, the peculiar combination of intimacy and dissociation that we may experience on the Internet, or the ways that nationality or geography affect our life choices. The sociological imagination does not just leave us hanging with these feelings of recognition, however. Mills writes that it also "enables [us] to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions." The sociological imagination thus allows us to see the veneer of social life for what it is, and to step outside the "trap" of rapid historical change in order to comprehend what is occurring in our world and the social foundations that may be shifting right under our feet. As Mills wrote after World War II, a time of enormous political, social, and technological change, "The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst."

Mills offered his readers a way to stop and take stock of their lives in light of all that had happened in the previous decade. Of course, we almost always



Sociologist C. Wright Mills commuting to Columbia University on his motorcycle. How does Mills's concept of the sociological imagination help us make the familiar strange?

HOW TO BE A SOCIOLOGIST ACCORDING TO QUENTIN TARANTINO: A SCENE FROM <u>PULP FICTION</u>

Have you ever been to a foreign country, noticed how many little things were different, and wondered why? Have you ever been to a church of a different denomination—or a different religion altogether—from your own? Or have you been a fish out of water in some other way? The only guy attending a social event for women, perhaps? Or the only person from out of state in your dorm? If you have experienced that fish-out-of-water feeling, then you have, however briefly, engaged your sociological imagination. By shifting your social environment enough to be in a position where you are not able to take everything for granted, you are forced to see the connections between particular historical paths taken (and not taken) and how you live your daily life. You may, for instance, wonder why there are bidets in most European bathrooms and not in American ones. Or why people waiting in lines in the Middle East typically stand closer to each other than they do in Europe or America. Or why, in some rural Chinese societies, many generations of a family sleep in the same bed. If you are able to resist your initial impulses toward xenophobia (feelings that may result from the discomfort of facing a different reality), then you are halfway to understanding other people's lifestyles as no more or less sensible than your own. Once you have truly adopted the sociological imagination, you can start questioning the links between your personal experience and the particulars of a given society without ever leaving home.

In the following excerpt of dialogue from Quentin Tarantino's 1994 film *Pulp Fiction*, the character Vincent tells Jules about the "little differences" between life in the United States and life in Europe.

VINCENT: It's the little differences. A lotta the same shit we got here, they got there, but there they're a little different.

JULES: Example?

VINCENT: Well, in Amsterdam, you can buy beer in a movie theater. And I don't mean in a paper cup either. They give you a glass of beer, like in a bar. In Paris, you can buy beer at McDonald's. Also, you know what they call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris?

JULES: They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese?

VINCENT: No, they got the metric system there, they wouldn't know what the fuck a Quarter Pounder is.

JULES: What'd they call it?

VINCENT: Royale with Cheese.

Vincent Vega (John Travolta) describes his visit to a McDonald's in Amsterdam to Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson).

JULES: (repeating) Royale with Cheese. What'd they call a Big Mac?
VINCENT: Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac.
JULES: What do they call a Whopper?
VINCENT: I dunno, I didn't go into a Burger King. But you know what they put on french fries in Holland instead of ketchup?
JULES: What?
VINCENT: Mayonnaise.
JULES: Goddamn!
VINCENT: I seen 'em do it. And I don't mean a little bit on the side of the plate, they fuckin' drown 'em in it.
JULES: Uuccch!

Your job as a sociologist is to get into the mind-set that mayonnaise on french fries, though it might seem disgusting at first, is not strange after all, certainly no more so than ketchup.

feel that social change is fairly rapid and continually getting ahead of us. Think of the 1960s or even today, with the rise of the Internet and global terror threats. In retrospect, we consider the 1950s, the decade when Mills wrote his seminal work, to be a relatively placid time, when Americans experienced some relief from the change and strife of World War II and the Great Depression. But Mills believed the profound sense of alienation experienced by many during the postwar period was a result of the change that had immediately preceded it.

Another way to think about the sociological imagination is to ask ourselves what we take to be natural that actually isn't. For example, let's return to the question "Why go to college?" Sociologists and economists have shown that the financial benefits of education—particularly higher education—appear to be increasing. They refer to this as the "returns to schooling." In today's economy, the median (i.e., typical) annual income for a high-school graduate is $33,176; for those with a bachelor's degree, it is $54,756 (2011 data; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a). That $21,580 annual advantage seems like a good deal, but is it really? Let's shift gears and do a little math.

What Are the True Costs and Returns of College?

Now that you are thinking like a sociologist, let's compare the true cost of going to college for four years to calling the whole thing off and taking a full-time job right after high school. First, there is the tuition to consider. Let's assume for the sake of argument you are paying $8,000 per year for tuition and another $9,000 for fees and room and board. That's a lot less than what most private four-year colleges cost, but about average for in-state tuition at a state school. (Community colleges, by contrast, are usually much cheaper, especially because they tend to be commuter schools whose students live off-campus, but they typically do not offer a four-year bachelor's degree.)

In making the decision to attend college, you are agreeing to pay $17,000 this year, something like $17,680 next year, 4 percent more the following year, and another 4 percent on top of that amount in your senior year. The $17,000 you have to pay right now is what hurts the most, because costs in the future are worth less than expenses today. Money in the future is worth less than money in hand for several reasons. The first is inflation. We all know that money is not what it used to be. In fact, taking into account the standard inflation rate—as measured by the government's Consumer Price Index—it took about $16 in 2011 to equal the buying power of a single dollar back in 1940 (Sahr, 2010). The second reason that money today is worth more than money tomorrow is that we could invest the money today to make more tomorrow.

Using a standard formula to adjust for inflation and bring future amounts into current dollars, we can determine that paying out $17,000 this year and the higher amounts over the next three years is equivalent to paying $70,023 in one

lump sum today; this would be the direct cost of attending college. Indirect costs—so-called opportunity costs—exist as well, such as the costs associated with the amount of time you are devoting to school. Taking into account the typical wage for a high-school graduate, not counting differences by gender, age, or level of experience, we can calculate that if you worked full time instead of going to college, you would make $33,176 this year. Thus, we find that the present value of the total wages lost over the next four years by choosing full-time school over full-time work is $132,704. Add these opportunity costs to the direct costs of tuition, and we get $202,727.

Next we need to calculate the "returns to schooling." For the sake of simplicity, we will ignore the fact that the differences between high-school graduates and college graduates change over time—given years of experience and the ups and downs of the economy. Instead, we will regard the $54,756 annual earnings figure for college graduates as fixed and subtract from that amount the $33,176 earned by the typical high-school graduate, which yields a net difference of $21,580. But remember, you would not start earning this money for four years. So the real difference is $21,580 four years from now plus $21,580 five years from now and so on, until you leave the labor force. Assuming that you attend college for only four years and retire at 65, you will have worked 43 years (high-school grads will be in the work force for 47 years because they get a four-year head start). When we compare your college-degree-holding lifetime earnings to the lifetime earnings of someone who has only a high-school education, we find that with a college degree you will make $795,236 more than someone who went straight to work after high school (Figure 1.1). (To make matters more straightforward, we are conveniently ignoring the fact that future money is inherently worth less than present money in economic decision making.) On top of this substantial financial return to schooling, one economist found that those with college degrees were happier, healthier, and less likely to get divorced than their high-school-educated peers, even after controlling for income (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2009).

But wait a minute: How do we know for sure that college really mattered in the equation? Individuals who finish college might earn more because they actually learned something and obtained a degree, or—a big or—they might earn more regardless of the college experience because people who stay in school (1) are innately smarter, (2) know how to work the system, (3) come from wealthier families, (4) can delay gratification, (5) are more efficient at managing their time, or (6) all of the above—take your pick. In other words, Yale graduates might not have needed to go to college to earn higher wages; they might have been successful anyway.

Maybe, then, the success stories of Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, Lady Gaga, and other college dropouts don't cut against the grain so sharply after all. Maybe they were the savvy ones: Convinced of their ability to make it on their own, thanks to the social cues they received (including the fact that they had

Figure 1.1: Returns to Schooling

$4,000,000.00
$3,500,000.00
$3,000,000.00
$2,500,000.00
$2,000,000.00
$1,500,000.00
$1,000,000.00
$500,000.00
$0.00
- $500,000.00

ANNIE
(HIGH SCHOOL)
BONNIE
(BACHELOR'S DEGREE)

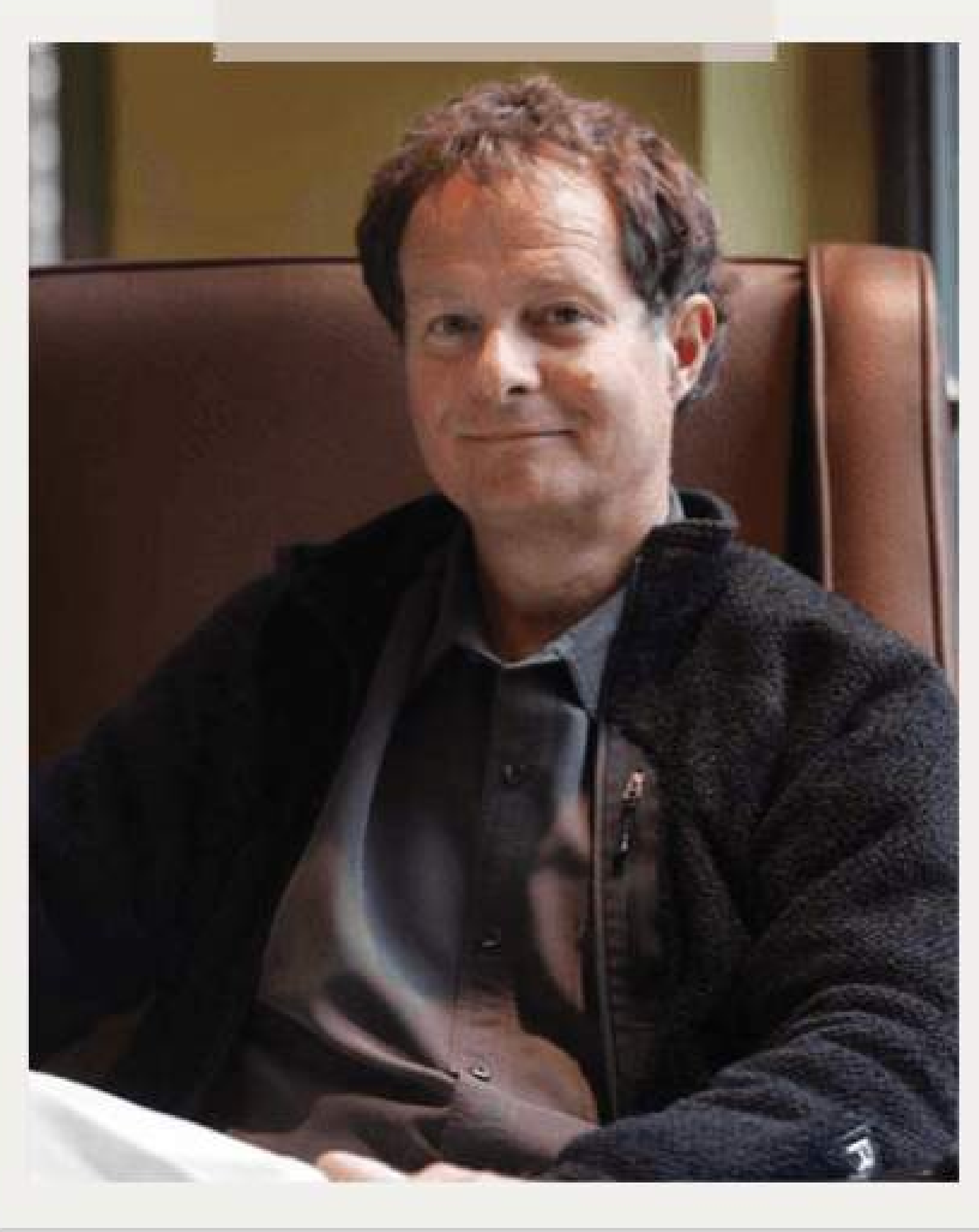
LIFETIME EARNINGS*

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47

NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

* This set of hypothetical women–Annie and Bonnie–live in a world that is not quite like reality. We did not flatten Annie's trajectory to account for the fact that high school diploma holders are more likely to experience periods of forced part-time work and/or unemployment. We also assumed the same rate of income increase over time (i.e.,raises) for these two, although high school diploma holders are more likely to experience wage stagnation than college degree holders.

Source: Murray, 2009.



Two famous college dropouts. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg (left) attended Harvard but dropped out before graduating. John Mackey (right) quit university before founding Whole Foods.

been admitted to college), they decided that they wouldn't wait four years to try to achieve success. They opted to just go for it right then and there. College's "value added," they might have concluded, was marginal at best.

Getting That "Piece of Paper"

Even if college turns out to matter in the end, does it make a difference because of the learning that takes place there or because of our credentialist society that it aids and abets? The answer to this question has enormous implications for what education means in our society. Imagine, for example, a society where people become doctors not by doing well on the SATs, going to college, taking premed courses, acing the MCATs, and then spending more time in the classroom. Instead, the route to becoming a doctor—among the most prestigious and highly paid occupations in our society—starts with emptying bedpans as a nurse's aide and working your way up through the ranks of registered nurse, apprentice physician, and so forth; finally, after years of on-the-job training, you achieve the title of doctor. Social theorist Randall Collins has proposed just such a medical education system in the controversial *The Credential Society: A Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (1979), which argues that the expansion of higher education has merely resulted in a ratcheting up of credentialism and expenditures on formal education rather than reflecting

College-campus bulletin boards are covered with advertisements like this one promoting websites that generate diplomas. Why are these fake diplomas not worth it?

any true societal need for more formal education or opening up opportunity to more people.

If Collins is correct and credentials are what matter most, then isn't there a cheaper, faster way to get them? In fact, all you need are $29.95 and a little guts, and you can receive a diploma from one of the many online sites that promise either legitimate degrees from nonaccredited colleges or a college diploma from any school of your choosing. Thus, why not save four years and lots of money and obtain your credentials immediately?

Obviously, universities have incentives to prevent such websites from undermining their monopoly on degree-conferring ability. So they rely on a number of other social institutions, ranging from copyright law to the local police force, to enforce this monopoly power. However, I have no knowledge of anyone—employer, school, landlord—ever verifying my educational claims. That is, no one has ever checked to make sure that I attended college or graduate school. They have taken my résumé at face value. (On the other hand, colleges do check that applicants have completed high school.)

But there are also informal mechanisms by which universities are protected that may be more important than any formal checks. First, there is the university's alumni network. Potential employers rarely call a university's registrar to make sure you graduated, but they will expect you to talk a bit about your college experience. If your interviewer is an alumnus or otherwise familiar with the institution, you might also be expected to talk about what dorm you lived in, reminisce about a particularly dramatic homecoming game, or gripe about an especially unreasonable professor. If you slip up on any of this information, suspicions will grow, and then people might call to check on your graduation status. Perhaps there are some good reasons not to opt for that $29.95 degree and to pay the costs of college after all.

What Is a Social Institution?

The university, then, is more than just a printing press that churns out diplomas, and, for that matter, it does not merely impart formal knowledge. It fulfills a variety of roles and provides links to many other societal institutions. For

example, a college is an institution that acts as a gatekeeper to what are considered legitimate forms of educational advantage by certifying what is legitimate knowledge. It is an institution that segregates great swaths of the population by age. (You won't find a more age-segregated environment than a four-year college; it even beats a retirement home in having the smallest amount of age variation in its client population.) A college is a proprietary brand that is marketed on sweatshirts and mugs and through televised sporting events. Last but not least, it is an informal set of stories told within a social network of students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and other relevant individuals.

This last part of the definition is key to understanding one of sociology's most important concepts, the social institution. A social institution is a complex group of interdependent positions that, together, perform a social role and reproduce themselves over time. A way to think of these social positions is as a set of stories we tell ourselves; social relations are a network of ties; and the social role is a grand narrative that unifies these stories within the network. In order to think sociologically about social institutions, you need to think of them not as monolithic, uniform, stable entities—things that "just are"—but as institutions constructed within a dense network of other social institutions and meanings. Sound confusing? Bear with me as I provide an example: I teach at New York University, or NYU. What exactly is the social institution known as NYU? It is not the collection of buildings I frequent. It certainly cannot be the people who work there, or even the students, because they change over time, shifting in and out through recruitment and retirement, admission and graduation. We might thus conclude that a social institution is just a name. However, an institution can change its name and still retain its social identity. Duke University was once called Normal College and then Trinity College, yet it remains the same institution.

Social institution a complex group of interdependent positions that, together, perform a social role and reproduce themselves over time; also defined in a narrow sense as any institution in a society that works to shape the behavior of the groups or people within it.

Of course, all such transitions involving a change of name, location, mission, and so on require a great deal of effort and agreement among interested parties. In some cases, changes in personnel, function, or location may be too much for a social institution to sustain, causing it to die out and be replaced by something that is considered new. Sometimes institutions even try to rupture their identity intentionally. Tobacco company Philip Morris had received such bad press as a cigarette manufacturer for so long that it changed its name to Altria, hoping to start fresh and shake off the negative connotations of its previous embodiment. For that effort to succeed, the narrative of Philip Morris circulating in social networks had to die out without being connected to Altria.

This grand narrative that constitutes social identity is nothing more than the sum of individual stories told between pairs of individuals. Think about your relationship to your parents. You have a particular story that you tell if asked to describe your relationship with your mother. She also has a story. Your story may change slightly, depending on whom you are talking to; you may add some details or leave out others. Your other relatives have stories about your mother and her relationship to you. So do her friends and yours. Anyone who

Tobacco company Philip Morris changed its name to Altria at a stockholders' meeting in January 2003.

knows her contributes to her social identity. The sum total of stories about your mom is the grand narrative of who she is.

All of this may seem like a fairly flimsy notion of how things operate in the social world, but even though any social identity boils down to a set of stories within a social network, that narrative is still hearty and robust. Imagine what it would take to change an identity. Let's say your mom is 50 years old. You want to make her 40 instead. You would not only have to convince her to refer constantly to herself as ten years younger; you would also have to get your other relatives and her friends to abide by this change. And it wouldn't stop there. You'd have to change official documents as well—her driver's license, passport, and so on. This is not so easily done. Even though your mother's identity (in this case her age, although the same logic can be extended to her name, ethnicity, and many other aspects of her identity) could be described as nothing more than an understanding between her, everyone who knows her, and the formal authorities, the matter is a fairly complicated one. If that sounds hard, just think about trying to change the identity of a major institution such as your university. You'd have to convince the board of directors, alumni, faculty, students, and everyone else who has a relationship to the school of the need for a change. Altering an identity is fairly difficult, even though it is ultimately nothing more than an idea.

I mentioned that if you wanted to change your mother's age, name, or race, you'd have to convince not only her friends but also the formal authorities, which are social institutions with their own logics and inertias. Let's take the example of college once again. Other than the informal ties of people who have a relationship to the grand narrative of a particular college, a number of social structures exist that make colleges, which are themselves made up of a series of stories within social networks, possible:

1. The *legal system* enforces copyright law, making fake diplomas illegitimate.
2. The *primary and secondary educational system* (i.e., K–12 schooling) prepares students both academically and culturally for college, as well as acting as

an extended screening and sorting mechanism to help determine who goes to college and to which one.

3. The *Educational Testing Service* and *ACT* are private companies that have a duopoly on the standardized tests that screen for college admission.
4. The *wage labor market* encompasses the entire economy that allows your teacher to be paid, not to mention the administrators, staff, and other outside contractors who maintain the intellectual, fiscal, and physical infrastructure of the school you attend.
5. *English*, although not the official language of the United States (there isn't one!), is the language in which instruction takes place at the majority of U.S. colleges. Language itself is a social phenomenon; some would argue that it is the basis for all of social life. But a given language is a particular outcome of political boundaries and historical struggles among various populations in the world. It is often said the only difference between a language and a dialect is that a language has an army to back it up. In other words, deciding whether a spoken tongue is a language or merely a dialect is a question of power and legitimacy.

Trying to understand social institutions such as the legal system, the labor market, or language itself is at the heart of sociological inquiry. Although social institutions shape every aspect of our behavior, they are not monolithic. In fact, every day we construct and change social institutions through ordinary interactions and the meanings we ascribe to them. By becoming aware of the intersections between social institutions and your life, you are already thinking like a sociologist.

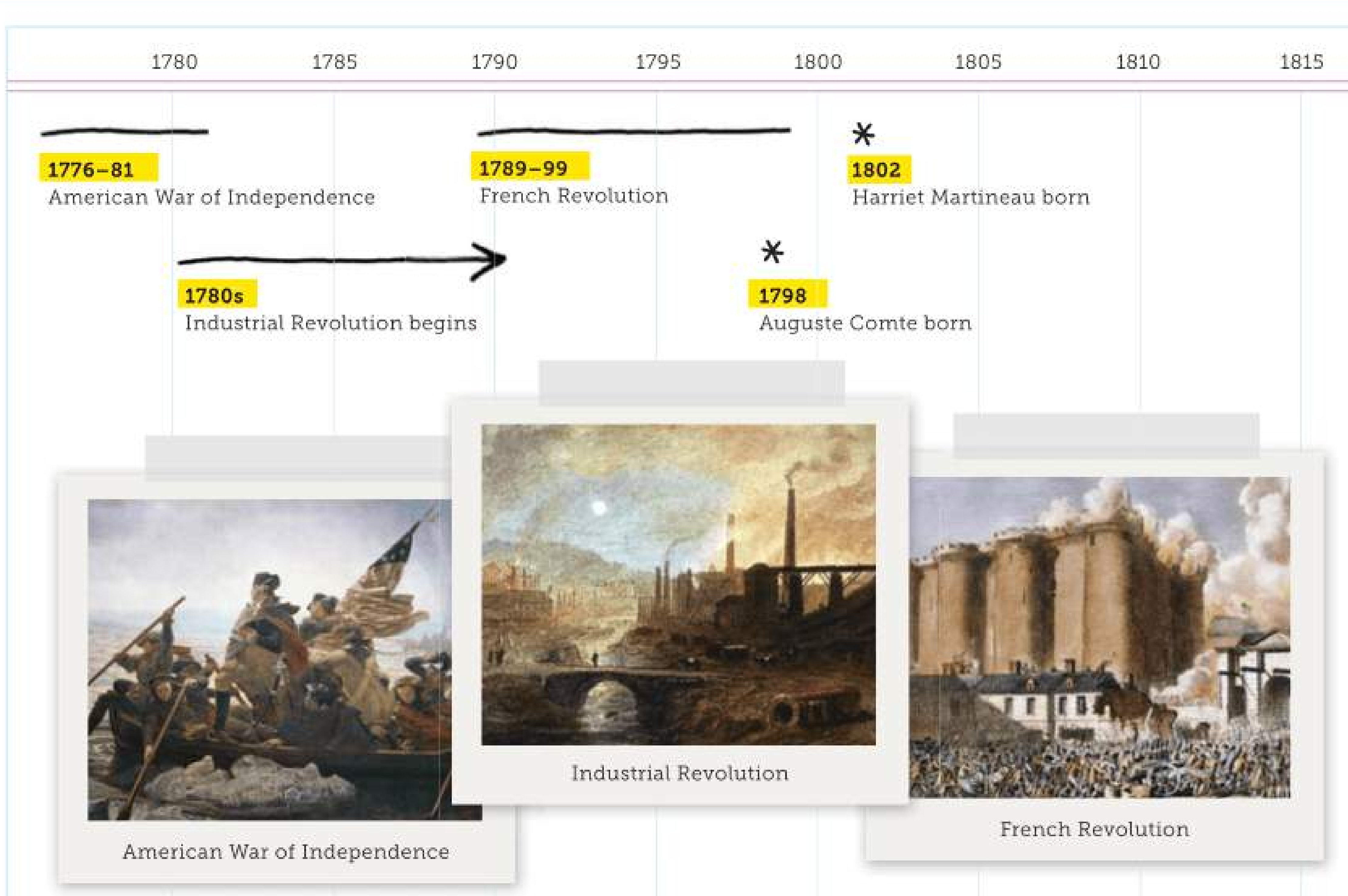
The Sociology of Sociology

Now that we have an idea of how sociologists approach their analysis of the world, let's turn that lens, the sociological imagination, to sociology itself. As a formal field, sociology is a relatively young discipline. Numerous fields of inquiry exist, such as molecular genetics, radio astronomy, and computer science, that could not emerge until a certain technology was invented. Sociology might seem to fall outside this category, but to study society, we need not only a curious mind and a certain willingness but also the specific frame of reference—the lens—of the sociological imagination. The sociological imagination is a technology of sorts, a technology that could have developed only during a certain time. That time was, arguably, the nineteenth century, when the French scholar Auguste Comte (1798–1857) invented what he called "social physics" or "positivism."

Auguste Comte and the Creation of Sociology

According to Comte, positivism arose out of a need to make moral sense of the social order in a time of declining religious authority. Comte claimed that a secular basis for morality did indeed exist—that is, we could determine right and wrong without reference to higher powers or other religious concepts. And that was the job of the sociologist: to develop a secular morality. Comte further argued that human society had gone through three historical, epistemological stages. In the first, which he referred to as the theological stage, society

TWO CENTURIES OF SOCIOLOGY

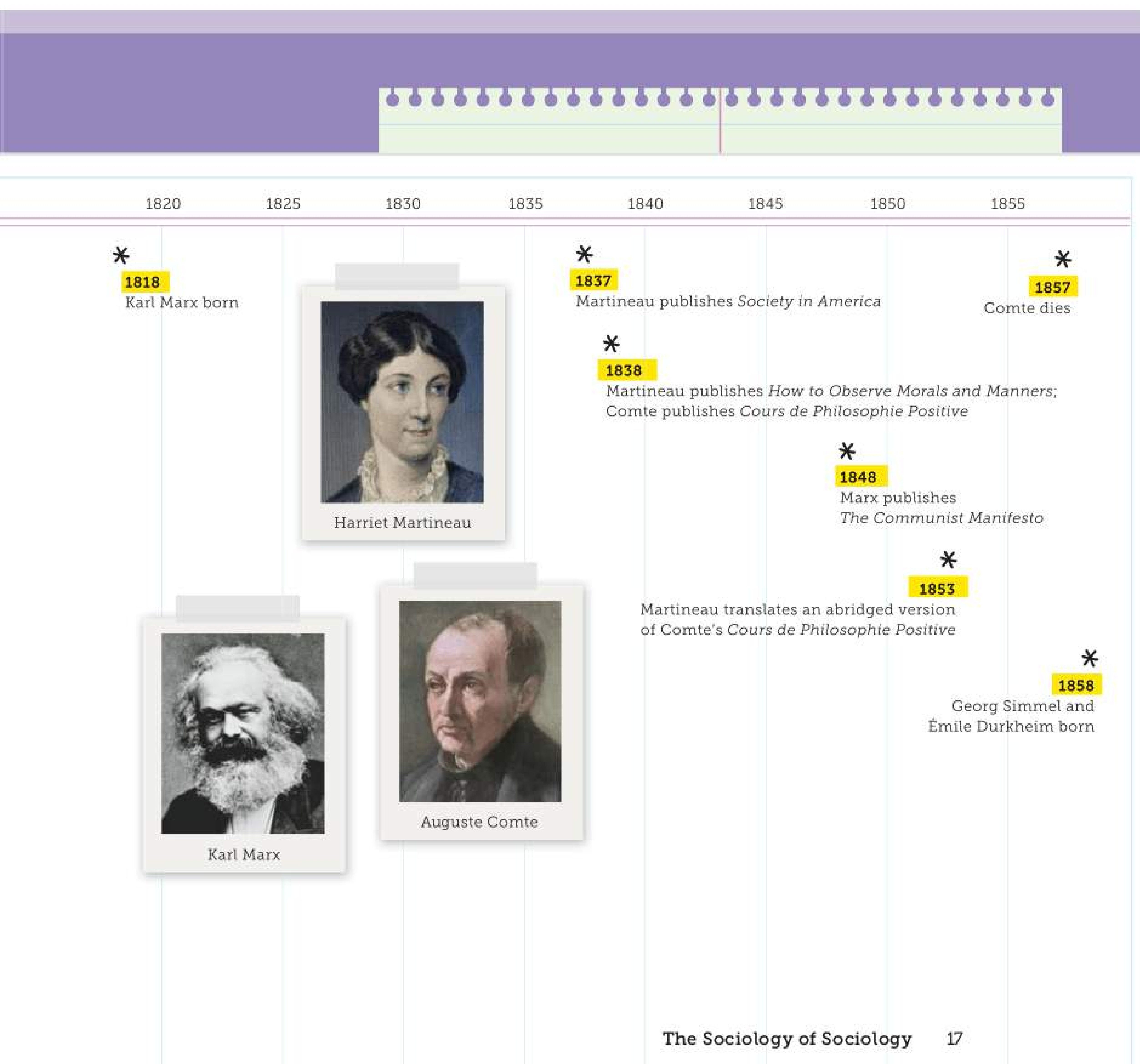


American War of Independence

Industrial Revolution

French Revolution

seemed to be the result of divine will. If you wanted to understand why kings ruled, why Europe used a feudal and guild system of labor, or why colonialism took root, the answer was that it was God's plan. To better understand God's plan and thus comprehend the logic of social life, scholars of the theological period might consult the Bible or other ecclesiastical texts. During stage two, the metaphysical stage according to Comte, Enlightenment thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Hobbes saw humankind's behavior as governed by natural, biological instincts. To understand the nature of society—why things were the way they were—we needed to strip



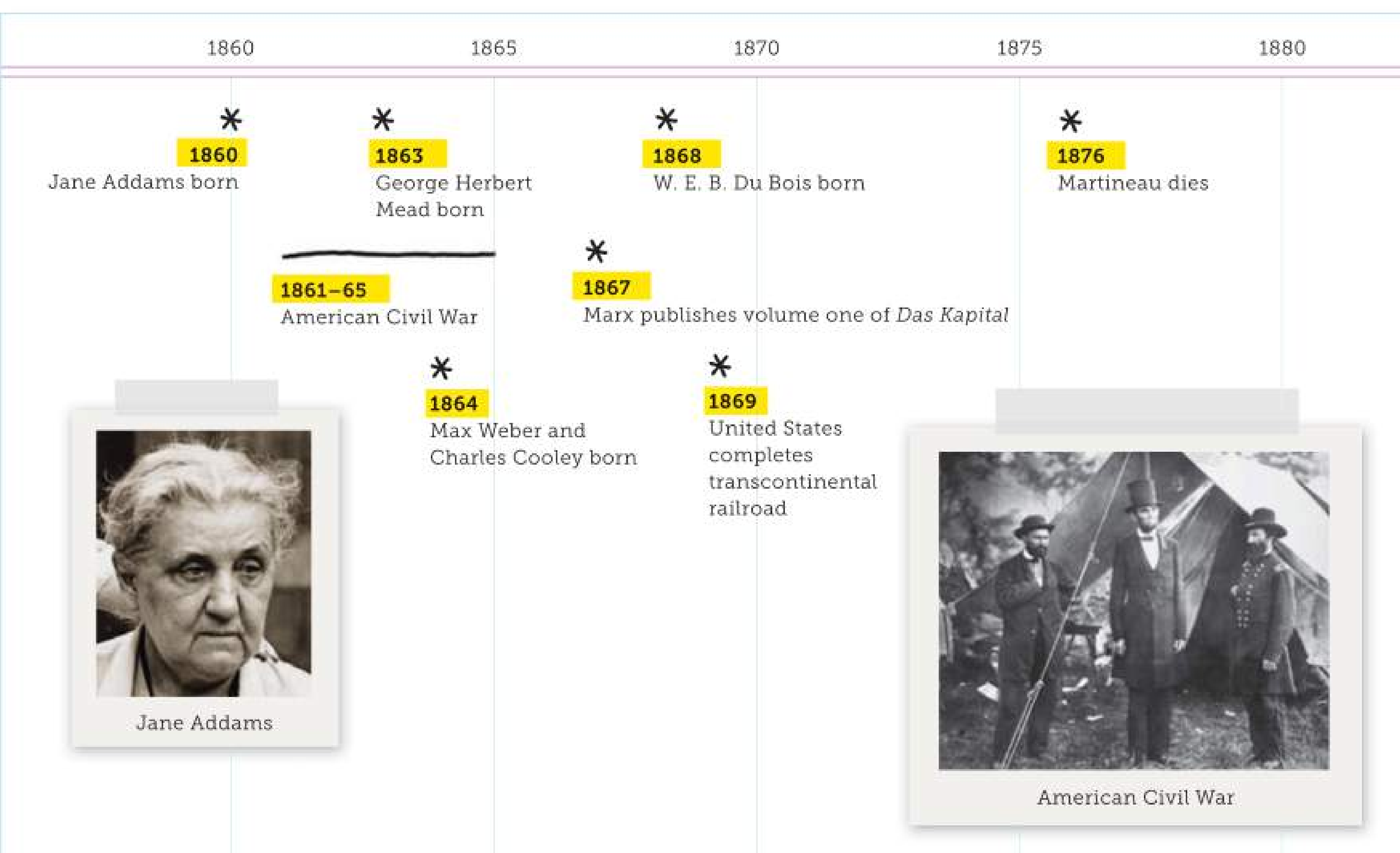
Harriet Martineau

Karl Marx

Auguste Comte

away the layers of society to better comprehend how our basic drives and natural instincts governed and established the foundation for the surrounding world. Comte called the third and final stage of historical development the scientific stage. In this era, he claimed, we would develop a social physics of sorts in order to identify the scientific laws that govern human behavior. The analogy here is not theology or biology but rather physics. Comte was convinced that we could understand how social institutions worked (and didn't work), how we relate to one another (whether on an individual or group level), and the overall structure of societies if we merely ascertained their

TWO CENTURIES OF SOCIOLOGY

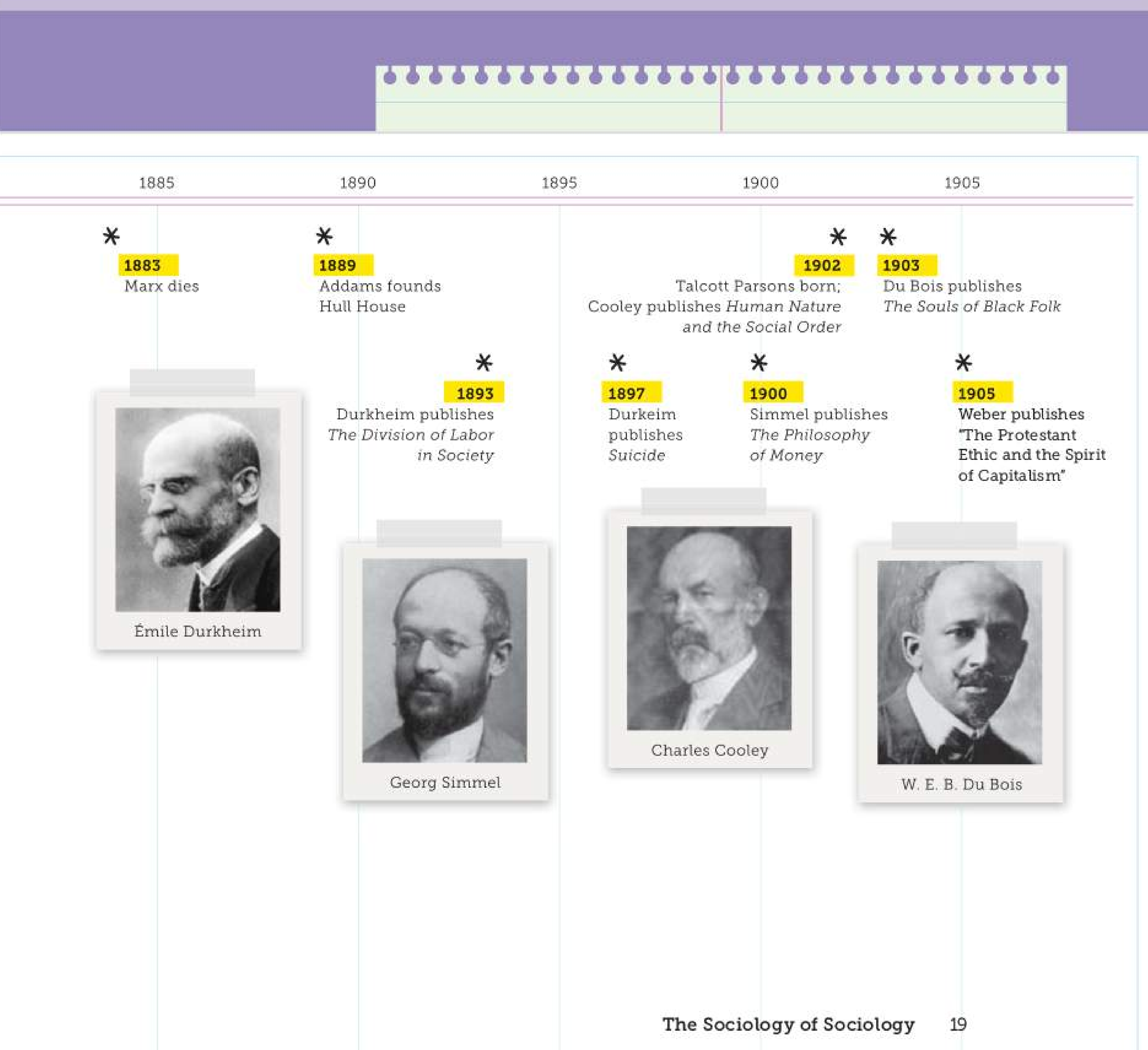


Jane Addams

American Civil War

"equations" or underlying logic. Needless to say, most sociologists today are not so optimistic.

Harriet Martineau Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), an English social theorist, was the first to translate Comte into English. In fact, Comte assigned her translations to his students, claiming that they were better than the original. She also wrote important works of her own, including *Theory and Practice of Society in America* (1837), in which she describes our nation's physical and social aspects. She addressed topics ranging from the way we educate children (which, she



Émile Durkheim

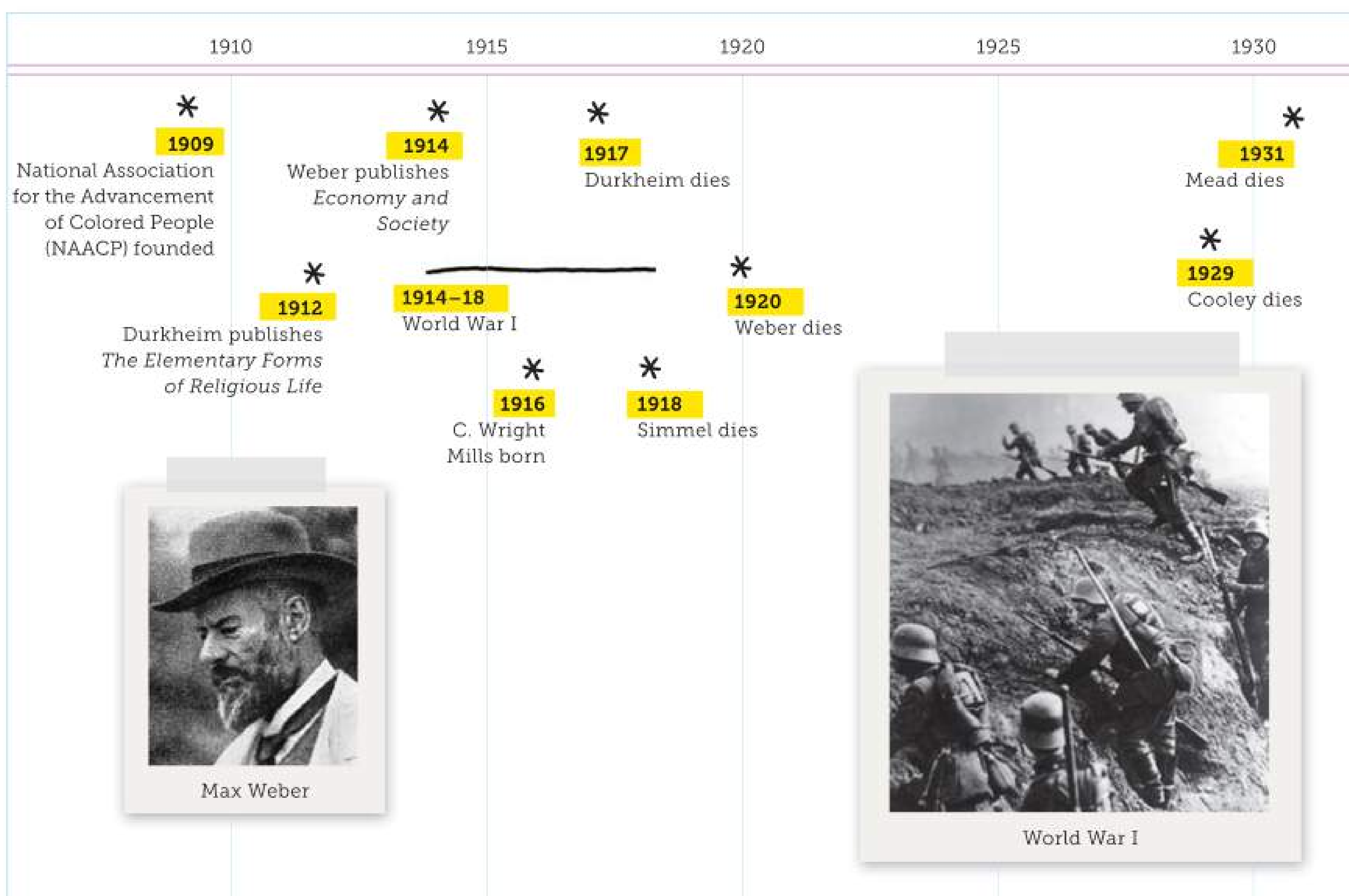
Georg Simmel

Charles Cooley

W. E. B. Du Bois

attests, affords parents too much control and doesn't ensure quality) to the relationship between the federal and state governments. She was also the author of the first methods book in the area of sociology, *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (1838), in which she took on the institution of marriage, claiming that it was based on an assumption of the inferiority of women. This critique, among other writings, suggests that Martineau should be considered one of the earliest feminist social scientists writing in the English language.

TWO CENTURIES OF SOCIOLOGY

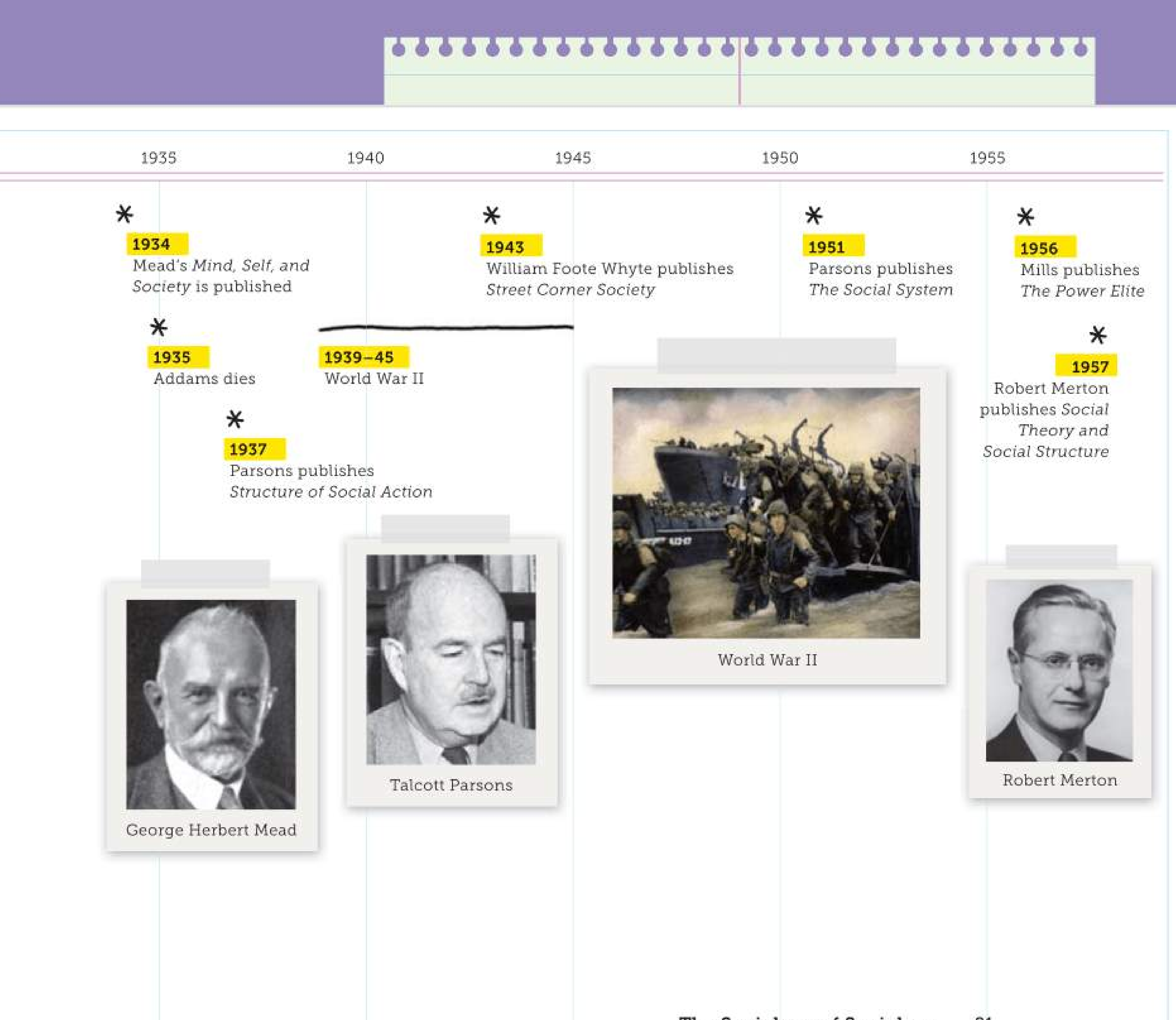


Max Weber

World War I

Classical Sociological Theory

Although Comte and Martineau preceded them, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim are often credited as the founding fathers of the sociological discipline. Some would add a fourth classical sociological theorist, Georg Simmel, to the triumvirate. A brief overview of each of their paradigms follows. We will return to the work of these thinkers throughout the book.



George Herbert Mead

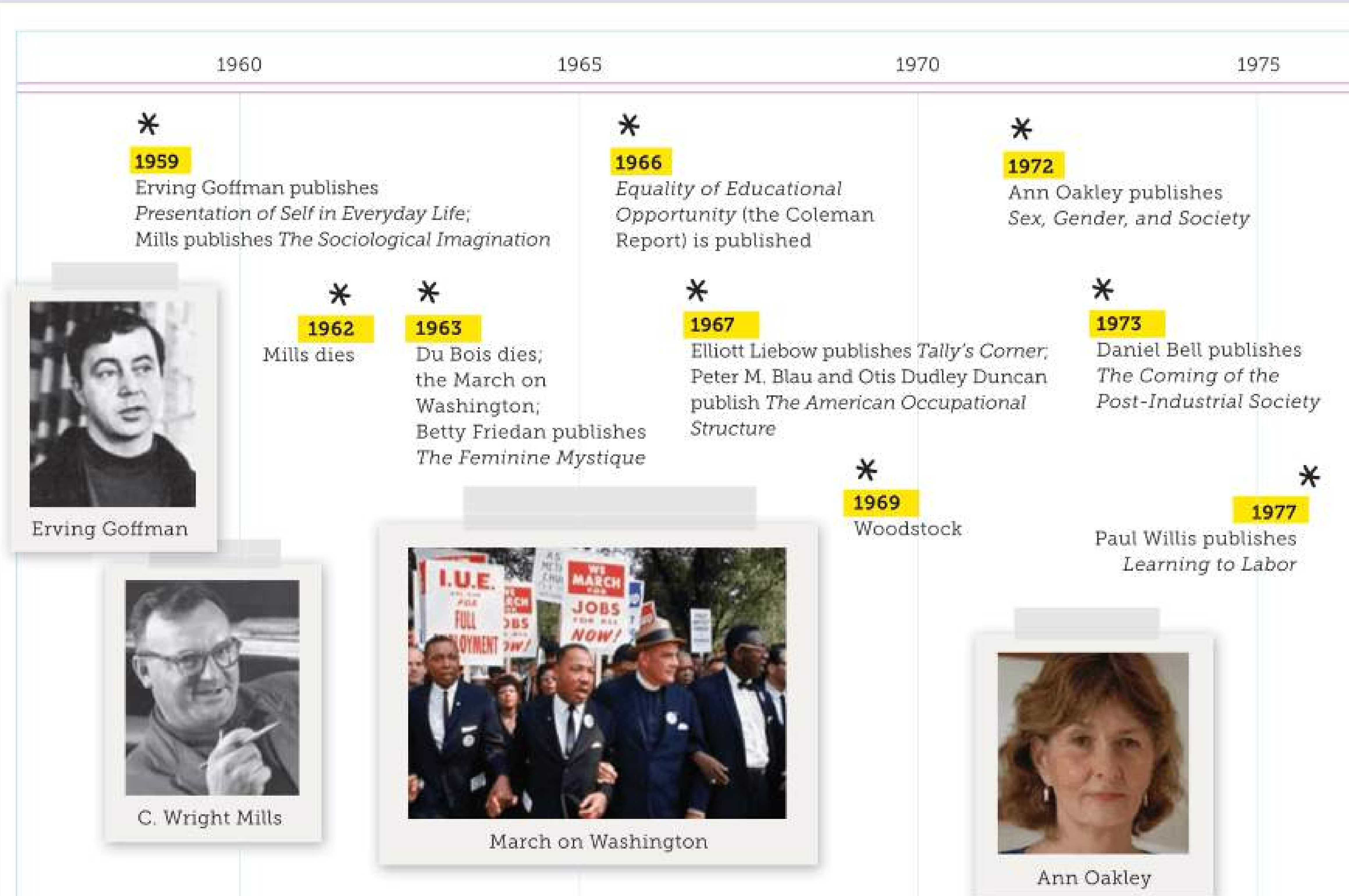
Talcott Parsons

World War II

Robert Merton

Karl Marx Karl Marx (1818–1883) is probably the most famous of the three early sociologists; from his surname the term *Marxism* (an ideological alternative to capitalism) derives, and his writings provided the theoretical basis for Communism. When Marx was a young man, he edited a newspaper that was suppressed by the Prussian government for its radicalism. Forced into exile, Marx settled in London, where he wrote his most important works. Marx was essentially a historian, but he did more than just chronicle events. He elaborated a theory of what drives history, now called historical materialism. Marx believed that it was primarily the conflicts between classes that drove social

TWO CENTURIES OF SOCIOLOGY



Erving Goffman

C. Wright Mills

March on Washington

Ann Oakley

change throughout history. Marx saw history as an account of man's struggle to gain control of and later dominate his natural environment. However, at a certain point—with the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of modern capitalism—the very tools and processes that humans embraced to survive and to manage their surroundings came to dominate humans. Instead of using technology to master the natural world, people became slaves to industrial technology in order to make a living. In Marx's version of history, each economic system, whether small-scale farming or factory capitalism, had its own fault lines of conflict. In the current epoch, that fault line divided society into

1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995

1978
William Julius Wilson publishes *The Declining Significance of Race*

1979
Parsons dies

William Julius Wilson

1984
Pierre Bourdieu publishes *Distinction*; Anthony Giddens publishes *The Constitution of Society*

Anthony Giddens

1989
Arlie Hochschild publishes *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*

Arlie Hochschild

1991
James Coleman publishes *Foundations of Social Theory*

1993
Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton publish *American Apartheid*

James Coleman

a small number of capitalists and a large number of workers (the proletariat) whose interests were opposed. This political struggle, along with escalating crises within the economic system itself, would produce social change through a Communist revolution. In the ensuing Communist society, private property would be abolished and the resulting ideology governing the new economy would be "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998). We will explore Marx's theories in depth in Chapter 7 on social stratification.

Max Weber If Marx brought the material world back into history, which had been thought of as mostly idea-driven until then, Max Weber (1864–1920), writing shortly after Marx, is said to have brought ideas back into history. Weber and others believed Marx went too far in seeing culture, ideas, religion, and the like as merely an effect and not a cause of how societies evolve. Specifically, Weber criticized Marx for his exclusive focus on the economy and social class, advocating sociological analysis that allowed for the multiple influences of culture, economics, and politics. Weber is most famous for his two-volume work *Economy and Society* (published posthumously in 1922), as well as a lengthy essay titled "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1904/2003). In the latter, he argued that the religious transformation that occurred during the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries laid the groundwork for modern capitalism by upending the medieval ethic of virtuous poverty and replacing it with an ideology that saw riches as a sign of divine providence. *Economy and Society* also provided the theories of authority, rationality, the state (i.e., government), and status and a host of other concepts that sociologists still use today.

Verstehen German for "understanding." The concept of *Verstehen* comes from Max Weber and is the basis of interpretive sociology in which researchers imagine themselves experiencing the life positions of the social actors they want to understand rather than treating those people as objects to be examined.

One of Weber's most important contributions was the concept of *Verstehen* ("understanding" in German). By emphasizing *Verstehen*, Weber was suggesting that sociologists approach social behavior from the perspective of those engaging in it. In other words, to truly understand why people act the way they do, a sociologist must understand the meanings people attach to their actions. Weber's emphasis on subjectivity is the foundation of interpretive sociology, the study of social meaning.

Émile Durkheim Across the Rhine in France, the work of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) focused on themes similar to those studied by his German colleagues. He wished to understand how society holds together and how modern capitalism and industrialization have transformed the ways people relate to one another. Durkheim's sociological writing began with *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1997). The division of labor refers to the degree to which jobs are specialized. A society of hunter-gatherers or small-scale farmers has a low division of labor (each household essentially carries out the same tasks to survive); today the United States has a high degree of division of labor, with many

highly specialized occupations. What made the substance of Durkheim's work sociology, rather than economics, was the fact that he argued (and substantiated through legal evidence) that the division of labor didn't just affect work and productivity but had social and moral consequences as well. Specifically, the division of labor in a given society helps to determine its form of social solidarity—that is, the way social cohesion among individuals is maintained. Durkheim followed this work with *Suicide* (1897/1951), in which he shows how this individual act is, in reality, conditioned by social forces: the degree to which we are integrated into group life (or not) and the degree to which our lives follow routines. Durkheim argues that one of the main social forces leading to suicide is the sense of normlessness resulting from drastic changes in living conditions or arrangements, which he calls anomie. He also wrote about the methods of social science as well as religion in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1917/1995). Although the concept originated with Comte, Durkheim is often considered the founding practitioner of positivist sociology, a strain within sociology that believes the social world can be described and predicted by certain observable relationships.

Anomie a sense of aimlessness or despair that arises when we can no longer reasonably expect life to be predictable; too little social regulation; normlessness.

Positivist sociology a strain within sociology that believes the social world can be described and predicted by certain describable relationships (akin to a social physics).

Georg Simmel Historically, Georg Simmel (1858–1918) has received less credit as one of the founders of sociology, although as of late he is gaining wider recognition. In a series of important lectures and essays, Simmel established what we today refer to as formal sociology—that is, a sociology of pure numbers. For example, among the issues he addressed were the fundamental differences between a group of two and a group of three or more (independent of the reasons for the group or who belongs to it). His work was influential in the development of urban sociology and cultural sociology, and his work with small-group interactions served as an intellectual precedent for later sociologists who came to study microinteractions. He provided formal definitions for small and large groups, a party, a stranger, and the poor. (These are antecedents of network theory, which emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century.)

American Sociology

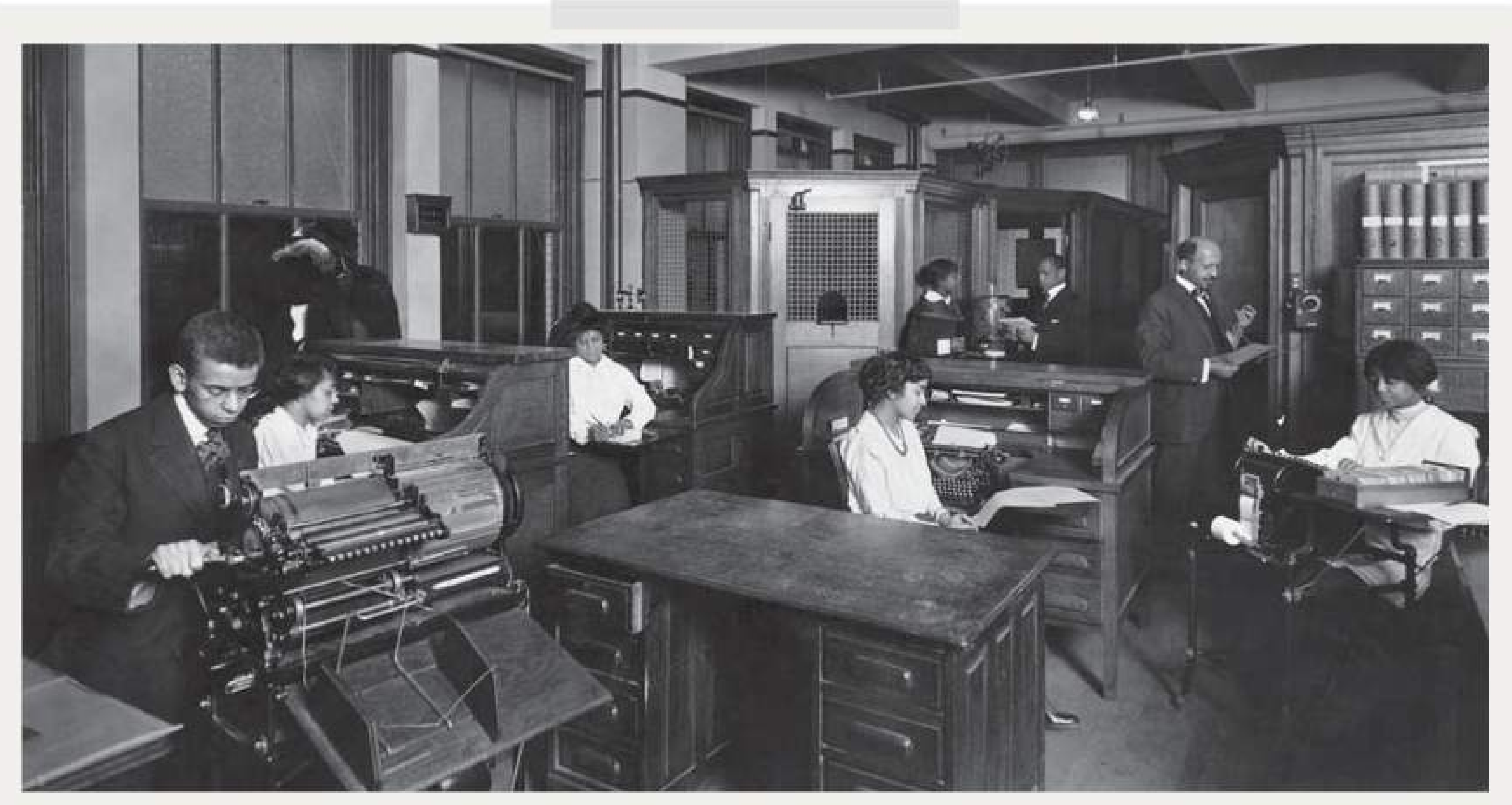
Throughout the history of sociology, the pendulum has tended to swing back and forth between a focus on big, sweeping theories and on more focused empirical research. The emergence of American sociology was characterized by the latter, applied perspective, and was best embodied by what came to be referred to as the Chicago School, named for many of its proponents' affiliation with the University of Chicago. If the Chicago School had a basic premise, it was that humans' behaviors and personalities are shaped by their social and physical environments, a concept known as social ecology.

Chicago, which had grown from a middle-sized city of 109,260 in 1860 to a major metropolis by the beginning of the twentieth century, when these scholars were writing, served as the main laboratory for the Chicago School's studies. Chicago proved to be fertile ground for studying urbanism and its many discontents. Immigration, race and ethnicity, politics, and family life all became topics of study, primarily through a community-based approach (i.e., interviewing people and spending time with them). Robert Park (1864–1944), for example, exhorted scholars to "go and get the seat of [their] pants dirty in real research." This was a time of rapid growth in urban America thanks to a high rate of foreign immigration as well as the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North. The researchers of the Chicago School were concerned with how race and ethnic divisions played out in cities: how Polish peasants and African American sharecroppers adapted to life in a new, industrialized world, or how the anonymity of the city itself contributed to creativity and freedom on the one hand, and to the breakdown of traditional communities and higher rates of social problems on the other. For example, in the classic Chicago School essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938), Louis Wirth—himself an immigrant from a small village in Germany—described how the city broke down traditional forms of social solidarity while promoting tolerance, rationality (which led to scientific advances), and individual freedom. Much of the work was what would be called cultural sociology today. For example, in their studies of ethnicity, Park and others challenged the notion inherited from Europe that ethnicity was about bloodlines and instead showed ethnicity "in practice" to be more about the maintenance of cultural practices passed down through generations. Likewise, the stages of immigrant assimilation into American society (contact, then competition, and finally assimilation), which are today regarded as common knowledge and indeed part of our national ideology, were first described by Park.

If there was a theoretical paradigm that undergirded much of the research of the Chicago School, it would be the theory of the "social self" that emerged from the work of the social psychologists Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Taking up the theme, manifest in the Chicago School's community studies, of how the social environment shapes the individual, Cooley and Mead incorporated some of the key ideas of the pragmatist school of philosophy (which argues that inquiry and truth cannot be understood outside their environment—i.e., that environment affects meaning). Cooley, who taught at the University of Michigan, is best known for the concept of the "looking-glass self." He argued that the self emerges from an interactive social process. We envision how others perceive us; then we gauge the responses of other individuals to our presentation of self. By refining our vision of how others perceive us, we develop a self-concept that is in constant interaction with the surrounding social world. Much of Cooley's work described the important role that group dynamics played in this process. (See Chapter 5 on groups and networks.)

In his classic *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), George Herbert Mead, a social psychologist and philosopher at the University of Chicago, described how the "self" itself (i.e., the perception of consciousness as an object) develops over the course of childhood as the individual learns to take the point of view of specific others in specific contexts (such as games) and eventually internalizes what Mead calls the "generalized other"—our view of the views of society as a whole that transcends individuals or particular situations. (Mead's theories are discussed in depth in Chapter 4 on socialization.) Key to both Cooley's and Mead's work is the notion that it is through social interaction that meaning emerges. This theoretical paradigm is perhaps best summarized by another Chicago scholar, W. I. Thomas, who stated that "if men define situations as real they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). This was an important precursor to the notion of the social construction of reality.

W. E. B. Du Bois However, even as the Chicago School questioned essentialist notions of race and ethnicity (and even the self), the community of scholars was still dominated by white men. The most important black sociologist of the time, and the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) failed to gain the renown he deserved. The first sociologist to undertake ethnography in the African American community, Du Bois made manifold contributions to scholarship and social causes.



W. E. B. Du Bois (second from right) at the office of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine.

Double consciousness
a concept conceived by W. E. B. Du Bois to describe the two behavioral scripts, one for moving through the world and the other incorporating the external opinions of prejudiced onlookers, which are constantly maintained by African Americans.

He developed the concept of double consciousness, a mechanism by which African Americans constantly maintain two behavioral scripts. The first is the script that any American would have for moving through the world; the second is the script that takes the external opinions of an often racially prejudiced onlooker into consideration. The double consciousness is a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1903, p. 2). Without a double consciousness, a person shopping for groceries moves through the store trying to remember everything on the list, maybe taste-testing the grapes, impatiently scolding children begging for the latest sugary treat, or snacking on some cookies before paying for them at the register. With a double consciousness, an African American shopping for groceries is aware that he or she might be watched carefully by store security and makes an effort to get in and out quickly. He or she does not linger in back corners out of the gaze of shopkeepers and remembers not to reach into a pocket lest this motion be perceived as evidence of shoplifting. Snacking on a bag of chips before reaching the register or sampling a tasty morsel from the bulk bins is totally out of the question. Those operating with a double consciousness risk conforming so closely to others' perceptions that they are fully constrained to the behaviors predicted of them. Du Bois was also interested in criminology, using Durkheim's theory of anomie to explain crime rates among African Americans. Specifically, Du Bois theorized that the breakdown of norms resulting from the sudden and newfound freedom of former slaves caused high crime rates among blacks (at least in the South). He also analyzed the social stratification among Philadelphia's black population and argued that such class inequality was necessary for progress in the black community. African Americans, he argued, would be led by what he coined "the talented tenth," an elite of highly educated professionals. In addition to being a major academic sociologist, Du Bois worked to advance a civil rights agenda in the United States. To this end, he co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

Jane Addams Among sociologists, women, much like African Americans, didn't always receive the respect they deserved. For example, Jane Addams (1860–1935) was considered a marginal member of the Chicago School, yet many of the movement's thinkers drew some of their insights from her applied work. Addams founded the first American settlement house, Hull House, an institution that attempted to link the ideas of the university to the poor through a full-service community center, staffed by students and professionals, which offered educational services and aid and promoted sports and the arts. It was at Hull House in Chicago that the ideas of the Chicago School were put into practice and tested. Although many of Addams's observations and experiences at Hull House were influential in the development of the Chicago School's theories and Addams herself was a prolific author on both the substance and

methodology of community studies, she was regarded as a social worker by the majority of her contemporaries. This label, which she rejected, partly resulted from the applied nature of her work, but undoubtedly gender also played a role in her marginalization: Many of the men of the Chicago School also engaged in social activism yet retained their academic prestige.

Modern Sociological Theories

Although it was born in a tradition of community studies that avoided grand theory and drew its insights from the careful observation of people in their environments, American sociology was largely characterized by the concept of functionalism for much of the twentieth century. Drawing on the ideas of Durkheim and best embodied by the work of Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), functionalism derived its name from the notion that the best way to analyze society was to identify the roles that different aspects or phenomena play. These functions may be manifest (explicit) or latent (hidden). This lens is really just an extension of a nineteenth-century theory called *organicism*, the notion that society is like a living organism, each part of which serves an important role in keeping society together. The state or government was seen to be the brain; industry was the muscular system; media and mass communications were the nervous system; and so on.

Functionalism the theory that various social institutions and processes in society exist to serve some important (or necessary) function to keep society running.

Twentieth-century sociologists had moved beyond such simplistic biological metaphors, yet the essential notion that social institutions were present for a reason persisted. Hence, analysis by Parsons and others sought to describe how the various parts of the whole were integrated with, but articulated against, one another. Almost every social phenomenon was subjected to functionalist analysis: What is the function of schooling? The health-care system? Even crime and the Mafia were seen to play a role in a functioning society. For example, functionalists view social inequality as a "device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons" (Davis & Moore, 1944).

Although associated with mid-twentieth-century sociology, the functionalist impulse originated in the nineteenth century, most notably in the work of Durkheim, who in 1893 wrote, "For, if there is nothing which either unduly hinders or favours the chances of those competing for occupations, it is inevitable that only those who are most capable at each type of activity will move into it. The only factor which then determines the manner in which work is divided is the diversity of capacities" (1972). Functionalism was still being applied into the late twentieth century by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, who argued in *The Bell Curve* that "no one decreed that occupations should sort us out by our cognitive abilities, and no one enforces the process. It goes on beneath the surface, guided by its own invisible hand" (1994, p. 52).

Female textile workers struggle with a national guardsman during a 1929 strike in Gastonia, North Carolina. How might a conflict theorist interpret labor unrest?

Conflict Theory Even though functionalism continues to reappear in many guises, its fundamental assertions have not gone unchallenged. Sociologists such as C. Wright Mills, writing from 1948 through 1962, criticized Parsons and functionalist theory for reinforcing the status quo and the dominant economic system with its class structures and inequalities rather than challenging how such systems evolved and offering alternatives. Functionalism also took a beating in the turbulent 1960s, when its place was usurped by a number of theories frequently subsumed under the label Marxist theory or conflict theory. Whereas functionalists painted a picture of social harmony as the well-oiled parts of a societal machine working together (with some friction and the occasional breakdown), conflict theory viewed society from exactly the opposite perspective. Drawing on the ideas of Marx, the theory—as expressed by Ralph Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, and others—stated that conflict among competing interests is the basic, animating force of any society. Competition, not consensus, is the essential nature, and this conflict at all levels of analysis (from the individual to the family to the tribe to the nation-state), in turn, drives social change. And such social change occurs only through revolution and war, not evolution or baby steps.

Conflict theory the idea that conflict between competing interests is the basic, animating force of social change and society in general.

According to conflict theorists, inequality exists as a result of political struggles among different groups (classes) in a particular society. Although functionalists theorize that inequality is a necessary and beneficial aspect of society, conflict theorists argue that it is unfair and exists at the expense of less powerful groups. Thus, functionalism and conflict theory take extreme (if opposing) positions on the fundamental nature of society. Today most sociologists see societies as demonstrating characteristics of both consensus and conflict and believe that social change does result from both revolution and evolution.

Feminist Theory Emerging from the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, feminist theory shares many ideas with Marxist theory—in particular, the Marxist emphasis on conflict and political reform. Feminism is not one idea but a catchall term for many theories. What they all have in common is an emphasis on women's experiences and a belief that sociology and society in general subordinate women. Feminist theorists emphasize equality between men and women and want to see women's lives and experiences represented in sociological studies. Early feminist theory focused on defining concepts such as sex and gender, and on challenging conventional wisdom by questioning the meanings usually assigned to these concepts. In *Sex, Gender, and Society* (1972), sociologist Ann Oakley argued that much of what we attribute to biological sex differences can be traced to behaviors that are learned and internalized through socialization (see Chapter 8 on gender).

In addition to defining sex and gender, much feminist research focuses on inequalities based on gender categories. Feminist theorists have studied women's experiences at home and in the workplace. They have also researched gender inequality in social institutions such as schools, the family, and the government. In each case, feminist sociologists remain interested in how power relationships are defined, shaped, and reproduced on the basis of gender differences.

Symbolic Interactionism A strain of thought that developed in the 1960s was symbolic interactionism, which eschewed big theories of society (macrosociology) and instead focused on how face-to-face interactions create the social world (microsociology). Exemplified most notably by the work of one of George Herbert Mead's students, Herbert Blumer, this paradigm operates on the basic premise of a cycle of meaning—namely, the idea that people act in response to the meaning that signs and social signals hold for them (e.g., a red light means stop). By acting on perceptions of the social world in this way and regarding these meanings as *sui generis* (i.e., appearing to be self-constituting rather than flimsily constructed by ourselves or others), we then collectively

Symbolic interactionism a micro-level theory in which shared meanings, orientations, and assumptions form the basic motivations behind people's actions.

Las Vegas, the ultimate postmodern city, borrows from various regions, times, and cultures to shape its constantly changing landscape.

make their meaning so. In other words, John G. Roberts, Jr. is Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court because we all act as if he is and believe that it is an objective fact he is (even if that belief is the creation of our somewhat arbitrary collective thinking). We then act in ways that reify, or make consequential, this consensus and arrive at our calculations based on the supposed objectivity of this "fact."

The groundwork for symbolic interactionism was laid by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory of social interaction. Goffman had used the language of theater to describe the social facade we create through such devices as tact, gestures, front-stage (versus backstage) behavior, props, and scripts. For example, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman explored how our everyday personal encounters shape and reinforce our notions about class and social status. According to Goffman, we make judgments about class and social status based on how people speak, what they wear, and the other tiny details of how they present themselves to others, and at the same time, they rely on the same information from our everyday interactions with them to classify us, too.

Postmodernism If symbolic interactionism emphasizes the meanings negotiated through the interaction of individuals, postmodernism can perhaps be summarized succinctly as the notion that these shared meanings have eroded. A red light, for instance, may have multiple meanings to different groups or individuals in society. There is no longer one version of history that is correct. Everything is interpretable within this framework; even "facts" are up for debate. It's as if everyone has become a symbolic interactionist and decided that seemingly objective phenomena are social constructions, so that all organizing narratives break down. Postmodernists may not feel compelled to act on these shared meanings as seemingly objective, because the meanings aren't, in fact, objective. The term itself derives from the idea that the grand narratives of history are over (hence, "after" modernism, *postmodernism*).

Postmodernism a condition characterized by a questioning of the notion of progress and history, the replacement of narrative within pastiche, and multiple, perhaps even conflicting, identities resulting from disjointed affiliations.

Social construction an entity that exists because people behave as if it exists and whose existence is perpetuated as people and social institutions act in accordance with the widely agreed-upon formal rules or informal norms of behavior associated with that entity.

Midrange Theory Although many sociologists have taken to the postmodernist project of deconstructing social phenomena (i.e., showing how they are created arbitrarily by social actors with varying degrees of power), most sociologists have returned, as the pendulum swings yet again, to what sociologist Robert Merton called for in the middle of the last century: midrange theory. Midrange theory is neither macrosociology (it doesn't try to explain all of society) nor microsociology. Rather, midrange theory attempts to predict how certain social institutions tend to function. For example, a midrange theorist might develop a theory of democracy (under what political or demographic conditions does it arise?), a theory of the household (when do households expand to include extended kin or nonkin, and when do they contract to the nuclear family unit or the individual?), or a theory explaining the relationship between the educational system and the labor market. The key to midrange theory is that it generates falsifiable hypotheses—predictions that can be tested by analyzing the real world. (Hypothesis generation is covered in Chapter 2.)

Midrange theory a theory that attempts to predict how certain social institutions tend to function.

Sociology and Its Cousins

We have already noted that a sociology of sports exists, as can a sociology of music, of organizations, of economies, of science, and even of sociology itself. What then, if anything, distinguishes sociology from other disciplines? Certainly overlap with other fields does occur, but at the same time, there is something distinctive about sociology as a discipline that transcends the sociological imagination discussed earlier. All of sociology boils down to comparisons across cases of some form or another, and perhaps the best way to conceptualize its role in the landscape of knowledge is to compare it with other fields.

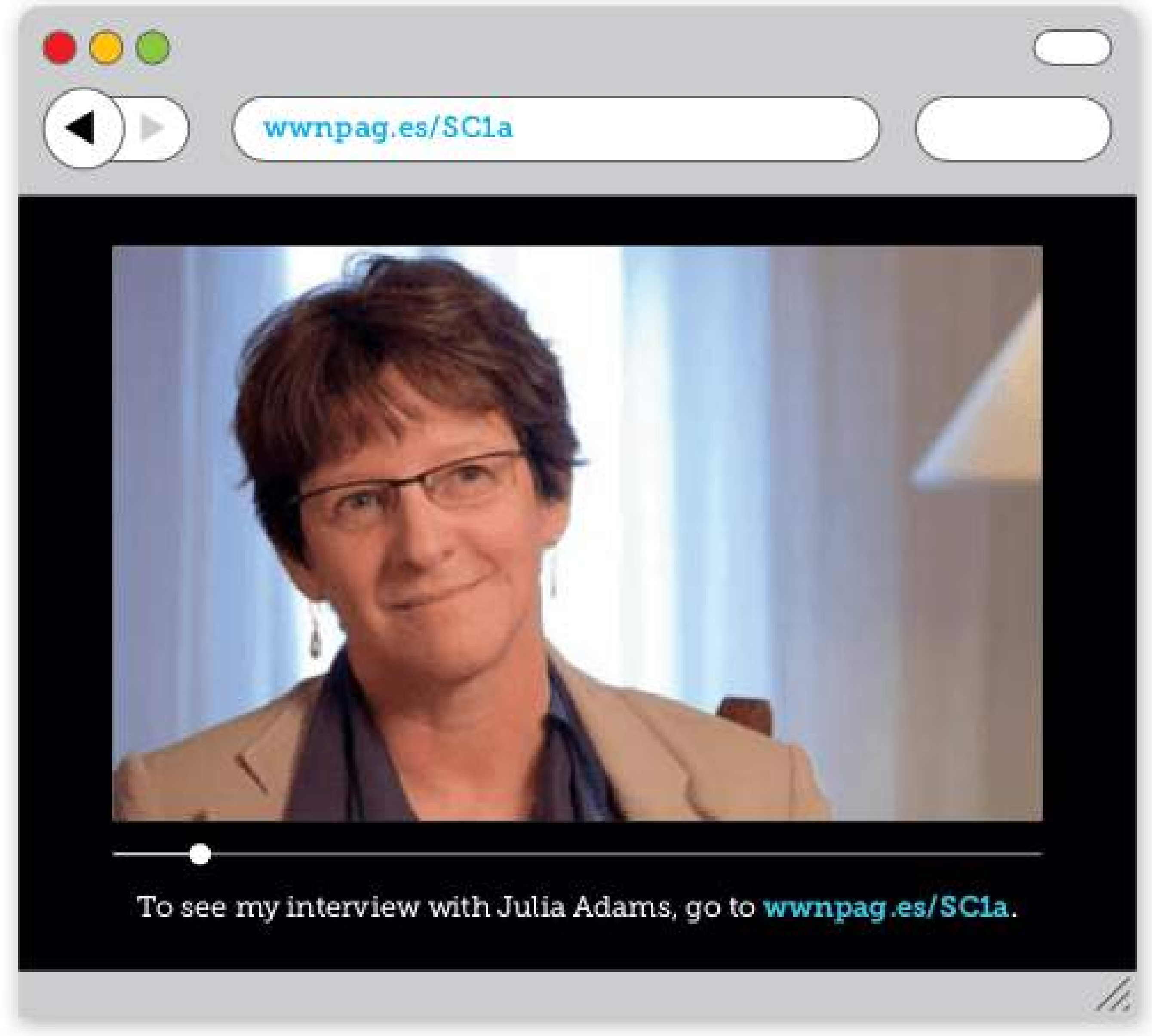
History

Let's start with history. History is concerned with the *idiographic* (from the Greek *idio*, "unique," and *graphic*, "depicting"), meaning that historians, at least traditionally, have been concerned with explaining unique cases. Why did Adolf Hitler rise to power? What conditions led to the Haitian slave revolt 200 years ago (the first such rebellion against European chattel slavery)? How did the Counter-Reformation affect the practices of lay Catholics in France? What was the impact of the railroad on civilization's sense of time? How did adolescence arise as a meaningful stage of life? Historians' research questions center on the notion that by understanding the particularity of certain past events, individual people, or intellectual concepts, we can better understand the world in which we live.

Sometimes historians use comparative frameworks to situate their analysis—for example, comparing Hitler's rise and Mussolini's to examine why the Third Reich pursued a genocidal agenda, whereas the Italian fascists had no such agenda and, in fact, somewhat resisted cooperating with Germany's deportation of Jews. Another strategy historians often use, although it is sometimes frowned on, is the notion of the counterfactual: What would have happened had Hitler been killed rather than wounded in World War I? Would World War II have been inevitable even if the victors in World War I had not pursued such a punitive reparations policy after defeating Germany?

The preceding description is, of course, an oversimplification of a diverse field. History runs the gamut from "great man" theories (a focus on figures like Hitler) to people's histories (a focus on the lives of anonymous, disempowered people in various epochs, or on groups traditionally given short shrift in historical scholarship, such as women, African Americans, and subaltern colonials) to

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (on the left) and Nazi leader Adolf Hitler at a 1937 rally in Munich. How do different disciplines provide various tools to analyze the rise of fascism under these leaders?



To see my interview with Julia Adams, go to wwnpag.es/SC1a.

historiography (in essence, metahistory examining the intellectual assumptions and constraints on knowledge entailed by the subjects and methods historians choose) in which historians rely on archival material and primary resources.

Sociology, by contrast, is generally not concerned with the uniqueness of phenomena but rather with commonalities that can be abstracted across cases. Whereas the unique case is the staple of the historian, the comparative method is the staple of sociologists. Historical comparative sociologist Julia Adams explained what makes her work different from what a historian would do: "If you define the difference according to whether one is engaged in primary archival research or not, I would . . . also be an historian as well as a sociologist," but the big difference is that, historical sociologists are "consciously theoretical" and "very keen to explain and illuminate" historical patterns (Conley 2013a). Whether looking at contemporary American life, the formation of city-states in medieval Europe, or the origins of unequal economic development thousands of years ago, sociologists formulate hypotheses and theorems about how social life works or worked.

Instead of inquiring why Hitler rose to power, the sociologist might ask what common element allowed fascism to arise during the early to mid-twentieth century in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan and not in other countries such as France, Great Britain, or the Scandinavian nations. Of course, sociologists recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all hypothesis that will explain all these cases perfectly, but the exercise of considering competing explanations is illuminating in and of itself. Instead of asking what specific conditions led to the Haitian slave revolt in 1791, the sociologist might ask under what general conditions uprisings have occurred among indentured populations. Instead of asking how the Counter-Reformation affected the practices of lay Catholics in one region of Europe, the sociologist might ask what aspects of the conditions in various regions of Europe made the reaction to the Catholic Church's reforms different. This is a subtle but important difference in focus. Instead of examining the impact of the railroad on our sense of time, the sociologist might compare the railroad to other forms of transportation that both collapsed distances and opened up the possibility of more frequent and longer migrations. And finally, instead of asking how adolescence arose as a meaningful stage of life, the sociologist might compare various societies that have distinct roles for individuals ages 13 to 20 to examine how those labor markets,

How does anthropologist Natasha Dow Schüll's research on slot-machine gamblers challenge the traditional boundaries between anthropology and sociology?

educational systems, family arrangements, life expectancies, and so on lead to different experiences for that age group.

Whether sociologists are comparing two tribes that died out 400 years ago, two countries today, siblings within the same family, or even changes in the same person over the course of his or her life, they are always seeking a variation in some outcome that can be explained by variation in some input. This holds true, I would argue, whether the methods are interviews, research using historical archives, community-based observation studies of participants, or statistical analyses of data from the U.S. census. Sociologists are always at least implicitly drawing comparisons to identify abstractable patterns.

Anthropology

The field of anthropology is split between physical anthropologists, who resemble biologists more than sociologists, and cultural anthropologists, who study human relations similarly to the way sociologists do. Traditionally, the distinction was that sociologists studied "us" (Western society and culture), whereas

anthropologists studied "them" (other societies or cultures). This distinction was helpful in the early to mid-twentieth century, when anthropologist Margaret Mead studied rites of passage in Samoa and sociologists interviewed Chicago residents, but it is less salient today. Sociologists increasingly study non-Western social relations, and anthropologists do not hesitate to tackle domestic social issues.

Take two recent examples that confound this division from either side of the metaphorical aisle: Caitlin Zaloom is a cultural anthropologist whose "tribe" (she likes to joke) is the group of commodities traders who work on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Natasha Dow Schüll, another anthropologist, has studied gamblers in Las Vegas and how they lose themselves and their money in the machine zone. Meanwhile, recent sociological scholarship includes Stephen Morgan's study of African status attainment and patronage relations. Another project, spearheaded by business-school professor Doug Guthrie in 2006, investigated the way informal social connections facilitate business in China. Given the era of globalization we have entered, it is appropriate that division on the basis of "us" and "them" has diminished. Many scholars now question the legitimacy of such a division in the first place, asking whether it served a colonial agenda of dividing up the world and reproducing social relations of domination and exclusion—accomplishing on the intellectual front what European imperialism did on the military, political, and economic fronts.

What then distinguishes sociology from cultural anthropology? Nothing, some would argue. However, although certain aspects of sociology are almost indistinguishable from those of cultural anthropology, sociology as a whole has a wider array of methods to answer questions, such as experimentation and statistical data analysis. Sociology also tends more toward comparative case study, whereas anthropology is more like history in its focus on particular circumstances. This does not necessarily imply that sociology is superior; a wider range of methods can be a weakness as well as a strength, because it can lead to irreconcilable differences within the field. For example, demographic and ethnographic studies of the family may employ different definitions of what a household is. This makes meaningful dialogue between the two subfields challenging.

The Psychological and Biological Sciences

Social, developmental, and cognitive psychology often address many of the same questions that sociologists do: How do people react to stereotypes? What explains racial differences in educational performance? How do individuals respond to authority in various circumstances? Ultimately, however, psychologists focus on the individual, whereas sociologists focus on the supra-individual (above or beyond the individual) level. In other words, psychologists focus on the individual to explain the phenomenon under consideration, examining how urges, drives, instincts, and the mind can account for human behavior, whereas sociologists examine group-level dynamics and social structures.

Biology, especially evolutionary biology, increasingly attempts to explain phenomena that once would have seemed the exclusive dominion of social scientists. There are now biological (evolutionary) theories of many aspects of gender relations—even rape and high-heeled shoes (Posner, 1992). Medical science has claimed to identify genes that explain some aspects of social behavior, such as aggressiveness, shyness, and even thrill seeking. Increasingly, social differences have been medicalized through diagnoses such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and the autistic spectrum of diseases. The distinction between these areas of biology and the social sciences lies not so much in the topic of study (or even the scientific methods in some cases), but rather in the underlying variation or causal mechanisms with which the disciplines are concerned. Sociology addresses supra-individual-level dynamics that affect our behavior, psychology addresses individual-level dynamics, and biology typically deals with the intra-individual-level factors (those within the individual) that affect our lives, such as biochemistry, genetic makeup, and cellular activity. So if a group of biologists attempted to explain differences in culture across continents, they would typically analyze something like local ecological effects or the distribution of genes across subpopulations.

Economics and Political Science

The quantitative side of sociology shares many methodological and substantive features with economics and political science. Economics traditionally has focused on market exchange relations (or, simply, money). More recently, however, economics has expanded to include social realms such as culture, religion, and the family—the traditional stomping ground of sociologists. What distinguishes economics from sociology in these contexts is the underlying view of human behavior. Economics assumes that people are rational utility maximizers: They are out to get the best deal for themselves. Sociology, on the other hand, has a more open view of human motivation that includes selfishness, altruism, and simple irrationality. (New branches of economics are moving, however, into the realm of the irrational.) Another difference is methodological: Economics is a fundamentally quantitative discipline, meaning that it is based on numerical data.

Similarly, political science is almost a subsector of sociology that focuses on only one aspect of social relations—power. Of course, power relations take many forms. Political scientists study state relations, legal structure, and the nature of civic life. Like sociologists, political scientists deploy a variety of methods, ranging from historical case studies to abstract statistical models. Increasingly, political science has adopted the rational actor model implicit in economics in an attempt to explain everything from how lobbyists influence legislators to the recruitment of suicide bombers by terrorist groups.

Having explained all of these distinctions, we should keep in mind that disciplinary boundaries are in a constant state of flux. For example, Stanford English professor Franco Moretti argues that books should be counted, mapped, and graphed. In his research, Moretti statistically analyzes thousands of books by thematic and linguistic patterns. Economist Steven Levitt has explored how teachers teach to the test (and sometimes cheat) and how stereotypically African American names may or may not disadvantage their holders. Historian Zvi Ben-Dor Benite has assembled a global, comparative history of how different societies execute criminals. It all sounds like sociology to me! For now, let's just say that significant overlap exists between various arenas of scholarship, so that any divisions are simultaneously meaningful and arbitrary.

Divisions within Sociology

Even if sociologists tend to leverage comparisons of some sort, significant fault lines still persist within sociology. Often, the major division is perceived to exist between those who deal in numbers (statistical or quantitative researchers) and those who deal in words (qualitative sociologists). Another split exists between theorists and empiricists. These are false dichotomies, however; they merely act as shorthand for deeper intellectual divisions for which they are poor proxies. A much more significant cleavage exists between interpretive and positivist sociology. Positivist sociology is born from the mission of Comte—that mission being to reveal the "social facts" (to use the term Durkheim later coined) that affect, if not govern, social life. It is akin to uncovering the laws of "social physics," although most sociologists today would shun Comte's phrase because it implies an overly deterministic sense of unwavering, time-transcendent laws.

To this end, the standard practice is to form a theory about how the social world works—for instance, that members of minorities have a high degree of group solidarity. The next task is to generate a hypothesis that derives from this theory, perhaps that minority groups should demonstrate a lower level of intragroup violence than majority groups. Next, we make predictions based on our hypotheses. Both the hypotheses and predictions have to be falsifiable by an empirical, or experimental, test; in this case, it might involve examining homicide rates among different groups in a given society or in multiple societies. And last comes the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis and the revision (or extension) of the theory (in the face of contradictory or confirming evidence). These scientific methods are the same as in any basic science. For that reason, positivism is often called the "normal science" model of sociology.

Normal science stands in contrast to interpretive sociology, which is much more concerned with the meaning of social phenomena to individuals (remember Weber's *Verstehen*). Rather than make a prediction about homicide rates, the interpretive sociologist will likely seek to understand the experience of solidarity among minority groups in various contexts. An interpretive sociologist

might object to the notion that we can make worthwhile predictions about human behavior—or more precisely, might question whether such an endeavor is worth the time and effort. It is a sociology premised on the idea that situation matters so much that the search for social facts that transcend time and place may be futile. Why measure the number of friends we have by the number of people we see face to face every day, given the existence of the Internet and how it has redefined the meaning of social interaction so completely?

Microsociology and Macrosociology

A similar cleavage involves the distinction between *microsociology* and *macrosociology*. Microsociology seeks to understand local interactional contexts—for example, why people stare at the numbers in an elevator and are reluctant to make eye contact in this setting. Microsociologists focus on face-to-face encounters and the types of interactions between individuals. They rely on data gathered through participant observations and other qualitative methodologies (for more on these methods, see Chapter 2).

Microsociology a branch of sociology that seeks to understand local interactional contexts; its methods of choice are ethnographic, generally including participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Macrosociology is generally concerned with social dynamics at a higher level of analysis—across the breadth of a society (or at least a swath of it). A macrosociologist might investigate immigration policy or gender norms or how the educational system interacts with the labor market. Statistical analysis is the most typical manifestation of this kind of research, but by no means the only one. Macrosociologists also use qualitative methods such as historical comparison and in-depth interviewing. They may also resort to large-scale experimentation. That said, a perfect overlap does not exist between methodological divisions and level of analysis. For example, microsociologists might use an experimental method such as varying the context of an elevator to see how people react. Or they might use statistical methods such as conversation analysis, which analyzes turn taking, pauses, and other quantifiable aspects of social interaction in localized settings.

Macrosociology a branch of sociology generally concerned with social dynamics at a higher level of analysis—that is, across the breadth of a society.

→ CONCLUSION

The bottom line is that anything goes; as long as you use your sociological imagination, you will be asking important questions and seeking the best way to answer them. As you read the subsequent chapters, keep in mind that a sociologist "makes the familiar strange." I have divided this book into three parts. The first six chapters introduce the methodological and theoretical tools that you need in order to think like a sociologist. The second part, Chapters 7 through 11, asks you to study the inequalities and differences that divide people in our society. The third part, Chapters 12 through 18, gives you an overview of the social institutions that are the building blocks of our society.

SOCIOLOGY ON THE STREET

The neighborhood where you grow up exerts a significant effect on the rest of your life. How did your house, neighbors, street, and town influence you? Watch the Sociology on the Street video to find out more: wwnpag.es/SOS1.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

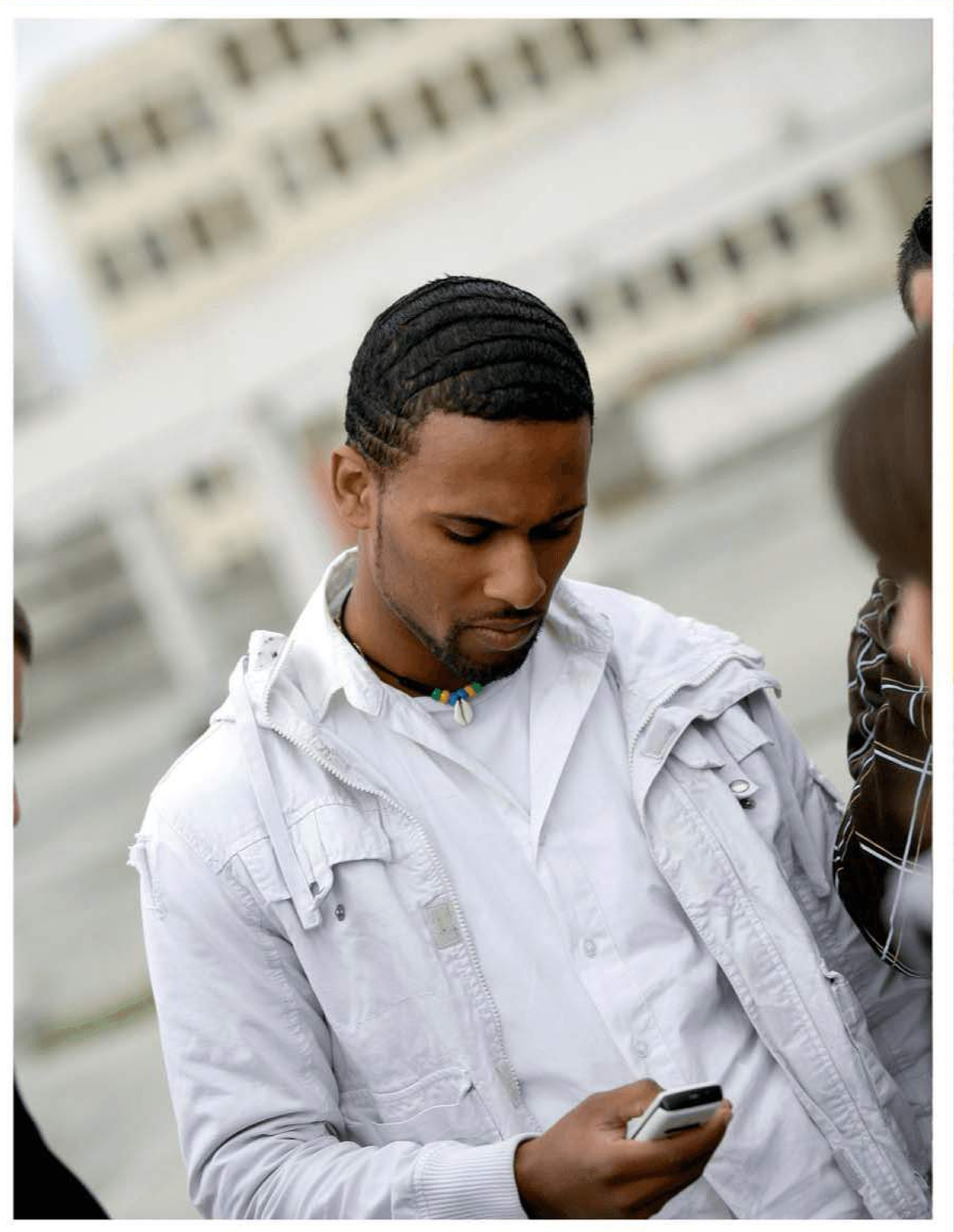
1. Some people accuse sociologists of observing conditions that are obvious. How does looking at sociology as "making the familiar strange" help counter this claim? How does sociology differ from simple commonsense reasoning?
2. What is the sociological imagination, and how do history and personal biography affect it? If a sociologist studies the challenges experienced by students earning a college degree, how could the lessons gained be described as "terrible" as well as "magnificent"?
3. What is a social institution, and how does it relate to social identity? Choose a sports team or another social institution to illustrate your answer.
4. A sociologist studies the way a group of fast-food restaurant employees do their work. From what you read in this chapter, how would Max Weber and Émile Durkheim differ in their study of these workers?
5. Compare functionalism and conflict theory. How would the two differ in their understanding of inequality?
6. You tell a friend that you're taking a class in sociology. There's a chance they know about sociology and are quite jealous. There's also a chance they're confusing sociology with the other social sciences. How would you describe sociology? How does sociology differ from history and psychology?
7. Sociology, like any discipline, features some divisions. What are some of the cleavages in the field, and why might these be described as false dichotomies?
8. Why do people go to college, and how does Randall Collins's book *Credential Society* make the familiar reality of college education seem strange?

PARADOX

A SUCCESSFUL SOCIOLOGIST MAKES THE FAMILIAR STRANGE.

WATCH THE ANIMATED SHORT ABOUT THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION PARADOX AT

WWNPAG.ES/PX1

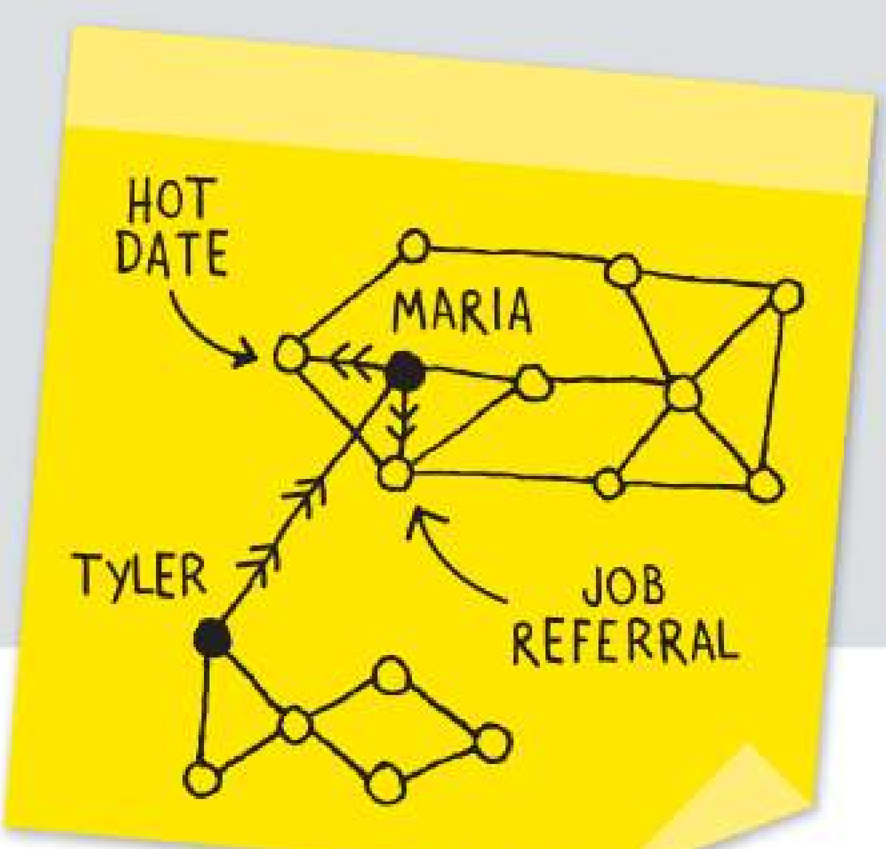


How is it possible to study something as rapidly evolving as technology? Social scientists utilize standardized research methods to ensure their information is as relevant and accurate as possible.

5 Groups and Networks

PARADOX

THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES: IT IS THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE ARE THE LEAST CONNECTED WHO OFFER US THE MOST OPPORTUNITIES.



It would seem that we are living in the age of social networks. Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and other social networking sites suck an ever-increasing proportion of the world's population into their virtual landscapes, along with, of course, more and more of our free time, as social life and leisure move online. But other than getting in touch with long-lost high-school buddies, what good are social networks anyway? Sure, you might be able to use Evite or Facebook as a virtual social secretary if you are organizing a baby shower or dorm party. But a good old-fashioned address book and rotary phone could have done the trick (even if it took longer).

Kate Rich, an Australian artist who has made a habit of digging tunnels through the invisible social structures most of us take for granted, has found a practical application for social networks. When she's not working for an anonymous, multinational collective with the ominous title The Bureau of Inverse Technology, she's climbing trees with friends in the English countryside. Or perhaps she's perfecting the recipe for Cube-Cola (**http://sparror.cubecinema.com/cube/cola/**), an open-source cola whose motto is "Standing on the hands of giants." The beverage takes its name from the Cube Cinema, a workers' collective located in downtown Bristol, United Kingdom, where the drink is served to patrons.

As manager of the Cube's bar and café since 2003, Kate first looked into ordering only "fair trade" products when confronted with the need for a reliable source of good coffee for her patrons. But she found herself "unsure about the promises and threats made on the packet, almost inevitably happy farmers testifying as if at gunpoint that they use the money for their children's

Infused grappa from local vineyards in Croatia, distributed through Feral Trade.

education" (Conley, 2010). So she decided to put her own social networks to work and created what would soon become Feral Trade (www.feraltrade.org). The premise is simple. Pulling it off was not. The basic idea is that while we cannot quite trust packaging labels, we should be able to trust the firsthand reports of our close friends and colleagues.

To solve her coffee problem, she got in touch with fellow artist Amy Balkin, who was living in San Francisco and who had a sister working in the Peace Corps in El Salvador. The sister, in turn, put Kate in touch with a coffee co-op for which she could vouch. It took about three months to negotiate the first shipment of 30 bags of coffee (the chain of e-mails is documented on the Feral Trade website). From there the business slowly moved into import and distribution of other food products and utilities: tea from Bangladesh, sweets from Iran, Turkish delight from Montenegro, electric rice-cookers from Iran, and so on.

Kate explains her hand-to-hand shipping methodology:

> People sometimes point to the similarities between Feral Trade and the drug trade: Some methods might be similar but the structures of economy and ownership are totally different. Drug running being more or less a mafia version of normal corporate relations, workers alienated from production, etc. With Feral Trade, the couriers are exclusively unpaid; they are peers; they are uncontrollable: coaxed, convinced, and occasionally spontaneously offering their services. I have entirely no leverage over them, other than their own interest or investment in the shipment. (Conley, 2010)

Though Feral Trade has been up and running for almost a decade and Kate has carefully documented every transaction and shipment online for public consumption, it took almost that long for the "authorities" to notice and contact her. Some officials from the U.K. government's Trading Standards Service Public Protection Group and its Environmental Health office dropped by the Cube unannounced. Kate explained to them that there was actually no consumer for them to protect, and that these were the peer-to-peer transactions of the social economy that most people enact when they bring gifts back from vacation for their friends and family, with the key differences that cash is exchanged and that everything is publicly documented. The officials shifted their questions to the fact that many of the products depicted on the Feral Trade website appeared to be "brightly coloured" and therefore might involve dyes that are banned in the United Kingdom. They also admitted that they had made inquiries to Her Majesty's Custom and Excise on the legality of the commercial use of personal import food products and had been "unable to get a straight answer"—which Kate, of course, took as a clear precedent to continue trading.

Kate finds these interactions with official bureaucracies slightly terrifying, even if they make for great Web documentation after the fact. The people she actually finds more frustrating are the "clients" who think she can take very specific retail-level orders.

> It's not about providing a global service to bring in desired items to an individual consumer. It's about coordinated social movement. Can I shift 20 boxes of Iranian sweets from Yazd to Bristol to distribute them amongst friends pre-Xmas? These went fridge-to-fridge—the couriers were me, an Egyptian musician friend, an Iranian art student I met at a party, a Russian professor I know in London and her four-year-old kid, and an IT guy from Hewlett Packard I'd never met before, along with various onlookers and companions. (Conley, 2010)

To someone who might request one very specific T-shirt from Ecuador, she says, "Get your own extended social network!"

> There's a moment where you're in the canopy suspended with your weight spread out over 10 or 20 twiglets of one tree and reaching for a handful of tendrils of the neighbouring tree; that's all your means of support. It always seems impossible, totally terrifying, then you just have to move and you're suddenly safe, grabbing onto one of tree two's branches. The shipping manoeuvres are like that, at their best. Total hazard then the thrill of things moving and cooperating in unplannable ways. (Conley, 2010)

This chapter explores some of the basic theories about group interaction and how it shapes our social world. We'll look at the connections between groups: how size and shape matter, what roles group members play, and how

the power of groups works compared with individuals and other institutions. We'll also discuss organizations and how they both react to and create social structure.

Social Groups

Unless you live alone in the woods, and perhaps even then, you are a member of many social groups. Social groups form the building blocks of society and most social interaction. In fact, even the self evolves from groups. Let's start by talking about the various types and sizes of groups. In his classic work "Quantitative Aspects of the Group," sociologist Georg Simmel (1950) argues that without knowing anything about the group members' individual psychology or the cultural or social context in which they are embedded, we can make predictions about the ways people behave based solely on the number of members, or "social actors," in that group. This theory applies not just to groups of people but also to states, countries, firms, corporations, bureaucracies, and any number of other social forms.

Just the Two of Us

Dyad a group of two.

Triad a group of three.

Simmel advances the notion that the most important distinction is that between a relationship of two, which he calls a dyad, and a group of three, which he calls a triad. This is the fundamental distinction among most social relations, he argues, and it holds regardless of the individual characteristics of the group's members. Of course, personality differences do influence social relations, but there are numerous social dynamics about which we can make predictions that have nothing to do with the content of the social relations themselves.

The dyad has several unique characteristics. For starters, it is the most intimate form of social life, partly because the two members of the dyad are mutually dependent on each other. That is, the continued existence of the group is entirely contingent on the willingness of both parties to participate in the group; if either person leaves, the dyad ceases to be. This intimacy is enhanced by the fact that no third person exists to buffer the situation or mediate between the two. Meanwhile, the members of a dyad don't need to be concerned about how their relationship will be perceived by a third party.

For example, we might consider a couple the most intimate social arrangement in our society. Both people must remain committed to being in the dyad for it to exist, and if one partner leaves, the couple no longer exists. There can be no secrets—if the last piece of chocolate cake disappears and you didn't eat it, you know who did. You could withhold a secret from your dyadic partner, but in terms of the actions of the group itself, no mystery lingers about who performs which role or who did what. Either you did it, or the other person did.

In a dyad, symmetry must be maintained. There might be unequal power relations within a group of two to a certain extent, but Simmel would argue that in a group of two an inherent symmetry exists because of the earlier stipulation of mutual dependence—namely, that the group survives only if both members remain. Even in relationships where the power seems so clearly unequal—think of a master and a servant or a prisoner and his captor—Simmel argues that there's an inherent symmetry. Yes, the servant may be completely dependent on the master for his or her wages, sustenance, food, and shelter, but what happens to the master who becomes dependent on the labor that the servant performs? Of course, forcible relationships might develop in which one of two parties is forced to stay in the dyad, but to be considered a pure dyad, the relationship has to be voluntary. Because a dyad could fall apart at any moment, the underlying social relation is heightened.

Dyads are the foundation of all social relationships. Why are they the most intimate relationship, according to Georg Simmel?

The dyad is also unique in other ways. Because the group exists only as long as the individuals choose to maintain it in a voluntary fashion, the group itself exerts no supra-individual control over the individuals involved. For example, whereas a child might claim, "She made me do it" and shamelessly tell on her older sister, a member of a dyad is less likely to say, "I was just following orders" or "The whole group decided to go see *Mission: Impossible 7*, and I really didn't want to, but I went anyway." The force of a group is much stronger when three or more individuals are part of the group.

Let's take a real-life example of how the characteristics of a dyad play out and see why they matter. Think about divorce. One point in a marriage at which the divorce rate is especially high is when a first child is born (and not just because of the parental sleep deprivation that arrives with a newborn). The nature of the relationship between the two adults changes. They have gone from being a dyad to becoming a triad. Perhaps the parents feel a sudden lack of intimacy, even though the baby is not yet a fully developed social actor. On the flip side, a husband or wife might begin to feel trapped in a marriage specifically because of a child. All of a sudden, group power exists—a couple has evolved into a family, and with that comes the power of numbers in a group.

And Then There Were Three

This brings us to the triad, distinguished by characteristics you can probably infer by now. In a triad, the group holds supra-individual power. In other words, in a group of three or four, I can say, "I'm really unhappy, I hate this place,

In what ways are triads more complex than dyads? What are the possible roles of triad members?

I hate you, and I'm leaving," but the group will go on. The husband may walk out on his wife and children, but the family he's abandoning still exists. He's ending his participation in the group, but the group will outlast his decision to leave it. Therefore, the group is not dependent on any one particular member.

What's more, in a triad, secrets can exist. Who left the cap off the toothpaste? If more than two people live under the same roof, you can't be sure. Politics is another aspect inherent in a group of three or more. Instead of generating consensus between two individuals, now you have multiple points of view and preferences that need to be balanced. This allows for power politics among the group's members. Simmel refers to three basic forms of political relations that can evolve within a triad depending on what role the entering third party assumes (Figure 5.1). The first role is that of mediator, the person who tries to resolve conflict between the other two and is sometimes brought in for that explicit purpose. A good example would be a marriage counselor. Rather than go to therapy, couples having marital problems often start a family because they believe a baby will bring them back together. Unfortunately, as most couples come to realize sooner rather than later, a baby cannot play the role of a mediator. Rather, the dynamics of the unhappy family may turn into a game of chicken: Which parent is more devoted to the child? Which dyad forms the core of the group, and which person will be left out or can walk away more easily?

Mediator the member of a triad who attempts to resolve conflict between the two other actors in the group.

A second possible role for the incoming third member of a triad is that of *tertius gaudens* (Latin for "the third that rejoices"). This individual profits from the disagreement of the other two, essentially playing the opposite role from the mediator. Someone in this position might have multiple roles. In the previous example, the marriage counselor plays the part of the mediator, but she is also earning her wages from the conflict between the couple. Maybe she encourages continued therapy even after the couple appear to have resolved all their issues, or perhaps she promotes their staying together even though they've already decided to get a divorce.

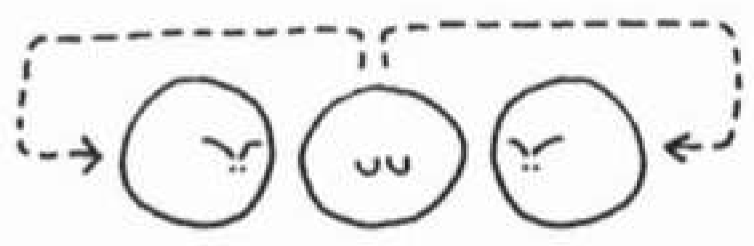
Tertius gaudens the member of a triad who benefits from conflict between the other two members of the group.

The third possible role that Simmel identifies for a third party is *divide et impera* (Latin for "divide and conquer"). This person intentionally drives a wedge between the other two parties. This third role is similar to *tertius gaudens*, the difference between the two being a question of intent and whether the rift preexisted. (If you've ever seen or read Shakespeare's *Othello*, there is no better example of *divide et impera* than the way Iago, counselor to Othello, uses the Moor's insecurities to foster a rift between him and his wife Desdemona in order to strengthen Iago's own hand in court politics. The play ends tragically, of course.)

Divide et impera the role of a member of a triad who intentionally drives a wedge between the other two actors in the group.

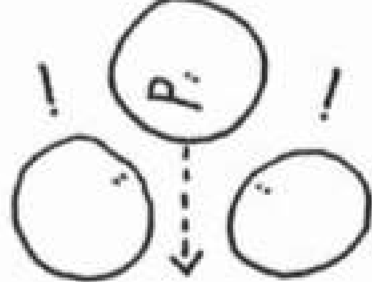
To take an example with which millions of Americans are familiar, let's return to the case of the triad formed when a romantic couple has a child

Figure 5.1: Political Relations within a Triad



MEDIATOR
The mediator attempts to resolve conflict between the other two members of the triad, and is sometimes brought in for that explicit purpose.

TERTIUS GAUDENS
Latin for "the third that rejoices." This individual profits from the disagreement of the other two actors, essentially playing the opposite role from the mediator.



DIVIDE ET IMPERA
Latin for "divide and conquer." This person intentionally drives a wedge between the other two parties.

but experiences strife and separates. What happens when the couple divorces? What role does the child play? A child could play any of the roles mentioned above. In the original dyad of the biological parents, the child can be a mediator, forcing his or her parents to work together on certain issues pertaining to his or her care. A child can be "the third who rejoices" from the disagreement of the two, profiting from the fact that he or she might receive two allowances or extra birthday presents because each parent is trying to prove that he or she loves the child more. A complicated *divide et impera* situation could develop if one of the child's parents enters into a second marriage, in which the kid remains the biological child of one parent and becomes the stepchild of the other. In this case, all sorts of politics arise because of the biological connection between the one parent and the child versus the marital love relationship between the two adults. The relationship between the nonbiological parent and the stepchild, who have the weakest bond, may be difficult. The situation could unfold in any number of ways. Many domestic comedies (think *The Parent Trap*) are based on the premise of a young, angst-ridden prankster playing the role of *divide et impera* between his or her parent and the new stepmother or -father.

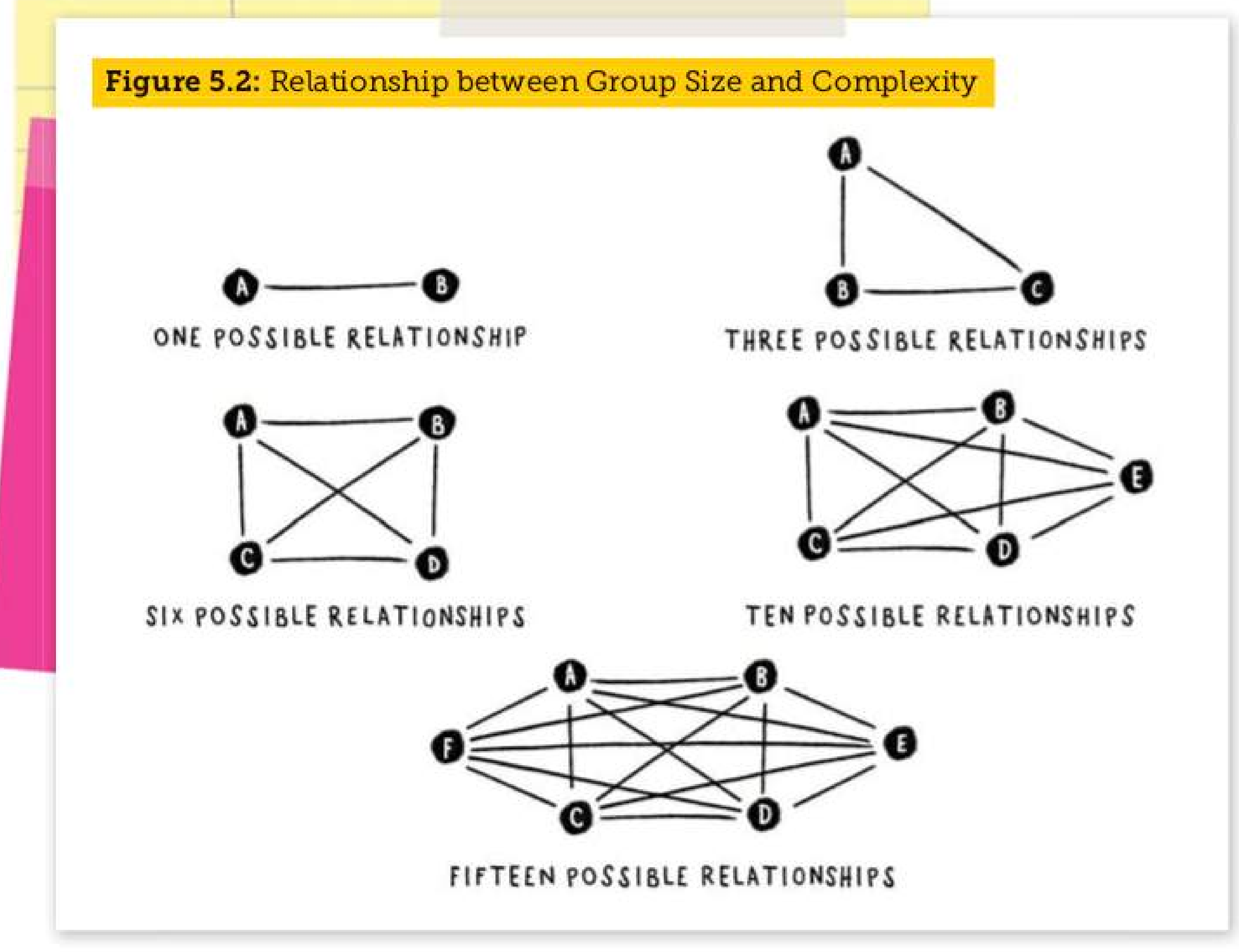
When contemplating how these theoretical concepts work within actual social interaction, keep in mind that these groups—dyads and triads—don't exist in a vacuum in real life. In discussing the politics of a stepfamily, we're talking about a household where there's a stepparent, a biological parent, and a child. Beyond our textbook example, in real life, this triad probably doesn't function so independently. There is probably another biological parent living elsewhere, maybe another stepparent, maybe siblings. Most social groups are

very complex, and we need to take that into consideration when we attempt to determine how they operate. This is why we start with Simmel's purest forms. The interactions that take place in groups of two and three become the building blocks for those in much larger groups.

Size Matters: Why Social Life Is Complicated

One key insight is that as the number of people in the group increases geometrically (2 + 1 = 3; 3 + 1 = 4; 4 + 1 = 5), the complexity of analyzing that group's ties increases exponentially (2 × 2 = 4; 4 × 4 = 16; 5 × 5 = 25). A two-person group has only one possible and necessary relationship; it must exist for there to be a group. In a triad, a sum of three relationships exists, with each person within the group having two ties. And again, for it to be a group of three, we're not talking about possible connections but actual ones. Each person in the triad has to have two ties—breaking a single tie turns the triad into two dyads. Even if one of the ties between two members is weaker, it is so well-reinforced by the remaining two ties that it is unlikely to fade away, a feature known as the "iron law" of the triad. When you move beyond triads to groups of four or more, something different happens. To create a group of four, there must be at least four relationships, but you can have as many as six. Figure 5.2 shows this exponential rise in possible relationships graphically.

Figure 5.2: Relationship between Group Size and Complexity



In a diagram with four people (A, B, C, and D), we can cross out the diagonals and the group will still exist. Everyone may have only two relationships as opposed to three (the number of possible relationships). A and D might never have spoken to each other, but the group will continue to function. The tendency, however, is for these possible relationships to become actual relationships. You and your roommate are in separate chemistry classes, but your lab partners happen to be roommates. If you both become friendly with your lab partners outside of class, chances are that you will meet your roommate's lab partner and vice versa. Such social ties between friends of the same friend tend to form. This can be good or bad. You may form a study group and, if your roommate's lab partner's boyfriend is a chemist, you (and everyone else) may benefit from his help. On the other hand, if the two break up and you start dating the chemist, it might make future labs a little uncomfortable for your roommate.

Let's Get This Party Started: Small Groups, Parties, and Large Groups

Groups larger than a dyad or triad, according to Simmel, can be classified into one of three types: small groups, parties, and large groups. A small group is characterized by four factors. The first is *face-to-face interaction*; all the members of the group at any given time are present and interact with one another. They are not spread out geographically. Second, a small group is *unifocal*, meaning that there's one center of attention at any given time. Turn taking among speakers occurs. A classroom, unless it's divided and engaged in group work, should be unifocal.

Small group a group characterized by face-to-face interaction, a unifocal perspective, lack of formal arrangements or roles, and a certain level of equality.

What makes the study group on the left a small group, and how is it different from the cocktail party on the right?

How is this classroom an example of a large group?

Classes usually don't qualify as small groups because a third characteristic of small groups is a *lack of formal arrangements* or *roles*. A study group, though, might qualify if you decide shortly before an exam to meet with some of your classmates. You need to agree on a place and time to meet, but otherwise there is no formal arrangement. In the classroom, however, a professor is in attendance, as are teaching assistants and students—all of whom play official roles in the group. The roles generally encountered in classes also contradict the fourth defining characteristic of a small group, *equality*. After all, you won't be giving your professor a grade, nor will she get into trouble, as you might, for arriving late at a planned lecture. Yours isn't a reciprocal and equal relationship. Within a small group, as in a dyad, there is a certain level of equality. Only in a dyad can pure equality exist, because both members hold veto power over the group. However, in a small group, even if the group will continue to exist beyond the membership of any particular member, no particular member has greater sway than the others. No one member can dissolve the group. If someone in your study group gets tired and falls asleep on his book, you and your classmates can continue to study without him.

When does a small group become a party? If you have ever hosted a party, you know that the worst phase is the beginning. You're worried that people might not show up: The party has started, only three people are there (everyone, after all, tends to arrive fashionably late), and you start to wonder, "Is this going to be it?" You have to keep a conversation going among three people; you refill their glasses as soon as they take one sip. If you're drinking alcohol (only if you're of legal drinking age, of course), you may consume more at the beginning of the party because you are nervous about it not going well. When does your small gathering officially evolve into a party, so that you can relax and enjoy yourself? Simmel would say that a party, like a small group, is characterized by face-to-face interaction but differs in that it is *multifocal*. Going back to the example of your sociology study group, if two people begin to talk about Margaret Mead's theory of the self while the rest of you discuss the differences between role conflict and role strain, then it is bifocal; if another subgroup splits off to deliberate on reference groups, then it has become multifocal. According to Simmel, you've got yourself a party! So when you're hosting your next party, you'll recognize when it has officially started.

Party a group that is similar to a small group but is multifocal.

The last type of group to which Simmel makes reference is the large group. The primary characteristic of a large group is the presence of a *formal structure* that mediates interaction and, consequently, *status differentiation*. When you enter a classroom, it should be clear who the teacher is, and you comprehend that she has a higher status than you have in that specific social context.

Large group a group characterized by the presence of a formal structure that mediates interaction and, consequently, status differentiation.

The professor is an employee of the university, knows more than you know about the subject being taught, and is responsible for assigning you a grade based on your performance in the course. You might be asked to complete a teacher evaluation form at the end of the semester, but it's not the same thing as grading a student. You and your professor aren't equals. The point is that the inherent characteristics of a group are determined not just by its size but also by other aspects of its form. Whether a group stays small, becomes a party, or evolves into a large group may depend on numbers, but it also may depend on the size and configuration of the physical space in which the social actors are assembled, preexisting social relationships, expectations, and the larger social context in which that group is embedded.

Primary and Secondary Groups

Simmel wasn't the only one who tried to describe the basic types of groups. The sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1909) emphasized a distinction between what he called primary and secondary groups. Primary groups are *limited in the number of members*, allowing for face-to-face interaction. The group is an end unto itself, rather than a means to an end. This is what makes your family different from a sports team or small business: Sure, you want the family to function well, but you're not trying to compete with other families or manufacture a product. Meanwhile, primary groups are *key agents of socialization*. Most people's first social group is their family, which is a primary group. Your immediate family (parents and siblings) is probably small enough to sit down at the same dinner table or at least gather in the same room at the same time. Loyalty is the primary ethic here. Members of a primary group are *noninterchangeable*—you can't replace your mother or father. And while you have strong allegiances to your friends, your primary loyalty is likely to be to your family. Finally, the relationships within a primary group are *enduring*. Your sister will always be your sister. Another example of a primary group might be the group of your closest friends, especially if you've known each other since your sandbox years.

Primary groups social groups, such as family or friends, composed of enduring, intimate face-to-face relationships that strongly influence the attitudes and ideals of those involved.

The characteristics of secondary groups, such as a labor union, stand in contrast to those of primary groups. The group is *impersonal*; you may or may not know all of the members of your union. It's also *instrumental*; the group exists as a means to an end, in this case for organizing workers and lobbying for their interests. In a secondary group, affiliation is *contingent*. You are only a member of your union so long as you hold a certain job and pay your dues. If you change jobs or join another union, your membership in that earlier group ends. Because the members of a secondary group change, the roles are more important than the individuals who fill them. The shop steward, the person chosen to interact with the company's management, may be a different person every year, but that position carries the same responsibilities within the group regardless of who fills it. A sports team is another example of a secondary

Secondary groups groups marked by impersonal, instrumental relationships (those existing as a means to an end).

group, although if you're also close friends with your teammates and socialize with them when you're not playing sports, the line between a primary and secondary group can become blurred.

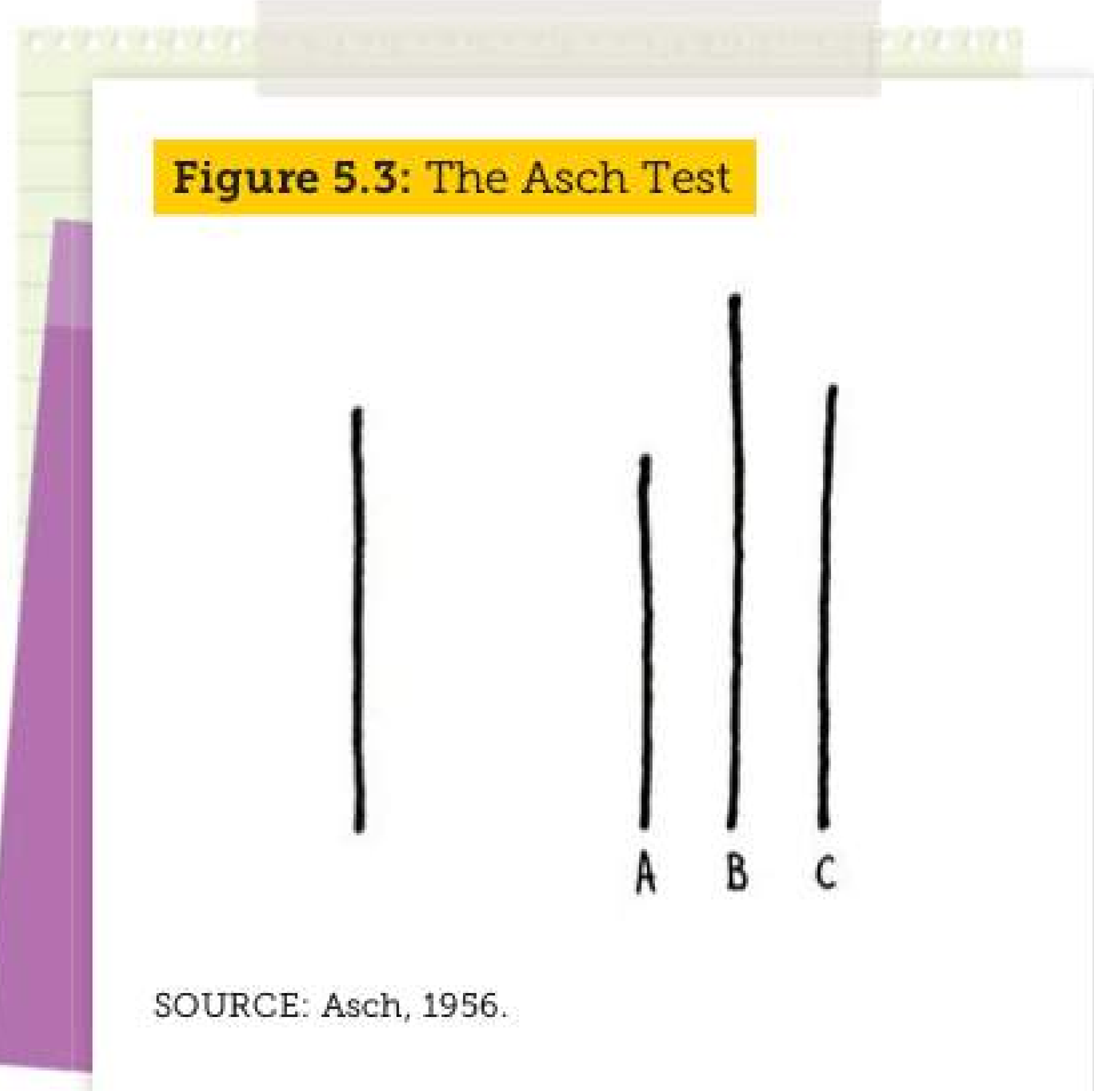


Figure 5.3: The Asch Test

SOURCE: Asch, 1956.

Group Conformity

Although we tend to put a high value on individuality in American culture, our lives are marked by high levels of conformity. That is, groups have strong influences over individual behavior. In the late 1940s the social psychologist Solomon Asch carried out a now-famous series of experiments to demonstrate the power of norms of group conformity. He gathered subjects in a room under the pretense that they were participating in a vision test, showed them two images of lines, and asked which ones were longer than the others and which were the same length (Figure 5.3).

The trick was that only one person in each room was really a research subject; the rest of the people had been told ahead of time to give the same incorrect answer. While a majority of subjects answered correctly even after they listened to others give the wrong answer, about one-third expressed serious discomfort—they clearly struggled with what they thought was right in light of what everyone else was saying. Subjects were the most confused when the entire group offered an incorrect answer. When the group members gave a range of responses, the research subjects had no trouble answering correctly. This experiment demonstrates the power of conformity within a group. More troubling instances of group conformity may be seen in cases of collective violence such as gang rape, which tends to occur among tightly knit groups like sports teams or fraternities (Sanday, 1990).

In-Groups and Out-Groups

In-group another term for the powerful group, most often the majority.

Out-group another term for the stigmatized or less powerful group, the minority.

In-groups and out-groups are another broad way of categorizing people. The in-group is the powerful group, most often the majority, whereas the out-group is the stigmatized or less powerful group, usually the minority (though the numbers don't have to break down this way). For example, in the United States, heterosexuals are the in-group in terms of sexuality (both more powerful and numerically greater), whereas homosexuals, bisexuals, and those who have other nonnormative sexual identities fall into the out-group. However, in South Africa, despite being a minority group, whites are the in-group because of their enormous political and economic power (the legacy of colonialism

and apartheid), whereas blacks are the out-group despite their greater numbers. The significance of in-groups and out-groups lies in their relative power to define what constitutes normal versus abnormal thoughts and behavior.

Reference Groups

We often compare ourselves to other groups of people we do not know directly in order to make comparisons. For example, your class might compare itself to another introduction to sociology class, which has a take-home midterm and an optional final. If your class has a 20-page term paper and a two-hour comprehensive final exam, you might feel as if you face an unfair amount of work. If your class has no external assignments, however, and your final grades are based on self-assessment, you might feel comparatively lucky. In either case, the other class serves as a reference group. Reference groups help us understand or make sense of our position in society relative to other groups. The neighboring town's high school or even another socioeconomic class can serve as a reference group. In the first instance, you might compare access to sporting facilities; in the second, you might compare voting patterns.

Reference group a group that helps us understand or make sense of our position in society relative to other groups.

From Groups to Networks

Dyads, triads, and groups are the components of social networks. A social network is a set of relations—a set of dyads, essentially—held together by *ties* between individuals. A tie is the content of a particular relationship. One way to think about "the ties that bind" is as a set of stories we tell each other that explain a particular relationship. If I ask you how you know a specific person, and you explain that she was your brother's girlfriend in the eighth grade, and the two of you remained close even after her relationship with your brother ended, that story is your tie to that person. For every person in your life, you have a story. To explain some ties, the story is very simple: "That's the guy I buy my coffee from each morning." This is a uniplex tie. Other ties have many layers. They are multiplex: "She's my girlfriend. We have a romantic relationship. We also are tennis and bridge partners. And now that you mention it, we are classmates at school and also fiercely competitive opponents in Trivial Pursuit."

Social network a set of relations—essentially, a set of dyads—held together by ties between individuals.

Tie the connection between two people in a relationship that varies in strength from one relationship to the next; a story that explains our relationship with another member of our network.

A narrative is the sum of stories contained in a set of ties. Your university or college is a narrative, for example. Every person with whom you have a relationship at your university forms part of that network. For all your college-based relationships—those shared with a professor, your teaching assistant, or classmates—your school is a large part of the story, of the tie. Without the school, in fact, you probably wouldn't share a tie at all. When you add up

Narrative the sum of stories contained in a set of ties.

the stories of all the actors involved in the social network of your school—between you and your classmates, between the professors and their colleagues, between the school and the vendors with whom it contracts—the result is a narrative of what your college is. Of course, you may have other friends, from high school or elsewhere, who have no relationship to your school, so your college is a more minor aspect of those relationships.

In Chapter 4 we talked about the power of symbols. What would you need to do if you wanted to change the name of your school? You and your friends could just start calling it something else. But you'd probably have to hire a legal team to alter the contracts (a form of tie that is spelled out explicitly in a written "story") that the school maintains with all its vendors. You would need to alert alumni and advise the departments and staff at school to change their stationery, websites, and any marketing materials. You would have to advise faculty to use the new name when citing their professional affiliation. You would need to contact legacy families (let's say a family whose last seven generations have attended this college) and inform them of the name change. Do you now have a sense of how complicated it would be to change this narrative? If you try to make a change that involves a large network, the social structure becomes very powerful. Ironically, something abstract like a name can be more robust than most of the physical infrastructure around us.

Embeddedness: The Strength of Weak Ties

Embeddedness the degree to which ties are reinforced through indirect paths within a social network.

Strength of weak ties the notion that relatively weak ties often turn out to be quite valuable because they yield new information.

One important dimension of social networks is the degree to which they are embedded. Embeddedness refers to the degree to which ties are reinforced through indirect paths within a social network. The more embedded a tie is, the stronger it is. That is, the more indirect paths you make to somebody, the stronger the relationship. It may feel less dramatic and intimate, but it's robust and more likely to endure simply by virtue of the fact that it's difficult to escape. You will always be connected to that person—if not directly, then through your "mutual" friends. However, the counterpoint to this dynamic lies in what sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) calls the strength of weak ties, referring to the fact that relatively weak ties—those not reinforced through indirect paths—often turn out to be quite valuable because they bring novel information. Let's say you're on the track team and that's your primary social group. An old classmate from high school whom you didn't really know (or run in the same circles with) back then, you now see occasionally because he also attends your college, but he's on the volleyball team. If the track team isn't doing anything on Friday night but the volleyball team is having a party, you've got an "in" through this relationship that's much weaker than the ones you've got with the other members of the track team. That "in" is the strength of the weak tie you maintain with the classmate from home. If you end up taking your friends

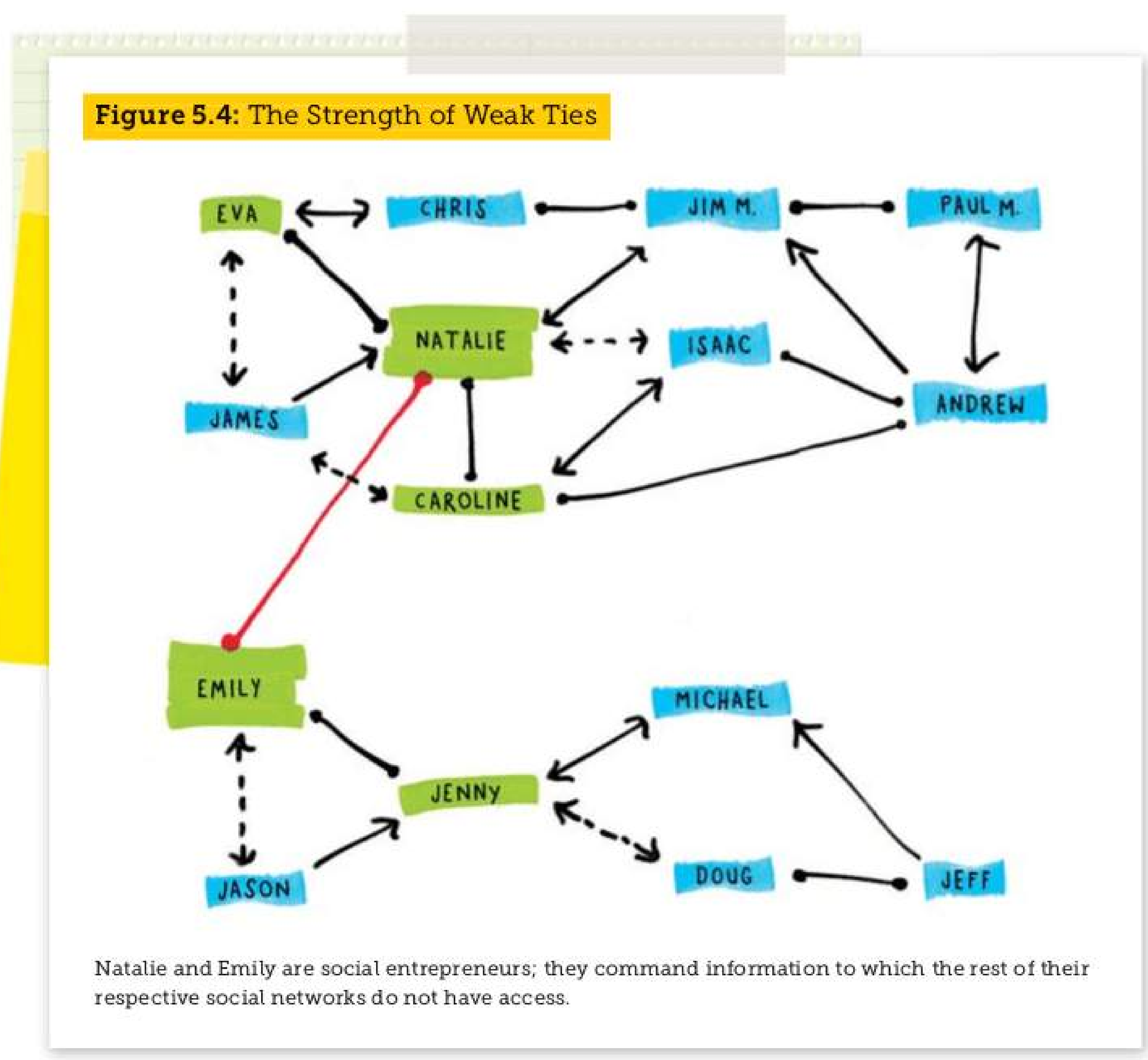
from the track team to the volleyball party and they become friends with your old friend, the tie between you and your old classmate is no longer "weak" because it is now reinforced by the ties between your old friend and your new track friends—regardless of whether you are actually more intimate with him or not. This example helps explain why the structure of the network is more complicated than the tie from one individual to another. Even though your friendships did not change at the volleyball party, the fact that people in your social network befriended others in your social network strengthens the ties between you and both of the individuals.

Jena McGregor (center) takes part in a speed networking event in New York City. Participants chat about their businesses and make contacts with as many people as they can in multiple four-minute sessions.

The strength of weak ties has been found especially useful in job searches (Granovetter, 1974). In a highly embedded network, all the individuals probably know the same people, hear of the same job openings, maintain the same contacts, and so on. However, your grandparents' neighbor, whom you see every so often, probably has a completely different set of connections. The paradox is that this weak tie provides the most opportunities. When Granovetter interviewed professionals in Boston (1973), he determined that among his 54 respondents who found their employment through personal network ties, more than half saw this contact person "occasionally" (less than once a week but more than once a year). Perhaps even more surprising was the fact that the runners-up in this category were not people whom the respondents saw "often" (once a week or more); it was those they saw "rarely" (once a year or less), by a factor of almost two to one. Additional research finds that weak ties offer the greatest benefits to job seekers who already have high-status jobs, suggesting that social networks combine with credentials to sort job applicants and that strong ties may be more useful in low-status, low-credential job markets (Wegener, 1991).

In Figure 5.4, by linking two otherwise separate social networks, the weak tie between Natalie and Emily provides new opportunities for dating—not only for them but for their friends as well. Their tie bridges what we call a structural hole between the two cliques, a gap between network clusters, where a possible tie could become an actual tie or where an intermediary could control the communication between the two groups on either side of the hole. In the figure, Jenny is a social entrepreneur bridging a structural hole because the people on the left side of the network diagram (Emily and Jason) have no direct ties with the people on the right (Michael, Doug, and Jeff). Their ties are only indirect, through Jenny. Assuming that the two sides have resources (romantic or otherwise) that would complement each other's, Jenny is in a position to mediate by acting as a go-between for the groups. When a third party

Structural hole a gap between network clusters, or even two individuals, if those individuals (or clusters) have complementary resources.



Natalie and Emily are social entrepreneurs; they command information to which the rest of their respective social networks do not have access.

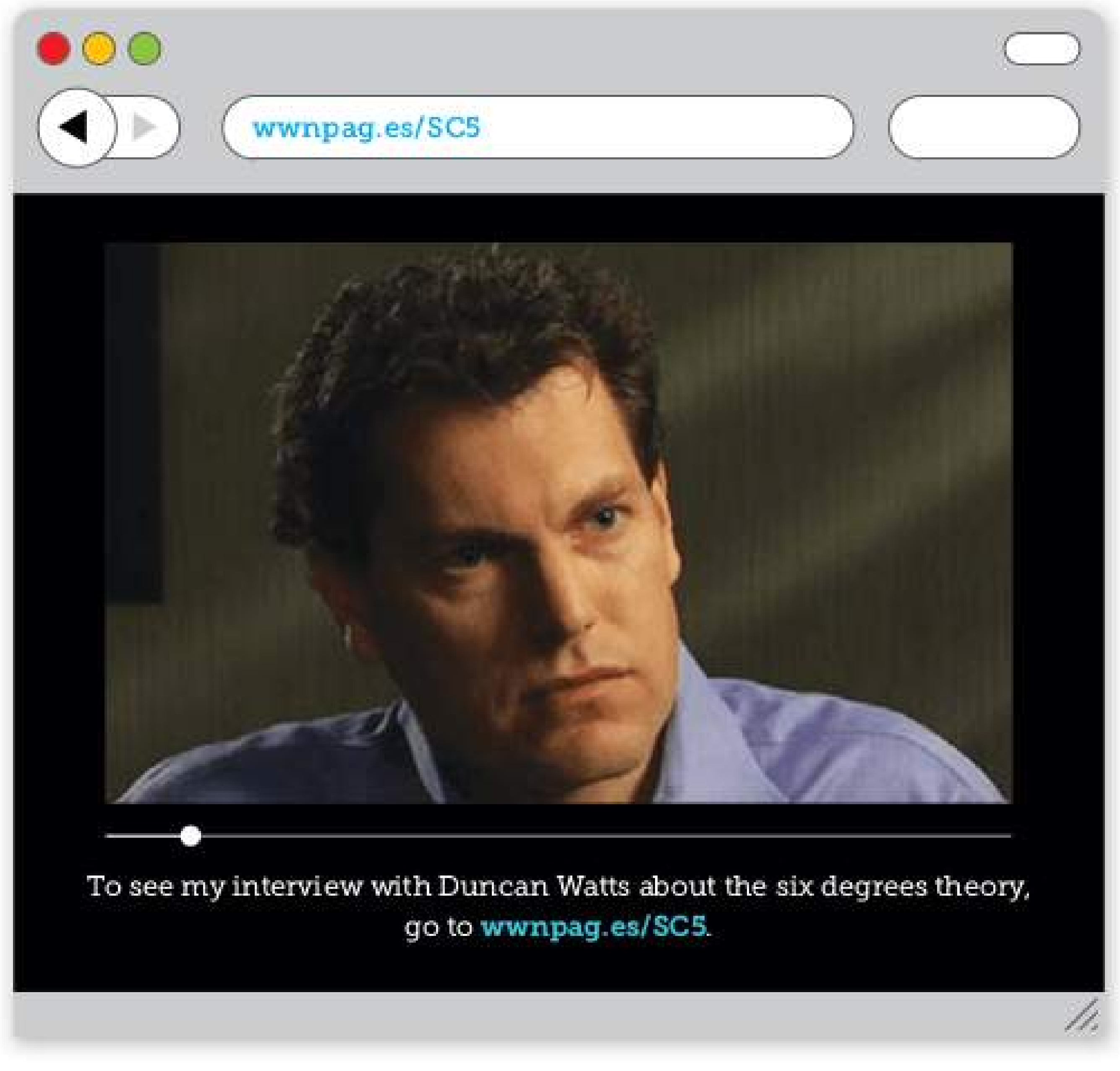
connects two groups or individuals who would be better off in contact with each other, that third party is an "entrepreneur," and he or she can profit from the gap. (Sound like the *tertius gaudens* in the triad? It should.)

When sociologist Ronald Burt studied managers in a large corporation (1992), he found that those with the most structural holes in their social networks were the ones who rose through the company ranks the fastest and farthest. This notion can be expanded to explain how a great deal of profit making occurs in today's economy. At one extreme is the totally free market, in which there are no structural holes; no restriction on information exists, and all buyers and sellers can reach one another—think eBay. At the other extreme is the monopoly, in which one firm provides necessary information or resources to a multitude of people (that is, maintains and profits from a gaping structural hole). And then there is everything in between these extremes: everyone from shipping magnates to spice traders to mortgage brokers to feral traders. Take real estate agents as an example. They earn their money by contractually maintaining (or creating) a structural hole. By signing up sellers, the real estate agents prevent the sellers from directly engaging in a transaction with potential buyers. Recently, the social network possibilities facilitated by the Internet (discussed below) have done much to erode the power of brokers—for example, by driving once-powerful travel agents into near extinction (ditto for stockbrokers).

Six Degrees

You have probably heard the term "six degrees of separation" and wondered if it is really true that each one of us is connected to every other person by social chains of no more than six people. The evidence supporting the six degrees theory came out of research undertaken in the 1960s by Stanley Milgram, whose colleagues were pestering him about why it always seemed like the strangers they met at cocktail parties turned out to be friends of a friend. Milgram decided to test the reach of social networks by asking a stockbroker in Boston to receive chain letters from a bunch of folks living in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Lincolnites could only send letters to friends or relatives who they believed would be likely to know someone who might know someone who might know the guy in Boston. About 20 percent of the letters eventually made it to Boston, and the average trip length was just over five people, hence the summary that in the United States there are no more than five people between any set of strangers, or six degrees of separation.

Duncan Watts (2003) noticed that Milgram's findings applied only to the letters that made it to their final destination. What about the letters that did not complete the journey? Were their chains quite a bit longer than six steps, thus making our six-degree theory more like a twelve-degree theory? Watts set up a similar, this time worldwide, experiment using e-mail and statistical models to estimate global connectedness and found that Milgram was not quite right. In Watts's words, "It's not true that everyone is connected to everyone else, but at least half the people in the world are connected to each other through six steps, which is actually kind of surprising" (Conley, 2009b). Furthermore, Watts was able to test the commonsense notion that there are some people out there who just seem to know everyone and that it must be through these superconnected people that the rest of us are able to say we're only six degrees from Kevin Bacon (or whomever). But instead he found that when it comes to whom we know, "the world's remarkably egalitarian," and that superconnectors played almost no role in getting the e-mail forwarded all the way to its destination (Conley, 2009b).



To see my interview with Duncan Watts about the six degrees theory, go to wwnpag.es/SC5.

Social Capital

Having many weak ties is one form of what sociologists call *social capital*. Like human capital, the training and skills that

Neighbors in the Central City section of New Orleans gather for their weekly domino game. Communities with thick webs of connection tend to thrive, with lower crime rates and more volunteer involvement.

make individuals more productive and valuable to employers, social capital is the information, knowledge of people or things, and connections that help individuals enter preexisting networks or gain power in them. Consider the importance of networking in endeavors such as preventing neighborhood crime or obtaining a good job. As it turns out, the cliché holds a lot of truth: It's not just what you know but whom you know. But whereas weak ties may be the most advantageous for an individual, for a community, many dense, embedded ties are generally a sign of high levels of social capital.

Social capital the information, knowledge of people or things, and connections that help individuals enter, gain power in, or otherwise leverage social networks.

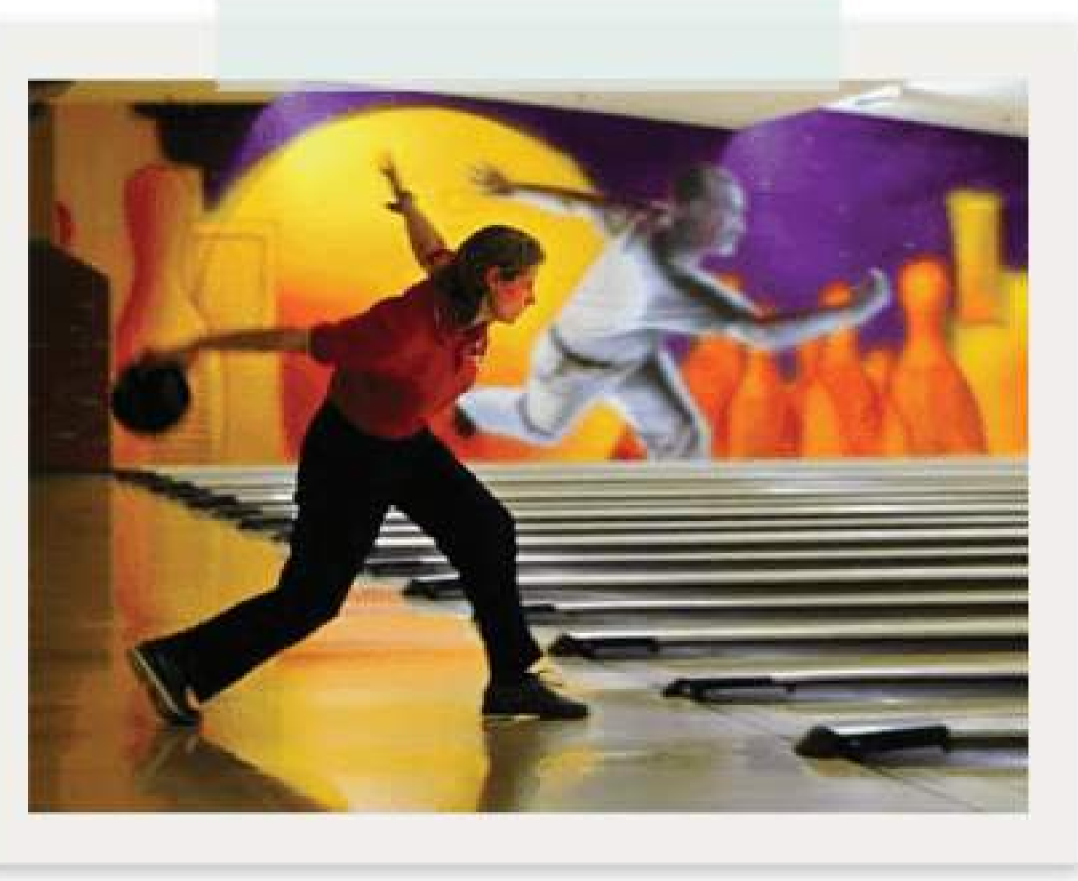
This concept makes sense when you think about it. Dense social capital means that people are linked to one another through a thick web of connections. As a result of these connections, they will feel inclined—perhaps even impelled—to help each other, to return favors, to keep an eye on one another's property. The more connections there are, the more norms of reciprocity, values, and trust are shared. After all, there is no such thing as total anonymity: Even if you don't know someone directly, chances are that you are only one or two degrees removed from him or her.

In this way, strong social capital binds people together; it weaves them into a tight social fabric that can help a community thrive. "You tell me how many choral societies there are in an Italian region," notes social capital scholar Robert Putnam, "and I will tell you plus or minus three days how long it will take you to get your health bills reimbursed by its regional government" (Edgerton, 1995). After years of research in Italy, Putnam determined that different regions of the country varied widely in their levels of participation in voluntary associations. As it turns out, the strength of participation in a region was a fairly good predictor of the quality and efficiency of its regional government (and, in turn, its economic growth).

The United States and Social Capital If it's true that social capital is correlated with economic and political health, some critics would say that the United States is in big trouble. Voluntary participation in civic life has taken a turn for the worse, and as a result, the nation's stock of social capital is at risk. In his best seller *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), Putnam traces the decline of civic engagement in the last third of the twentieth century. We are more loosely connected today than ever before, he says, experiencing less family togetherness, taking fewer group vacations, and demonstrating little civic engagement.

In *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (1998), Robert Wuthnow finds that people are worried about what they see as a breakdown of families and neighborliness and a concurrent rise in selfishness. When

Wuthnow surveyed a random sample of Americans, fewer than half believed that their fellow citizens genuinely cared about others. Even worse, some studies suggest that more and more people think their neighbors are inherently untrustworthy (Lasch, 1991). A considerable majority of Americans believe that their communities are weaker than ever before (Wuthnow, 1998). Without communal ties of civic and religious participation, Americans have lost trust in their neighbors. Interpersonal trust matters; it is essential for building the complex social structures necessary for a functioning democracy and economy.



Bowling alone? Although the overall number of bowlers has increased, the number of people bowling in groups has dropped. Are we seeing a decline in social engagement?

Indeed, more and more people are bowling alone. Actual bowling activity was on the rise at the end of the twentieth century, when Putnam and Wuthnow were writing—the total number of bowlers in America increased by 10 percent from 1988 to 1993—but *league* bowling dropped a whopping 40 percent in the same time frame. This is no good for bowling-lane owners, but it's also bad news for democracy in America. Bowling alone is part of a more general trend of civic disengagement and a decline in social capital. It's happening in PTAs, the Red Cross, local elections, community cleanups, and labor unions. Even membership in the Boy Scouts has decreased by 26 percent since the 1970s. More people live alone. Some go so far as to say that friendships have become shallower, and the phenomenon of BFF (best friends forever) is an increasing rarity (Wuthnow, 1998). As civic participation withers, activities once performed by communities have moved toward private markets.

Who's to blame for America's fading civic life? The social entrepreneur who has too many structural holes to maintain? Parents? Our school systems, television, the Internet? A combination of all these and other factors works in conjunction with broad social trends, creating an increasingly differentiated, specialized, urbanized, and modern world. Social institutions must adjust to the flexibility, sometimes called the liquidity, of modernity by becoming more fragmented, less rigid, and more "porous" (Wuthnow, 1998). It becomes easier to come and go, to pass through multiple social groups such as churches, friends, jobs, and even families. Gone is the rigid fixity of finding and holding onto a lifelong "calling." Similarly, a majority of graduating college students (60 percent) attend more than one school before receiving a degree (Zernike, 2006).

This mobility and flexibility take a toll on people's lives. More than in previous eras, people report feeling rushed, disconnected, and harried, so it's no surprise that civic responsibilities are pushed aside. It's not that Americans don't care. In fact, they join more organizations and donate more money than ever before. They just don't give their time or engage in face-to-face activities (Skocpol, 2004). But before we blame the Internet, note that the trend toward

CASE STUDY: SURVIVAL OF THE AMISH

Pennsylvania's Lancaster County attracts more than 5 million visitors a year with its Pennsylvania Dutch country charm. Horse-drawn wagons carry visitors over covered bridges toward historic museums, colonial homes, and restaurants. Lancaster thrives on tourists' curiosity about the Amish, who first settled the land in 1693. Today about 59,350 Amish live in nearby homogenous farm communities. As far as appearances go, they certainly meet tourists' expectations.

Wearing straw hats and black bonnets, riding horse-drawn buggies, the Amish provide great photo opportunities. Children are taught in private schoolhouses, typically one room, only until the eighth grade, at which point they work full time on the family farm. The lives of the Amish revolve around going to church, tilling the earth, and working for the collective good. They value simplicity and solidarity. How, visitors wonder, have Amish communities in Pennsylvania and other states survived in our fast-paced society?

The Amish certainly appear to be relics of the past, but looks can be deceiving. Although the Amish place primary importance on agriculture, they do so in anything but a premodern fashion. The Amish, especially those living close to urban areas, have adopted farming innovations such as the use of insecticides and chemically enhanced fertilizers. Their homes are stylishly modern, with sleek kitchens and natural gas–powered appliances.

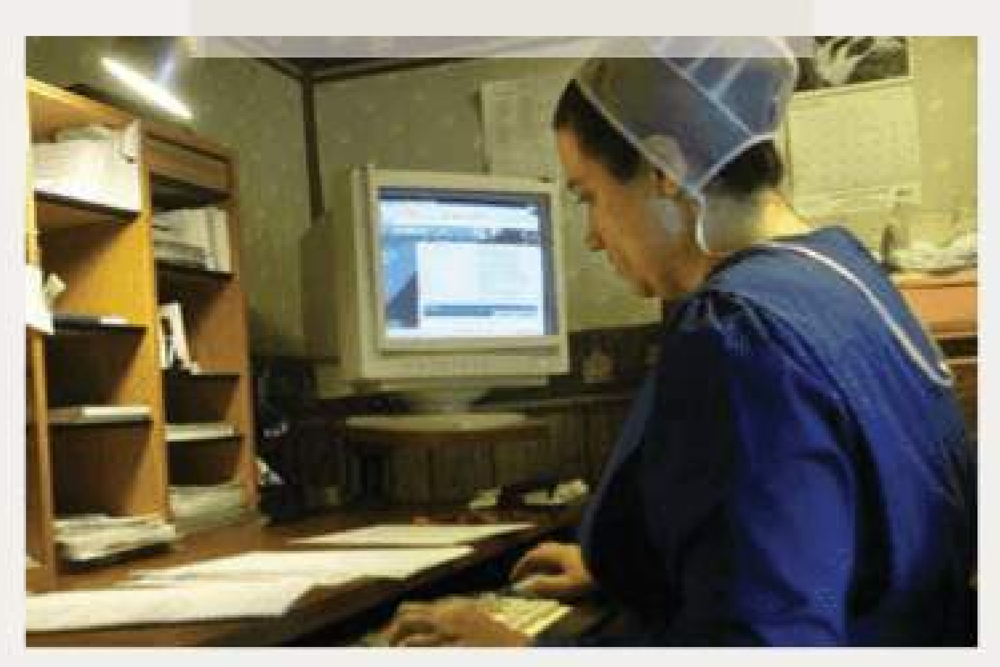
Because Lancaster County has experienced a certain degree of urban growth and sprawl, the Amish are not immune to the hustle and bustle of commerce. In fact, many Amish are savvy business owners. The number of Amish-owned microenterprises more than quadrupled between 1970 and 1990. By 1993 more than one in four Amish homes had at least one nonfarm business owner (Kraybill and Nolt, 1995). The result of this economic growth is a curious mix of profit-seeking entrepreneurship with a traditional lifestyle. Imagine finding out that your local rabbi, priest, or imam doubled as a high-rolling stock trader during the week.

How can these seemingly incompatible spheres of religious tradition and commerce coexist? This is the question Donald Kraybill set out to answer when he studied 150 Amish business entrepreneurs in Lancaster County (1993; in 1995 with Nolt). Not only do the Amish trade with outsiders, Kraybill documented, but they do so quite successfully: About 15 percent of the businesses he studied had annual sales exceeding half a million dollars. Their success rate is phenomenal: Just 4 percent of Amish start-ups fail within a decade, compared with the 75 percent of all new American firms that fail within three

An Amish barn raising in Tollesboro, Kentucky.

years of opening. That is, in a time when the majority of new American business ventures flop, virtually all Amish businesses succeed. Are the Amish just naturally better at conducting commerce? Is it something in their faith, or self-discipline? Perhaps the answer lies in the community's hand-pumped water?

The answer is, none of the above. The secret to Amish success turns out to be the way they strategically combine their traditions with the rest of the modern world. As the Amish have become increasingly entangled in the economic web of contemporary capitalism, they have held onto their cultural traditions by maintaining an ideologically integrated and homogenous community. They are distinctly premodern and un-American in that they believe in the subordination of the individual to the community. They have rejected the prevalent American culture of rugged individualism, the notion of "every man for himself," often said to be the basis for successful entrepreneurship, in favor of "every man for the greater good." Individuals are expected to submit not only to God but also to teachers, elders, and community leaders. Their social fabric firmly binds people together. Whereas fashion for many people is a means of self-expression, the dark, simple clothing of the Amish signals membership in and subordination to the community. They have no bureaucratic forms of government or business; rather, they operate in a decentralized, loose federation of church districts. They reject mass media and automobiles and limit their exposure to diverse ideas and lands. The outcome is homogeneity of



Kimberly Hamme works on billing for her online business, Plainly Dressed, in her Paradise Town, Pennsylvania, home office. Hamme sells what most people would call Amish clothing. She does most of her business over the Internet.

belief, unified values, and not surprisingly, dense social capital. Amish businesses, like the people themselves, are tightly enmeshed in social networks, such as church and kinship systems, that provide economic support. The typical Amish person has more than 75 first cousins, most of whom shop in the same neighborhood. Add to that the taboo on bankruptcy within the community, and Amish businesses would be a dream come true for investors—that is, if the Amish were to accept outside capital (they don't).

Rather than marvel at how this culture maintains its centuries-old traditions while functioning in the business world, we should look at how they succeed in business regardless of being Amish. Kraybill and Nolt found that the cultural restraints of being Amish do indeed thwart business opportunity to some extent. Amish business owners aren't allowed to accept financial capital from outsiders or to prosecute shoplifters (to do so would single out lawbreakers and go against community solidarity). The success of Amish entrepreneurship is a telling example of the power of social capital.

giving more but showing up less predates the Web. It is probably more a result of increased work hours and other pressures to keep up in an age of rising inequality.

The social pendulum swinging between loneliness and unity may be starting to turn back toward togetherness, with slightly different characteristics than we are used to seeing. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg set out to study people who live alone, trying to understand the costs and benefits of leaving some of the ties that bind dangling free (Klinenberg, 2013). He found that being old and living alone is indeed a lonely reality and a growing problem for women, who have always tended to outlive their husbands but are now aging alone in neighborhoods that their children have left for jobs and lives elsewhere. But for young and middle-aged people, living alone is a lifestyle frequently filled with friends, dates, coworkers, volunteer work, and plenty of socializing. People who live alone are more likely to volunteer than people the same age who are living with partners or families. Maybe civic participation is not dying, after all.

But the news may not be all bad on the social capital front: Following the events of September 11, 2001, Putnam noticed a revival of civic engagement among young people who were at or near college age during the terrorist attacks. He found that among 18- to 24-year-olds, voting rates have increased by 23 percent since 2001, following a quarter-century of declining

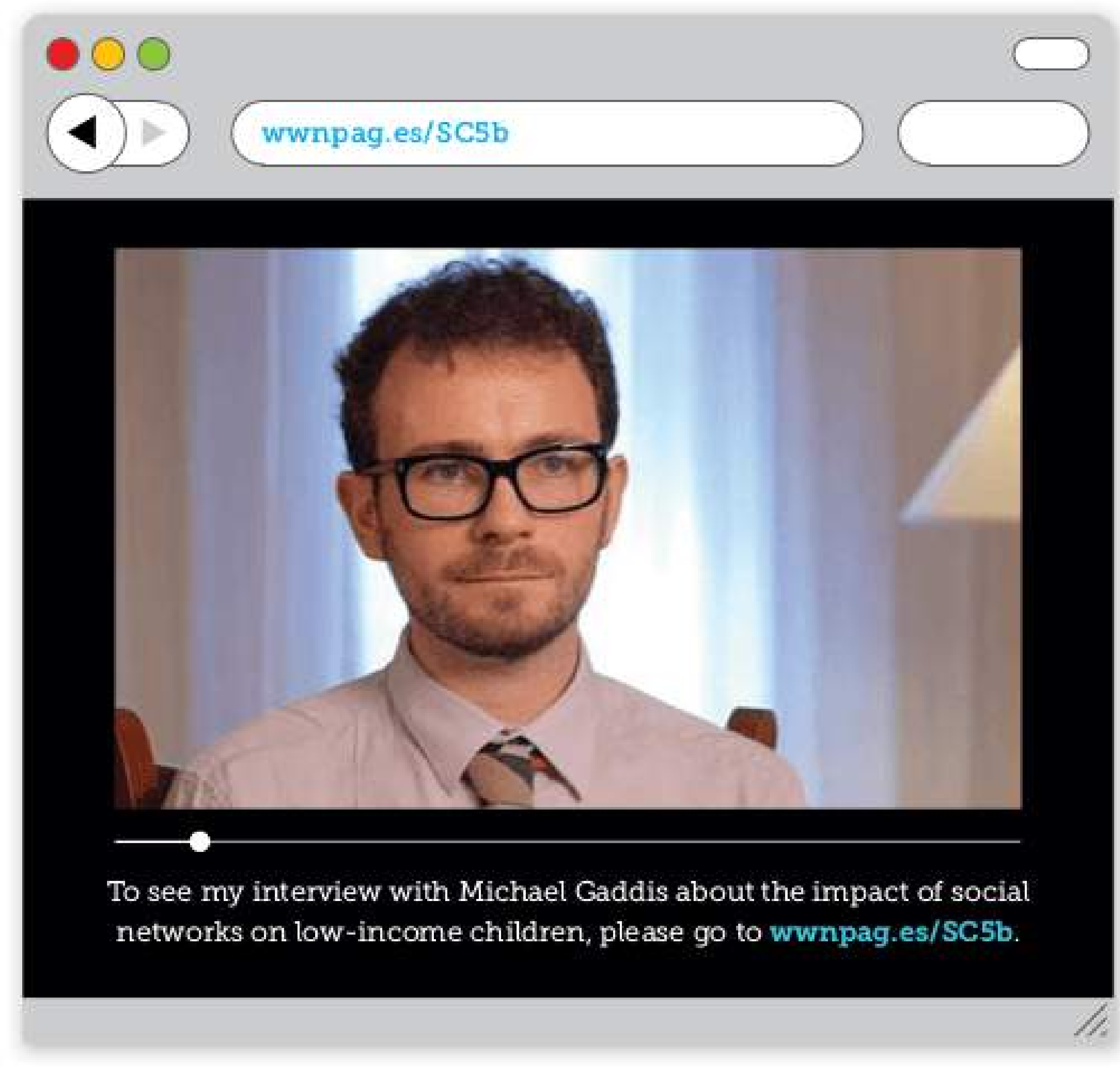
Volunteers build an elementary school playground in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, thousands of college volunteers participated in the rebuilding efforts.

participation in national politics. Another positive sign is that college freshmen are increasingly talking about politics and volunteering in their communities. As a "teachable moment," Putnam argues, 9/11 revealed how interconnected our individual fates are—a point often missed in the anonymity of the daily grind: "We learned that we need to—and can—depend on the kindness of strangers who happen to be near us" (Sander & Putnam, 2005).

Understandably, Putnam's claims have ignited much controversy. Some researchers have noted that even if an increase in participation occurred after 9/11, it was short-lived among adults (Sander & Putnam, 2010). Others claim the opposite, insisting that social capital never declined as Putnam declared. Rather, it has simply become more informal. Wuthnow, for example, argues that modernization brings about new forms of "loose connection" but hardly a disappearance of all connection. Nor does it necessarily follow that modern Americans are any worse off than when connections were tight. Things change, but that does not always mean they change for the worse. Though Putnam laments the loss of face-to-face communal ties, in the past three decades we've witnessed an explosion of non-place-based connections: Think of the rich social life ongoing on social media, including Twitter, blogs, and Facebook.

With the exit of the old (such as the Elks, Rotary, and other fraternal and civic organizations), in have come new kinds of clubs—large national groups like the National Organization of Women, which one can join by mail or online, and informal support groups like Weight Watchers. Furthermore, the trend of declining social capital is falsely linear, as if from the 1970s to today civic society has moved in one simple direction (downhill). More probable is that civic engagement moves like a pendulum, swinging back and forth between privatism (as in the 1920s) and heightened public consciousness (as in the 1930s). Right now may feel like the end of social capital, but perhaps we're just at a low point on a constantly shifting trend line. The calls to save social capital may be a form of projected nostalgia, a misplaced romanticizing of the past.

Sociologist Michael Gaddis has been using network structure to look at another challenging aspect of social capital: Even for people with a healthy number of ties to friends, family, and community, not all social capital is equal. As Gaddis points out, "Everyone knows friends, coworkers, family members, but the important part of social capital . . . is the resources that are linked to you through these networks. Do I know someone who knows someone



To see my interview with Michael Gaddis about the impact of social networks on low-income children, please go to wwnpag.es/SC5b.

who has a job opening and could refer me? Can I access those resources?" He looked at kids growing up in "low-income families, one-parent families" who applied to the Big Brothers Big Sisters program where they hoped to be assigned an adult mentor with whom to spend time. Because of high demand, only some students got to participate, making it possible for Gaddis to compare students who got mentors with those who wanted them but were not able to get them. It turned out that "mentors with higher education levels, higher income" were "able to make greater changes" amongst the little brothers and sisters (Conley, 2013b). It is not how many people you know that gives you greater social capital, but the resources associated with the people you know and their willingness to share those resources with you that increases your social capital.

The picture we've arrived at is that of a complex social world where the decay of some forms of civic life is accompanied by the eventual emergence of new ways of building communities. Americans living in modern, urban, anonymous, and loosely connected communities carve out new social spaces, in turn creating a different kind of social fabric that holds together our republic. People adapt to what's new, retain what they can of the old, and negotiate within global forces and local communities.

→ Network Analysis in Practice

Researchers take the concepts we've discussed so far—embeddedness, the iron law of the triad, and network position—and apply them to real-world contexts in order to understand how group life shapes individual behavior. Network analysts also map out social relationships to better understand transmission phenomena such as the spread of disease, the rise and fall of particular fads, the genesis of social movements, and even the evolution of language itself.

The Social Structure of Teenage Sex

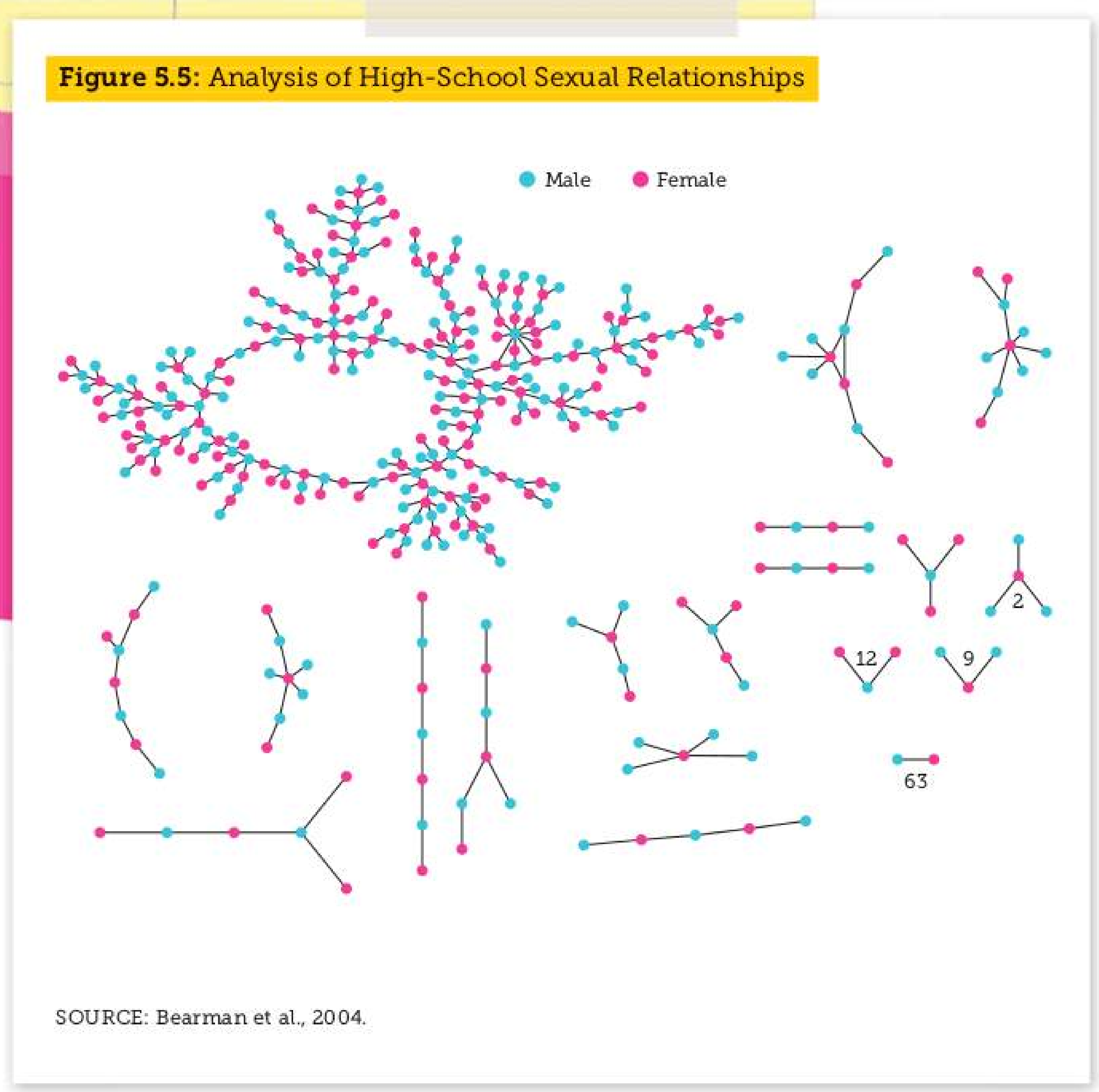
According to a *New York Times Magazine* article (Denizet-Lewis, 2004), contemporary American teenagers supposedly approach their love lives with a blasé attitude. "Hooking up" has replaced going steady; "friends with benefits" are preferred over girlfriends and boyfriends, with all their attendant demands and the corresponding commitment. The good news is that more reputable studies, including one using network analysis, refute this image of 1970s hedonism being re-created in the contemporary American high school. The bad news is that, even so, the sexual mores of American adolescents are putting them at greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than ever before.

Here are some more trustworthy numbers: About 50 percent of American teenagers over the age of 15, when interviewed by researchers, have admitted to engaging in sexual intercourse. (Boys probably tend to exaggerate their sexual experience, and girls probably downplay it.) A good number of those who have not yet had intercourse are still sexually active in other ways: Approximately one-third have "had genital contact with a partner resulting in an orgasm in the past year." Bluntly put, what this means is that a good two-thirds of American teens are having sex or participating in some form of sexual activity. Teenagers' romantic relationships tend to be short term compared with adults', averaging about 15 months, so there is a fair amount of partner trading. Survey research among students in college, where "hookup culture" is prevalent, found that 70 percent use condoms when they engage in vaginal/penile intercourse. That 70 percent is "a lot less than a hundred, but a lot more than zero," notes principal investigator Paula England (Conley, 2009d). To top that off, most adolescents with a sexually transmitted infection "have no idea that they are infected." All of these factors combine to make American teenagers a breeding ground for STIs, which have increased dramatically in this age group in the last decade.

Despite sensational media reports about teenage hookups, monogamous couples such as J.D. and Elysia, both 14, of Yorktown High School in Arlington, Virginia, are more typical. What else does research reveal about high-school sexual relationships?

So what's a public health officer to do? During the administration of George W. Bush, the religious right and conservative policy makers suggested the "virginity pledge" and other abstinence policies as a solution. As it turns out, the pledge does delay the onset of sexual activity on average, but when the teenagers who take it eventually do have sex, they are much more likely to practice unsafe sex (Bearman & Brückner, 2001; Brückner & Bearman, 2005). Among the many problems in designing safe-sex or other programs to reduce the rate of STIs among teenagers is the fact that we knew very little about the sexual networks of American adolescents until quite recently. It would not be far off to say that we knew more about the sexual networks of aboriginal tribes on Groote Island than we did about those of American teenagers.

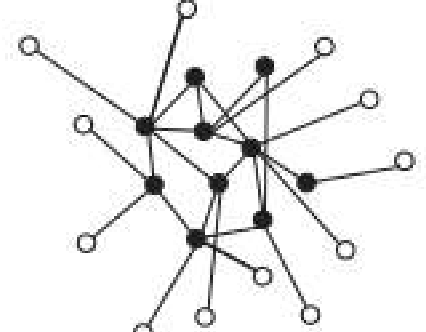
One component of the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, conducted by J. Richard Udry, Peter Bearman, and others from 1994 to 1996, investigated the complete sexual network at 12 high schools across the nation, including the pseudonymous Jefferson High School, whose 1,000-person student body is depicted in Figure 5.5 (Bearman et al., 2004).



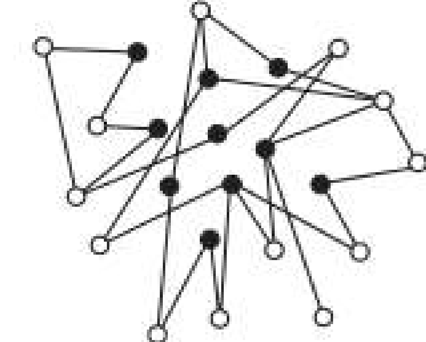
They focused their analysis on Jefferson, because its demographic makeup, although almost all white, is fairly representative of most American public high schools and, more important, it is in a fairly isolated town, so less chance exists of the sexual networks spilling over to other schools.

The pink dots represent girls and the blue ones boys. The dyad in the lower right-hand corner tells us that there are 63 couples in which the partners have only had sex with each other. There are small, comparatively isolated networks consisting of ten or fewer people, and then one large ring that encompasses hundreds of students. Preventing the transmission of infection in the small networks is much simpler than preventing the spread in the large ring. One young man in the ring has had nine partners, but even if you persuaded him to use condoms or practice abstinence, you still wouldn't address most of the network. Your action might positively impact the people immediately around him. But to the extent other origin points of infection exist within the network, it is going to be very difficult to stop transmission. One practice that would slow the spread of STIs is lengthening the gap between partners: Sleeping with more than one person at a time increases the rate of transmission. The fuzzy

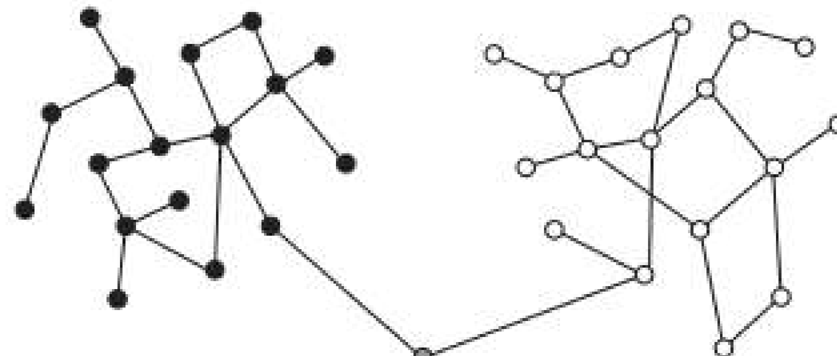
Figure 5.6: Models for Spread of Sexually Transmitted Infections



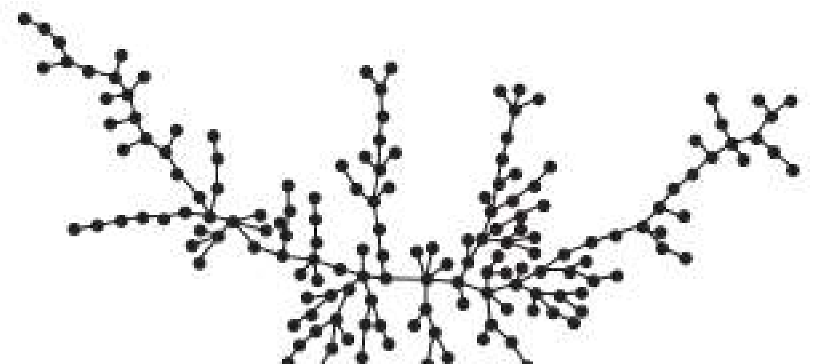
Panel A: core infection model



Panel C: inverse core model



Panel B: bridge between disjointed populations



Panel D: spanning tree

SOURCE: Bearman et al., 2004.

ring structure represents a type of network called a circular spanning tree—a spanning tree being one of four ideal types of sex networks hypothesized by Peter Bearman and other epidemiologists (scientists who study the spread of diseases).

Figure 5.6 illustrates the four different possible models of contact and spread for STIs. Panel A represents a core infection model, where the dark, filled-in circles representing infected people are all connected to this core group. Therefore, the infection circulates through everyone in the group, but they're also connected outward to other partners. If you mapped out a sexual network like this, with the objective of stopping diseases from being sexually transmitted, you would try to isolate that core network and either cut them off from sexual relations with others or at least ensure that when they came into contact with uninfected partners, they practiced safe sex. Panel B shows a possible structural hole. Imagine an infected group and an uninfected group, but one person bridges them. Theoretically, such a circumstance is fairly easy to address, in that all you have to do is cut the tie or persuade that one person to engage in safe sex, and you've thus protected the uninfected population. Panel C depicts an inverse core model, representing the way much of the AIDS transmission occurs in populations where men routinely spend long periods of

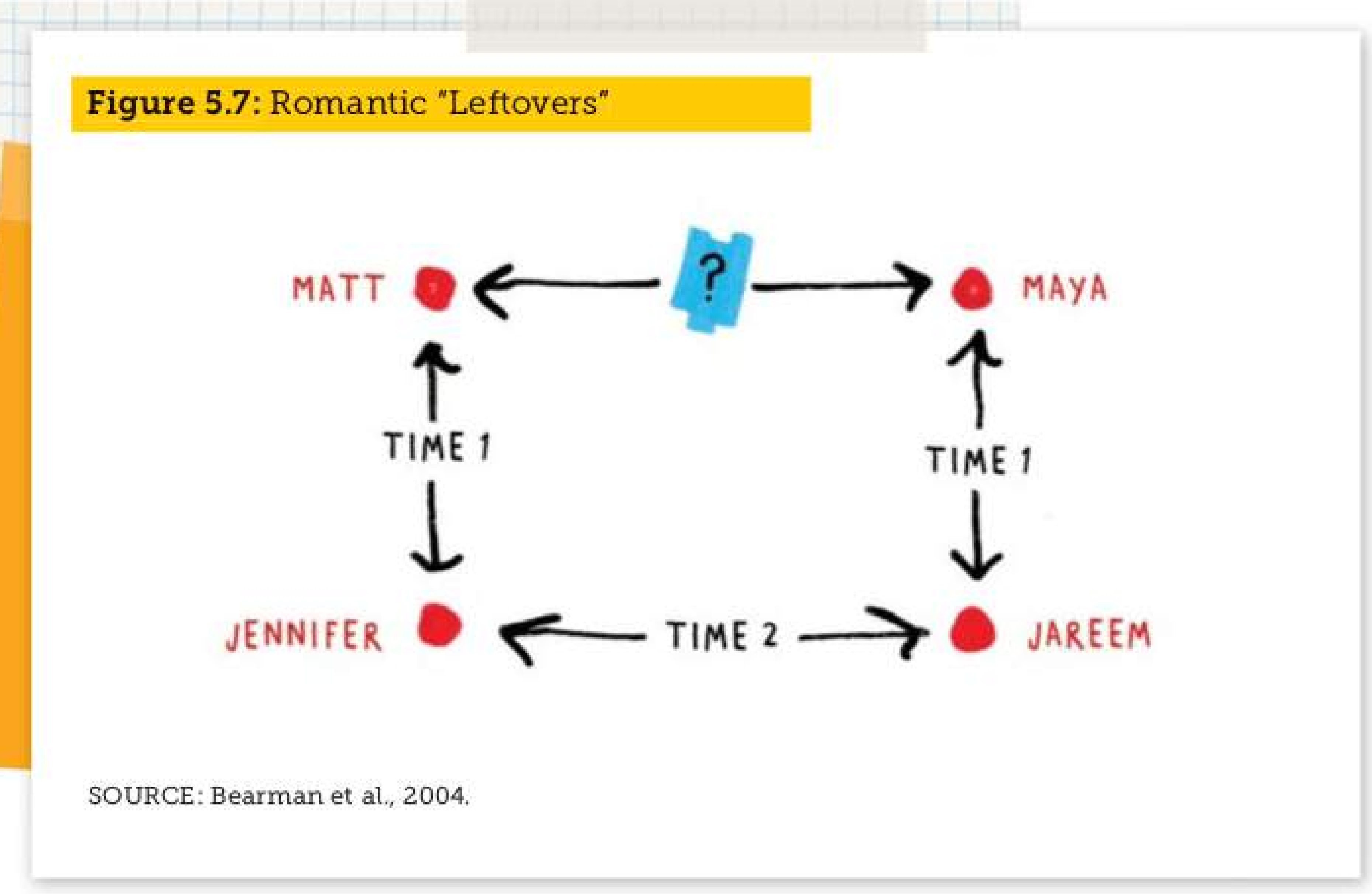
time away from their families, such as long-haul truckers and some men from African villages. The traveling men visit prostitutes in the city or at truck stops, acquire the virus from one, transmit it to another, and then bring the virus back home. The infected members are not connected directly with one another (that is, the prostitutes are not having sex with each other); rather, the individuals at the periphery of the core (the men who solicit the prostitutes) connect the core members to each other and possibly beyond the group to other populations. The last network model, illustrated in panel D, is the spanning tree model, in linear rather than circular form. This is essentially how power grids are laid out: There's a main line, and branches develop off of that line. It is difficult to completely stop transmission along a spanning tree model. That's why we design electrical grids to be a series of spanning trees so that if one circuit fails the power can continue to flow around it, although as anyone who has experienced a blackout knows, specific sections can be left without power if they are severed from the rest of the tree. In terms of STI transmission, you could initiate some breaks that would split the tree into two groups, but that's not going to completely isolate the infection. If you attack something on a branch, you're not doing anything to the rest of the network. There's no key focal point that allows you to stop the spread.

Romantic Leftovers

When Peter Bearman and his colleagues analyzed the sexual habits of teenagers, they uncovered another rule that governed this social network. They found lots of examples of triads, where partners are traded within groups. But the main rule that seemed to govern these relationships was "no cycles of four," which means you do not date the ex of your ex's current boyfriend or girlfriend. The most interesting aspect of the rule, sociologically speaking, is that no one was consciously aware of this pattern. The researchers interviewed many students, and not one of them directly stateed, "Of course not, you don't date the ex of your ex's new flame." Yet it's the single taboo that governs everyone. Figure 5.7 illustrates this rule of thumb graphically.

At time 1, Matt and Jennifer are dating, as are Jareem and Maya. At time 2, Jennifer and Jareem date. The rule suggests that Matt and Maya will never date. Why is that? Once Jennifer and Jareem start dating, if Matt and Maya decide to date each other, they are relegating themselves to secondary social status, as if they were "leftovers." The practical, take-home lesson in all of this is that if you want to date the ex of your ex's new crush, act before your ex does. If you're Jennifer and you wish to prevent your old boyfriend Matt from going out with Maya, quickly start dating Jareem, because then Maya and Matt will never date. But extend the "no seconds" rule to thirds or more, and the taboo erodes. The fact that no students in the high school studied were

Figure 5.7: Romantic "Leftovers"



SOURCE: Bearman et al., 2004.

aware of the rule is what makes this kind of social norm possible: It's not conscious. This is a good example of how social structures govern individual-level behavior, and it speaks to some of the limitations of interpretive sociology. If the researchers had taken a more Weberian approach and asked students how they choose partners and, more important, why they don't date certain people, they probably wouldn't have discovered this rule. The researchers could see it only by taking a bird's-eye view and analyzing this structure with mathematical tools.

Organizations

I've mentioned several times that sociology—here network analysis—can be applied not just to individuals but to all social actors, which may include school systems, teams, states, and countries. In the contemporary United States, companies and organizations are important social actors. In fact, thanks to the Fourteenth Amendment, they have identities as legal persons: They sponsor charitable causes; they can sue and be sued; they even have birthdays.

Organization is an all-purpose term that can describe any social network—from a club to a Little League baseball team to a secret society to your local church to General Motors to the U.S. government—that is defined by a common purpose and that has a boundary between its membership and the rest of the social world. *Formal* organizations have a set of governing structures and rules for their internal arrangements (the U.S. Army, with its ranks and

Organization any social network that is defined by a common purpose and has a boundary between its membership and the rest of the social world.

rules), whereas *informal* organizations do not (the local Brangelina fan club). Of course, a continuum exists, because no organization has absolutely no rules, and no organization has a rule for absolutely everything. Therefore, the study of organizations focuses mainly on the social factors that affect organizational structure and the people in those organizations.

Organizational Structure and Culture

Organizational culture the shared beliefs and behaviors within a social group; often used interchangeably with *corporate culture*.

Organizational structure the ways in which power and authority are distributed within an organization.

Have you ever heard the phrase the "old boys' club"? The term is used to refer to exclusive social groups and derives literally from fraternities, businesses, and country clubs that allowed only men—specifically, certain groups of elite men—to join. These groups have their own customs, traditions, and histories that make it difficult for others to join and feel as if they belong, even when the "boys" aren't being deliberately hostile. The term organizational culture refers to the shared beliefs and behaviors within a social group and is often used interchangeably with *corporate culture*. The organizational culture at a slaughterhouse—where pay is low, employees must wear protective gear, the environment is dangerous, and animals are continuously being killed—is probably very different from the organizational culture at a small, not-for-profit community law center. The term organizational structure refers to how power and authority are distributed within an organization. The slaughterhouse probably has a hierarchical structure, with a clear ranking of managers and supervisors who oversee the people working the lines. The law center, however, might be more decentralized and cooperative, with five partners equally co-owning the business and collaborating on decisions. How an organization is structured often affects the type of culture that results. If a business grants both parents leave when a new child enters the home, allows for flextime or telecommuting, or has an on-site child-care center, those structural arrangements will be much more conducive to creating a family-friendly organizational culture than those of a company that doesn't offer such benefits.

The growth of large multinational corporations over the course of the last 100 years has affected organizational structure. One example of this impact can be seen in *interlocking directorates*, the phenomenon whereby the members of corporate boards often sit on the boards of directors for multiple companies. In 2013, for example, the boards of insurance companies such as AIG, Humana, MetLife, and Travelers frequently had board members who also served on the boards of drug and medical device makers such as Johnson & Johnson, DuPont, Abbott Laboratories, and Dow Chemical. (The website www.theyrule.net allows you to create an interactive map of companies' and institutions' boards of directors.) Does it matter that these people sit together on the same boards? The problem, critics argue, is that we then allow a select group of people—predominantly rich, white men—to control the decisions

made in thousands of companies. Such people also have ties to research institutions and elected officials that may compromise their objectivity and create conflicts of interest. Capitalism, after all, is based on competition, but if board members on interlocking directorates favor the other companies to which they are connected, suppliers may not be competing on a level playing field when bidding for contracts. Or worse, take the situation that might develop when a board member of a drug maker asks his friend and fellow board member at a health insurance company to give preferential coverage to his companies' drugs over a competitors' drugs. This can lead to higher prices for consumers who need to purchase the competitors' drugs. Another situation might arise in which one of these two board members knows a former member of Congress through board service together who they can use as a lobbyist to see that federal health programs like Medicare and Medicaid also give preferential treatment to a particular drug, costing taxpayers more than they would have paid without the pressure arising from these relationships. This type of situation can lead to what sociologist C. Wright Mills called a "power elite" or aristocracy. (Concern over the consolidation of control in the media industry, for example, is discussed in Chapter 3.)

Institutional Isomorphism: Everybody's Doing It

Networks can be very useful. They provide information, a sense of security and community, resources, and opportunities, as we saw illustrated by Granovetter's concept of weak ties. Networks can also be constraining, however. Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, focusing on businesses, coined the phrase *institutional isomorphism* to explain why so many businesses that evolve in very different ways still end up with such similar organizational structures (1983). Isomorphism, then, is a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (Hawley, 1968). With regard to organizations, this means that those facing the same conditions (say, in industry, the law, or politics) tend to end up like one another.

Isomorphism a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions.

Let's consider a hypothetical case: A new organization that enters into a fairly established industry but wants to approach it differently, perhaps a bank that wants to distinguish itself from other banks by being more casual or more community oriented. The theory of isomorphism suggests that such a bank, when all is said and done, will wind up operating as most other banks do. It's locked into a network of other organizations and therefore will be heavily influenced by the environment of that network. The same is true for new networks of organizations. A group of not-for-profits might spring up in a specific area. Because all will face the same environmental conditions, they will likely be, in the final analysis, more similar than different, no matter

how diverse their origins. DiMaggio and Powell are part of a school of social theory referred to as the new institutionalism, which essentially tries to develop a sociological view of institutions (as opposed to, say, an economic view). In this vein, networks of connections among institutions are key to understanding how the institutions look and behave. These theorists would argue that all airlines raise and lower their fares at the same time, for example, not because they are independently reacting to pure market forces but because symmetry, peer pressure, social signaling, and network laws all govern the organizational behavior of these Fortune 500 companies to the same extent that these forces affect the sex lives of seniors at Jefferson High School. Pretty scary, huh?

The 1965 Hart-Cellar Act

Since 1921 the United States has maintained strict quotas on the number of legal immigrants from specific countries. These quotas were originally based on the proportion of non-U.S.-born residents from each country of origin at the time of the 1910 Census. That original system evolved over the course of the twentieth century. For example, a law passed in 1924 shifted the basis for quotas from the 1910 Census to the 1890 Census, thereby curtailing the numbers of eastern and southern Europeans who could enter the United States. That same law capped overall immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere at about 150,000, essentially cutting off immigration for many years. During the Great Depression, government officials also limited the number of immigrants to avoid competition in the labor market, given the high rates of domestic unemployment. The law was tweaked again in the 1950s. However, it was the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965, otherwise known as the Hart-Cellar Act, that changed the face of immigration as we know it today.

Most important, the Hart-Cellar Act eliminated quotas on national origin, replacing this approach with a system of family preferences. Immigrants could sponsor their family members, so immigration suddenly became a network phenomenon. At the time, Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts (then in his first term of office) said, "The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society. It will not relax the standards of admission. It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs" (U.S. Senate, 1965). Although many have debated in the years since whether our cities have become flooded with immigrants, standards of admission have been relaxed, or immigration has caused American workers to lose their jobs, no doubt exists that the ethnic mix of society has changed as a result. How might family networks have shifted the makeup of the immigrant population? And how has this changed national and local politics as of late?

→ CONCLUSION

What do we learn from the formal analysis of group characteristics and social networks? Simply knowing the formal characteristics of a group helps us understand much of the social dynamics within it. Is it a dyad or a triad? What is the proper reference group for a particular social process? Is this group a primary or secondary group—and what does that mean for my obligations to it? Likewise, we can use network analysis in micro- and macro-level studies. You could carefully weigh the potential consequences of dating your best friend's ex by mapping out your social network and anticipating shifts in ties that might transpire. Or you could analyze President Richard Nixon's strategy of "triangulation" of the Soviet Union and Communist China during the early 1970s using the iron law of the triad. Sociologists use network analysis to study everything from migration to social movements to cultural fads to global politics.

PRACTICE

SOCIOLOGY ON THE STREET

How has social media significantly changed the number and strength of our weak ties? Watch the Sociology on the Street video to find out more: wwnpag.es/SOS5.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

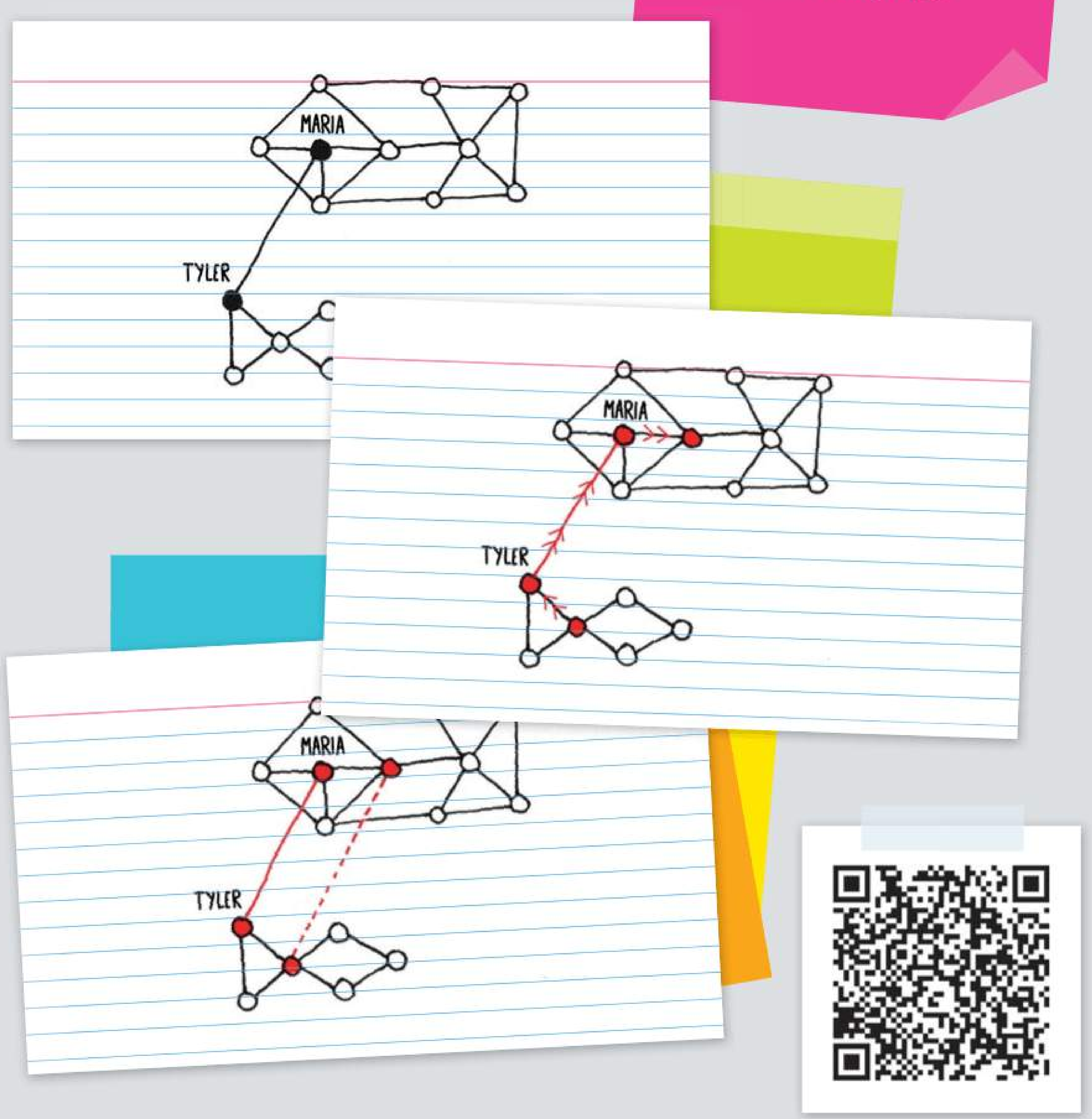
1. Consider Feral Trade—do you think it relies more on strong or weak ties? Why?
2. The Hart-Cellar Act brought a system of family preferences to the immigration process. Why might a network of family members make it easier for new immigrants to support themselves in the new country they call home?
3. If getting a job is "all about connections," how does the work on "the strength of weak ties" round out our understanding of this phenomenon? How does nepotism (hiring family members) fit into this discussion?
4. An undecided voter who knows little about the political candidates reads the result of the latest poll on voting day and sees that other voters seem inclined to choose one of the candidates. According to Asch's work on conformity, how might the poll affect the voter's behavior? Do you think media sources should release polls shortly before an election?
5. If you could choose your position in a social network, would you want to bridge a structural gap? Why might the manager of a company try to prevent the development of structural gaps between the company's various departments? Would a high-school nurse be more likely to encourage or discourage structural gap formation?
6. What is an organizational structure? Describe the organizational structure at your school or workplace and determine how this structure might affect the organizational culture.
7. A new coffee shop opens in your neighborhood, which already has two other coffee shops. The new coffee shop offers free Internet access to customers. Within a few weeks, the two other shops offer free Internet access as well. Explain how this example might illustrate Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell's concept of institutional isomorphism.

PARADOX

THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES: IT IS THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE ARE THE LEAST CONNECTED WHO OFFER US THE MOST OPPORTUNITIES.

WATCH THE ANIMATED SHORT ABOUT THE GROUPS AND NETWORKS PARADOX AT

WWNPAG.ES/PX5



This New York City street poster refers to oppressive surveillance in George Orwell's novel *1984*. What are the social consequences of this sort of social control?