A CAREER IN SOCIOLOGY

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To

Mí Mama
"Holding it together"

Mí Amor
"500 miles and 500 more"

Mí Shamrocks
"Your memory will live on"

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PREFACE

A Career in Sociology was written for introductory undergraduate courses on sociological practice. The book was designed for faculty and students searching for an open educational resource (OER) that provides sociological terms, concepts, and theories in the study of sociological practice. To adapt to the educational needs of individuals using this book, the instructor or learner must understand the underlying content. And, instructional approach may require additional resources and/or other methods to make the learning experience her or his own.

The book is supported by discussion of relevant theory and research in sociological practice. *A Career in Sociology* has stressed learner-centered teaching with the instructor taking on the role of a facilitator of learning. As such, it is expected the instructor will serve as the mediator between the content of this book and learners' understanding of material on multiple and higher levels. This book does not offer a set of rules in teaching introduction to sociological practice, but rather suggests content and applications to consider and modify as needed by the ever-changing dynamics of instructors and learners.

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MODULE 1: CAREERS IN SOCIOLOGY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the module, you will be able to:

1. explain concepts central to the application of sociology and sociological practice.
2. summarize how sociological perspectives develop.
3. describe the influence of history and biography on thinking and behavior.
4. employ a sociological imagination and apply the scientific method in problem-solving.

INTRODUCTION

Sociology is the study of human social life. Essentially, a career in sociology centers on work pertaining to people or providing a service to society. The knowledge and skills developed earning a sociology degree leads to employment advocating, guiding, and helping people.

In jobs where you work with or serve society, you will encounter aspects of sociology including research methods, socialization, culture, race and ethnicity, gender, sex and sexuality, stratification and inequality, deviance, and other areas of human social life. Sociological practice is the use and application of sociological principles and approaches to serve and work with people. In other words, using sociological knowledge and skills to serve others is **sociological practice**.

BASIC, PUBLIC, AND APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

There are a variety of ways people use and practice sociology. Basic, public, and applied sociology are the most common forms of sociological practice. Each form integrates research on human social life to understand and improve society.

Some people in sociology use discipline concepts and theories to produce knowledge and research in the field. This form of sociological practice is **basic sociology**. Academics including teachers, scholars, and researchers use basic sociology to study society, test hypothesis, and construct theories.

Theories explain how things work and are fundamental in understanding and solving social issues (Steele and Price 2008). To address social issues, we must understand their structure, influences, and processes. Sociological theories give a better understanding of how society works to guide solutions and improve circumstances. Basic sociology helps develop understanding about human social life including the influence of groups and organizations on people to improve society (Henslin 2011). A basic sociologist will analyze society based on theoretical foundation and publish findings for practitioners to identify and construct the best and most effective practices in addressing and solving social issues.

Public sociology uses empirical methods and theoretical insights to evaluate and analyze social policy (Henslin 2011). Formal norms such as laws, regulations, court orders, and executive decisions enacted by government are **social policies**. A public sociologist studies society and social policies to engage in issues of public and political concern for social change (Burawoy 2014). These practitioners use sociological research and theories to contribute and influence policy, activism, and social movements.

Applied sociology uses information about society and social forces or actions to solve social issues. The goal of applied sociology is to use theories, concepts, and methods to solve real-world problems (Steele and Price 2008). This form of sociological practice is the application of sociology to improve society, not rebuild it or create social reform as with public sociology. Applied sociologists use sociology to address a specific social issue for a specific group of people. This form of practice applies sociological principles and methods to enhance human social life by using analyzing, evaluating, and suggesting interventions or solutions grounded in theory.

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AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

As an applied sociologist, W.E.B. DuBois used social research and findings to liberate and empower people of color. Research the publications and work of DuBois then explain how his findings and efforts influenced sociological practice today.

Clinical sociology, an arm of applied sociology, emphasizes the implementation of client-centered or direct service solutions. These practitioners work to solve client-centered problems by using social research to diagnose and measure interventions for change (Steele and Price 2008). These practitioners integrate sociological principles and methods to address social conditions and issues of individuals, groups, and organizations. Clinical sociologists use interventions or solutions supported by empirical evidence and grounded in theory to help improve the lives of others (Henslin 2011). This form of practice uses sociological components to serve and meet the needs of people and groups.

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY IN PRACTICE

1. Watch the video entitled *What is Applied Sociology* by Dr. Stephen F. Steele: https://youtu.be/qEG5TV9za_g.
2. After viewing the film, explain the different forms of sociological practice.
3. Describe how sociology might be used or incorporated in the workplace.
4. Provide three examples of jobs or careers that incorporate sociological practice.

WHAT IS A SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTITIONER?

Sociological practitioners are public or applied sociologists who apply theories, research, and methods to bring about social change (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). As a practitioner, you will be involved in planning and implementing problem-solving interventions to improve the lives of others by examining social situations and understanding how they are organized. Practitioners use their training, skills, and knowledge to provide clients (e.g., individuals, groups, or organizations) information or data about the social condition or problem and areas for improvement. Clients then use the data, with or without direct involvement of the practitioner, to plan and develop policies or programs for change. Practitioners may also play a role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programs to guide their development and progress towards identified goals.

A sociological practitioner is an active, ongoing agent of intervention and change (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Sociological practitioners are one kind of interventionists among other professionals (e.g., social workers, therapists, physicians, probation officers, etc.) working on social problems. One of the most important competencies required in sociological practice, as with other interventionists, is the working relationship between practitioner and client (e.g., individuals, groups, or organizations). The overall outcomes of intervention and change rely on the trust, confidence, cooperation, and motivation of those working to improve or address the problem. Intervention and change are a process requiring collective action and collaboration among practitioners and clients to gain results.

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN PRACTICE

The field of sociology developed in the 1800s. Auguste Comte defined sociology as "the study of society." His goal, coined **positivism**, centered on social reform with the aim of improving society. Comte's work developed from his observations of the social world. His research founded the field of sociology through the application of the scientific method to collect empirical data on society. In essence, sociology became the scientific study of social patterns (Griffiths, Keirns, Strayer, Cody-Rydzewsk, Scaramuzzo, Sadler, Vyain, Byer, and Jones 2015).

Since its inception, the scientific method is viewed as the way to answer questions about human social life. However, at the turn of the 20th century, some sociologists began to question the social research application of the scientific method. Instead, social researchers began to incorporate an interpretive approach to the field of sociology termed **antipositivism**. This **interpretive framework** implies numeric and statistical data gathered using a scientific method does not provide a deep understanding of the intent behind the thinking and behavioral patterns of people. As a result, sociologists today often examine statistical data and interpret or decode personal narratives in social research to identify patterns and draw conclusions about human social life. Sociologists use social research to create theories and identify solutions or interventions for change.

The **research process** is a method for gathering facts. The purpose of social research is to investigate and provide insight into how human societies function (Griffiths et al. 2015). Social research includes the scientific method and empirical evidence resulting in an **interpretive perspective** based on theoretical foundation. **Theories** are perspectives or viewpoints. Without empirical evidence or facts, theories are simply ideas or things believed to be true but not proven.

Figure 1. Visual Representation of the Interpretive Perspective
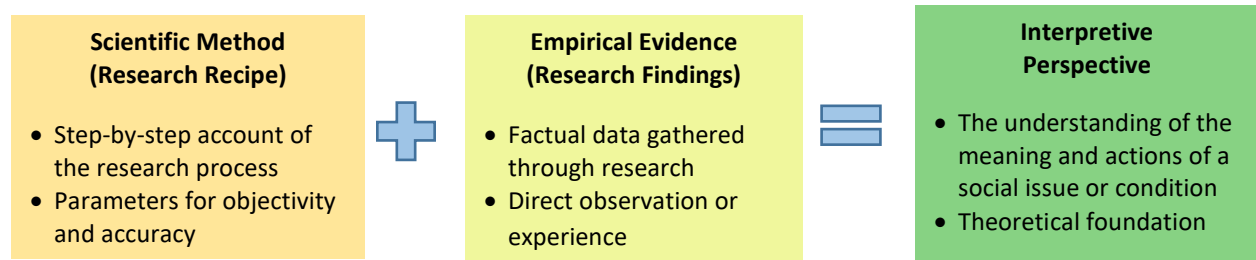
Scientific Method (Research Recipe)		Empirical Evidence (Research Findings)		Interpretive Perspective
• Step-by-step account of the research process • Parameters for objectivity and accuracy	➕	• Factual data gathered through research • Direct observation or experience	🟰	• The understanding of the meaning and actions of a social issue or condition • Theoretical foundation

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The **scientific method** provides parameters for social research. The scientific method involves careful data collection, theory development, hypothesis formulation and testing (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). By using the scientific method, sociologists ensure validity and reliability of research findings and results. **Validity** ensures the research study is measuring what it is intended to measure. **Reliability** means that if someone else copies the same research process design and plan, they get consistent findings or results as the original research study. The scientific method establishes the margins and boundaries for objective and accurate research (Griffiths et al. 2015). Using a scientific research design or plan is a recipe for other researchers to test and substantiate someone's work and findings.

Table 1. A Comparison of the Scientific Method in Basic and Applied Sociology

In **basic sociology**, the scientific method serves as a guide in research design and includes these steps:	In **applied sociology**, the scientific method serves as a guide in research design and in the identification of solutions or interventions and includes these steps:
1. Identify a research topic or issue to study 2. Develop a research question to examine or explore 3. Create a hypothesis or make a prediction about the anticipated findings and results 4. Complete a literature review of other research on the question or topic of study 5. Design a research method and approach for collecting data or information 6. Gather and collect data 7. Analyze and interpret data 8. Report findings and results	1. Identify a social problem to address 2. Formulate a research question 3. Describe level of analysis and theoretical approach 4. Research interventions, programs, etc. 5. Develop a hypothesis 6. Identify intervention 7. Implement intervention 8. Evaluate and analyze results

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Client-centered services requires sociological practitioners to find and build on facts to construct and understand an issue or condition of an individual, group, or organization (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). In applied sociology, the scientific method incorporates steps for gathering facts and insights about social patterns and interventions. The primary differences between the scientific method approach in basic and applied sociology are the topics and conditions practitioners research and study. Findings of scientific investigation in applied sociology help inform an understanding of a condition or issue and selection of strategies, solutions, or interventions for change (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). The goal in using the scientific method in applied sociology is to identify solutions or interventions to use and implement derived from theoretical foundation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Theories are perspectives or viewpoints. Without facts, theories are simply ideas or things believed to be true though not proven. The research process is a method for gathering facts. The purpose of **social research** is to investigate and provide insight into how human societies function (Griffiths, et al. 2015). Social research includes empirical evidence and the scientific method resulting in an interpretive perspective based on theoretical foundation.

There are several **research methods** sociologists use to collect data or gather information about people. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses specific to the type of data collected and its usefulness. Every method collects certain types of information (quantitative or qualitative) on particular sample sizes (number of people of study). **Quantitative data** is numeric or statistical information. Quantitative data reflects social patterns of behavior with numbers and figures. **Qualitative data** is descriptive evidence. Qualitative data interprets personal accounts, narratives, and stories to depict social patterns. There are eight commonly used data collection methods to gather quantitative and/or qualitative data about people.

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A **survey** or questionnaire is a series of questions. Before developing and disseminating a survey, sociologists must determine the target group or population of study. Once a population is selected, the researcher must determine the sample or individuals from the target group that will be examined. The best method to get a representative sample is to obtain a **random sample**. This will allow everyone from the target group an equal chance of being selected for the study. When a researcher wants to target subsets of a group, they can generate a **stratified random sample**.

Survey questions must be developed in neutral language. Questions must allow respondents or participants to express their own opinions and respond to the survey to avoid biased answers. When designing a research study, researchers must decide whether to use closed-ended or open-ended questions. **Closed-ended questions** allow respondents or participants to answer questions from a list of possible answers. **Open-ended questions** allow respondents or participants to answer questions in their own words.

Surveys are a good method for collecting quantitative data from large populations or groups. Administering a survey requires little to no direct contact with study subjects, meaning researchers spend less or little face-to-face time gathering data from people in comparison to other types of data collection methods. This method is limited to numeric or statistical analysis with narrow insight into the meaning or reasons behind responses or answers given by the participants.

Table 2. Effective Focus of the Most Common Data Collection Methods

Research Method	Data Collection Focus
Survey	Quantitative
Participant Observation	Qualitative
Interview	Qualitative
Ethnography	Quantitative/Qualitative
Case Study	Qualitative
Secondary and Document Analysis	Quantitative/Qualitative
Unobtrusive Measures	Quantitative

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Participant observation is the act of observing participants in the research setting. Here the researcher studies the group as a member of the group. Being a participant allows the researcher to observe and gain intimate insights into the ensemble and its members to develop a deep understanding of those involved. The primary challenge of this method is to avoid researcher bias from personal interactions and involvement as a member of the group.

An **interview** is a conversation with study participants. The research interviewer develops a series of questions to ask study subjects. Interviews gather people's thoughts, opinions, feelings, and biographies to help understand personal experiences and social patterns. Interviewers must develop rapport with participants to create a safe environment for sharing personal information and stories. This qualitative method is time consuming and widely used for collecting data from small groups or individuals.

Ethnography involves both participant observation and interview research methods. This technique allows the researcher to collect in-depth information about the observations made through formal (structured interview) and informal interactions (participant observation). The researcher is able to receive information about the intentions, motivations, or thoughts of the

study participants. This approach reduces researcher bias and ensures focused analysis of social patterns verifiable by personal accounts of others.

Case studies involve a researcher focusing on a single event, situation, or individual to understand the dynamics of relationships (Henslin 2011). This in-depth qualitative method requires one-on-one longitudinal time with study subjects. The focus centers on understanding the personal biographies and accounts of individuals. Researchers must develop rapport and trust with participants over time to invoke open and honest truth telling about personal accounts and experiences.

Secondary and document analysis is a research method used to analyze data or information collected by another person or party. Secondary analysis may include a review of documents or written sources including books, newspapers, records, etc. (Henslin 2011). The limitations of this method center on the data collection approach and credibility of the source. Researchers cannot alter the data collection method to ensure validity and reliability as well as make changes to the type and focus of information gathered.

Unobtrusive measures are the act of "observing the behavior of people who do not know they are being studied" (Henslin 2011:26). Study subjects are unaware they are being examined. Researchers must take caution in using this approach. When appropriately employed, unobtrusive studies provide useful quantitative data for specific sites, environments, or contexts studied. However, information gathered using this method is not reliable for developing generalizations about social patterns. Additionally, researchers must protect identifying information during data collection to avoid violations of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity among study subjects.

UNOBTRUSIVE VS. OBTRUSIVE OBSERVATIONS

A useful research approach for sociological practitioners to apply in the workplace is observational research. This approach provides a practitioner to observe behavior in a natural setting.

1. Conduct an investigation on unobtrusive and obtrusive observations. Describe each research approach and explain how data is observed and collected.
2. What is the difference between obtrusive and unobtrusive observations?
3. Explain the positive aspects of applying an observational research approach to examine human social life.
4. Explain the negative aspects of applying an observational research approach to examine human social life.
5. Describe how a public sociologist and an applied sociologist would use observational research in her or his job to assess and solve social problems.

Experiments determine cause and effect relationships (Henslin 2011). In an experiment, there is an experimental and control group. The experimental group receives a variable, factor, or change while the control group receives no adjustments in order to compare the impact of variances or alterations between groups. A variable that causes a change is the **independent**

variable, whereas the variable that depends on another variable to change is the **dependent variable**. Experiments help understand the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

There are several limitations of experiments as a research method. Conducting an experiment is expensive (e.g., space, materials, participant incentives, etc.) and time consuming. Replicating experiments and experimental conditions is challenging. Similar to unobtrusive measures, generalizations based on results are not possible. That is, inferences from the study are not applicable to other individuals or groups beyond those in the experiment. Findings are relevant to those in the study only. In addition, researchers have little to no control over extraneous variables that may influence participant bias or results leading to artificial conclusions.

USING RESEARCH TO ASSESS AND SOLVE PROBLEMS

Think about a social problem you want to impact. Align each research method with the type or variety of data categories and information you can gather by applying the technique to help you assess the problem and develop possible solutions.

- Survey
- Participant observation
- Interviews
- Ethnography
- Case study
- Secondary and document analysis
- Unobtrusive measures
- Experiment

Data and Information ➜ Social Problem or Condition Assessment and Potential Solutions

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DEVELOPING A SOCIOLOGICAL EYE

Serving and working with people requires patience, empathy, and an objective eye. One of the most difficult skills to master as a sociological practitioner is objectivity. **Objective conditions** exist without bias because they are measurable and quantifiable (Carl 2013). A practitioner must understand and evaluate solutions from a neutral perspective or viewpoint to help identify the needs of others they work with and serve. The use of scientific tools and approaches helps practitioners identify impartial and unbiased solutions to social and client-based problems. Applying sociological principles and practices are a way to remove prejudice and interest-based perceptions among practitioners.
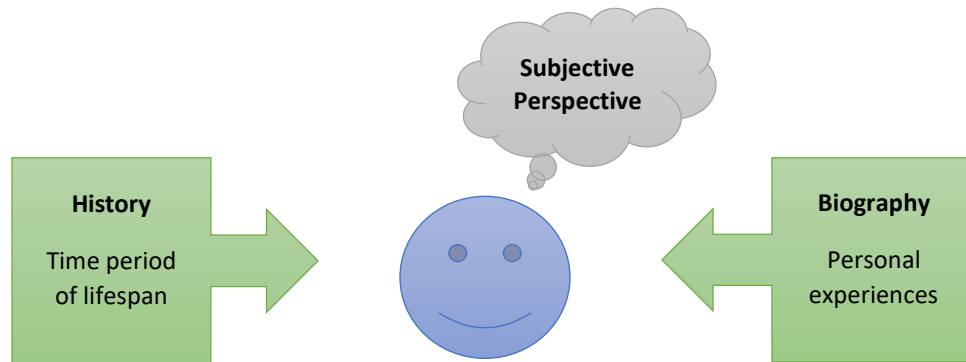
History and Biography

Every person analyzes and evaluates the world from a subjective perspective or viewpoint. Subjective concerns rely on judgments rather than external facts. Personal feelings and opinions from a person's history and biography drive subjective concerns. The time period we live

(**history**) and our personal life experiences (**biography**) influence our perspectives and understanding about others and the social world. Our history and biography guide our perceptions of reality reinforcing our personal bias and subjectivity.

Figure 2. The Influence of History and Biography on Perspective

Relying on subjective viewpoints and perspectives leads to diffusion of misinformation (inaccurate), disinformation (false or fake), and fallacies (unsound reasoning) that can be detrimental to our physical and socio-cultural environment and negatively impact our perceptions, considerations, and acceptance of others. It takes awareness and deliberate practice to reduce personal bias in our interactions, interpretations, and understanding of others and the social world. We must seek out facts and develop knowledge to enhance our objective eye. By using valid, reliable, proven facts, data, and information, we establish credibility and make sound judgments and better decisions for the world and those we work with and serve.

PERSPECTIVE INFLUENCES

1. Describe your dream job in sociology. What are your career goals? How do you want to help and serve people? What changes to you want to make in your community and society?

2. According to C. Wright Mills, our history (time we live) and biography (personal experiences) influence our perceptions about the world. Think about the historical and biographical influences on your life and your decision to pursue a career in sociology. Explain how you developed your interest in sociological practice and what led you to pursue a degree in sociology.

3. How might your passion to help others be influenced by egocentric ideologies or self-interest? What can you do to have a meaningful career helping others without bias? How will you develop a sociological or objective eye when working with people to address and solve social problems?

The Sociological Imagination

The **sociological imagination** is a practice sociologists employ to help recognize and step outside one's personal history and biography to examine a situation, issue, person, or society through an objective eye (Carl 2013). According to C. Wright Mills ([1959] 2000), the sociological imagination requires individuals to "think themselves away." Mills suggests the sociological imagination allows us to examine people and the world from a "new" eye to understand the personal and social influences on people's life choices and outcomes. This practice helps remove personal bias and preconceived notions and opinions to improve acceptance, consideration, and the needs of others. Sociologists must remove the blinders of self-interest and ideology to look at others and the world as they are and not as we perceive them.

THE POWER OF OBSERVATIONS

1. Consider your career goal and the professional environment you will work in. Describe a situation where you will need to use a formal observational approach to collect data or information to share with your clients or agency where you work.

2. How might using an informal unobtrusive observational approach be helpful in the workplace as a sociological practitioner? What type of knowledge or information can you discover by observing others?

3. Explain how either of these research approaches might improve the development of your sociological imagination or objective eye? Specifically, how might observational data help develop your sociological imagination about 1) a workplace situation, 2) co-workers, 3) a social issue, and 4) a client?

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Antipositivism	Public sociology
Applied sociology	Qualitative data
Basic sociology	Quantitative data
Biography	Random sample
Case studies	Reliability
Clinical sociology	Research methods
Close-ended questions	Research process
Dependent variable	Scientific method
Ethnography	Secondary and document analysis
Experiments	Social policies
History	Social research
Independent variable	Sociological imagination
Interpretive framework	Sociological practice
Interpretive perspective	Sociological practitioner
Interview	Stratified random sample
Objective conditions	Survey
Open-ended questions	Theories
Participant observation	Unobtrusive measures
Positivism	Validity

MODULE 2: THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN PRACTICE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the module, you will be able to:

1. identify ways sociology is applied in the real world.
2. describe the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis.
3. understand the similarities and differences between the theoretical paradigms in sociology.
4. use the sociological paradigms to identify and determine appropriateness of problem-solving approach and intervention.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Developing a sociological imagination helps us understand how our history and biography influences our individual thinking and behavior. By understanding how our personal perspective or viewpoint develops, we are also able to understand how history and biography influences the perspective or viewpoint of others. Recognizing the effect of history and biography on people aids us in grasping the effect personal struggles and issues have on a person's thinking and behavior.

C. Wright Mills (1959) described the connection between personal struggles to public issues. He described that by understanding the **personal struggles** or conditions people confront, we foster awareness about how widespread the struggles are among people in society and the impact they have on everyone as a **social problem**. For example, by learning about the individual troubles and challenges one is facing with opioid addiction, sociologists get a good understanding about how these dilemmas might influence or manifest in other opioid addicts and provide insight into possible ways of combating the condition for everyone with a similar problem. Through scientific research, sociological practitioners not only gather and learn information to help individuals, they also use the data to infer or evaluate a problem on a larger scale to help society address the issue and those effected by the problem (i.e., individuals, family, friends, organizations, and communities).

Sociological practitioners work on improving conditions for individuals and society as a whole. Basic, public, and applied sociologists gather research on personal issues to develop a framework for understanding public or social problems and possible solutions for improving human social life on a large scale. Public and applied sociologists specifically use scientific research to solve and improve social plights or conditions. Some practitioners choose to work with individuals to solve their personal issues or challenges using scientifically proven methods within the social context. These practitioners are clinical sociologists.

There are three continuums or **levels of social analysis** in the field of sociology. A sociological practitioner works and solves problems within or across these continuums. Regardless of the level of analysis (macro, meso, or micro), a practitioner must learn about and understand all

three continuums to find the best approach or solution to addressing the personal or public issue they are working to solve.

Personal troubles influence and have consequences for individuals, families, friends, organizations, and communities. Sociological analysis of personal and public issues require comprehension about how people interact and live together (i.e., the **social arrangement**). Analyzing the macro, meso, and micro continuum gives us information about the social arrangement from three different levels.

The macro continuum or **macro level** analysis examines large social units including global and national systems, policies, processes as well as large corporate structures, programs, and organizations. Macro level analysis includes exploration of broad scale social institutions

including political and legal systems and processes, military systems and orders, economies, social welfare systems and processes, religions, educational systems and programs, and communication media (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Macro analysis also evaluates social adaptation and change such as the evolving roles of women in the workplace, politics, and leadership.

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In sociological practice, we must be aware of the systems, policies, processes, institutions, and organizations connected to personal and public issues or problems. Considering the issue of opioid addiction, a practitioner will need to assess the macro level arrangements involved in creating (drug manufacturers), supporting (drug cartels), and combating (criminal justice system) the problem.

Midlevel or **meso level** analysis examines networks, communities, organizations, and groups. The meso continuum ranges from government agencies, corporations, universities, and small secondary groups including departments, units, or clubs (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). This level of analysis evaluates internal and external effectiveness, change, adaption, and intergroup relations of a network, community, or organization. Working on the opioid addiction epidemic, a sociological practitioner must investigate the meso level arrangements supporting and fighting addiction such as the Drug Enforcement Agency, Coast Guard, Purdue Pharma (leading manufacturer of the narcotic painkiller OxyContin), local law enforcement agencies, local mental health professionals, community addiction programs, family support groups, etc. The practitioner must understand how these groups influence each other, work together, and impede each other's goals or mission around opioid addiction.

Table 3. Continuums of Social Analysis

Level of Analysis	Social Arrangement Examination
Macro	Large social units • Systems • Processes • Structures • Institutions • Policies • Organizations
Meso	Midlevel social units • Network • Organization • Community • Group
Micro	Small social units • Interactions • Relationships and roles • Socialization • Thinking and motivation

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The **micro level** examines small social units of which the individual is the social focus as a member of a specific social system (Bruhn and Rebach 207). To understand the individual, micro level analysis serves to identify interactions among individuals and relationships among group members. This level focuses on understanding the roles of individuals in groups, relationships between group members, hierarchy and dominance structures of individuals within groups, and the socialization process of individuals to learn and establish group norms and acceptance. Micro analysis also studies the motivation, self-esteem, and socio-emotional intelligence of individuals and small groups (Rosenberg and Turner 1990; Hochschild 1979). To understand opioid addiction at a micro level, sociological practitioners will examine the first opioid experience of addicts (who, what, where, when, and why), the personal and social group influences supporting addiction, and social groups or group members helping to combat or reduce addiction.

MACRO, MESO, AND MICRO ANALYSIS

As you begin your professional career, you will need to learn about and understand the industry and organization you work in and the clientele you serve.

1. Research organizations in your desired field or matching your career interest.

2. Choose one organization for those you researched to learn more about for this application.

3. Using a macro level of analysis, find out the systems, policies, processes, and institutions influencing or affecting the operations of the organization.

4. Applying a meso level of analysis, investigate which networks, communities, external organizations, and external and internal groups shaping the organization.

5. Exercising the micro level of analysis, explore different roles of people involved in the organization, the socialization process of individuals within the organization to learn and establish organizational norms and acceptance, relationships between internal and external people involved with the organization, hierarchy and dominance structures of individuals within and receiving services from the organization.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Paradigms are theoretical frameworks explaining society (Griffiths et al. 2015). These frameworks are perspectives, a way of observing and examining people and the world through different lenses. As a sociological practitioner, you must learn to use and apply sociological theories to understand and evaluate people and their social situations or conditions from an objective viewpoint to identify appropriate interventions.

Sociologists use theories to study and understand people. "The **theoretical paradigms** provide different lenses into the social constructions of life and the relationships of people" (Kennedy, Norwood, and Jendian 2017:22). In using the sociological eye, each theoretical paradigm helps remove bias in assessing people and social issues at all levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro). There as three major paradigms in the field of sociology: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Functionalism and conflict theory examine society on macro and meso levels. Symbolic interactionism investigates micro level interactions in society. There are also three modern or emerging paradigms in sociology: feminism, exchange theory, and environmental theory. Feminism and environmental analyze macro and meso levels. Exchange theory focuses on micro level analysis.

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Functionalism is a macrosociological and mesosociological perspective examining the purpose or contributions of interrelated parts within the social structure. Functionalists examine how parts of society contribute to the whole. Everything in society has a purpose or function. Even a negative contribution helps society discern its function. For example, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs inspired society to define the behavior as undesirable, develop laws, and consequences for people committing such an act. A **manifest function** in society results in expected outcomes (i.e., using a pencil to develop written communication). Whereas, a **latent function** has unexpected results (i.e., using a pencil to stab someone). When a function creates unexpected results that cause social hardships or negative consequences the result is defined as a latent dysfunction.

Conflict Theory is a macrosociological and mesosociological perspective exploring the competition among social groups over resources in society. Groups compete for status, power, control, money, territory, and other resources for economic or social gain. Conflict Theory explores the struggle between those in power and those absent of power within a social context of struggle. The cultural war over immigration in the United States with competing groups representing open versus closed border ideologies is an example.

Symbolic Interactionism is a microsociological perspective observing the influence of interactions on thinking and behavior. Interactionists consider how people interpret meaning and symbols to understand and navigate the social world. Individuals create social reality through verbal and non-verbal interactions. These interactions form thoughts and behaviors in response to others influencing motivation and decision-making. Hearing or reading a word in a language one understands, results in a mental image and comprehension about the information shared or communicated (i.e., the English word "bread" is most commonly visualized as a slice or loaf and considered a food item).

There are three modern approaches to sociological theory (Carl 2013). **Feminism**, a macrosociological and mesosociological perspective, studies the experiences of women and minorities in the social world including the outcomes of inequality and oppression for these groups. One major focus of the feminist theoretical approach is to understand how age, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and social class intersect with gender to determine outcomes for people (Carl 2013). **Exchange Theory** examines decision-making of individuals in society. This microsociological perspective focuses on understanding how people consider a cost versus benefit analysis accentuating their motivation and self-interest in making decisions. **Environmental Theory** explores how people adjust to ecological, both environmental and social, changes over time (Carl 2013). The focal point of this macrosociological and mesosociological perspective is to figure out how people adapt or evolve over time in response to ecological space or context.

Applying Theories

Functionalists examine how people work together to create society as a whole. From this perspective, societies need systems, policies, processes, and institutions to exist (Griffiths et al. 2015). For example, policies or laws function to support the social structure of society, and values and norms guide people in their thoughts and actions. Consider how education is an important concept in the United States because it is valued. Educational institutions including the policies and norms surrounding registration, attendance, grades, graduation, and materials (i.e., classrooms, textbooks, libraries) all support the emphasis placed on the value of education in the United States. By observing people using functionalism, we study how members of a society work together by investigating how social systems, policies,

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processes, and institutions meet the needs of social networks, communities, organizations, and groups.

Conflict theorists understand the social structure as inherently unequal resulting from the differences in power based on age, class, education, gender, income, race, sexuality, and other

social factors. For a conflict theorist, society reinforces issues of "privilege" groups and their status in social categories (Griffiths et al. 2015). Inequalities exist in every social system. Therefore, social norms benefit people with status and power while harming others and at the expense of others. For example, although cultural diversity is valued in the United States, some people and states prohibit interracial marriages, same-sex marriages, and polygamy (Griffiths et al. 2015). By applying conflict theory, we investigate the dynamics of power among and between social systems, policies, processes, institutions networks, communities, organizations, and groups.

Symbolic interactionists study the thoughts and actions of individuals through the expression of social interactions between them. These theorists conceptualize human interactions as a continuous process derived from the interpretation and meaning of the physical and social environment. "Every object and action has a symbolic meaning, and language serves as a means for people to represent and communicate their interpretations of these meanings to others" (Griffiths et al. 2015:72). Interactionists evaluate how people depend on the interpretation of meaning and how individuals interact when exchanging comprehension and meaning. For instance, derogatory terms such as the "N" word might be acceptable among people of the same cultural group but viewed as offensive and antagonistic when used by someone outside of the group. When sociological practitioners apply symbolic interactionism, they identify the implication words and symbols including tone, body language, and labels that influence thinking and behavior.

Table 4. Theoretical Perspectives in Sociological Practice

Theoretical Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Application
Functionalism	Macro and meso	Examine how members of society work together
Conflict theory	Macro and meso	Investigate the social dynamics of power and inequality
Symbolic interactionism	Micro	Identify the implication of words and symbols on thinking and behavior
Feminism	Macro and meso	Distinguish the circumstances and effects of oppression on women and minority groups
Exchange theory	Micro	Evaluate the influence of social forces on thinking, behavior, and decisions
Environmental theory	Macro and meso	Discover the social and environmental impact on change or adaptation

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Feminism explores the lives and experiences of women and minorities. For example, a woman in Lebanon does not have the right to dissolve a marriage without her husband's consent even in cases of spousal abuse (Human Rights Watch 2015). Feminism explicitly examines oppressive

structures within systems, policies, and the inequity of institutions and groups in relation to age, gender, race, social class, sexuality, or other social category. The application of feminism in sociological practice notes the circumstances and effects of oppression resulting from social systems, policies, processes, and institutions on networks, communities, organizations, or social groups.

Exchange theorists observe how society and social interactions influence decision-making. Social values and beliefs often influence people's attitudes, judgments, or actions. Sociological practitioners apply exchange theory to evaluate people's decisions to see the social forces motivating or driving people's thinking, behavior, and choices.

Environmental theorists assess how people, as part of the social and physical environment, adapt and change over time. If you contemplate any rule of law, you can see how society has altered because of shifts in social ideas or ecological fluctuations. Consider the anti-tobacco laws in the United States making it illegal to smoke in public spaces as an example of social shifts towards health and wellness, or water meters to control and regulate residential water usage and waste as an example of ecological drought and prolonged water shortages in the United States. Application of environmental theory uncovers the social and environmental influences of change or areas encountering change in social systems, policies, process, institutions, networks, communities, organizations, and groups.

HARNESSING UNDERSTANDING ABOUT SOCIAL CONDITIONS

1. Review the organizational information you researched and assessed the Levels of Analysis exercise.
2. Analyze the organization using each of the theoretical paradigms: Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Interactionism, Feminism, Exchange Theory, and Environmental Theory.
3. Now, analyze the clientele or population served by the organization using each of paradigms: Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Interactionism, Feminism, Exchange Theory, and Environmental Theory.

USING A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Organizations hire sociological practitioners to design new programs or evaluate existing ones. As a practitioner, you will need to use a sociological imagination to analyze a program's social condition or situation, its parts, and possible solutions. You will be responsible for examining the condition from the perspective of others including organizational administrators, staff, clients, and community affected to assist you in designing or evaluating the program. To accomplish this task, you must be able to complete an objective evaluation or needs assessment and communicate your findings to those involved.

To apply a sociological perspective you will need to examine the social arrangement of the condition or situation from a macro, meso, and micro level of analysis. To begin, identify the structure and make-up of the organization and systems involved in or around the issue that the program is working to address. Next, assess the social groups involved in the organization or

system. Understand what input and impact these groups have on persons both involved within and served by the program. Finally, investigate the relationships and interactions among the organization, groups, and individuals involved in the program and condition it is addressing.

UNDERLINING FACTORS OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS

To construct a fishbone diagram, complete the following steps:

1. Identify the social condition or situation.

2. Brainstorm potential variables (categories or factors) influencing the condition including policies, resources, culture, etc.

3. Start a fishbone diagram with an arrow leading to the condition and variables branched off.

4. Write the categories or factors of the variables identified in item 3. Include the categories or factors above and below the arrow pointing to the condition. Be sure to connect the variable to specific names. For example:
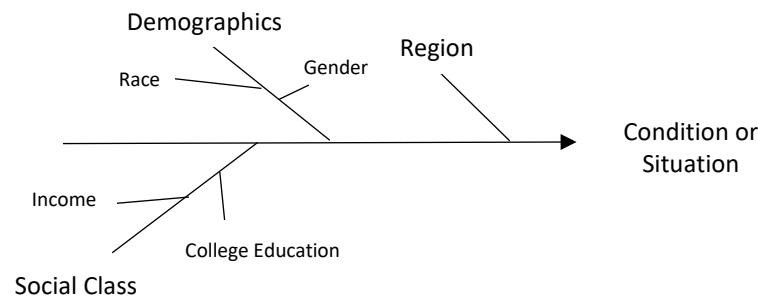
5. Interpret the results and identify the primary issues influencing the current condition or situation. Consider how the theoretical paradigms can help you make sense of what is happening.

6. Write a summary of your findings by presenting the condition or situation, then explain the factors influencing the problem.

7. Plan the steps for implementing a solution or resolving the problem.

A useful way to understand a program or organization's needs is to chart the social condition or situation using a **fishbone diagram**. This tool constructs a visual representation of the social impact on a condition and identifies the primary issues affecting the problem. Results assist in developing a written summary of the factors influencing the condition and used to plan the next steps in solving or resolving any issues.

AN EXERCISE IN SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

The mayor is working with city council leaders to improve waste management services to local residents in the area. The city is considering a private-public partnership to provide waste removal and recycling services to the community. Use your sociological imagination to identify the pros and cons of the city embarking on this partnership with a private, for-profit company. The partnership will require an annual contract with a fee for services. How will this type of partnership impact local residents? Consider the impact five (5) years from now.

1. Use a fishbone diagram to structure the issue.

2. Apply the six (6) theoretical paradigms in sociology to identify variables that may influence the issue.

3. Write a summary of your analysis.

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Conflict Theory	Manifest function
Functionalism	Meso level
Environmental Theory	Micro level
Exchange Theory	Paradigms
Feminism	Personal struggles
Fishbone diagram	Social arrangement
Latent function	Social problem
Levels of social analysis	Symbolic interactionism
Macro level	Theoretical paradigms

MODULE 3: SOCIOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the module, you will be able to:

1. explain the sociological process of intervention.
2. describe the six approaches to solving social issues.
3. recognize and apply macro, meso, and micro levels of intervention.
4. explain the sociological practitioner's role and approach in solving social problems.
5. identify issues requiring a multilevel, multifactor problem solving approach.

INTERVENTIONS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Social issues impair social functioning and negatively impact the lives of individuals, groups, and organizations (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). People effected by a particular social issue may face a variety of obstacles and challenges associated with the problem including labeling, stigma, discrimination, and isolation. Sociological practitioners work to address the problem by changing the social setting, arrangement, norms, and behaviors surrounding the issue and the people involved. A sociological practitioner may serve as the facilitator of this social change, a broker by acting on the behalf of others for change, or a clinician by providing direct services or help to change the situation of individuals and families.

There are six approaches most commonly used by sociological and other professional practitioners, communities, and clients to address social problems and create change. To resolve or improve situations, different problems require different approaches based on the client needs and social resources available to them. Each sociological approach incorporates a different level of analysis to assess the problem with a specific focal area of intervention. When social change requires different levels of analysis, sociological approaches must identify and explore multiple solutions across continuums. Not all approaches result in an expeditious solution. Sociological approaches and interventions take planning and time to implement and can take years to gain permanent change or improve people's lives.

Process of Intervention

Regardless of approach, sociologists follow an incremental process of intervention to remedy a social problem. Each sociological approach includes a **process of intervention** that includes an assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation phase. There are no timelines of completion defined within each phase. Rather the sociological practitioner, clients, and other impacted individuals or groups set deadlines and completion parameters based on context and need.

The first phase examines the social problem and needs of those it impairs. This is an investigative stage to gather information and understand the situation to define the problem (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). A sociological practitioner must first identify the presenting problem and client(s). The presenting problem refers to the client's perspective of the problem as they see it in their own words (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). The **assessment** is a discovery phase of the history and evolution of the problem within the geographic region to find out who is seeking help and why. The assessment also helps determine the role or involvement of the sociological practitioner in the intervention.

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An assessment is a case study guided by the nature of the problem and clients (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Data collection may include interviews, focus groups, surveys, and secondary analysis (e.g., analytic data, educational records, criminal records, medical files, etc.). Findings and results are presented and discussed with clients and other involved parties to formulate solutions and objectives of intervention.

The next stage in the process is to plan the steps for achieving intervention objectives. The **plan** is a formal (written) agreement among interventionists (including the sociological practitioner) and client(s) outlining the objectives and roles and responsibilities of each person involved. The plan will include observable, measurable objectives that include: 1) subject and verb stating the condition to achieve, 2) amount or percentage of reduction or improvement of the condition, and 3) timeframe or deadline for completion (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Both process and outcome objectives must be delineated in the plan. **Process objectives** will focus on program operations or services, and **outcome objectives** concentrate on the results of the intervention against **baseline data** (i.e., data collected prior to intervention). Interventionists and clients work together to develop a plan so everyone has an equal voice and understanding of their duties, obligations, and work to complete in the implementation phase.

DEVELOPING MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Consider a social problem you would like to address in your community. Conduct secondary analysis of the issue to identify the presenting problem, clientele, and existing community services. Explore nonprofit and public agencies in your community working on the problem you chose to help you gather information.

After completing your analysis, draft four observable, measurable objectives of intervention for the problem and population you wish to address. Two objectives must focus on process and two on outcomes. All outcomes must include a verb and subject stating the condition to achieve, amount or percentage of reduction or improvement of the condition, and timeframe or deadline for completion.

The third phase in the process centers on implementation. In this stage, the plan commences according to the steps outlined in the formal agreement. **Implementation** puts the plan into action by following the proposed sequence and schedule. This phase engages strategies in order to accomplish objectives. For example, solving chronic poverty in your community might require employing several strategies such as improving K-12 education, increasing higher education enrollments and job skills training, providing access to health care, and developing employment opportunities. During the implementation phase, interventionists and collaborators will initiate and work on each strategy for change.

The final phase in the process of intervention is evaluation. Sociologists use **evaluation** to find out if a program, service, or intervention works (Steele and Price 2008). There are two types of evaluation. A process or **formative evaluation** gathers information to help improve or change a program, service, or intervention. Did everything occur and work according to plan? Sociological practitioners work with clients to determine program strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement to strengthen or adapt the program (Steele and Price 2008). An outcome or **summative evaluation** measures the impact of the program, service, or intervention on clients or participants. Were benchmarks achieved or changes made? Practitioners measure changes in clients over the duration of their participation from start to completion. The impact evaluation determines if change occurred, any unintended outcomes, and the long-term effects.

Evaluation is an ongoing task tracking program progress from beginning to end (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Interventionists and practitioners must monitor the program continuously to ensure the service or intervention is advancing toward change, and adjustments or alternatives are deployed to increase effectiveness in a timely manner. The goal of evaluation is to know why a program, service, or intervention succeeded or failed to reform or adapt present and future support and solutions. Evaluation is a mechanism of **continual improvement** by regularly providing information and identifying unintended consequences.

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Evaluation requires both quantitative and qualitative data (see page 5) using a variety of data collection methods and tools to gather information (e.g., tests, questionnaires, archival data, etc.). Data collection tools vary from program to program, sometimes tools exist to conduct an evaluation, and other times practitioners must develop them (Viola and McMahon 2010). Practitioners lead in the development of data collection protocols, tools, and instruments for review by participants (e.g., clients and community members) before they are ready to use.

As a contributing member of an evaluation team, sociological practitioners (see page 3) must be aware of **role-conflict**. It is imperative to avoid role-conflict in a participatory evaluation model.

In other words, practitioners must be aware of their role within the evaluative context or situation as to whether one is serving as a researcher, practitioner, or interventionist (i.e., clinical sociologist). It is difficult to implement the scientific method (process and procedures) in the field within the standards of academic research when serving as a practitioner (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Sociological practitioners or interventionists do not always have control over the evaluation research, study environment, or time to complete an evaluative study as prescribed by the scientific method.

In addition, evaluations may cause tension between practitioners (interventionists) and evaluation associates. Interventionists are responsible for providing data and keeping records while implementing program activities. Conflicting demands for an interventionists' time and energy during the program implementation process may lead to a delay in gathering and sharing data with evaluators. Evaluation is not always equally valued, and some interventionists may consider evaluation unimportant or a threat to their work or process resulting in uncooperative behavior or interest.

THE VALUE OF PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Workforce Internship Networking (WIN) Center at West Hill College Lemoore in California connects and supports students and alumni by providing employment, occupational readiness, and job placement information and resources to advance personal career goals. The WIN Center provides a space for employers and students to connect. At the WIN Center, students and alumni receive skills training, employment and internship application assistance, and support in creating a professional profile.

1. Describe why it might be important to evaluate the WIN Center.
2. Considering the importance of evaluating college campus programs, how often would you recommend evaluating the WIN Center's programs and services? What should the evaluation examine?
3. What role could program monitoring play in the overall evaluation of the WIN Center?
4. If you were responsible for overseeing program monitoring and the evaluation of the WIN Center, what data would you collect to assess its impact?

Problem Solving Approaches and Interventions

There are six problem solving approaches and interventions most commonly used among practitioners. Each approach examines a different aspect of a social problem. The nature of the problem and people involved determines the most appropriate intervention to apply.

A **social systems approach** examines the social structure surrounding the problem or issue. This approach requires macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis (see pages 12-13) to help understand the structure of the problem and the arrangement of individuals and social groups involved. Analysis requires comprehension of the entire issue and parts associated, as well as, which components and protocols of the structure are independent or dependent of each other. Application of this approach requires grasp of the complete problem including the hierarchy, order, patterns, and boundaries of individuals and social groups including their interactions,
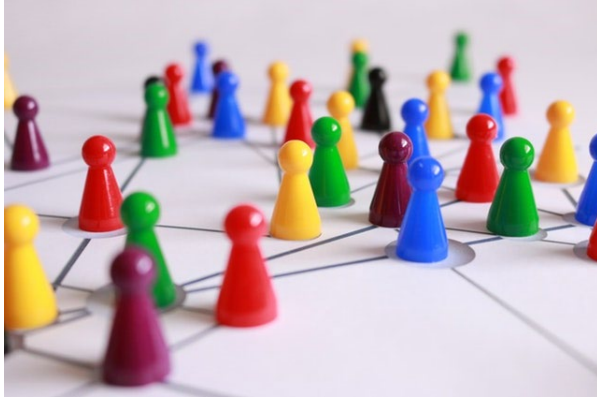
This image "Close-up Photography of Yellow Green Red and Brown Plastic" by Pixabay is licensed under CC BY 4.0

relationships, and processes as a body or structure surrounding the issue (Bruhn and Rebach 2007).

The interventions deployed using a social systems approach focus on establishing and maintaining stability for all parties even while change is occurring. Social system interventions require change agents or leaders such as sociological practitioners to help control and guide inputs (what is put in or taken into the problem) and outputs (what is produced, delivered, or supplied resulting from change) used in problem solving (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). This approach requires the involvement of everyone in the social structure to design or re-design the system and processes around the issue.

The **human ecology approach** examines the "web of life" or the ecosystem of a social problem or issue. This approach is often visually represented by a spider web to demonstrate how lives are interlinked and interdependent. A human ecology approach focuses on macro and meso levels of analysis to develop knowledge about the social bonds, personal needs, and environmental conditions that impede or support life challenges and opportunities for individuals. Practitioners evaluate and analyze where individuals and groups fit in the social structure or ecosystem and their roles. The purpose of this approach is to identify cognitive and emotional boundaries people experience living in social systems to help confront and remove the obstacles they face.

This image "Arachnid Artistic Blur Bokeh" by Pixabay is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Interventions applied in a human ecological approach target changes in families, institutions, and small communities. The goal is to confront the stressors and strain created by social situations and settings. Interventions from a human ecology approach help people determine acceptable behaviors within different social environments (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Practitioners work with social groups to remove collaborative challenges between groups in a social ecosystem and the individuals working and living within them. Change is concentrated on developing a new system and process to support and remove obstacles for individuals effected by a social problem.

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS PART 1

1. Describe the **social systems** approach and explain what type of social problems or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

2. Describe the **human ecology** approach and explain what type of social problem or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

3. Which approach is the most appropriate for assessing and addressing the social conditions listed below. Use supporting evidence to justify your analysis.

   a. A county mental health court
   b. Gender neutral bathrooms on a college campus
   c. Anti-bullying campaign in local K-12 schools

A **life cycle approach** examines the developmental stages and experiences of individuals facing issues or various life crises. Meso and micro levels of analysis are required with this method. Data gathered assists practitioners in understanding the adaption of individuals or groups to change, challenges, and demands at each developmental stage of life (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Analysis incorporates evaluation of interpersonal connections between a person and the environment, life transitions, and patterns. This approach if applicable when working with individuals, groups, and organizations, which all have and go through a life cycle and stages of development.

Interventions using this approach target changes in social norms and expectations of individuals or groups facing difficulties. Practitioners help identify the context and issues creating anxiety among individuals or groups and facilitate coping strategies to attack their issues. This approach builds on positive personal and social resources and networks to mend, retrain, or enable development and growth.

The **clinical approach** evaluates disease, illness, and distress. Both meso and micro levels of analysis are required for this method. Practitioners assess biological, personal, and environmental connections by surveying the patient or client's background, and current and recent conditions (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). A Patient Evaluation Grid (PEG) is the most commonly used tool for data collection. This approach requires in-depth interactions with the patient or client to identify themes associated with their condition and the structure of the social system related to their illness and support. When applying this approach in medical practice, the evaluation and analysis leads to a diagnosis.

This image "Black and White Blood Pressure Kit" by Pixabay is licensed under CC BY 4.0

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS PART 2

1. Describe the **life cycle** approach and explain what type of social problems or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

2. Describe the **clinical** approach and explain what type of social problem or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

3. Which approach is the most appropriate for assessing and addressing the social issues listed below. Use supporting evidence to justify your analysis.

   a. Policing strategies to reduce crime and improve community relationships
   b. Reductions in self-injury or cutting among teens
   c. A community college social work education degree program

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Intervention in a clinical approach concentrates on removal of symptoms, condition, or changes in the individual to solve the problem. The overarching goal of this method is to prevent the problem from reoccurring and the solution from interfering with the individual's functioning. Problem management must minimally disrupt the social system of the patient or client.

A **social norms approach** focuses on peer influences to provide individuals with accurate information and role models to induce change (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). This approach observes macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. Intervention centers on providing correct perceptions about thinking and behavior to induce change in one's thoughts and actions. This technique is a proactive prevention model aimed at addressing something from happening or arising.

There are three levels of intervention when applying a social norms approach (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Practitioners use interventions independently or together for a comprehensive solution. At the **universal level of intervention**, all members of a population receive the intervention without identifying which individuals are at risk. A **selective level of intervention** directs assistance or services to an entire group of at risk individuals. When specific individuals are beyond risk and already show signs of the problem, they receive an **indicated level of intervention**. A **comprehensive intervention** requires an integration of all three levels.

Practitioners assist communities in problem solving by applying a **community based approach**. All three levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro) are required for this method. The aim of this approach is to plan, develop, and implement community based interventions whereby local institutions and residents participate in problem solving and work towards preventing future issues. Practitioners work with communities on three outcomes, individual empowerment, connecting people, and improving social interactions and cooperation (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Concentrating on these outcomes builds on community assets while tailoring solutions to local political, economic, and social conditions. By building bridges among individuals and

groups in the community, practitioners facilitate connections between services, programs, and policies while attacking the problem from multiple vantage points.

A community based approach helps ensure problem analysis, evaluation, and interventions are culturally and geographically appropriate for local residents, groups, and organizations. To operate effectively, this intervention requires practitioners to help facilitate face-to-face interactions among community members and develop a

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communication pattern for solving community problems. To build an appropriate intervention, practitioners must develop knowledge and understanding about the purpose, structure, and process of each group, organization, and collaboration within the community (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Upon implementation, a community based approach endows local residents and organizations to observe and monitor their own progress and solutions directly.

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS PART 3

1. Describe the **social norms** approach and explain what type of social problems or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

2. Describe the **community based** approach and explain what type of social problem or issues this approach is the most valid method to use.

3. Which approach is the most appropriate for assessing and addressing the social problems listed below. Use supporting evidence to justify your analysis.

    a. Human trafficking prevention program
    b. Reductions in electronic cigarette, vaping, and new tobacco product usage

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Commonalities of Approaches

There are four common themes among problem solving approaches. All approaches focus on creating change. Interventionists work towards changing behavior or the social arrangements of clients. The goal is to improve social functioning of individuals, groups, communities, and organizations.

Table 5. Problem Solving Interventions

Problem Solving Approach	Intervention Focus
Social Systems	Create stability of the social arrangement or social structure
Human Ecology	Identify social location of individuals (place or position in society) to tackle and remove obstacles
Lifecycle	Build resources and networks to mend, retrain, or enable development and growth
Clinical	Remove symptoms or condition and help support change
Social Norms	Proactive prevention through modeling behavior
Community Based	Train and empower local residents and organizations to solve their problems

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Each approach begins with a judicious problem assessment. Identifying and investigating the presenting problem is critical to understanding and framing the needs of clients. The assessment stage allows interventionists to formulate a theory and construct an operational definition of what is to be changed (Bruhn and Reach 2007). This stage initiates the intervention planning process.

Many social problems have common causes and solutions so a multidimensional approach to problem solving alleviates many symptoms but can also cause new ones to surface. According to Lindblom and Cohen (1979), solving one social problem often creates new problems or solves others. Because social problems are multidimensional touched by multiple factors and social arrangements, all approaches incorporate multi-factor and multilevel problem solving interventions examining micro (individual) and meso or macro (collective) needs of clients. This means all approaches involve more than one level of intervention.

Lastly, all approaches include client follow-up and an evaluation of program and services. These activities serve as a feedback mechanism for determining successes, failures, and areas for improvement (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). Evaluation data is used for developing programs and providing accountability among practitioners and clients.

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Assessment	Life cycle approach
Baseline data	Outcome objectives
Clinical approach	Plan
Community based approach	Process objectives
Comprehensive intervention	Process of intervention
Continual improvement	Role-conflict
Evaluation	Selective level of intervention
Formative evaluation	Social norms approach
Human ecology approach	Social systems approach
Implementation	Summative evaluation
Indicated level of intervention	Universal level of intervention

MODULE 4: WORKING WITH DIVERSE GROUPS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the module, you will be able to:

1. understand the personal characteristics for a successful career in sociology.
2. recognize the professional skills and competencies required in sociological practice.
3. define professional code of ethics.
4. evaluate and apply ethical standards in sociological practice.

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Careers for sociologists are diverse and sometimes untraditional (Viola and McMahon 2010). Sociologists are trained to help people and organizations assess and improve their social condition or situation. As agents of change, sociologists must develop an understanding of investigational methods, measurements, and social relationships to help clients and communities narrow the gap between their current condition and what they need (Bellman 1990). Overall, a sociologist's work focuses on helping people by adding value and expertise in research, data collection, and analysis about social issues and potential solutions.

Sociologists play a direct role in people's lives by providing information and support to individuals and organizations for change. Sociological practitioners help others create programs and services, build capacity and infrastructure, adapt to social and organizational fluctuations, and develop or increase resources (Viola and McMahon 2010). The social and collaborative nature of being a practitioner requires people skills including trust and integrity. As a result, sociologists must develop personal characteristics such as patience, flexibility, and tolerance to build trust with clients and community members they serve.

Being a sociologist requires knowledge in building and maintaining relationships with people. Sociological practitioners must develop the ability to establish rapport and trust with others for effective and efficient collaboration (Viola and McMahon 2010). The most critical interpersonal communication skills needed for a successful career in sociology includes listening, facilitation, and conflict resolution. These skills allow practitioners to communicate across cultures and share data or information using technical (formal) terminology and conversational (informal) language to work with and understand diverse individuals and groups.

Communication only happens when practitioners, clients, and community members engage in uncovering and understanding the meaning behind the words. **Active listening** requires listeners to give feedback, confirm understanding by asking questions, and making clarifying statements rather than focusing on what they want to say (Freedom Learning Group 2019). Without listening, there is no understanding and no foundation for building trust and rapport. By listening, a sociological practitioner can assess people's needs and translate their questions and desires into concrete tasks to support and help them.

Much of the work facilitated by sociological practitioners focuses on partnerships with individuals and groups to cultivate solutions for change. Practitioners must demonstrate a level of leadership and **facilitation skills** to create an open, safe, and collaborative work environment for all participants. Creating an effective setting and atmosphere for change requires practitioners to be aware of the roles and intrinsic motivation of the people involved. This level of awareness helps manage group dynamics, cohesiveness, and direction for optimal results.

This image "Six Women Standing and Sitting inside the Room" by Christine Morillo is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Secondarily, effective facilitation requires sensitivity to the established norms people bring to the collaborative process and the social pressures to conform when working in groups (Black, Bright, Gardner, Hartmann, Lambert, Leduc, Leopold, O'Rourke, Pierce, Steers, Terjesen, and Weiss 2019). An effective sociological practitioner will identify and show consideration for established norms while helping people recognize shared standards and customs among the collaborative group to identify common goals for change. Additionally, supportive practitioners aid individuals in dealing with internal group pressures that allows everyone to retain their unique characteristics or traits while accepting the collaborative groups' standards or procedures.

Lastly, by harnessing group cohesiveness, practitioners show collaborates how to help each other and work together as a team (Black et al. 2019). Practitioners emphasize the benefits of working together towards common goals for change. Group cohesiveness blends complementary strengths and promotes a sense of ownership among each group member.

There are five stages of **team or group development** (Tuckman and Jensen 1977). The **forming stage** or first phase of development begins with the introduction of team members. This is commonly known as the "polite" stage in which team participants are friendly, demonstrate enthusiasm, focus on similarities, and look for leadership and direction among its membership (Black et al. 2019). The second or **storming stage** initiates when team members begin testing the group process. This is the "win-lose" stage where individuals clash for control over the group and choose sides creating a negative atmosphere with frustration around the goals, tasks, and progress of the group (Black et al. 2019).

The storming process may be long and painful for the team, but the third or norming stage will eventually form and take shape. In the **norming stage**, team members now demonstrate group cohesion, openly exchange and communicate ideas, have common goals, ground rules, boundaries, and share responsibility and control (Tuckman 1965). Once there is established

value and respect for one another, the team is able to build momentum and achieve results. In the fourth or **performing stage**, the team is confident, self-directed, and expresses renewed enthusiasm (Black et al. 2019). In this stage, the team is a problem-solving instrument (Tuckman 1965).

Figure 3. Tuckman's Model of Team Development
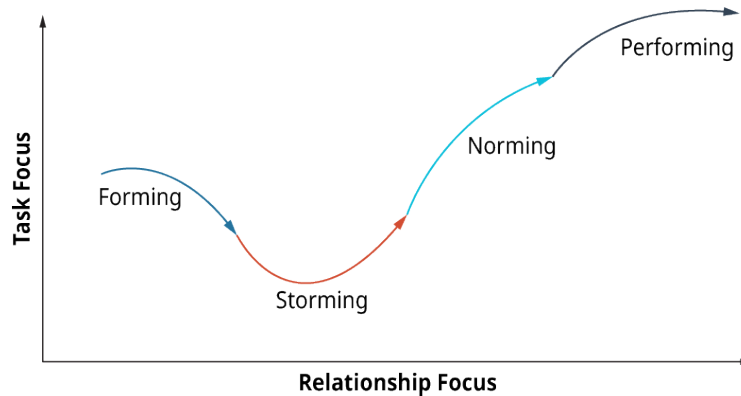
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As a project, program, or initiative ends, team members complete their work and the group begins to dissolve. This **adjourning stage** is the fifth and final stage of team development. In this stage, team members seek closure and recognition for their work and contributions (Tuckman and Jensen 1977).

Leading people and facilitating groups is challenging. It takes time and experience to understand and figure out the most appropriate methods and approaches for supporting people through change and problem solving. One of the most challenging aspects of working with teams and collaborative partnerships is figuring out how to balance the demands and expectations of individuals, the team or partners, and external stakeholders and constituencies (Black et al. 2019). Developing a checklist to identify people relevant to a particular effort or cause helps practitioners manage and facilitate the group process as well as ensure optimal performance for leading change. Some checklist questions to consider include:

- Whose participation and support do we need to identify the issue or condition and solve the problem?
- Who needs my support? What do they need from me or the team or collaborators?
- Who can keep me and our team or effort from being successful?
- What is my ongoing strategy to motivate, engage, and influence change?

The answers to these questions are important in guiding and building the relationships we need to develop for social change. The primary role of sociological practitioners is to build and manage relationships with people who will support the team and their work (Black et al. 2019).

This is the politics of sociological practice meaning practitioners must develop interpersonal skills to bridge people and shape strong working relationships.

Acting as a facilitator, a sociological practitioner must demonstrate leadership skills. The practitioner often serves as an orchestrator or person that arranges and helps set the tone for a group to push on and accomplish its goals (Black et al. 2019). The process of leadership is different from being a leader or head of a group. **Leadership** is a working relationship with

This image "People Sitting around Brown Wooden Table under White Pendant Lamp Inside Room" by Christine Morillo is licensed under CC BY 4.0

group members directed at achieving the needs of the team in problem solving and change. The act of leadership is an exchange relationship among group members and the practitioner to influence each other and the context or condition the collaborators are addressing.

Several characteristics endow people with leadership potential (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991; Kirkpatrick and Locke 2000; and Locke et al. 1991). The common traits of effective leadership include:

- Drive or a strong desire to achieve accompanied with ambition, energy, tenacity, and initiative
- Motivation to lead others
- Commitment to truth, honesty, and integrity
- Self-confidence or assurance in one's self, ideas, and ability
- Cognitive ability or analytical ability to think conceptually and strategically
- Industry knowledge or understanding of the community and social conditions or needs
- Miscellaneous traits such as charisma, creativity, flexibility, and self-monitoring or alter one's behavior in context to social cues as necessary

Sociological practice emphasizes a **transformational leadership** style where the focus is on inspiring others to action and helping people understand they can influence outcomes. Transformational leadership centers on engaging and energizing others through procedural justice whereby people effected by a condition or issue play an equitable role in confronting or solving the problem (Pillai, Schriesheim, and Williams 1999). This form of leadership motivates individuals to transcend their own centric thinking or self-interest for the benefit of the group, community, and society (Manz and Sims 1987). Through this process, collaborators focus on higher-order needs such as self-esteem, self-actualization, and get a voice in influencing decisions and outcomes that effect and are important to them.

This image "Boy and Girl Sitting on Bench Toy" by June Intharoek is licensed under CC BY 4.0

Interpersonal conflict involves situations when a person or group blocks expectations, ideas, or goals of another person or group. Conflict develops when people or groups desire different outcomes, opinions, offend one another, or simply do not get along (Black, et al. 2019). People tend to assume conflict is bad and must be eradicated. However, a moderate amount of conflict can be helpful in some cases. For example, conflict can lead people to discover new ideas and new ways of identifying solutions to social problems or conditions and is often the very mechanism to inspire innovation and change. It can also facilitate motivation among clients, communities, and organizations to excel and push themselves in order to meet outcomes and objectives (Black et al. 2019). According to Coser (1956), conflict is likely to have stabilizing and unifying functions for a relationship in its pursuit for resolution. People and social systems readjust their structures to eliminate dissatisfaction to re-establish unity.

The appropriate **conflict resolution** approach depends on the situation and the goals of the people involved. According to Thomas (1977), each faction or party involved in the conflict must decide the extent to which it is interested in satisfying its own concerns categorized as **assertiveness** and satisfying their opponent's concerns known as **cooperativeness** (Black et al. 2019). Assertiveness can range on a continuum from assertive to unassertive, and cooperativeness can range on a continuum from uncooperative to cooperative. Once the people involved in the conflict have determined their level of assertiveness and cooperativeness, a resolution strategy emerges.

In the conflict resolution process, competing individuals or groups determine the extent to which a satisfactory resolution or outcome might be achieved. If someone does not feel satisfied or feels only partially satisfied with a resolution, discontent can lead to future conflict. An unresolved conflict can easily set the stage for a second confrontational episode (Black et al. 2019).

Sociological practitioners can use several techniques to help prevent or reduce conflict. Actions directed at conflict prevention are often easier to implement than those directed at reducing conflict (Black et al. 2019). Common **conflict prevention strategies** include emphasizing collaborative goals, constructing structured tasks, facilitating intergroup communications, and avoiding win-lose situations. Focusing on collaborative goals and objectives prevents goal conflict (Black et al. 2019). Emphasis on primary goals help clients and community members see the big picture and work together. This approach separates people from the problem by maintaining focus on shared interests (Fisher and Ury 1981). The overarching goal is to work together to address the structure of the overarching social concern or issue.

Table 6. Five Modes of Resolving Conflict

Conflict-Handling Modes	Appropriate Situations
Competing (Assertive-Uncooperative)	1. When quick, decisive action is vital—e.g., emergencies 2. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing—e.g., cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline 3. On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right 4. Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior
Collaborating (Assertive-Cooperative)	1. When trying to find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised 2. When your objective is to learn 3. When merging insights from people with different perspectives 4. When gaining commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus 5. When working through feelings that have interfered with a relationship
Compromising	1. When goals are important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes 2. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals 3. When attempting to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues 4. When arriving at expedient solutions under time pressure 5. As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful
Avoiding (Unassertive-Uncooperative)	1. When an issue is trivial, or when more important issues are pressing 2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns 3. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution 4. When letting people cool down and regain perspective 5. When gathering information supersedes immediate decision 6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively 7. When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues
Accommodating (Unassertive-Cooperative)	1. When you find you are wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness 2. When issues are more important to others than yourself—to satisfy others and maintain cooperation 3. When building social credits for later issues 4. When minimizing loss when you are outmatched and losing 5. When harmony and stability are especially important 6. When allowing subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes
Source: Adapted from Thomas, Kenneth W. 1977. "Toward Multidimensional Values in Teaching: The Example of Conflict Behaviors." *Academy of Management Review* 2:487.	

When collaborative partners clearly define, understand, and accept tasks and activities aimed at shared goals, conflict is less likely to occur (Black et al. 2019). Conflict is most likely to occur when there is uncertainty and ambiguity in the roles and tasks of clients and community members. Dialogue and information sharing among collaborative partners is imperative and eliminates conflict. Understanding others' thinking is helpful in collaborative problem solving. Through dialogue people, are better able to develop empathy, avoid speculation or misinterpreting intentions, and escape blaming others for situations and problems which leads to defensive behavior and counter attacks (Fisher and Ury 1981). Sharing information about the state, progress, and setbacks helps eliminate conflict or suspicions about problems or issues when they arise.

As clients and community partners become familiar with each other, trust and teamwork develops. Giving people time to interact and get to know each other helps foster and build effective working relationships (Fisher and Ury 1981). It is important for team members to think of themselves as partners in a side-by-side effort to be effective in their work and accomplish shared goals. Avoiding win-lose situations among collaborative partners also weakens the potential for conflict (Black et al. 2019). Rewards and solutions must focus on shared benefits resulting in win-win scenarios.

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Conflict can have a negative impact on teams or collaborative work groups and individuals in achieving their goals and solving social issues. Sociological practitioners cannot always avoid or protect people from conflict when working collaboratively. However, there are actions practitioners can take to reduce or solve dysfunctional conflict.

When conflict arises, sociological practitioners may employ two general approaches by either targeting changes in attitudes and/or behaviors. Changes in attitudes result in fundamental changes in how groups get along, whereas changes in behavior reduces open conflict but not internal perceptions maintaining separation between groups (Black et at. 2019). There are several ways to help reduce conflict between groups and individuals that either address attitudinal and/or behavioral changes. The nine **conflict reduction techniques** in Table 2 operate on a continuum, ranging from approaches that concentrate on changing behaviors at the top of the scale to tactics that focus on changing attitudes on the bottom of the scale.

Table 7. Conflict Reduction Techniques

Technique	Description	Target of Change
Physical separation	Separate conflicting groups when collaboration or interaction is not needed for completing tasks and activities	Behavior
Use rules	Introduce specific rules, regulations, and procedures that imposes particular processes, approaches, and methods for working together	Behavior
Limit intergroup interactions	Limit interactions to issues involving common goals	Behavior
Use diplomats	Identify individuals who will be responsible for maintaining boundaries between groups or individuals through diplomacy	Behavior
Confrontation and negotiation	Bring conflicting parties together to discuss areas of disagreement and identify win-win solutions for all	Attitude and behavior
Third-party consultation	Bring in outside practitioners or consultants to speak more directly to the issues from a neutral or outsider vantage point to help facilitate a resolution	Attitude and behavior
Rotation of members	Rotate individuals from one group to another to help understand frame of reference, values, and attitudes of others	Attitude and behavior
Identify interdependent tasks and common goals	Establish goals that require groups and individuals to work together	Attitude and behavior
Use of intergroup training	Long-term, ongoing training aimed at helping groups develop methods for working together	Attitude and behavior
Source: Adapted from Black, J. Stewart, David S. Bright, Donald G. Gardner, Eva Hartmann, Jason Lambert, Laura M. Leduc, Joy Leopold, James S. O'Rourke, Jon L. Pierce, Richard M. Steers, Siri Terjesen, and Joseph Weiss. 2019. *Organizational Behavior*. Houston, TX: OpenStax College.		

LEADING A TEAM

1. Describe a time you held a leadership position among your family, friends, at school, or with co-workers.

2. In reflecting back on the skills and competencies presented in the module, did you use any of them in the leadership position you described? Explain.

3. Which skills and competencies from the module do you think are the most important in leading others?

Other Abilities and Proficiencies

Working as a sociological practitioner, you must develop knowledge and historical information about the social problem you wish to address, the nature or origin of the condition, and possible methods for solving the issue (Lau and Chan 2019). Understanding a social problem aids in formulating the structure and approach to tackling it. This also ensures change agents are targeting and developing an accurate plan to address the "real" problem or issue.

Solving problems requires critical and creative thinking. **Critical thinking** is the process of reflection and questioning aimed at confronting assumptions, examining context, and investigating alternatives (Brookfield 1986; Tice 2000). This process emphasizes assessment of one's thoughts and interpretation of thoughts to validity, authenticity, and accuracy of understanding and reasoning. **Creative thinking** supports critical thinking as a process of developing new and useful possibilities to one's thoughts (Lau and Chan 2019). Creative thinking aids in discovering new or alternative ideas and options. The inventive qualities of creative thinking aids sociological practitioners in constructing potential solutions to social problems.

In addition, when working toward social change, practitioners and collaborators must employ strategic thinking. This cognitive activity improves decision-making, strengthens the ability to cope with change, and instills a mentality of continuous improvement. **Strategic thinking** is a critical thinking process people use to analyze, evaluate, and problem solve. The application of this process challenges conventional thought by emphasizing foresight or predicting human responses and outcomes. Strategic thinking requires aptitude in self-development (e.g., learning new skills and overcoming bad habits), organizational strategies that are productive and responsive to challenges and innovations, and tactical thinking to deal with confrontation, competition, maximize impact, and protect selves (Lau and Chan 2019). The purpose of strategic thinking in addressing social problems is to establish a systems perspective focusing on client needs and the barriers preventing success or change.

EXPLORING SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTITIONER METHODS AND SKILLS

1. Review the Public Sociology Toolkit (https://publicsociologytoolkit.com/public-sociology-toolkit/).

2. Explore each of the 18 methods and skills sociological practitioners use to investigate social issues and work to create social change.

3. Think about a social problem that is important to you and describe how a team of practitioners, clients, and community stakeholders might apply each of the 18 methods in the toolkit to improve the social condition you identified.

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTITIONER QUALITIES

Below are a list of general traits and skills needed in the field of sociology. Review the items and complete a self-assessment for further preparation as a sociological practitioner. These items will give you a sense of where your strengths are and what you have to offer clients, communities, and employers.

_____ I am comfortable speaking with and in front of people.
_____ I am authentic and self-confident when working with others.
_____ I have effective written and oral communication skills.
_____ I am not afraid to say "no" or disappointing someone.
_____ I am self- motivated and self-disciplined to complete my work on time.
_____ I accept criticism and am willing to learn from my mistakes.
_____ I am aware of my personal and professional weaknesses and strengths.
_____ I have strong organizational skills (i.e., time management, recordkeeping, meeting deadlines, etc.).
_____ I am flexible and tolerant when working with others.
_____ I am able to reflect and synthesize what others share with me.
_____ I am able to work collaboratively or on a team.
_____ I am able to manage conflict without getting defensive.
_____ I am able to use a variety of data collection, analysis, and reporting methods.
_____ I am able to use software (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, statistical analysis (SPSS or Nvivo, etc.) for creating, recording, and presenting data and reports.
_____ I can apply a variety of theoretical models and approaches to solving social problems.

CODE OF ETHICS

Ethics are a set of concepts and principles that guide social behavior. To avoid cultural and religious bias or judgment, society uses shared ethical ideologies as guides in reasoning ethical issues. Ethical life emerges from the human capacity and cognitive ability to comprehend the effect of helping or harming others (Paul and Elder 2005).

People enforce ethics through communication and social interactions. Through socialization and cultural teachings, society nurtures ethical behaviors and social expectations using positive and negative re-enforcement. Ethical decisions require critical evaluation and analysis of

thinking, motivation, and consequences. Individuals must become proficient at reflection to assess and make sound ethical decisions.

"Human nature has a strong tendency toward egotism, prejudice, self-justification, and self-deception" (Paul and Elder 2005:2). People can never eliminate egocentric tendencies but combat them as they evolve into ethical persons. The achievement of ethical reasoning requires doing what is right regardless of selfish desire. Obtaining ethical reasoning requires the deliberate practice and development of fair-mindedness, honesty, integrity, self-knowledge, and concern for others.

Applying Ethical Principles in Sociological Practice

The **code of ethics** establishes the social norms of acceptable and unacceptable conduct and behavior (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). All professional companies and organizations have rules and policies on ethical conduct and behaviors encouraged internally within the organization and externally when working with outside constituents or clientele. In the workplace, the code of ethics includes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints that violate the ethical principles and standards outlined by the organization (Bruhn and Rebach 2007).

Professional associations comprised of members within a specific profession like sociology also have ethical codes of conduct establishing the expectations of professionals working within the field or discipline. The American Sociological Association (ASA) has published guidelines outlining the principles and standards that sociologists must adhere to in professional activities. The six guiding principles enforce: 1) professional competence, 2) integrity, 3) professional and scientific responsibility, 4) respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity, 5) social responsibility, and 6) human rights (ASA 2019). The Association also dictates the ethical standards for professional and scientific conduct that center on and clarify the rules and policies surrounding the established guiding principles. Any violation of the code may lead to imposition of sanctions including termination of membership (ASA 2019).

Practitioners must be aware of the ethical standards established by their respective professional associations including other professional groups (i.e., therapists, counselors, etc.) to remain certified and affiliated with the organizations and networks. The Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology also has a code of ethics. The central value in sociological practice is "**do no harm**." This means practitioners are responsible for protecting clients including community collaborators by obtaining informed consent to participate, protecting privacy and anonymity, preventing physical and emotional harm, ensuring truth and honesty, and providing information and

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feedback as needed (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). It is imperative for practitioners to be clear about the ethical soundness of their decisions when working with clients, the community, and collaborators to ensure the values and standards of the profession. Respect and communication are essential in building moral relationships and maintaining ethical standards in sociological practice.

DEFINING "DO NO HARM"

Consider the parameters of the ethical value "do no harm."

1. Explain methodology and approach for obtaining informed consent from people in sociological practice.
2. Describe the ways to protect privacy and anonymity of clients, community members, and collaborators as a practitioner.
3. Discuss how to prevent physical and emotional harm when addressing the social conditions people face or confront. Explain the boundaries and code of conduct for maintaining professional relationships with clients, community members, and collaborators.
4. Illustrate how to maintain honesty and truth in your professional work and relationships.
5. Describe the appropriate attitude and approach when providing information and feedback to clients, community members, and collaborators.

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Active listening	Facilitation skills
Adjourning stage	Five modes of resolving conflict
Assertiveness	Forming stage
Code of ethics	Interpersonal conflict
Conflict prevention strategies	Leadership
Conflict reduction techniques	Norming stage
Conflict resolution	Performing stage
Cooperativeness	Professional associations
Creative thinking	Storming stage
Critical thinking	Strategic thinking
"Do no harm"	Team or group development
Ethics	Transformational leadership

MODULE 5: PREPARING FOR A CAREER IN SOCIOLOGY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the module, you will be able to:

1. articulate the academic and professional pathway required for a career in sociology.
2. design a plan or roadmap for developing knowledge, gaining work experience, and establishing a network for job readiness and growth.

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Sociology is a broad academic field that focuses on uncovering the sources and solutions of social problems (Bruhn and Rebach 2007). In choosing a sociology major, you must have an industry or social condition emphasis in mind when selecting course work. Many students do not adequately plan or choose appropriate courses to help them prepare for the area or type of work they want to do as a sociologist after graduation. Sociology is a flexible degree similar to Liberal Studies or Business in that you can tailor your course work to match your job market interests. Many **sociology degree programs** prepare students for work as data or policy analysts, researchers, and support staff for private, public, and non-profit agencies (Soriano 2019). The problem with the degree's generalized focus is that students often choose the quickest pathway to degree completion without considering the skills and competencies they will need to be a contender or compete in the job market.

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From the onset, a sociology major must determine what type of work or career they want. A career as a **basic sociologist** will require a doctoral level degree, which will consist of four years completing undergraduate or bachelor's level classes, two years fulfilling graduate or master's level courses plus thesis, and two to four additional years to complete doctoral course work and a dissertation. Basic sociology is for someone who wants to focus on publishing research and/or working as a university professor.

To be a **public sociologist**, you may or may not need to earn a doctoral degree depending on the area and level of social policy you wish to work. If you want to write policy or make direct changes to law or the judicial system, you will need a doctoral or a law degree. If you want a job in advocacy focused on policy changes, your job title or work will depend on the level of degree you obtain. An undergraduate or bachelor's degree will more than likely align with entry-level

or program/administrative support type jobs (e.g., intake specialist, case manager, behavior technician, victim advocate, analyst, etc.).

Academic preparation for work in applied or clinical sociology is similar to public sociology. An **applied sociologist** with a doctoral or master's degree may find work in academia, program evaluation, or research as an administrator/director, faculty, or consultant depending on interest and area of expertise. As with public sociology, an undergraduate or bachelor's degree will prepare you for entry-level or program/administrative support jobs.

In addition to the type of sociological work you wish to do, you must consider what social condition(s) you want to work on as a change agent. Preparing yourself academically for work in public health is very different than preparing yourself for a job in criminal justice, education counseling, social work, etc. The elective courses you choose in college are paramount for preparing you for the industry and type of work you want to do as a sociologist. Make sure you examine the sociology major requirements and course options you have when deciding which courses to take. Remember, you want to be qualified for the jobs you want. For example, do not take medical sociology as an elective over a course in deviance and control if you are preparing for a career in probation or criminal justice. Medical sociology will help you develop comprehensive knowledge as a sociologist and understand the needs of some clients when working in criminal justice, but the information and knowledge you gain will not be as applicable for a career in probation as deviance and control. Medical sociology is a good match along with deviance and control if you plan on working in a psychiatric facility or psychiatric ward of a prison. Think about your career goal and choose the college and courses that will prepare for your dream job in sociology.

Lastly, another consideration is that all jobs in sociology will require knowledge and skills in report writing, public speaking, research methods, and data analysis. In order to share information about a social condition or issue, sociologists must disseminate factual and empirical data in written form and through social interactions including face-to-face meetings and presentations. Part of communicating effectively requires the ability to transfer technical information about a social problem to diverse groups who have different levels of education and experience (Viola and

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McMahon 2010). The same is true for sharing solutions and approaches for social change. In preparing for a career as a sociologist, it is imperative to develop writing, public speaking, and research abilities. Mastering these skills will establish your credibility and make you competitive in the job market.

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IS A SOCIOLOGY DEGREE RIGHT FOR ME?

There are a variety of ways people use and practice sociology. Basic, public, and applied sociology are the most common forms of sociological practice. Each form integrates research on human social life to understand and improve society. Let us explore the type of work you might be interested in pursuing as a sociologist.

1. What is your dream job or career interest?

2. Which form of sociological practice does your interest align (basic, public, or applied sociology)?

3. What type of degree or how much education will you need to qualify for your dream job?

4. Research bachelor's level college courses and their descriptions in sociology and identify the best courses and electives you will need to take to prepare you for your dream job. Explain how these courses will help you develop the skills and competencies you need for a successful career in sociology.

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Job Hunting

Since sociology is a broad field with diverse areas of interests, clientele, and conditions, you will not find a blanket job announcement seeking as a sociological practitioner or stating, "Sociologist Wanted." Instead, you will need to read and search for work by examining the job description and qualifications in vacancy announcements. Search for jobs in a variety of fields related to your interests and skill level (Steele and Price 2008). This means **job hunting** will require time and attention to detail to find employment opportunities and job titles that meet your knowledge, abilities, interests, and social conditions you wish to address in your career.
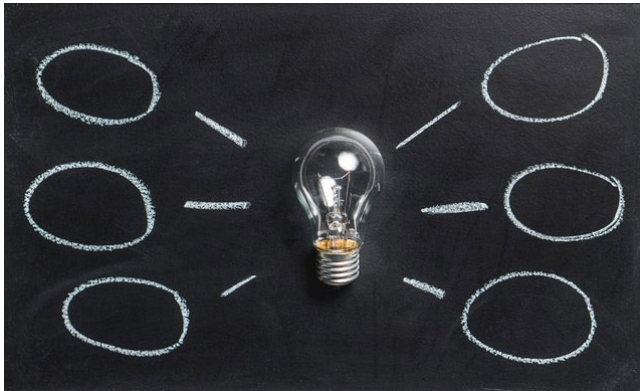
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As a Sociologist, there are varieties of employment opportunities in private, public, and non-profit organizations. The type of job you qualify for will depend on the level of college degree you obtain as well as the knowledge, skills, and competencies you possess. Try to cast a wide net when looking for work. The right job for you may not have the title you expect. For example, let us imagine you are looking for work to improve educational programs and services for foster youth. Many private, public, and non-profit organizations work and serve foster youth, so you will need to research which ones are located in the community you want to work in, and then you will need to search for vacancies in the organizations you find. You may be surprised to find jobs that match your interest with titles such as program coordinator, program monitor, or analyst. Many times organizations use generic titles because the role and responsibilities of a position are wide-ranging and

comprehensive like one working to improve educational programs and services for foster youth. Do not be discouraged because the employment opportunities you find available do not come with a fancy job title. As a Sociologist, your work and the contributions you make to improving people's lives is what is most important.

Marketing Yourself

In preparation for work, one of your first tasks will be to develop a resumé. A **resumé** is a written document of your education, credentials, work experience, and accomplishments. Identify your credentials including degrees and certificates earned. Also, list your work experience including unpaid or volunteer work. The key to creating an effective resumé is the ability to articulate your accomplishments into skills and abilities. It is more important to state your role and describe your talents and proficiencies while volunteering at a local food pantry than stating you served food. In other words, explain what skills and competencies you used to serve food. For example, "While working at the community food pantry, I was responsible for 1) loading and unloading food to maintain inventory, 2) sorting and packaging food items to ensure safe handling and appropriate nutritional values per serving, 3) checking expiration dates for safe consumption, 4) discarding expired food items in accordance with health department regulations and protocols, 5) helping customers complete liability forms and answering customer questions and 6) maintaining a clean and sanitary service area."

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THE PROFESSIONAL RESUMÉ

When seeking employment as a Sociological Practitioner, you will need to showcase your knowledge and skills in a professional resumé. Only in academia will you find a job announcement for a Sociologist. Employment opportunities fit for your sociologically training are typically classified under titles such as eligibility worker, case manager, job developer, grant writer, program monitor, project coordinator, etc. In your professional resumé, you will need to demonstrate how your knowledge and skills fit the position advertised.

For this application, develop a professional resumé using a template or format highlighting your qualifications. Resumé templates and formatting ideas are available in Microsoft Word or online by conducting an Internet search. In your resumé, include your education, work experience (including unpaid and volunteer work), skills, and references. In your skills section, do not forget to include the abilities, talents, and competencies you developed in your college courses (i.e., unobtrusive observations, survey development, survey administration, interviewing techniques, table and graph development using Google and Microsoft software, technical writing, presentations, etc.).

When looking for work in sociological practice, emphasize your aptitude in research methods, statistics, and knowledge of diverse groups. If you have work or volunteer experience related to these competencies, delineate them in the section where you describe the job. If your only experience with research methods, statistics, and diverse groups is in the classroom, you might consider creating a section on your resumé for specialized skills to inform potential employers of your talents even for those developed as part of your academic training or other technical preparation.

Anyone preparing for a professional career should develop a portfolio for potential employers displaying their work. A **portfolio** highlights your accomplishments, skills, and potential. The portfolio is a visual example of your academic and professional work that may include reports, papers, projects, artwork, presentations, or other samples as appropriate for the job you seek. A professional portfolio with specific examples demonstrating your sociological skills and abilities will give you a competitive edge and show employers the talents you will bring to the organization and its clientele.

CREATE A PORTFOLIO

1. Gather samples of your best academic work (e.g., papers, projects, presentations, etc.) to include in a portfolio.

2. Add any certificates or awards and degrees you have received. Include photographs highlighting your work or contributions you have made to the community.

3. Write a one page biographical sketch with career goals and interests to include as the opening page of your portfolio.

Networking and Building Relationships

In sociological practice, you will need to develop and maintain **people skills**. This means you must learn to listen, communicate, and relate to others in a professional environment. People skills are essential for networking and building relationships, which is the foundation for improving the lives and social conditions of people.

Networking and building relationships is part of everyday work for a sociologist (Viola and McMahon 2010). With the focus on helping people, you are responsible for nurturing professional contacts aimed at solving social problems and treating people you serve with integrity and respect. Your role as a practitioner will require you to form linkages, make connections, expand resources, and bring people together to employ interventions and change (Viola and McMahon 2010). The purpose behind networking and building relationships is to exchange information, obtain advice, and make referrals.

There are several ways to build a professional network and relationships. When you are starting a career as a sociologist consider asking family members, friends, former and current professors or other university connections, and employers to mentor or provide you with meaningful contacts in the community such as organizational leaders. Contacts and networks may also develop by participating in unpaid community work or attending professional conferences. Your network may be the key to connecting you with the job and career pathway you seek (Steele and Price 2008).

The number and types of connections you make with people will influence the opportunities and access to the work you want to pursue. Build your contacts and develop you reputation with care to establish credibility so others will want to help and open professional doors and opportunities for you. Maintain contact and regularly follow-up with your network regardless of need, so relationships stay intact for those instances requiring assistance and support.

This image "Women Wearing While Sleeveless Top and Black Pencil Skirt Facing Woman Wearing Pink Sleeveless Top and Black Pencil Skirt on Wall" by mentatdgt is licensed under CC BY 4.0

ESTABLISHING YOUR NETWORK

1. Make a list of people in your personal and professional network (e.g., family, friends, current and former professors, employers, etc.).

2. From your list, pinpoint the people that could help you establish professional connections leading to your career interest or dream job. Discuss mentorship or apprenticeship opportunities you might be able to develop. Describe the type or kind of connections they could help you establish in the community.

3. Identify the types of contacts or resources you are missing or need to develop to build your professional network and relationships. Whom might you contact in your current network that could lead you to new or missing connections?

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Applied sociologist	Portfolio
Basic sociologist	Public sociologist
Job hunting	Resumé
Networking	Sociology
People skills	Sociology degree programs