Part One

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSPECTIVE

The focus of this book is on everyday life. Our work is based on the belief that a key measure of sociology's value and vitality is its ability to provide insight into the underlying structure of day-to-day life. Certainly, sociology should provide you with a way to understand how society as a whole is organized and ordered. At the same time, a sociological way of looking at things should be immediately applicable to your everyday life. We propose to show that there is an order and predictability to everyday life which becomes visible once you begin to look very hard at behaviors and situations you might otherwise take for granted. Sociological analysis has the power to let you see everyday behaviors and situations in a new way. Talking, using space, waiting, relating to members of the opposite sex, choosing clothing, presenting images of yourself to others, touching, behaving in classrooms, and meeting strangers are all behaviors that happen in culturally predictable ways.

The first part of this book, consisting of three chapters, is designed to accomplish three broad goals: (1) to introduce the study of everyday life as a legitimate concern in the study of sociology; (2) to provide you with knowledge of some of sociology's key concepts; and (3) to lay out the theoretical perspective that is most helpful in analyzing everyday events.

While close observation is required in order to comprehend how daily life is organized, you also need some tools to help you know what to do with your observations. Concepts and the theories built from them provide a blueprint for identifying underlying patterns in social life. In the first three chapters you will learn how such standard sociological concepts as culture, norms, values, roles, status, power, socialization, self, impression management, and interaction both direct the analysis of daily life and provide insight into its management.

In these chapters we also elaborate on a theoretical perspective in sociology called *symbolic interaction*. We will employ this theoretical view throughout the text as we investigate the various contexts of everyday life.

Chapter 1 presents a rationale for the study of everyday behavior. The notion that clear cultural expectations underlie daily activity is illustrated with examples of regularities in the use of time, space, and gesture. Beyond this, we emphasize how people's interpretations and definitions of social situations direct their behaviors. The questions of how individuals give meaning to various social situations are central to the perspective of symbolic interaction. An additional concern in chapter 1 is to show the significance of everyday behavior in studying how society itself is ordered. By the time you finish the first chapter you will possess several helpful ideas for looking at daily life in new ways.

Social life would be impossible without people's ability to define situations in shared ways. Chapter 2 elaborates on the important notion that human beings are symbol-using animals who collectively give meaning to the objects, events, and situations that make up their lives. We consider in detail the human capacity to symbolize, the socialization processes through which "selves" emerge, and the crucial importance of role-taking in human communications. The ability to engage in symbolic communication, we argue, not only makes social order possible, it also constitutes a continual source of nonconformity in social life. Chapter 2 can give you a deeper understanding of the symbolic interaction perspective and a better ability to use it yourself.

Chapter 3 shows how the assessment of meaning in interaction depends on information about others. Here we describe the kinds of information used to evaluate the people you physically encounter. We explain how such master attributes as gender, age, and race affect everyday relations and describe how people interpret each other's clothing, body type, and gestures. The chapter concludes by describing a view of interaction that stresses how individuals control information and foster impressions of self in everyday life. Chapter 3 builds on some of the key principles learned in earlier chapters.

1

Culture and the Organization of Everyday Life

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Cultural Expectations and Everyday Interactions
- Social Conventions as Guides for Social Order
- Beyond Social Conventions: The Interpretation of Everyday Life
- The Individual–Society Relationship
- The Sociology of Everyday Life
- Conclusion

A story is told about a man who became a fixture on the streets of Edinburgh, Scotland. He would stop people on Princes Street, a main thoroughfare, and ask them if they were sane. "If any replied Yes, he would retort—ah, but can you *prove* it? And, if they could not, he proceeded triumphantly to show them that *he* at any rate could prove his sanity, by producing his own certificate of discharge from a mental hospital" (Gellner, 1975:431). This little anecdote raises significant questions about how we show that we are sane and the criteria we use in deciding whether others are insane. Mental illness is a social construction. A pivotal issue seems to be whether a "competent authority" will state for the record that an individual is "sane" and normal or "insane" and abnormal (Curra, 2000). At the root of this difficulty is the fact that people's behaviors can be seen as appropriate or inappropriate only in terms of the societies and situations in which they take place. "Definitions of mental disorder are culture-bound; what is labeled crazy in one society or social context may be seen as perfectly normal in another—or possessed, extraordinary, saintly, inspired by the holy spirit" (Goode, 2001:381–82). Our interpretations of the world around us are context-dependent. Those interpretations, however, are neither static nor self-evident. They are products of our experiences and the labels passed down to us from those we trust or from those in power, or both.

In response to growing concern about cross-cultural misunderstandings, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) adopted guidelines in 1995 that explicitly recommend considering cultural and ethnic factors when diagnosing or treating patients. With the rise in immigration to the United States during the last several decades, doctors increasingly must diagnose and treat patients whose symptoms do not appear in Western textbooks (Goleman, 1995; Alegría et al., 2011). For example, whereas Americans sometimes fear that they will be embarrassed by their bodies, Japanese people sometimes experience disabling fears, known as "taijin kyofusho," that their bodies will embarrass *others*. Malaysian men may be stricken by "koro," the sudden and intense fear that their penises and testicles will recede into their bodies and kill them. Latin Americans can succumb to "bouffée délirante," sudden outbursts of excited, confused, violent,

or agitated behavior (Weitz, 2001:193). Are these odd behaviors? Only within the context of U.S. cultural definitions of "normal" behavior (see box).

Female Circumcision? Or Female Genital Mutilation?

The topic of female circumcision, or female genital mutilation (FGM),* continues to be hotly debated among academics, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and the popular press (Wade, 2009; 2012). Defenders of the practice (including some women) say it is a *cultural* issue and that the Western world simply does not understand or, put more strongly, Western critics are asserting a self-centered imperialism over their perceived inferiors (Nnaemeka, 2005). Western opposition to the practice has become part of United States policy on human rights that has attracted detractors claiming that such laws discriminate, rather than protect, immigrant communities. Isabelle Gunning (1999:51) argues that anti-FGM policies are less about women's well-being, but provide a means "for politicians to pretend to address race and gender issues."

Female circumcision has been performed since ancient times and continues to be practiced around the globe. Customary female genital surgery is far less familiar in the United States and other Western countries (though there are small pockets of immigrant groups that practice it). It is primarily practiced in many East and West African countries, among particular ethnic groups in other regions of Africa, and in some parts of Southeast Asia (for example, Malaysia) and the Middle East. In some African countries, the prevalence among women aged fifteen to forty-nine is very high (over 80 percent). These include estimates from Djibouti (93 percent), Egypt (91 percent), Eritrea (89 percent), Guinea (96 percent), Mali (85 percent), Sierra Leone (91 percent), Somalia (98 percent), and northern Sudan (89 percent) (Public Policy Advisory Network, 2012).

The primary purpose of female genital mutilation is to protect a girl from sexual temptations and thereby preserve her marriageability. There are firmly entrenched beliefs about the insatiable nature of female sexual desire in most practicing societies. The "uncut" are considered "dirty" and unmarriageable. Many parents say that if they fail to have their daughters cut, no respectable men will associate with the girls, who will end up "running wild like American women" (Dugger, 1996b; MacFarquar, 1996). In fact, many immigrants to the United States make tremendous sacrifices to save enough money to send their daughters back to their home country to have the operation performed (Dugger, 1996b). The practice was made illegal in the United States in 1997.

Westerners have difficulty understanding women's desire to continue this tradition. Critics of Western *ethnocentrism*—applying standards of our own culture to other cultures—point out that genital surgery increases women's status in societies where it is practiced. What might come as a surprise is the fact that clitoridectomies were not uncommon in the United States and Europe through the latter part of the 19th century. The practice was based on the belief that elimination of all sources of female sexual sensation would "cure" masturbation and prevent nymphomania—not to mention orgasm, which was considered an "ailment" that could be cured by removing the clitoris (Dreifus, 2000). Until the mid-1940s, clitoridectomies were routine for female patients in many mental hospitals. Views that women should be sexually "pure" are not limited to non-Western cultures.

Ethnocentrism notwithstanding, FGM is troubling. Women who have undergone FGM, often at a very young age, report that it is excruciatingly painful. FGM is seldom practiced under sterile conditions, with anesthesia and precise surgical instruments. The "surgery" is performed most frequently by untrained individuals who use sharp rocks, razor blades, kitchen knives, broken glass, or even their teeth. Short-term effects include excruciating pain, hemorrhage, tetanus, gangrene, and blood poisoning; long-term effects include sterility, increased difficulty in childbirth, permanent incontinence, painful intercourse, and lack of sexual pleasure.

(continued)

The practice of FGM is waning. Senegal, Togo, and at least five other African countries have banned clitoridectomy. Although some African women have been working to eliminate the practice in their own countries, there is considerable resistance from both women and men, who strongly object to having Western values imposed on them (Dugger, 1996a; MacFarquar, 1996; Wade, 2009; 2012). Waris Dirie, a Somali woman who underwent FGM at age 5 and later fled Somalia to escape an arranged marriage to a 60-year-old man, becoming a fashion model in London and United Nations special ambassador on FGM, says Westerners should not try to change African customs; changes must come from within countries themselves.

Will the practice continue? Probably. Though it will likely depend upon the way it is labelled, discussed, and, perhaps most importantly, performed. Misunderstandings persist all across the board. As Lisa Wade (2012:42) remarks:

> The heat in this debate is derived, then, from both sides erasing diversity in favor of stereotyping. Much in the same way that some scholars conflate "Africans" with "barbarism" and construct a thing called "female genital mutilation" out of a wide range of practices, some postcolonial critics (Western and non-Western alike) conflate "Western feminists" with "cultural imperialism" and construct a thing called "anti-FGM discourse" out of a diverse set of arguments.

As scholars, it is imperative that we retain a balanced view of today's cutting practices (including male circumcision) across non-Western and Western countries.

* Use of the term "circumcision" to describe the range of procedures performed on females is objectionable to some people on the grounds that it suggests a less severe procedure than occurs. Use of the term "genital mutilation" is offensive to others, particularly in instances in which no permanent alteration of the genitalia occurs (Williams and Sobieszczyk, 1997).

■ Cultural Expectations and Everyday Interactions

Like many around the world, as Americans we are born into an exceedingly complex **culture**. Its complexity derives from our increasingly pluralistic and diverse population made up of individuals with varying hopes, dreams, and desires. The term "culture" can be complex and elusive, which, in part, made it the 2014 "word of the year" because it was looked up more frequently than any other word (Steinmetz, 2014). At its most basic, *culture* means the collection of knowledge, beliefs, customs, and morals shared by members of a society or portion of a society. Our culture becomes so familiar to us at an early age that we tend to take it for granted. We normally do not question what we do and why we do it. Everyday life appears to be a reality that rarely requires explanation. It simply exists. The social world confronts us as an ordered and intelligible fact, regardless of whether we agree with that fact. We live our lives making moral judgments about what is right and what is wrong. We generally know which behaviors are proper and which would be improper in a given situation. Indeed, social life would be chaotic if we had to question at length the meaning of every behavior before we engaged in it. As Christian Smith contends, "to enact and sustain moral order is one of the central, fundamental motivations for

human action" (Smith, 2003:11). When we pull up beside a car at a red light, we know we should not stare at the occupants. When we meet a person for the first time, we do not need to ask ourselves how long we ought to shake hands. We do not expect new acquaintances to reveal their life problems to us. We would likely fear a stranger who boarded a nearly empty bus or train and deliberately sat next to us. We expect students to shut off or at least mute their cell phones when they come to class (hint hint). There are, in short, an extraordinary number of **cultural expectations** we learn virtually from birth that lend order and organization to our daily interactions with others. Such "background expectancies" constitute the fundamental rules in accordance with which people normally act. These rules are often difficult to specify, though a quick Google search for "etiquette" will reveal that many book authors have tried. These rules, however, reflect our mutually held assumptions about proper and conventional behavior.

The central goal of this book is to analyze **everyday interactions** or communications from a sociological point of view. This first chapter provides a rationale for the study of routine social encounters in which everyone participates. The authors will also begin to outline the theoretical perspective we consider to be most valuable in exploring how transactions with others are accomplished. This is the **symbolic interactionist perspective** (see Fine, 1993; Hewitt and Shulman, 2010), which centers attention on how individuals interpret and give meanings to the daily interactions that make up their **social worlds**.

To begin our presentation of this perspective, we will first consider the numerous social conventions that serve as guides for human behaviors and the maintenance of social order. Beyond that, they also serve as the basis on which everyday interactions are analyzed and interpreted by individuals. They therefore have a bearing on both the power of society to influence individuals' behaviors and the power of individuals to change or manipulate society.

■ Social Conventions as Guides for Social Order

There are thousands of cultural expectations that guide the minute details of our everyday interactions with others. These expectations are expressed as social conventions, or **norms,** which make up the rules for acceptable behaviors. Several volumes would be needed to describe all the norms in American society, ranging from proper table manners to the enormously complex regularities of face-to-face and computer-mediated discourse. Together these norms make our daily encounters reasonably predictable, so we know what is expected of us and what to expect of others. Conventions such as those governing use of space, time, and posture or gesture also provide indications of the relative power, prestige, and status among the individuals taking part in interactions.

The authors of this book maintain that social life would be utterly unmanageable if there were no broadly shared consensus about how mem-

bers of a society ought to conduct themselves in the myriad situations encountered in daily life. Social conventions or shared norms based on cultural expectations make everyday life possible and, by extension, constitute the basis for order in the society.

Spatial Conventions

The study of spatial conventions or norms regarding space between people in everyday behaviors has been labeled **proxemics.** Our **personal space**, "that piece of the universe you occupy and call your own" (Samovar and Porter, 2001), is contained within an invisible boundary surrounding the body. With few exceptions, we do not allow others to violate this personal territory. Cultures that stress individualism (for example, England, the United States, Germany, Australia) generally demand more space than do collective cultures. Many Africans, in contrast, "get physically close to complete strangers and stand even closer when conversing" (Richmond and Gestrin, 1998:95). This **territoriality** is evident in numerous types of daily encounters in American life. The next time you are waiting in an airline (or bus, or train) terminal, notice how people have arranged their luggage to create a zone surrounding them. On public transportation, notice how people go to great lengths to prevent someone from sitting in the seat next to them. Passengers often keep to themselves and purposefully disengage with others in order maintain a certain degree of stability during their trip among, and not with, others (Kim, 2012). Likewise, as many of you know, students in many classrooms soon develop a proprietary interest in their seats. They lay claim to a particular seat early in the term, which they thereafter feel they own for all practical purposes. And if someone is already in "your seat" when you get to class, you're likely to feel a shift in stability and order because your territory has been invaded and conquered by someone else's bottom.

Spatial conventions serve as an ordering device that sets rules and limits for most everyday interactions. In American society, normal conversational distance is about 2 feet, for example. We become increasingly uncomfortable when anyone comes closer. Imagine how you would react if a stranger came up to you and began to talk to you with his or her face only inches from yours. Such a person was depicted as "the close talker" in the *Seinfeld* episode "The Raincoat." In fact, much of Jerry Seinfeld's humor relies on the recognition and breaking of everyday conventions (Paolucci and Richardson, 2006).

The conventions about appropriate distance often work in conjunction with use of the eyes. In the elevator in a public building, for example, the occupants may avoid eye contact with one another by looking either at the floor or at the flashing numbers over the door. A plausible explanation is that eye contact is an invitation to verbal contact. The seminal interpretive sociologist Georg Simmel wrote that "the eye is destined for a completely unique sociological achievement: the connection and interaction of individ-

uals that lies in the act of individuals looking at each other. This is perhaps the most direct and purest interaction that exists" (Simmel, [1907] 1997:111). As such, we tend to avoid making eye contact in order to avoid conversing with strangers in a situation where we think our personal space might be violated.

Four common distances used in interpersonal communication were distinguished by Edward Hall, an anthropologist who continues to have a considerable influence on analyses of everyday interactions across cultures. For his initial study, he used observations and interviews with middle-class adults, mainly in the northeastern United States, as a basis for categorizing the spatial conventions that govern the distances people maintain between themselves in their communications with one another.

The closest encounters, according to Hall, take place at 0 to 18 inches, or within **intimate distance.** They include activities such as lovemaking, wrestling, or whispering, which involve either actual body contact or very close proximity. At this distance, Hall says, "the presence of the other person is unmistakable and may at times be overwhelming because of the greatly stepped-up sensory inputs. Sight (often distorted), olfaction, heat from the other person's body, sound, smell, and feel of breath all combine to signal unmistakable involvement with another body" (Hall, 1969:116).

Encounters at 1.5 to 4 feet take place at **personal distance,** in Hall's terms. The space between individuals at this distance can be thought of as "a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between

itself and others" (p. 119). Most daily conversations take place within this range. Encounters that occur from 4 to 12 feet apart are said to take place at **social distance.** Interactions at casual social gatherings generally occur within this range. Encounters more than 12 feet apart are said to occur at **public distance,** "well outside the circle of personal involvement." In political addresses or theatrical performances, for example, "the voice is exaggerated and amplified, and much of the communication shifts to gestures and body stance" (p. 106).

In American society, conceptions of appropriate distance and personal space expand and contract, depending on the situation. How close to each other two people stand often is considered evidence of the degree of intimacy between them. Business conversations are carried out at one distance, talks between friends at another, and interactions between lovers at still another. The relative status or position of various people also can be inferred from the spatial distances they maintain. The distance between the teacher and the students in a classroom, for example, is a mark of the *differences* in their power and prestige. As the traditionally rigid status distinctions between teacher and student have been reduced in recent years, the way space is planned and used in classrooms also has changed. In many schools, raised platforms and fixed rows of seats have been replaced by movable chairs and circular arrangements, in hopes of facilitating more direct and informal interactions between students and teachers. "Flipping" the classroom by rearranging the space in unconventional ways has become a popular practice intended to more fully engage students and instructors alike (Tucker, 2012).

Hall and Hall's (1990) work details cultural variations in the use of and response to space. They show that perceptions of private territory, conversational distances, and public distances maintained by Americans, Germans, French, Japanese, and Arabs vary greatly. The arrangement of offices provides a good example of how culture affects use of space. In Germany, where privacy is stressed, office furniture is spread throughout the office. In Japan, on the other hand, where group participation is encouraged, desks may be arranged hierarchically in the center of a large, common room with no walls or partitions (McDaniel, 2000). Supervisors and managers are positioned nearest the windows. "This organization encourages exchange of information, facilitates multitask accomplishments, and promotes the Confucian concept of learning through silent observation" (Samovar and Porter, 2001:187). There has been a recent trend toward more "open space" floor plans. Today, more than 70% of U.S. employees work in an open office environment, and individual work spaces shrank from 225 square feet in 2010 to 190 square feet in 2013 (Cagnon et al., 2014.) Changing the places where people work, as the theory goes, will change *how* people work.

The way furniture is arranged in the home also communicates something about the culture. Visitors to the United States from France, Italy, and Mexico are often surprised at living rooms with furniture pointed toward

the television. For them, conversation is important—facing seating toward a television hardly encourages people talking to one another (Samovar and Porter, 2001).

Spatial conventions constitute only one aspect of the cultural expectations that lend order and predictability to everyday interactions. Inferences about differences in power, prestige, and status among individuals based on their use of personal space must be confirmed or rejected by other aspects of their behavior, such as regard for time, facial expressions, posture, and verbalization.

Time Conventions

Seconds, minutes, and hours are not simply measures of time with a constant meaning. They assume different symbolic values in different contexts, under different circumstances, and in front of different audiences. The meanings we attach to time are specific to particular situations and may, like spatial conventions, attest to differences in power, prestige, and status among persons. Students place a greater subjective value on a professor's time than on their own, for example. Entering a professor's office, students often begin their conversations with the declaration "I know you're probably busy, but . . ." and during the conversation they look for cues to determine whether they are exceeding an "appropriate" time limit in the office.

While time is measured in such absolutely defined units as seconds, minutes, and hours, each interval is not experienced in an identical fashion. The time spent on an important job interview will carry a different meaning from the same amount of time spent on the tennis court, for example. Albert Einstein once commented on the relativity of time by saying that two minutes in an uncomfortable situation seems like two hours. Like all other features of any culture, time is experienced subjectively.

Time Concepts in Contemporary Societies. There are clear understandings about most time conventions in American society. Imagine the reaction if you shook someone's hand for 60 seconds instead of the conventional 4 to 5 seconds, for example. Americans often plan their behavior to occur in a particular time sequence. As with other social conventions or norms, however, there is considerable variation in expectancies about time within the society, depending on circumstances and the individuals involved.

Temporal (time-related) conventions and perceptions are linked to a society's level of urbanization and industrialization. The more complex, rationalized, bureaucratized, urbanized, and industrialized a society is, the more rigorous, concrete, and linear its conception and treatment of time will be. In a highly developed urban-industrial society, precision of timing is of great importance (see chapter 11). In fact, there is a classic argument that an orientation to time, rather than to task or social activities, becomes the crucial characteristic of industrial capitalist societies (Thompson, 1967).

This argument is based on the classical writings of Karl Marx and Max Weber, two of the 19th-century thinkers who helped lay the groundwork for

sociology. Marx believed that the regulation and exploitation of labor time is the central characteristic of capitalism; that is, the exchange of commodities is in effect the exchange of labor time. Capitalism entails the attempts by the **bourgeoisie** either to extend the working day or to work labor more intensively. Later writers have demonstrated just how much conflict in industrial capitalism is focused around time—capital's right to determine hours of work and labor's attempt to limit those hours (see, for example, Walsh and Zacharias-Walsh, 2001).

Weber demonstrated that the Protestant Ethic encouraged people to develop themselves as subjects oriented to saving time and maximizing activity: "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. . . . Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary to health . . . is worthy of absolute moral condemnation" (Weber, [1904–5] 1930:158). As Benjamin Franklin said, "Time is money"—to waste time is to waste money (Weber, [1904–5] 1930:48).

Simmel, writing at the onset of the 20th century, described how life in the new "metropolis" required extensive use of clocks and watches in order for people's travel arrangements and appointments to occur efficiently. Efficient time management was part of the overly rationalized city. According to Simmel, "If all the watches in Berlin suddenly went wrong in different ways even only as much as an hour, its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time" (Simmel, [1905] 1950:413).

Virtually all Americans, including many children, consider it essential to have a timekeeping device. In the late 20th century, it was typically a wristwatch. Today it is more likely to be some other type of handheld device, such as a cell phone, that displays the time. Americans often must know exactly what time it is. The city dweller's constant preoccupation with time and punctuality has been identified as a central characteristic of urban life. And the perceived acceleration of time has been noted as a key feature of late modern or postmodern times (Harvey, 1989; Flaherty, 2011). Conversely, attempts to combat the supposed need for instant gratification—express lanes and minute rice—have emerged in the form of such movements as "slow food" and "slow city" (Pink, 2008). Marked by an intentional effort to slow time down by respecting the daily rituals of eating and walking, these movements demonstrate the subjective nature of the ways that time is experienced.

Generalization about the connection between time perception and extent of urbanization notwithstanding, we should still be clear on the idea that the meaning of time varies from culture to culture. Differences in time orientation have a number of analogues in the way international business, for example, is handled and in the way people relate to one another. There is much more to business than just business in many parts of the world. Cultural distinctions in terms of protocol regarding appropriateness of jumping right into business discussions before a get-acquainted interlude can lead to problems. This cultural distinction is the greatest area of difference between American and Guatemalan styles of doing business, for example.

In Guatemala, a strong personal relationship precedes solid business opportunities, which is also the case for Latin America in general. According to an article in *Business America*, an inexperienced American visitor often tries to force a business relationship:

> The abrupt "always watching the clock" style rarely works in Guatemala. A better informed business executive would engage in small talk, indicate an interest in the families of his or her business associates, join them for lunch or dinner, and generally allow time for a personal relationship to develop. (*Business America*, 1994:8)

Think about the way Americans talk about time: "losing time," "saving time," "making time," "killing time," and so on. Life in industrialized society is so enmeshed with the clock that its inhabitants are often oblivious to how eccentric their temporal beliefs can appear to others (Levine, 1997). Robert Levine describes an exchange student from Burkina Faso in eastern Africa who found the concept of "wasting time" confusing because there is no such thing as wasting time in that country. What is truly wasteful, perhaps even sinful, is to not make sufficient time available for the people in your life (Levine, 1997). One of your authors has traveled to this country and observes that in this highly "relational" culture it would be seen as improper not to greet neighbors and have fairly lengthy conversations about their families. No one rushes, and the sort of frantic American relationship with time is nonexistent, at least in the villages.

As an exercise, you might pay attention over the next week or so to the way you think about and treat time. As you plan your study assignments, for example, do you devote one evening's study to your sociology, another evening for a second subject, and so on, or do you read in several subject areas each day? Which mode of studying do you find most comfortable and why? As you travel to your classes in the morning, do you leave extra time to ensure that you won't be late for class? If you happen to arrive late, how do you feel upon entering the room and what do you imagine is running through the mind of your professor? After class, as you are heading out to meet a friend for lunch, do you quickly excuse yourself from an unexpected conversation with a classmate or do you presume that the person waiting for you will understand if you are late? How late can you be without expecting your friend to be upset? Will he or she be angry if you are 30 seconds late, 2 minutes late, 5 minutes late, 10 minutes late, half an hour late? At what point do you call or send a text message? If you are the one waiting, how long will it be before you become angry with a tardy friend? It might even be interesting to do a small, informal poll with students you know from abroad. Do they think the way you do about these matters?

The Power to Make Others Wait. Bureaucracy, a predominant influence in modern society (see chapter 7), demands that much time be spent waiting for others or for goods and services. The study of delay in a mass-consumption society is a significant area of sociological inquiry because so much time must be spent waiting.

In the most immediate sense, delay may be caused by the relations between supply and demand for goods and services. Analysis of waiting, however, uncovers delay strategies used to exercise power and status in social interactions. The scarcity or monopolization of valued services creates situations that allow workers to exercise power over clients and customers, for example. Bureaucrats have notoriously abused their power to make people wait. They might not themselves possess anything of value, but in their work roles they control access to resources people need. We cannot even drive our automobiles without first acquiring licenses and registration papers from bureaucrats who, in fact, have low status within their organizations.

Others may keep us waiting because of the perceived importance of the services or knowledge they have to offer. Doctors usually have patients waiting for them, but a patient who fails to show up for an appointment will be charged for the unused time. Executives may regularly keep visitors waiting, "cooling their heels" in an outer office. Barry Schwartz observes, "In general the more powerful and important a person is, the more others' access to him must be regulated. Thus, the least powerful may always be approached at will; the most powerful are seen only by appointment" (Schwartz, 1974:847). In a similar fashion, welfare recipients are often forced to wait at welfare offices, which, in turn, reinforces their subordinate status to the state. "In those recurring encounters at the welfare office, poor people learn that, despite endless delays and random changes, they must comply with the requirements of agents and their machines" (Auyero, 2011:24). So while we recognize that time may be subjective, it is not untainted by other social conditions and forces.

Facial, Posture, and Gesture Conventions

Since the 1980s the study of **nonverbal communication** has become a major area of inquiry in the social sciences and has engaged the attention of researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, communications, linguistics, and neuroscience. Much of the research on facial expression, for example, is concentrated on the universal presentation of such emotions as interest, surprise, disgust, anger, fear, and sadness (Keltner, 1995). Findings from a study on the ability to interpret facial expression of emotion may be of particular interest to you (especially if you are trying to convince your parents that studying abroad is beneficial!). Using student populations from the United States, Germany, South Africa, and Japan, researchers found that those who had traveled outside their home country were better receivers of nonverbal cues than were others (Swenson and Casmir, 1998). And apparently reading literary fiction—the types of works you read in English or humanities-based classes rather than popular works like *Fifty Shades of Grey*—increases individuals' ability to empathize and read others' actions (Greenfeldboyce, 2013).

Research on nonverbal communication shows that meanings conveyed by people's gestures and postures vary from context to context (Carroll and

Russell, 1996) and cross-culturally (see box). **Kinesics,** the sociological study of body movement and gesture, is concerned with the shared cultural meanings attached to nonverbal behaviors. Consensus about the significance of postures, gestures, and expressions enhances our ability to explain and predict our own and others' behaviors in daily interactions.

Ray Birdwhistell (1952, 1970), a pioneer in this field, maintains that the majority of interactions utilize nonverbal communication. We give cues to our meanings by the way we stand, our facial expressions, and the position of our heads. We control most of these expressions and consciously use them to express a range of emotions from anger to disappointment to love. All communicative expressions are not easily controlled, however. We find it hard to control such physiological responses as a red face in an embar-

"V" is for Victory?

One of the arguments in this chapter, consistent with our social psychological viewpoint, is that behaviors carry quite different meanings in different settings. To be sure, assuming that certain nonverbal gestures carry the same meaning in other cultures can get you into a lot of trouble. Dane Archer, who is known for his use of video to explore cultural differences in gestures, states emphatically, "Gestures are definitely NOT a universal language, as people who have worked, lived, or studied abroad may have noticed" (Archer, 1997b:79). Travelers sometimes learn this the hard way, inadvertently committing offense by using the culturally "wrong" gesture. Archer urges travelers to practice "gestural humility"—that is, "the assumption that the gestures we know from home will not mean the same things abroad, and also that we cannot infer or intuit the meaning of any gestures we observe in other cultures" (p. 80). Even prominent political figures can blunder. President George H. W. Bush greeted a group of Australians with a gesture he understood as World War II British prime minister Winston Churchill's famous "V for victory" gesture. However, President Bush made the gesture *backward* (his palm facing his own face), effectively flashing the crowd with the British Commonwealth equivalent of the American "finger" (or "screw you") gesture. The Australians were more dumbfounded than insulted, not quite believing that a head of state would stoop to such an unpresidential act (Archer, 1997b:80). Bush wasn't the only one to get it wrong—Margaret Thatcher did the same thing when she was prime minister of the United Kingdom.

Archer has videotaped hundreds of hours of ESL (English as a Second Language) students demonstrating gestures, resulting in the documentary videos *A World of Gestures: Culture and Nonverbal Communication* (1991) and *A World of Difference: Understanding Cross-Cultural Communication* (1997a). These documentaries provide numerous examples of nonverbal communication with different cultural meanings. Perhaps the most famous is the American "OK" sign, which means "money" in Japan, "zero" in France, "homosexuality" in Ethiopia, and an obscenity in Latin America! Similarly, the American raised thumb gesture of "good luck" is a vulgar gesture meaning "sit on this" in Sardinia and "screw you" in Iran (Archer, 1997a). Other examples of nonverbal communication with different meanings in different cultures include holding hands, shrugging, silence, and use of eyes in interpersonal expressions (Singh et al., 1998). Bodily smells—whether natural or perfumed—have varying meanings across cultural and situational contexts (Waskul and Vannini, 2008; Borer, 2013).

If, however, you wish to avoid miscommunication, there is one gesture that carries virtually universal meaning. Most people will know that you mean to express appreciation when you smile.

rassing situation or involuntary hand tremors during high anxiety. Often we look for these expressions in others with whom we are interacting as a check on their emotions or attitudes.

An interesting example of the way our internal emotional states are reflected in outward appearance is the case of lying. Nonverbal behaviors that are significantly more frequent with lying include blinking and an increased number of what have been termed *adaptors*. These are nervous habits such as scratching or twiddling one's hair (Ford, 1996). Other physical cues believed to be associated with lying include an increased incidence of leaning forward, licking the lips, touching the nose, averting one's gaze, and handling objects (Henahan, 1999).

Raising the hand to the nose has been reported in many cultures as a movement associated with lying. This gesture may be related to the fact that the nose contains erectile tissues that engorge when a person is lying, sort of a "Pinocchio effect" (Henahan, 1999). Whether a lie is benign, such as a joke to make someone laugh, or malicious, to deceive someone and put him or her in harm's way, can often be determined by facial gestures. Consider, as Clifford Geertz (1973) did in his discussion of meaningful action, the distinction between blinks and winks. Blinks are involuntary. You've probably blinked a few dozen times while reading this chapter without even knowing it. Winks, on the other hand, are intentional. They are meaningful. A wink rather than a blink or a nose scratch can signal that a lie is meant for playful purposes or other nonthreatening intentions.

The simplest nonverbal gestures can communicate a great deal. Think of a skier or skater who falls and then exaggerates the effect by lying on the cold ground longer than necessary, with arms and legs flung out. Through such exaggeration the person may wish to communicate, "I know I look kind of silly, but understand that I am really a quite competent person and you should not take this momentary awkwardness very seriously." Sometimes gestures of this sort are used in conjunction with verbal utterances, as when a woman runs headlong to catch a bus or elevator before it leaves, only to have the doors close in her face. At this point she might stand, hands on hips, moving her head from side to side, muttering. Her comments are supposedly made to herself, but they also may be meant to be heard by anyone within earshot. They might be intended to communicate, "Understand that although this has happened, I remain fully in control of myself."

Avoiding Communication. Nonverbal communication can be instrumental in avoiding communication. Moore (1998) observed "courtship rejection signals" by women attempting to discourage the attention of men in singles' bars. This is an interesting study, given that most research on courtship focuses on behaviors that individuals use to *attract* partners (see chapter 5). The women Moore observed used 17 behaviors to demonstrate disinterest or rejection, including facial expressions such as yawning, frowning, and sneering; gestures such as negative head shaking or putting hands in pockets; and posture patterns such as arm crossing or holding the torso

rigidly. A number of signals involved the eyes—for example, *gaze avoidance*. This occurred when the woman did not make eye contact with the man, despite the fact that he was looking directly at her. She looked at other people or at another point in the room, or she made eye contact with someone else at the table. Other eye signals that functioned as rejection signals included *upward gaze*, when she looked at the ceiling, and *hair gaze*, when she drew her hair across her face and looked at the ends (Moore, 1998).

People often use props as an aid in such situations. We would be hard-pressed to explain why some people wear sunglasses on the subway, for example, unless we considered their use in shielding the "improper" use of eyes. Other props such as iPods or cell phones—Goffman (1963) would call these "involvement shields"—are also used to avoid any kind of contact with others who are physically present. Avoidance may itself be a form of social interaction—we must sometimes communicate to others that we do not wish to communicate. Particularly in urban interactions with strangers, we must systematically take one another into account in order to avoid unwanted encounters (see chapter 4). When such strategies don't work, however, we enter the sometimes dangerous world of the "peeping Tom" or the sexual predator. The unwanted gaze can be seen as infringement of the social norms of privacy in both private and public settings (Rosen, 2011).

Rules for Physical Contact

There also are clear conventions regulating actual physical contact between individuals (Henley, 1986). A commonplace behavior such as hand-holding is a highly regulated activity, for example. A few questions suggest the range of these regularities: Who can hold hands with whom? Is it more appropriate for women to hold hands in public than it is for men? Why? Is there an age-related factor influencing who can hold hands with whom? Would a female in her 20s feel uncomfortable holding her father's hand while walking down the street? Would a male of the same age feel self-conscious holding his mother's hand in a restaurant?

We share clear expectations about who may touch whom, on what part of the body, and in what context. Different meanings and symbolic significance are attached to different parts of the body. On the field, male athletes pat each other's bottoms after significant plays or outstanding personal efforts, but this same behavior elsewhere would hardly be interpreted as a display of male camaraderie. You might seek others' attention by lightly tapping them on the shoulder, but you would not grab them by the thigh. Sometimes it is considered appropriate for one person to touch another, but not vice versa. A teacher may, while explaining a point to a student, touch the student's shoulder. The student would hesitate to do the same to the teacher. Sometimes even the slightest touch (accidentally touching someone's foot under a dining table, for example) requires an immediate apology.

As with the other normative conventions detailed in this chapter, rules about touching vary considerably from culture to culture. Americans who

normally do not touch other people unless they are on a fairly intimate basis will feel comfortable in Japan, England, Scandinavia, and Australia, where similar rules prevail. Americans who travel to Middle Eastern countries, Latin American countries, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, or Russia may have to adjust to encounters, even among strangers, where people routinely touch each other. People from some Mediterranean cultures often hold the elbow of the person to whom they are speaking. For many Americans, this uninvited touching is nearly unbearable (Archer, 1997b).

A Blueprint for Everyday Life

This section has described only a small fraction of the types of rules and expectations that constitute a critical part of any culture. As the members of a society together acquire knowledge, beliefs, art, customs, morals, and other capabilities and habits, the culture evolves over time. A pattern of norms or conventions about what one can and cannot do in a given society emerges. A society is possible only because its members share these standards and cultural expectations.

Commonly held ideas about how one ought to behave provide members of the same culture with a blueprint for conducting their everyday lives. Knowledge of cultural rules and social conventions is not itself enough to ensure social order, however. Human beings constantly interpret and negotiate such rules.

■ Beyond Social Conventions: The Interpretation of Everyday Life

The sociologist's job—to explain human behavior—would be quite simple if behaviors were the product only of the types of social conventions we have mentioned. Were that the case, we would only have to set about cataloging all of the rules to which people in American society normally conform. Alas, things are not quite so simple! It would be more accurate to say that these conventions or shared norms constitute the *boundaries* within which people interact. Alone they are not sufficient to explain how daily encounters are managed. Beyond knowledge of background rules, successful interaction requires engaging in a **process of interpretation** through which a situation is assessed and meanings are assigned to a person's own behaviors and those of others. Though our interpretations of people, places, and things may be different—since they depend upon such cultural factors as race, class, and gender identification, among others—the *necessary* act of interpretation in everyday life is at least one practice that all able-minded individuals have in common.

Assessing Meanings and Formulating Behaviors

It may very well be true that you know what to do when entering a new classroom for the first time because you have learned from an early age the

general rules applicable to classroom behavior. You are unlikely to sit down in the chair behind the desk at the front of the room, for example. You have learned not to speak unless directed to do so by the teacher. If you want to talk, you would probably raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged by the teacher. And so on. Knowledge of these rules alone, however, will not allow you to predict fully the meanings and patterns of behavior that will become central in any particular classroom. That is, the rules that govern classroom behavior will be products of ongoing actions by the particular teacher and students involved, all of whom must constantly take the others' actions into account when formulating their own lines of action (Karp and Yoels, 1976).

As in any other setting, participants in the classroom will be engaged in an ongoing assessment of one another's actions. Students will soon define the situation as to whether in a particular class the teacher *really* wants discussion, whether it is safe to make one's opinion known, whether one ought to laugh at the teacher's jokes, and, if so, how raucously. Decisions of this sort cannot be anticipated or determined solely through knowledge of the general and learned conventions applicable to most classrooms.

Interpretation in the Acting Situation

Behavior is always produced via interpretation in the **acting situation.** The expectancies surrounding behavior in any situation always emerge from the interaction itself. They may be in a state of continual transformation. According to Herbert Blumer, "In the flow of group life there are innumerable points at which participants are redefining each other's acts" (1962:184). Interpretation is an ongoing process that is achieved through shared expectations. Though meanings are continuously negotiated, they are never negotiated totally anew as if new ideas are somehow created out of thin air without any relation to past encounters and situations.

Suppose someone approaches you and asks for a light for a cigarette. This is an apparently simple request, but, in fact, it is not immediately clear how you would respond. You probably would believe the other person's motives to be different under different circumstances, and in different time periods. Smoking was once a fairly ubiquitous behavior. Just watch a movie filmed before the 1990s. Or stream an episode of the television show *Mad Men*, which takes place in a New York advertising firm in the 1960s where everyone is lighting up, and often drinking liquor, at all times of the day in offices, restaurants, subways, and other public places. Situational factors or variables will influence the meaning you attach to the request for a light. Would the gender of the person make any difference in your interpretation? Would you possibly attribute different motives to a stranger and to a close friend making the same request? Would it make any difference where the request was made (at a friend's house, on campus, or outside a bar)? What role might such factors as the time of day, the age of the requester, or his or her dress, race, demeanor, and facial expression play in your interpretation

of the request? How might you react if you recently quit smoking or knew someone who died of lung cancer? Even the most apparently simple human transactions may call forth quite different meanings, which we confer on them by piecing together bits of information in the situation.

Virtually all our behaviors depend on our ability to assess features of the situation in which we are acting and then define it. Some situations may require more extensive interpretation than others, however. In some situations we realize that we must be quite strategic in formulating our behaviors. In these situations we might engage in extensive mind work or mental gymnastics prior to acting. We might consciously try to manipulate those with whom we interact in order to control the **definition of the situation** they will come to have. These may be situations that we consider risky or in which we perceive obstacles to the realization of our goals.

■ The Individual–Society Relationship

The social conventions described in the preceding section lend support to a central idea in the symbolic interactionist approach to the study of sociology: *The capacity of humans to interact and communicate effectively with one another is a truly extraordinary ability and worthy of in-depth investigation.* The explanation of how social conventions reflect the social order and influence the interpretation of everyday events has brought out a number of general points. First, although we may not think much about it, there is a clear ordering to our everyday lives. There are underlying dimensions to everyday social life that can be discovered. Second, the coherence of everyday life depends on our possession of a truly remarkable range of knowledge. Third, our behaviors are a product of our ability to interpret social situations and confer meanings on them. Fourth, rather than being regarded as a given, social order should be considered a human accomplishment that requires explanation. Fifth, if we seek to understand how, in the broadest sense, a society is possible and how it operates as an ongoing concern, it is a good strategy to begin by exploring how we carry out our day-to-day interactions.

This approach also supports an even more general sociological theme: the relationship between the individual and the society. We live in a society that significantly influences our behaviors through numerous social conventions. At the same time, we exercise substantial freedom of action relative to those in the past and present living under highly restrictive control (for example, Hitler's Nazi Germany; South Africa under apartheid; the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; Libya under Muammar Gaddafi's rule). The desire for freedom, which can come at a cost, is practically a universal human trait. It is a paradox of human existence that while societies influence human behaviors, humans sometimes also transform societies. We must entertain simultaneously the apparently contradictory thoughts that humans are social products and that society is a human product.

Understanding Freedom and Constraint in Social Life

The abiding theoretical questions of sociology flow from consideration of the connection between the individual and society: How do individuals become functioning members of a society? How and why do they become responsive to the demands of a society? Why do they conform to society's rules? How is it that some people refuse to do so? To what extent is behavior determined by **social structure?** Just how much can individuals change societies?

Nearly all the great classical social theorists were intrigued by these questions. On the whole, their theoretical work may be read as attempts to understand the nature of the **social bonds** existing between individuals and the bonding of individuals to the society (see box). Those who are considered the founding figures of sociology—Karl Marx (1818–1883), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Georg Simmel (1858–1918), Max Weber (1864–1920), Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), and William Graham Sumner (1840–1910), among others—all broached questions of order and disorder, change and stability, deviance and conformity. These questions, of course, do not allow for single, definitive answers. They still are the guiding questions for

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917)

French sociologist Émile Durkheim was instrumental in establishing sociology as a social science, distinguishing "the scientific study of society and human behavior" from the field of philosophy and other social sciences. Central to Durkheim's work was the notion of society as a reality in its own right: Despite the variety of people within a society and the fact that some die and others are born, there is an order that exists above and beyond its specific components. Durkheim spoke of a "collective conscience;" the shared beliefs of members of a social unit. Perhaps most importantly, Durkheim showed that this order can be examined scientifically, through observations. These observations produce social statistics, or *social facts*, numbers that characterize a collectivity. For example, the birthrate of a society, although composed of thousands of individual births, is a statistic that exists at the level of society as a whole. Durkheim's emphasis on statistics reflected his personal concern to make sociology respectable to the ruling intellectual elites of the day. Then, as now, "science" was associated with numbers, with *quantitative* measurement. His classic work, *Suicide* ([1897] 1951), is based on a comparison of official statistics and historical records across groups.

Durkheim observed patterns in the data: Suicide rates in all the countries he examined tended to be higher among widowed, single, and divorced people than among married people; higher among people without children than among parents; and higher among Protestants than among Catholics. Rather than interpret this finding in terms of psychological states, Durkheim felt that the nature of *social* life was involved. He concluded that when group, family, or community ties are weak, people feel disconnected and alone. When these ties are strong, people have a supportive network that could protect to some extent against the individualism and alienation of life in modern society (see chapter 11).

Durkheim was a pivotal figure in the establishment of sociology in the French university system. His ideas not only had a profound impact in France but also played a major role in shaping American sociology.

sociological work, and sociologists collectively are still in the business of trying to understand just how societies and individuals influence one another. One thing seems clear, however. Comprehension of everyday life requires a conception of the individual–society relationship in which primacy is placed on neither the society nor the individual.

The authors of this book are convinced that any attempt to understand the operation of society that neglects the processes governing social interaction will be theoretically unsatisfying. Ultimately a society is composed of people interacting with one another. All explanations of human behavior must in some way account for individuals' intentions, motives, and subjective understanding of the situation in which they act. All human behavior is constructed from everyday **shared meaning structures.** We presume, in other words, that any effort to understand the operation of society as a whole must begin with and be built upon analysis of individuals' everyday lifeworlds. We agree with Peter Adler, Patricia Adler, and Andrea Fontana, who, in their review of critical works on the sociology of everyday life, comment, "Naturally occurring interaction is the foundation of all understanding of society. Describing and analyzing the character and implications of everyday life interaction should thus serve as both the beginning and end point of sociology" (1987:219). This is not to suggest that sociologists should give up the study of social structure in favor of the study of human interaction. Instead, we believe, along with a number of sociological theorists (see Maines, 2001; Fine, 2010; Harris, 2010) that the most fruitful sociological inquiries are based on an integration of the two levels of analysis, society and the individual. Simmel concluded one of his seminal essays on human interaction with the following mandate:

> One will no longer be able to consider as unworthy of attention the delicate, invisible threads that are spun from one person to another if one wishes to understand the web of society according to its productive, form-giving forces—this web of which sociology hitherto was largely concerned with describing the final finished pattern of its uppermost phenomenal stratum. ([1907] 1997:120)

These "delicate, invisible threads" are precisely the objects of inquiry that sociologists who recognize the foundational aspects of everyday life attempt to make visible. As the studies presented throughout this book suggest, we can detect these threads by focusing on the "form-giving forces" that individuals enact and rely upon to makes sense of their interactions, encounters, and experiences with others.

Too much sociology, we think, makes the mistake of accepting the **reification** of social structures by regarding them as having a life of their own independent of individuals. Much sociological work is based on the supposition that institutions are more than the sum of their parts and, once created, exert a force on individuals over which they have little control.

There is no question that institutions exert a strong force on individuals. Ample evidence of this can be found in the bureaucratic systems (see chap-

ter 7) that provide a structure for the lives of college and university students. There are certain things you are required to do if you wish to remain within the system. You must show up for exams, you must pay your tuition, you must follow certain course registration procedures, and so forth. In that sense the structure is real, powerful, and has an obdurate quality that transcends the existence of any particular student. The university has an independent life in the sense that it existed as an institution before you were born and will, in all likelihood, continue to exist after you graduate and, hopefully, move on to greener pastures.

Does this mean that your behaviors are utterly controlled by the academic bureaucracy? Does it mean that sociologists need not be concerned with the interactions among individuals within the institution and the definitions and meanings they give to their lives in it? Of course not! It should not come as news that students manipulate academic institutions. Through interaction with others, you determine just how hard you will work in your courses. You make, consult, and access judgments about professors on RateMyProfessor.com. You and your fellow students could collectively choose to make life difficult for your instructors by such strategies as choosing not to participate in class discussion or conning them into letting you turn in late term papers.

We are committed to the idea that, in large measure, human beings act according to the *interpretations* they make of social life. Individuals are not merely puppets pushed around by forces over which they have no control. Substantially, they make their own worlds. Unlike atoms, molecules, or stable elements of the physical universe, they think, construct meanings, and respond creatively to their environments. Consequently, the social world is in a state of continual process, change, and production. Values and attitudes change. Behaviors once thought taboo become incorporated into the repertoire of conventional behaviors. New social forms are created to meet needs better, and unpredictable fads are devised.

Humans thus experience choice and discretion in their everyday lives. But it would be misleading to minimize the significance of the constraints within which they must act. The dramas of daily life occur within larger historical and institutional settings. Because people are born into a world that is itself a product of the actions of previous generations, many areas of social existence have already been staked out for them. There are understood limits on their behavior. Societies have moral as well as geographical boundaries. And every society has its caretakers (for example, police, judges, psychiatrists) who are entrusted with the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of those boundaries and the power to do so (see chapter 8).

The Dynamic Interplay of Expectations and Interpretations

In our view, therefore, human behavior must not be seen exclusively as either the product of the social structures enveloping people or a matter of individual will and choice. There is a dynamic interplay between society's expectations for individuals and their own responses in situations.

The nature of the relationship between individuals and social structures is beautifully captured in a statement by sociologist Wendell Bell. Some people, he says, rather than following along like rats in a maze, view the social structure as tentative and proceed by experimentally testing to learn what parts of it can be manipulated. In his words,

> At the extreme, such persons may decide that the social structure, the maze itself, is subject to some extent to their will and may decide to shape it, as best they can, to suit themselves. . . . Usually in cooperation with others, some people try to manipulate the real world to conform more closely to their images of the future; push out some walls, add some new openings, widen the passageways, create some new opportunities. (Bell, 1968:163)

While society sets the ground rules within which we act, we do not unthinkingly respond to society's expectations. Behavior is also partially the result of our personal, subjective interpretations of the situations we face. The most appropriate conception of daily life, therefore, requires that we understand human behavior as an ongoing interchange, or a *dialectic,* between freedom and constraint.

■ The Sociology of Everyday Life

The authors of this book advocate the study of everyday interactions as a central area of sociological study *in its own right.* We believe sociologists cannot afford to neglect the study of everyday life. On theoretical grounds, we maintain that the study of such interactions is necessary to understand social order and change in society. In a still broader sense, as we analyze various aspects of everyday lives in later chapters, we will be exploring the limits and potentialities of human beings' relations with each other. This is, by any standard, an important endeavor.

You may wonder that if the study of everyday interaction is as important as we believe it to be, why is it necessary to argue for its merits as an area of sociological investigation? The fact is that the processes governing everyday life and accounting for its order have been largely ignored by many sociologists who consider them as, at best, only the starting point for their own broader, more **macrosociological investigation** of large-scale processes and social structures. Much sociology, in this respect, leaves wholly unattended the grounds on which it is constructed. The sociologist Harold Garfinkel made this point some time ago when he said, "Although sociologists take socially structured scenes of everyday life as a point of departure they rarely see, as a task of sociological inquiry in its own right, the general questions of how any such commonsense world is possible" (1967:36). Garfinkel is arguing that efforts to understand society as a whole depend on the **microsociological investigation** of individuals' daily interactions (see box).

Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology

Harold Garfinkel developed *ethnomethodology* (literally, people or folk methods) as a technique for looking beneath the "taken-for-granted" surface of daily life. His goal is to understand how people produce meaning out of their experiences. First we must consider the "seen but unnoticed," expected background features of everyday scenes that members of a society use as a scheme of interpretation. People respond to background expectancies but are at a loss to say of what the expectancies consist. For these background expectancies to come into view, "one must either be a stranger to the 'life as usual' character of everyday scenes, or become estranged from them" (Garfinkel, 1967:37). He is most famous for his "demonstrations," designed to "produce reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected" (p. 38). That is, by doing something that turns this world upside down, the unspoken reality is revealed.

Garfinkel sent his students out to expose this unspoken reality by "breaching" it. They entered elevators and stood facing the other occupants, rather than turning around to face the door. On visits home they acted as if they were strangers, asking permission to eat food, for example. In everyday conversations ("Hi, how are you?") they refused to respond in the expected manner ("What do you mean, 'how am I'? Physically? Emotionally?"). As you might expect, people's reactions were anything but positive, ranging from questioning the person's sanity to anger. The point was not to upset people but to upset the balance of everyday life, thus proving beyond doubt that certain taken-for-granted norms had been violated. According to Garfinkel, "there *is* order in the most ordinary activities of everyday life" (1996:7). The preoccupation in ethnomethodology's studies is "to find, collect, specify, and make . . . observable the . . . production and natural accountability of immortal familiar society's most ordinary organizational things in the world" (p. 6).

Why the Study of Interactions Has Been Neglected

A central reason why sociologists have failed to study everyday interactions systematically is their concern for conventional methods of scientific inquiry. Virtually since sociology's inception in the 19th century, sociologists have modeled their discipline after the natural sciences. They have been intent on using the same tools the natural scientist uses in their investigation of human behavior. We can call this "physics envy." This has led to a long-standing central concern with the establishment of causal laws about human society.

Moreover, social scientists have frequently embraced a version of scientific inquiry in which precise measurement of variables and the rigorous testing of propositions are the standard for judging scientific work. The notion that there is only one proper form of scientific inquiry is a somewhat naive conception of science, in our view. It immediately restricts the range of phenomena that may be investigated to those variables that are clearly quantifiable and hence measurable. Such a bias is reflected in the definition of a true behavioral *scientist* as a person who, when asked if he loves his mother, replies that he cannot answer until he has done an analysis of their correspondence.

We surely would not argue with attempts to measure accurately the variables of interest to social scientists. But the demand that social scientists be concerned only with observable, quantifiable, and measurable phenomena has directed attention away from basic processes of human communication, which often defy precise "measurement." Our idea of interaction is that people act in awareness of one another and mutually adjust their responses in light of the actions of others. We therefore want to consider such factors as their motives, their goals, the meanings they confer on the gestures of others, their identities, their self-concepts, and the processes through which they define social situations. These necessary elements for understanding social interaction are resistant to precise measurement. We must be concerned with what goes on in a person's head and how he or she interprets the information and sensory stimuli that make up social reality.

An appropriate metaphor might be the operation of a traditional clock. We cannot fully comprehend how such a clock works by looking only at the outside casing or examining only the regularity of the minute, hour, and second hands. Certainly it is easier to describe these visible outer mechanisms, just as it would be simpler only to document and measure actual behaviors. The study of interaction requires more: concern with the inner dialogue that people have with themselves both before they act and while they are acting.

A second reason sociologists have generally neglected the study of routine, everyday social encounters may be their long-standing preference for investigations of issues that have social policy implications. Sociologists have shown a preference for research areas that might persuade the public that sociologists have something to say about "important" issues. Understandably, they have concentrated their efforts on areas where they are likely to receive funding for their study. Funding agencies like definitive answers. Quantifiable measurements provide simple numerical answers to complex questions. Social problems such as juvenile delinquency, poverty, race relations, health delivery systems, aging, prostitution, drug addiction, environmental degradation, and gender and sex discrimination have always been and still are popular issues for sociological study. These areas provide much rich information on day-to-day interactions, but they have not typically been investigated with this goal in mind. As we will see in the following chapters, such is no longer the case.

What the Study of Interactions Should Accomplish

If the analysis of everyday interactions is to be accepted as a central area of sociological study, it must be able to accomplish specified goals. Our efforts ought to produce some type of new knowledge about human behavior. As Jack Katz (2001) suggests, we must be able to describe the "what," document the "how," and interpret and explain the "why" of social interactions and encounters.

Discovering Underlying Social Forms. In some respects, the facts of everyday life are obvious and accessible to anyone who carefully observes.

For that reason, our goal is never simply description of everyday life. Certainly our analysis begins with careful description, but beyond that we seek to appreciate how the facts of everyday behavior reveal deeper, often hidden dimensions of social life. The trick of sociological analysis is to identify recurring patterns of social life reflected in a range of behaviors. If we are successful, our analyses will let us see a familiar set of facts from new angles, which will add new dimensions to our understanding. Another way to express the same thought is that our analyses should "penetrate" the obvious and thereby reveal underlying aspects of social life.

Ever since the first trees bore fruit, it has been apparent to everyone that apples fall from trees. Before Sir Isaac Newton purposely observed this event, however, no one had ever related the falling of apples to the motion of the planets. Newton's contribution was the conceptual breakthrough that revealed the laws of gravity. Once that underlying dimension of the physical world was uncovered, the fact that apples fall from trees became somewhat insignificant. Newton's law allowed scientists to understand the behavior of any falling body. The discovery of underlying dimensions that reveal commonalities in a whole class of events is the real task of scientific inquiry. Scientists are less concerned with the *content* of events than with the common forms taken by apparently dissimilar events.

The "obvious" empirical facts of social life are important in the same way. It is our job to make plain how the facts of everyday life reflect underlying social forms (Simmel, 1950) or dimensions. To illustrate the point, social scientists interested in a phenomenon such as "religious devotion" should not just investigate what goes on in churches. They would do well to study also such seemingly diverse phenomena as labor union meetings, behaviors on national holidays, football games, and punk rock concerts. These are all events that could profitably be understood as expressions of religious devotion. The same intensity and reverence associated with religious rituals and symbols underlie these phenomena. Clearly, contexts or situations that differ widely in content (the content of church services is quite unlike the content of football games) can nevertheless display common social forms.

A phenomenon such as embarrassment is interesting, but we do not suggest studying it only to describe embarrassing situations. Our broader intention is to use these descriptions as a starting point for thinking clearly about more general issues such as risk, identity, performances, and deviance in interaction (see chapter 9). To use an earlier example in this chapter, we might be interested in detailing conventions of "touching" behavior to gain insight into patterns of intimacy in society, elements of body image, and power relations (see chapter 6).

If we wish to investigate how people behave in stressful, anxiety-related, or uncomfortable situations, we could focus on contexts where we expect them to experience stress, anxiety, and discomfort. We might choose to observe students in dormitories before final exams, for example. It would be true that we were observing behaviors in a dormitory, but we would not

be concerned with the context per se. We would be motivated to study dormitory life as a convenient context in which to develop an analysis of stress interaction. This analysis has significance far beyond the dormitory itself. In other words, sociological analysis must always carry us beyond the specific context we are investigating. The specific case of dormitory behavior becomes as incidental as apples falling from trees after we discover underlying elements of how humans behave under stress.

A danger faced by sociologists who study everyday life phenomena is the criticism that they are concerned with trivial events. We maintain, however, that sociological analysis of the routine events and worlds of everyday life often provides important insights and concepts that have a larger relevance for understanding social life. Throughout the following chapters we will be citing studies that provide a powerful explanation of human behavior. We can, however, mention here a few examples of the kinds of topics we have in mind. Gary Fine (1996) has studied the organizational culture and structure of restaurant kitchens. Arlie Russell Hochschild (1997) examines what happens "when work becomes home and home becomes work." Mitch Duneier and Harvey Molotch's (1999) study of urban street vendors uncovers the process of "interactional vandalism" in which street men are able to breach the norms of urban interaction. Yuki Kato (2011) found that suburban teenagers use the spatial metaphor of the "bubble" to both promote and criticize their middle-class identities and lifestyles. Colin Jerolmack (2013) explores the various ways that humans and animals—in his case, pigeons—interact in private and public places in order to uncover the differing meanings that individuals give to pigeons. A pigeon in New York, Berlin, and London, for example, is a bird of a different feather. Studies such as these affirm the necessity of looking at everyday life settings and interactions to understand the bases of social order and change in society at large.

Some of the most exciting and promising work is in the area of social inequality. Philippe Bourgois (1995) shows how the urban drug trade offers a path to status and economic success for young men who have no chance for industrial work nor the cultural capital to break into middle-class service jobs. Katheryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997) interviewed mothers on welfare to discover how they "make ends meet." Elijah Anderson (1999) shows how the desperate search for respect influences the everyday lives of young African Americans in the inner city. David Grazian (2007) uncovers how the masculine nightlife ritual of the "girl hunt" supports males' belief in the fantasy of the one-night stand as part of an ideology of male dominance and female passivity despite evidence to the contrary. And Patrick Grzanka and Justin Maher (2012) show how supposedly tongue-in-check websites such as Stuff White People Like reinforce white privilege by constructing a new and superficial kind of white "ethnicity."

Developing Sociological Skepticism. Unfortunately, there is no set of rules we can give that will allow you to discover the underlying forms of social life. What we can do in this book is let you see how social scientists

think about everyday phenomena, the particular imagination or consciousness they bring to the study of everyday events, and the kinds of questions that guide their analyses. The production of good ideas is not a mechanical process, as Stanislav Andreski (1972:108) notes:

> The so-called methods of induction are in reality methods of verification; they tell us how to test hypotheses *but not how to arrive at them.* Indeed, the latter process is just as much a mystery as it was in the days of Socrates: all that is known is that, *in order to conceive fruitful original ideas, one must have talent, must immerse oneself in the available knowledge, and think very hard.* (emphasis added)

In the chapters that follow we will familiarize you with the ideas of those who have written about everyday behaviors and share the knowledge they provide. We also will continue to detail the elements of the theoretical perspective—symbolic interaction—that we consider most useful for analyzing everyday events. The central goal of this volume, however, is to compel you to think very hard about how your daily interactions are organized and made sociologically intelligible.

At the risk of sounding too dramatic, we want to develop in those who read this book a kind of sociological skepticism. Good sociology demands a degree of skepticism. It is the sociologist's obligation to question those features of reality that appear obvious. Sociologists must strive to become strangers to the events and phenomena in their daily lives that they most take for granted. As a sociologist, therefore, you must step outside your "normal" role as a member of the society and ask how your behaviors are structured and endowed with meaning. Good sociology requires you to be skeptical enough to believe that things are not always as simple as they appear to be. In his seminal "invitation" to think sociologically, Peter Berger wisely wrote:

> Sociology is justified by the belief that it is better to be conscious than unconscious and that consciousness is a condition of freedom. . . . We contend that it is part of a civilized mind in our age to have come in touch with the peculiarly modern, peculiarly timely form of critical thought we call sociology. Even those who do not find in this intellectual pursuit their own particular demon . . . will by this contact have become a little less stolid in their prejudices, a little more careful in their own commitments and a little more skeptical about the commitments of others—and perhaps a little more compassionate in their journeys through society. (Berger, 1963:175)

We presume, then, that those things "everybody already knows," those apparently obvious aspects of the society with which you have grown up from infancy and remain committed to, can be subjected to sociological analysis. It is, we will show, an analysis that provides insight into the way people produce and construct their everyday existences. In this respect, we take on the professional obligation of questioning aspects of social life that may seem obvious and unproblematic. Our subject matter does not have

anything mysterious about it—we certainly grant that. The questions we ask about familiar life phenomena and the analyses deriving from these questions are intended to advance and deepen your understanding of the sociological topics to be discussed in the following pages.

The Everyday Self

From one day to the next, there are some beliefs, ideas, and feelings you bring with you. Of course we can all "wake up on the wrong side of the bed," as they say. But most days, we don't awaken wondering who we are, or at least not right away. Our early morning routines help remind us of who we are. Can you identify some of the material, temporal, and spatial "props" you use to help maintain your everyday self? Do you sit in the same seat at the dining table while you drink your coffee before you go to work or school in the morning? If not, in what other ways do you display or enact a core sense of self throughout your everyday activities?

Conclusion

The focus of this book is on the application of sociological principles, concepts, and ideas to your everyday life. It begins with the assumption that the value of sociology lies in its ability to provide fresh insight into events and situations that might ordinarily be taken for granted.

Space, time, gesture, and posture norms are examples of the underlying patterns in everyday life. These patterns become obvious only when we begin to look closely at everyday phenomena. Moreover, social order persists only because we share knowledge of an extraordinary range of cultural expectations. Beyond knowledge of the norms of social conventions based on these expectations, however, the meanings we attach to behaviors vary from context to context. Social norms only provide the boundaries for our encounters. We must, in addition, interpret the meanings our behaviors have in a particular setting.

While much of the analysis in this book concentrates on face-to-face interaction, we also point out that the dramas of daily life are played out within larger institutional and historical settings. As members of schools, families, churches or synagogues, and a multitude of other bureaucracies and institutions, we are obliged to behave in certain ways. Social structures diminish personal choice and discretion. At the same time, people manipulate social structures. Human behavior therefore is the product of neither the social structures enveloping individuals nor the individual's free will and choice. Rather, it is the result of a dynamic interplay between cultural expectations and people's interpretations of situations.

The notion that people must define and interpret the meanings of both their own and others' behaviors is basic to the perspective that guides our