SOCIOLOGY GLOSSARY

**Absolute poverty** A standard of poverty based on a minimum level of subsistence.

**Achieved status** A social position attained by a person largely through his or her own efforts.

**Affirmative action** policy intended to improve minority access to occupational and educational opportunities

**Ageism** systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old (Butler 1969)

**Agrarian society** The most technologically advanced form of preindustrial society, in which members are engaged primarily in the production of food but increase their crop yield through such technological innovations such as the plow.

**Alienation** disconnection of workers from their work, the product of their work, other workers, and species being, and other types of property.

**Anomie theory of deviance** A theory developed by Robert Merton that explains deviance as an adaptation either of socially prescribed goals or of the norms governing their attainment, or both.

**Anomie** state of normlessness

**Anticipatory socialization** Processes of socialization in which a person “rehearses” for future positions, occupations, and social relationships.

**Applied sociology** The use of the discipline of sociology with the specific intent of yielding practical applications for human behavior and organizations.

**Argot** Specialized language used by members of subculture.

**Ascribed status** A social position “assigned” to a person by society without regard for the person’s unique talents or characteristics.

**Basic sociology** Sociological inquiry conducted with the objective of gaining a more profound knowledge of the fundamental aspects of social phenomena. Also known as pure sociology.

**Bilateral descent** A kinship system in which both sides of a person’s family are regarded as equally important.

**Birthrate** The number of live births per 1,000 population in a given year. Also known as the *crude birthrate*.

**Bisexuality** classification of individuals according to their emotional-sexual relationships and lifestyle with persons of either sex

**Bourgeoisie** Karl Marx’s term for the capitalist class, the owners of the means of production.
Brain drain  The immigration to the United States and other industrialized nations of skilled workers, professionals, and technicians who are desperately needed in their home countries.

Bureaucracy  A component of formal organization in which rules and hierarchical ranking are used to achieve efficiency.

Capitalism  An economic system in which the means of production are held largely in private hands, and the main incentive for economic activity is the accumulation of profits.

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Caste  A hereditary rank, usually religiously dictated, that tends to be fixed and immobile.

Causal logic  The relationship between a condition or variable and a particular consequence, with one event leading to the other.

Census  An enumeration, or counting, of a population.

Charismatic authority  Max Weber’s term for power made legitimate by a leader’s exceptional personal or emotional appeal to his or her followers.

Class consciousness  In Karl Marx’s view, a subjective awareness of common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change.

Class system  A social ranking based primarily on economic position in which achieved characteristics can influence social mobility.

Class  A term used by Max Weber to refer to a group of people who have a similar level of wealth and income.

Classical theory  An approach to the study of formal organizations in which workers are viewed as being motivated almost entirely by economic rewards.

Clinical sociology  The use of the discipline of sociology with the specific intent of altering social relationships or restructuring social institutions.

Closed system  A social system in which there is little or no possibility of individual mobility.

Code of ethics  The standards of acceptable behavior developed by and for members of a profession.

Collective decision making  The active involvement of employee problem-solving groups in corporate management.

Colonialism  The maintenance of political, social, economic, and cultural domination over a people by a foreign power for an extended period.

Communism  As an ideal type, an economic system in which all property is communally owned and no social distinctions are made based on people’s ability to produce.

Community  A spatial or political unit of social organization that gives people a sense of belonging.

Concentric-zone theory  A theory of urban growth devised by Ernest Burgess that sees growth in terms of a series of rings radiating from the central business district.

Conflict perspective  A sociological approach that assumes that social behavior is best understood in terms of conflict or tension between competing groups.

Conformity  Going along with one’s peers—individuals of our own status who have no special right to direct our behavior.
Content analysis The systematic coding and objective recording of data, guided by some rationale.

Control group Subjects in an experiment who are not introduced to the independent variable by the researcher.

Control variable A factor held constant to test the relative impact of an independent variable.

Correlation A relationship between two variables in which a change in one coincides with a change in the other.

Counterculture A subculture that deliberately opposes certain aspects of the larger culture.

Credentialism An increase in the lowest level of education needed to enter a field.

Crime A violation of criminal law for which some governmental authority applies formal penalties.

Cultural relativism The viewing of people’s behavior from the perspective of their own culture.

Cultural transmission A school of criminology that argues that criminal behavior is learned through social interactions.

Cultural universal A general practice or belief found in every culture.

Culture lag Ogburn’s term for the period of maladjustment when the nonmaterial culture is still struggling to adapt to new material conditions.

Culture shock The feeling of surprise and disorientation that people experience when they witness cultural practices different from their own.

Culture The totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior.

Curanderismo Traditional Latino folk practices for holistic health care and healing.

Death rate The number of deaths per 1,000 population in a given year. Also known as the crude death rate.

Degradation ceremony An aspect of the resocialization process within total institutions, in which people are subjected to humiliating rituals.

Deindustrialization The systematic, widespread withdrawal of investment in basic aspects of productivity, such as factories and plants.

Demography The scientific study of population.

Dependency theory An approach to global stratification that contends that industrialized nations exploit developing countries for their own gain.

Dependent variable The variable in a causal relationship that is subject to the influence of another variable.

Deviance Behavior that violates the standards of conduct or expectations of a group or society.

Differential association A theory of deviance proposed by Edwin Sutherland that holds that violation of rules results from exposure to attitudes favorable to criminal acts.

Diffusion The process by which a cultural item spreads from group to group or society to society.

Discovery The process of making known or sharing the existence of some aspect of reality.

Discrimination acts based on prejudiced beliefs against a specific individual or coup
Dominant ideology  A set of cultural beliefs and practices that help to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests.

Downsizing  Reductions taken in a company’s workforce as part of deindustrialization.

Dramaturgical approach  A view of social interaction popularized by Erving Goffman that examines people as if they were theatrical performers.

Dysfunction  negative consequences of the structure of society

Economic system  The social institution through which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed.

Econosclerosis  “hardening of the economic arteries” whereby children are increasingly unable to exceed their parents’ economic status (Caputo 2003)

Education  A formal process of learning in which some people consciously teach while others adopt the social role of learner.

Egalitarian family  An authority pattern in which spouses are regarded as equals.

Elite model  A view of society as ruled by a small group of individuals who share a common set of political and economic interests.

Environmental justice  A legal strategy based on claims that racial minorities and the lower classes are subjected disproportionately to environmental hazards.

Equilibrium model  Talcott Parsons’s functionalist view of society tending toward a state of stability or balance.

Estate system  A system of stratification under which peasants were required to work land leased to them by nobles in exchange for military protection and other services. Also known as feudalism.

Esteem  The reputation that a specific person has earned within an occupation.

Ethnic groups  groups set off from other groups by virtue of a unique set of cultural traits (such as language, religion, or diet)

Ethnocentrism  The tendency to assume that one’s own culture and way of life represent the norm or are superior to all others.

Ethnography  The study of an entire social setting through extended, systematic observation.

Evolutionary theory  A theory of social change that holds that society is moving in a definite direction.

Exclusion  practice of prohibiting or restricting the entry or participation or groups in society; type of institutional discrimination

Experiment  An artificially created situation that allows the researcher to manipulate variables.

Experimental group  Subjects in an experiment who are exposed to an independent variable introduced by a researcher.

Expressiveness  Concern for the maintenance of harmony and the internal emotional affairs of the family.

Expulsion  removal of a group by direct force or intimidation; type of institutional discrimination

Extended family  A family in which relatives—such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles—live in the same home as parents and their children.
False consciousness A term used by Karl Marx to describe an attitude held by members of a class that does not accurately reflect their objective position.

Family A set of people related by blood, marriage (or some other agreed-upon relationship), or adoption who share the primary responsibility for reproduction and caring for members of society.

Feminist perspective A sociological approach that views inequity in gender as central to all behavior and organization.

Feminization of poverty A trend in which women constitute an increasing proportion of the poor people of the United States.

Fertility The level of reproduction in a society.

Folkway A norm governing everyday social behavior whose violation raises comparatively little concern.

Force The actual or threatened use of coercion to impose one’s will on others.

Formal norm A norm that generally has been written down and specifies strict punishments for violators.

Formal organization A group designed for a special purpose and structured for maximum efficiency.

Formal social control Social control carried out by authorized agents, such as police officers, judges, school administrators, and employers.

Function consequences of the structure of society

Functionalist perspective A sociological approach that emphasizes the way that parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability.

Gemeinschaft A term used by Ferdinand Tönnies to describe a small, close-knit community, often found in a rural area, in which strong personal bonds unite members.

Gender role Expectations regarding the proper behavior, attitudes, and activities of males and females.

Gender socially constructed masculinity and femininity

Generalized other A term used by George Herbert Mead to refer to the attitudes, viewpoints, and expectations of society as a whole that a child takes into account in his or her behavior.

Gesellschaft A term used by Ferdinand Tönnies to describe a community, often urban, that is large and impersonal, with little commitment to the group or consensus on values.

Glass ceiling An invisible barrier that blocks the promotion of a qualified individual in a work environment because of the individual’s gender, race, or ethnicity.

Globalization The worldwide integration of government policies, cultures, social movements, and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas.

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Goal displacement Within a bureaucracy, overzealous conformity to official regulations within a bureaucracy.

Group Any number of people with similar norms, values, and expectations who interact on a regular basis.
Growth rate  The difference between births and deaths, plus the differences between immigrants and emigrants, per 1,000 population.

Hawthorne effect  The unintended influence of observers or experiments on subjects of research.

Health  As defined by the World Health Organization, a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.

Heterosexism  the privileging of heterosexuality over homosexuality in society

Heterosexuality  of individuals according to their emotional-sexual relationships and lifestyle with persons of the opposite sex

Hidden curriculum  Standards of behavior that are deemed proper by society and are taught subtly in schools.

History of social problems  four-stage process by which problems are recognized and addressed (transformation, legitimization, response adjustment, and change or exit from system)

Homophobia  Fear of and prejudice against homosexuality.

Homosexuality  classification of individuals according to their emotional-sexual relationships and lifestyle with persons of the same sex

Horizontal mobility  The movement of an individual from one social position to another of the same rank.

Horticultural society  A preindustrial society in which people plant seeds and crops rather than merely subsist on available foods.

Human ecology  An area of study concerned with the interrelationships between people and their spatial setting and physical environment.

Human relations approach  An approach to the study of formal organizations that emphasizes the role of people, communication, and participation within a bureaucracy and tends to focus on groups.

Hunting-and-gathering society  A preindustrial society in which people rely on whatever foods and fibers are readily available in order to survive.

Hypothesis  A speculative statement about the relationship between two or more variables.

Ideal type  A construct or model that serves as a measuring rod against which actual cases can be evaluated.

Income  Salaries and wages.

Independent variable  The variable in a causal relationship that when altered causes or influences a change in a second variable.

Industrial city  A city characterized by relatively large size, open competition, an open class system, and elaborate specialization in the manufacturing of goods.
Industrial society A society that depends on mechanization to produce its goods and services.

Infant mortality rate The number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births in a given year.

Influence The exercise of power through a process of persuasion.

Informal norm A norm that generally is understood but is not precisely recorded.

Informal social control Control that people use casually to enforce norms.

In-group Any group or category to which people feel they belong.

Innovation The process of introducing a new idea or object into a culture through discovery or invention.

Institutional discrimination discrimination practiced by the government, social institutions, or organizations

Instrumentality An emphasis on tasks, a focus on more distant goals, and a concern for the external relationship between one’s family and other social institutions.

Interactionist perspective A sociological approach that generalizes about everyday forms of social interaction.

Intergenerational mobility Changes in the social position of children relative to their parents.

Interview A face-to-face or telephone questioning of a respondent to obtain desired information.

Intragenerational mobility Changes in a person’s social position within his or her adult life.

Invention The combination of existing cultural items into a form that did not exist before.

Kinship The state of being related to others.

Labeling theory Theory that attempts to explain why certain people are viewed as deviants.

Laissez-faire A form of capitalism in which businesses compete freely, with minimal government intervention in the economy.

Language An abstract system of word meanings and symbols for all aspects of culture; includes gestures and other nonverbal communication.

Latent function Unconscious or unintended function; hidden purpose.

Law Governmental social control.

Legal-rational authority Max Weber’s term for power made legitimate by law.

Life chances Max Weber’s term for people’s opportunities to provide themselves with material goods, positive living conditions, and favorable life experiences.

Life course approach A research orientation in which sociologists and other social scientists look closely at the social factors that influence people throughout their lives, from birth to death.

Life expectancy The median number of years a person can be expected to live under current mortality conditions.

Looking glass self A concept used by Charles Horton Cooley that emphasizes the self as the product of our social interactions with others.

Luddites Rebellious craft workers in nineteenth-century England who destroyed new factory machinery as part of their resistance to the industrial revolution.
Macro institutional, structural level of society

**Manifest function** Open, stated, and conscious function.

**Master status** A status that dominates others and thereby determines a person’s general position within society.

**Material culture** The physical or technological aspects of our daily lives.

**Matriarchy** A society in which women dominate in family decision making.

**Matrilineal descent** A kinship system that favors the relatives of the mother.

**McDonaldization** The process through which the principles of the fast-food restaurant have come to dominate certain sectors of society, both in the United States and throughout the world.

Micro individual, face-to-face level of society

**Minimal hierarchy** A relatively flat organizational structure designed to increase workers’ access to those in authority.

**Modernization theory** A functionalist approach that proposes that modernization and development will gradually improve the lives of people in developing nations.

**Modernization** The far-reaching process by which developing nations move from traditional or less developed institutions to those characteristic of more developed societies.

**Monogamy** A form of marriage in which one woman and one man are married only to each other.

**Monopoly** Control of a market by a single business firm.

**Morbidity rate** The incidence of disease in a given population.

**Mores** Norms deemed highly necessary to the welfare of a society.

**Mortality rate** The incidence of death in a given population.

**Multilinear evolutionary theory** A theory of social change that holds that change can occur in several ways, and does not inevitably lead in the same direction.

**Multinational corporation** Commercial organization that is headquartered in one country but does business throughout the world.

**Multiple-nuclei theory** A theory of urban growth developed by Harris and Ullman that views growth as emerging from many centers of development, each of which reflects a particular urban need or activity.

**Natural science** The study of the physical features of nature and the ways in which they interact and change.

**Neocolonialism** Continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries.

**New social movement** Organized collective activities that address values and social identities, as well as improvements in the quality of life.

**New urban sociology** An approach to urbanization that considers the interplay of local, national, and worldwide forces and their effect on local space, with special emphasis on the impact of global economic activity.

**Nonmaterial culture** Customs, beliefs, philosophies, governments, and patterns of communication, as well as ways of using material objects.
**Nonverbal communication** The sending of messages through the use of postures, facial expressions, and gestures.

**Norm** An established standard of behavior maintained by a society.

**Nuclear family** A married couple and their unmarried children living together.

**Obedience** Compliance with higher authorities in a hierarchical structure.

**Objective method** A technique for measuring social class that assigns individuals to classes on the basis of criteria such as occupation, education, income, and place of residence.

**Objective reality** refers to origin of social problems in the acknowledgement that the problem exists and is verifiable, measurable

**Observation** A research technique in which an investigator collects information through direct participation in and/or closely watching a group or community.

**Open system** A social system in which the position of each individual is influenced by his or her achieved status.

**Operational definition** An explanation of an abstract concept that is specific enough to allow a researcher to assess the concept.

**Organized crime** The work of a group that regulates relations among various criminal enterprises involved in various illegal activities.

**Otherness** those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong.

**Out-group** A group or category to which people feel they do not belong.

**Patriarchy** A society in which men dominate in family decision making.

**Patrilineal descent** A kinship system that favors the father’s relatives.

**Personality** The individual characteristics, attitudes, needs, and behaviors that set one person apart from another.

**Peter principle** A principle of organizational life originated by Laurence J. Peter, according to which every employee within a hierarchy tends to rise to his or her level of incompetence.

**Pluralist model** A view of society in which many competing groups within the community have access to government officials, so that no single group is dominant.

**Politics** In Harold D. Lasswell’s words, “who gets what, when, and how.”

**Polyandry** A form of polygamy in which a woman can have several husbands at the same time.

**Polygamy** A form of marriage in which an individual may have several husbands or wives simultaneously.

**Polygyny** A form of polygamy in which a husband may have several wives at the same time.

**Postindustrial city** A city in which global finance and the electronic flow of information dominate the economy.

**Postindustrial society** A society whose economic system is engaged primarily in the processing and control of information.

**Postmodern society** A technologically sophisticated society that is preoccupied with consumer goods and media images.

**Power elite** A term used by C. Wright Mills for a small group of military, industrial, and government leaders who control the fate of the United States.
Power  The ability to exercise one’s will over others.
Preindustrial city  A city with only a few thousand residents that is characterized by a relatively closed class system and limited social mobility.
Prejudice  negative attitude based on the attributes of an individual
Prestige  The respect and admiration that an occupation holds in a society.
Prevalence  The total number of cases of a specific disorder that exist at a given time.
Primary group  A small group characterized by intimate, face-to-face association and cooperation.
Profane  The ordinary and commonplace elements of life, as distinguished from the sacred.
Professional criminal  A person who pursues crime as a day-to-day occupation.
Proletariat  Karl Marx’s term for the working class in a capitalist society.
Protestant ethic  Max Weber’s term for the disciplined work ethic, this-worldly concerns, and rational orientation to life emphasized by John Calvin and his followers.
Qualitative research  Research that relies on what scientists see in field or naturalistic settings more than on statistical data.
Quantitative research  Research that collects and reports data primarily in numerical form.
Questionnaire  A printed research form used to obtain desired information from a respondent.
Race  group or population that shares a set of physical traits (socially constructed)
Racism  belief that certain racial or ethnic groups are inferior to others and that discriminatory behavior against them is justified
Random sample  A sample for which every member of the entire population has the same chance of being selected.
Reference group  Any group that individuals use as a standard in evaluating themselves and their own behavior.
Relative deprivation  The conscious feeling of a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities.
Relative poverty  A floating standard of deprivation by which people at the bottom of a society, whatever their lifestyles, are judged to be disadvantaged in comparison with the nation as a whole.
Reliability  The extent to which a measure produces consistent results.
Religion  A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things according to Émile Durkheim.
Religious belief  A statement to which members of a particular religion adhere.
Religious experience  The feeling or perception of being in direct contact with the ultimate reality, such as a divine being, or of being overcome with religious emotion.
Religious ritual  A practice required or expected of members of a faith.
Research design  A detailed plan or method for obtaining data scientifically.
Resocialization  The process of discarding former behavior patterns and accepting new ones as part of a transition in one’s life.
Resource mobilization The ways in which a social movement utilizes such resources as money, political influence, access to the media, and personnel.

Rite of passage A ritual marking the symbolic transition from one social position to another.

Role conflict The situation that occurs when incompatible expectations arise from two or more social positions held by the same person.

Role strain The situation that occurs when the same social position imposes conflicting demands and expectations.

Role taking The process of mentally assuming the perspective of another in order to respond from that imagined viewpoint.

Routine activities theory The theory that criminal victimization increases when motivated offenders and vulnerable targets converge.

Sample A selection from a larger population that is statistically representative of that population.

Sanction Penalty or reward for conduct concerning a social norm.

Science The body of knowledge obtained by methods based upon systematic observation.

Scientific management approach Another name for the classical theory of formal organizations.

Scientific method A systematic, organized series of steps that ensures maximum objectivity and consistency in researching a problem.

Second shift The double burden—work outside the home followed by child care and housework—that many women face and few men share equitably.

Secondary analysis A variety of research techniques that make use of previously collected and publicly accessible information and data.

Secondary group A formal, impersonal group in which there is little social intimacy or mutual understanding.

Segregation physical and social separation of ethnic or racial groups; type of institutional discrimination

Self According to George Herbert Mead, a distinct identity that sets one apart from others.

Serial monogamy A form of marriage in which a person may have several spouses in his or her life, but only one spouse at a time.

Sex biological (physiological and hormonal) masculinity or femininity

Sexism The ideology that one sex is superior to the other.

Sexual harassment Behavior that occurs when work benefits are made contingent upon sexual favors.

Sexual orientation classification of individuals according to their emotional-sexual relationships and lifestyle

Sick role Societal expectations about the attitudes and behavior of a person viewed as being ill.

Significant other A term used by George Herbert Mead to refer to those individuals who are most important in the development of the self, such as parents, friends, and teachers.

Slavery A system of enforced servitude in which some people are owned by other people.
Social advocates those who use their resources to support, educate, and empower individuals and their communities

Social change Significant alteration over time in behavior patterns and culture.

Social construction of reality (a.k.a. social constructionism) idea that our world is a social creation, originating and evolving through our everyday thoughts and actions

Social control Techniques and strategies for preventing deviant behavior in any society.

Social epidemiology The study of the distribution of disease, impairment, and general health status across a population.

Social inequality A condition in which members of a society have different amounts of wealth, prestige, or power.

Social innovation policy, program, or advocacy that features an untested or unique approach

Social institution An organized pattern of beliefs and behavior centered on basic social needs.

Social interaction The ways in which people respond to one another.

Social mobility The movement of individuals or groups from one position of a society’s stratification system to another.

Social movement Organized collective activities to bring about or resist fundamental change in an existing group or society.

Social network A series of social relationships that links a person directly to others, and through them indirectly to still more people.

Social policy enactment of a course of action through a formal law or program

Social role A set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status.

Social science The study of various aspects of human society.

Social stratification ranking of individuals into social strata or groups

Social structure The way in which a society is organized into predictable relationships.

Socialism An economic system in which the means of production and distribution are

Socialization The process through which people learn the attitudes, values, and actions appropriate for members of a particular culture.

Societal-reaction approach Another name for labeling theory.

Society A fairly large number of people who live in the same territory, are relatively independent of people outside it, and participate in a common culture.

Sociobiology The systematic study of the biological bases of human social behavior.

Sociocultural evolution The process of change and development in human societies that results from cumulative growth in their stores of cultural information.

Sociological imagination An awareness of the relationship between an individual and the wider society.

Sociology The systematic study of social behavior and human groups.

Species being in Marx, the true self, or human potential, the ultimate form of alienation

Status group A term used by Max Weber to refer to people who have the same prestige or lifestyle, independent of their class positions.
Status A term used by sociologists to refer to any of the full range of socially defined positions within a large group or society.

Stigma The labels society uses to devalue members of certain social groups.

Stratification The structured ranking of entire groups of people that perpetuates unequal economic rewards and power in a society.

Subculture A segment of society that shares a distinctive pattern of mores, folkways, and values that differs from the pattern of the larger society.

Subjective reality social process by which social problems become defined

Survey A study, generally in the form of an interview or questionnaire, that provides researchers with information about how people think and act.

Symbol Gesture, object, or language that forms the basis of human communication.

Teacher-expectancy effect The impact that a teacher’s expectations about a student’s performance may have on the student’s actual achievements.

Technology Cultural information about how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs and desires.

Telecommuter An employee who works full-time or part-time at home rather than in an outside office, and who is linked to supervisor and colleagues through computer terminals, phones, and fax machines.

Theory In sociology, a set of statements that seeks to explain problems, actions, or behavior.

Title IX part of the Educational Amendments of 1972 that prohibits the exclusion of any person from participation in an educational program or the denial of benefits based on one’s sex

Total fertility rate (TFR) The average number of children born alive to any woman, assuming that she conforms to current fertility rates.

Total institution A term coined by Erving Goffman to refer to institutions that regulate all aspects of a person’s life under a single authority, such as prisons, the military, mental hospitals, or convents.

Tracking The practice of placing students in specific curriculum groups on the basis of test

Traditional authority Legitimate power conferred by custom and accepted practice.

Trained incapacity The tendency of workers in a bureaucracy to become so specialized that they develop blind spots and fail to notice obvious problems.

Unilinear evolutionary theory A theory of social change that holds that all societies pass through the same successive stages of evolution and inevitably reach the same end.

Urban ecology An area of study that focuses on the interrelationships between urban residents and their environment.

Urbanism A term used by Louis Wirth to describe distinctive patterns of social behavior evident among city residents.

Validity The degree to which a measure or scale truly reflects the phenomenon under study.

Values Collective conception of what is considered good, desirable, and proper—or bad, undesirable, and improper—in a culture.

Variable A measurable trait or characteristic that is subject to change under different
Verstehen  The German word for “understanding” or “insight”; used by Max Weber to stress the need for sociologists to take into account the subjective meanings people attach to their actions.

Vertical mobility  The movement of a person from one social position to another of a different rank.

Vested interests  Veblen’s term for those people or groups who will suffer in the event of social change, and who have a stake in maintaining the status quo.

Victimization survey  Questioning ordinary people, not police officers, to determine whether they have been victims of crime.

Victimless crime  The willing exchange among adults of widely desired, but illegal, goods and services.

Vital statistics  Records of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces that are gathered through a registration system maintained by governmental units.

Wealth  An inclusive term encompassing all of a person’s material assets, including land, stocks, and other assets.

White-collar crime  Illegal acts committed in the course of business activities.

Work team  Teams of employees assigned to address specific tasks or issues in the workplace.

World systems analysis  Immanuel Wallerstein’s view of the global economic system as divided between certain industrialized nations that control wealth and developing countries that are controlled and exploited.