**CHAPTER 1**

**THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION**

# **Chapter Overview**

This chapter begins by introducing students to the origin of the term *sociology* coined by Auguste Comte. It also discusses the formation of this subject as a discipline with a particular focus on the systematic study of human society. In this instance, it highlights the important distinction between *society*—the largest human group to share institutions and territory—and *culture*—a system of behaviour, beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, and materials. Students learn about C.W. Wright Mills’ conceptualization of the *sociological imagination*, and that seeing individual troubles as public issues remains at the heart of this conceptualization and sociological research generally.

Sociological research has three core foci: social inequality, social institutions, and social change. These foci are supplemented by the three core aims of sociology: to define general themes in everyday life, to critically determine what constitutes common sense and why, and to look at how individuals are shaped by society and, in turn, shape it.

Students also learn in this chapter about the sociological research undertaken by one of the first sociologists, Émile Durkheim, who systematically studied suicide in European countries. Durkheim noted how different sociology was from philosophy, a popular academic discipline in his day, because it relies on empirical research and because it focused on social facts, or the external social structures, norms, and values that shape the actions of individuals. These social facts proved suicide was not only an individual’s decision as many professionals believe. Suicide patterns are affected by the social context in which they take place.

Finally, in this chapter students learn more about quantitative and qualitative sociology and the research methods of both approaches. Quantitative sociology is based on surveys and experiments, while qualitative sociology is based on interviews and observation.

# **Learning Objectives**

After reading this chapter, students will be able to:

* Understand and apply the sociological imagination to a variety of social issues in order to see the connection between personal troubles and public issues;
* Identify and understand the three core foci of sociology (social inequality, social institutions, and social change);
* Define and apply the three core aims of sociology to the study of social phenomena;
* Understand and explain Durkheim’s study of suicide as an illustration of the complex relationship between individuals and society;
* Define and analyze the core methods in sociology.

# **Lecture Outline**

**Introduction**

* *Sociology*, or studying society in a systematic way, is a term coined by Auguste Comte.
* *Societies* are large-scale human groups sharing common territory and institutions.
* *Cultures* are systems of behaviour, beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, and materials.
* Individuals from many different disciplines are interested in the study of society.
* Philosophers as far back as Socrates and Plato wondered what makes a good society.
* Sociology differs for it is built on the study of society in a systematic way.
* Societies are not the same as states, as they are built on interactions among their members.
	+ Interactions happen in patterned ways through routines, expectations, and behaviours that establish themselves over time and build common meanings.
	+ These interactions occur in a variety of settings and levels and are shaped by culture.
* *Dominant culture* is defined as the culture capable of imposing its beliefs and behaviours on individuals because of the economic and political power it wields.
* *Countercultures* differ from the dominant culture and reject it whereas subcultures differ from the dominant culture but don’t necessarily oppose it.
* One last cultural distinction to remember: *high culture* is considered the culture of the elite whereas *low culture* is the culture of the majority.

**The Sociological Imagination**

* The sociological imagination is an idea developed by C. Wright Mills to help individuals see the connections between their lives and larger society.
* He argued we can understand our lives in more depth if we understand the larger history of our society.
* To do so, he advocated illuminating and connecting the personal troubles we face as individuals and larger public issues or the social problems that arise in human societies.
* Think about how individual choices are structured in society.
* We make our own decisions, or exercise our own agency, but our agency is shaped or limited by larger social forces.
* Examples of such social forces include family, social class, gender norms, the education system , and the economy.

**Three Core Foci of Sociology**

* Sociology is the systematic study of human societies.
* Almost anything in human societies can be researched within sociology.
* However, most research is done within three primary areas of focus: the study of social inequality, the role of social institutions in society, and the study of social change.
* The first core focus is the study of social inequality, or the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged.
	+ Gaps exist in terms of rights, opportunities, rewards, and privileges.
	+ Inequality is based on consequential to human lives differences among people.
	+ Differences that have been the basis of most sociological inquiry include social class, gender, race, and ethnicity.
	+ More recently, we started seeing the importance of other differences, such as sexual orientation, age, immigration status, and ability.
* The second substantial focus is the study of social institutions.
* There are five core institutions in modern Canadian society: the family, education, religion, the economy, and government.
	+ Social institutions are defined as the norms, values, and rules of conduct structuring human interactions.
	+ I Institutions are not just physical spaces or buildings but also the social arrangements for how things are done. .
	+ They are standardized ways of doing something where actions become regularized, patterned, and reproduced.
	+ Institutions help society to run smoothly by socializing us and teaching us the rules of our society.
	+ They can also serve a negative function by maintaining and reinforcing inequality. As standardized methods become routine, they can reinforce some of the differences between people.
	+ Institutions can also be an avenue for social change.
* The third core focus of sociological research is the study of social change.
	+ Social institutions can both perpetuate inequality and create social change.
	+ If society is based on interactions among people, it can change just as people do.
	+ For example, one major institution in modern Canadian society that has changed greatly is religion.
	+ Secularization—the process of religion losing its authority over individuals and social life in general.
	+ Core founders of sociology, such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim, all argued that the modernization of society would inevitably coincide with a decline in religiosity.
	+ Canada’s religiosity is on the decline, but religiosity is on the rise in many parts of the world.
	+ Religion’s changing role shows the larger social transformations that are at the heart of the study of sociology.
	+ The changing nature of religion depends on the social context in which it is examined.

**Three Core Aims of Sociology**

* Sociologists aim to define general themes in everyday life.
* Sociologists aim to critically determine what is familiar or common sense in human societies and why it is that way.
* Finally, sociologists aim to examine the dual process of how individuals are shaped by society and how, in turn, individuals shape their society.
* The creation of institutions is an example of this process as it is carried out by collectives of human beings who determine how these institutions should function.
* In turn, institutions influence the individuals who created them in terms of how they think and how they act.
* It can be difficult to study society because it is all around us.
* In order to make sense of how society functions, sociologists look for general patterns in particular people’s experiences.
* When patterns are found, sociologists do research to determine why those patterns exist.
* Through systematic study, sociology can illuminate patterns in society, how they are established, and how they become common sense to those living them.

**Émile Durkheim and the Study of Suicide**

* Émile Durkheim was one of the first sociologists.
* Durkheim noted how different sociology was from philosophy, a popular academic discipline in his day, due to its reliance on empirical research.
* For Durkheim, sociology was unique because it focused on social facts, the external social structures, norms, and values that shape the actions of individuals.
* Durkheim found that suicide wasn’t entirely a matter of the individual’s decision to take their own life.
* He determined suicide rates differed by country, by gender, and even by religion.
* The differences in suicide rates could only be explained by considering social facts, or those elements of society beyond the individual’s control.
* His study led him to the conclusion that there are four main types of suicide, which differ depending on the degree of individuals’ integration into a society and the degree of regulation, or the extent of external constraint on individuals.
	+ Egoistic suicide occurs in societies with low levels of integration.
	+ Altruistic suicide occurs in societies with high levels of integration.
	+ Anomic suicide occurs in societies with excessively low regulation.
	+ Fatalistic suicide occurs in societies with excessively high regulation.
* Durkheim believed conditions of society are so powerful they influence even the most personal of individual decisions such as suicide.

**Research Methods: How Do Sociologists Study Society?**

* When thinking about what to analyze, sociologists formulate research questions to guide their decisions.
* Research questions focus on the relationship between *variables*, or things that change.
* *Independent variables* are the variables that potentially affect other variables.
* *Dependent variables* are the variables affected by independent variables.
* Two major types of research comprise the type of work sociologists do.
	+ The first is quantitative research, which refers to research on things that can be counted. It examines how variables relate to one another and tests these relationships with statistical models
	+ The second is qualitative research, which refers to research on social processes and tends to examine a smaller number of cases in more detail.
		- Two major types of data collection methods in quantitative research are surveys and experiments. Surveys: Involve distributing questionnaires to many people;
		- The purpose is to learn about the characteristics, attitudes, or behaviours of individuals in human societies.
	+ Experiments:
		- With this method, the researcher is interested in understanding how some factor affects individual behaviour;
		- This method involves comparing two groups: an experimental group and a control group;
		- The treatment is given only to the experimental group to see how they will react.
* Two major data collection methods of qualitative research are interviewing and participant observation:
	+ Interviewing:
* Involves asking each participant the same set of questions and recording their responses;
* Allows researchers to ask questions that require longer answers and provides opportunities to ask follow-up questions.
	+ Participant observation, often referred to as ethnography:
		- The researcher actively engages with a group of individuals to understand their lives and experiences;
		- Requires extensive involvement with the group under study for a long period of time.
* Sociologists use additional research methods in their work.
	+ Some use content analysis to study documents such as newspapers, historical letters, Tweets, or other texts.

Some use focus groups which are interviews conducted with larger groups of people.

# **Key Terms**

**Breaching experiments** A term developed by Harold Garfinkel. In these experiments, a researcher breaks a social rule to reveal ways by which individuals cooperate to maintain the smooth functioning of social interactions and social order.

**Content analysis** A research technique to study documents such as newspapers, historical letters, Tweets, or other texts.

**Counterculture** A group of people who reject parts of the dominant culture.

**Culture** A system of behaviour, beliefs, knowledge, practices, values, and materials.

**Dependent variables** The variables that are affected by independent variables.

**Dominant culture** The culture capable of imposing its values, beliefs, and behaviours because of its economic and political power.

**Experiment** One of the quantitative research methods. This approach involves comparing two groups—the experimental group, which is given the treatment, and the control group.

**Focus groups** A qualitative research technique that refers to interviews conducted with larger groups of people.

**High culture** The culture of a society’s elite.

**Homophily** The concept suggesting that most people couple with and marry people who are similar to them.

**Independent variables** The variables that affect other variables.

**Interview** A qualitative research method in which a researcher asks each participant the same set of questions and records his or her responses.

**Participant observation (ethnography)** One of the core qualitative methods in which a researcher actively engages with a group of people and works to understand their lives and experiences through an intensive involvement with them over an extended period of time.

**Personal troubles** The problems that we face as individuals.

**Popular (or low) culture** The culture of the majority.

**Public issues** The social problems that arise in society.

**Qualitative research** The type of research that examines a smaller number of cases in more detail and emphasizes social processes.

**Quantitative research** The type of research that focuses on things that can be counted and examines how variables relate to one another by utilizing statistical models.

**Religiosity** The measure of how religious a person is.

**Research question** The question that focuses on the relationship between two variables.

**Secularization** The loss of religious authority over the lives of individuals and human societies.

**Social fact** The external social structures, norms, and values that shape individuals’ actions.

**Social inequality** The gap between advantaged and disadvantaged people in human society.

**Social institutions** The norms, values, rules of conduct, and social arrangements that shape social interactions in human societies.

**Society** The biggest group of human beings who share the same geographic territory and institutions.

**Sociological imagination** Term coined by C. Wright Mills to highlight the connection between our personal troubles and public issues.

**Sociology** The systematic study of human society.

**Subculture** A group of people who differ from the dominant culture without necessarily opposing it.

**Survey research** One of the major quantitative research methods that involves giving questionnaires to a large number of people to learn about their characteristics, attitudes, or behaviours.

**Types of suicide** The four types of suicide, defined by Durkheim, which differ based on the level of integration or regulation in a society are egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic suicide.

**Variables** The factors that can take on different values, in other words, they can vary or change.

**Visible minorities** A Government of Canada term used to define people other than Aboriginal people, who are not white in colour or not Caucasian in race.

# **Sample Answers to Critical Reading Questions**

**Reading: “The Sociological Imagination” by C. Wright Mills.**

1. **What does Mills mean by “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both”? How could you understand your own life better by knowing more about history? How do individual biographies shape history? Think of a concrete example of this connection between individual biography and larger social history and the way it socializes people.**

Mills means that private troubles are inevitably public issues. No matter what you are experiencing on an individual level, if you really want to understand your own life, then you should take a closer look at the society around you, its history, and its socialization processes. Students may reflect on the way their school system socialized them and the content that was used to do so. How well do students know the history of residential schools in Canada, for example? If their knowledge is limited, perhaps it is because the Canadian government sought to hide this history from its citizens by downplaying it in schools. This was happening until residential school survivors and their families broke this silence to educate Canadians and receive some form of justice for the wrongs inflicted in these schools.

1. **What do the terms personal troubles and public issues mean? How could we understand the issues of gender inequality, poverty, and crime as either a personal trouble or a public issue? How does labelling these problems a personal trouble or a public issue shape the kinds of solutions we would propose to solve them?**

Mills used the terms *personal troubles* and *public issues* in his theory of the sociological imagination. Personal troubles refer to the struggles people have in their individual lives, perhaps with unemployment, violence, or debt. But, of course, these are all public issues because they happen to multiple people in society through the reach of social institutions, culture, and society. We can understand poverty, for example, as a personal trouble as someone may struggle to pay their rent or pay their bills, internalize this struggle, and blame themselves for their situation. But as a public issue, poverty may be potentially seen as a problem in government funding, regulation, or legislative oversight. Perhaps the individual is struggling to pay their rent because there are no rent controls preventing landlords from increasing their rent values or converting their properties to short-term rentals. How we label problems determines the level to which we understand them and deal with them. We can either keep blaming individuals for their own personal troubles or we can see all individual troubles as public issues requiring a public response.

1. **Mills questions the role of the physical and natural sciences in this chapter. He says that in some cases “they have raised more problems . . . than they have solved, and the problems that they have raised lie almost entirely in the area of social not physical affairs” (Mills 1959/2000, 15). How could the problem of climate change illustrate this point? What are the social ways by which we could prevent or ameliorate the effects of climate change?**

Mills would likely say that the physical and natural sciences have essentially affirmed climate change is happening, but the social response has been lacking from governments and corporations. Mills would wonder why and perhaps locate the answer in the ruling elite, as he often theorized in his work. Does the government and corporate focus on profit-making override concrete steps to ensure the climate is livable for future generations? Mills might wonder if this social block is creating an ever-growing public issue. Preventing or ameliorating the effects of climate change will require all citizens to put pressure on their governments and corporations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by addressing how our society’s thirst for profit is putting the planet at risk.

**Reading: “Toward a Sociology of Reconciliation of Conflicting Desires” by Susan O’Donnell and David Perley.**

1. **What is a damaged-centred approach to studying Indigenous issues in Canada? Why is this approach problematic?**

Damaged-centred research is a type of research carried out by academics about Indigenous peoples with or without their consent or potential connections to Indigenous communities that only analyzes the consequences of poverty, racism, and colonialism in Indigenous communities and not the resistance to these consequences found in every Indigenous community in the country. According to Eve Tuck, without the proper participation of Indigenous peoples in the research process, damaged-centred research risks the internalization by Indigenous peoples of this damaged identity.

1. **What is a desire-based approach, as proposed in this article? How might this type of approach help us to understand how different groups of people can come together towards reconciliation?**

A desire-based approach represents a closer integration of Indigenous peoples with the research process so that research focuses on the kind of change necessary to support the realization of desires throughout Indigenous communities. How can research contribute to Indigenous communities regaining control over the realization of their desires for land, self-determination, and healing from the damage done by colonialism in Canada? It is the kind of research that does not deny colonialism and the damage it has done, but it does not make this damage the sole focus of the research. More inclusive, desire-focused research means bringing together people in the research process on a more equal footing and for the purpose of the social change capable of laying the groundwork for true reconciliation.

1. **What is the sociology of reconciliation of conflicting desires? How do the authors suggest that we can all participate in doing this?**

The sociology of reconciliation of conflicting desires is a new approach to research that focuses on capacity building in Indigenous communities, so research is more inclusive and may potentially be taken over by the community one day. The focus of this research is land and how the desire for the lands of Indigenous peoples continues the colonial pattern of dispossessing their lands and leaving Indigenous communities in worse shape politically, economically, spiritually, and culturally. The authors suggest we can all participate in this process if research is collaboratively made more inclusive of Indigenous peoples and offers them more control over the research process and inevitably the land.

# **Sample Answers to Activity Questions**

**Activity: The Freshman 15 and Binge Drinking: Health as a Personal Trouble or Public Issue**

1. **How is binge drinking a personal trouble? What individual factors lead some people to engage in this behaviour?**

Students may offer examples about each individual’s personal predilections for alcohol use and abilities to coop with additions or desires around excessive drinking. They can also mention the influence of the immediate social circle of peers who may encourage frequent drinking leading to a personal choice to engage in a binge drinking behaviour to fit in. Perhaps other reasons such as a personal choice to use excessive drinking for recreational purposes or stress relief may also be considered individual factors.

1. **How is binge drinking a public issue? Why might it be more common on university and college campuses than in other places? Why are some dorms, campuses, or areas more likely to encourage binge drinking? What social factors are related to this behaviour?**

When considering binge drinking as a public issue, it is important to look into such questions as what kind of population is affected. What are their age, gender, perhaps income level, cultural background, family status, occupation, etc.? If we, for example, determine that college and university students leaving on campus are one of the groups being affected the most, we can begin looking into the social conditions contributing to this situation. Presumably, we may determine that the construction design of dorms and campus activities bring students together and offer them multiple opportunities to socialize. While such opportunities are great for developing friendships and networking, they may also contribute to young people being engaged in excessive partying and drinking. We also may consider how drinking is portrayed in our society as an integral part of having a good time during informal social gatherings such as parties and celebrations. What kind of message about recreational alcohol use do young people receive during their upbringing experiences with their families and friends and how does it affect their drinking behavior when they begin their earlier adulthood lives on campus?

1. **If binge drinking is a personal trouble, how can we deal with it? If binge drinking is a public issue, what sorts of solutions might we propose?**

At a personal level, students may consider such strategies as attending counseling or educational sessions on the effects of binge drinking, so individuals will be better equipped to make healthier choices around drinking behavior. On the other hand, if binge drinking is a public issue, then bigger changes at institutional levels need to be considered. For example, how can the institution of family reinforce values that drinking is not necessary for socializing and having fun with friends or how can the higher education settings increase opportunities and offer conditions for healthier life choices related to drinking behaviour?

**Activity: Suicide in Canada**

1. **How do gender and family type relate to suicide? How does Durkheim’s theory about certain social conditions leading to suicide explain the suicide rates among Canadian men and women in different family situations?**

Family type and gender may potentially prevent individuals from suicidal tendencies for several reasons. Durkheim believed that one’s integration into a larger social body such as a family, for example, might lower an individual’s risk of suicide. For Durkheim, suicide was not an individual-level decision solely, as he theorized it was a personal decision strongly influenced by the social context of the individual. As such, he might think about how the social context women experience in Canada affects their suicide rate compared to men. Perhaps it is the stronger social networks women form as a result of the unequal care work they do in society that allows them to feel more integrated. When answering this question, students must refer to the context of the statistics in question.

1. **How is religiosity related to suicide rates across countries? Would Durkheim be surprised that more religious countries tend to have lower levels of suicide? Why or why not? How would he explain this relationship?**

Religiosity seems negatively correlated with suicide rates around the world, meaning that as religiosity rises, suicide rates go down. This would not surprise Durkheim, who found that there was a strong connection between religion and suicide rates, but it wasn’t a pure connection as the statistics currently demonstrate. Even though most religious countries experience lower suicide rates, India stands out as a highly religious society with unusually high suicide rates. Durkheim might concede that religion promotes integration and integration promotes lower suicide rates, but whatever religious dynamics exist in India contradict the direction of this connection. Students might suggest that this will require additional research into India’s religious context.

1. **In general, countries that are very religious have low levels of suicide, and countries that are not very religious have higher levels. But Israel has a relatively low rate of suicide given its low level of religiosity, and India has a relatively high rate of suicide given its high rate of religiosity. How can you explain these unusual cases? Can you use Durkheim’s theory? Why or why not?**

Students might reflect on the gender and class dynamics of each country as perhaps influencing religious beliefs in ways that don’t occur in other countries with higher religiosity. Students may potentially also use Durkheim’s theory, which made room for such an anomaly in the way his research showed different suicide rates in members of the Protestant and Catholic faiths, respectively. He explained the difference by unpacking the different tenets of the Protestant and Catholic faiths to show how integration and regulation of members of both faiths differ depending on the tenets of each.

# **Sample Answers to Media Study Questions**

**Media Study 1.1: The Very Real Consequences of Weight Discrimination**

This video acts as a link between C.W Mills’ The Sociological Imagination excerpt reading and the ACTIVITY *The Freshman 15 and Binge Drinking: Health as a Personal Trouble or Public Issue*. The video will help students reflect on their own experiences and encourage connections to broader social issues, as well as the questions associated with the chapter activity.

1. **Have you experienced any of the situations outlined in the video?**

Answers will vary according to personal stories, but some may include being misdiagnosed and being told to lose weight.

Example: Yes, over a span of eight years, I attended multiple medical appointments in an attempt to find out why I was experiencing pain in my left leg. Many tests were conducted, but the results were coming back “clear”, and I was given a variety of possible diagnoses; it turned out the wrong tests were being done. One doctor even told me that I should try to lose weight and that my jeans might be too tight thus causing my pain! I was not satisfied with NOT having clear answers about what my body was telling me. Thankfully, my family doctor was open to trying all avenues in figuring out my leg pain and referred me to yet another specialist. This time we had the answer—there was a tumour (osteogenic sarcoma) in my knee! My pain and health issues were NOT due to weight issues! Fortunately, my tumour was slow growing and considered only first stage, but my experience outlines how weight stigma may have led to multiple misdiagnoses and a threat to my life.

1. **How would you define weight discrimination?**

Weight discrimination is when an individual may experience prejudice and discrimination and are treated differently due to their weight (whether considered thin or large). Stereotyping may play a role in this process where those who are considered overweight and obese are judged a certain way and looked down upon. Some stereotypes may include that “Fat people are lazy” or “Fat people are dirty.” As discussed in the video, weight discrimination has concrete, measurable effects on the lives of people who experience it. Anyone who might be considered thin or large can be a victim of weight discrimination. Although some research has been done on studying larger individuals and more negative effects have been found, research around weight—whether thin or large—is an area that requires more examination.

1. **How can weight stigma be studied?**

Weight discrimination can be studied by simply asking study participants their stories when attending medical appointments. These stories can be viewed for common themes such as the quality of care that patients receive by medical professionals. Studies can also be done on physician bias where doctors could fill out surveys that measure attitudes towards weight related themes. Doctors or nurses in training could also be asked to provide data and observations from their placement and residency experiences in the health care field.

1. **What are some of the effects of weight stigma?**

Some of the effects of weight stigma include higher chances of gaining (more) weight, weight bias internalization (patients believe the negative stereotypes about their bodies), depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and eating disorders.

1. **How can you address the problem of weight discrimination and offer solutions?**

Example: I can educate others by having conversations about weight stigma and by sharing the video shown in this Media Study. As a nursing student, I can also raise awareness and give suggestions within my program—to my coordinator and to my peers in my classes. I can share this video with my colleagues when I am on placement/co-op and suggest that doctors and nurses learn about the studies outlined in this video. I can also lead and conduct studies that are more inclusive of race, gender, and class.

**Media Study 1.2: The Origins of Suicide**

1. **What is the connection between suicide and the increase in development, wealth, and industrialization?**

Suicide rates increase with wealth and industrialized growth within a society. This is contradictory to what one might expect when perceived comfort and security should be an outcome of having more wealth and growth. This phenomenon was first studied by Émile Durkheim towards the end of the nineteenth century and continues to persist.

1. **Compare the difference in suicide rates between two countries outlined in the video.**

In the video, the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is compared to a developed country like South Korea. As countries become more industrialized, beliefs change around where responsibility lies with success or failure—ideas shift from blaming the gods or luck to individuals.

1. **Adding to Durkheim’s ideas on suicide, what is the impact of societal beliefs on an individual and the risk of suicide?**

Culture ascribes failure to individuals as poor luck or divine intervention, so when a society gives these beliefs up, they place trust in a meritocratic, individualistic philosophy that fate is always in an individual’s own hands, but as discussed in the video, this creates a heavy psychological burden. Full responsibility for failure in life then falls fully on the individual and the only way to escape is self-annihilation.

1. **According to the video, what would mitigate personal responsibility?**

Believing in luck and tragedy as something that can happen to good people is a way to mitigate personal responsibility, therefore, one is always deserving of compassion. A change in ideology that it is no longer based in personal responsibility and choices when one wins or loses (in life), would lessen the psychological load one would carry.

# **Additional Class Activities and Discussion Questions**

1. Ask students to use Mills’ writing on the sociological imagination to put their individual lives in the context of the historical time period within which they exist. How do they see themselves in the unfolding history they have been a part of their entire lives?
2. In groups, ask students to discuss the nature of breaching experiments as developed by Harold Garfinkel. Specifically, ask them to come up with their own breaching experiments, but make sure they understand what the experiment is trying to prove and how it will prove it.
3. Ask students each to write a short essay, no more than two pages, about their thoughts on income inequality. Do they believe society is becoming more or potentially less equal? Remind students to reference material, statistics, and research from Chapter 1 to support their argument.
4. Ask students, in groups, as a class, or individually, to debate the positive and negative aspects of institutions. How is it that institutions can serve a positive function for social change but also a negative function at the same time?
5. Ask students what they think is the most important core aim of sociology and why.
6. Ask students to work in groups to define the three core areas of sociology and then ask them to explain which one they would choose to pursue in future research.
7. Ask students if they think Durkheim’s categories for the different types of suicide apply in Canada today? Why or why not? Make sure they explain their answer.
8. Ask students to work in groups to come up with potential research projects. Make sure they explain how the research methods they chose differ for qualitative and quantitative sociology?