CHAPTER 17

Social Change and Collective Behavior

USING Your Sociological Imagination

When you see photos or films showing the Plains Indians of the Old West—Sioux, Crow, and so forth—what do you think about the culture of those Native Americans? If you're like most of us, you may assume that it had remained unchanged for many centuries—that these people dressed and acted in exactly the same way as their ancestors.

We often assume that nonindustrial societies such as these stand still over time. Actually, though, sociology teaches us that change comes to all societies. Whether by borrowing from other cultures, discovering new ways of doing things, or creating inventions that ripple through society, all peoples experience social change.

Let's return to the example of the Plains Indians. You may picture these tribes as fierce, buffalo-hunting warriors. Perhaps images of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse astride fast horses attacking Custer come to mind, leading you to think that their ancestors for centuries had also ridden horses. In fact, horses were a relatively recent introduction to Plains Indian culture in the 1800s. The Spanish brought modern horses to North America, and not until the late 1600s and early 1700s were horses available in large numbers to the Plains Indians. Early Native American tribes on the Plains had been nomads living more off wild food plants than buffalo. This chapter will examine different ways change affects society.

Sections

1. **Social Change**
2. **Theoretical Perspectives on Social Change**
3. **Collective Behavior**
4. **Social Movements**

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

❖ illustrate the three social processes that contribute to social change.

❖ discuss how technology, population, natural environment, revolution, and war cause cultures to change.

❖ describe social change as viewed by the functionalist and conflict perspectives.

❖ discuss rumors, fads, and fashions.

❖ compare and contrast theories of crowd behavior.

❖ compare and contrast theories of social movements.

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Section 1

Social Change

Key Terms

- social change
- social processes
- discovery
- invention
- diffusion
- technology
- revolution
- war

Section Preview

Social change refers to new behaviors that have long-term and relatively important consequences. Discovery, invention, and diffusion are the major social processes through which social change occurs. Important agents of social change are technology, population, the natural environment, revolution, and war.

social change
new societal behaviors with important long-term consequences

Defining Social Change

Change is one of the most constant features of American society. This is so true that it is almost a cliché. In fact, all societies change—some rapidly, others more slowly. For sociologists, **social change** occurs when many members of the society adopt new behaviors. The behaviors must have long-term and important consequences.

How fast has social change occurred? Scientists use an analogy to help people understand the pace of social change. Imagine for a moment the entire history of Earth as a 365-day period. Midnight of January 1 is the starting point. Today's date is December 31. Each Earth "day" represents about twelve million years. The first form of life, a simple bacterium, appeared in February. More complex life, such as fish, appeared about November 20. On December 10, the dinosaurs appeared; by Christmas they were extinct. The first recognizable human beings did not appear until the afternoon of December 31. Modern humans *(homo sapiens)* emerged shortly before midnight that day. All of recorded history occurred in the last sixty seconds of the year (Ornstein and Ehrlich, 1991). In the scheme of history, then, human social changes occur in the "blink of an eye." Only when we look at social change from the perspective of the human life span does it sometimes seem to be a slow process.

Can social change be predicted? It is difficult to predict how a society will change. This is partly because the course of change in a society depends on the nature of the existing culture. For example, two societies that adopt a democratic form of government may develop in very different ways. Both Britain and the United States are democracies. But their histories prior to becoming democracies were different, since Britain had a royal tradition. As a result, democratic government took different forms in these two nations.
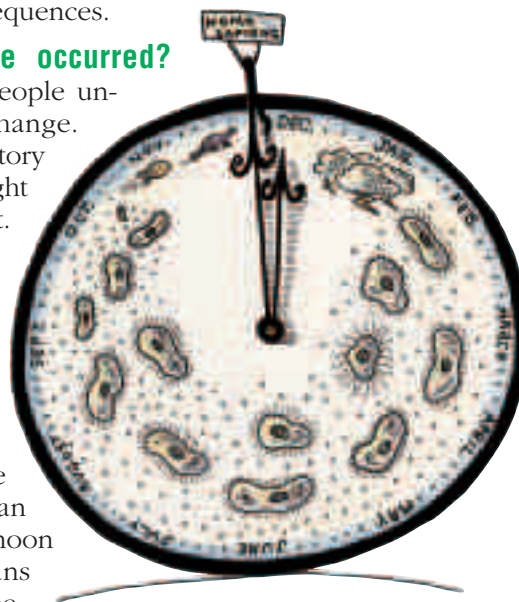
Figure 17.1 Key Assumptions in Predicting Social Change in America

The most accurate predictor of trends in American society has been the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* which was published in the 1830s, displayed an amazing grasp of American society. Tocqueville's success has been attributed to several key assumptions he made. Do you think that any of these assumptions are less important today in predicting social change than the others?

1. **Major social institutions would continue to exist.** Unlike many of his contemporaries—and many of ours—Tocqueville did not expect the family, religion, or the state to disappear or to be greatly changed.

2. **Human nature would remain the same.** Tocqueville did not expect men and women to become much better or worse or different from what history had shown them to be.

3. **Equality and the trend toward centralized government would continue.**

4. **The availability of material resources (such as land, minerals, and rich soils) limits and directs social change.**

5. **Change is affected by the past, but history does not strictly dictate the future.**

6. **There are no social forces aside from human actions.** Historical events are not foreordained by factors beyond human control.

Adapted from Theodore Caplow, *American Social Trends* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), p. 216.

In addition, change does not merely "happen" to people. People in a society can consciously decide for themselves how change will occur. They can, for example, deliberately avoid a predicted state of affairs (Caplow, 1991).

These facts should not discourage people from attempting to understand changes in society. Alexis de Tocqueville was a Frenchman who published a remarkably penetrating study of American society after a tour in the early 1830s. The accuracy of his predictions was based upon sound assumptions he made about American society. Figure 17.1 discusses these basic premises.

Why do some societies change faster than others?   Understanding why some societies change faster than others is another difficult task. Sociologists have identified several important social processes that influence the pace of social change. In addition, several specific factors play important roles. We turn first to the social processes and then to the specific agents, or factors, that affect rates of change.

> "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.
>
> **L.P. Hartley**
> **short story author**"

Social Processes

A process is a series of steps that lead gradually to a result. As you get closer to graduation from high school, you may decide to continue your formal education. You will then begin a process of applying for acceptance to various colleges. If you follow all the steps in the necessary order and meet the colleges' criteria for entrance, the end result of your application process will be an acceptance letter.

Rapid social change means that generations do not share certain knowledge. Besides "snail-mail," what are some other products or technologies that might become obsolete?

Cultures and societies experience **social processes** that result in significant changes. Three important social processes are *discovery, invention,* and *diffusion.*

How does discovery promote social change?

In the **discovery** process, something is either learned or reinterpreted. When early ocean explorers did not fall off the end of the world, they changed what all but a few people believed about the shape of the earth. With this geographical knowledge came new patterns of migration, commerce, and colonization. Salt, another early discovery, was first used to flavor food. Because it was so highly valued, it also came to be used as money in Africa and as a religious offering among early Greeks and Romans. Fire was used at first by prehistoric peoples for warmth and cooking. Later, people discovered that fire could be used to clear fields, to create ash for fertilizer, and to melt ores to combine into new metals.

social processes
series of steps leading to change on a societal level

discovery
process by which something is learned or reinterpreted

invention
the creation of something new from previously existing items or processes

What is the role of invention in social change?

Invention is the creation of something new from items or processes that already exist. Examples of physical inventions come easily to mind. Consider the airplane. It was not so much the materials Orville and Wilbur Wright used—most of the parts were available—but the way the brothers combined these materials that enabled them to make their successful flight at Kitty Hawk.

The pace of social change through invention is closely tied to how complex the society or culture already is. The greater the number of existing items, or elements, the more ways they can be combined into inventions. Thus, the more complex and varied a society, the more rapidly it will change. This helps to explain why people reached the moon less than seventy years after the Wright brothers' first flight, even though scientists believe that several million years had passed between the appearance of the human species and the invention of the airplane. NASA was able to reach the moon relatively quickly because the United States had become advanced in such areas as physics, aerodynamics, and the manufacturing of specialized materials.

diffusion
process by which one culture or society borrows from another culture or society

How important is diffusion in social change?

When one group borrows something from another group—norms, values, foods, styles of architecture—change occurs through the process of **diffusion.** The extent and rate of diffusion depend on the degree of social contact. The more contact a group has with another group, the more likely it is that objects or ideas will be exchanged. In other words, social contact has the same effect on diffusion that complexity has on invention.

Borrowing may involve entire societies. The American colonists learned methods of growing cotton that were first developed in India. Potatoes from South America were transplanted across the Atlantic to become Ireland's most important food crop. Diffusion may also take place between groups within the same society. African American musicians were the creators of a jazz subculture that spread throughout white America (and into other countries as well).

By which social process did this image of Elvis reach Jerusalem, Israel?

Before it is widely accepted, a borrowed element must harmonize with the group culture. In spite of the fact that unisex fashion is popular in America today, wearing a Scottish kilt on the job could get a construction worker laughed off the top of a skyscraper. Wearing kilts still clashes with the American definition of manhood. If skirts are ever to become as acceptable for American men as pants are for women, either their form will have to be modified or the cultural concept of masculinity will have to change.

Diffusion may involve using only part of a borrowed characteristic or trait. The Japanese, for example, accept capitalism but resist the American form of democratic government, style of conducting business, and family structure. Diffusion almost always involves picking and choosing.

In modern society, most aspects of culture are borrowed rather than created. The processes of discovery and invention are important, but usually far more elements enter a society through cultural diffusion.

Technology

Besides the three processes for social change, sociologists have identified some major forces that lead to change. **Technology** includes knowledge and hardware (tools) that are used to achieve practical goals. The appearance of new technology is generally a sign that social change will soon follow (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1998).

technology
knowledge and tools used to achieve practical goals

How important is technology to social change?   Technology is a prime promoter of social change. *Time* magazine's selection of Albert Einstein as the person of the century reflected the magazine's conclusion that the twentieth century will be remembered most for its advances in science and technology (Golden, 1999).

The creation of the silicon chip, which led to the computer revolution, has brought about technological change at an astounding rate. It took more than a century for telephones to spread to 94 percent of the homes

in the United States. In contrast, in less than five years the Internet had reached over 25 percent of Americans. (See page 29 for a comparison of the number of years it took for various technologies to be adopted in U.S. households.)

The changes that resulted from the use of computers are almost impossible to list. In 1999, social historian Francis Fukuyama described a workplace undergoing a transformation. The effects of these changes, he claims, will be as great as those of the Industrial Revolution. Telecommunications technology, for example, will allow many to work from their homes, but it will result in far less human interaction (McGinn and Raymond, 1997–98). In the field of medicine, computer technology has radically changed many surgical techniques. Microsurgeries and radio wave therapy are examples (Cowley and Underwood, 1997–98). Drivers in Germany can get real-time computer-generated information on traffic problems on the autobahn by using cell phones or electronic consoles in their cars.

These college students at a campus cyber café seem very comfortable with the fast pace of technological change in American society.

Population

Changing demographics are another important factor for creating social change. A classic example is the huge increase in the birth of babies following the return of American soldiers at the end of World War II (the so-called baby boom). Americans born between 1946 and 1964 caused the expansion of child healthcare facilities and created the need for more teachers and schools in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, the generation following baby boomers now in their thirties and in the labor market are experiencing increased competition for jobs and fewer opportunities to move up the career ladder. As the baby boomers retire, problems of health care and Social Security loom large. Longer working hours, retraining programs, and reeducation for older people will probably become political issues for future elections. As America's population continues to age, more attention is being paid to our senior citizens. Already, there are more extended-care homes, an increase in geriatric emphasis in medicine, and more television advertising and programming targeting the aging elderly population.

The Natural Environment

Interaction with the natural environment has, from the earliest times, also transformed American life. The vast territory west of the thirteen colonies permitted the nation to expand, ultimately to the Pacific Ocean. This western movement helped shape our cultural identity and values. It also caused untold changes, most tragically the destruction of many Native American cultures.

The environment continued to shape historical events, especially when natural disasters occurred. The Great Depression of the 1930s was due in part to a long drought that hit the Midwestern plains states. Overplanting and plowing had upset the fragile ecosystem and turned the prairies into a giant "dust bowl."

In 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine had a meltdown. This event added to opposition in the U.S. to using nuclear power as an energy source.

Another Time

The Horse Among the Plains Indians

Diffusion is one of the social processes that creates social change. The society of the Plains Indians in the west central United States was altered drastically by the European introduction of the horse—an example of diffusion.

In the nineteenth century, horses were the primary means of transportation and as such were an integral part of Plains Indian culture. The modern horse, however, was not native to the Americas, but was first brought by the Spanish. It was not until the late 1600s and early 1700s that horses in any numbers became available to the tribes of the Great Plains. . . .

The horse truly revolutionized life among the Plains tribes. The horse drastically altered the economic base and changed the lifestyle of these peoples. On horseback a hunter armed with bow and arrow could find and kill enough bison within a few months to feed his family for the year. Not only could he kill larger numbers of game animals, but he could pack the meat onto horses and readily transport it vast distances. Horses also allowed for the transporting of increased quantities of material goods. Teepees increased in size, and clothing and other material items became increasingly abundant and elaborate in decoration. For the first time these widely scattered groups could gather together in large camps, sometimes numbering in the thousands, for at least a portion of the year. In short, the horse quickly elevated the Plains tribes to relative prosperity.

The horse also sharply altered the relationship between these peoples and the neighboring farming tribes. The once relatively inoffensive nomads were now transformed into aggressive, predatory raiders. The Plains tribes were now capable of quickly assembling large parties of horse-mounted warriors who could raid the sedentary farming villages with impunity. The military balance of power had shifted.

In the decades immediately after the acquisition of the horse, the original Plains tribes flourished. Attacks on the neighboring farming peoples had a devastating effect, and many villages were abandoned. It was not long, however, before many cultivators saw both the economic and the military advantages derived from being horse-mounted nomadic bison hunters. The Cheyenne and some of the Dakota abandoned the life of settled farmers and moved westward to the plains to become nomadic, teepee-dwelling, bison hunters themselves. As they moved onto the plains, they came to challenge directly the original Plains tribes for dominance over critical hunting resources, which intensified warfare. As a result, warfare and the warrior tradition became an integral part of Plains Indian values, social organization, and behavior.

Source: Adapted from James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity,* 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000, p. 284.

Thinking It Over

1. List at least five major changes that resulted from the introduction of the horse to the culture of the Plains Indians.
2. Identify an item that has been introduced to your culture from another place. (This item could be food, clothing, an invention, or even an idea.) What effect has it had on your life?

World View

Internet Connections

As this map shows, the number of people connected to the Internet varies widely from country to country. As of the late 1990s, nearly 60 percent of Internet connections were on the North American continent. This map shows the number of computers connected to the Internet per 100,000 people.

Computers Connected to the Internet per 100,000 People

Over 5000	250–499
3000–5000	50–249
1000–2999	Below 50
500–999	No data
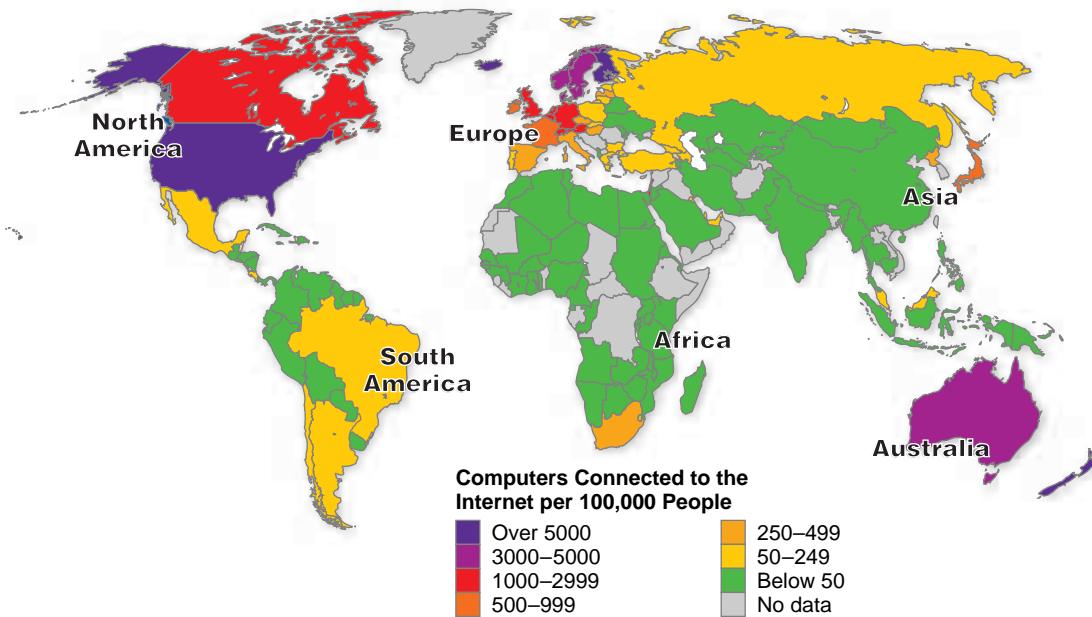
Interpreting the Map

1. Do you see a pattern in the number of connections to the Internet? Explain.
2. What implications might this distribution have for future social change?

Adapted from *The Macmillan Atlas of the Future*. New York: Macmillan, 1998.

In the early 1970s, OPEC (an organization of oil-producing nations) launched an embargo, refusing to sell its oil to other countries. Because of the natural short supply of oil without the contribution of the oil-rich Mideastern countries, oil products became scarce and expensive, contributing to economic inflation in the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s. As a result, Americans began driving smaller, more fuel-efficient automobiles.

Revolution and War

revolution
sudden and complete overthrow of a social or political order

Revolution and war are related factors that lead to social change. A **revolution** involves the sudden and complete overthrow of an existing social or political order. A revolution is often, but not always, accompanied by vio-

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lence. Most revolutionaries expect that the revolution will bring about fundamental changes. Marx, for example, expected workers' revolutions to eliminate class-based inequality and therefore to have a profound effect on the social and economic structures of the societies in which they occurred.

Are revolutions normally followed by radical changes? According to Charles Tilly, a revolution results in the replacement of one set of power holders by another (Tilly, 1978, 1997). In the view of another respected sociologist, a post-revolutionary society is eventually replaced by a society that looks much like the original one (Brinton, 1990). Radical changes are rarely permanent because people tend to revert to more familiar customs and behaviors. They do so in part because continuity with the past provides security and a blueprint for behavior.

What sorts of changes do follow revolutions?   In most cases, the new social order created by a successful revolution is likely to be a compromise between the new and the old. Consider the example of China, the site of a communist revolution in 1949. The revolution did not result in the wholesale changes promised by its leaders. One of the revolutionary reforms, for example, promised liberation from sexism. The situation for Chinese women has improved, but sexual equality is a far-distant dream in that country ("Closing the Gap," 1995).

How does war promote social change?   **War** is organized, armed conflict that occurs within a society or between nations. Sociologist Robert Nisbet (1988) described how war brings about social change through diffusion, discovery, and invention. Social change is created through diffusion because wars break down barriers between societies, bringing people from different societies together. This association leads to the adoption of new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Wars also promote invention and discovery. For example, during World War II (1939–1945), the pressure of war enabled the U.S. government to promote and finance the development of such technologies as the atomic bomb, synthetic rubber, and antibiotics. Each contributed to a cultural revolution after the war. And America's culture, both during and after World War I, was imported by societies all over the world.

Wars often bring about social change because culturally dissimilar societies, such as the U.S. and Kuwait, come into increased contact.

war
organized, armed conflict that occurs within a society or between nations

> Every generation revolts against its fathers and makes friends with its grandfathers.
>
> **Lewis Mumford**
> **American author**

Section 1 Assessment

1. Briefly describe three important processes for social change.
2. Provide one example each (not given in the text) of how population and interaction with the natural environment have caused social change.
3. Explain how war can be both a positive and a negative force for social change.

Critical Thinking

4. **Drawing Conclusions** Identify a major social change that has occurred in your lifetime. What do you think are the major sources of this change—discovery, diffusion, or invention? Be careful to relate the manner of change to the *nature* of the change itself.

Focus on Research

Case Study: Is the American Dream Dying?

Americans have long expected to achieve a higher standard of living than their parents. Instead, according to Katherine Newman (1994), social and economic change are placing the American Dream in jeopardy. The downscaling of jobs and pay that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s has replaced earlier optimism with anger, doubt, and fear.

Newman spent two years conducting personal interviews with 150 Americans living in "Pleasanton," a suburban community representative of much of America. Pleasanton is a mix of skilled blue-collar workers and white-collar professionals from a variety of ethnic and religious origins. Her respondents were schoolteachers, guidance counselors, and sixty families whose children were then grown.

The residents of Pleasanton believed that the promise of America had taken an unexpected wrong turn, and they were trying to make sense of it. Newman attempted to understand the residents' view of this downward mobility. The stresses associated with changing economic conditions, she believed, would bring cultural expectations, disappointments, and conflicts close enough to the surface for a trained social scientist to see. As the study progressed, she did, in fact, see conflict between parents and grown children, disagreements along lines of race and ethnicity, and unhappy marriages. The following statement reveals a baby boomer's shattered confidence in the American Dream.

> I'll never have what my parents had. I can't even dream of that. I'm living a lifestyle that's way lower than it was when I was growing up and it's depressing. You know it's a rude awakening when you're out in the world on your own. . . . I took what was given to me and tried to use it the best way I could. Even if you are a hard worker and you never skipped a beat, you followed all the rules, did everything they told you you were supposed to do, it's still horrendous. They lied to me. You don't get where you were supposed to wind up. At the end of the road it isn't there. I worked all those years and then I didn't get to candy land. The prize wasn't there . . . (Newman, 1994:3).

After a detailed and often personal exploration of what Newman calls the "withering American Dream," she turns to the larger social and political implications for society. She explores the transition from a society of upward mobility based on effort and merit to a society in which social classes of birth increasingly dictate future social and economic positions.

According to Newman, the soul of America is at stake. She raises these questions: Will Americans turn to exclusive self-interest, or will they care for others as well as themselves? Will suburbanites turn a blind eye to the rapidly deteriorating inner cities? Will the generational, racial, and ethnic groups turn inward, or will they attempt to bridge the divides that threaten to separate them further?

A partial answer to these questions is reflected in public opinion about federal, state, and local tax revenues. If the residents of Pleasanton are any guide, Americans do not wish to invest in the common good. Public schools, colleges, universities, and inner cities, for example, are receiving a rapidly declining share of public economic support. In conclusion, Newman states:

This does not augur well for the soul of the country in the twenty-first century. Every great nation draws its strength from a social contract, an unspoken agreement to provide for one another, to reach across the narrow self-interests of generations, ethnic groups, races, classes, and genders toward some vision of the common good. Taxes and budgets— the mundane preoccupations of city hall—express this commitment, or lack of it, in the bluntest fashion. Through these mechanistic devices, we are forced to confront some of the most searching philosophical questions that face any country: What do we owe one another as members of a society? Can we sustain a collective sense of purpose in the face of the declining fortunes that are tearing us apart, leaving those who are able to scramble for advantage and those who are not to suffer out of sight? (Newman, 1994:221)

A former G.E. worker stands in front of signs lamenting the move of a plant from North Carolina to Mexico. This thirty-year veteran of the closing plant would agree that the American dream is dying.

Working with the Research

1. Think about your past experiences at home and in other social institutions (such as schools and churches). What is your conception of the American dream, based on these experiences? Critically analyze the ways in which society shaped your conception.
2. Newman's research was done in the early 1990s. Do you believe that she is right about the fate of the American dream? Explain.
3. If the American dream is withering, many social changes are in store. Describe the major changes you foresee.
4. Suppose Katherine Newman had decided to place her study in the context of sociological theory. Write a conclusion to her book from the theoretical perspective—functionalist or conflict theorist—that you think is most appropriate.

2

Theoretical Perspectives on Social Change

K e y   T e r m s

- **equilibrium**
- **urbanism**

Section Preview

The functionalist and conflict perspectives view social change in very different ways. The functionalist perspective depicts societies as relatively stable. Following a major change, these integrated systems seek a new equilibrium. According to the conflict perspective, societies are unstable systems that are constantly undergoing change. Symbolic interactionism identifies decreasing shared values as a source of social instability.

The Functionalist Perspective

Because functionalism emphasizes social stability and continuity, it may seem contradictory to refer to a functionalist theory of social change. There are, however, two functionalist theories of social change—proposed by William Ogburn and Talcott Parsons—that are especially interesting. Both of these theories are based on the concept of *equilibrium*.

Close your eyes and imagine a tightrope walker inching his way across a deep chasm on a narrow rope. If you have an active imagination, you will picture him continually shifting his body and using a pole to counterbalance the effects of the wind as well as the effects of his own motions. The tightrope walker is concerned with maintaining equilibrium. When used by sociologists, **equilibrium** describes a society's tendency to react to changes by making small adjustments to keep itself in a state of functioning and balance.

A society in change, then, moves from stability to temporary instability and back to stability. Sociologists refer to this as a dynamic, or moving, equilibrium. For example, in 1972, a broken dam led to the destruction of the community of Buffalo Creek, West Virginia. The physical destruction of the community was accompanied by death and the loss of the old way of life. Despite the ensuing chaos, residents of the community slowly pulled their lives together again. Although things were not the same as before, a new equilibrium was built out of the physical, social, and human wreckage (Erikson, 1976).
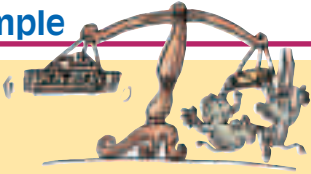
equilibrium
a state of functioning and balance, maintained by a society's tendency to make small adjustments to change

Social equilibrium was shaken for a while, after an earthquake caused the collapse of this Los Angeles area freeway.

Figure 17.2 Focus on Theoretical Perspectives

Social Change. This table provides one example each of how the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives view social change. Describe how a functionalist would look at an interest group and how a conflict theorist would view equilibrium.

Theoretical Perspective	Concept	Example
Functionalism	Equilibrium	Continuity in the nature of the presidency despite scandals in the Nixon and Clinton administrations
Conflict Theory	Interest group	Enactment of civil rights laws in the 1960s as a result of the struggle over racial equality
Symbolic Interactionism	Urbanism	The smaller proportion of social interaction in a large city compared to a small town is based on a decrease in the number of shared meanings

The 1960s saw the norms of sexual behavior change radically. After skyrocketing, for example, teenage pregnancy is declining. Although Americans do not follow the norms of the 1950s, a retreat from extremes is occurring as new norms of sexual behavior are being established.

The Conflict Perspective

According to the conflict perspective, social change is the result of struggles among groups for scarce resources. Social change is created as these conflicts are resolved. Many of the basic assumptions of the conflict perspective emerge from the writings of Karl Marx about social class conflicts (see page 16). Marx wrote that "without conflict, no progress: this is the law which civilization has followed to the present day."

Sociologists such as Ralf Dahrendorf have adapted many of Marx's ideas. Dahrendorf believes that the resources at stake are more than economic. The quest for power is the source of social change in his view. Whereas Marx saw conflict between two opposing social classes, Dahrendorf sees conflict among groups at all levels of society. Social change thus comes from a multitude of competing interest groups. These groups can be political, economic, religious, racial, ethnic, or gender based. Society changes as power relationships among interest groups change.

History seems to favor Dahrendorf's viewpoint over Marx's. Class conflict has not occurred in any capitalist society; social classes have not been polarized

> " The single greatest power in the world today is the power to change.
>
> **Karl Deutsch**
> **Harvard professor** "

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into major warring factions. Rather, capitalist societies are composed of countless competing groups. In America, racial groups struggle over the issue of equal economic opportunity, environmentalists and industrialists argue about environmental protection and economic development, and so on, with many other groups at odds with opposing groups over their own special issues.

Symbolic Interactionism

Human beings, according to symbolic interactionism, interact with others on the basis of commonly shared symbols. The nature and frequency of social interaction are affected by the extent to which people share meanings. As shared interpretations of the world decrease, social ties weaken and social interaction becomes more impersonal.

The relationship between shared meanings and the nature of social interaction can be illustrated within the context of the change from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. Accompanying this shift is the emergence of urbanization and its distinctive way of life. This distinctive way of life is known as **urbanism.**

What is the way of life associated with urbanism? According to German sociologist Ferdinard Tönnies (1957), social interaction prior to the Industrial Revolution was based on shared tradition. In rural settings, daily life revolved around family, common norms and values, and an interest in the welfare of all community members. Tönnies thought that urbanization creates a very different way of life. In urban society, he wrote, social interaction is impersonal and fragmented because most people with whom one interacts are strangers who share little common tradition.

Sociologists have both agreed and disagreed with Tönnies ever since he introduced this view of urbanism in 1887. According to Tönnies's critics, the way of life in urban society is much more varied than he described it (Gans, 1968). While some urbanites may have hardly any shared meanings on which to base social interaction with others (poor people, elderly people), many others share meanings on which they interact (members of ethnic neighborhoods, members of artistic subcultures).

We need not worry about the outcome of this ongoing debate. It has been the subject of research for sociologists for a long time. What matters here is that this research is guided by ideas of symbolic interactionism.

urbanism
the distinctive way of life shared by the people living in a city

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Student Web Activity
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 17—Student Web Activities** for an activity on urbanism.

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Assessment–Section 2

1. Describe an area of your life that would benefit from having more equilibrium. How might you achieve this?
2. How did Dahrendorf's interpretation differ from Marx's theory of social change?
3. What theory of social change best explains the enactment of civil rights laws in the 1960s?

Critical Thinking

4. **Finding the Main Idea** Are functionalism and conflict theory compatible as explanations for social change? Clearly distinguish the two perspectives in formulating your answer.

CONTENTS

Collective Behavior

K e y T e r m s

- **collective behavior**
- **collectivity**
- **dispersed collectivity**
- **rumor**
- **urban legend**

- **fad**
- **fashion**
- **mass hysteria**
- **panic**
- **crowd**

- **mob**
- **riot**
- **contagion theory**
- **emergent norm theory**
- **convergence theory**

Defining Collective Behavior

Collective behavior refers to the spontaneous behavior of people who are responding to similar stimuli. Let's look more closely at some of the terms in this definition. First, what is meant by *collective?* When sociologists use this term, they are referring to a large number of people who do not normally interact and who do not necessarily share clearly defined norms. Sociologists call such a gathering of people a **collectivity.** Stimuli are outside events or persons that cause a response. Putting it all together, collective behavior involves spontaneous social interaction in which loosely connected participants influence one another's behavior.

The study of collective behavior poses a large problem. Sociologists are used to studying structured, not unplanned, behavior. How are researchers going to investigate a social phenomenon that occurs spontaneously? In spite of this difficulty, sociologists have developed fascinating theories of collective behavior. It turns out that collective behavior involves more structure and rationality than appear on the surface. Sociologists identify several types

Section Preview

Collective behavior describes how people behave when they are united by a single short-term goal. Rumors, fads, fashions, mass hysteria, and panics are examples of collective behaviors. Crowds gather and behave in different ways depending on the stimuli and conditions present. Contagion theory and emergent norm theory describe crowd behavior.

collective behavior
the spontaneous behavior of a group of people responding to similar stimuli

collectivity
collection of people who do not normally interact and who do not share clearly defined norms

Some twenty people were badly injured following a 1947 panic in Nice, France. Sociologists see some structure even in such spontaneous social behavior.

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dispersed collectivity
collectivity made up of people who are not physically connected but who follow common rules or respond to common stimuli

of collective behavior. In the more structured forms, such as crowds and social movements, people are in physical contact. We will look at these interactions in the following sections. In a **dispersed collectivity** people are widely scattered. Nevertheless, they are in some way following common rules or responding to common stimuli. Behavior among members of dispersed collectivities is not highly individualized:

When people are scattered about, they can communicate with one another in small clusters of people; all of the members of a public need not hear or see what every other member is saying or doing. And they can communicate in a variety of ways—by telephone, letter, Fax machine, computer linkup, as well as through second-, or third-, or fourth-hand talk in a gossip or rumor network (Goode, 1992:255).

Rumors, Legends, Fads, and Fashions

People will typically respond to certain information in similar ways, even when physically separated. *Rumors, fads,* and *fashions* are collective behaviors characteristic of dispersed collectivities.

What is a rumor?   A **rumor** is a widely circulating story of questionable truth. Rumors are usually spread by people about events or other people that are of great interest to themselves. The mass media exploit the public's fascination with rumors. Entertainment magazines devote themselves exclusively to rock idols and movie stars; tabloid newspapers are loaded with suggestive guesswork, half-truths, and innuendos; even mainstream news publications offer accounts of the rich, famous, and offbeat. As these examples suggest, rumors and gossip are closely related.

You probably heard many rumors about what would happen when the clock struck midnight on the last day of 1999. According to these rumors, power grids would fail, elevators would stop working, and the stock market would crash as the year 2000 began. According to another rumor, a fast-food restaurant chain was increasing the protein content of its hamburgers by adding ground worms. Then there was the warning about combining a soft drink and a popular candy—a combination that would supposedly cause the stomach to explode. None of these rumors proved true; but they were spread and believed, in part, because they touched on people's insecurities, uncertainties, and anxieties.

How are urban legends started?   Related to rumors are what Jan Harold Brunvand calls *urban legends* (Brunvand, 1989). **Urban legends** are moralistic tales passed along by people who swear the stories happened to someone they know or to an acquaintance of a friend or family member. Instead of fairy tales that take place in the far-distant past, urban legends take place in shopping malls, on city subways, and in schools. The tales often focus on current concerns and fears, such as AIDS and inner-city gangs. A typical story tells about a man who wakes up in a hotel room missing a kidney. Another describes alligators roaming the sewer systems of big cities. As cautionary tales, urban legends warn us against engaging in risky behaviors

Swing dancing (shown here in 1950s style) has become popular again.

rumor
a widely circulating piece of information that is not verified as being true or false

urban legend
a moralistic tale which focuses on current concerns and fears of the city or suburb dweller

by pointing out what has supposedly happened to others who did what we might be tempted to try. Like rumors, urban legends permit us to play out some of our hidden fears and guilt feelings by being shocked and horrified at others' misfortune.

Are fads long lasting?   A **fad** is an unusual behavior pattern that spreads rapidly, is embraced zealously, and then disappears after a short time. The widespread popularity of a fad rests largely on its novelty. Students in the early 1970s introduced the "streaking" fad—running naked across college grounds or through occupied classrooms. More recent fads include body piercing, tattoos, retro-swing dancing, and snowboarding.

What are fashions?   Fads are adopted by a particular group; fashions are much more widespread. A **fashion** is a behavior pattern that is widely approved but is expected to change periodically. In the United States today, the "in" fashions for clothing are introduced seasonally and usually involve changes in such features as skirt length and lapel width. High school students wishing to be fashionable wear the labels of Tommy Hilfiger, FUBU, Abercrombie & Fitch, Gap, and Nike.

Fashion changes show up most often in items that involve personal appearance such as clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles; but automobile design, home decorating, architecture, and politics are also subject to fashion. Slang is a language-based fashion. Slang terms go in and out of favor very quickly (Lofland, 1993). *Cool, the cat's pajamas, groovy, tubular, neat, tough, fine, awesome, rad, bad, phat,* and *sick* are all slang terms of approval that were popular among young people of various decades.

fad
an unusual behavior pattern that spreads rapidly and disappears quickly

fashion
a widely accepted behavior pattern that changes periodically
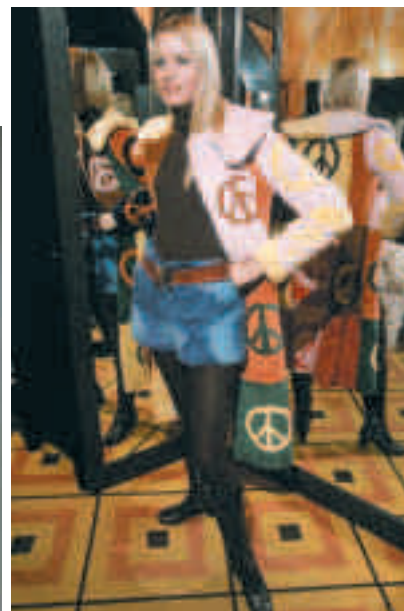
Fashion in dress is constantly changing. Can you identify each of these styles with a decade between 1960–2000?

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Sociology Today

Terrorist Attacks and Disaster Myths

You fail a test, lose a boyfriend, have a minor auto accident, or suffer defeat by an archrival's basketball team. You might well describe each of these occasions as a "disaster." For sociologists, however, the term disaster is limited to events with the following characteristics:

- Extensive damage to property
- Great loss of human life
- Massive disruption to everyday living
- Unpredictability and suddenness of a short-term event

Researchers typically divide disasters into "natural disasters" such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and "technological accidents" such as airline crashes, nuclear plant meltdowns, and ship sinkings. But how can we classify the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.? It was neither natural nor an accident. But, it had all the characteristics of a disaster. In fact, terrorism is introducing a new type of disaster, one that involves technology and is intentionally caused by humans.

The World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks obviously met the criteria of a disaster. Less obviously, they also exposed as false many popular beliefs about human behavior in disasters. Let's consider four such myths within the context of this national tragedy.

- **Victims of disasters panic.** Contrary to this myth, disaster victims do not generally panic. While some individuals in disasters may panic and while mass panics may follow disasters, the prevailing response is one of general composure and problem-solving behavior. Some inside the

Firefighters raising the flag at the World Trade Center rescue site.

Mass Hysteria and Panics

Mass hysteria exists when collective anxiety is created by acceptance of one or more false beliefs. Orson Welles's famous "Men from Mars" radio broadcast in 1938, though based entirely on H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds,* caused nationwide hysteria. About one million listeners became frightened or disturbed, and thousands of Americans hit the road to avoid the invading Martians. Telephone lines were jammed as people shared rumors, anxieties, fears, and escape plans (Houseman, 1948; Cantril, 1982; Barron, 1988).

A classic example of mass hysteria was the response to imagined witches in seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts, chronicled in Arthur Miller's famous play, *The Crucible.* Twenty-two people labeled witches died—twenty by hanging—before the false testimony of several young girls began to be questioned. The mass hysteria dissipated only after the false beliefs were discredited. There has been some hysteria in the United States regarding AIDS. A 1987 Gallup poll showed that a substantial proportion of Americans held

World Trade Center did respond with incapacitating emotion. One secretary in shock, for example, had to be carried out by a fellow worker. Some people jumped from the towers. But the disaster failed to set off a widespread panic. Many who heeded the first building-wide instructions died after calmly remaining in their offices. And many of the survivors remained as interested observers, forcing police to broadcast an urgent plea for them to hurry away for their own safety.

- **Disaster victims respond as isolated individuals.** Typically, we picture disaster victims as individuals trying to save only themselves. Actually, according to research, people immediately engage in group efforts to help others. People in the World Trade Center with cell phones offered them to other victims desperate to call family or friends. Scores of New York police and over 300 firefighters died while working together to rescue trapped victims.

- **Disaster victims leave the scene as soon as possible.** Contrary to this myth, the majority of victims remain near the disaster site. Rather than fleeing, most victims of the World Trade Center disaster remained to help others, to witness the fire and rescue efforts, or to think about returning to their offices. In addition, large numbers of volunteers and off-site emergency personnel actually rushed *to* the scene. So many New Yorkers offered to donate blood that many were turned away. Bellevue Hospital at one point had five doctors for each emergency ward patient. Four

firefighters who were playing golf on Staten Island saw the first plane hit the north tower. Three of those four lost their lives in rescue efforts, and they were just a few of the hundreds of firefighters who died after *entering* the disaster site. To help rescuers searching for survivors under the rubble, ironworkers, many of whom had built the World Trade Center, labored together in 12-hour volunteer shifts clearing away twisted steel.

- **Crime is prevalent during disasters.** Rather than increasing, crime actually decreases after a disaster. While some isolated instances of criminal behavior occur, the crime rate in a disaster falls. After the World Trade Center disaster, some looting in surrounding buildings was reported, and a Picasso drawing valued at $320,000 was stolen from a Madison Avenue art gallery. More importantly, the overall crime rate in New York City declined 34 percent in the week following the disaster. According to the NYPD, arrests were down 64 percent compared to the same seven days the previous years.

Doing Sociology

1. Think of some event you formerly considered a disaster. Explain why it was not a disaster from a sociological viewpoint.
2. Do you think that the behavior following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center is best explained by functionalism, conflict theory, or symbolic interactionism? Explain your choice.

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false beliefs regarding the spread of AIDS—30 percent believed insect bites could spread the disease, 26 percent related the spread to food handling or preparation, 26 percent thought AIDS could be transmitted via drinking glasses, 25 percent saw a risk in being coughed or sneezed upon, and 18 percent believed that AIDS could be contracted from toilet seats (Gallup, 1988). These mistaken ideas persisted on a widespread basis despite the medical community's conclusion that AIDS is spread through sexual contact, by sharing hypodermic needles, and by transfusion of infected blood. By the late 1990s, knowledge, tolerance, compassion, and understanding of AIDS had increased enough that the frequency of these rumors dropped off.

mass hysteria
collective anxiety created by the acceptance of one or more false beliefs

What is the difference between mass hysteria and a panic?   A **panic** occurs when people react to a real threat in fearful, anxious, and often self-damaging ways. Panics usually occur in response to such unexpected events as fires, invasions, and ship sinkings. Over 160 people, for example, died in the Kentucky Beverly Hills Supper Club in 1977 when a panic reaction to a

panic
reaction to a real threat in fearful, anxious, and often self-damaging ways

fire caused a jamming of the escape routes. Interestingly enough, people often do not panic after natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Although panics may occur at the outset, major natural catastrophes usually lead to highly structured behavior (Erikson, 1976; Dynes and Tierney, 1994).

Crowds

A **crowd** is a temporary collection of people who share an immediate common interest. The temporary residents of a large campground, each occupied with his or her own activities, would not be considered a crowd. Sociologists would call this kind of gathering an *aggregate*. But if some stimulus, such as the landing of a hot-air balloon or the sudden appearance of a bear, drew the campers together, the aggregate would become a crowd.

People in a crowd often have no predefined ideas about the way they should behave. They do, however, share the urgent feeling that something either is about to happen or should be made to happen.

crowd
a temporary collection of people who share an immediate common interest

Are there different types of crowds? Sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969a) has distinguished four basic types of crowds.

1. A *casual crowd* is the least organized, least emotional, and most temporary type of crowd. Although the people in a casual crowd share some point of interest, it is minor and fades quickly. Members of a casual crowd may gather with others to observe the aftermath of an accident, to watch someone threatening to jump from a building, or to listen to a street rap group.

2. A *conventional crowd* has a specific purpose and follows accepted norms for appropriate behavior. People watching a film, taking a chartered flight to a university ball game, or observing a tennis match are in conventional crowds. As in casual crowds, there is little interaction among members of conventional crowds.

3. *Expressive crowds* have no significant or long-term purpose beyond unleashing emotion. Their members are collectively caught up in a dominating, all-encompassing mood of the moment. Free expression of emotion—yelling, crying, laughing, jumping—is the main characteristic of this type of crowd. Hysterical fans at a rock concert, the multitude gathered at Times Square on New Year's Eve, and the some 250,000 Americans at the Woodstock music festival in 1999 are all examples of expressive crowds.

4. Finally, a crowd that takes some action toward a target is an *acting crowd*. This type of crowd concentrates intensely on some objective and engages in aggressive behavior to achieve it. Protestors at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle were an acting crowd. Although the protests involved many groups with various objectives, they all shared the goal of placing "people before profits" (Klee, 1999). A conventional crowd may become an acting crowd, as when European soccer fans abandon the guidelines for spectators in order to attack the officials. Similarly, an expressive crowd may become an acting one, as in the case of celebrating Super Bowl fans who wind up overturning cars and destroying property. Mobs are acting crowds, as are crowds engaging in riots.

Each of these photos can be associated with a type of crowd. Which photo shows an acting crowd?

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What are mobs and riots? A **mob** is an emotionally stimulated, disorderly crowd that is ready to use destructiveness and violence to achieve a purpose. A mob knows what it wants to do and considers all other things distractions. In fact, individuals who are tempted to deviate from the mob's purpose are pressured to conform. Concentration on the main event is maintained by strong leadership.

Mobs have a long and violent history. Many students are familiar with the scenes of mob actions described by Charles Dickens in the classic story *A Tale of Two Cities*. The formation of mobs is not limited to revolutions, however. During the mid-1700s, American colonists mobbed tax collectors as well as other political officials appointed by the British. During the Civil War, hundreds of people were killed or injured as armed mobs protested against the Union Army's draft. Mobs in the United States have acted as judges, juries, and executioners in the lynching of African Americans (as well as some whites) since the end of the nineteenth century.

Some acting crowds, although engaged in deliberate destructiveness and violence, do not have the mob's sense of common purpose. These episodes of crowd destructiveness and violence are called **riots**. Riots involve a much wider range of activities than mob action. Whereas a mob surges to burn a particular building, to lynch an individual, or to throw bombs at a government official's car, rioters often direct their violence and destructiveness at targets simply because they are convenient. People who participate in riots typically lack power and engage in destructive behavior as a way to express their frustrations. A riot, usually triggered by a single event, is best understood within the context of long-standing tensions.

Ghetto riots tore through many large American cities during the summer of 1967. The riots occurred against a background of massive unemployment, uncaring slum landlords, poverty, discrimination, and charges of police brutality. In 1989, thousands of angry citizens stormed the secret police headquarters in East Berlin. Although no one was killed or injured, the protest aroused widespread fear that the country was about to drop into anarchy (Bierman, 1990). In 1992 police officers charged in the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles were acquitted by a jury. In the aftermath of the acquittals, Los Angeles experienced America's deadliest riots in twenty-five years. Two days of rioting left the City of Angels with at least 53 dead, over 2,000 injured, over 16,000 arrested, and an estimated $800 million in damage from looting and burning (Duke and Escobar, 1992; Mathews, 1992).

Theories of Crowd Behavior

Theories have been developed to explain crowd behavior. The three most important are *contagion theory, emergent norm theory* and *convergence theory.*

What is contagion theory? *Contagion* often refers to the spread of disease from person to person. Accordingly, **contagion theory** focuses on the spread of emotion in a crowd. As emotional intensity in the crowd increases, people temporarily lose their individuality to the "will" of the crowd. This makes it possible for a charismatic or manipulative leader to direct crowd behavior, at least initially.

Contagion theory has its roots in the classic 1895 work of Gustave Le Bon (originally published in 1895). Le Bon was a French aristocrat who disdained

mob
emotional crowd ready to use violence for a specific purpose

riot
episode of largely random destruction and violence carried out by a crowd

Riots occurred in 1992 in Los Angeles after the acquittals of four white officers accused of the beating of African American motorist Rodney King. This looter took advantage of the riot to add to her wardrobe.

contagion theory
theory stating that members of crowds stimulate each other to higher and higher levels of emotion and irrational behavior

Riot police officers look at a fire set by fans during a 1996 soccer game in Athens. How does contagion theory describe the behavior that led to the fire?

emergent norm theory
theory stating that norms develop to guide crowd behavior

convergence theory
theory that states that crowds are formed by people who deliberately congregate with like-minded others

crowds made up of the masses. People in crowds, Le Bon thought, were reduced to a nearly subhuman level.

By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings (Le Bon, 1960:32).

Herbert Blumer (1969a) has offered another version of contagion theory. Blumer avoids Le Bon's elitist bias but still implies that crowds are irrational and out of control. For Blumer, the basic process in crowds is a "circular reaction"—people mutually stimulating one another. This process includes three stages. In *milling,* the first stage, people move around in an aimless and random fashion, much like excited herds of cattle or sheep. Through milling, people become increasingly aware of and sensitive to one another; they enter something akin to a hypnotic trance. All of this prepares the crowd to act in a concerted and spontaneous way.

The second stage, *collective excitement,* is a more intense form of milling. At this stage, crowd members become impulsive, unstable, and highly responsive to the actions and suggestions of others. Individuals begin to lose their personal identities and take on the identity of the crowd.

The last stage, *social contagion,* is an extension of the other stages. Behavior in this stage involves rigid, unthinking, and nonrational transmission of mood, impulse, or behavior. We see such behavior, for example, when fans at soccer games in Europe launch attacks on referees that disrupt games and leave people injured or even killed. Taking a less extreme case, people at auctions can find themselves buying objects of little or no value to them because they have become caught up in the excitement of bidding.

What is emergent norm theory?   Sociologists today realize that much crowd behavior, even in mobs, is actually very rational (McPhail, 1991). **Emergent norm theory** stresses the similarity between daily social behavior and crowd behavior. In both situations, norms guide behavior (Turner, 1964; Turner and Killian, 1987). So even within crowds, rules develop. These rules are *emergent* norms because the crowd participants are not aware of the rules until they find themselves in a particular situation. The norms develop on the spot as crowd participants pick up cues for expected behavior.

Contagion theory proposes a collective mind that motivates members of the crowd to act. According to emergent norm theory, people in a crowd are present for a variety of reasons. Hence, they do not all behave in the same way. Conformity may be active (some people in a riot may take home as many watches and rings as they can carry) or passive (others may simply not interfere with the looters, although they take nothing for themselves). In Nazi Germany, for instance, some people destroyed the stores of Jewish merchants, while others watched silently.

What is convergence theory?   Both the contagion and emergent norm theories of crowd behavior assume that individuals are merely responding to those around them. It may be a more emotional response (as in contagion theory) or a more rational response (as in emergent norm theory). In other words, the independent variable in crowd behavior is the crowd itself. In contrast, in **convergence theory** crowds are formed by people who deliberately

Police made mass arrests in 1992 when anti-abortion activists attempted to blockade a Milwaukee abortion clinic. How does this behavior relate to convergence theory?

congregate with others who they know to be like-minded. According to convergence theory, the independent variable in crowd behavior is the desire of people with a common interest to come together.

There have been many instances of crowds gathering in front of clinics to discourage abortions. This behavior, say convergence theorists, does not simply occur because people happened to be at the same place and are influenced by others. Such a crowd is motivated to form because of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes (Berk, 1974).

Section 3 Assessment

1. How is a dispersed collectivity different from other types of collectivities?
2. Some observers at a lynching do not participate but do not attempt to stop the lynching. Which of the following theories of crowd behavior best explains this?
   a. contagion theory
   b. crowd decision theory
   c. emergent norm theory
   d. convergence theory

Critical Thinking

3. **Making Generalizations** Rumors may or may not be true. Do you think most rumors turn out to be false? Why or why not?
4. **Applying Concepts** Identify a current rumor, fad, or fashion. Explain why it is part of a dispersed collectivity.
5. **Applying Concepts** Think of a crowd you have been part of, and identify it as one of the four types of crowds described in the text. Provide examples of behavior within the crowd (yours or someone else's) that illustrate why it was that particular type.

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The Mob has many Heads, but no Brains.

Thomas Fuller
English minister

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Tech Trends

Rumors at Warp Speed

Even before e-mail and the Internet, rumors spread like wildfire. Now, with instantaneous and multiple communications, there is virtually no limit to how fast a rumor can travel. A recent example demonstrates how quickly rumors can spread through the Internet.

The "gangsta" rapper Tupac Shakur was shot four times while riding in a car on the Las Vegas strip. A week after his death, a rumor surfaced that he was still alive. This rumor became so widespread on the Internet that the television show *Nightline* reported it. *Nightline* gave no credence to the story, but it found the rumor itself worth reporting. The rumor is still believed by many of Shakur's fans.

The Internet has rumors, gossip, and conspiracy theories to satisfy almost any taste. *Conspiracy Nation,* a magazine devoted to conspiracy theories, has a web site that describes dozens of rumors about plots. A recent offering, for example, explored efforts by the "new world order" to clone human beings. Other articles have examined a variety of theories on political assassinations and suicides (Rust and Danitz, 1998). E-mail chain letters spread rumors ranging from impending doom caused by various computer viruses to tales of free vacations and cash prizes (Branscum, 1999). Clearly, the Internet can accelerate and magnify the effects of such rumors.

And the effects of rumors can be serious. A recent Internet rumor erroneously charged a reputable on-line information publisher with selling its customers' credit and medical histories. Another rumor, originated by Internet tabloid journalist Matt Drudge, charged a key Clinton White House aide with wife abuse. These types of rumors can have serious effects on a person's reputation or the financial stability of a company.

Such damage can now occur overnight, be long lasting, and even become irreversible. "Now the Internet is taking hearsay global at light speed, shaking up the media and blurring fact and fiction like never before" (Rust and Danitz, 1998: 22).

The rapper Tupac Shakur was widely rumored to still be alive a week after he was shot to death on the Las Vegas strip. This rumor was spread on the Internet.

Analyzing the Trends

How much credibility do you give to information from an Internet source? What criteria do you think should be used to evaluate the validity of information?

Social Movements

Key Terms

- **social movement**
- **revolutionary movement**
- **reformative movement**
- **redemptive movement**
- **alternative movement**
- **value-added theory**
- **resource mobilization theory**

The Nature of Social Movements

The **social movement** is the most highly structured, rational, and enduring form of collective behavior. Several defining elements characterize social movements.

- ❖ a large number of people
- ❖ a common goal to promote or prevent social change
- ❖ structured organization with commonly recognized leaders
- ❖ activity sustained over a relatively long time period

Examples of past and present social movements include the American Revolution, abolitionism, the suffragette movement, the pro-life and pro-choice movements, and the environmental movement.

Most social movements are started to stimulate change. As the definition indicates, however, a social movement may instead oppose change. Conservative political and fundamentalist religious organizations for example, are engaged in a concerted effort to oppose abortion (Tax, 1999). The National Rifle Association has focused its resources and membership on blocking certain gun control legislation (Walsh and Suro, 1999).
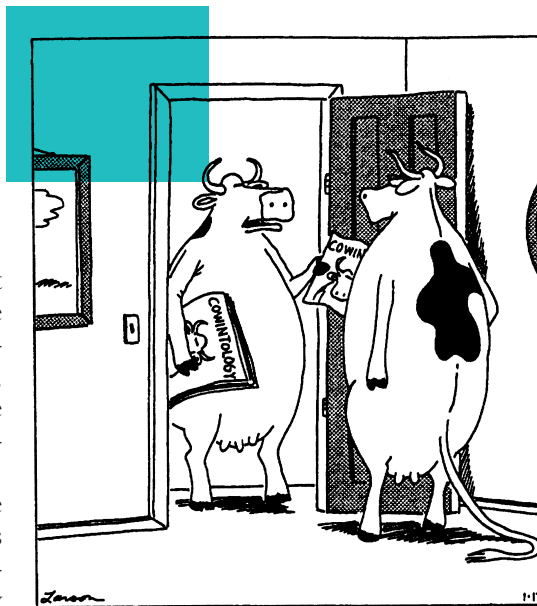
"Listen—just take one of our brochures and see what we're all about . . . In the meantime, you may wish to ask yourself, 'Am I a happy cow?'"

A very human need to belong is a prime motivator for joining social movements. What other motivations might be responsible for causing a person to join a social movement?

Section Preview

Social movements are more permanent and more organized than other types of collectivities. Theories to explain how social movements develop include value-added theory and resource mobilization theory.

social movement
movement whose goal is to promote or prevent social change; the most structured and rational form of collective behavior

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Figure 17.3 Major Forms of Collective Behavior

Behavior	Definition	Example
Rumor	A widely circulating piece of information that is not verified as being true or false	Continuously repeated prediction that airplanes would crash on a massive scale on January 1, 2000
Urban legend	A moralistic tale which focuses on current concerns and fears of the city or suburban dweller	Fierce alligators in New York City's sewer system
Fad	An unusual behavior pattern that spreads rapidly and disappears quickly (although it may reappear)	Body piercing
Fashion	A widely accepted behavior pattern that changes periodically	Nike shoes
Crowd	A temporary collection of people who share an immediate interest	New Year's celebrants at Times Square in New York City
Mob	An emotional crowd ready to use violence for a specific purpose	Lynch mob
Riot	An episode of largely random destruction and violence carried out by a crowd	Destructive behavior following the acquittal of police officers who were filmed using extreme force against Rodney King
Social movement	Movement whose goal is to promote or prevent social change	Civil Rights movement

Primary Types of Social Movements

Despite commonalities, various social movements have unique characteristics. It is difficult to compare the civil rights movement with the environmental movement. This has led sociologists to study differences between social movements. David Aberle (1991) has identified four basic types of social movements.

revolutionary movement
a social movement that attempts to change the total structure of society

❖ A **revolutionary movement** attempts to change a society totally. The American Revolution was one of the most successful revolutionary movements in history. Another example is the revolutionary movement

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led by Mao Zedong in China. As a result of Mao's revolutionary movement, a communist government was instituted.

❖ A **reformative movement** aims to effect more limited changes in a society. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (an antialcohol organization founded in 1874) and the antiwar movement of the 1960s illustrate this type of social movement.

❖ A **redemptive movement** focuses on changing people completely. The religious cult of David Koresh (the Branch Davidians) was a redemptive movement.

❖ An **alternative movement** seeks only limited changes in people. Zero Population Growth, an organization that celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1998, illlustrates such a movement. It attempts to persuade people to limit the size of their families. It does not advocate sweeping lifestyle changes, however; nor does it advocate legal penalties for large families.

Demonstrators, with banners in hand, ride a truck en route to Tiananmen Square to protest for democracy and human rights in Beijing, China, in 1989. Explain the type of social movement this demonstration best illustrates.

reformative movement
a social movement that attempts to make limited changes in society

redemptive movement
a social movement which seeks to change people completely

alternative movement
a social movement that focuses on bringing about limited changes in people

Theories of Social Movements

Because of the highly structured nature of social movements, sociologists have been able to analyze this form of collective behavior. Two major theories of social movements have evolved. One is *value-added theory,* and the other is *resource mobilization theory.*

What is value-added theory?   Before discussing value-added theory, we need to understand the concept of adding value. In the value-added process, each step in the creation of a product contributes, or adds value, to the final entity. Neil Smelser, the sociologist who originated the value-added theory of social movements, gives an example involving automobile production.

> *An example of [the value-added process] is the conversion of iron ore into finished automobiles by a number of stages of processing. Relevant stages would be mining, smelting, tempering, shaping, and combining the steel with other parts, painting, delivering to retailer, and selling. Each stage "adds its value" to the final cost of the finished product. The key element in this example is that the earlier stages must combine according to a certain pattern before the next stage can contribute its particular value to the finished product, an automobile. Painting, in order to be effective as a "determinant" in shaping the product, has to "wait" for the completion of the earlier processes. Every stage in the value-added process, therefore, is a necessary condition for the appropriate and effective condition of value in the next stage (Smelser, 1971:13–14).*

Smelser used this process as a model to understand social movements. The **value-added theory** identifies six conditions that must exist in order for social movements to occur.

value-added theory
theory holding that certain conditions must exist for social movements to occur

1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Hot Topics Vietnam War Civil Rights	**Hot Topics** Clean Air and Water Female Empowerment	**Hot Topics** International Human Rights Endangered Species Sexual Harassment	**Hot Topics** Gay Rights Sweatshop Labor Medical Use of Marijuana	**Hot Topics** Globalization Corporate Dominance Immigration

Figure 17.4 Hot Buttons for College Activists. *According to Robert Merton, protest movements are reactions on structural strains of burning importance. College activists have been moved to action by different structural strains since the 1960s.*

Source: **U.** *The National College Magazine* (February, 2000).

1. *Structural conduciveness*. The environment must be social-movement friendly. The college student demonstrations in the 1960s and 1970s occurred because of the war in Vietnam, yes, but also because most college campuses had convenient sites for rallies and protest meetings.

2. *Structural strains*. A second condition promoting the emergence of a social movement is the presence of conflicts, ambiguities, and discrepancies within a society. Without some form of strain, there is no stimulus for change. A key discrepancy in the antiwar movement case was the government's continued stance that there was no war (no legal war had been declared), despite the vast resources being devoted to battle and the obvious combat casualties. (Figure 17.4 identifies major structural strains that have mobilized college students since the 1960s.)

3. *Generalized beliefs*. Generalized beliefs include a general recognition that there is a problem and agreement that something should be done to fix it. Two shared beliefs were crucial to the antiwar movement. One was the belief that the Johnson and Nixon administrations were not telling the truth about the war. Another was that the Vietnam War was so morally wrong that it had to be stopped.

This famous photograph of the tragic antiwar demonstrations at Kent State University in 1970 captured the attention of the nation.

4. *Precipitating factors*. One or more significant events must occur to galvanize people into action. On April 30, 1970, President Nixon ordered the invasion of the neutral country of Cambodia. This event was a show of force to the North Vietnamese government with which the United States government was negotiating to end the war.

5. *Mobilization of participants for action*. Once the first four conditions exist, the only remaining step is to get the people moving. Massive demonstrations were part of the political furor the Cambodian invasion provoked. More than 100,000 opponents of the Vietnam War marched on Washington, D.C. Hundreds of colleges were forced to close as a result of strikes by 1.5 million students.
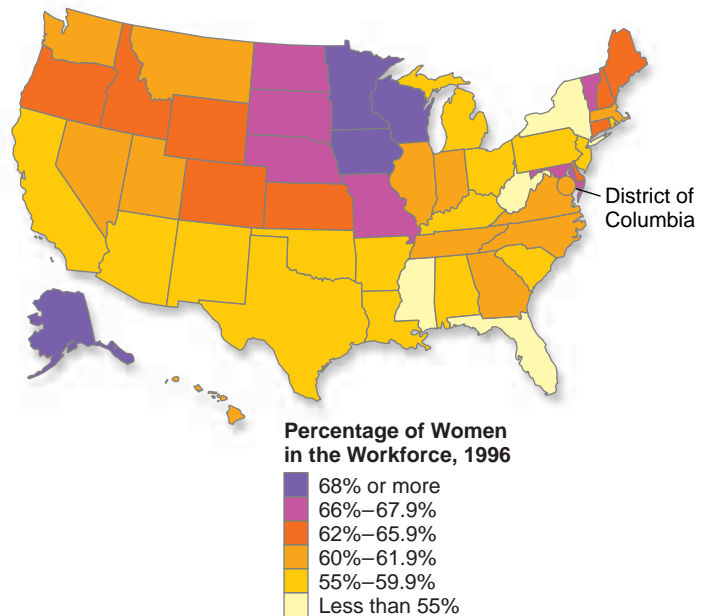
Snapshot of America

Women in the Workplace

The number of women in the U.S. workplace is related to social change and social movements. The U.S. female workforce shot up during World War II. Once the soldiers returned home, however, a large percentage of those working women quit work to raise families. Owing in part to the women's movement, the U.S. has seen a peacetime resurgence of women entering the workforce. This map shows the percentage of women in each state who are active in the labor force.

District of Columbia

Percentage of Women in the Workforce, 1996

- 68% or more
- 66%–67.9%
- 62%–65.9%
- 60%–61.9%
- 55%–59.9%
- Less than 55%

Interpreting the Map

1. Relate strain theory, the women's movement, and increased female labor force participation.
2. How does your state compare with other states in terms of female employment? Describe.

Adapted from *The World Almanac of the U.S.A.* 1998.

6. *Social control.* The sixth determinant of a social movement is ineffective social control. Actions of the media, police, courts, community leaders, and political officials can lead to the success or failure of a social movement. If the right kind of force is applied, a potential social movement may be prevented, even though the first five determinants are present. Efforts to control the situation may block the social movement, minimize its effects, or make matters worse. Efforts to control the antiwar movement, for example, were actually counterproductive. During the student antiwar protests following the Cambodian invasion, the Ohio National Guard, mobilized by the governor of Ohio, killed four students and wounded at least nine others on the Kent State University campus. Two African American students were killed during an antiwar protest at Jackson State University in Mississippi. Such heavy-handedness on the part of politicians and law enforcement officials only stimulated further protest that hastened the ending of the war.

CONTENTS

resource mobilization theory
theory of social movements
that focuses on the use of
resources to achieve goals

What is resource mobilization theory? Resource mobilization theory focuses on the process through which members of a social movement secure and use the resources needed to advance their cause. Resources include human skills such as leadership, organizational ability, and labor power, as well as material goods such as money, property, and equipment (Cress and Snow, 1996; McCarthy and Wolfson, 1996).

The civil rights movement of the 1960s succeeded in part because of the commitment of African Americans and in part because people of other races contributed the money, energy, and skills necessary to stage repeated protests. In contrast, the gay movement in the United States has experienced difficulty partly because of a relative shortage of money, foot soldiers, and affluent supporters.

Muslim worshippers donate money to aid the relief effort for Turkey, which was devastated by a tremendous earthquake in 1999. Relate this behavior to resource mobilization theory.

Section 4 Assessment

1. How would a sociologist define the term *social movement?*
2. Which of the following is an example of a reformative social movement?
   a. the French Revolution
   b. Zero Population Growth
   c. the Branch Davidians
   d. Women's Christian Temperance Union
3. How is Smelser's theory of social movements an example of the value-added process?
4. Briefly explain the resource mobilization theory of social movements.

Critical Thinking

5. **Synthesizing Information** If you wished to mount a social movement to change some U.S. policy (i.e., air pollution limits), which theory of social change would most likely guide your strategy? Explain why you would select a particular theory and how it would guide your approach.

> One hundred and eighty-one years ago, our forefathers started a revolution that still goes on.
>
> **Dwight D. Eisenhower**
> **U.S. president**

Summary

Section 1: Social Change

Main Idea: Social change refers to new behaviors that have long-term and relatively important consequences. Discovery, invention, and diffusion are the major social processes through which social change occurs. Important agents of social change are technology, population, the natural environment, revolution, and war.

Section 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Social Change

Main Idea: The functionalist perspective depicts societies as relatively stable. Following a major change, these integrated systems seek a new equilibrium. According to the conflict perspective, societies are unstable systems that are constantly undergoing change. Symbolic interactionism identifies decreasing shared values as a source of social instability.

Section 3: Collective Behavior

Main Idea: Collective behavior describes how people behave when they are united by a single short-term goal. Rumors, fads, fashions, mass hysteria, and panics are examples of collective behaviors. Contagion theory and emergent norm theory describe crowd behavior.

Section 4: Social Movements

Main Idea: Social movements are more permanent and more organized than other types of collectives. Theories to explain how social movements develop include value-added theory and resource mobilization theory.

Self-Check Quiz
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 17—Self-Check Quizzes** to prepare for the chapter test.

Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

a. social movement
b. contagion theory
c. rumor
d. revolution
e. fashions
f. fads
g. crowd
h. collective behavior
i. emergent norm theory
j. social change
k. technology

1. New societal behaviors with long-term and relatively important consequences are called _____.

2. _____ is the knowledge and hardware used to achieve practical goals.

3. _____ is a type of social movement that may involve the violent toppling of a political regime.

4. The spontaneous and unstructured social behavior of people who are responding to similar stimuli is known as _____.

5. _____ is a widely circulating story of questionable truth.

6. The unusual behavior patterns that spread rapidly, are embraced zealously, and then disappear in a short time are called _____.

7. _____ are behavior patterns that are widely approved but expected to change periodically.

8. A temporary collection of people who share a common interest is known as a _____.

9. _____ emphasizes the irrationality of crowds, created when members stimulate one another to higher and higher levels of emotional intensity.

10. _____ stresses the similarity between daily social behavior and crowd behavior.

11. The form of collective behavior that has the most structure is called _____.

Reviewing the Facts

1. Use a diagram similar to the one below to show the cause and effect relationship between the three major social processes and social change.

SOCIAL PROCESSES
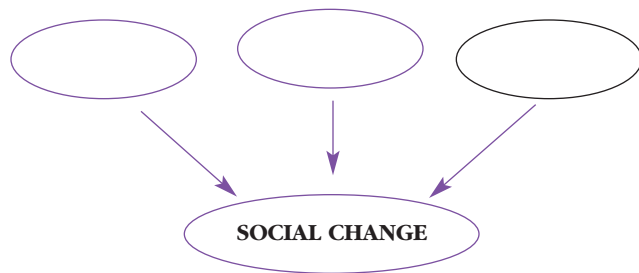
SOCIAL CHANGE

2. Identify and describe the three theories of crowd behavior.
3. What are the five important agents of social change?
4. In your own words explain the value-added theory of social movements.
5. List and describe the four primary types of social movements.
6. Explain the resource mobilization theory of social movements.

Thinking Critically

1. **Applying Concepts** Once upon a time, a family decided to grow orange trees. After several years of hard work and struggle, the first oranges appeared on the trees. Every year after that, when the oranges appeared, the father would say, "Everyone is entitled to choose one orange from the crop." The business thrived and expanded. The children were puzzled that even when the orange grove had grown to include over a thousand trees, they were allowed only one orange a year. Finally, when the children were grown and had children of their own, one of the grandchildren said, "Grandpa, every year we produce hundreds of thousands of oranges, and every year you tell us that we can have only one orange. Why is that?" Grandpa replied, "Because that's the way it's always been." In what way is this story a metaphor for society?

2. **Analyzing Information** Television shows often mirror changes taking place in some segments of society. Sometimes, these changes have not yet reached the mainstream culture. (One popular program centers many of its scenes in a unisex workplace bathroom.) What role do you think television has in changing society? Do you think its influence is more positive or negative?

3. **Evaluating Information** In this country, it is common to read about rumors circulated by the media, especially tabloid newspapers and television news magazine programs. How justified are newspapers and news reporters in publicizing unverified information? Should viewers be responsible for evaluating the information themselves? Should the news sources be penalized for not investigating or verifying rumors? What are the consequences for society if news sources are not reliable?

4. **Drawing Conclusions** Twenty years ago, body piercing (other than for earrings) was considered deviant behavior. Today, it is fast becoming a social norm in many classes and social categories. Do you think that body piercing is a fad or a fashion? What factors might cause a behavior that is not desirable in one generation to become accepted just one generation later?

Sociology Projects

1. **Technology** Over the next few days, look for new technologies that have initiated social changes within the last five years. For example, Web TV is a fairly new technological invention. Make a list of such items, including things that you have heard are coming but have not yet been released. For each item write down what earlier development made the new item possible. For example, high-definition TV was a result of knowledge gained from aerospace

satellite projects. Share your findings with class-mates. You will probably be amazed at how extensive your list is. Post it in the classroom, and add to it as you hear about more changes.

2. **Fads** Look through old and new magazines for examples of fads that have appeared since you were born. (Examples might include retro platform shoes and Beanie Babies.) Create a collage illustrating those fads. Are some of the fads still around? Have they been replaced by similar fads? Ask your parents or grandparents what some fads were when they were teenagers. Find pictures, or ask them if they can provide you with examples. Make a poster or arrange the pictures in a booklet format that explains some of the unusual fads.

3. **Crowd Behavior** As an experiment in crowd behavior, try to start a new fad or fashion in your school. For example, get everyone in your group or class to agree to start wearing neck-laces with metal washers on them or un-matched socks. If several of you do this, you might be able to convince others that a new fad has begun. If the fad does not catch on, list reasons why you think your peers were resistant to change in this case.

4. **Rumors** Search the library magazine catalog or Internet for rumors concerning a public figure. Identify the source and evaluate its credibility. Or, research a lawsuit filed by a public figure over the publication of a false story.

5. **Fads and Fashions** Working in groups, collect some old high school yearbooks from parents and relatives. Comb through them looking for examples of fads and fashions from different decades. Present your findings to the whole class.

6. **Rumors and the Media** As an extension to "Thinking Critically," question number 3, consider and list the options that a news reporter has when he or she receives unverified stories to report. Suggest possible consequences associated with each option.

Technology Activity

1. Jan Harold Brunvand coined the term *urban legend* to describe a type of rumor that is long lasting and widely believed. This term is commonly used now, and if you search the Internet, you will find many sites devoted to this subject.

   a. Select a few of the web sites (two good ones are at http://www.urbanlegends.com/ and http://www.snopes2.com/) and review them. Be prepared to share one or two of them with your class.

   b. What common elements do these urban legends have? Do your observations correspond with those of Urbanlegends.com?

   c. What role do you think the Internet plays in spreading these urban legends?

Chapter 17
Enrichment Reading
Falling Through the Net

Computer technology is changing the face of American society. Access to personal computers and the Internet is even affecting the nature of social stratification. Digital technology has become such an important tool for economic success that it threatens to create a new divide between haves and have-nots.

Information tools, such as the personal computer and the Internet, are increasingly critical to economic success and personal advancement. *"Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide"* finds that more Americans than ever have access to telephones, computers, and the Internet. At the same time, however, . . . there is still a significant "digital **divide**" separating American information "haves" and "have nots." Indeed, in many instances, the digital divide has *widened.* . . .

The good news is that Americans are more connected than ever before. Access to computers and the Internet has soared for people in all demographic groups and geographic locations. At the end of 1998, over 40 percent of American households owned computers, and one-quarter of all households had Internet access. Additionally, those who were less likely to have telephones (chiefly, young and minority households in rural areas) are now more likely to have phones at home.

Accompanying this good news, however, is the persistence of the digital divide between the information rich (such as Whites, Asians/Pacific Islanders, those with higher incomes, those more educated, and dual-parent households) and the information poor (such as those who are younger, those with lower incomes and education levels, certain minorities, and those in rural areas or central cities). The 1998 data reveal significant **disparities,** including the following:

❖ Urban households with incomes of $75,000 and higher are more than *twenty times* more likely to have access to the Internet than those at the lowest income levels, and more than *nine times* as likely to have a computer at home.

❖ Whites are more likely to have access to the Internet from home than Blacks or Hispanics have from *any* location.

❖ Black and Hispanic households are approximately *one-third* as likely to have home Internet access as households of Asian/Pacific Islander descent, and roughly *two-fifths* as likely as White households.

❖ Regardless of income level, Americans living in rural areas are lagging behind in Internet access. Indeed, at the lowest income levels, those in urban areas are more than twice as likely to have Internet access than those earning the same income in rural areas.

For many groups, the digital divide has *widened* as the information "haves" outpace the "have nots" in gaining access to electronic resources. The following gaps with regard to home Internet access are representative:

❖ The gaps between White and Hispanic households, and between White and Black households, are now more than five percentage points larger than they were in 1997.
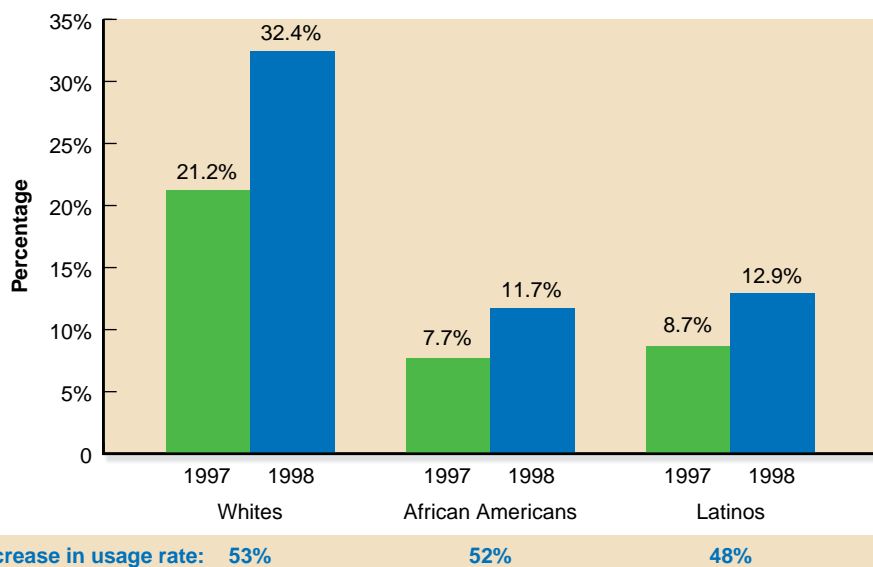
Figure 17.5 Minorities and the Internet.   *This figure reveals the digital divide in the United States between whites, African Americans, and Latinos. What do you think are the most important consequences of this divide?*

Source: "Report Finds Net Users Increasingly White, Well Off," *Washington Post,* July 9, 1999, p. A20.

What Does it Mean?

divide
as a noun, something that separates two areas; a point or line of division

disparities
marked differences in quality or character (usually where you would not expect them)

irrespective
regardless; without relation to

❖ The digital divides based on education and income level have also increased in the last year alone. Between 1997 and 1998, the divide between those at the highest and lowest education levels increased 25 percent, and the divide between those at the highest and lowest income levels grew 29 percent.

Nevertheless, the news is not all bleak. For Americans with incomes of $75,000 and higher, the divide between Whites and Blacks has actually narrowed considerably in the last year. This finding suggests that the most affluent American families, **irrespective** of race, are connecting to the Net.

Source: "Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide," a Report on the Telecommunications and Information Technology Gap in America (Washington, DC: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, July 1999)

Read and React

1. What is the main idea of this report on Internet access?
2. What does the term *information rich* (in the third paragraph) mean?
3. Who is more likely to have Internet access, whites or Asian/Pacific Islanders? How can you tell?
4. Why do you think urban Americans are more than twice as likely to have Internet access as rural Americans with the same income level?
5. In what category has the gap between African Americans and whites significantly narrowed? What explanation would you offer for this?
6. Do you think the federal government is now (or should be now) attempting to bridge the digital divide in the U.S.? Why or why not?