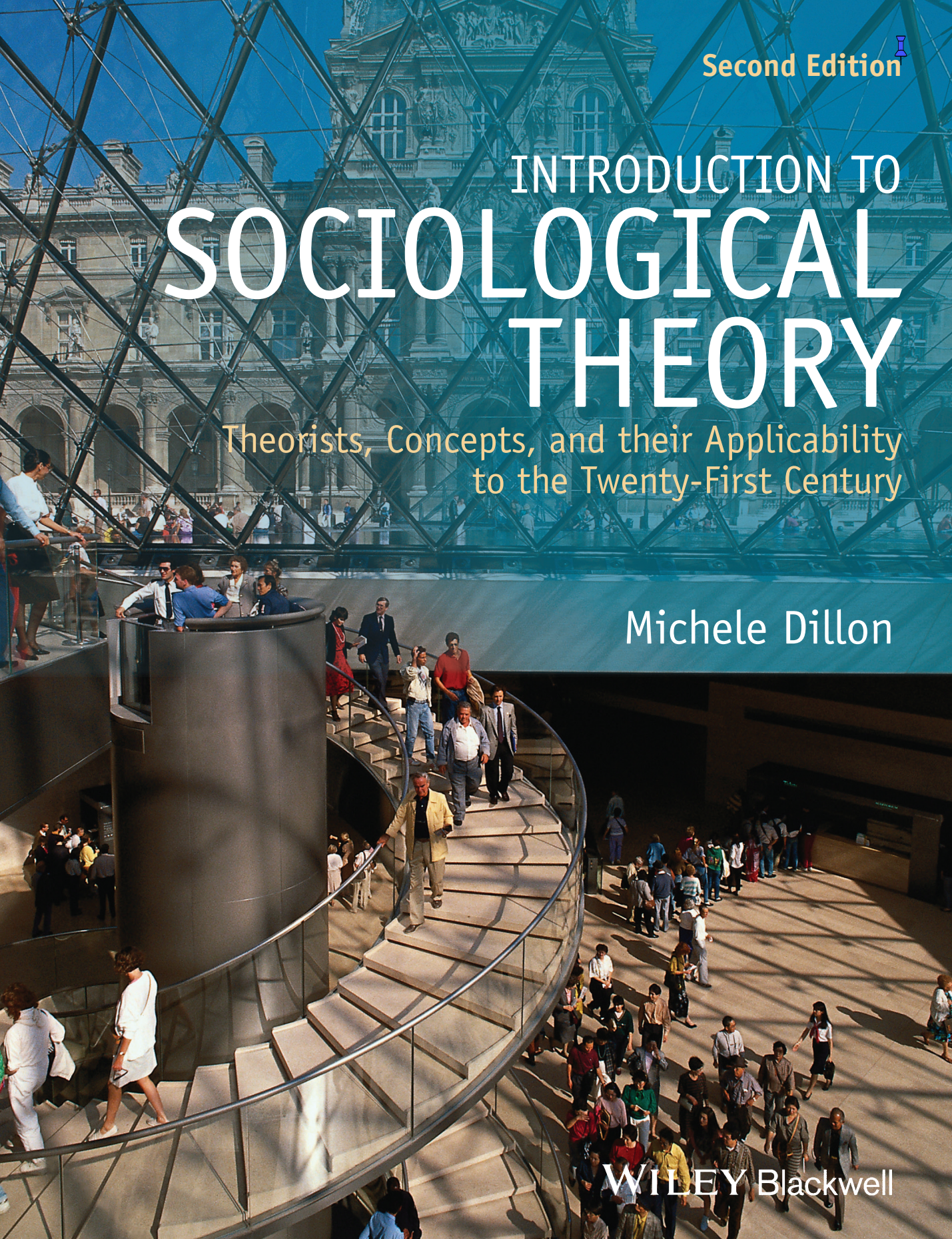
Second Edition
INTRODUCTION TO
SOCIOLOGICAL
THEORY
Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability
to the Twenty-First Century
Michele Dillon
WILEY Blackwell

Introduction to Sociological Theory

About the website

The *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century* companion website contains a range of resources created by the author for instructors teaching this book in university courses. Features include:

- Instructor's manual for each chapter, including
  - Note to the Instructor
  - News Resources that can be used to stimulate classroom discussion
  - Essay Assignment Questions
  - Exam Short Answer Questions
  - Multiple choice questions (and answers)
- PowerPoint teaching slides with photographs and video links
- List of complementary primary readings
- Quote Bank

Instructors can access these resources at: www.wiley.com/go/dillon

Introduction to Sociological Theory

Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century

SECOND EDITION

Michele Dillon

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2014

Edition history: Blackwell Publishing Ltd (1e, 2010)

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dillon, Michele, 1960–
Introduction to sociological theory: theorists, concepts, and their applicability to the twenty-first century / Michele Dillon. – Second edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-118-47192-0 (pbk.)
1. Sociology. 2. Sociology–History. I. Title.
HM585.D55 2014
301—dc23

2013033132

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Inside the Pyramid at the Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo © Thomas Craig/Getty Images
Cover design by Simon Levy Associates

Set in 10/13pt Minion by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

1 2014

CONTENTS

BOXED FEATURES

TIMELINES

BOXES

TOPICS

FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Justin Vaughan at Wiley-Blackwell for persuading me to write this book and for his support throughout the process. I also appreciate the editorial production assistance of Annie Rose and Ben Thatcher, and Annie Jackson's careful copyediting. I greatly appreciate the efforts of several reviewers whose close reading of various chapters provided detailed comments that helped make the book stronger. I am especially appreciative of the hard work of those reviewers who read a full draft of the book. I am very grateful to James Tucker, Jennifer Esala, and Jared del Rosso for their helpful comments on the first edition of this book. I also benefited greatly from Andrew Wink's photography skills.

The information in the timelines is derived from various sources including: Colin McEvedy (1985), *The Macmillan World History Factfinder*, New York: Macmillan; H. E. L. Mellersh (1999), *Chronology of World History*, volumes 1–4, Santa Barbara, CA: BC-CLIO; Derrick Mercer, ed. (1996), *Chronicle of the World*, London: Dorling Kindersley; Hans-Albrecht Schraepler (1997), *Directory of International Economic Organizations*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press; and Caroline Zilborg and Susan Gall, eds. (1997), *Women's Firsts*, Detroit, MI: Gale.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As you read through the individual chapters in this book, you will find the following features designed to help you to develop a clear understanding of sociological theory and to apply it to everyday life.

Key Concepts Each chapter opens with a list of its key concepts, presented in the order in which they appear in the chapter. They are printed in blue when they first appear in the text, and are defined in the glossaries at the end of each chapter and at the end of the book (pp. 521–539).

Chapter Menu A menu gives you the main headings of the chapter that follows.

Biographical Note These provide background information on the main theorists discussed in the chapter. Their names are given in bold when they first appear in the chapter.

Theorists' writings Each of the first three chapters has a chronological list of the major writings of the theorists discussed: Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

Timelines Where a historical framework will aid your understanding of the chapter, timelines list major events with their dates.

Boxes These summarize points relevant to the chapter.

Topics These features draw on information reported in the news about an event or issue that has particular salience for the concepts being discussed in the chapter. The stories highlight how particular everyday events can be used to illustrate or probe larger social processes.

Summary The text of the chapter is summarized in a final paragraph or two.

Points to Remember These list in bullet note form the main learning points of the chapter.

Glossary At the end of each chapter its key concepts are listed again, this time in alphabetical order, and defined. The glossary at the end of the book combines the end-of-chapter glossaries to define all the key concepts covered in the book.

Questions for Review At the end of each chapter, questions are listed that prompt you to discuss some of the overarching points of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

KEY CONCEPTS

sociological theory	agency	inalienable rights
concepts	classical theory	utilitarianism
conceptual frameworks	canon	scientific reasoning
pluralistic	contemporary theory	empiricism
macro	Enlightenment	positivist
social structures	democracy	objectivity
micro	reason	interpretive understanding
culture	rationality	emancipatory knowledge

CHAPTER MENU

Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century, Second Edition. Michele Dillon.

Timeline I.1 Major pre-Enlightenment influences, and events from the Enlightenment to the establishment of sociology

500 BC–AD 999 The Classical World 1000–1490 The Feudal Age 1490–1664 The Age of Discovery	
1599	Francis Bacon, *Essays*
1620	English Pilgrims arrive at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts
1633	Galileo summoned by the Inquisition to defend his theory that the earth moves around the sun
1636	Harvard College founded
1637	René Descartes, "I think, therefore, I am"
1665–1774 The Enlightenment	
1670	Blaise Pascal, "Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed"
1687	Isaac Newton explains laws of motion and theories of gravitation
1689	John Locke, *On Civil Government*
1702	Cambridge University establishes faculty chairs in the sciences
1733	Voltaire praises British liberalism
1752	Benjamin Franklin invents a lightning conductor; demonstrates the identity of lightning and electricity
1762	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
1771	The right to report parliamentary debates established in Britain

1775–1814	**The Age of Revolution**
1775	American War of Independence; battles of Lexington and Concord (Massachusetts)
1776	British troops evacuate Boston; Declaration of Independence
1776	Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
1788	Bread riots in France
1789	Fall of the Bastille; beginning of the French Revolution; new French Constituent Assembly abolishes feudal rights and privileges
1791	Bill of Rights in America; first 10 amendments to the US Constitution
1792	Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
1796	Freedom of the press established in France
1805	First factory to be lit by gaslight (in Manchester, England)
1807	Air pump developed for use in mines
1813	Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
1823	Jeremy Bentham, Utilitarianism
1831	John Stuart Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*
1835–1840	Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
1837	Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*
1839	Comte gives sociology its name
1855	Harriet Martineau translates Comte's *Positive Philosophy*
1859	Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (modern evolutionary theory)
1861–1865	American Civil War, the South (Confederates) versus the North (Union)
1865	US president Abraham Lincoln assassinated
1865	Thirteenth amendment to the US Constitution, abolishing slavery

Welcome to sociological theory. It might seem unusual to begin a theory book with an excerpt about hotel bedrooms (Topic I.1) and the burdens plush mattresses impose on housekeepers. But it is precisely this sort of daily occurrence that sociological theory, with its breadth of concepts or analytical ideas, is well suited to illuminating. Although theory, by definition, is abstract, this book illustrates the richness of sociological theory by emphasizing its practical application and explanatory relevance to daily life. I will introduce you to the major theorists whose writings and conceptual frameworks inform sociological thinking. The book will equip you with the theoretical vocabulary and understanding that will enable you to appreciate the plurality of perspectives within sociological theory. It will give you confidence to apply these

Topic I.1 Hotel rooms get plusher, adding to maids' injuries

"Some call it the 'amenities arms race,' some 'the battle of the beds.' It is a competition in which the nation's premier hotels are trying to have their accommodations resemble royal bedrooms. Superthick mattresses, plush duvets and decorative bed skirts have been added, and five pillows rather than the pedestrian three now rest on a king-size bed. Hilton markets these rooms as Suite Dreams, while Westin boasts of its heavenly beds. The beds may mean sweet dreams to hotel guests, but they mean pain to many of the nation's 350,000 hotel housekeepers. Several new studies [by unions and health scientists] have found that thousands of housekeepers are suffering arm, shoulder, and lower-back injuries … it is so strenuous a job that [housekeepers have] a higher risk of back disorders than autoworkers who assemble car doors …The problem, housekeepers say, is not just a heavier mattress, but having to rush because they are assigned the same number of rooms as before while being required to deal with far more per room: more pillows, more sheets, more amenities like bathrobes to hang up and coffee pots to wash. Ms. Reyes [a hotel housekeeper] complained that some days she must make 25 double beds, a task that entails taking off, and putting on, 100 pillowcases … Housekeepers who earn $17,300 a year on average, invariably stoop over to lift mattresses, some of which are only 14 inches off the floor. They frequently twist their backs as they tuck in the sheets, often three of them rather than the two of yesteryear. Since it can take 10 to 12 minutes a bed, a housekeeper who makes 25 beds a day frequently spends four to five hours on the task, lifting mattresses 150 to 200 times … [A Hilton spokesman] said the company had increased training to try to minimize harm to housekeepers … [and to ease] workloads … [and said that the unions are] pushing the injury issue as a smoke screen, largely to pressure hotel companies to agree to procedures making it easier to unionize workers."

Steven Greenhouse, "Hotel Rooms Get Plusher, Adding to Maids' Injuries." *New York Times* (April 21, 2006).

ideas to the many sociological topics you study (e.g., inequality, crime, medical sociology, race, political sociology, family, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, community, globalization, etc.), and help you to think analytically about the many occurrences in daily life far beyond the classroom.

ANALYZING SOCIAL LIFE

The short excerpt on housekeepers and hotel mattresses provides a single snapshot of contemporary society, but its elements can be used to highlight the different ways that sociological theorists approach the study of society. For example, Karl Marx (1818–1883), a towering figure in the analysis of modern capitalism (see chapter 1), would focus on the relations of

economic inequality and exploitation that underlie hotel maids' injuries. His theory highlights the extent to which the capitalist pursuit of profit structures the service production process in hotels (and in factories, corporations, etc.) – e.g., the number of hotel rooms that have to be cleaned every day by each worker – and determines the low wages paid to workers, as well as consolidating the economic or class inequality that is part and parcel of capitalism. You might suggest that if the maids are unhappy, they should just leave the Westin. But if they leave, what are their options? Very limited, Marx would respond. Because hotel maids (and other workers) have to live, they need money in order to survive (especially in a "welfare-to-work" society in which there is very little government economic support available to those who are unemployed long term). Therefore, while the maids are free to leave the Westin they are not free to withhold labor from every hotel – they must work someplace. Hence wage-workers must sell their labor on the job market, even if what they receive in exchange for their labor will always be significantly less than the profit the capitalist will make from their work. Although hotel-owners have to pay the many costs associated with the upkeep and running of a hotel, there still remains a large gap between the minimum wage paid to hotel maids (and waitresses, etc.; approx. $7 an hour) and the price paid by hotel guests for a one-night stay in the luxury hotel room ($399 and upwards) that the maids clean.

Further, the competitive nature of capitalism and the economic competition between hotels (as noted in the excerpt) mean that the profit-driven working conditions in one luxury hotel will not vary much from those in another. If a hotel company were to lose "the battle of the beds," in the competition for affluent customers, profit decline spells that particular company's likely demise too. Low wages and occupational injuries, therefore, are what maids can expect, regardless of the particular hotel (whether the Westin or the Hilton). Moreover, if hotel maids are unable to work as a result of their injuries, there will always be others waiting to take their place; one of the effects of globalization (a topic discussed in chapter 14) is to increase the competition between low-wage-workers whose pool is expanded by the increasing numbers of immigrant and migrant workers available to the low-paying service industries (e.g., Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Sassen 2007).

In focusing on the profit and economic relations within capitalist societies, Marx also alerts us to how ideology, i.e., a society's taken-for-granted ideas about work, achievement, freedom, consumption, luxury, etc., determines how we explain and justify all sorts of social phenomena, whether social inequality, the Olympic Games, or the latest consumer fad. Marx – and more recent theorists influenced partly by Marx, such as Critical Theorists (see chapter 5) – would argue that the ideology of freedom – typically used to denote political freedom and democracy – has in today's world become the freedom to shop. We all (more or less) want the plush consumer lifestyle that we associate with luxury hotels, a pursuit promoted by the (globalizing) capitalist class, and especially by advertising, mass media, and pop culture industries. Thus the popularity of, for example, "Louie," a Blood Raw/Young Jeezy song celebrating Louis Vuitton merchandise. Similarly, Kanye West's "Flashing Lights" reminds us that consumption trumps everything else. Indeed, Marx would argue that it is largely because hotel housekeepers (and their families and neighbors) buy into the allure of consumption that they consent to work as hard as they do, despite their injuries, and without fully realizing or acknowledging the inequality of the capitalist system with its ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Max Weber (1864–1920) (his surname is pronounced *vayber*), also offers an analysis of modern capitalism. But unlike Marx, he orients us to the various subjective motivations and meanings that lead social actors – either individually, or collectively as workers, hotel companies, trade unions, religious organizations, states, or trans-national alliances (e.g., the EU) – to behave as they do (see chapter 3). Among the many engines driving behavior, Weber, somewhat like Marx, highlights the centrality of strategic or instrumental motivations underlying social behavior, including the maids' actions. In particular, hotel-owners and unions pursue their own economic and political interests by making cost–benefit assessments of which courses of action are the most expedient given the respective objectives of each group. Hotel companies, for example, are suspicious of the union's objectives beyond the specific issue of housekeeper injuries; the companies are concerned that their strategic interests (in making money, hiring particular workers, and competing with other hotel chains) will be undermined if their work force is unionized. And union leaders, too, are concerned if they think that workers can garner a good wage deal without the union's intervention. Not surprisingly, as some contemporary theorists highlight (e.g., Ralph Dahrendorf; see chapter 6), inter-group conflict is common in democratic societies as various economic and other interest groups compete for greater recognition of their respective agendas.

Life, however, is not all about economic and strategic interests. One of the theoretical achievements of Weber was to demonstrate that values and beliefs also matter; they orient social action (something subsequently emphasized by Talcott Parsons, an American theorist who was highly influential for several decades (1940s–1970s) in shaping sociological thinking and research; see chapter 4). Individuals, groups, organizations, and whole countries are motivated by values, by commitments to particular understandings of friendship, family, patriotism, environmental sustainability, education, religious faith, etc. Subjective values, such as commitment to their family, to providing for their children, may explain why hotel housekeepers work as hard as they do; and indeed why many immigrant women leave their children and families in their home country while they work abroad earning money to send home so their children can have a more economically secure life (e.g., England 2005; Sassen 2007). The strong cultural value of individualism in the US, for example, also helps to explain why labor unions have a much harder time gaining members and wielding influence in the US than in Western European countries such as the UK, Ireland, and France. The historical-cultural influence of Protestantism and its emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility in the US means that Americans tend to believe that being poor is largely an individual's own responsibility (and a sign of moral weakness), beliefs that impede the expansion of state-funded social welfare programs.

As recognized by both Marx and Weber, differences in economic resources are a major source of inequality (or of stratification) in society, determining individuals' and groups' rankings relative to one another; e.g., upper-class, middle-class, lower-class strata. Additionally, Weber, unlike Marx, argues that social inequality is not only based on differences in income but also associated with differences in lifestyle or social status. Weber and contemporary theorists influenced by his conceptualization of the multiple sources of inequality – such as Pierre Bourdieu – argue that individuals and groups acquire particular habits that demonstrate and solidify social class differences. Such differences are evident

not only between the upper and lower classes, but also between those who are closely aligned economically. This helps to explain why affluent people stay in premier rather than economy hotels and why some affluent people prefer the Ritz Carlton to the Westin. For similar status reasons, some women will spend hundreds of dollars on a Louis Vuitton handbag rather than buy a cheaper, though equally functional one by Coach (see especially Bourdieu; chapter 13).

The cultural goals (e.g., consumption, economic success) affirmed in society are not always readily attainable. Children who grow up in poor neighborhoods with under-funded schools are disadvantaged by their limited access to the social institutions (e.g., school) that provide the culturally approved means or path toward academic, occupational, and economic success (e.g., MacLeod 1995). Thus, as the American sociologist Robert Merton (see chapter 4) shows, society creates deviance (e.g., stealing) as a result of the mismatch between cultural goals (e.g., consumer lifestyle) and blocked access to the acceptable institutional means to attain those goals.

Although deviance is a social creation and is "normal" – as classical theorist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) emphasizes, because it comes from society and exists in all societies (e.g., as indicated by crime rates) – "too much" deviance (or crime) may threaten the social order. Social order and cohesion are Durkheim's core theoretical preoccupation (see chapter 2). He is basically interested in what knits society together; what binds and ties individuals into society. Therefore, rather than focusing on what Marx, for example, would see as exploitation, Durkheim would highlight the social interdependence suggested in our story of the hotel maids. For Durkheim, hotel-owners, workers, guests, unions, and occupational health scientists are all part of the social collectivity, a collectivity whose effective functioning is dependent on all doing their part in the social order. In like manner, Talcott Parsons sees social institutions such as the economy, the family, and the political and legal systems as working separately but also interdependently to produce an effectively functioning society (see chapter 4).

Social interdependence for Durkheim is underscored by the fact that without guests, for example, there would be no hotel maids and no hotel-owners (this is well understood by people living in seaside towns; business is seasonal and with hotels/restaurants closed for the winter, there are fewer work opportunities). Durkheim is not interested in analyzing the (unequal) economic relations in the hotel industry or the historical origins of tourism. What is relevant to him is how, for example, occupations, hotels, tourism, and consumption patterns (and all other social things) have a determining force on individual social behavior; all of these for Durkheim are collective, social forces that shape, constrain and regulate social behavior, and in the process, tie individuals and groups into social relationships with one another.

Tipping hotel maids and restaurant waitresses is not required by law. But we are constrained into doing so – even though no one other than the maid can tell whether or not you left money for her in the hotel room – by the (equally strong) collective force of social custom. As Durkheim would stress, all social customs (and laws) both come from society and function to affirm and bolster the interdependence of individuals within society. Moreover, as contemporary network theorists demonstrate, even *weak* ties among individuals, among acquaintances who chat (share information) when they occasionally run into

one another on the street, are socially beneficial to individuals (in finding a good restaurant, or a job, etc.) and to enhancing community well-being (e.g., in mobilizing people to participate in neighborhood projects; see chapter 7).

In contrast to Durkheim, exchange theorists emphasize that we tip and give gifts and invite friends to dinner with the expectation that this will yield some specific return to us. In this exchange view of self-interested action, all social exchange has use-value: one never gets or gives something for nothing (e.g., George Homans; Peter Blau; chapter 7). Therefore, when I tip the hotel maid even though I don't expect to return to that hotel (and with the tip-related expectation of better service), I must be getting something in return, such as the validation of my own status relative to the maid – perhaps found in the slight nod of the head or smile when passing the maid and her cart in the corridor. For exchange theorists, exchange relationships are not just those based on money (as for Marx), but those based on the exchange of status (see also Bourdieu, chapter 13), information, friendship, advice, housework, political influence, etc., and the power imbalances in relationships (e.g., between friends, spouses, governments, etc.) that they reflect and perpetuate. In all relationships, rational choice theorists contend, we assess what we get and what to give on the basis of its probable use-value to us as (resource maximization) individuals (see chapter 7).

So far I have not commented on the fact that the hotel worker quoted in our excerpt is a woman. Indeed, the very word "maid" is a gendered word, i.e., used to denote a woman and "women's work." Male domestic servants, by contrast, are referred to in more elegant language as "butlers." They, as depicted in *Downton Abbey*, have a higher status and more independence even as they are, nonetheless, at the beck and call of their masters/superiors. Today, despite the advances in women's equality, women comprise a disproportionate share of low-wage service workers. Feminist standpoint theorists (e.g., Dorothy Smith; Patricia Hill Collins; see chapter 10), coming out of a tradition that focuses on women's inequality in society, have much to say about these matters. In particular, they highlight the day-in/day-out routines and experiences of women who make 25 beds a day, and who, after the paid work-day ends, make the beds and cook dinner and do many other chores for their families. Feminist theorists also underscore that women's chores, experiences, and opportunities are typically different than men's, and when similar, women's work is rewarded very differently than men's work (at work and at home); women continue, for example, to remain on the margins of the decision-making power elites in society (see C. Wright Mills; see chapter 6).

The phenomenological tradition (see chapter 9) emphasizes the significance of ordinary everyday knowledge in defining individuals' concrete "here-and-now" social realities. Partly influenced by phenomenology, feminist standpoint theorists (e.g., Smith) underscore how the knowledge that derives from women's everyday experiences is very different to the knowledge that is recognized as the legitimate, objective knowledge in society. Whether in politics, in corporate offices, in law courts, or even among sociologists, the knowledge that comes from women's experiences – as mothers and homemakers, and from the challenges they face as, increasingly, they simultaneously move within the "man-made" world of work and public life – tends to be demeaned. It does not fit well with the male-centered (see chapter 10) and indeed heterosexist bias (see chapter 11) that characterizes sociology and other established sources of knowledge.