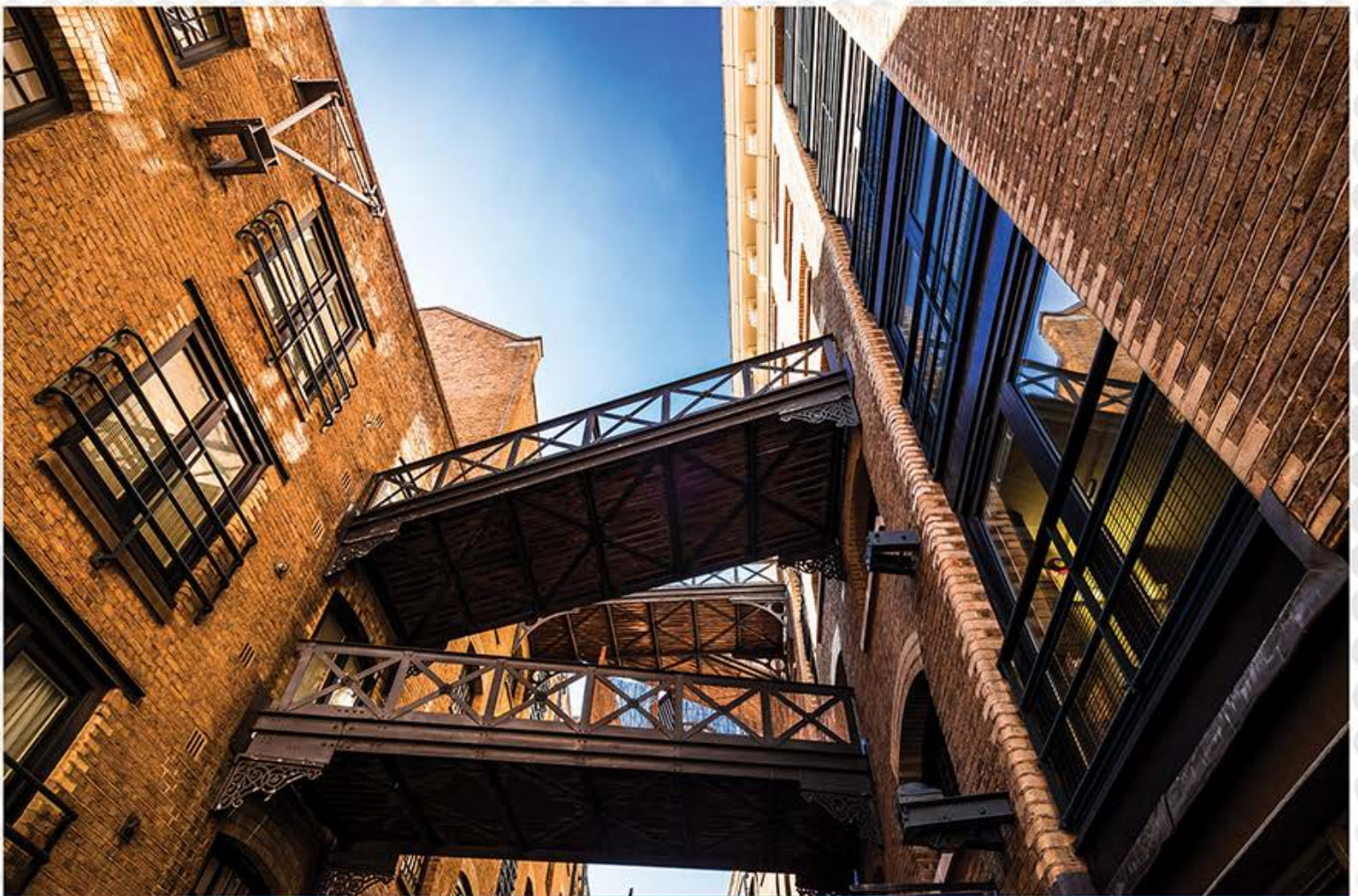


# Sociology

Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life



T W E L F T H   E D I T I O N

David M. Newman



# Sociology

Twelfth Edition

*For Zach, Seth, and Hazel*

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# Sociology

Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life

Twelfth Edition

**David M. Newman**  
*DePauw University*



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne



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## Preface to the Twelfth Edition

It was the first day of the fall semester several years ago. I had just finished making the final adjustments to an earlier edition of this book, which was due to be published the following January. I felt pretty good about myself, like I'd just accomplished something monumental. Let's face it; being able to call yourself *an author* is pretty cool. Even my two sons were impressed with me (although not as impressed as the time we went to a professional hockey game and I leaped out of my seat to catch an errant, speeding puck barehanded). I walked confidently into the first meeting of my Introduction to Sociology class eager to start teaching wide-eyed, first-year students a thing or two about sociology.

In my opening comments to the class that day, I mentioned that I had just written this book. The panicked look in students' eyes—a curious combination of awe and fear—calmed when I told them I wouldn't be requiring them to read it that semester. I told them that the process of writing an introductory text helped me immensely in preparing for the course and that I looked forward to passing on to them the knowledge I had accumulated.

The next day after class, one of the students—a bright-eyed, freshly scrubbed 18-year-old—approached me. The ensuing conversation would leave a humbling impression that lasts to this day:

*Student:* Hi. Umm. Professor Newman . . . I called my parents last night to, like, tell them how my first day in college went. I think they were, like, more nervous than I was. You know how parents can be.

*Me:* Yes, I sure do. I'm a parent myself, you know.

*Student:* Yeah, whatever. Anyway, I was telling them about my classes and my professors and stuff. I told them about this class and how I thought it would be pretty cool. I told them you had written a book. I thought that would impress them, you know, make it seem like they were getting their money's worth and everything.

*Me:* Well, thanks.

*Student:* So, they go, "What's the book about?" [He laughs sheepishly.] I told them I really didn't know, but I'd find out. So, like, that's what I'm doing . . . finding out.

*Me:* Well, I'm glad you asked. You see, it's an introductory sociology textbook that uses everyday experiences and phenomena as a way of understanding important sociological theories and ideas. In it I've attempted to . . .

*Student:* [His eyes, which were already glazed over with boredom, suddenly jumped back to life.] Wait, did you say it was a textbook?

*Me:* Why, yes. You see the purpose of the book is to provide the reader with a thorough and useful introduction to the sociological perspective. I want to convey . . .

*Student:* [Quite embarrassed now] Oh . . . Professor Newman, I'm really sorry. I misunderstood you. I thought you had written a real book.

*Real book. Real book. Real book.* Those words rang in my head like some relentless church bell. At first, I tried to dismiss this comment as the remark of a naïve kid who didn't know any better. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized what his comment reflected. The perception that textbooks aren't *real* books is widespread.

A couple of years ago, I heard a radio ad for a local Red Cross book drive. The narrator asked listeners to donate any unused or unwanted books *as long as they weren't textbooks*. Yep, that's what he said. A torn copy of *The Cat in the Hat*? Fine, they'll take it. A grease-stained owner's manual for a Ford Fusion? Sure, glad to have it. A



2003 guidebook on how to use Myspace? What a lovely addition to the collection. Textbooks? No way!

Sadly, these sorts of perceptions are not altogether undeserved. Textbooks hover on the margins of the literary world, somewhere between respectable, intellectual monographs on trailblazing research and trashy romance novels. Traditionally, they've been less than titillating: thick, heavy, expensive, and easily discarded for a measly five bucks at the end-of-semester "book buy-back."

My goal—from the first edition of this book to the current one—has always been to write a textbook that reads like a *real* book. In the previous 11 editions, I tried to capture simultaneously the essence and insight of my discipline and the reader's interest. From what reviewers, instructors, and students who've read and used the book over the years have said, I think I've been fairly successful. While no Hollywood movie studio has expressed interest in turning this book into a movie (yet!), people do seem to like the relaxed tone and appreciate the consistent theme that ties all the chapters together. Many instructors have commented on how the book enables students to truly understand the unique and useful elements of a sociological perspective. Take that, Red Cross!

## Features of the Twelfth Edition

To my sons—who believe that I have nothing important to say about anything anyway—continually revising this book has always been clear evidence of my incompetence. Back when he was in middle school, my younger son once asked me, "Why do you keep writing the same book over and over? My English teacher made me rewrite a book report on *To Kill a Mockingbird* because I answered some questions wrong. Is that what's going on here, Dad? Is your publisher making you write the book again because you made too many mistakes?" I told him no and that I'd make him read the whole book—cover to cover—if he continued to ask such questions. He stopped . . . although to this day, he's still not convinced I have anything useful to say.

Despite his concerns, sociology textbooks do need to be revised regularly and frequently to be of any use. No book can be of lasting value if it remains static, locked into a particular style and content. So I keep my ears and eyes open, always looking for some new example or current issue to include in the book. My office overflows with stacks of books, newspaper clippings, photocopied journal articles, Post-it notes, and shreds of paper napkins containing scribbled ideas that I write to myself at the breakfast table when I come across something interesting. I've even been known to send myself e-mails at 3:00 in the morning so as not to forget the great idea that came to me in the haziness between sleep and wakefulness.

One thing I've learned over the years is that when revising a book, it's a lot easier to add new material than it is to cut out the old stuff. But simply inserting bits and pieces here and there tends to make books fat and unwieldy. So I've tried to streamline this edition wherever possible. I've replaced outdated material with new material where appropriate, revised all the statistical information, condensed or deleted some sections, and changed the order of others.

Here are some of the specific changes I've made to enhance the features that worked so well in the previous editions.

## Updated Examples and Statistical Information

As in the first 11 editions, I've peppered each chapter with anecdotes, personal observations, and accounts of contemporary events that serve as illustrations of the sociological points I'm making. Many of the examples you will read are taken from today's news headlines; others come from incidents in my own life.

It would be impossible to write an introduction to the discipline of sociology without accounting for the life-altering occurrences—wars, natural disasters, school shootings, political upheavals, court decisions, economic meltdowns, the latest Kardashian escapade—that we hear about every day. So throughout this book, I've made a special effort to provide some sociological insight into well-known contemporary events and trends, both large

and small. In doing so, I intend to show you the pervasiveness and applicability of sociology in our ordinary, everyday experiences in a way that, I hope, rings familiar with you.

As you will see, it is impossible to understand what happens to us in our personal lives without taking into consideration broader social and historical phenomena. Several specific recent developments have had—and will continue to have—a dramatic impact on sociological thought and on people’s everyday lives: the political changeover brought about by the 2016 election, trends in the global economy, the stream of fatal encounters between police and unarmed people of color, and the continued dramatic growth of communication technology, particularly ever-present social networking sites:

As I’m writing this preface, the new Trump administration has been in office for one year. How will it shift global politics, the course of the nation, and the rhythm of our everyday lives after 8 years of a Democratic administration?

When the economy suffers (or improves), everyone—from tycoons to unemployed welfare recipients—experiences some kind of alteration in her or his day-to-day routine. It’s been quite a challenge to keep up with the most current information on joblessness, hiring trends, home foreclosures, spending patterns, and so on.

Each new incident of racially or ethically connected violence—whether at the hands of law enforcement, hate groups, or lone assailants—alters the trajectory of race relations in this country.

And how can we analyze the sociology of everyday life without acknowledging the powerful role online social networking has had in shaping the way we learn, work, relate to others, and ultimately define ourselves?

Thus, you will see references to these—and many other—developments throughout the book to illustrate the interconnections between private life and massive historical occurrences.

I also want to call your attention to the fact that many extended examples of sociological theories and concepts throughout the book focus on some aspect of health, illness, and medicine. I have done this for two reasons. First of all, no matter who we are or where we come from, all of us must deal with health matters from time to time. Our own physical and mental well-being is perhaps the most personal and immediate thing in our lives. At the same time, whenever we seek medical attention—whether in a doctor’s office, a local pharmacy, or a hospital—or try to figure out how to pay for it, we enter a massive health care system that can sometimes feel immensely bureaucratic and *impersonal*. And as medical costs continue to rise, changes to our health care system—both proposed and enacted—will dominate economic forecasts, newspaper headlines, and legislative action for years to come. Second, students taking the Medical College Admissions Test now must take a course in sociology. And so these health care-related examples will provide such students with applications and illustrations that are directly relevant to their needs and, hopefully, make them better doctors in the future.

I’ve also tried to provide the most current statistical information possible. I’ve updated all the graphic exhibits and, in the process, changed some of them from statistical tables to more readable charts and graphs, making trends and relationships more obvious. Much of the new statistical information is drawn from the most recent data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Population Reference Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Pew Research Center.

## Updated “Sociologists at Work” and “Micro-Macro Connections”

In the previous 11 editions, I provided many in-depth features that focused either on a specific piece of sociological research or on some issue that illustrates the connection between the everyday lives of individuals and the structure of their society. These extended discussions link social institutions to personal experiences and provide insight into the methods sociologists use to gather information and draw conclusions about how our world works.

Instructors and students alike have found these features very useful in generating classroom discussion. The features that I've thoroughly updated from previous editions focus on topics such as suicide, the vocabulary of war, family privacy, smartphone usage, cultural influence on emotions, children's toys, dual-earner households, clergy sexual abuse, the cultural impact of antidepressants, same-sex marriage, the global health divide, interracial identity, residential segregation, racial mistrust of medical research, sexual harassment in the military, dangerous media images of eating disorders, intergenerational conflict, and the shifting politics of immigration. In addition, I've also added a few new features on the effect of clothing on the way we think, the mismatch between perceptions and the reality of wealth inequality, cultural appropriation of race and ethnicity, and online privacy.

## Teaching Resources and Website to Accompany the Book and Companion Reader

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## A Word About the “Architecture of Everyday Life”

I chose the image of architecture in the subtitle to convey one of the driving themes of this book: Society is a human construction. It is not “out there” somewhere, waiting to be visited and examined. It exists in the minute details of our day-to-day lives. Whenever we follow its rules or break them, enter its roles or shed them, work to change things or keep them as they are, we are adding another nail, plank, or frame to the structure of our society. In short, society—like the buildings around us—couldn't exist were it not for the actions of people.

At the same time, however, this structure that we have created appears to exist independently of us. We don't

usually spend much time thinking about the buildings we live, work, and play in as human constructions. We see them as finished products, not as the processes that created them. Only when something goes wrong—the pipes leak or the walls crack—do we realize that people made these structures and people are the ones who must fix them. When buildings outlive their usefulness or become dangerous to their inhabitants, people must renovate them or, if necessary, tear them down.

Likewise, society is so massive and has been around for so long that it *appears* to stand on its own, at a level above and beyond the toiling hands of individual people. But here, too, when things begin to go wrong—widespread discrimination, environmental degradation, massive poverty, lack of affordable health care, escalating crime rates—people must do something about it.

So the fascinating paradox of human life is that we build society, collectively “forget” that we’ve built it, and live under its massive and influential structure. But we are not stuck with society as it is. Human beings are the architects of their own social reality. Throughout this book, I examine the active roles individuals play in designing, building, maintaining, renovating, or tearing down society.

## A Final Thought

One of the greatest challenges I have faced in three decades of teaching sociology is trying to get my students to see the personal relevance of the course material, to fully appreciate the connection between the individual and society. The true value of sociology lies in its unique ability to show the two-way connection between the most private elements of our lives—our characteristics, experiences, behaviors, and thoughts—and the cultures, groups, organizations, and social institutions to which we belong. The “everyday life” approach in this book uses real-world examples and personal observations as a vehicle for understanding the relationship between individuals and society.

My purpose is to make the familiar unfamiliar—to help you critically examine the commonplace and the ordinary in your own life. Only when you step back and examine the taken-for-granted aspects of your personal experiences can you see that there is an inherent, sometimes unrecognized organization and predictability to them. At the same time, you will see that the structure of society is greater than the sum of the experiences and psychologies of the individuals in it.

It is my conviction that this intellectual excursion should be a thought-provoking and enjoyable one. Reading a textbook doesn’t have to be boring or, even worse, the academic equivalent of a painful trip to the dentist (although I personally have nothing against dentists). I believe that one of my responsibilities as a teacher is to provide my students with a challenging but comfortable classroom atmosphere in which to learn. I have tried to do the same in this book. Your instructor has chosen this book not because it makes his or her job teaching your course any easier but because he or she wants you, the student, to see how sociology helps us to understand how the small, private experiences of our everyday lives are connected to this thing we call society. I hope you learn to appreciate this important message, and I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Have fun,

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## About the Author

### David M. Newman

earned his BA from San Diego State University in 1981 and his graduate degrees from the University of Washington in Seattle (MA 1984, PhD 1988). After a year at the University of Connecticut, David came to DePauw University in 1989 and has been there ever since. David teaches courses in Contemporary Society, Deviance, Mental Illness, Family, Social Psychology, and Research Methods. He has published numerous articles on teaching and has presented research papers on the intersection of gender and power in intimate relationships. Recently most of his scholarly activity has been devoted to writing and revising several books, including *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life: Brief Edition* (Sage, 2017); *Identities and Inequalities: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* (McGraw-Hill, 2017); and *Families: A Sociological Perspective* (McGraw-Hill, 2009). His most recent book, *Redemption or Stigma? The Promise, Practice and Price of Second Chances in American Culture* (Lexington Books), is projected to be published in 2019. It examines the cultural meaning, institutional importance, and social limitations of “second chance” and “permanent stigma” narratives in everyday life.

## Part 1 **The Individual and Society**

What is the relationship between your private life and the social world around you? **Part I** introduces you to the guiding theme of this book: Our personal, everyday experiences affect and are affected by the larger society in which we live. In **Chapters 1** and **2** I discuss the sociological perspective on human life and the ways in which it differs from the more individualistic approaches of psychology and biology. You will read about what society consists of and get a glimpse into sociologists' attempts to understand the two-way relationship between the individual and society.

As you read on, keep in mind a metaphor that will be used throughout the book to help explain the nature of society: architecture. Like buildings, societies have a design discernible to the alert eye. Both are constructed by bringing together a wide variety of materials in a complex process. Both, through their structure, shape the activities within. At the same time, both change. Sometimes they change subtly and gradually as the inhabitants go about their lives; other times they are deliberately redecorated or remodeled. As you make your way through this book, see if you can discover more ways in which buildings and societies are alike.

# 1 Taking a New Look at a Familiar World

- Sociology and the Individual
- The Insights of Sociology
- The Sociological Imagination

André graduated from college in 2017. He had been a model student. When not studying, he found time to help kids read at the local elementary school and actively participated in student government at his own school. He got along well with his professors, his grades were excellent, he made the dean's list all 4 years, and he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. As a computer science major with a minor in economics, André thought his future was set: He would land a job at a top software company or perhaps a stock brokerage firm and work his way up the ladder so that he'd be earning a six-figure income by the time he was 30.

But when André entered the job market and began applying for jobs, things didn't go exactly according to plan. Despite his credentials, nobody seemed willing to hire him full time. He was able to survive by taking temporary freelance programming jobs here and there and working nights at the Gap. Although most of his classmates had similar difficulties finding jobs, André began to question his own abilities: "Do I lack the skills employers are looking for? Am I not trying hard enough? What the heck is wrong with me?" His friends and family were as encouraging as they could be, but some secretly wondered if André wasn't as smart as they'd thought he was.

Michael and Louise were both juniors at a large university. They had been dating each other exclusively for the past 2 years. By all accounts, the relationship seemed to be going quite well. In fact, Michael was beginning to think about marriage, children, and living happily ever after. Then one day out of the blue, Louise dropped a bombshell. She texted Michael that she thought their relationship was going nowhere and perhaps they ought to start seeing other people.

Michael was stunned. "What did I do?" he asked her. "I thought things were going great. Is it something I said? Something I did? Tell me. I can change."

She said no, he hadn't done anything wrong; they had simply grown apart. She told him she just didn't feel as strongly about him as she used to.

Even though he let his friends talk him into immediately changing his relationship status on Facebook, Michael was devastated. They tried to comfort him. "She wasn't any good for you anyway," they said. "We always thought she was a little creepy. She probably couldn't be in a serious relationship with anybody. It wasn't your fault; it was hers."

In both of these stories, notice how people immediately try to explain an unfortunate situation by focusing on the personal characteristics and attributes of the individuals involved. André blames himself for not being able to land a job in his field; others, although supportive, harbor doubts about his intelligence and drive. Michael wonders what he did to sour his relationship with Louise; his friends question Louise's psychological stability. Such reactions are not uncommon. We have a marked tendency to rely on **individualistic explanations**, attributing people's achievements and disappointments to their personal qualities.

So why can't André, our highly intelligent, well-trained, talented college graduate, land a permanent job in his field? It's certainly possible that he has some personal flaw that makes him unemployable: lack of motivation, laziness, negative attitude, bad hygiene, a snooty demeanor, and so on. Or maybe he just doesn't come across as particularly smart during job interviews.

But by focusing exclusively on such individual "deficiencies," we risk overlooking the broader societal factors that may have affected André's job prospects. For instance, the employment situation for college graduates like André was part of a broader economic trend that began with the global financial crisis of 2008 and continued to suppress the job market by the time he got his degree. At the time I was writing this chapter, 4.1% of American adults (about 7 million people) were officially unemployed and about a quarter of them had been unemployed for at least 27 weeks. Incidentally, the official unemployment rate only counts people who have been actively seeking employment for the past month. Thus it doesn't include the 5.3

million people who were employed part time even though they wanted to work full time, the 1.6 million “marginally attached” unemployed people who had looked for a job sometime in the past year (just not in the past month), and the 514,000 so-called “discouraged” workers who had lost hope and given up looking for employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017c). So you see, even though the unemployment rate is lower than it was, say 10 years ago, a lot of people remain in André’s boat.

But he’s got a college education. That should help, right? Well, it turns out that college degrees are not necessarily a guarantee of fruitful employment. Even though the economy has been steadily improving over the past decade, the unemployment rate for recent college graduates has remained fairly stable: 5.6% today compared with 5.5% in 2007 (the year prior to the Great Recession). To put it another way, in 2000, 38% of college graduates between the ages of 22 and 27 were underemployed (that is, working in jobs that didn’t require a college degree); by 2016, that figure increased to over 45%. In addition, less than 30% of employed college graduates work in a job that provides retirement or pension benefits. And 1 out of 10 recent college graduates is neither employed nor pursuing more education in graduate or professional school (Kroeger, Cooke, & Gould, 2016).

New graduates do fare better than other young people who don’t have college degrees (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013). For instance, college graduates earn 98% more per hour on average than people without a degree (cited in Leonhardt, 2014). However, the average starting salary for college graduates has stagnated in recent years. In fact, since 2000, the wages of young college graduates has actually dropped by 7.7% (Shierholz, Davis, & Kimball, 2014). To make money matters worse, the average 2016 college graduate has \$37,172 in student loan debt, up 6% from the previous year (Student Loan Hero, 2017).

In addition, their future outlook may not be so great. In a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016), only about 5% of employers indicate that they intend to hire more college graduates than they did the previous year; a third said they intend to hire *fewer* graduates. Indeed, according to some economists, for the next 10 to 15 years, recent graduates will probably earn less and have more bouts of unemployment than if they had graduated at a time when jobs were more plentiful (Kroeger, Cooke, & Gould, 2016).

So you see, André’s employability and his chances of earning a good living were as much a result of the economic forces operating at the time he began looking for a job as of any of his personal qualifications. Had he graduated only 5 years earlier—when the unemployment rate hovered around 10%—his job prospects would have been much worse. But had he graduated 5 years later—when employment opportunities are projected to improve even more for graduates in his field—his prospects would have been much brighter.

And what about Michael and Louise? It seems perfectly reasonable to conclude that something about either of them or the combination of the two caused their breakup. We tend to view dating relationships—not to mention marriages—as successes or failures based solely on the traits or behaviors of the two people involved.

But how would your assessment of the situation change if you found out that Lee—to whom Louise had always been secretly attracted—had just broken up with his longtime girlfriend, Julie, and was now available? Like it or not, relationships are not exclusively private entities; they’re always being influenced by forces beyond our control. They take place within a larger network of friends, acquaintances, ex-partners, coworkers, fellow students, and people as yet unknown who may make desirable or, at the very least, acceptable dating partners. On Facebook, people routinely post up-to-the-minute changes in the status of their relationships, thereby instantaneously advertising shifts in their availability.

When people believe they have no better alternative, they tend to stay with their present partners, even if they are not particularly satisfied. When people think that better relationships are available to them, they may become less committed to staying in their present ones. Indeed, people’s perceptions of what characterizes a good relationship (such as fairness, compatibility, affection) are less likely to determine when and if it ends than the presence or absence of favorable alternatives (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990). Research shows that the risk of a relationship ending increases as the supply of potential alternative relationships increases (South & Lloyd, 1995).

In addition, Louise’s decision to leave could have been indirectly affected by the sheer number of potentially obtainable partners—a result of shifts in the birthrate 20 years or so earlier. Today, there are roughly 126 U.S. men between 25 and 34 who are single, divorced, or widowed for every 100 women in the same categories (K. Parker, Wang, & Rohal, 2014). For a single, heterosexual woman like Louise, such a surplus of college-age men increases the likelihood that she would eventually find a better alternative to Michael. Fifty years ago, however, when there were 180 single men for every 100 single women, her chances would have been even better. The number of available alternatives can also vary geographically. For instance, Michael’s prospects would improve if he were living in Auburn, Maine, where there are 81 unmarried men for every 100

unmarried women, but his chances would sink if he lived in Mansfield, Ohio, where there are 215 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women (Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends, 2014). In sum, Michael's interpersonal value, and therefore the stability of his relationship with Louise, may have suffered not because of anything he did but because of population forces over which he had little, if any, control.

Let's take this notion beyond Louise and Michael's immediate dating network. For instance, the very characteristics and features that people consider desirable (or undesirable) in the first place reflect the values of the larger culture in which they live. Fashions and tastes are constantly changing, making particular characteristics (e.g., hairstyle, physique, clothing), behaviors (smoking, drinking, sharing feelings), or life choices (educational attainment, occupation, political affiliation) more or less attractive. And broad economic forces can affect intimate choices even further. In China, where there are about 41 million *more* unmarried young men than women (Tsai, 2012a), single women can be especially choosy when it comes to romantic partners, often requiring that suitors be employed and own their own homes before they'll even consider them for a date (Jacobs, 2011).

The moral of these two stories is simple: To understand experiences in our personal lives, we must move past individual traits and examine broader societal characteristics and trends. External features beyond our immediate awareness and control often exert as much influence on the circumstances of our day-to-day lives as our "internal" qualities. We can't begin to explain an individual's employability without examining current and past economic trends that affect the number of jobs available and the number of people who are looking for work. We can't begin to explain why relationships work or don't work without addressing the broader interpersonal network and culture in which they are embedded. By the same token, we can't begin to explain people's ordinary, everyday thoughts and actions without examining the social forces that influence them.

## Sociology and the Individual

Herein lies the fundamental theme of **sociology**—the systematic study of human societies—and the theme that will guide us throughout this book: Everyday social life—our thoughts, actions, feelings, decisions, interactions, and so on—is the product of a complex interplay between societal forces and personal characteristics. To explain why people are the way they are, believe the things they believe, or do the things they do, we must understand the interpersonal, historical, cultural, technological, organizational, and global environments they inhabit. To understand either individuals or society, we must understand both (C. W. Mills, 1959).

Of course, seeing the relationship between individuals and social forces is not always so easy. The United States is a society built on the image of the rugged, self-reliant individual. Not surprisingly, it is also a society dominated by individualistic understandings of human behavior that seek to explain problems and processes by focusing exclusively on the character, the psychology, or even the biochemistry of each person. Consequently, most of us simply take for granted that what we choose to do, say, feel, and think are private phenomena. Everyday life seems to be a series of free personal choices. After all, we choose what to major in, what to wear when we go out, what and when to eat, who our mates will be, and so on.

But how free are these decisions? Think about all the times your actions have been dictated or at least influenced by social circumstances over which you had little control. Have you ever felt that because of your age or gender or race, certain opportunities were closed to you? Your ability to legally drive a car, drink alcohol, or vote, for instance, is determined by society's prevailing definition of age. When you're older, you may be forced into retirement despite your skills and desire to continue working. Gender profoundly affects your choices, too. Some occupations, such as bank executive and engineer, are still overwhelmingly male, whereas others, such as registered nurse and preschool teacher, are almost exclusively female. Likewise, the doctrines of your religion may limit your behavioral choices. For a devout Catholic, premarital sex or even divorce is unlikely. Each day during the holy month of Ramadan, a strict Muslim must abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. An Orthodox Jew would never dream of drinking milk and eating meat at the same meal. Even universal bodily needs can be influenced by our social context.

### Micro-Macro Connection: A Sociology of Sleep

Everybody sleeps. Indeed, at certain moments in our lives—when we've pulled an all-nighter studying for finals, when we're sick, when we become new parents—sleep may be the most all-encompassing preoccupation we have. Indeed, one of the major ailments of modern life is lack of sleep. According to one poll, nearly two thirds of Americans complain that they don't get enough sleep. In the United States alone, there are over 2,000 sleep clinics to treat people's sleep problems. "Fatigue management" is now a growing therapeutic field (cited in Kolbert, 2013).

Sleep is obviously experienced differently by different individuals. I'm sure you know people who say they can't function on less than 10 hours of sleep a night while others say they're wide-awake and perky on just four.

But sleep preferences are not just a matter of individual adaptation. Children, for example, typically require much more sleep than adults, especially in their first several years of life. Even here, though, individual needs can be overridden by broader social concerns. A major accomplishment of parenting is getting children to fit their sleeping patterns into the parents' schedule. "My baby slept through the night last night!!" is a celebratory exclamation all new parents long to shout. But it's not always easy. What parent hasn't experienced the struggle of trying to get a fussy baby or combative toddler to sleep at night? But parent-child conflict over sleep never completely disappears. Try waking up a surly teenager on a school day morning sometime. Incidentally, the problem of dozy teenagers has become so bad that the American Academy of Pediatrics (2014) recently issued a policy statement recommending a later start of the school day in middle and high school so that teens can get enough sleep at night.

According to sociologist Simon Williams (2011), sleep is "a window onto the social world" (p. 27). How, when, where, how much, and with whom we sleep is always a product of social, cultural, historical, and even economic forces. For homeless people on the streets of Delhi, India, for instance, finding some way and somewhere to sleep is a nightly struggle:

The bicycle rickshaw pullers . . . fold their bodies into strange angles on the four-foot seats of their vehicles. The day laborers curl their bodies on the frigid sidewalk, sometimes spooned against other men for warmth (E. Barry, 2016, p. A6).

With so many people in such desperate need of sleep, dishonest vendors—what the locals call the "sleep mafia"—sell filthy blankets to those who can scarcely afford food, jacking up their prices when the temperature drops. Essentially, these individuals decide who sleeps where, how well they sleep, and for how long.

All societies must organize the sleep of their members in some way. Think about when and where it's appropriate to sleep. At night? In the privacy of your own home? Of course. American adults are expected to go to sleep somewhere around 11:00 at night and wake up around 7:00 in the morning—what one anthropologist refers to as "consolidated sleeping" (Wolf-Meyer, 2012). Anything else—"sleeping during the day, sleeping in bursts, waking up in the middle of the night"—is considered unsound, even abnormal and perhaps subject to some kind of therapeutic intervention (Kolbert, 2013, p. 25).

At times, going without sleep can be worn as a boastful badge of honor or pride. "If you snooze, you lose," "I'll have time to sleep when I'm dead," and all that. But this clearly can be taken too far. "Drowsiness . . . is increasingly regarded as the new drunkenness: a culpable state, since, we are every bit as dangerous behind the wheel when we're drowsy as when we are drunk" (S. Williams, 2011, pp. 27–28). Indeed, the U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that "driving while drowsy" causes 40,000 injuries and over 1,500 deaths a year on U.S. roads (cited in Kolbert, 2013).

We tend to believe that "lying unconscious for eight hours straight [belongs] to a natural order" (Barron, 2016, p. 27). But the "8 hours of sleep a night" ideal has not always characterized people's lives. Up until the mid-19th century, it was common for people to sleep in segments throughout the day. They may have gone to bed in the later afternoon or early evening, slept for several hours, woken up and engaged in a few hours of activity—what the French referred to as *dorveille*, or "wakesleep"—then gone to bed for a "second sleep." In some societies, periods of daytime sleep are a common part of the culture. The *siesta* in some Mediterranean countries and the midday rest in some Asian societies are held as acceptable, even valued, practices.

However, such a pattern was not (and today is not) conducive to a complex, global world that hinges on employment and profit. For years, the taken-for-granted 9 to 5 workday and Monday through Friday workweek have had a significant impact on how we divide and define time. Most of us can easily make distinctions between workdays and non-workdays (holidays and weekends); between work hours and rest hours. And it's pretty clear in which of these times sleep is considered appropriate.

Yet the boundary between work (wakefulness) and home (sleep) is not always so clear. In certain occupations that involve the operation of heavy machinery—like long-distance truckers, train conductors, and airplane pilots—tired workers pose obvious safety hazards. Hence they have mandatory downtime policies and work hour limitations. But as the pace of life has sped up, even office-based, non-manual occupations are facing the problem of worker fatigue due to lack of sleep. It's estimated that drowsiness costs the U.S. economy hundreds of billions of dollars each year in higher stress and lost productivity (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). One third of respondents in one poll indicated that they'd fallen asleep at work in the previous month (National Sleep Foundation, 2008).

Some sociologists have argued that recent changes in the workplace—flexible schedules, telecommuting, home-based work—have begun to blur the time-honored boundaries between public and private, work and home, and given rise to shifting conceptions of sleep. In particular, they cite the greater acceptability of the workplace nap as evidence of changing attitudes toward sleep and wakefulness: "Once a taboo act engaged in by those who knew they were violating company rules, workplace napping is emerging, albeit unevenly, in American work culture as a tolerated, if not prescribed, behavior" (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005, p. 34). More and more companies have come to the conclusion that restorative naps are a relatively cheap solution to the problem of excessive drowsiness. Many now provide nap rooms (or serenity rooms) for their employees, where they can find comfortable sofas, soothing lighting, and enforced bans on tablet and smartphone usage.

I don't think we're yet to the point where *all* American employees will have opportunities to take periodic power naps at work. We're not in danger of becoming a *siesta* culture anytime soon. However, I hope you can now see that "the very places, spaces [and] schedules . . . of sleep are themselves deeply social, cultural, historical, and political matters—and potentially subject to contestation and change" (S. Williams, 2011, p. 31). Even in something so natural as sleep, society interacts with the individual to shape the experience.