

BRYM ROBERTS STROHSCHNIE LIE

SOCIOLOGY



~~MY~~ YOUR COMPASS FOR A NEW WORLD

FIFTH CANADIAN EDITION



SOCIOLOGY

YOUR COMPASS FOR A NEW WORLD

FIFTH CANADIAN EDITION

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DEDICATION

Many authors seem to be afflicted with stoic family members who gladly allow them to spend endless hours buried in their work. I suffer no such misfortune. The members of my family have demanded that I focus on what really matters in life. I think that focus has made this a better book. I am deeply grateful to Rhonda Lenton, Shira Brym, Talia Lenton-Brym, and Ariella Lenton-Brym. I dedicate this book to them with thanks and love.

Robert Brym

To Charlie, our spirited little man: May your navigation through the social maze be revealing and fun.

Lance W. Roberts

To students past and present whose passion and enthusiasm continue to inspire me. And most of all, thanks to my husband, Frank, whose love and support sustains me through it all.

Lisa Strohschein

For Charis Thompson, Thomas Cussins, Jessica Cussins, and Charlotte Lie, with thanks and love.

John Lie

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Preface, xvii

PART I **FOUNDATIONS, 1**

CHAPTER 1
A SOCIOLOGICAL COMPASS, 2

CHAPTER 2
HOW SOCIOLOGISTS DO RESEARCH, 34

PART II **BASIC SOCIAL PROCESSES, 65**

CHAPTER 3
CULTURE, 66

CHAPTER 4
SOCIALIZATION, 94

CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL INTERACTION, 115

CHAPTER 6
NETWORKS, GROUPS, BUREAUCRACIES, AND SOCIETIES, 136

PART III **INEQUALITY, 165**

CHAPTER 7
DEVIANCE AND CRIME, 166

CHAPTER 8
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, 192

CHAPTER 9
GLOBALIZATION, INEQUALITY, AND DEVELOPMENT, 219

CHAPTER 10
RACE AND ETHNICITY, 244

CHAPTER 11
SEXUALITIES AND GENDER STRATIFICATION, 273

CHAPTER 12
SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY: DISABILITY, AGING,
AND DEATH, 304

PART IV **INSTITUTIONS, 329**

CHAPTER 13
WORK AND THE ECONOMY, 330

CHAPTER 14
POLITICS, 356

CHAPTER 15
FAMILIES, 383

CHAPTER 16
RELIGION, 413

CHAPTER 17
EDUCATION, 436

CHAPTER 18
MASS MEDIA AND MASS COMMUNICATION, 460

CHAPTER 19
HEALTH AND MEDICINE, 481

PART V **SOCIAL CHANGE, 503**

CHAPTER 20
POPULATION AND URBANIZATION, 504

CHAPTER 21
COLLECTIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, 526

ONLINE CHAPTER 22
TECHNOLOGY AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, 22-1

References, 549

Index, 591

Preface, xvii

PART I FOUNDATIONS, 1

CHAPTER 1

A SOCIOLOGICAL COMPASS, 2

Introduction, 3

Why You Need a Compass for a New World, 3

The Goals of This Chapter, 4

The Sociological Perspective, 5

The Sociological Explanation of Suicide, 5

Suicide in Canada Today, 7

From Personal Troubles to Social Structures, 8

BOX 1.1 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

SUICIDE AND THE INNU OF LABRADOR, 9

The Sociological Imagination, 10

BOX 1.2 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

HERE COMES HONEY BOO BOO: THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AND REALITY TV, 11

BOX 1.3 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

12 YEARS A SLAVE, 12

Origins of the Sociological Imagination, 12

Theory, Research, and Values, 14

Theory, 16

Research, 16

Values, 17

Sociological Theory and Theorists, 17

Functionalism, 17

Conflict Theory, 18

Symbolic Interactionism, 21

Feminist Theory, 23

Fashion Cycles and the Four Theoretical Perspectives, 25

Functionalism, 25

Conflict Theory, 26

Symbolic Interactionism, 27

Feminism, 27

A Sociological Compass, 28

Equality versus Inequality of Opportunity, 28

Freedom versus Constraint, 29

Why Sociology? 30

Careers in Sociology, 30

BOX 1.4 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

ARE CORPORATE SCANDALS A PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUAL ETHICS OR SOCIAL POLICY? 31

Summary, 33

Note, 33

CHAPTER 2

HOW SOCIOLOGISTS DO RESEARCH, 34

Science and Experience, 35

Objective, 35

Levels of Experience, 36

Scientific versus Unscientific Thinking, 37

Research Preliminaries, 39

Research Approaches, 39

The Research Act: Connecting Ideas to Evidence, 42

Ethical Considerations, 43

BOX 2.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

ZERO DARK THIRTY, 45

Quantitative Approaches, 46

Measuring Variables, 46

Experiments, 47

BOX 2.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

GOVERNMENT NUTRITIONAL EXPERIMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, 48

Surveys, 49

BOX 2.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

PRIVACY, POLITICS, AND THE CANADIAN CENSUS, 49

Qualitative Approaches, 55

Participant Observation, 56

BOX 2.4 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

UNDERCOVER BOSS, 57

Qualitative Interviewing, 60

The Importance of Being Subjective, 61

Summary, 62

PART II BASIC SOCIAL PROCESSES, 65

CHAPTER 3

CULTURE, 66

Culture as Problem Solving, 67

Culture as Meaning Generator, 67

Culture Defined, 68

The Origins of Culture, 69

Culture and Biology, 71

The Evolution of Human Behaviour, 71

Language and the Sapir-Whorf Thesis, 73

Culture as Freedom and Constraint, 74

A Functionalist Analysis of Culture: Culture and Ethnocentrism, 74

BOX 3.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

BORAT AND THE DICTATOR, 74

Culture as Freedom, 76

Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Production, 77

Cultural Diversity, 77

Multiculturalism, 78

BOX 3.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

SHOULD RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS BE BANNED IN PUBLIC SPACES? 78

A Conflict Analysis of Culture: The Rights Revolution, 80

BOX 3.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: CULTURAL RELATIVISM OR ETHNOCENTRISM? 80

From Diversity to Globalization, 81

Aspects of Postmodernism, 83

Canada: The First Postmodern Culture? 85

Culture as Constraint, 87

Rationalization and Time Use, 87

Consumerism, 88

BOX 3.4 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

MY SHOPPING ADDICTION AND HOARDERS: IS CONSUMERISM A SOCIAL DISEASE? 89

From Counterculture to Subculture, 90

Cultural Capital, 91

Summary, 92

CHAPTER 4

SOCIALIZATION, 94

The Consequences of Social Isolation in Childhood, 95

Formation of the Self, 96

Freud, 96

Cooley's Symbolic Interactionism, 97

Mead, 97

At the Intersection of Biography and History, 98

BOX 4.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY, 99

A Sociology of the Life Course, 100

Age Cohort, 101

Generation, 101

How Socialization Works, 103

Theories and Agents of Socialization, 104

Families, 104

Schools: Functions and Conflicts, 105

Symbolic Interactionism and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, 106

Peer Groups, 106

The Mass Media, 107

BOX 4.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

CYBER-BULLYING, 108

The Mass Media and the Feminist Approach to Socialization, 109

Resocialization and Total Institutions, 110

Socialization and the Flexible Self, 111

BOX 4.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

SELF-TRANSFORMATION: EXTREME MAKEOVER AND ITS SPINOFFS, 112

Self-Identity and the Internet, 113

Summary, 113

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL INTERACTION, 115

The Building Blocks of Interaction, 116

BOX 5.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

SONS OF ANARCHY, 118

BOX 5.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

WE LIVE IN PUBLIC, 120

Feminist Theory and Emotions, 120

Emotion Management, 121

Emotion Labour, 122

Emotions in Historical Perspective, 123

Conflict Theories of Social Interaction, 124

Competing for Attention, 124

Power and Social Interaction, 125

BOX 5.3 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA RUINED INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION? 126

Power and Position, 128

Symbolic Interaction, 129

Goffman's Dramaturgical Analysis, 129

Ethnomethodology, 130

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication, 131

From Small Processes to Big Structures, 134

BOX 5.4 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

DOES NEGOTIATING SOCIAL ORDER TAKE TOO MUCH TIME AND ENERGY? 134

Summary, 135

CHAPTER 6**NETWORKS, GROUPS, BUREAUCRACIES, AND SOCIETIES, 136****Beyond Individual Motives, 137**

The Holocaust, 137

How Social Groups Shape Our Actions, 138

**BOX 6.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:
GROUP LOYALTY OR BETRAYAL? 139****Social Networks, 141**

It's a Small World, 141

**BOX 6.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:
THE SOCIAL NETWORK, 142**

Finding a Job, 143

Urban Networks, 144

Online Networks, 144

The Building Blocks of Social Networks, 145

Is Group Loyalty Always Functional? 146

Love and Group Loyalty, 146

Primary and Secondary Groups, 146

Benefits of Group Conformity, 147

**BOX 6.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:
HOMELAND AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP, 148**

Disadvantages of Group Conformity, 149

Group Conformity, Group Conflict, and Group
Inequality, 150

Groups and Social Imagination, 151

Bureaucracies, 152

Bureaucratic Inefficiency, 152

Bureaucracy's Informal Side, 154

Leadership, 155

Overcoming Bureaucratic Inefficiency, 156

Organizational Environments, 156

Societies, 157

Foraging Societies, 158

Pastoral and Horticultural Societies, 159

Agricultural Societies, 159

Industrial Societies, 160

Postindustrial Societies, 161

Postnatural Societies, 161

Freedom and Constraint in Social Life, 162

Summary, 163

PART III**INEQUALITY, 165****CHAPTER 7****DEVIANCE AND CRIME, 166****The Social Definition of Deviance and Crime, 167**The Difference between Deviance and Crime, 167
Sanctions, 168**BOX 7.1 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:****VIOLENCE AND HOCKEY: DEVIANT, CRIMINAL, OR NORMATIVE? 169**

Measuring Crime, 170

**BOX 7.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:
SHOULD RECREATIONAL DRUGS BE LEGALIZED? 171**

Criminal Profiles, 173

Explaining Deviance and Crime, 175Symbolic Interactionist Approaches to Deviance and
Crime, 175

Functionalist Explanations, 177

**BOX 7.3 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:
EASY A, 178****BOX 7.4 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:
BREAKING BAD, 179**

Conflict Theories, 180

Feminist Contributions, 182

Social Control and Regulation, 184

Internal and External Social Control, 184

Trends in Social Control, 184

The Prison, 185

Moral Panic, 187

Alternative Forms of Punishment, 188

Summary, 191

CHAPTER 8**SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, 192****Patterns of Social Inequality, 193**

Shipwrecks and Inequality, 193

Economic Inequality in Canada, 194

Explanations of Income Inequality, 196

Income versus Wealth, 198

**BOX 8.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:
CAN GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE INEQUALITY? 199**

Income and Poverty, 201

**BOX 8.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:
THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES, 202**

Explaining Poverty, 205

**BOX 8.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:
INCOME REDISTRIBUTION AND TAXATION, 206****Theories of Stratification, 207**

Conflict Perspectives, 207

Power, 212

**BOX 8.4 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:
TREME: HOW INEQUALITY SHAPES DISASTER, 213**

Social Mobility, 214**Perceptions of Class Inequality, 216**

Summary, 217

CHAPTER 9**GLOBALIZATION, INEQUALITY, AND DEVELOPMENT, 219****The Creation of a Global Village, 220**

The Triumphs and Tragedies of Globalization, 221

The Sources and Contours of Globalization, 223

Globalization in Everyday Life, 223

BOX 9.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

CAN WORK CONDITIONS BE IMPROVED IN CLOTHING FACTORIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES? 224

The Sources of Globalization, 225

A World Like the United States? 226

Globalization and Its Discontents: Anti-globalization and Anti-Americanism, 228

The History of Globalization, 229

Development and Underdevelopment, 230

Levels and Trends in Global Inequality, 231

Modernization Theory: A Functionalist Approach, 233

Dependency Theory: A Conflict Approach, 234

Core, Periphery, and Semiperiphery, 235

Neoliberal versus Democratic Globalization, 238

Globalization and Neoliberalism, 238

Foreign Aid, Debt Cancellation, and Tariff Reduction, 239

BOX 9.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS, 240

Democratic Globalization, 242

Summary, 243

Notes, 243

CHAPTER 10**RACE AND ETHNICITY, 244****Defining Race and Ethnicity, 245**

The Great Brain Robbery, 245

Race, Biology, and Society, 246

Ethnicity, Culture, and Social Structure, 249

Ethnic and Racial Stratification in Canada, 250

Canadian Multiculturalism, 251

BOX 10.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE, 252

Race and Ethnic Relations: The Symbolic Interactionist Approach, 253

Labels and Identity, 253

Ethnic and Racial Labels: Imposition versus Choice, 255

BOX 10.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

SEARCHING FOR SUGARMAN, 256

Conflict Theories of Race and Ethnicity, 257

Internal Colonialism, 257

The Theory of the Split Labour Market and the Case of Asian Canadians, 263

BOX 10.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

MORE SEASONAL AND MIGRANT WORKERS? 263

Some Advantages of Ethnicity, 264

The Future of Race and Ethnicity in Canada, 267**BOX 10.4 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:**

SHOULD WE PAY THE PRICE OF PAST WRONGS? 270

Summary, 271

Notes, 272

CHAPTER 11**SEXUALITIES AND GENDER STRATIFICATION, 273****Sex Versus Gender, 274**

Is It a Boy or a Girl? 274

Gender Identity and Gender Role, 275

Theories of Gender, 276

Modern Essentialism: Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology, 277

Functionalism and Essentialism, 277

A Critique of Essentialism from the Conflict and Feminist Perspectives, 277

Social Constructionism and Symbolic Interactionism, 279

Gender Segregation and Interaction, 281

The Mass Media and Body Image, 282

BOX 11.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

TODDLERS & TIARAS, 284

Male–Female Interaction, 286

Sexuality, 287

Sexuality and Resistance, 287

Enforcing Heteronormativity, 289

BOX 11.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

MILK (2008), 291

Gender Inequality, 292

The Origins of Gender Inequality, 293

The Women's Movement, 294

Gender Inequality in the Labour Market, 295

Eliminating the Gender Gap in Earnings, 297

Male Aggression against Women, 299

BOX 11.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

DOES A RAPE CULTURE EXIST ON UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE CAMPUSES? 301

Summary, 302

CHAPTER 12

SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY: DISABILITY, AGING,
AND DEATH, 304

Thinking About the Human Body Sociologically, 305

BOX 12.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

ROBOCOP (2014), 307

Society and the Human Body, 308

The Body and Social Status: A Feminist Interpretation, 308

Disability, 313

Disability in Canada, 314

The Social Construction of Disability, 315

Rehabilitation and Elimination, 315

Ableism, 316

Challenging Ableism: The Normality of Disability, 317

BOX 12.2 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

THE MICHAEL J. FOX SHOW, 318

Aging, 318

The Sociology of Aging, 318

Population Aging in Canada and around the World, 319

Intergenerational Tensions: A Conflict Interpretation, 321

Death and Dying, 323

BOX 12.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

NEGOTIATING THE AMBIGUITY BETWEEN SOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL
DEATH, 325

Summary, 326

PART IV**INSTITUTIONS, 329****CHAPTER 13**

WORK AND THE ECONOMY, 330

The Promise and History of Work, 331

Salvation or Curse? 331

Economic Sectors and Revolutions, 333

“Good” versus “Bad” Jobs, 334

The Deskilling Thesis, 335

A Critique of the Deskilling Thesis, 337

The Social Relations of Work, 338

Labour Market Segmentation, 339

Worker Resistance and Management Response, 340

BOX 13.1 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

THE IMPORTANCE OF VACATIONS, 342

Unions and Professional Organizations, 343

Barriers between the Primary and Secondary Labour
Markets, 344

The Time Crunch and Its Effects, 344

The Problem of Markets, 345

BOX 13.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

SHOULD WE ABOLISH THE MINIMUM WAGE? 346

**Capitalism, Communism, and Democratic
Socialism, 348**

Capitalism, 348

BOX 13.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

DRAGONS' DEN, 348

BOX 13.4 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

TRIANGLE: REMEMBERING THE FIRE, 349

Communism, 350

Democratic Socialism, 351

The Corporation, 351

Globalization, 353

Globalization in the Less Developed Countries, 353

The Future of Work and the Economy, 354

Summary, 355

CHAPTER 14

POLITICS, 356

Introduction, 357

Free Trade and Democracy, 357

What Is Politics? Key Terms, 358

BOX 14.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

GAME OF THRONES, 359

Theories of Democracy, 362

A Functionalist Account: Pluralist Theory, 362

Conflict Approaches I: Elite Theory, 362

BOX 14.2 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN CANADIAN
POLITICS, 364

BOX 14.3 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

THE IDES OF MARCH, 365

Conflict Approaches II: Marxist Rejoinders to Elite
Theory, 365

Conflict Approaches III: Power Resource Theory, 366

Conflict Approaches IV: State-Centred Theory, 368

The Future of Democracy, 372

Two Cheers for Russian Democracy, 372

The Three Waves of Democracy, 373

The Social Preconditions of Democracy, 375

Postmaterialism and the Dilemma of Canadian
Politics, 375

Politics by Other Means, 377

War, 377

Terrorism and Related Forms of Political
Violence, 380

Summary, 381

Notes, 382

CHAPTER 15**FAMILIES, 383****Is “The Family” in Decline? 384****Functionalism and the Nuclear Ideal, 387**

Functional Theory, 387

Foraging Societies, 387

The Canadian Family in the 1950s, 388

Conflict and Feminist Theories, 391

The Gender Division of Labour, 391

Mate Selection, 392

Love and Mate Selection, 392

Marriage and Cohabitation, 393

Living Apart Together, 395

Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions, 395

BOX 15.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, 396

Divorce, 397

Predictors of Divorce, 398

Consequences of Divorce, 398

Economic Hardship, 399

BOX 15.2 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

THE MILLERS, 402

Reproduction, 403

Reproductive Choice, 404

Reproductive Technologies, 404

Zero-Child Families, 405

Lone-Parent Families, 406

Step-Parent Families, 407

Family Policy, 408

Summary, 411

CHAPTER 16**RELIGION, 413****Religion and Society, 414****Theoretical Approaches to the Sociology of Religion, 415**

Durkheim’s Functionalist Approach, 415

BOX 16.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

FROM DUCK DYNASTY TO THE GOOD WIFE, 416

Religion, Feminist Theory, and Conflict Theory, 417

Weber and the Problem of Social Change: A Symbolic Interactionist Interpretation, 421

The Rise, Decline, and Partial Revival of Religion, 422

The Rise of Religion, 422

The End of Religion? 423

BOX 16.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART I AND PART II, 424

The Market Theory, 427

The Future of Religion, 430

Religion Around the World, 430

Religious Tolerance, 430

Religious Affiliation in Canada, 431

BOX 16.3 IT’S YOUR CHOICE:

THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, 432

Religiosity, 433

Summary, 435

CHAPTER 17**EDUCATION, 436****The Riot in St. Léonard, 437****Mass Education: An Overview, 438**

Uniform Socialization, 440

Rising Levels of Education, 440

Individual Advantages and Disadvantages, 440

BOX 17.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

IS GRADE INFLATION HARMFUL? 441

The Rise of Mass Schooling, 442

Mass Schooling and National Wealth, 443

BOX 17.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

ARE VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS NEXT? 444

The Functions of Education, 444

Latent Functions, 444

Manifest Functions: The Logic of Industrialism, 445

Cultural Homogeneity and Solidarity, 445

Common School Standards, 446

National Solidarity, 446

Sorting Into Classes and Hierarchies: A Conflict Perspective, 447

Economic Barriers to Higher Education, 447

BOX 17.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

MR. D, 447

BOX 17.4 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

THE LOTTERY, 448

Exclusion, Credentialism, and Professionalization, 449

Cultural Capital and Control, 450

Reproducing Inequality: The Contribution of Symbolic Interactionism, 451

The Hidden Curriculum, 452

Testing and Tracking, 452

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, 453

BOX 17.5 IT’S YOUR CHOICE:

IS SCHOOL ENOUGH? 454

Prospects and Challenges for Education in Canada, 455

Gender Differences: A Feminist Perspective, 455

Participation and Aboriginal Background, 456
 International Competition, 458
 Summary, 459

CHAPTER 18

MASS MEDIA AND MASS COMMUNICATION, 460

The Significance of the Mass Media, 461

Illusion Becomes Reality, 461

What Are the Mass Media? 462

The Rise of the Mass Media, 462

Causes of Media Growth, 465

Theories of Media Effects, 467

Functionalism, 467

Conflict Theory, 467

BOX 18.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

SHOULD CANADA'S BROADCASTERS BE SUBJECT TO MORE GOVERNMENT REGULATION? 469

BOX 18.2 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

THE NEWSROOM, 470

BOX 18.3 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

REDACTED, 471

Interpretive Approaches, 472

Feminist Approaches, 473

Centralized Control and Resistance on the Internet, 475

Access, 476

Content, 477

Internet Advertising, 477

Media Convergence, 477

The Rise of Social Media, 478

Summary, 480

CHAPTER 19

HEALTH AND MEDICINE, 481

The Black Death, 482

Health and Inequality, 483

Defining and Measuring Health, 483

The Social Causes of Illness and Death, 485

BOX 19.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, 486

BOX 19.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

THE HIGH COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, 492

Health Care and Medicine, 493

The Canadian Health Care System: A Conflict Approach, 493

The Power of Medicine, 496

The Social Limits of Modern Medicine, 499

BOX 19.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

BIG BANG THEORY, 500

Challenges to Traditional Medical Science, 501

Summary, 502

PART V

SOCIAL CHANGE, 503

CHAPTER 20

POPULATION AND URBANIZATION, 504

Population, 505

The City of God, 505

The Population "Explosion", 506

The Malthusian Trap, 508

A Critique of Malthus, 508

BOX 20.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

WORLD WAR Z, 509

Demographic Transition Theory, 509

Population and Social Inequality, 512

BOX 20.2 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

HOW CAN WE FIND 100 MILLION MISSING WOMEN? 513

Urbanization, 514

From the Preindustrial to the Industrial City, 515

The Chicago School and the Industrial City, 515

After Chicago: A Critique, 516

The Corporate City, 519

Rural Communities, 520

The Postmodern City, 522

BOX 20.3 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

GIRLS, 523

Summary, 524

Note, 525

CHAPTER 21

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, 526

How to Spark a Riot, 527

The Study of Collective Action and Social Movements, 528

Non-Routine Collective Action, 529

The Vancouver Riot of 1907, 529

Breakdown Theory: A Functionalist Approach to Collective Action, 529

Assessing Breakdown Theory, 531

Social Movements, 533

Solidarity Theory: A Conflict Approach, 533

BOX 21.1 SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?:

STATE SURVEILLANCE OF DEMONSTRATIONS, 535

Strikes and the Union Movement in Canada, 536

Resource Mobilization, 536

Political Opportunities, 537

Social Control, 538

Framing Discontent: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach, 539

Examples of Frame Alignment, 540

An Application of Frame Alignment Theory: Back to 1968, 541

The History and Future of Social Movements, 542

The Past 300 Years, 542

New Social Movements, 544

BOX 21.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

V FOR VENDETTA, 546

Summary, 547

Note, 548

ONLINE CHAPTER 22

TECHNOLOGY AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, 22-1

Technology: Saviour or Frankenstein? 22-2

BOX 22.1 SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE:

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, 22-3

Technology *and* People Make History, 22-5

How High Tech Became Big Tech, 22-7

Environmental Degradation, 22-9

BOX 22.2 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES:

FOOD, INC., 22-13

The Social Construction of Environmental Problems: A Symbolic Interactionist View, 22-15

The Social Distribution of Environmental Risk, 22-16

BOX 22.3 IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

THE CANADIAN OIL PIPELINE DEBATE, 22-17

What Is to Be Done? Functionalist versus Conflict Solutions, 22-21

The Market and High Technology, 22-21

A Workable Strategy? 22-22

Evolution and Sociology, 22-23

Summary, 22-25

Notes, 22-25

References, 549

Index, 591

NEW IN THE FIFTH CANADIAN EDITION

Welcome to the fifth Canadian edition of *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*. We have been gratified and moved by the positive response to earlier editions of this book. At the same time, we benefited from the constructive criticisms generously offered by numerous readers and reviewers. *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*, Fifth Canadian Edition, is a response to many of their suggestions. Before we share the unique features that have characterized this text and have led to its success edition after edition, allow us to list the main innovations in this edition:

- Throughout, we added new research findings and incorporated data from the most recent Canadian census to keep the book as up-to-date as possible. The new edition contains more than 60 new figures.
- We have increased coverage of such timely issues as:
 - the “cultural turn” in sociology – Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu, and poststructuralism
 - the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, and Idle No More
 - qualitative research methods
 - ethics and social research
 - socialization across the life course
 - Canadian inequality in historical and comparative perspective
 - cyber-bullying
 - online networks
 - social media
 - critical race theory
 - First Nations
 - multiculturalism
 - third-wave feminism and postfeminism
 - the social construction of sexuality and sexual scripts
 - gender inequality from a global perspective
 - mate selection, including hooking up, friends with benefits, and same-sex relationships
 - cohabitation
 - divorce and step-parent families
 - the market model of religion
 - obesity
 - the social history of the tattoo
 - health policy and health inequality
 - intersectionality and health
- **Sociology at the Movies** was one of the most popular features of earlier editions among both faculty members and students. Building on this popularity, we wrote 16 new sociological reviews of movies including *12 Years a Slave*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *The Dictator*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, *We Live in Public*, *Easy A*, *The Queen of Versailles*, *Searching for Sugar Man*, *RoboCop*, *Triangle: Remembering the Fire*, *The Ides of March*, *Friends with Benefits*, *The Lottery*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, *World War Z*, and *V for Vendetta*.
- Because of the success of our **Sociology at the Movies** feature, we decided to expand our coverage of popular culture by writing 20 **Sociology On The Tube** boxes. These boxes identify and explain the sociological significance of such popular TV shows as *Breaking Bad*, *Homeland*, *Game of Thrones*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Toddlers*

and Tiaras, Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo, The Millers, Mr. D, The Newsroom, and Duck Dynasty.

- Our selection of other feature boxes has also been revitalized. We have written:
 - eight new **It's Your Choice boxes** on such timely topics as work conditions in overseas clothing factories, seasonal migrant workers, rape culture on college and university campuses, and euthanasia
 - five new **Social Policy boxes** on hot topics ranging from cyber-bullying to the legalization of recreational drugs to the Canadian oil pipeline debate

A COMPASS FOR A NEW WORLD

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (2002 [1859])

Dickens refers to the end of the eighteenth century, yet he offers a prophetic description of the times in which we live. We, too, set sail at the dawn of an age of superlatives, an age of uncertainty.

Over the past couple of decades, we have torn old countries apart and created new ones. We proclaimed a new era of medical breakthroughs with the sequencing of the human genome, yet learned that the plague is still with us in the form of AIDS, expected to kill 85 million people by 2020. After some economists proclaimed that recessions were a thing of the past, we experienced two devastating economic crises that bankrupted many high-flying companies and individuals; we are still living through the aftermath of the second one. We saw the world's mood and its political and economic outlook buoyant one day, anxious the next, as terrorist attacks and wars led us further into an era of uncertainty.

The world is an unpredictable place. It is especially disorienting for students entering adulthood. We wrote this book to show undergraduates that sociology can help them make sense of their lives, however uncertain they may appear to be. We hope it will serve as their sociological compass in the new world they are entering as young adults. Moreover, we show that sociology can be a liberating practical activity, not just an abstract intellectual exercise. By revealing the opportunities and constraints we face, sociology can help us navigate our lives, teaching us who we are and what we can become in this particular social and historical context. We cannot know what the future will bring, but we can at least know the choices we confront and the likely consequences of our actions. From this point of view, sociology can help us create the best possible future. That has always been sociology's principal justification, and so it should be today.

UNIQUE FEATURES

We have tried to keep sociology's main purpose and relevance front and centre in this book. As a result, *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*, Fifth Canadian Edition, differs from other major introductory sociology textbooks in four ways:

1. ***Drawing connections between one's self and the social world.*** To varying degrees, all introductory sociology textbooks try to show students how their personal experiences connect to the larger social world. However, we employ two devices to make

these connections clearer than in other textbooks. First, we illustrate key sociological ideas by using examples from popular culture that resonate deeply with student interests and experiences. For example, in Chapter 1 we illustrate the main sociological perspectives (functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and feminism) by analyzing changing fashions from Britney Spears to Lady Gaga. We analyze Canadian hockey to highlight central features of Durkheim's theory of religion in Chapter 3. In Chapter 21, we discuss the role of Facebook and Twitter in helping to mobilize the democratic movement in North Africa and the Middle East. We think these and many other examples speak directly to today's students about important sociological ideas in terms they understand, thus making the connection between self and society clear.


Second, we developed several unique pedagogical features to draw the connection between students' experiences and the larger social world. "Sociology at the Movies" and "Sociology on the Tube" take universal and popular elements of contemporary culture and render them sociologically relevant. We provide brief reviews of movies and television shows and highlight the sociological issues they raise and the sociological insights they embody. In each chapter, we repeatedly challenge students to consider how and why their own lives conform to, or deviate from, various patterns of social relations and actions. Many chapters feature an "It's Your Choice" box that sets out alternative approaches to a range of social problems and asks students to use logic and evidence to devise a course of action. Here we teach students that sociology can be a matter of the most urgent practical importance. Students also learn they can have a say in solving social problems.

2. **What to think versus how to think.** All textbooks teach students both *what* to think about a subject and *how* to think about it from a particular disciplinary perspective. In our judgment, however, introductory sociology textbooks usually place too much stress on the "what" and not enough on the "how." The result is that they sometimes read more like encyclopedias than enticements to look at the world in a new way. We have tipped the balance in the other direction. Of course, *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World* contains definitions and literature reviews. It features standard pedagogical aids, such as a list of **Chapter Aims** at the beginning of each chapter, a new **Time for Review** feature at the end of each major section in each chapter, a detailed **Summary** at the end of each chapter, and definitions of key terms in the margins of the text. However, we devote more space than other authors do to showing how sociologists think. The **Social Policy: What Do You Think** feature asks students to think critically and form an opinion about social policy issues by bringing logic and evidence to bear on them. We often relate an anecdote to highlight an issue's importance, present contending interpretations of the issue, and then adduce data to judge the merits of the various interpretations. We do not just refer to tables and graphs, we analyze them. When evidence warrants, we reject theories and endorse others. Thus, many sections of the book read more like a simplified journal article than an encyclopedia. If all this sounds just like what sociologists do professionally, then we have achieved our aim: to present a less antiseptic, more realistic, and therefore intrinsically exciting account of how sociologists practise their craft. Said differently, one of the strengths of this book is that it does not present sociology as a set of immutable truths carved in stone tablets. Instead, it shows how sociologists actually go about the business of solving sociological puzzles.

BOX 4.1

SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY



In The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, starring Ben Stiller, the title character works for Life magazine. He enjoys a rich fantasy life, often "zoning out" to rescue damsels in distress. Many of his daydreams focus on Cheryl, who has just started working at the magazine. He repeatedly fails to get her attention, but a pivotal moment shatters Walter's world and sets him on a new course.

To his horror, Walter realizes he may have misplaced a photographic negative that is being considered for the cover of the magazine's last print edition. Under pressure from his superiors to turn over a negative he hasn't even seen, Walter realizes he can admit that he doesn't have it, enduring humiliation and scorn, or try to track down the prize photographer who took the picture in the hope that he somehow forgot to send in the negative.

Impetuously, Walter boards a plane to Greenland, the photographer's last known location. Thus begins a series of escapades that take him to Iceland, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and require him to jump out of a helicopter into the ocean, ward off sharks in the North Sea, and climb the Himalayas. On his journeys, Walter stumbles across forgotten aspects of his life that embolden him. For example, a skateboard reminds him of a lost childhood talent. Jumping on the skateboard allows him to connect with Cheryl's son and paves the way for Walter to pursue a more intimate relationship with Cheryl.

Walter seizes an opportunity that ultimately allows him to discover who he really is. In realizing that the person he longs to be is the person that lies within him, he reconnects with the interrupted trajectory of his life, fashioning for himself a biography that has meaning and purpose. However, because the movie shouts *carpe diem* (seize the day) as the solution to a life of drudgery and disappointment, it comes off as extraordinarily non-sociological. How can we discover the full range of opportunities that we can take advantage of? How can we change social structures and public policies to increase the number and variety of opportunities that are open to us and others? These are questions that movies like *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* have little to say about but that sociology can help to answer.

BOX 7.4

SOCIOLOGY ON THE TUBE

BREAKING BAD



It starts with an RV roaring down a desert highway in New Mexico, driven by a middle-aged man clad in just a ventilator mask and tighty-whities. The van runs into a ditch. The man grabs a pistol and a camcorder, jumps out of the van, and starts recording. He identifies himself as Walter White, professes love to his wife and son, and concludes, "There are going to be some things that you'll come to learn about me in the next few days. I just want you to know that no matter how it may look, I only had you in my heart. Goodbye!" (Breaking Bad, season 1, episode 1).

Who is this man? He summarizes his plight this way: "My wife is seven months pregnant with a baby we didn't intend. My 15-year-old son has cerebral palsy. I am an extremely overqualified high-school chemistry teacher. When I can work, I make \$43,700 per year. I have watched all of my colleagues and friends surpass me in every way imaginable. And within eighteen months, I will be dead" (*Breaking Bad*, season 2, episode 3). Walter White (played by Bryan Cranston) has advanced, inoperable lung cancer.

How can Walter pay for his medical bills? How can he ensure that his family is looked after once he is gone? How can he overcome the humiliating fact that he had a brilliant future behind him? The answer appears in the unlikely form of a former pupil, Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul), whom he chances to spot fleeing a meth lab. Walter realizes that he has the skills to make the purest methamphetamine on the market and that Jesse can distribute the product. And so begins an adventure that leads Walter—a good man with a steady job and strong family values—to manufacture a highly addictive, illegal substance, consort with meth heads, take on a Mexican drug cartel, murder people who get in the way, and work his way up to the status of a criminal kingpin.

Walter White stares into a chasm separating cultural goals from institutionalized means of achieving them. On the one hand, he desires what everyone wants: good health, a secure family life, and respected status in his community. On the other hand, he has no hope of achieving these ambitions by legitimate means. And so, when the opportunity presents itself, he breaks bad, just as Robert Merton would have predicted.

• **Sociology at the Movies** and **Sociology on the Tube** offer sociological insights gleaned from current films and popular television shows, and demonstrates sociology's vitality and relevance to students' lives. These features also encourage students to think critically about the films they watch.

BOX 11.3

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

DOES A RAPE CULTURE EXIST ON UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE CAMPUSES?



Every Labour Day weekend, first-year university and college students flock to campus to take part in Fresh Week. It's a way to welcome and orient first-year students to university and college life with live music, organized social gatherings, tours, and rallies—all intended to instill a sense of school spirit in the newcomers.

In 2013, the yearly event came under public scrutiny at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Saint Mary's University in Halifax. Videos posted to social media sites showed first-year male and female students yelling out an almost identical chant: "We like them YOUNG; Y is for your sister; O is for oh-so-tight; U is underage; N is for no consent; G is for grab that ass."

Apparently, the chants were nothing new. They had been recited for years on both campuses across Canada. This time, though, public outrage led university officials across the country to vow to take action.

For some people, the chants proved that Canadian universities were home to a "rape culture." A rape culture is said to exist in any environment where sexual violence is normalized, excused, and even condoned. For example, people who believe that men are naturally aggressive and that women are "just asking for it" foster an environment that is conducive to rape. Others are uncertain that a rape culture exists on college and university campuses.

They say that the problem lies with a small number of men who are sexual predators. Treating all men as potential sexual offenders is blatantly unfair.


Still others suggest that the problem is not just cultural but institutional. Because college and university life can be stressful and alienating for first-year students, partying is an important opportunity for them to unwind and get to know others. Colleges and universities that fail to provide students with enough opportunities for socializing or those that adopt heavy-handed alcohol policies may unwittingly encourage students to attend private parties where men control nearly all aspects of the party experience, including choosing the venue, arranging transportation, and overseeing the flow of alcohol. From this point of view, if colleges and universities adopt policies that minimize the amount of private partying, the rate of sexual violence against women will fall.

What do you think? Is the problem of rape restricted to a small minority of men? Do student rallies that incite non-consensual sex provide evidence that a rape culture exists on campus? Do you think that institutional factors contribute to the problem? Could all three factors (individual, cultural, and institutional) play a role? How might one best begin to address the issue of sexual assault on Canadian college and university campuses?

BOX 4.2

SOCIAL POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

CYBER-BULLYING



Every schoolyard, it seems, has a bully, someone who picks on smaller children by pushing them around and calling them names. Less directly, school bullying also occurs when one scrawls messages on toilet stalls to ruin a person's reputation. But, in the age of the Internet, where instant messaging and social media websites allow for instant and constant communication, bullying takes on a whole new meaning. The phenomenon has grown so quickly that it has garnered its own label: cyber-bullying. Cyber-bullying is the use of electronic communications technology to threaten, harass, embarrass, or socially exclude others.

More than 30 percent of Canadian middle- and high-school students report having been either the cyber-bully or a victim of cyber-bullying over a three-month period (Mishna et al., 2012).

Cyber-bullying differs from traditional bullying in several respects. In traditional forms of bullying, it is relatively simple to identify the aggressor and the victim. But this is not the case with cyber-bullying. Victims can just as easily become aggressors themselves. In fact, victims appear to be much more comfortable—and capable—of retaliating to aggressive acts online than they ever would be in person (Law et al., 2012). In addition, traditional forms of bullying have a relatively small audience: those who are bystanders in the playground or who read the comments on the bathroom wall. When bullying victims leave the school property, they are generally able to shed their identity as a victim. In contrast, when messages or pictures are posted online, the audience is limitless. No one can control what happens after images or messages are posted online: they are visible in cyberspace in perpetuity (Sticca and Perren, 2013). Consequently, for the victim, no place feels safe.

What do you think? Why might cyber-bullying be more harmful than traditional forms of bullying are? Is it important to find ways to control how people communicate with one another over the Internet? Are stronger laws needed to police the spreading of hateful messages on the Internet? Or would laws that regulate Internet communications excessively restrict personal freedom?

While these measures may have an effect on cyber-bullying, experts point out

• **It's Your Choice** teaches students that sociology can have urgent, practical importance—and that they can have a say in the development of public policy.

• **Social Policy: What Do You Think?** invites students to engage critically with issues related to social policy.

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN TO

- Contrast religion's ability to create societal cohesion and reinforce social inequality with its ability to promote social conflict and social change.
- Evaluate the secularization thesis, which holds that the influence of religion on society is weakening.
- Assess the market theory of religion as an alternative to the secularization thesis.
- Appreciate the degree to which religious freedom and tolerance are under threat in some parts of the world.
- Identify social factors associated with religiosity.

TIME FOR REVIEW

- Environmental problems do not arise spontaneously. They are socially constructed and undermined by groups that have an interest in promoting or ignoring them.
- Environmental risk is unevenly distributed, with more risk faced by people in lower classes, people who are members of disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups, and people in less-developed countries.

- The text features **student-tested pedagogical aids** and it shows how sociologists actually go about the business of solving sociological puzzles.

3. **Objectivity versus subjectivity.** Sociologists since Max Weber have understood that sociologists—indeed, all scientists—are members of society whose thinking and research are influenced by the social and historical context in which they work. Yet most introductory sociology textbooks present a stylized and unsociological view of the research process. Textbooks tend to emphasize sociology's objectivity and the hypothetico-deductive method of reasoning, for the most part ignoring the more subjective factors that go into the research mix. We think this emphasis is a pedagogical error. In our teaching, we have found that drawing the connection between objectivity and subjectivity in sociological research makes the discipline more appealing to students. It shows how research issues are connected to the lives of real flesh-and-blood women and men, and how sociology is related to students' existential concerns. Therefore, in most chapters of *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World* we include a personal anecdote that explains how certain sociological issues first arose in our own minds. We often adopt a narrative style because stories let students understand ideas on an emotional as well as an intellectual level, and when we form an emotional attachment to ideas, they stay with us more effectively than if our attachment is solely intellectual. We place the ideas of important sociological figures in social and historical context. We show how sociological methodologies serve as a reality check, but we also make it clear that socially grounded personal concerns often lead sociologists to decide which aspects of reality are worth checking on in the first place. We believe *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World* is unique in presenting a realistic and balanced account of the role of objectivity and subjectivity in the research process.

4. **Diversity and a global perspective.** It is gratifying to see how much less parochial introductory sociology textbooks are today than they were just a few decades ago. Contemporary textbooks highlight gender and race issues. They broaden the student's understanding of the world by comparing Canada with other societies. They show how global processes affect local issues and how local issues affect global processes. *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World* makes diversity and globalization prominent themes, too. We employ cross-national comparisons between Canada and countries as diverse as India and Sweden. We incorporate maps that illustrate the distribution of sociological variables globally and regionally, and the relationship among variables across time and space. We remain sensitive to gender and race issues throughout. This has been easy for us because we are members of racial and ethnic minority groups. We are multilingual. We have lived in other countries for extended periods. And we have published widely on countries other than Canada, including the United States, Russia, Israel, Palestine, South Korea, and Japan. As you will see in the following pages, our backgrounds have enabled us to bring greater depth to issues of diversity and globalization than other textbooks bring.

ANCILLARIES

A full range of high-quality ancillaries has been prepared to help instructors and students get the most out of *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*, Fifth Canadian Edition.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR INSTRUCTORS



About the Nelson Education Teaching Advantage (NETA)

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NETA Test Bank: This resource was written by Ivanka Knezevic at the University of Toronto Mississauga. It includes over 2200 multiple-choice questions written according to NETA guidelines for effective construction and development of higher-order questions. The Test Bank was copy edited by a NETA-trained editor. Also included are true/false, short answer, and essay questions. Test Bank files are provided in Word format for easy editing and in PDF format for convenient printing, whatever your system.

The NETA Test Bank is available in a new, cloud-based platform. **Testing Powered by Cognero®** is a secure online testing system that allows you to author, edit, and manage test bank content from any place you have Internet access. No special installations or downloads are needed, and the desktop-inspired interface, with its drop-down menus and familiar, intuitive tools, allows you to create and manage tests with ease. You can create multiple test versions in an instant and import or export content into other systems. Tests can be delivered from your learning management system, your classroom, or wherever you want.

NETA PowerPoint: Microsoft® PowerPoint® lecture slides for every chapter have been created by Tamy Superle of Carleton University. There is an average of 30 slides per chapter, many featuring key figures, tables, and photographs from *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World*. NETA principles of clear design and engaging content have been incorporated throughout, making it simple for instructors to customize the deck for their courses.

Image Library: This resource consists of digital copies of figures, short tables, and photographs used in the book. Instructors may use these jpegs to customize the NETA PowerPoint or create their own PowerPoint presentations.

NETA Instructor's Manual: This resource was written by Peter Laurie at Fleming College. It is organized according to the textbook chapters and addresses key educational concerns, such as typical stumbling blocks student face and how to address them.

DayOne: Day One—Prof InClass is a PowerPoint presentation that instructors can customize to orient students to the class and their text at the beginning of the course.

MindTap: MindTap for *Sociology: Your Compass for a New World* is a personalized teaching experience with relevant assignments that guide students to analyze, apply, and elevate thinking, allowing you to measure skills and promote better outcomes with ease. A fully online learning solution, MindTap combines all student learning tools—readings, multimedia, activities, and assessments—into a single Learning Path that guides the student through your curriculum. You may personalize the experience by customizing the presentation of these learning tools to your students, even seamlessly introducing your own content directly into the Learning Path.

DVD Resources

Enhance your classroom experience with the exciting and relevant videos of *Think Outside the Book: The Nelson Sociology DVD Collection*, prepared to accompany *Sociology: Your*



Compass for a New World, Fifth Canadian Edition. Designed to enrich and support chapter concepts, this set of seven 30-minute video segments was created by Robert Brym to stimulate discussion of topics raised in sociology. Produced in conjunction with Face to Face Media (Vancouver), the Jesuit Communication Project (Toronto), and the National Film Board of Canada, the selections have been edited to optimize their impact in the classroom. Many of the selections are taken from films that have won national and international awards.

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- *Sociology as a Life or Death Issue*, Second Canadian Edition, is a series of beautifully written essays in which Robert Brym introduces sociology by analyzing the social causes of death. It focuses on hip-hop culture, the social bases of cancer, suicide bombers, gender risk, and the plight of hurricane victims in the Caribbean region and on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. In doing so, it reveals the powerful social forces that help to determine who lives and who dies and demonstrates the promise of a well-informed sociological understanding of the world. This brief and inexpensive volume is an eye-opener, an inspiration, and a guide for students of sociology and for anyone with an inquiring mind and hopes for a better world for future generations.
- *Controversies in Canadian Sociology*, First Edition, by Reza Nakhaie, includes a range of classic and contemporary readings, employing the point-counterpoint method to challenge students to evaluate arguments on their merits and to develop their critical imaginations.
- *Society in Question*, Sixth Edition, by Robert J. Brym, provides balanced coverage of the approaches and methods in current sociology, as well as unique and surprising perspectives on many major sociological topics. All readings have been chosen for their ability to speak directly to contemporary Canadian students about how sociology can enable them to make sense of their lives in a rapidly changing world.
- *Images of Society: Readings that Inspire and Inform Society*, Second Edition, by Jerry P. White and Michael Carroll, is an exciting collection of readings designed for use in introductory sociology classes. The contents range from classic works in sociology to pieces illustrating recent sociological principles. Academic and journalistic readings have been selected by the authors to convey the distinctive way sociologists think. All readings are excerpts from longer pieces and are introduced with short prologues written by the editors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anyone who has gone sailing knows that when you embark on a long voyage, you need more than a compass. Among other things, you need a helm operator blessed with a strong sense of direction and an intimate knowledge of likely dangers. You need crew members

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PART 1

FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1
A Sociological Compass

CHAPTER 2
How Sociologists Do Research

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CHAPTER 1

A SOCIOLOGICAL COMPASS

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN TO

- Define sociology.
- Identify the social relations that surround you, permeate you, and influence your behaviour.
- Describe how sociological research seeks to improve people’s lives and test ideas using scientific methods.
- Summarize the main schools of sociological theory.
- Appreciate how sociology emerged out of the scientific, democratic, and industrial revolutions.
- Understand the main challenges facing society today.

INTRODUCTION

Why You Need a Compass for a New World

“When I was a small child growing up in New Brunswick in the 1950s, an Aboriginal woman would come to our home from time to time, and my mother would serve us lunch,” recalls Robert Brym.

“The woman’s name was Lena White. I was fond of Lena because she told good stories. During dessert, as we sipped tea with milk, Lena would spin tales about Gluskap, the Creator of the world.

“I liked Gluskap because he was mischievous and enormously powerful. He fought giants, drove away monsters, taught people how to hunt and farm, and named the stars. But he also got into trouble and learned from his mistakes. For example, one day the wind was blowing so hard Gluskap couldn’t paddle his canoe into the bay to hunt ducks. So he found the source of the wind: the flapping wings of the Wind Eagle. He then tricked the Wind Eagle into getting stuck in a crevice where he could flap no more. Now Gluskap could go hunting. However, the air soon grew so hot he found it difficult to breathe. The water became dirty and began to smell bad, and there was so much foam on it he found it hard to paddle. When he complained to his grandmother, she explained that the wind was needed to cool the air, wash the earth, and move the waters to keep them clean. And so Gluskap freed the Wind Eagle and the winds returned to the earth. Gluskap decided it was better to wait for good weather and then go duck hunting, rather than to conquer the winds.

“Like the tale of the Wind Eagle, many of the Gluskap stories Lena told me were about the need for harmony among humans and between humans and nature. You can imagine my surprise, therefore, when I got to school and learned about the European exploration of what was called the New World. My teachers taught me all about the glories of the *conquest* of nature—and of other people. I learned that in the New World, a Native population perhaps a hundredth as large as Europe’s occupied a territory more than four times larger. I was taught that the New World was unimaginably rich in resources. European rulers saw that by controlling it they could increase their power and importance. Christians recognized



Gluskap

© William Dennis Kinchlea

new possibilities for spreading their religion. Explorers discerned fresh opportunities for rewarding adventures. A wave of excitement swelled as word spread of the New World's vast potential and challenges. I, too, became excited as I heard stories of conquest quite unlike the tales of Gluskap. Of course, I learned little about the violence required to conquer the New World."

In the 1950s, I was caught between thrilling stories of conquest and reflective stories that questioned the wisdom of conquest. Today, I think many people are in a similar position. On the one hand, we feel like the European explorers because we, too, have reached the frontiers of a New World. Like them, we are full of anticipation. Our New World is one of instant long-distance communication, global economies and cultures, weakening nation-states, and technological advances that often make the daily news seem like reports from a distant planet. In a fundamental way, the world is not the same place it was just 50 or 60 years ago. On the other hand, we understand that not all is hope and bright horizons. Our anticipation is mixed with dread. Gluskap stories make more sense than ever. Scientific breakthroughs are announced almost daily, but the global environment has never been in worse shape, and AIDS is now the leading cause of death for adults in Africa. Marriages and nations unexpectedly break up and then reconstitute themselves in new and unanticipated forms. We celebrate the advances made by women and minority groups only to find that some people oppose their progress, sometimes violently. Waves of people migrate between continents, establishing cooperation but also conflict between previously separated groups. New technologies make work more interesting and creative for some, offering unprecedented opportunities to become rich and famous. But they also make jobs more onerous and routine for others. The standard of living goes up for many people but stagnates or deteriorates for many more.

Amid all this contradictory news, good and bad, uncertainty about the future prevails. That is why my colleagues and I wrote this book. We set out to show undergraduates that sociology can help them make sense of their lives, however uncertain they may appear to be. Five hundred years ago, the early European explorers of North and South America set themselves the task of mapping the contours of the New World. We set ourselves a similar task here. Their frontiers were physical; ours are social. Their maps were geographical; ours are sociological. But in terms of functionality, our maps are much like theirs. All maps allow us to find our place in the world and see ourselves in the context of larger forces. Sociological maps, as the famous American sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote, allow us to "grasp the interplay of [people] and society, of biography and history" (Mills, 1959: 4). This book, then, shows you how to draw sociological maps so you can see your place in the world, figure out how to navigate through it, and perhaps discover how to improve it. It is your sociological compass.

We emphasize that sociology can be a liberating practical activity, not just an abstract intellectual exercise. By revealing the opportunities and constraints you face, sociology can help teach you who you are and what you can become in today's social and historical context. We cannot know what the future will bring, but we can at least know the choices we confront and the likely consequences of our actions. From this point of view, sociology can help us create the best possible future. That has always been sociology's principal justification, and so it must be today.

The Goals of This Chapter

This chapter has three goals:

1. The first goal is to illustrate the power of sociology to dispel foggy assumptions and help us see the operation of the social world more clearly. To that end, we examine a phenomenon that at first glance appears to be solely the outcome of breakdowns in *individual* functioning: suicide. We show that, in fact, *social* relations powerfully influence suicide rates. This exercise introduces you to the unique qualities of the sociological perspective.