

SEVENTH  
CANADIAN  
EDITION

# SOCIOLOGY IN OUR TIMES

LOTHIAN MURRAY  
LINDEN  
KENDALL





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**Sociology in Our Times, Seventh Canadian Edition**

by Jane Lothian Murray, Rick Linden, and Diana Kendall

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**Cover Design:**  
Sharon Lucas

**Cover Image:**  
Preappy/Moment/Getty Images

**Compositor:**  
Cenveo Publisher Services

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Adapted from *Sociology in Our Times*, by Diana Kendall, published by Cengage Learning. Copyright ©2015 by Cengage Learning.

Printed and bound in the United States of America  
1 2 3 4 19 18 17 16

For more information contact Nelson Education Ltd.,  
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**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Kendall, Diana Elizabeth, author  
*Sociology in our times* / Jane Lothian Murray (University of Winnipeg), Rick Linden (University of Manitoba), Diana Kendall (Baylor University).

Revision of: Kendall, Diana Elizabeth. *Sociology in our times*. Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 978-0-17-655863-5 (paperback)

1. Sociology—Textbooks.  
2. Sociology—Canada—Textbooks.  
I. Linden, Rick author II. Lothian Murray, Jane, 1960- author III. Title.

HM586.K45 2016  
301 C2015-906768-5

ISBN-13: 978-0-17-655863-5  
ISBN-10: 0-17-655863-2

*To the memory of my brave son Drew Samson Elliot Murray. Your smile lit up the life of everyone around you. Your courage held us strong. Your spirit will guide us always. I will hold you tight forever in my heart.*

—JANE LOTHIAN MURRAY (MOM)

*To the memory of my mother-in-law, Mildred Cormack. She was a great friend who taught me the value of storytelling as a way of understanding the world (as well as keeping her grandchildren amused).*

—RICK LINDEN





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Welcome to the seventh Canadian edition of *Sociology in Our Times*. Each time we write a new edition, we become acutely aware of how quickly our country and the world change. Even as some things change, however, others remain the same. One thing that has not changed is the significance of education and the profound importance of understanding how and why people act the way they do, how societies grapple with issues and major problems, and why many of us are reassured by social institutions—including family, religion, education, government, and the media—even at times when we might like to see certain changes occur in these institutions.

Like previous editions of this widely read text, this seventh Canadian edition is a cutting-edge book in two ways: (1) by including a diversity of classical and contemporary theory, interesting and relevant research, and lived experiences that accurately mirror the diversity in society itself, and (2) by showing students that sociology involves important questions and issues that they confront both personally and indirectly through the media and other sources. This text captures the interest of a wide variety of Canadian students by taking into account their concerns and perspectives. As the title suggests, we have selected topics most pertinent to “*Our Times*,” including the widening income gap between the rich and poor, new and emerging definitions of family life, changing constructions of sexuality, and ongoing concerns related to our environment. In doing so, we hope that students will learn to critically examine their social world, and further to contemplate the social world they hope to live in moving forward.

The research presented in the book includes the best work of classical and established contemporary sociologists, and an inclusive treatment of all people is woven throughout the text. By using the latest theory and research, *Sociology in Our Times* not only provides students with the most relevant information about sociological thinking, but also helps students consider the significance of the interlocking nature of class, race, and gender in all aspects of life.

We have sought to make the research accessible and engaging for both students and instructors. Concepts and theories are presented in a straightforward and understandable way, and the wealth of concrete examples and lived experiences woven throughout the chapters makes the relevance of sociological theory and research abundantly clear to students. We know that people learn best through stories, and we have tried throughout to tell stories about our social world.

## NEW FEATURES

### Changes in the Seventh Canadian Edition

The seventh Canadian edition of *Sociology in Our Times* provides us with the opportunity to further improve a text that has

been well received by students and educators. We have added several hundred new references that incorporate the most recent new developments in sociological research, including the latest census data from Statistics Canada. We have added a new chapter on “Sociology and the Environment” because of the importance of this growing field to the discipline and to the future of society.

- **Chapter 1** (“The Sociological Perspective”) introduces students to the main theoretical perspectives used in sociology and includes a new opening narrative from a student discussing the challenges faced by millennials as a result of the excesses of the boomer generation. Students are also introduced to the importance of having a global sociological imagination.
- **Chapter 2** (“Sociological Research”) describes how social scientists conduct their research and the links between research and theory. The chapter now includes a section on big data, perhaps the most exciting new development in sociological methodology in the past several decades. This section discusses some of the important ethical implications of using big data. The Sociology and New Media box on “Methods and the New Media,” formerly online, has been integrated into the body of the chapter.
- **Chapter 3** (“Culture”) has the 2011 census data on language diversity, ethnicity, and Indigenous peoples in Canada. This chapter has an expanded focus on multiculturalism as demonstrated with the new opening narrative, which highlights the challenges of negotiating identity in an increasingly multicultural society. In keeping with this theme, a new Point/Counterpoint box (“Multiculturalism, Reasonable Accommodation, and ‘Veiled’ Hostility”) explores various debates around Muslim women wearing religious head covering and clothing.
- **Chapter 4** (“Socialization”) has shifted focus somewhat to examine the effects of positive socialization and interesting new issues relating to early childhood and adolescent socialization that are particularly relevant to students attending university for the first time. A new Point/Counterpoint box (“The Issue of Excessive Praise”) examines the effects of excessive praise on early childhood socialization.
- **Chapter 5** (“Society, Social Structure, and Interaction”) includes new research on homelessness in Canada. In the new opening narrative, a young woman describes trying to survive living “on the street” in Winnipeg.
- **Chapter 6** (“Families”) has the most recent data (2011) on changes in Canadian families, including an increase in the number of same-sex families, stepfamilies, and common-law families, while maintaining its focus on family diversity and change.

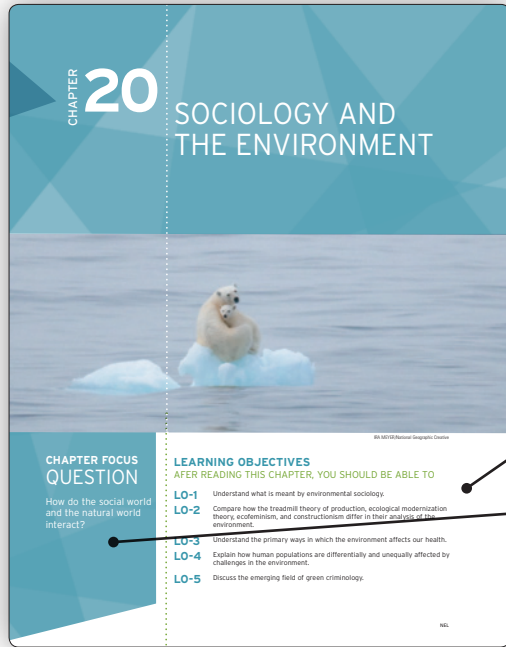
- **Chapter 7** (“Groups and Organizations”) examines how organizations affect our behaviour. The section on the famous Asch experiments has been updated by describing a study designed to see if the judgments of fingerprint experts would be affected by peer pressure. Also, Milgram’s work on obedience was used to help explain the behaviour of U.S. government officials who were involved in torturing prisoners following the 9/11 attacks. The section on gender issues within organizations has been updated to include the recent sexual harassment issues at Dalhousie University’s Faculty of Dentistry.
- **Chapter 8** (“Crime and Deviance”) has a new chapter introduction, which discusses the lives of British Columbia’s notorious Bacon Brothers. These gang leaders grew up in a middle-class household and became the leaders of one of Canada’s most violent organized crime groups. The chapter also includes a new section on surveillance, which is becoming an important topic within the field of criminology. Crime statistics have been updated to include 2014 crime rates.
- **Chapter 9** (“Social Class and Stratification in Canada”) has the most recent data on the distribution of wealth and income, as well as poverty, in today’s society. This chapter highlights the effects of growing income and wealth inequality.
- **Chapter 10** (“Global Stratification”) has a new chapter introduction, which tells the inspiring story of Malawi’s William Kamkwamba—The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind. There is a new Sociology in Global Perspective box (“The Missing Women”) dealing with the world’s missing women. These are women who were never born because of sex-selective abortion, or who died early because of infanticide, the denial of healthcare and proper nutrition to young girls, and the impact of death in childbirth and through HIV/AIDS for adult women. The section on the health and safety hazards associated with offshore production now includes a discussion of the deadly collapse of a clothing factory at Bangladesh’s Rana Plaza.
- **Chapter 11** (“Ethnic Relations and Race”) maintains its emphasis on racism with a revised discussion of different types of racism, new personal narratives from racial minorities who have experienced racism, and a new Point/Counterpoint box (“Explaining White Privilege to the Deniers and the Haters”) that challenges students to think about white privilege. This chapter also includes the newest (2011) census data on ethnic origins, language diversity, and visible minorities.
- **Chapter 12** (“Gender”) explores our understanding of gender and challenges students to move past binary definitions of gender to an understanding of gender as complex and encompassing more than just two possibilities. The opening narrative tells the story of 11-year-old Wren who is transgender. A Point/Counterpoint box (“How Many Genders: 56 or 2?”) defines various new ways that individuals can define their gender.
- **Chapter 13** (“Sex, Sexualities, and Intimate Relationships”) examines a range of controversial issues related to sexuality today. It includes updated information on sexual health, diverse sexualities, the sexual double standard, and “hookup cultures.”
- **Chapter 14** (“Aging”) includes two important additions to the discussion of theories of aging: The aging and society paradigm is now included as a functionalist theory of aging, and cumulative advantage theory is now part of the discussion of conflict theories. The chapter also increases the cross-cultural emphasis by discussing aging in Japan and China. Statistics in the chapter have been extensively updated to reflect the aging of Canadian society. Finally, the chapter presents the innovative ideas of the group called the Committee for Retirement Alternatives for Women.
- **Chapter 15** (“Health, Healthcare, and Disability”) contains updated statistics on health and healthcare. There is a discussion of discrimination against individuals as well as against several African nations during the Ebola outbreak in 2014–2015. The chapter also includes a new emphasis on the social determinants of health. The Sociology and New Media box (“Dr. Google: Health on the Web”) on the role of new media in health and healthcare is now included in the body of the chapter.
- **Chapter 16** (“Education”) has a focus on issues of postsecondary education, including rising tuition costs, increasing student debt, and a shrinking job market. A new opening narrative explores the decision to go to college or university directly out of high school or to take a “gap year.” The chapter also includes an examination of home-schooling and dropping out.
- **Chapter 17** (“Religion”) has a new chapter introduction discussing the controversy over Trinity Western University’s Christian Covenant, which requires that students follow a conduct code prescribing that sexual relations are permissible only within a marital relationship and between a man and a woman. Several provincial law societies have refused to accredit this program. The chapter also includes new material on women and religion, and on Indigenous people and religion. The

theory section now includes a discussion of rational choice theories of religion. New data from the 2011 National Household Survey have been used to update the discussion of the religious affiliation of Canadians.

- **Chapter 18** (“Mass Media”) was new in the last edition, so it has not been extensively revised in this edition.
- **Chapter 19** (“The Economy and Work”) has been updated to discuss the changes in the economy brought about by new media (including blogs, Wikipedia, crowdsourcing, the sharing economy, etc.), and by new technology such as 3D printing. These changes are occurring rapidly and will have a profound impact on the future economy. There is a more extensive discussion of the problems that unions may face in the future and an expanded section on the difficulties facing women who are seeking careers in the high-tech industry. The chapter also deals with the issue of the hollowing out of the middle class.
- **Chapter 20** (“Sociology and the Environment”) is a new chapter that examines a number of important issues related to environmental sociology, including climate change, environmental effects on health, and environmental justice and environmental racism. In this chapter, students are introduced to the primary theoretical frameworks in environmental sociology. This chapter also focuses on the health implications of climate change and other environmental issues. Several controversial cases, both in Canada (“Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows”) and internationally (“Bhopal Tragedy”), are used to challenge students to explore the complex

interplay between human activity and environmental destruction.

- **Chapter 21** (“Collective Behaviour, Social Movements, and Social Change”) includes a new chapter introduction that looks at former Senate Page Brigette Depape, whose “Stop Harper” sign disrupted the throne speech. The chapter also features updated examples of mass behaviour, such as rumours, gossip, fads, and fashion; an updated discussion on revolutionary movements, such as Tunisia in 2013; and interesting new examples of protest movements in Canada.
- **Chapter 22** (“Power, Politics, and Government”) has a new chapter introduction looking at the impact of the Idle No More movement. There is additional material on current Canadian political issues, including why Canadians believe there is a democratic deficit and the problem of domestic terrorism. The Sociology and New Media box on social media and politics (“The Political Impact of Social Media”) has now been included in the body of the chapter. There is also additional material on social media, including the Facebook political participation study. (This chapter is available online at [www.nelson.com/student](http://www.nelson.com/student).)
- **Chapter 23** (“Population and Urbanization”) has a new chapter introduction showing how a new immigrant to Canada learned about some practices that Canadians take for granted. The chapter also has new material on cities and gender, and a new section on the second demographic transition. (This chapter is available online at [www.nelson.com/student](http://www.nelson.com/student).)



## UNIQUE FEATURES WALKTHROUGH

The following special features are specifically designed to reflect the themes of relevance and diversity in *Sociology in Our Times*, as well as to support student learning. The enhanced pedagogical framework aims to respect diverse learning preferences and engage today's students.

### Chapter Learning Objectives

A list of objectives at the beginning of each chapter gives students an overview of major topics and a convenient aid for reviewing the central points of each chapter.

### Chapter Focus Questions

Each chapter begins with an open-ended question that provides a starting point for students to think about the material covered in the chapter.

### Interesting and Engaging Lived Experiences

Authentic first-person accounts are used as opening vignettes and throughout each chapter to create interest and give concrete meaning to the topics being discussed. Lived experiences, including racism, transgender marriage, environmental activism, transgender issues, disability, and homelessness, provide opportunities for students to consider social life beyond their own experiences and to examine class, ethnicity, gender, and age from diverse perspectives. An unusually wide range of diverse experiences—both positive and negative—is systematically incorporated to expose students to a multiplicity of viewpoints.

### Critical Thinking Questions

After the opening lived experience in each chapter, a series of introductory questions invites students to think about the major topics discussed in the vignette and in the chapter.



**BOX 18.1** SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

How Much Do You Know About the Media?

True	False	
T	F	1. You do not need to be concerned about your privacy when using social media sites such as Facebook.
T	F	2. Canadians spend more time watching television than using the Internet.
T	F	3. Canadian radio stations can broadcast any songs they wish.
T	F	4. When people design their online avatars in virtual worlds such as Second Life, they are not bound by our real-life cultural preferences about body size, hairstyles, and dress.
T	F	5. While Internet dating sites are becoming more common, most people still meet their partners through traditional means such as family, school, and church.

For answers to the quiz about the media, go to [www.nelson.com/student](http://www.nelson.com/student).

**Sociology and Everyday Life**

Each chapter has a brief Sociology and Everyday Life quiz that relates the sociological perspective to the pressing social issues presented in the opening vignette. (Answers are provided online at [www.nelson.com/student](http://www.nelson.com/student).) Do official statistics accurately reflect crime rates in Canada? Does increasing cultural diversity lead to an increasing incidence of hate crimes and racism? Do individuals over the age of 65 have the highest rate of poverty? Topics such as these will pique the interest of students.

**BOX 17.2** SOCIOLOGY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Religious Terrorism

Religious terrorism has become a serious threat in post-modern societies. While there is a long history of religious wars among states and many earlier instances of religious terrorism, this type of terrorism has intensified over the past three decades. Following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States and subsequent bombings in Madrid, Bali, London, Mumbai, and elsewhere, much of the world's attention is now focused on Islamic terrorists, including members of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, and Nigeria's Boko Haram. However, all of the world's major religious traditions—as well as many minor religious movements—have been linked with terrorism. Among the questions that interest sociologists are: What are the causes of religious terrorism? How does it differ from other types of terrorist activities?

Violent extremism is not limited to any one faith. In Northern Ireland, the Catholic Irish Republican Army (IRA) exploded hundreds of bombs and killed hundreds of civilians in an attempt to free Northern Ireland from British rule. In 1994, a Jewish right-wing settler, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, shot and killed more than 30 Palestinians who were praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. On the other side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, hundreds of Israelis have been killed by Palestinian suicide bombers. In Canada and the United States, there have been numerous bombings of abortion clinics, and several doctors who perform abortions have been killed or wounded—some of these attacks were carried out by Christian ministers, and other attacks were supported by militant Christian groups.

There are differences in the motivation behind these different attacks. The IRA bombing campaign had a strong political component, while members of the Japanese sect had few identifiable political goals. In each of the instances, however, the religious ideology of the terrorists defines the enemy and provides a justification for killing innocents. According to Bruce Hoffman, there are important differences between religious and secular terrorism:

For the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. Terrorism assumes a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators are thereby unconstrained by the political, moral, or practical constraints that seem to affect other terrorists. . . . Thus, religion serves as a legitimizing force—conveyed by sacred text or imparted via clerical authorities claiming to speak for the divine. (1995:272)

The acts of secular terrorists may be restrained by their fear of alienating potential supporters. Religious terrorists must please only themselves and their god, and can justify attacks against all “nonbelievers.” Finally, purely religious terrorists are not trying to change an existing system, such as a particular government. Rather, they wish to transform the social order. For example, according to former al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden:

**Emphasizing the Importance of a Global Perspective**

In our interconnected world, the sociological imagination must extend beyond national borders. The global implications of topics are examined throughout each chapter and in Sociology in Global Perspective boxes. Topics include commercial surrogacy in India, missing women around the world, the relationship between long-term environmental pollution and new social pressures in China, aging in Russia, and religious terrorism.

**Point/Counterpoint Boxes**

Point/Counterpoint boxes encourage students to use their sociological knowledge to grapple with some of today's most hotly contested issues, such as how much accommodation is reasonable for multicultural minorities, the impact of white privilege, and the corporatization of medical charities. The topics covered can be used as springboards for in-class debate or online discussion forums.

**BOX 18.3** POINT/COUNTERPOINT

New Media and Privacy

You have just tweeted a friend that you're going for coffee. As you pass a coffee shop, a coupon arrives on your phone offering 50 cents off a large cup of coffee. A friend who is travelling to Paris uses an online site to book a hotel room. Because she is using a Mac computer, the hotels that come up on the booking list are more expensive than if she had used a PC. A new college graduate has submitted a resumé for a job. The potential employer looks at the applicant's Facebook site, finds photos of the applicant using soft drugs at parties, and decides not to hire the person. In each of these cases, information that a person might expect to be private has been used by a third party. In the first two cases, the information was sold to an advertiser.

Online sites such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter provide a useful service for hundreds of millions of users. However, from the perspective of those who own

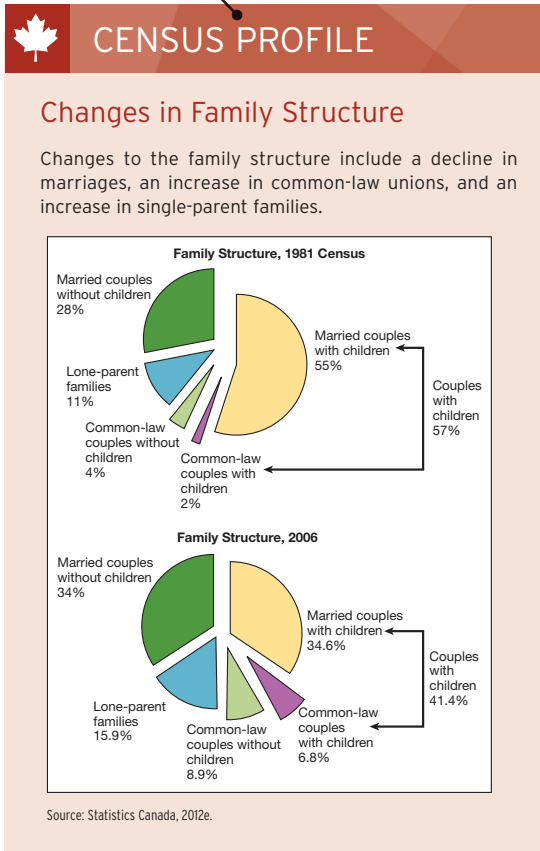
users that allows advertisers to carefully target their ad campaigns. Advertisers are interested in knowing your location, relationship status, travel plans, musical tastes, occupation, and other interests.

Search engines such as Google make billions of dollars from tracking the key words you use. If you search for terms such as *headache* or *upset stomach*, you may receive ads or coupons for remedies for these maladies. Google also tracks your information across its different products, such as Gmail and YouTube, to develop more complete profiles of users in order to personalize the service.

Facebook and other networking sites frequently change their privacy policies with little notice. In 2009, Facebook suddenly made lists of friends publicly available. This change had serious consequences for many

## Census Profile

The Census Profiles provide information that highlights changes in Canadian society based on census data. Each unique box uses recent statistics, ensuring students are up-to-date and informed about the topics discussed.



## Concept Snapshot

A brief summary of all major perspectives covered in the chapter and the key people connected to those theories are presented in a table format that is efficient for studying.

CONCEPT SNAPSHOT	
<b>FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES</b> Key thinker: Talcott Parsons	In modern societies, families serve the functions of sexual regulation, socialization, economic and psychological support, and provision of social status.
<b>CONFLICT PERSPECTIVES</b> Key thinker: Friedrich Engels	Families both mirror and help perpetuate social inequalities based on class and gender.
<b>FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES</b> Key thinkers: Nancy Mandell, Ann Duffy	Women's subordination is rooted in patriarchy and men's control over women's labour power.
<b>SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVES</b> Key thinker: Jessie Bernard	Family dynamics, including communication patterns and the subjective meanings that people assign to events, mean that interactions within families create a shared reality.
<b>POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES</b> Key thinker: David Elkind	In postmodern societies, families are diverse and fragmented. Boundaries between the workplace and home are also blurred.

## Time to Review Questions

Time to Review questions help students to review and retain key information from the preceding paragraphs.

**TIME TO REVIEW**

- Why does the country you are born in play such an important role in determining your life chances?
- How does excessive consumption in high-income countries affect people living in poverty in low-income countries?
- How have experts conceptualized world poverty and global stratification?
- Discuss the role of debt in determining the economic future of low-income nations.
- Why does foreign aid not always work to the benefit of people in low-income countries?

## Visual Summary

The Visual Summary provides a concise summary of key points and theoretical perspectives. Summarized learning objectives are illustrated by a relevant image from the chapter. A list of **Key Terms** with page references provides a helpful study aid. The **Key Figures** feature reintroduces students to the major players in each chapter with a few important points and a portrait. Additionally, **Application Questions** encourage students to assess their knowledge of the chapter and apply insights they have gained to other issues.

**VISUAL SUMMARY**

**3**

**KEY TERMS**

**LO-1 Understand the importance of culture in our lives and those of others in society.**

Culture encompasses the knowledge, language, values, and customs passed from one generation to the next in a human group or society. Culture is essential for our individual survival because, unlike nonhuman animals, we are not born with instinctive information about how to behave and how to care for our selves and others.

Culture can be a stabilizing force for society, providing a sense of continuity; however, culture can also be a force that generates discord, conflict, and violence.

There are both material and nonmaterial expressions of culture. Material culture consists of the physical creations of society. Nonmaterial culture is more abstract and reflects the ideas, values, and beliefs of a society.

**LO-2 Identify the essential components of culture.**

These components are symbols, language, values, and norms. Symbols express shared meanings; through them, groups communicate cultural ideas and abstract concepts. Language is a set of symbols through which groups communicate. Values are a culture's collective ideas about what is or is not acceptable. Norms are the specific behavioural expectations within a culture.

**LO-3 Describe what causes cultural change in societies.**

Cultural change takes place in all societies. Change occurs through discovery and invention and through diffusion, which is the transmission of culture from one society or group to another.

**LO-4 Compare and contrast ethnocentrism and cultural relativism as approaches to examining cultural differences.**

Ethnocentrism is the assumption that one's own culture is superior to other cultures. Cultural relativism counters culture shock and ethnocentrism by viewing and analyzing another culture in terms of its own values and standards.

**Key Terms:**

- counterculture** A group that strongly rejects dominant societal values and norms and seeks alternative lifestyles (p. 76).
- cultural imperialism** The extensive infusion of one nation's culture into other nations (p. 76).
- cultural lag** William Ogburn's term for a gap between the technical development of a society (material culture) and its moral and legal institutions (nonmaterial culture) (p. 77).
- cultural relativism** The belief that the behaviours and customs of any culture must be viewed and analyzed by the culture's own standards (p. 76).
- cultural universals** Customs and practices that occur across all societies (p. 62).
- culture** The knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society (p. 59).
- diffusion** The transmission of cultural items or social practices from one group or society to another (p. 74).
- discovery** The process of learning about something previously unknown or unrecognized (p. 74).
- ethnocentrism** The tendency to regard one's own culture and group as the standard—and thus superior—whereas all other groups are seen as inferior (p. 76).
- folkways** Informal norms or everyday customs that may be violated without serious consequences within a particular culture (p. 70).



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## FOR INSTRUCTORS

The **Nelson Education Teaching Advantage (NETA)** program delivers research-based instructor resources that promote student engagement and higher-order thinking to enable the success of Canadian students and educators. Visit Nelson Education's Inspired Instruction website at [www.nelson.com/inspired/](http://www.nelson.com/inspired/) to find out more about NETA.

The following instructor resources have been created for *Sociology in Our Times*, Seventh Canadian Edition. Access these ultimate tools for customizing lectures and presentations at [www.nelson.com/instructor](http://www.nelson.com/instructor).

### NETA Test Bank

This resource was written by Jen Wrye of North Island College. It includes over 2500 multiple-choice

questions written according to NETA guidelines for effective construction and development of higher-order questions. Also included are approximately 650 true/false questions and more than 250 short-answer and essay questions.



The NETA Test Bank is available in a new, cloud-based platform. **Nelson Testing Powered by Cognero®** is a secure online testing system that allows instructors to author, edit, and manage test bank content from anywhere Internet access is available. No special installations or downloads are needed, and the desktop-inspired interface, with its drop-down menus and familiar, intuitive tools, allows instructors to create and manage tests with ease. Multiple test versions can be created in an instant, and content can be imported or exported into other systems. Tests can be delivered from a learning management system, the classroom, or wherever an instructor chooses. Nelson Testing Powered by Cognero for *Sociology in Our Times* can also be accessed through [www.nelson.com/instructor](http://www.nelson.com/instructor).

### NETA PowerPoint

Microsoft® PowerPoint® lecture slides for every chapter have been created by Liam Kilmurray of the University of Ottawa. There is an average of 35 slides per chapter, many featuring key figures, tables, and photographs from *Sociology in Our Times*. 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.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This edition of *Sociology in Our Times* would not have been possible without the insightful critiques of these colleagues, who have reviewed some or all of this book or its previous editions. Our profound thanks to each reviewer for engaging in this time-consuming process:

Dawn Anderson, University of Regina

Sean Ashley, Simon Fraser University

Christian Caron, University of Toronto

Choon-Lee Chai, Red Deer College

Bede Eke, University of Alberta

Sandra Enns, Langara College and Capilano University

Anthony Iafrate, Lambton College

Anton Oleinik, Memorial University

Christopher Schneider, University of British Columbia

We express our deep appreciation to Krista Robson of Red Deer College and Anthony Iafrate of Lambton College and the University of Windsor, who coordinated feedback from their students and whose feedback has greatly informed the pedagogical enhancements to the textbook.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the many individuals at Nelson Education involved in the development and production of *Sociology in Our Times*. Among them, Joanna Cotton and Cara Yarzab, who gave us encouragement and sound advice on several earlier editions. The seventh edition included many changes, including a new environment chapter and a new design. We have very much enjoyed the friendship and guidance given throughout this process by Maya Castle, our Publisher, and Content Development Manager Lisa Berland, who have worked tirelessly with us on this project. Linda Szostak has helped keep our prose legible and facts straight as the Copy Editor, and Christine Gilbert has overseen the production process. We also thank Terry Fedorkiw and the sales and marketing staff for their great work in ensuring that there would be a seventh edition of this book, and Julie Pratt and Daniela Glass, who managed the permissions research and clearances for this edition. As always, the leadership, good humour, and hard work of the Nelson team have made this an enjoyable experience.

We would both like to thank our families, who—after an exasperated “are you *still* working on that book?!?!?!?”—continue to provide encouragement and support.



# THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

- LO-1** Explain what sociology can contribute to our understanding of social life.
- LO-2** Explain why the sociological imagination is important for studying society.
- LO-3** Discuss the major contributions of early sociologists.
- LO-4** Describe the key assumptions behind each of the contemporary theoretical perspectives.

## CHAPTER FOCUS QUESTION

How does sociology add to our knowledge of human societies and of social issues such as consumerism?

The Canadian Press/Nathan Denette



Consider the description by *National Post* writer Danielle Kubes describing some of the challenges of her generation, often referred to as “Millennials,” Generation Y, or the “Entitlement Generation” (born between 1981 and 1999). In her article entitled “The spending diaries: What three millennials spend their money on and why,” Kubes explains why her generation has it so much harder than the boomers (born between 1946 and 1964):

*I’m a millennial. I hate that word: “Millennial.”*

*Before it came into vogue, the nine million Canadians born between 1980 and 2000 were called the echo boom, or gen-Y, which I preferred, since it seemed to denote we came from somewhere—as opposed to a spontaneous wave of children that appeared with genetic mutations that gave them super opposable thumbs, perfect for texting.*

*Calling us millennials seems an attempt by previous generations to distance themselves from our propensities and our circumstances, as if they had no part. And the widest division seems to be in the economic sphere—how much we earn, the way we earn, and what we choose to buy.*

*Naturally, these economics have informed every other aspect of our life, like how we mate, the shelter we choose, and the way we transport ourselves.*

*I spoke recently with David Coletto, who, as the 32-year-old CEO of Abacus Data, an Ottawa-based research firm, is a millennial that studies other millennials.*

*“We asked 18- to 35-year-olds in Canada, a representative sample, have you achieved a number of big milestones in your life?” Coletto says.*

*“Have you moved out of your parents’ home, do you have children, have you bought a house, are you financially independent, have you got a job in the field that you studied for, or a career, have you started your career?” he says.*

*“What’s unique is that millennials are achieving many of these milestones far later in their life.”*

*It’s easy to see why—no generation of Canadians has ever spent so many years being educated, while ending up so poor.*

*The economy before us had been growing almost steadily for 70 years, with a slight blip in the 1990s (see the 1994 movie *Reality Bites* for details), and then it contracted at the precise moment the first cohort of millennials graduated and started job-hunting.*

*What followed was a dramatic rise in precarious employment . . . Wages were stagnant for those who did manage to secure employment—in 20 years they’ve risen only 35 per cent for the average Canadian.*

*In the same 20 years, the cost of undergraduate tuition rose 334 per cent, leading to an average student debt load of around \$25,000, according to the Canadian Federation of Students. . . . The double whammy of a stunted job market and late adulthood, started deep in the red, has shaped this generation’s spending—from choosing to live at home, to outrage at spending \$70 a month on cable, to ignoring the boomer markers of success.\**

Source: Kubes, D. 2015

Without question, we live in a “consumer society” where many of us rely on credit cards, loans, and lines of credit to pay for items we want to purchase or services we need. However, the younger generation has had to wrestle with financial challenges that older generations did not have to worry about, like paying off their student loans while trying to save and manage spending on lower salaries. A recent survey found that more than one-third of Generation Y’ers find it almost impossible to save. The consequences for Generation Y’ers living in a consumer society is that it is expensive to live, easy to spend, and a struggle to save.

Why are sociologists interested in studying consumerism? Sociologists study the *consumer society*—a society in which discretionary consumption is a mass phenomenon among people across diverse income categories—because it provides

interesting and important insights into many aspects of social life and our world. In the consumer society, for example, purchasing goods and services is not limited to the wealthy or even the middle class; people in all but the lowest income brackets spend time, energy, and money on shopping, and some amass large debts in the process. According to sociologists, shopping and consumption—in this instance, the money that people spend on goods and services—are processes that extend beyond our individual choices and are rooted in larger structural conditions in the social, political, and economic order in which we live. In the second decade of the 21st century, many people have had financial problems not only because of their own consumerism but also because of national and global economic instability. In addition, the process of globalization has dramatically affected consumerism and shifted the worldwide production and distribution of goods and services.

Why have shopping, spending, and credit card debt become major problems for some people? How are social relations and social meanings shaped by what people in a given society produce and how they consume? What national and worldwide social processes shape the production and consumption of goods, services, and information? In this chapter, we see how the sociological perspective helps us examine complex questions such as these, and we wrestle with some of the difficulties of attempting to study human behaviour. Before reading on, take the Sociology and Everyday Life quiz in Box 1.1, which lists a number of commonsense notions about consumption and consumer debt.

In this chapter, we will see how the sociological perspective helps us examine social issues, such as debt accumulation and overspending, and wrestle with some of the difficulties of attempting to study human behaviour. Throughout this text, you will be invited to use the sociological perspective and to apply your sociological imagination to reexamine your social world and explore important social issues and problems you may not have considered before.

\* Danielle Kubes, “The spending diaries: What three millennials spend their money on and why,” *Financial Post*, June 15, 2015, [http://business.financialpost.com/personal-finance/young-money/the-spending-diaries-what-three-millennials-spend-their-money-on-and-why?\\_\\_lsa=3dd8-793b](http://business.financialpost.com/personal-finance/young-money/the-spending-diaries-what-three-millennials-spend-their-money-on-and-why?__lsa=3dd8-793b). Material republished with the express permission of: **National Post**, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

**CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

1. Why have shopping, spending, credit card debt, and bankruptcy become major problems for some people?

2. How are social relations and social meanings shaped by what people in a given society produce and how they consume?

3. The millennial generation (those born after 1981) has often been described as the “Entitlement Generation.” Is credit card debt an example of this entitlement or of other social factors? How do you respond to this label?

**LO-1****PUTTING SOCIAL LIFE INTO PERSPECTIVE**

► **sociology** The systematic study of human society and social interaction.

**Sociology** is the systematic study of human society and social interaction. It is a *systematic* study because sociologists apply both theoretical perspectives and research methods (or orderly approaches) to examinations of social behaviour. Sociologists study human societies and their social interactions in order to develop theories of how human behaviour is shaped by group life and how, in turn, group life is affected by individuals.

To better understand the scope of sociology, you might compare it to other social sciences, such as anthropology, psychology, economics, and political science. Like anthropology, sociology studies many aspects of human behaviour; however, sociology is particularly interested in contemporary social organization, relations, and social change. Anthropology primarily concentrates on human existence over geographic space and evolutionary time, meaning that it focuses more on traditional societies and the development of diverse cultures. Cultural anthropology most closely overlaps sociology. Unlike psychology, sociology examines the individual in relation to external factors, such as the effects of groups, organizations, and social institutions on individuals and social life; psychology primarily focuses on internal factors relating to the individual in explanations of human behaviour and mental processes—what occurs in the mind. Social psychology is similar to sociology in that it emphasizes how social conditions affect individual behaviour. Although sociology examines all major social institutions, including the economy and politics, the fields of economics and political science concentrate primarily on a single institution—the economy or the political system. Topics of mutual interest to economics and sociology include issues such as consumerism and debt, which can be analyzed at global, national, and individual levels. Topics of mutual interest to political science and sociology are how political systems are organized and how power is distributed in society. As you can see, sociology shares similarities with other social sciences but offers a comprehensive approach to understanding many aspects of social life.

**WHY STUDY SOCIOLOGY?**

Sociology helps us gain a better understanding of our selves and our social world. It enables us to see how behaviour is largely shaped by the groups to which we belong and by the society in which we live.

Most of us take our social world for granted and view our lives in personal terms. Because of our culture’s emphasis on individualism, we often do not consider the complex connections between our own lives and the larger, recurring patterns of the society and world in which we live. Sociology helps us look beyond our personal experiences and gain insights into society and the larger world order. A **society** is a large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations, such as Canada, the United States, or Mexico. Examining the world order helps us understand that each of us is affected by **global interdependence**—a relationship in which the lives of all people are closely intertwined and any one nation’s problems are part of a larger global problem.

Individuals can make use of sociology on a more personal level. Sociology enables us to move beyond established ways of thinking, thus allowing us to gain new insights into ourselves and

► **society** A large social grouping that shares the same geographical territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations.

► **global interdependence** A relationship in which the lives of all people are closely intertwined and any one nation’s problems are part of a larger global problem.

to develop a greater awareness of the connection between our own “world” and that of other people. According to sociologist Peter Berger (1963:23), sociological inquiry helps us see that “things are not what they seem.” Sociology provides new ways of approaching problems and making decisions in everyday life. It promotes understanding and tolerance by enabling each of us to look beyond our personal experiences (see Figure 1.1).

Many of us rely on intuition or common sense gained from personal experience to help us understand our daily lives and other people’s behaviour. **Commonsense knowledge** guides ordinary conduct in everyday life. We often rely on common sense—or “what everybody knows”—to answer key questions about behaviour: Why do people behave the way they do? Who makes the rules? Why do some people break rules and why do others follow them?

► **commonsense knowledge** A form of knowing that guides ordinary conduct in everyday life.

Many commonsense notions are myths. A *myth* is a popular but false notion that may be used, either intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate certain beliefs or “theories” even in the light of conclusive evidence to the contrary. For example, one widely held myth is that “money can buy happiness.” By contrast, sociologists strive to use scientific standards, not popular myths or hearsay, in studying society and social interaction. They use systematic research techniques and are accountable to the scientific community for their methods and the presentation of their findings. Although some sociologists argue that sociology must be completely value free—without distorting subjective (personal or emotional) bias—others do not think that total objectivity is an attainable or desirable goal when studying human behaviour. However, all sociologists attempt to discover patterns or commonalities in human behaviour. For example, when they study shopping behaviour or credit card abuse, sociologists look for recurring patterns of behaviour and for larger, structural factors that contribute to people’s behaviour. Women’s studies scholar Juliet B. Schor refers to consumption as the “see–want–borrow–buy” process, which she believes is a comparative process in which desire is structured by what we see around us (1999:68). As sociologists examine patterns such as these, they begin to use their sociological imagination.

**TIME TO REVIEW**

- What commonsense understandings do you take for granted in everyday life?
- Which of these (if any) are myths?

**FIGURE 1.1** : FIELDS THAT USE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

In many careers, including jobs in academia, business, communications, health and human services, and law, the ability to analyze social science research is an important asset.

Health and Human Services	Business	Communication	Academia	Law
Medicine Nursing Physical Therapy Occupational Therapy Counselling Education Social Work	Advertising Labour Relations Management Marketing	Broadcasting Public Relations Journalism Social Media	Anthropology Economics Geography History Information Studies Media Studies/ Communication Political Science Psychology Sociology	Law Criminal Justice Mediation Conflict Resolution

Source: Based on Katzer, Cook, and Crouch, 1991.

► **sociological imagination** C. Wright Mills's term for the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society.

## LO-2 THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

How can we make a connection between our personal experiences and what goes on in the larger society? Sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959a) described sociological reasoning as the **sociological imagination**—the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society. This awareness enables us to understand the link between our personal experiences and the social contexts in which they occur. The sociological imagination helps us distinguish between personal troubles and social (or public) issues. *Personal troubles* are private problems of individuals and the networks of people with whom they associate regularly. As a result, those problems must be solved by individuals within their immediate social settings. For example, one person being unemployed or running up a high credit card debt could be identified as a personal trouble. *Public issues* are problems that affect large numbers of people and often require solutions at the societal level. Widespread unemployment and massive, nationwide consumer debt are examples of public issues. The sociological imagination helps us place seemingly personal troubles, such as losing one's job or overspending on credit cards, into a larger social context, where we can distinguish whether and how personal troubles may be related to public issues.

**OVERSPENDING AS A PERSONAL TROUBLE** Although individual behaviour can contribute to social problems, our individual experiences are influenced and in some situations determined by the society as a whole—by its historical development and its organization. In everyday life, we often blame individuals for “creating” their own problems. If a person sinks into debt because of overspending or credit card abuse, many people consider it to be the result of his or her own personal failings. However, this approach overlooks debt among people who are in low-income brackets, having no way other than debt to gain the basic necessities of life. By contrast, at middle- and upper-income levels, overspending takes on a variety of other meanings.

At the individual level, people may accumulate credit cards and spend more than they can afford, thereby affecting all aspects of their lives, including health, family relationships, and employment stability. Sociologist George Ritzer (1999:29) suggests that people may overspend through a gradual process in which credit cards “lure people into consumption by easy credit, and then entice them into still further consumption by offers of ‘payment holidays,’ new cards, and increased credit limits.”

**OVERSPENDING AS A PUBLIC ISSUE** We can use the sociological imagination to look at the problem of overspending and credit card debt as a public issue—a societal problem.

### BOX 1.1

### SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

#### How Much Do You Know About Consumption and Debt Accumulation?

True	False	
T	F	1. The average Canadian household has just over \$100,000 in debt.
T	F	2. Generation Y'ers are more likely to overspend than previous generations.
T	F	3. Student debt in Canada has declined in recent years.
T	F	4. Overspending is primarily a problem for people in the higher-income brackets in Canada and other affluent nations.
T	F	5. Generation Y'ers are much more inclined to impulse buy and then later regret their purchases than are their baby boomer parents.

For answers to quiz on consumption and credit cards, go to [www.nelson.com/student](http://www.nelson.com/student).



For example, Ritzer (1998) suggests that the relationship between credit card debt and the relatively low savings rate constitutes a public issue. In 2014, Canadian credit card debt was estimated to be at more than \$73 billion, while the savings rate continued to diminish. Because savings is money that governments, businesses, and individuals can borrow for expansion, a lack of savings often creates problems for future economic growth. Some practices of the credit card industry are also a public issue because they harm consumers. Credit card companies may encourage overspending, and then substantially increase interest rates and other fees, making it more difficult for consumers to pay off debts. Mills’s *The Sociological Imagination* (1959a) is useful for examining issues because it helps integrate microlevel (individual and small-group) troubles with compelling public issues of our day. Recently, his ideas have been applied at the global level as well.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A GLOBAL SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION** Although existing sociological theory and research provide the foundation for sociological thinking, we must reach beyond past studies that have focused primarily on North America to develop a more comprehensive *global* approach for the future. In the 21st century, we face unprecedented challenges, ranging from global political and economic instability to environmental concerns and natural disasters and terrorism. All of the nations of the world are not on equal footing when it comes to economics and politics. The world’s **high-income countries** are nations with highly industrialized economies; technologically advanced industrial, administrative, and service occupations; and relatively high levels of national and personal income. Examples include the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the countries of Western Europe (see Map 1.1).

► **high-income countries** Nations with highly industrialized economies; technologically advanced industrial, administrative, and service occupations; and relatively high levels of national and personal income.

**MAP 1.1 THE WORLD’S ECONOMIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

High-income, middle-income, and low-income countries.



High income: New York, United States

Low income: Congo

Middle income: China



As compared with other nations of the world, many high-income nations have a high standard of living and a lower death rate due to advances in nutrition and medical technology. However, everyone living in a so-called high-income country does not necessarily have a high income or an outstanding quality of life. Even among middle- and upper-income people, problems such as personal debt may threaten economic and social stability. This may increasingly be the case as the effects of the recent global economic crisis take hold.

► **middle-income countries** Nations with industrializing economies, particularly in urban areas, and moderate levels of national and personal income.

► **low-income countries** Countries that are primarily agrarian, with little industrialization and low levels of national and personal income.

In contrast, **middle-income countries** are nations with industrializing economies, particularly in urban areas, and moderate levels of national and personal income. Examples of middle-income countries include Brazil and Mexico, which are experiencing rapid industrialization. **Low-income countries** are primarily agrarian, with little industrialization and low levels of national and personal income. Examples of low-income countries include many of the nations of Africa and Asia, where people typically work the land and are among the poorest in the world (see Chapter 10).

Throughout this text, we will continue to develop our sociological imaginations by examining social life in Canada and other nations. The future of this country is deeply intertwined with the future of all other nations of the world on economic, political, environmental, and humanitarian levels. We buy many goods and services that were produced in other nations, and we sell much of what we produce to the people of other nations (see Box 1.2).

Peace in other nations is important if we are to ensure peace within our borders. Famine, unrest, and brutality in other regions of the world must be of concern to people in Canada. Moreover, fires, earthquakes, famine, or environmental pollution in one nation typically has an adverse influence on other nations as well. Global problems contribute to the large influx of immigrants who arrive in Canada annually. These immigrants bring with them a rich diversity of language, customs, religions, and previous life experiences; they also contribute to dramatic population changes that will have a long-term effect on this country.

Whatever your race or ethnicity, class, sex, or age, are you able to include in your thinking the perspectives of people who are quite different from you in experiences and points of view? Before you answer this question, a few definitions are in order. *Race* is a term used by many people to specify groups of people distinguished by physical characteristics such as skin colour, but no “pure” racial types exist and most sociologists consider the concept of race to be a social construction used to justify existing social inequalities. *Ethnicity* refers to a group’s cultural heritage or identity; it is based on factors such as language or country of origin. *Class* is the relative location of a person or group within the larger society; it is based on wealth, power, prestige, or other valued resources. *Sex* refers to the biological and anatomical differences between females and males. By contrast, *gender* refers to the meanings, beliefs, and practices associated with sex differences, referred to as *femininity* and *masculinity*.

In forming your own global sociological imagination and in seeing the possibilities for sociology in the 21st century, it will be helpful for you to understand the development of the discipline.

### LO-3

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING

Throughout history, social philosophers and religious authorities have made countless observations about human behaviour. However, early thinkers focused their thoughts on what they believed society *ought* to be like, rather than describing how society *was*.

Several revolutions that took place in the 18th century had a profound influence on the origins of sociology. The Enlightenment produced an intellectual revolution in how people thought about social change, progress, and critical thinking. The optimistic views of the *philosophes* and other social thinkers regarding progress and equal opportunity (at least for some people) became

## BOX 1.2

## SOCIOLOGY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

## Global Walmartization: From Big-Box Stores to Online Supermarkets in China

Did you know that:

- Walmart has more than 10,000 stores in 27 countries and that more than half of all Walmart stores worldwide are located outside the United States?
- Walmart operates nearly 300 stores in China, including supercentres, neighborhood markets, and Sam's Clubs?
- Walmart is a major player in the credit card business in China, where people in the past were opposed to buying anything on credit?

Although most of us are aware that Walmart stores are visible in virtually every city in North America, we are less aware of the extent to which Walmart and other big-box stores are changing the face of the world economy as megacorporations expand their operations into other nations and into the credit card business.

The strategic placement of Walmart stores both here and abroad accounts for part of the financial success of this retailing giant, but another U.S. export—credit cards—is also part of the company's business plan. Credit cards are changing the way that people shop and how they think about spending money in emerging nations such as China. For example, Walmart China is aggressively seeking both shoppers and credit card holders.



AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko

An exciting aspect of studying sociology is comparing our own lives with those of people around the world. Global consumerism, as evidenced by the opening of a Walmart Supercenter in Shanghai, China, provides a window through which we can observe how issues such as shopping and credit affect all of us. Which aspects of this photo reflect local culture? Which aspects reflect a global cultural phenomenon?

By encouraging people to spend money now rather than save it for later, corporations such as Walmart that issue “co-branded” credit cards gain in two ways: (1) people buy more goods than they would otherwise, thus increasing sales; and (2) the corporation whose “brand” is on the credit card increases its earnings as a result of the interest the cardholder pays on credit card debt.

The motto for the Walmart credit card in China is “Maximizing value, enjoying life,” and this idea encourages a change in attitude from the past, when—regardless of income level—most residents of that country did not possess credit cards. This has brought a corresponding surge in credit card debt, which can be partly attributed to aggressive marketing by transnational retailers, but also to credit card companies encouraging consumers to buy now, pay later. But Walmart is not stopping there: the company also now owns a controlling (51 percent) interest in Yihaodian, an online Chinese supermarket that sells food, cosmetics, clothing, and consumer electronics to more than one million registered users in five major cities in China.

Throughout this course, as we study the social effects of major changes in societies, such as industrialization, urbanization, and the progression of the digital age, we will see that many of the issues we discuss, such as consumerism and globalization, have both positive and negative effects. Global consumerism, whether in big-box stores or through credit cards or electronic commerce, provides a window through which we can observe how an issue such as shopping affects all of us. Among the poor and those most hard-hit by difficult economic times, the lack of ability to purchase basic necessities is a central litmus test for analyzing quality of life and social inequality. Among persons in the middle class, purchasing power is often used to determine social mobility (the ability to move into) or social stability (the ability to stay on) the middle rungs of a society's ladder of income and wealth. Among persons in the upper class, high rates of luxury consumerism are often seen as an outward sign of “having it all.” As we will see, ideas related to consumerism and globalization vary widely across nations.

Are people in North America unique in how we view consumerism? In how we view Walmart and other big-box stores? What do you think?

Sources: Based on Lemaire, 2012; Walmart.com, 2012; WalMart Corporation, 2012.