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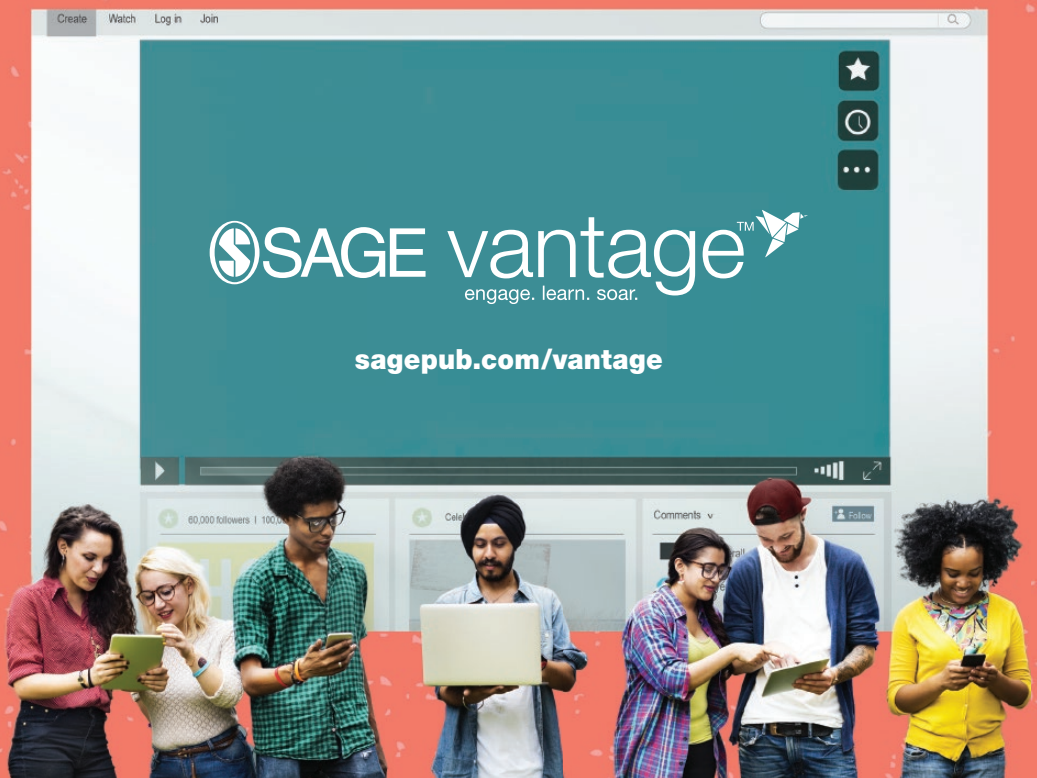

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FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
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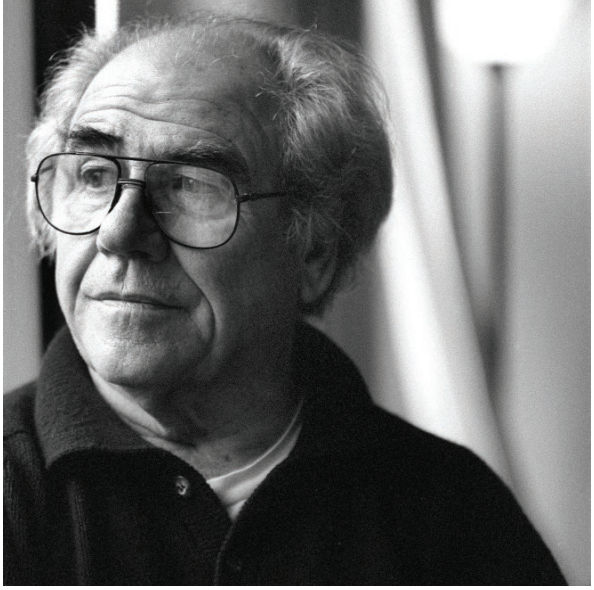

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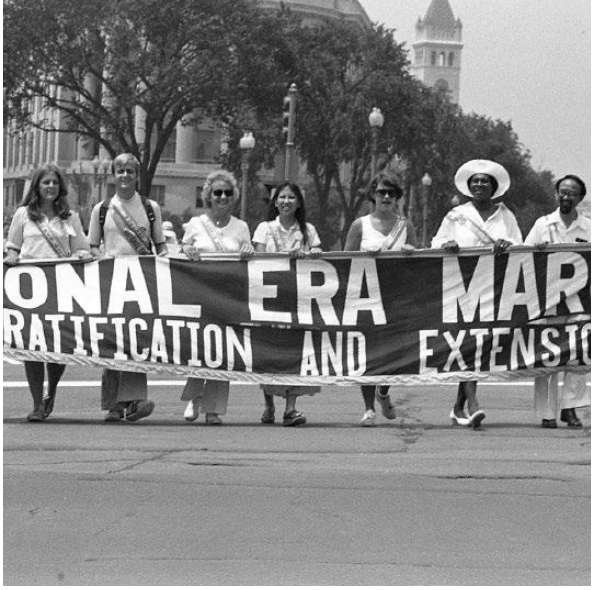

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LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

The social world, as well as the field of sociology that studies that world, is always interesting, exciting, and ever-changing. My goal for this newly revised fourth edition of ***Essentials of Sociology*** is not only to introduce you to sociology, but also to discuss what has inspired—and what continues to inspire—my dedication to the field. The hope is that you will learn a good deal about the social world from the perspective of sociology, as well as how my interests have shaped my personal sociological journey.

My initial interests in the field were the sociology of work and the sociology of organizations, but I was quickly drawn to sociological theory and how even the most classical theories were relevant to my everyday life. That interest came to fruition in the publication of *The McDonaldization of Society* in 1993 (now in its ninth edition). In that book, I apply and expand on Max Weber's famous classical theoretical ideas on rationality. I saw those ideas at work in my local fast-food restaurant, as well as in many other contemporary settings. After the publication of *The McDonaldization of Society,* I grew interested in consumption, including credit card debt and the places of consumption, and I authored two books on these topics, *Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society* and *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption.* I developed a curiosity about globalization after recognizing that McDonaldization and consumer culture had spread rapidly throughout much of the world. This inspired me to write *The Globalization of Nothing* and *Globalization: A Basic Text.* Most recently, my sociological journey has led me to the internet, especially social networking sites, which are highly rationalized, are often places to consume, and are all globalized.

You will discover how my interests have shaped this book in a variety of ways. Consumption figures prominently in most chapters; this reflects my belief that this topic should be a central concern for sociologists. This book also includes a strong emphasis on globalization to encourage you to better understand and appreciate how your daily lives are shaped by global processes. Each chapter contains a primary section on globalization that explains why and how globalization has influenced an array of sociological issues, including the discipline itself. Throughout this book—in sections headed "Digital Living"—the sociological implications of the internet and technology are explored. To demonstrate the relevance of sociology not just within academia but to the broader public, an additional pedagogical feature, "Trending" boxes, has been included. These highlight recently published books written by sociologists and scholars in related fields that have gained mainstream popularity. Most of these books are based on extensive ethnographic research about current sociological problems, and their narratives are readable, relatable, and fascinating to me—I hope the same will be true for you. The Trending boxes also include links such as webpages where you can watch videos of authors discussing their books and/or read reviews of their books from popular newspapers and magazines.

Here I have described a bit about my personal sociological journey. I hope that this book will provide you with a starting point to begin your own journey, to examine your social world critically, and to develop your own sociological ideas and opinions. My aim in writing this book is to equip you to see the social world in a different way and, more important, to use the ideas discussed here to help to create a better world.

—George Ritzer, University of Maryland

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I need to begin by thanking Wendy Wiedenhoft, who coauthored the previous edition of this book. Unfortunately, Wendy's workload prevented her from working on this edition. Nonetheless, many of her ideas and most of her previous contributions are to be found in this edition. I deeply appreciate everything she has contributed to this book.

I also want thank my friends for decades, and coauthors of a previous introductory textbook, Kenneth C. W. Kammeyer and Norman R. Yetman. That book went through seven editions, the last of which was published in 1997. It was most useful to me in this text in helping define various sociological concepts that have changed little over the years. I have also been able to build on discussions of many issues covered in that text. However, because of the passage of more than two decades in sociology and in the social world (an eternity in both), as well as the innumerable changes in them, this text has comparatively little in common with the earlier one. Nonetheless, my perspective on sociology was strongly shaped by that book and the many insights and ideas provided by my friends and coauthors before, during, and in the many years after the writing of that book.

Professor Rebecca Plante played a key role in the second edition of this book. She offered useful comments and suggestions throughout, and she was especially central in the revision of Chapter 9, on gender and sexuality. These are her areas of expertise, and the chapter is much improved because of her contributions to it. I would also like to thank Professor Paul Dean, coauthor of the second edition of my book *Globalization: A Basic Text,* for his numerous and important contributions to Chapter 7, on social stratification.

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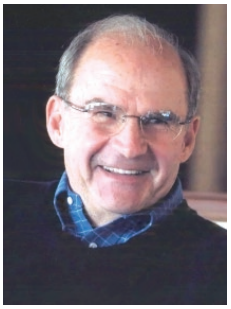
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



George Ritzer is Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at the University of Maryland. Among his awards are Honorary Doctorate from La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia; Honorary Patron, University Philosophical Society, Trinity College, Dublin; American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contribution to Teaching Award; and being named the 2013 Eastern Sociological Society's Robin Williams Lecturer. He has chaired four sections of the American Sociological Association: Theoretical Sociology, Organizations and Occupations, Global and Transnational Sociology, and the History of Sociology. In the application of social theory to the social world, his books include *The McDonaldization of Society* (9th ed., 2019; 10th ed., forthcoming), *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (3rd ed., 2010), and *The Globalization of Nothing* (2nd ed., 2007). He is the author of *Globalization: A Basic Text* (Blackwell, 2010; 2nd ed., 2015, with Paul Dean). He edited the *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Sociology* (2012) and *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (2008) and co-edited (with Jeff Stepnisky) the *Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Classical and Contemporary Major Social Theorists* (2012) and the *Handbook of Social Theory* (2001). He was founding editor of the *Journal of Consumer Culture*. He also edited the eleven-volume *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007; 2nd ed., forthcoming, with Chris Rojek), the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (2005), and the five-volume *Encyclopedia of Globalization* (2012). He co-edited a special double issue (2012) of the *American Behavioral Scientist* on prosumption and edited a symposium on prosumer capitalism in *Sociological Quarterly* (2015). His books have been translated into more than 20 languages, with more than a dozen translations of *The McDonaldization of Society* alone.

AP Photo/Christophe Ena

1 An Introduction to Sociology in the Global Age

Learning Objectives

- **1.1** Identify major social changes since the 1880s studied by sociologists.
- **1.2** Explain why sociologists today focus on globalization, consumption, and the digital world.
- **1.3** Describe how sociologists understand continuity and change, particularly in the context of the sociological imagination and the social construction of reality.
- **1.4** Differentiate between sociology's two possible purposes, science and social reform.
- **1.5** Evaluate how sociology relates to other social sciences and how sociological knowledge differs from common sense.

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A Sociology of Revolutions and Counterrevolutions

In December 2010, street demonstrations, labor strikes, and other acts of civil resistance swept through the small North African nation of Tunisia. The demonstrators met strong resistance from the Tunisian government. Nevertheless, their protests eventually resulted in the overthrow of autocratic president Ben Ali after 23 years in power.

The trigger for the Tunisian protests was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor who claimed he had been harassed and humiliated by authorities. Bouazizi died in a burn and trauma center 18 days after setting himself on fire.

The Tunisian revolution was at the root of the "Arab Spring"—the wave of social unrest and social revolution that Tunisia's uprising inspired throughout the Middle East. Such events are not only important in themselves; so too are the counterreactions to them by other individuals as well as by larger organizations. Those responses have since undermined the revolutions that occurred during the Arab Spring. In some cases, such as in Egypt, counterreaction by the military led to a return to the kind of autocratic government that was a cause of the protests in the first place. In the Persian Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain), monarchs have suppressed dissidents and thwarted efforts aimed at greater democratization. In the aftermath of the 2011 overthrow of dictator Muammar Qaddafi, Libya (and Yemen) have descended into civil wars, vicious fights for power, and, at least at the moment, large-scale anarchy. In Libya, but more important in Syria and Iraq, a radical Islamic group—the Islamic State (IS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL], the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS], or Da'ish, from an acronym for a name of the group in Arabic)—swept through large portions of those countries and succeeded, at least for a time, in dismembering them in its effort to form an independent state that spanned much of the Middle East. That new state was envisioned to be a caliphate, dominated by a leader—a caliph—devoted to a strict interpretation of Islam. The success of IS led, in turn, to other counterreactions, both locally (especially by the Kurds and Iranians) and globally (with the United States helping the Iraqi government and Russia aiding the Syrian government), designed to limit IS's gains, if not to defeat it. Today, IS has been defeated on most fronts and lost much of the territory it once controlled, but it remains a significant threat as a terrorist group.

By drawing on modern sociology's 200-year history while looking to the future, sociologists today can find the tools and resources to gain a better understanding of where we have been, where we are, and, perhaps most important, where we are going. Sociology has traditionally tried to understand the place of the individual—even a Tunisian street vendor—within society and society's effect on the individual. In today's global age, however, we need to look beyond given individuals and societies to global realities and processes. For example, IS grew in strength through the influx of individual supporters and fighters from other parts of the world, including the United States and Great Britain. To take a more general example of globalization—one that is more directly relevant to most readers of this book—online networks that transcend national boundaries, such as Facebook and Twitter, have forever altered the ways in which we interact with each other as well as the societies that we shape and that shape us. As the world has become increasingly globalized, sociology has developed an increasingly global perspective.

The Changing Nature of the Social World—and Sociology

One of the most important lessons you will learn in your study of sociology is that what you think and do as an individual is affected by what is happening in groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and the world. This is especially true of social changes, even those that are global in scope and

seem at first glance to be remote from you, such as Mohamed Bouazizi's public suicide and the revolution throughout much of the Middle East that it helped set in motion. The roots of that dramatic act of protest lay in poverty, high unemployment, an authoritarian government, and political corruption that affected Bouazizi personally. Before his actions, most Tunisians would never have risked their lives to protest against their country's repressive regime. Yet Bouazizi and tens of thousands of others in countries across the region did just that. While you may or may not be motivated to engage in revolutionary activities, you are continually affected by the social changes taking place around you.

ROSLAN RAHMAN/AFP/Getty Images

Will our highways be safer and injury rates lower because of the sensors in self-driving cars like this one? Or will we have more air pollution and therefore more illness because there will be so many self-driving cars on the road? Sociologists assess the so-called butterfly effects of changes like driverless cars.

A second important lesson in sociology is that you are not only affected by larger events but also capable to some degree of having an impact on large-scale structures and processes. This is an example of the **butterfly effect** (Lorenz 1995). While this concept is generally applied to physical phenomena, it also applies to social phenomena (Daipha 2012). The idea is that a relatively small change in a specific location can have far-ranging, even global, effects over both time and distance. For example, Bouazizi's actions helped lead to the Tunisian revolution and, more generally, to street demonstrations and civil war, as well as counterreactions elsewhere in the Arab world that continue to reverberate throughout the region and many other parts of the world. Perhaps the arc of your life and career will be affected by the upheavals that began with the Arab Spring. More important, it is very possible that actions you take in your lifetime will have wide-ranging, perhaps global, effects.

This example of the relationship between people and larger social realities and changes set the stage for the definition of **sociology** as the systematic study of the ways in which people are affected by and affect the social structures and social processes associated with the groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and world in which they exist.

Sociology deals with contemporary phenomena, as you have seen, but its deep historical roots have led to many longer-term interests. In the fourteenth century, the Muslim scholar Abdel Rahman Ibn Khaldun studied various social relationships, including those between politics and economics. Of special importance to the founding of sociology was the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. During this industrial age, many early sociologists concentrated on factories, the production that took place in those settings, and those who worked there, especially blue-collar, manual-labor workers. Sociologists also came to focus on the relationship between industry and the rest of society, including, for example, the state and the family.

By the middle of the twentieth century, manufacturing in the United States was in the early stages of a long decline that continues to this day. (However, manufacturing in other parts of the world, most notably in China, is booming.) The United States had moved from the industrial age to the "postindustrial age" (Bell 1973; Leicht and Fitzgerald 2006). In the United States, as well as in the Western world more generally, the center of the economy and the attention of many sociologists shifted from the factory to the office. That is, the focus moved from blue-collar, manual-labor work to white-collar office work (Mills 1951) as well as to the bureaucracies in which many people worked (Clegg and Lounsbury 2009; Weber [1921]

1968). Another change in the postindustrial age was the growth of the service sector of the economy, involving everyone from high-status service providers such as physicians and lawyers to lower-status workers behind the counters of fast-food restaurants and now those who drive for Uber.

The more recent rise of the "information age" (Castells 2010; Kline 2015) can be seen as a part, or an extension, of the postindustrial age. Knowledge and information are critical in today's world. So, too, are the technologies—computers, smartphones, the world wide web—that have greatly increased the productivity of individual workers and altered the nature of their work. Rather than designers drawing designs by hand, computer-assisted technologies are now used to create designs for everything from electric power grids to patterned fabrics. The widespread use of smartphones has enabled, among many other things, the rise of companies such as Uber and Lyft, the success of which is threatening the rental car industry and especially the taxicab industry and the livelihoods of many taxi drivers (who are also threatened by driverless cars). A passenger uses an app to indicate that he or she needs a ride, and one is provided by an independent car owner for a set fee, which is automatically charged to the passenger's credit card. Some of the drivers work a few hours a day for these services in search of a little extra money, while others work full-time for the services. Their willingness to do this work has reduced the need for taxicabs and full-time taxi drivers.

More generally, less and less work occurs in the office because the computer and the internet now allow many people to work from anywhere. Many are part of the "gig economy" meaning that they are temporary workers handling a number of short-term jobs ("gigs") rather than working full-time for an organization.

However, it is not just work that has been affected by new technologies. Uber is part of the growing "sharing economy" (Sundararajan 2016), in which people share (for a fee) many things; most notably, some share their homes through websites such as Airbnb.com (Pogue 2014). One key component of this new technological world, Google, is so powerful that a 2011 book is titled *The Googlization of Everything* (Vaidhyanathan 2011). Thus, much sociological attention has shifted to computers and the internet, as well as those who work with them (Lynch 2016; Scholz 2013).

The transition from the industrial to the postindustrial and now to the information age has important personal implications. Had you been a man who lived in the industrial age, you would have worked (if you could find a job) for money (pay). You would have done so to be able to buy what you needed and wanted. Women working in the private sphere were largely uncompensated or compensated at a lower rate, as is often still the case. However, in the postindustrial age, it is increasingly likely that men and women will be willing, or forced, to work part time or even for free (Anderson 2009; Dusi 2017; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010), as in the case of interns, bloggers, and contributors to YouTube and Wikipedia.

You may be willing to perform free labor because you enjoy it and because much of what is important in your life is, in any case, available for free on the internet. There is no need for you to buy newspapers when blogs are free. Similarly, there is no need buy CDs when music is streamed free on various internet sites or inexpensively by Spotify. Why buy or rent DVDs when movies can be downloaded, or viewed, at no cost or inexpensively from the internet (from Netflix, for example)? However, while all of this, and much else, is available for free, the problem is that the essentials of life—food, shelter, clothing—still cost money, lots of money.

Many hope that the labor they currently perform for free will eventually have an economic payoff. One person (known as PewDiePie) played video games on YouTube. By early 2019, he had garnered nearly 100 million subscribers and almost 21 billion views. He reputedly has earned millions of dollars per year (Jacobs 2014). Playing video games has become big business—one tournament drew 11,000 fans to a stadium and offered $11 million in prize money. Many hope that their work as bloggers or on YouTube will lead to full-time jobs.

These are a few of the many social changes to be discussed in this book. The essential point is that the social world (people, groups, organizations, and so on)—*your* social world—is continually changing. Sociology is a field that is, and must be, constantly attuned to and involved in studying those changes.

Central Concerns for a Twenty-First-Century Sociology

While the social world has been changing dramatically over the last two centuries or so and sociology has adapted to those changes, sociology has continued to focus on many of its traditional concerns. We have already mentioned industry, production, and work as long-term sociological interests; others include deviance and crime (see Chapter 6), the family (see Chapter 10), and the city (see Chapter 14). Of particular concern to many sociologists has been, and continues to be, the issue of inequality as it affects the poor, particularly racial and ethnic groups, women, and gays and lesbians (see Chapters 8 and 9). The bulk of this book is devoted to these basic sociological topics and concerns, but the discussion also encompasses the nontraditional and very contemporary issues of globalization, consumption, and the digital world.

Globalization

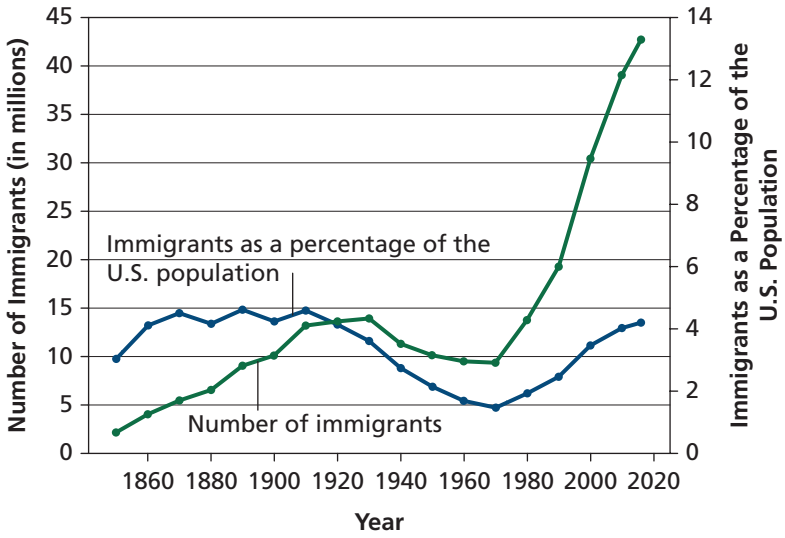
No social change is as important today as globalization because it is continually affecting all aspects of the social world everywhere on the globe. A date marking the beginning of globalization cannot be given with any precision, and in fact, it is in great dispute (Ritzer 2012b; Ritzer and Dean 2019; Steger 2017). However, the concept of globalization first began to appear in the popular and academic literature around 1990. Today, globalization is a central issue in the social world as a whole as well as in sociology; globalization and talk about it are all around us. In fact, we can be said to be living in the "global age" (Albrow 1996). However, this fact as well as the advantages of globalization for the United States have been questioned by Donald Trump. Such questioning has led to talk of "deglobalization" (however, see my blog post "Deglobalization? Not a Chance" [Ritzer 2016]). Deglobalization was also behind the vote in the United Kingdom to exit the European Union (called Brexit), as well as actions taken by other European nations to create border restrictions. However, none of these actions are going to have much impact on globalization as a whole or in such areas as the internet, the media, and culture.

A major component of any past or present definition of sociology is society. There are about 200 societies in the world, including those that encompass the United States, China, and South Africa. **Society** is a complex pattern of social relationships that is bounded in space and persists over time. Society has traditionally been the largest unit of analysis in sociology. However, in the global age, societies are seen as declining in importance (Holton 2011; Meyer, Boli, and Ramirez 1997). This is the case, in part, because larger transnational and global social structures are growing in importance. These include the United Nations (UN); the European Union (EU); the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); multinational corporations (MNCs), such as Google and ExxonMobil; and multinational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as Amnesty International. In at least some cases, these transnational structures are becoming more important than individual societies. OPEC is more important to the rest of the world's well-being than are the organization's key member societies, such as Abu Dhabi or even Saudi Arabia. However, this emphasis on the transnational and global has led to a counterreaction in which the focus has shifted back to one's own society (e.g., "America First").

Social processes, like social structures, exist not only at the societal level but also at the global level, and these global processes are increasing in importance. Consider migration (see Chapter 14). People move about, or migrate, within and between societies. For example, many people have moved from the northeastern United States to the West and the South. However, in the global age, people are increasingly moving between societies, some halfway around the world. The United States now has a higher percentage of immigrants than it has had in almost a century (see Figure 1.1). Many have migrated from and through Mexico to the United States (Massey 2003; Ortmeyer and Quinn 2012). More generally, large numbers of people are migrating from a number of predominantly Islamic societies in the Middle East and Africa to the West (Voas and Fleischmann 2012). In many cases, they were fleeing from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya (Yeginsu and Hartocollis 2015). In addition, the movement of thousands of people from the

FIGURE 1.1

Number of Immigrants and Their Share of the Total U.S. Population, 1850–2020



Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2016 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

West to join radical Islamist organizations (such as the Islamic State), especially in Syria and Iraq, has been of major concern to Western governments. Some fear that at least some of those involved in radical Islamist activities there will migrate back to the West and engage in terrorist acts.

There have always been large-scale population movements. However, in the global age, and even with recent restrictions, people generally move around the world far more freely and travel much greater distances than ever before. Another way of saying this is that people—and much else—are more "fluid." That is, they move farther, more easily, and more quickly than ever before. Younger people, especially millennials (or Generation Y, those born from the early 1980s through the late 1990s, as well as the following Generation Z), are likely to be especially mobile, including globally. Their greater fluidity is reflected in, among many other things, the fact that they are more likely to book airline tickets and to check in for flights online and to use boarding passes sent directly to their smartphones (Lee 2013).

The movement of products of all types is also more fluid as a result of massive container ships, jet cargo planes, and package delivery services such as FedEx and UPS. Even more fluid is the digital "stuff" you buy on the internet when you download music, videos, movies, and so on. And in the realm of the family, tasks once confined to the home, such as caregiving and housework, have become increasingly fluid, as those who can afford to do so often outsource domestic labor (van der Lippe, Frey, and Tsvetkova 2012; Yeates 2009). More generally that greater fluidity is manifested in the information that flows throughout the world in the blink of an eye as a result of the internet, texting, e-mail, and social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter.

ASK YOURSELF

Have you ever thought of your posts on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter as part of a global flow of information? In what ways do they actually fit this description? What does your position in this global flow of information reveal about you?

These flows can be expedited by structures of various types.

- Air cargo delivery will increasingly be facilitated by the development of the "aerotropolis" (Kasarda and Lindsay 2011), a preplanned "city of the future" developed because of proximity and access to a large, modern airport (Kasarda 2016). The "smart city" of New Songdo, South Korea, is being built (it is over 50 percent completed) because such an airport (Incheon) is nearby and easily reached via a 12-mile-long bridge. This is in contrast to the usual situation where the airport (e.g., Reagan National in Washington, D.C.; LAX in Los Angeles; Heathrow in London) is built within or very close to a city center. Traditional airports are typically too small and too difficult to reach, create too much noise for city residents, and cannot expand much beyond their current confines.

- The European Union (EU), founded in 1993, is an example of a social structure that serves to ease the flow of citizens among member nations (but not of people living outside the EU). Border restrictions were reduced or eliminated among the 27 EU member nations, although some of them have been reinstituted in recent years because of concern about the flow of undocumented immigrants. Similarly, the launch of the euro in 1999 greatly simplified economic transactions among the 18 EU countries that accept it as their currency.

- The continuing free flow of information on the internet is made possible by an organization called ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). It handles the net's underlying infrastructure.

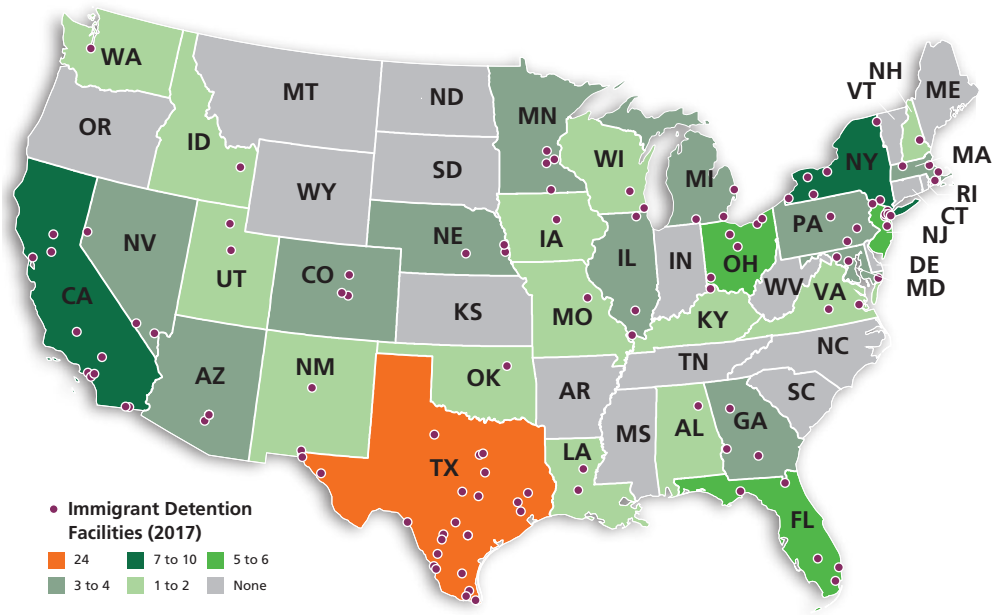
There are also structures that impede various kinds of global flows. National borders, passports and passport controls (Robertson 2010; Torpey 2000), security checks, and customs controls limit the movement of people throughout the world. Such restrictions were greatly increased in many parts of the world after the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001. This made global travel and border crossing more difficult and time-consuming. Then there are the even more obvious structures designed to limit the movement of people across borders. Examples include the fences between Israel and the West Bank, as well as one between Israel and Egypt completed in 2013. Even more recent are border fences under construction or completed in several European countries (e.g., Hungary, Slovenia), which are designed to limit, direct, or stop the flow of migrants from Syria and elsewhere (Surk 2015). During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump promised to turn the existing barriers between the United States and Mexico into a wall, at least for part of the length of the distance required. In the early days of his presidency, Trump encountered opposition to the wall because of its high cost and environmental concerns. From late 2018 to early 2019, the U.S. government endured a partial shutdown because of Trump's insistence on building the wall and congressional resistance to funding it. It remains to be seen how much of the wall will actually be built.

The existing fences across the Mexican border, and increased border police and patrols, have already led unauthorized migrants to take longer and riskier routes into the United States. There are more than 200 immigration detention centers in the United States (see Figure 1.2), and Human Rights Watch found that 18 immigrants died in them from 2012 to 2015 due to negligent medical care (Jula and Preston 2016). A crisis arose at the Mexican border in mid-2014 when tens of thousands of children from Central America flooded the area and overwhelmed detention centers (Archibold 2014). Another occurred in late 2018 when Trump exaggerated the risks posed by a "caravan" of immigrants from Central America and sought to counter it by sending thousands of U.S. troops to guard the border. There are, of course, many other structural barriers in the world, most notably trade barriers and tariffs, which limit the free movement of goods and services of many kinds.

In sum, **globalization** is defined by increasingly fluid global flows and the structures that expedite and impede those flows. Globalization is certainly increasing, and it brings with it a variety of both positive and negative developments (Ritzer and Dean 2019). On one side, most people throughout the world now have far greater access to goods, services, and information from around the globe than did people during the industrial age. On the other side, a variety of highly undesirable things also flow more easily around the world, including diseases such as Zika, HIV/AIDS, and Ebola, and pollution released primarily by

FIGURE 1.2

U.S. Immigration Detention Facilities, 2017



Source: U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, Detention Facility Locator, March 2017 (www.ice.gov/detention-facilities).

industrialized countries that worsens the adverse effects of climate change (including global warming). Also on the negative side are the flows of such forms of "deviant globalization" as terrorism, sex trafficking, and the black markets for human organs and drugs (Gilman, Goldhammer, and Weber 2011; Marmo and Chazel 2016).

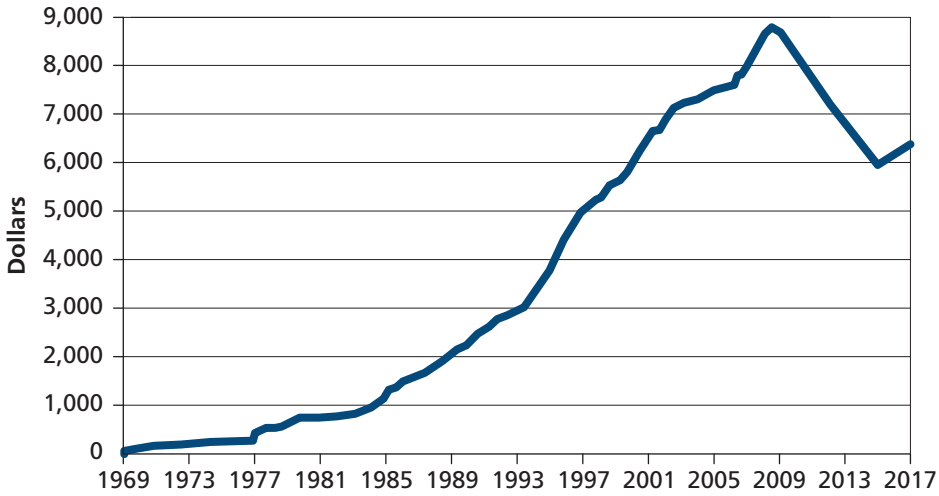
Consumption

While consumption has been a central feature of societies for centuries, it is only in recent years that we can think in terms of a "world of consumers" (Trentmann 2016). Beginning in the 1950s, the center of many capitalist economies began to shift from production and work to **consumption**, or the process by which people obtain and use goods and services. During that period, the center of the U.S. economy shifted from the factory and the office to the shopping mall (Baudrillard [1970] 1998; Wiedenhoft Murphy 2017a). For many, work and production became less important than consumption.

The dramatic rise in consumption was made possible by, among other things, the growing affluence of the population. A more specific factor was the introduction (in the 1950s and 1960s) and increasing availability of credit cards. The use of credit cards has now become widespread at shopping malls, on the internet, and in many other settings. One indicator of the increase in consumption in the United States is the increase in credit card debt. As you can see in Figure 1.3, credit card debt per household grew astronomically in the early years of credit card use (the figure begins with $37 in 1969). Credit card debt reached its high point, $8,729, in 2008 and steadily declined after the Great Recession to an average of $5,946 per household. However, credit card debt increased by almost 3 percent from 2016 to 2017 to an average of $6,375 per household.

FIGURE 1.3

U.S. Credit Card Debt per Capita, 1969–2017



Source: Data from the U.S. Federal Reserve and U.S. Census Bureau and Jessica Dickler, 2018. "Credit Card Debt Hits a Record High." CNBC. January 23.

ASK YOURSELF

Have your consumption habits or credit card use changed over the last six months? The last three years? Do you anticipate that your habits will change in the next three years? If so, how and why? Will you consume more or less?

Consumption is certainly significant economically, but it is significant in other ways as well. For example, culture is very much shaped by consumption, and various aspects of consumption become cultural phenomena. A good example is the iPhone, which is used in many ways to consume but more generally has revolutionized culture in innumerable ways. Billions of people have bought iPhones and similar smartphones as well as the ever-increasing number of apps associated with them. These phones have altered how and where people meet to socialize and the ways in which they socialize. In addition, the media and people in general spend so much time discussing the implications of the latest iPhone and similar products that these devices have become central to the larger culture in which we live. Rumors about the characteristics and release date of the next version of the iPhone continually add to the excitement.

Consumption and globalization are also deeply intertwined. Much of what we consume in the developed world comes from other countries. In 2017 alone, the United States imported more than $505 billion worth of goods from China; the comparable figure in 1985 was only $4 million in goods (U.S. Census Bureau 2018a). Furthermore, the speed and convenience of internet commerce tend to make global realities and distances irrelevant to consumers. Finally, travel to other parts of the world—a form of consumption itself—is increasingly affordable and common. A major objective of tourists is often the sampling of the foods of foreign lands, as well as the purchasing of souvenirs (Chambers 2010; Gmelch 2010; Mak, Lumbers, and Eves 2012). Medical tourism is less common, but it is estimated that globally it is a $100-billion-per-year industry (Fetscherin and

Imaginechina via AP Images

New consumption sites and products are often a hot cultural phenomenon. Many people will line up for hours, even camp out overnight, just to be among the first to be at such an event or to get such a product. This is clear from the crowd in Beijing, China, in line for a chance to buy the latest iPhone.

Stephano 2016). Large numbers of Americans—and many others—travel great distances for such services as cosmetic procedures and even open-heart surgery. They do so largely because the costs are much lower elsewhere in the world. Many U.S. women who have difficulty conceiving travel to developing countries such as India in order to hire surrogates, "rent" their uteruses and ovaries, and exploit their eggs (Pfeffer 2011).

Sociologists are understandably interested in these developments in the realm of consumption. Early sociologists completed many studies of work, production, factories, and factory workers. Today's sociologists continue to study work-related issues, but they are devoting increasing attention to consumption in general (Warde 2017) and more specifically to such phenomena as online shopping, done increasingly through the use of smartphones (Kim et al. 2017); the behavior of shoppers in more material locales such as department stores (Miller 1998); and the development of more recent consumption sites, such as fast-food restaurants (Ritzer 2019) and shopping malls (Ritzer 2010b). All these have become increasingly global phenomena. The most popular destination for visitors to Barcelona is *not* one of Antoni Gaudí's amazing architectural creations but rather a new outlet mall on the outskirts of the city (Mount 2014). Online shopping is increasingly popular in many places, including in India and especially in China (Bearak 2014; Wang and Pfanner 2013). The growth of online shopping in developed countries, and even more in less developed countries, has been made possible by the massive expansion and growing popularity of smartphones.

McDonaldization

Ritzer's study of a major site for consuming food—the fast-food restaurant—led to the development of the concept of **McDonaldization**, or the process by which the rational principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of society and more societies throughout the world (Ritzer 2019; Ritzer and Miles, 2019; for a number of critical essays on this perspective, see Ritzer 2010c). This process leads to the creation of rational systems—not only fast-food restaurants, but also, among others, online shopping sites (see Trending later in this chapter)—that have four defining characteristics:

- *Efficiency*. The emphasis is on the use of the quickest and least costly means to whatever end is desired. It is clear that employees of fast-food restaurants work efficiently: Burgers are cooked and assembled as if on an assembly line, with no wasted movements or ingredients. Similarly, customers are expected to spend as little time as possible in the fast-food restaurant. Perhaps the best example of efficiency is the drive-through window, a highly organized means for employees to dole out meals in a matter of seconds.

- *Calculability*. You hear a lot at McDonald's about quantities: how large the food portions are—the Big Mac—and how low the prices are—the dollar breakfast. You don't hear as much, however, about the quality of the restaurant's ingredients or its products. Similarly, you may hear about how many burgers are served per hour or how quickly

they are served, but you don't hear much about the skill of employees. A focus on quantity also means that tasks are often done under great pressure. This means that they are often done in a slipshod manner.

- *Predictability.* McDonaldization ensures that the entire experience of patronizing a fast-food chain is nearly identical from one geographic setting to another—even globally—and from one time to another. When customers enter a McDonald's restaurant, employees ask what they wish to order, following scripts created by the corporation. For their part, customers can expect to find most of the usual menu items. Employees, following another script, can be counted on to thank customers for their order. Thus, a highly predictable ritual is played out in the fast-food restaurant.

- *Control.* In McDonaldized systems, technology exerts a good deal of control over people, processes, and products. French fry machines limit what employees can do and control any remaining tasks. They buzz when the fries are done and even automatically lift them out of the hot oil when they've reached just the right amount of crispiness. Workers must load fry baskets with uncooked fries and unload them when the baskets emerge from the oil. The automatic fry machine may save time and prevent accidents, but it limits and dictates employee actions and leaves them with little meaningful work. Similarly, the drive-through window can be seen as a technology that ensures that customers dispose of their own garbage, if only by dumping it in the backseats of their cars or on the roadside.

Paradoxically, rationality often seems to lead to its exact opposite—irrationality. Just consider the problems of meaningless work, roadside litter due to drive-through services at fast-food restaurants, or the societal problems associated with childhood obesity, which has been blamed, in part, on the ubiquity of fast food. Another of the irrationalities of rationality is dehumanization. Fast-food employees are forced to work in dehumanizing jobs, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, alienation, and high turnover rates. Fast-food customers are forced to eat in dehumanizing settings, such as in the cold and impersonal atmosphere of the fast-food restaurant, in their cars, or on the move as they walk down the street. As more of the world succumbs to McDonaldization, dehumanization becomes increasingly pervasive.

Critiquing Consumption

The sociological study of consumption sites involves, among many other things, a critical look at the ways in which they are structured. (The previous discussion of the irrationalities associated with McDonaldized settings is one example of such a critical perspective.) These sites may be set up to lead people to consume certain things and not others, to consume more than they might have intended, and to go into debt (Brubaker, Lawless, and Tabb 2012; Manning 2001; Marron 2009; Ritzer 1995). Consider Shoedazzle (www.shoedazzle.com), a website that uses commercials and "style quizzes" to recruit new members. Shoedazzle highlights an "exclusive" VIP membership status on its webpage, which anyone can join. Making its members feel special through seemingly personalized style quizzes and VIP memberships lures consumers into buying more shoes (and other products) than they really need.

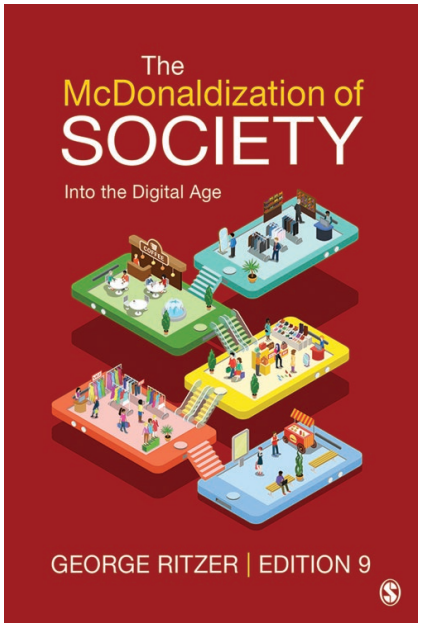
Sociologists are also interested in how consumers use shopping malls and e-tailers in ways that were not anticipated by their designers. For example, people often wander through shopping malls and their many shops, which have been designed to spur consumption, without buying anything. Defunct malls are serving as impromptu skate parks. Students are using Amazon.com as a source for term-paper bibliographies rather than buying the books. Travelers are using internet sites such as Expedia and KAYAK to compare prices but then buying airplane tickets on the airlines' own websites.

Social change continues. The Great Recession and its aftermath altered many things, including the degree to which society is dominated by consumption. Even today, long after the onset of the recession in 2007 and its supposed end, many U.S. consumers remain reluctant to spend money, or at least as much as they did in the past, on consumption (Kurtz 2014). As a result, consumption sites have experienced great difficulties. Many outdoor strip malls and some indoor malls have emptied; they have become "dead malls" (as documented on the site http://deadmalls.com). Many

TRENDING

The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age, 9th ed. (Sage 2019)

George Ritzer



As its main title suggests, this book focused, at least originally, on McDonald's, other fast-food restaurants, and other "brick-and-mortar" consumption sites such as IKEA, Walmart, other chain stores, shopping malls, and amusement parks. However, as is clear in the new subtitle, the focus of the last edition has moved in the direction of consumption sites on the internet, as well as to mixed "bricks-and-clicks" consumption sites (Belk 2013). The prime example of both, and *the* giant in the world of contemporary consumption, is Amazon.com. Amazon.com is a dominant force on the internet, especially in consumption (with 43 percent of all e-commerce [Wingfield 2017]), but it is also increasingly a force in bricks-and-clicks with the opening in recent years of conventional bookstores and convenience stores and with its purchase in 2017 of the Whole Foods chain of supermarkets. These "brick" sites complement in various ways the "clicks" on Amazon.com, and they are increasingly likely to do so in the future as Amazon creates a more seamless system.

Comparisons between McDonald's and Amazon .com from the point of view of the McDonaldization thesis demonstrate that Amazon.com is far more McDonaldized than McDonald's.

- Amazon.com makes obtaining a wide array of products highly *efficient* by eliminating lengthy and perhaps fruitless trips to department stores, big-box stores (such as Walmart), and the mall. What could be more efficient than sitting at home, ordering products online, and having your order delivered in a day or two? While McDonald's made obtaining a meal in a restaurant more efficient through the drive-through window, it still has the inefficiency of requiring consumers to drive (or walk) to the restaurant to get their food.
- Shopping on Amazon.com involves a highly predictable series of online steps that lead to the completion of an order. McDonald's brought great *predictability* to eating in a restaurant. There are well-defined steps in obtaining a meal there: join the line, scan the marquee to know what to order when you (finally) get to the counter, order, pay, take the tray of food to a table, eat it, and dispose of the debris on completion of the "meal." However, there are a series of unpredictabilities at McDonald's, absent at Amazon.com, such as those associated with inattentive, surly, or incompetent counter people.
- There is great *calculability* involved in shopping on Amazon.com. Prices are clearly marked and consumers know exactly what the total cost of an order is. Before finalizing a purchase customers are able to delete items, thereby reducing the final cost. The marquee at McDonald's offers preset prices and similar calculability, although unless customers are able to do the math in their heads, the final price is not known until the purchase is completed.

- Shopping on Amazon.com is tightly controlled by the nature of the site and its reliance on nonhuman technologies. Consumers can only order what is on the site and cannot ask (there is no one to ask) for products to be modified. In addition, there are no crowds, to say nothing of unreliable and intrusive salespeople, on Amazon.com. Great *control* is exerted over customers at McDonald's, but they are able to request some modifications in at least some of the food they order. This is one of the reasons that lines can be long at counters and drive-throughs. Counter people, as well as those who staff the drive-through windows, can adversely affect the process in various ways (for example, food may not be modified as requested; it is not unusual to drive or walk some distance only to find that one's sack of food does not include exactly what was ordered).
- The main *irrationality of rationality* associated with Amazon.com is its tendency to lead to excessive consumption, while that is not possible at McDonald's given its limited menu and low prices. However, it *is* possible, even likely, to consume too many calories, too much fat, and too much sugar at McDonald's (Spurlock 2005). ●

Visit edge.sagepub.com/ritzeressentials4e to

- Watch an interview with Ritzer about his book *The McDonaldization of Society.*
- Examine photographs and learn more about what *Smithsonian* magazine has identified as the most unique McDonald's restaurants in the world.
- Look at menu items from different McDonald's restaurants.

of the malls that continue to exist have numerous vacant stores, including abandoned large department stores. Las Vegas, which has long been a capital for the consumption of entertainment and high-end goods and services, has been hurting (Nagourney 2013). Casinos in Atlantic City, New Jersey, are being shuttered, and there are those who want to see the city become more like the simpler beach community it once was (Hurdle 2014). Dubai, aspiring to be the consumption capital of the East, hit a financial rough spot in 2009 and has yet to recover completely from it. It seems possible, although highly unlikely, that even though we entered the consumption age only about half a century ago, we now may be on the verge of what could be called the "postconsumption age." While excessive consumption and the related high level of debt were key factors in causing the Great Recession, a postconsumption age would bring with it problems of its own, such as fewer jobs and a declining standard of living for many.

ASK YOURSELF

What would your life be like in a postconsumption age? In what ways might it be better? Worse? Why?

The Digital World

Sociology has always concerned itself with the social aspects and implications of **technology**, or the interplay of machines, tools, skills, and procedures for the accomplishment of tasks. One example is the assembly line, a defining feature of early twentieth-century factories. Later, sociologists became interested in the automated technologies that came to define factories. However, technologies have continued to evolve considerably since then. Sociologists are now devoting an increasing amount of attention to the digital world that has emerged as a result of new technologies already mentioned in this chapter, such as computers, smartphones, the internet, and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Mukherjee 2018).

While we discuss life in the digital world throughout this book, living digitally is not separate from living in the social world. In fact, the two forms of living are increasingly intersecting and creating an augmented world (Jurgenson 2012). The widespread use of smartphones allows people to text many others to let them know they are going to be at a local club. This can lead to a spontaneous social gathering at the club that would not have occurred were it not for this new technology. However, the most dramatic examples of the effect

of smartphones on the social world are seen in their use in mobilizing, especially through Twitter, large numbers of people to become involved, and stay involved, in social movements such as the revolutions in Egypt (2011) and Ukraine (2014).

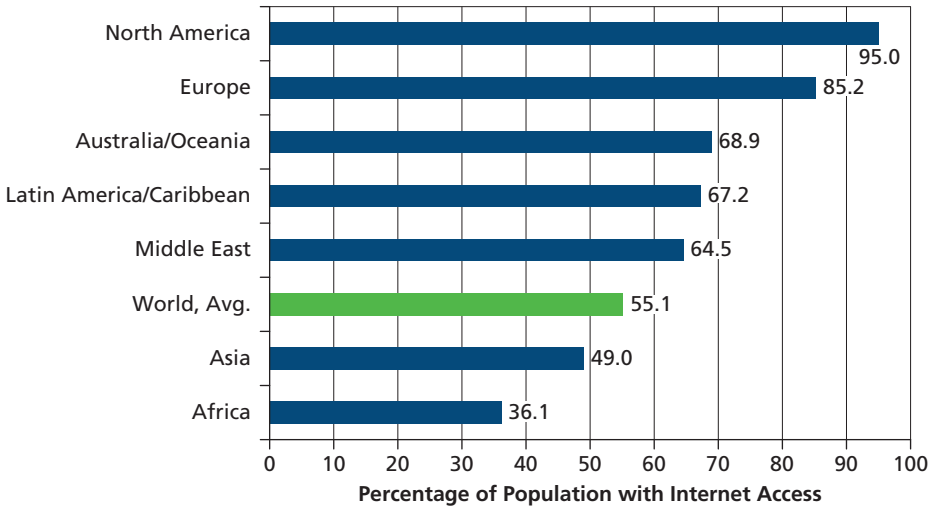
The networking sites on the internet that involve social interaction are the most obviously sociological in character (Aleman and Wartman 2008; Patchin and Hinduja 2010). For example, Hodkinson (2015) has pointed out the similarities between teenagers' bedrooms and their social networking sites in terms of privacy issues. Both are intimate personal spaces where teenagers socialize and individualize in ways that express their identities. Social networking sites are especially important in North America (Europe is not far behind), where the percentage of those with access to the internet is highest (see Figure 1.4). However, their importance is increasing elsewhere, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, as reflected in the role they played there in recent social revolutions. Protesters used cell phones and the internet to inform each other, and the world, about the evolving scene. To take another example, Facebook .com/yalaYL has become a key site where Israelis, Palestinians, and other Arabs communicate with each other about both everyday concerns and big issues such as the prospect for peace in the Middle East. This social networking takes place online, while peaceful face-to-face interaction between such people, and between their leaders, is difficult or nonexistent, especially in light of continuing violence in and around Israel (Bronner 2011).

While social networking sites can bring about greater interaction, they also come between people and affect the nature of interaction. Twitter limits each message to 280 characters, but face-to-face communication has no such limits. On the other hand, face-to-face communication is limited to a shared physical space, whereas communication via Twitter travels anywhere there is a device connected to the internet. Sociologists are interested in getting a better handle on the nature of the differences, as well as the similarities, between mediated and nonmediated (e.g., face-to-face) interaction. In technologically **mediated interaction**, technology such as the internet and the smartphone comes between the people who are communicating, while there is no such interference in nonmediated interaction. People who are shy and insecure when it comes to dating or sex, for example, may be much more comfortable relating to others on mediated websites such as Hinge, Match.com, OkCupid, and Tinder.

Another sociological issue related to the internet is the impact on our lives of spending so

FIGURE 1.4

Internet Access by Geographic Region, 2018



Source: Data from Internet World Stats, Miniwatts Marketing Group.

much time interacting on social networking sites. For example, are you more likely to write term papers for your college classes using shorter sentences and more abbreviations because of your experience on Twitter or with texting? Consider also the impact of the 9 hours per day that young people ages 13 to 18 spend on entertainment or screen media (Common Sense Media 2015). In some cases, little time remains for other activities (e.g., schoolwork, face-to-face interaction). Increasing the ability of children to spend time on screen media is the growing availability of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. In 2017, 98 percent of children in the United States under 8 years of age lived in homes with mobile devices, compared to 52 percent just two years earlier. They were also more than 30 percent more likely in 2017 to use such devices than they were in 2013 (Common Sense Media 2017a). A study of parents and children in fast-food restaurants found that a significant majority of the parents were more absorbed in their mobile devices than they were in relating to their children (Radesky et al. 2014).

Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/Getty Images

Social changes brought about by the thorough integration of the internet in most areas of our lives have been enormously influential—and the changes are far from over. Teenagers and even very young children take our constant connectivity for granted, suggesting that most of the changes we are witnessing will become ever more pervasive.

We may also multitask among several online and offline interactions simultaneously, such as in class or while doing homework. You may think you do a great job of multitasking, but dividing focus in this way can actually reduce your ability to comprehend and remember and thus lower your performance on tests and other assignments (PBS 2010).

Internet technology also affects the nature of consumption. More of it is taking place on such sites as eBay and Amazon.com, and that trend is expected to continue to grow. In 2015 a Pew study found that 79 percent of all Americans shopped online compared to only 22 percent in 2000. Fifteen percent of shoppers purchased at least one item per week, and 51 percent used their mobile devices to purchase goods. Consumers spent a record $453 billion shopping online in 2017 (Digital Commerce 360 2019). It is also easier for people to spend money on consumption on internet sites than it is in the material world. It is worth noting that these sites, as well as the internet in general, are global in scope. The ease with which global interactions and transactions occur on the internet is a powerful indicator of, and spur to, the process of globalization.

Smartphones are also having a variety of effects on consumption. For example, on the one hand, they are making it easier for people to find particular kinds of restaurants and to get to them quickly and efficiently. On the other hand, when people are eating in those restaurants, smartphones tend to slow down service because diners take time photographing the meal, taking selfies, and asking waitstaff to take photos of them (Griswold 2014). Many shoppers use their smartphones in stores to look up product information, compare prices, and download coupons (Skrovan 2017). Target now uses Bluetooth beacon technology to locate shoppers in its stores via a Target app on their smartphone and to direct them to products on their shopping lists (Perez 2017).

Digital Living: Blogging and Tweeting about Sociology

Blogging and tweeting are two popular ways to transmit and acquire information today. Current events are often posted in real time, sometimes

by individuals who are witnessing them. The Arab Spring was referred to as the Twitter Revolution because people around the world were able to follow these political uprisings through tweets posted by protestors. Sports fans can follow their favorite teams and on game day receive instantaneous alerts when their team scores a touchdown or scores a run. Individuals who want to find alternative perspectives on social issues from the mainstream press can follow a variety of alternate online sites (e.g., the far-right-wing Breitbart News) and blogs (e.g., the left-leaning Mother Jones). Blogging and tweeting encourage individual agency. They offer the opportunity for all of us to participate in the social construction of reality and can be used as platforms to promote social reforms, such as #BlackLivesMatter. But there are a few structural constraints attached to these methods of communication. Twitter limits its tweets to 280 characters. Many popular blogs and Twitter accounts are written and maintained by celebrities, professional experts, and representatives of formal organizations (some of which are highly politicized), who have more power to shape reality than the average person does. Especially notable in this regard is the use of Twitter by Donald Trump, both as presidential candidate and as president, to reach directly his supporters and thereby bypassing the traditional media. Trump's Twitter account (@RealDonaldTrump) has about 60 million followers.

Sociologists and organizations devoted to sociological theory and research use blogs and tweets to expose others to the sociological imagination, helping individuals at the micro level realize that their private troubles are connected to larger public issues. Popular sociologists who blog include the author of this book, George Ritzer (https://georgeritzer.wordpress.com), who discusses the themes addressed in this book, such as McDonaldization, globalization, and consumption, and Philip Cohen, who writes about family inequality (https://familyinequality.wordpress.com). The Society Pages blog (https://thesocietypages.org) includes a set of sociology blogs such as The Color Line (https://thesocietypages.org/colorline) and Sociology Lens (www.sociologylens.net) that keep readers current on issues pertaining to inequality, race, gender, crime, and health. The American Sociology Association's blog (speak4sociology.org) offers a forum for its followers to debate sociological issues. A variety of Twitter accounts regularly post comments about and links to relevant sociological topics, including @Soc_Imagination, @SociologyLens, @DiscoverSoc, @SocWomen, and @SocImages. In addition, professional sociologists, such as Michael Burawoy (@burawoy), Matthew Desmond (@just_shelter), Zeynep Tufekci (@zeynep), and Sudhir Venkatesh (@avsudhir), tweet to promote awareness about social problems and publicize their research and social activism.

Globalization, Consumption, the Digital World, and You

The three main issues discussed previously, taken singly and collectively, are of great concern not only to society in general and to sociologists but also to you as a college student. You live a good part of your life in these three interrelated domains.

As a college student, you live a truly global existence in a college or university. A significant number of your classmates may come from elsewhere in the world. Your classes are increasingly being taught by teaching assistants and professors from other parts of the globe. The ideas you are learning are the most global of all, flowing freely from virtually everywhere in the world to become part of lectures and textbooks.

As consumers, you and your classmates are likely well acquainted with the college bookstore and the nearby shopping mall. In addition, on the internet you are able to find a nearly infinite variety of goods (including textbooks, which are increasingly bought online) and services, the majority of which are likely to come from the far reaches of the world.

Finally, an increasing portion of your education is obtained through the inherently global internet—for example, through e-learning on web-based courses and online degree programs. In 2017 the number of students enrolled in massive online open courses (MOOCs) increased to 78 million from 58 million in 2016 (Lederman 2018). With the emergence of MOOCs, you, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of students from around the globe, are increasingly likely to participate in global classes (including courses in sociology; Behbehanian and Burawoy 2014) and other programs available on the internet (see Chapter 11 for more on MOOCs; see also Lewin 2012).

Globalization, consumption, and the internet are of great importance on their own. However, perhaps more important are the ways in which they interact with one another and interpenetrate with your life as a college student—and the lives of virtually everyone else.

Sociology: Continuity and Change

This chapter has emphasized recent social changes and their impact on society and on sociology, but there is also much continuity in society, as well as in the field of sociology. This section deals with a number of traditional approaches and concerns in sociology that are of continuing relevance to even the most recent sociological issues.

The Sociological Imagination

The systematic study of the social world has always required imagination on the part of sociologists. There are various ways to look at the social world. For example, instead of looking at the world from the point of view of an insider, one can, at least psychologically, place oneself outside that world. The U.S. "war on terror" might look defensible from the perspective of an American, especially one who lived through 9/11, but it would look quite different if you imagined yourself in the place of an innocent Muslim caught in the middle of that war (Philips 2016).

The phenomenon of being able to look at the social world from different, imaginative perspectives attracted the attention of the famous sociologist C. Wright Mills, who in 1959 wrote a very important book titled *The Sociological Imagination*. He argued that sociologists have a unique perspective—the **sociological imagination**—that gives them a distinctive way of looking at data or reflecting on the world around them (Selwyn 2015). For example, the fact that many of us no longer use cash is not simply an individual preference, but the consequence of technological changes. Cash is not a viable option for online shopping. Most retailers make it easy and convenient to use credit cards instead of cash at drive-through windows and gasoline stations. Not long ago, Amazon began opening physical grocery stores (Amazon Go) that require consumers to use a mobile app on their smartphones to purchase items. Consumers scan their smartphones when they enter the store, and digital technology detects what they place in their carts. There is no need to stand in line to pay for any items because they are charged to a customer's Amazon account when the person leaves the store (Rao 2016).

Archive Photos/Getty Images

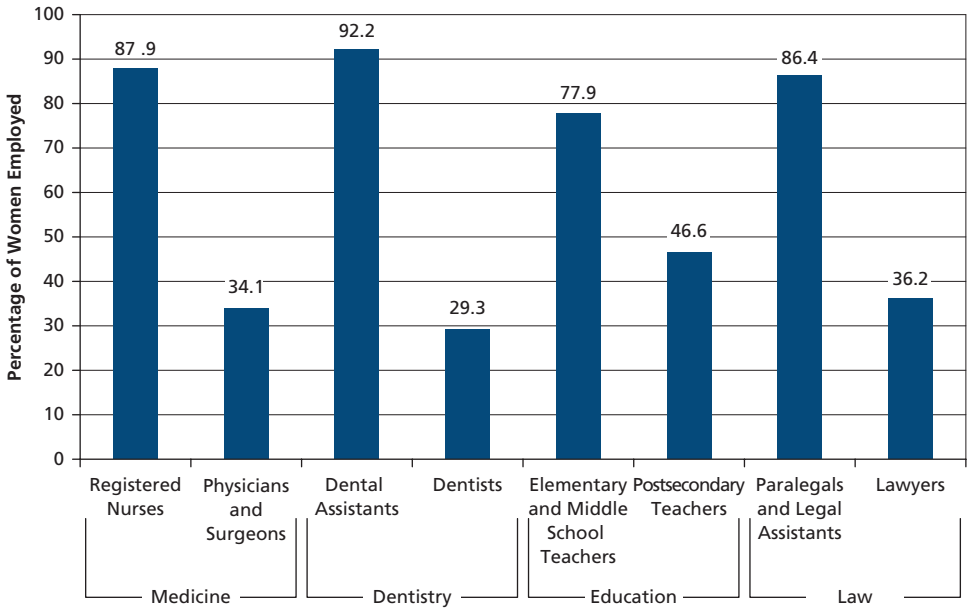
C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) was a prominent post–World War II sociologist who urged the use of the "sociological imagination" to study issues of concern to sociology . . . and to you.

Private Troubles and Public Issues

The sociological imagination may be most useful in helping sociologists see the linkage between private troubles and public issues. For example, ADHD—attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder—can easily be seen as a private trouble. For years there was little public awareness of ADHD, and those who had it were likely to suffer alone. But since the 1980s, it has become clear that ADHD is also a public issue, and it is becoming an increasingly important one not only in the United States

FIGURE 1.5

Percentages of Women in Selected Occupations, 2016



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016.

but also globally (Ellison 2015). The number of children in the United States ages 3 to 17 diagnosed with ADHD increased from 4.4 million in 2003 to 6.1 million in 2016 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016a). It is clear that many people suffer from ADHD, which creates a number of larger problems for schools, employers, and society as a whole. The fact that it has become a public issue may make ADHD less of a private trouble for some, as there is now greater public understanding of the problem and many more support groups are available.

Another example of the relationship between private troubles and public issues relates to the fact that women are more likely than men to be concentrated in lower-paying jobs (see Figure 1.5; Field 2018). For example, women are much more likely to be comparatively poorly paid dental hygienists than dentists or legal assistants rather than lawyers. Being limited occupationally creates personal troubles for many women, such as inadequate income and job dissatisfaction. This is also a public issue, not only because the discrepancy between the sexes is unfair to women as a whole but also because society is not benefiting from the many contributions women could be making.

ASK YOURSELF

Do you agree that private choices sometimes lead to, or are part of, public issues? Can you think of an example from your own life or the life of a family member?

The decision to pursue one college major or career path over another could become a private trouble if a student makes a poor choice or has one forced on him or her. Sociologists have also shown that such choices are very much related to larger public issues. If many people make poor choices, or are forced into them—as women and other minorities often are—this will lead to public issues such as widespread job dissatisfaction and poor performance on the job. Culturally based ideas about

gender often shape personal preferences in choosing a college major, and gendered beliefs about career competence steer women and men toward some types of jobs and away from others (Speer 2017). Being in a poorly paid and unsatisfying job is a personal trouble for an individual woman, but it is a public issue when large numbers of women find themselves in this situation.

Official White House Photo by Pete Souza

As they watch in real time the locating and killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, the tension shows on the faces and the body language of the highest officials of the United States, including President Obama.

The Micro–Macro Relationship

The interest in personal troubles and public issues is a specific example of a larger and more basic sociological concern with the relationship between microscopic (**micro**, or small-scale) social phenomena, such as individuals and their thoughts and actions, and macroscopic (**macro**, or large-scale) social phenomena, such as groups, organizations, cultures, society, and the world, as well as the relationships among them (Turner 2005). Karl Marx, often considered one of the earliest and most important sociologists, was interested in the relationship between what workers do and think (micro issues) and the capitalist economic system in which the workers exist (a macro issue). To take a more contemporary example, Randall Collins (2009) has sought to develop a theory of violence that deals with everything from individuals skilled in violent interactions, such as attacking those who are weak, to the material resources needed by violent organizations to cause the destruction of other violent organizations. An example of the former type of violent organization is the well-equipped U.S. Navy SEALs team that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011 and through that act helped hasten the decline of al-Qaeda. However, the decline of al-Qaeda helped lead to the rise of a new, even more violent, organization, the Islamic State.

In fact, a continuum runs from the most microscopic to the most macroscopic of social realities, with phenomena at roughly the midpoint of this continuum best thought of as meso (middle or intermediate) realities. The definition of sociology presented at the beginning of this chapter fits this continuum quite well. Individual actions and thoughts lie on the micro end of the continuum; groups, organizations, cultures, and societies fall more toward the macro end; and worldwide structures and processes are at the end point on the macro side of the continuum. Although in their own work the vast majority of individual sociologists focus on only very limited segments of this continuum, the field as a whole is concerned with the continuum in its entirety, as well as with the interrelationships among its various components.

The Agency–Structure Relationship

American sociologists tend to think in terms of the micro–macro relationship. In other parts of the world, especially in Europe, sociologists are more oriented to the agency–structure relationship. The agency–structure continuum is complex, but for our purposes we can think of agency as resembling the micro level and structure as resembling the macro level.

The utility of the agency–structure terminology is that it highlights several important social realities and aspects of the field of sociology. Of greatest significance is the fact that the term *agency* gives great importance to the individual—the "agent"—as having power and a capacity for

creativity (Giddens 1984). In sociological work on agency, great emphasis is placed on the individual's mental abilities and the ways in which these abilities are used to create important, if not decisive, actions.

However, individual agents are seen as enmeshed in macro-level social and cultural structures that they create and by which they are constrained (King 2004). For example, as a student, you help create the universities you attend, but you are also constrained by them and the power they have over you. Your university can require you to do certain things (such as take specific courses in order to earn your degree) and prevent you from doing other things (such as taking courses that might be of greater interest or even taking no courses at all). On the other hand, you as a student can act to change or overthrow those structures. You might organize student-run groups on topics of interest, such as religious rights or manga cartoons, attract many participants to the groups, and eventually prompt the university to add courses on those topics. Or perhaps you might organize students to stop enrolling in an elective course that seems irrelevant to their lives, causing that elective to be dropped from the course catalog.

Agents (you as a student, in this case) have great power. In the words of another important sociologist, Erving Goffman (1961b), individuals are **dangerous giants**. That is, they have the potential to disrupt and destroy the structures in which they find themselves. Yet often agents do not realize the power they possess. As a result, social structures such as the university and the class you are currently taking function for long periods of time with little or no disruption by individual agents.

However, there are times, such as during the Vietnam War protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when students come to realize that they are dangerous giants and act to change not only the university but also the larger society (Gitlin 1993). For example, students at some universities are protesting against the possible deportation of undocumented immigrants by pressuring school administrators to create "sanctuary campuses" that protect faculty, students, and staff from federal immigration authorities.

There are far more minor, everyday actions that reflect the fact that people can be dangerous giants. Examples involving students include questioning a professor's argument or going to the dean to protest the excessive absences of an instructor. However, most people most of the time do not realize that they are dangerous giants—that they have the capacity to alter greatly the social structures that surround them and in which they are enmeshed.

AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

Students at many universities have organized to protest on such issues as rape and abuse of student athletes. In this case, students at the elite University of California, Berkerley, are protesting proposed tuition increases at that university.

The Social Construction of Reality

The discussion of agency and structure leads to another basic concept in sociology: the **social construction of reality** (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Knoblauch and Wilke 2016). People at the agency end of the continuum are seen as creating social reality, basically macro-level phenomena, through their thoughts and actions. That reality then comes to have a life of its own. That is, it becomes a structure that is partly or wholly separate from the

people who created it and exist in it. Once macro phenomena have lives of their own, they constrain and even control what people do. Of course, people can refuse to accept these constraints and controls and create new social realities. This process of individual creation of structural realities, constraints, and coercion then begins anew, in a continuing loop. It is this continuous loop that is the heart of agency–structure and micro–macro relationships, the social world, and the field of sociology.

For example, in the realm of consumption, it is people—as designers, manufacturers, consumers, and bloggers—who create the world of fashion (Entwhistle 2015; Mair 2018). However, once the fashion world comes into existence, that world has a great deal of influence over the social constructions, especially the tastes, of individuals who purchase the fashions it produces. Famous fashion houses such as Dior and Givenchy dominate the industry and perpetuate their existence through continual fashion changes. These companies—and, more important, the "fast-fashion" companies that copy and mass-produce their products, such as H&M, Forever 21, and Zara—control people's tastes in fashion and thereby the nature of the clothing they buy and wear. Changing fashions are highly profitable for the companies involved. Consumers are led to be eager to buy the latest fashions, although most often in the form of relatively inexpensive fast-fashion knockoffs.

Of course, many people do not accept such social constructions; they do not go along with the constraints of the fashion industry. They do not wear what the industry wants them to wear, and they do not change the way they dress because of changes in fashion induced by the fashion industry. Many people have their own sense of fashion and create their own way of dressing. Others ignore fashion altogether. Of greatest importance from this perspective is the fact that the idea of what is in fashion often comes not from the fashion industry but rather from the ways of dressing that people put together themselves. These people, in a real sense, construct their own social reality. In fact, in a process known as "cool hunting" (Gloor and Cooper 2007), scouts for the fashion industry seek out new and interesting ways of dressing, often focusing on what young people in the suburbs and the inner cities are wearing. They bring those innovative ideas back to the fashion industry, and some of them are turned into next year's fashions.

Social Structures and Processes

A nineteenth-century sociologist, Auguste Comte, was important not only for inventing the term *sociology* in 1839 but also for being the originator of sociology as a field. Crucial for our purposes here is his early distinction between what he called "social statics" and "social dynamics." In his social statics, Comte looked at the various "parts" (structures) of society, such as the manufacturers and retailers of clothing fashions, and the ways in which they relate to one another as well as to the whole of society. In examining such relationships, Comte investigated social processes among and between parts of society as well as in society as a whole. However, under the heading of social dynamics, his main focus was on a specific social process—social change—and how the various parts of society change.

It is important to emphasize that **social structures** are enduring and regular social arrangements, such as the family and the state. While social structures do change, they are generally not very dynamic; they change very slowly. **Social processes** are the dynamic and ever-changing aspects of the social world.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857) invented the term *sociology*, argued that the discipline should be a science, and created a general theory of the social world.

Granger, NYC—All rights reserved.

The elements of globalization can be divided between structures (e.g., the United Nations) and a variety of more specific social processes (e.g., the migration of people across national borders). In terms of consumption, we can think of the shopping mall (or Amazon.com) as a structure and the shopping (or consumption) that takes place in it as a process. Finally, the internet as a whole and social networking sites in particular are structures, while the communication and the social interaction that take place in them can be viewed as processes.

Needless to say, neither the shopping mall nor the internet existed in Comte's day. Once again, we see that the social world is constantly changing and that sociologists, as well as students of sociology, must be sensitive to those changes. However, some of sociology's earliest concepts continue to be applicable, and usefully applied, to the social world.

Sociology's Purpose: Science or Social Reform?

Comte was famous not only for examining the relationship between structure and process but also for arguing that such study ought to be scientific. He believed that the social world was dominated by laws and that sociology's task was to uncover those laws. As those laws were uncovered, the science of sociology would develop. But Comte was also concerned about the problems of his day and interested in solving them through social reform. In fact, to Comte, science and reform should not be separated from one another. A number of classical sociologists—Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Jane Addams, and others—shared this view. Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) was not only a commentary on the social ills of the capitalist economy but also a rallying cry to workers to organize and abolish capitalism.

Many of today's sociologists study social problems of all sorts, such as poverty and crime. They use a variety of scientific methods to collect large amounts of data on such problems (see Chapter 2). They also seek to use what they learn about those problems to suggest ways of reforming society. They believe that these two activities—scientific research and social reform—are not necessarily distinct; they can and should be mutually enriching. While many contemporary sociologists accept this position, a division has developed over time, with some sociologists focusing more on scientific research and others more engaged in activities designed to reform society and address social problems.

The sociologists who engage in "pure science" operate with the conviction that we need to have a better understanding of how the social world operates before we can change it, if that's what we want to do. The knowledge gained through social research may ultimately be used by those who want to change society, or to keep it as it is, but that is not the immediate concern of these researchers.

Other sociologists take the opposite position. C. Wright Mills, for example, was little interested in doing scientific research. He was mostly interested in such social reforms as limiting or eliminating the unwholesome and worrisome ties between the military and industry in the United States. He was also critical of many of the most prominent sociologists of his day for their orientation toward being pure scientists, their lack of concern for the pressing problems of the day, and their unwillingness to do anything about those problems. Feminist sociologists have extended the argument, pointing out that the topics and methods of objective, scientific sociology themselves sometimes reflect, and ultimately reinforce, social inequality along the lines of race, gender, and class because they are based on the assumptions of society's elite.

ASK YOURSELF

What do you believe is the best purpose of sociology: pure science or social reform? Why? Make a note to ask yourself this question again at the end of your course. Did you answer it differently?

Sociology, the Other Social Sciences, and Common Sense

Sociology is one of the social sciences—that is, it is one of the fields that studies various aspects of the social world. Among the others are anthropology, communication studies, economics, geography, political science, and psychology. Generally

speaking, sociology is the broadest of these fields; social scientists in other fields are more likely than sociologists to delve into specific aspects of the social world in much greater depth. Sociological study touches on the culture of concern to anthropologists, the nation-state of interest to political scientists, and the mental processes that are the focus of psychologists. However, that does not mean that sociology is in any sense "better" than—or, conversely, not as good as—the other social sciences.

Rather than comparing and contrasting these fields in general terms, this concluding section focuses on the different ways in which these fields approach one of this book's signature concerns—globalization.

- *Anthropology:* Focuses on cultural aspects of societies around the world, such as the foods people eat and how they eat them, as well as the differences among cultures around the globe.
- *Communication studies:* Examines communications across the globe, with the internet obviously of focal concern in the contemporary world.
- *Economics:* Investigates the production, distribution, and consumption of resources through markets and other structures that span much of the globe, especially those based on and involving money.
- *Geography:* Studies spatial relationships on a global scale and maps those spaces (Herod 2009).
- *Political science:* Studies nation-states, especially the ways in which they relate to one another around the world as well as how they have grown increasingly unable to control global flows of migrants, viruses, recreational drugs, internet scams, and the like.
- *Psychology:* Examines the ways in which individual identities are shaped by increased awareness of the rest of the world and tensions associated with globalization (e.g., job loss), which may lead to individual psychological problems such as depression (Lemert and Elliott 2006).

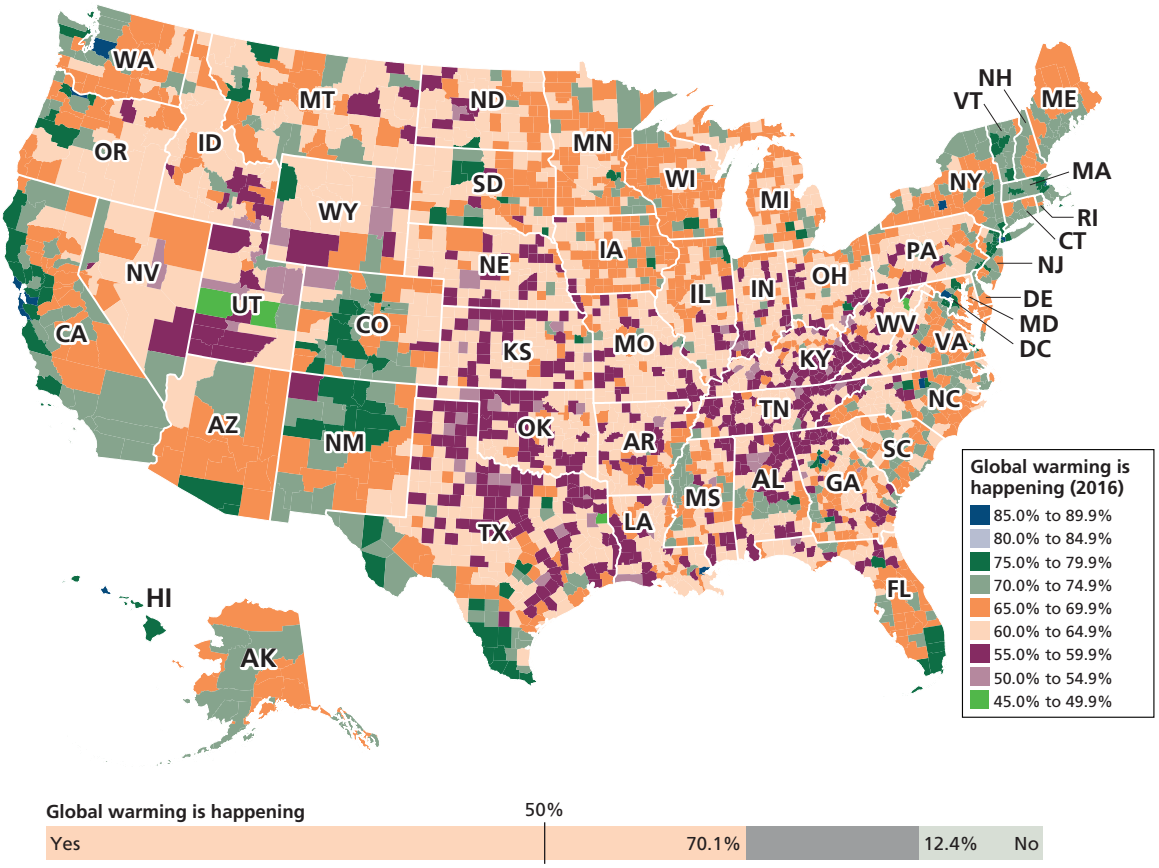
Sociology encompasses all these concerns, and many others, in its approach to globalization. It studies globe-straddling cultures (such as consumer or fast-food culture), relationships between political systems (the European Union and its member nations, for example), communication networks (such as CNN and Al Jazeera or Twitter and Facebook), and markets (for labor or stocks and bonds, for example) that cover vast expanses of the globe. Sociology maps all of these, and even their impacts (both good and bad) on individuals. You might want to study the other fields to get a sense of the depth of what they have to offer on specific aspects of globalization. However, if you are looking for the field that gives you the broadest possible view of all of these things as well as the ways in which they interrelate, that field is sociology.

While sociology and the other social sciences differ in important ways, they are all quite different from commonsense understandings of the social world. Everyone participates in globalization in one way or another. However, few if any people research these phenomena in the same rigorous way and to the same degree that social scientists examine them. That research leads, among other things, to a greater understanding of the nature of globalization. For example, you probably have a sense that globalization has changed society—perhaps even an impression that it is changing your life. What you are unlikely to know are globalization's causes, effects, and linkages to other social phenomena, or its largely invisible effects on society and the world. Research on the topic is also likely to yield much more insight into the pros and cons of globalization on personal, societal, and global levels. Such detailed knowledge and insight will help you, and others, to navigate more successfully the accompanying changes in social processes and structures.

One example of the gap between common sense and social scientific knowledge relates to perceptions of the causes of climate change. There is strong consensus in the scientific community that global warming is occurring and that it is caused primarily by human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels. However, data from a recent survey, illustrated in Figure 1.6, show that only 70 percent of Americans believe that global warming is happening and just 53 percent believe

FIGURE 1.6

Estimated Percentage of Adults Who Think Climate Change Is Happening, 2018



Source: Howe, Peter D., Matto Mildenberger, Jennifer R. Marlon, and Anthony Leiserowitz (2015). "Geographic Variation in Opinions on Climate Change at State and Local Scales in the USA." Nature Climate Change, doi:10.1038/nclimate2583, via Yale Climate Opinion Maps–U.S. 2018 (http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us-2018/).

that it is caused by human activity. Furthermore, 28 percent think that there is a lot of disagreement among scientists about the causes of global warming (Howe et al. 2015).

While common sense is important, even to sociologists, there is no substitute for the systematic study of the social world in both its minutest detail and its broadest manifestations. ●

SUMMARY

Sociology is the systematic examination of the ways in which people are affected by and affect the social structures and social processes associated with the groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and world in which they exist. Social changes in the last few centuries, including the Industrial Revolution, the growth of the service sector, and the arrival of the information age, have strongly influenced the field of

sociology. This book deals with innumerable social issues, but it focuses especially on three powerful structural forces in the social world that have drawn the attention of contemporary sociologists: globalization, consumption, and digital technology.

As the world has become more globalized, it has become more fluid as people, products, and information flow more quickly and easily across national borders. The role of consumption in our daily lives over the past few decades has resulted in the increasing use of credit cards and the growing popularity of online shopping. Digital technology is changing how and when we interact with others, including the near ubiquitous use of smartphones and social media. The process of McDonaldization, or an emphasis on efficiency, calculability, predictability, and technological control, characterizes many aspects of globalization, consumption, and digital technology.

Social changes such as globalization, consumption, and digital technology can be understood using C. Wright Mills's "sociological imagination," which calls on us to look at social phenomena not just from a personal perspective but also from the outside, from a distinctively sociological perspective. In addition, recognizing that much of our reality is socially constructed can help us comprehend how the agency of individuals can bring about social change; at the same time, these changes become structures that both enable and constrain social action. These social structures become enduring and slow to change, while social processes represent the more dynamic aspects of society.

Sociologists study many issues, sometimes to understand them through scientific research and sometimes to help generate change and reform. The goal of sociology as a pure science is to collect large quantities of data about the social world to build knowledge, while the goal of sociology as a means of social reform aims to use this knowledge for social change.

Sociology, like other social sciences, distinguishes itself from commonsense opinions about the social world by developing rigorous theories and engaging in systematic research to study social phenomena. Sociology, the least specialized of the social sciences, encompasses aspects of anthropology, political science, psychology, economics, and communications.

KEY TERMS

butterfly effect, 3
consumption, 8
dangerous giants, 20
globalization, 7
macro, 19
McDonaldization, 10
mediated interaction, 14
micro, 19
social construction of reality, 20
social processes, 21
social structures, 21
society, 5
sociological imagination, 17
sociology, 3
technology, 13

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How is the projected impact of the driverless car an example of the butterfly effect? Use your sociological imagination to think of ways in which your individual choices and actions will be influenced by this development.
2. Your social world is continually changing. What are some examples of new technologies that have been developed during your lifetime? How have they changed the way you interact with and relate to others?
3. How do shopping malls reflect increasing globalization? Do you think shopping malls lead to a sameness of culture around the world, or do they allow local areas to retain their differences?
4. What items are you most likely to buy using the internet? How do social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) influence what you consume?
5. What social structures have impeded the flow of information in the past? How have the internet and

social networking sites made it easier to get around these structural barriers?

6. According to C. Wright Mills, how are private troubles different from public issues? How can we use the micro/macro distinction to show how private troubles are related to public issues?
7. What is the difference between structure and agency? Within your classroom, could you be a "dangerous giant"? In what ways does your school prevent you from becoming a dangerous giant?
8. What do sociologists mean by the social construction of reality? How can you apply this perspective to better understand trends in the fashion industry?
9. Can you think of ways in which we can use "pure science" to better understand the process of McDonaldization? What do you believe should be the goal of research?
10. How is sociology's approach to globalization different from that of other social sciences? What are the advantages of using a sociological approach to understand globalization?

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Helen H. Richardson/The Denver Post

2 Thinking About and Researching the Social World

Learning Objectives

- **2.1** Identify the notable contributions of the most influential classical sociological theorists.
- **2.2** Explain the three major categories of contemporary theories.
- **2.3** Describe the scientific method and various methods of sociological research.
- **2.4** Summarize five key issues in social research.

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Do Sociological Theory and Research Help Us Understand Today's Overheated Politics?

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump, American politics has been far more fraught than usual with political maneuvering, fiery rhetoric, and intense partisanship. Trump has been reported to revel in the chaos that was characteristic of both his campaign and presidency. More importantly, as President Trump has aggressively sought to implement his largely conservative agenda, liberals have ramped up their rhetoric and political opposition to it.

How would a sociologist deal with such highly partisan political action and mutual antagonism? The answer depends to a large extent on which sociologist you ask. Like other scientists, sociologists use theories and do research to make sense of the phenomena they study. A sociologist's perspective on any given issue is therefore framed by the particular explanatory theories and research methods to which he or she subscribes.

Theoretically, some sociologists suggest that partisan political maneuvering and debate, even if impassioned, are a normal aspect of stable government, necessary to resolve issues and move society forward. Others believe that factions fighting to promote their own interests are enacting a simple, if large-scale, power struggle. Still others might focus on the interaction of those involved in the conflict.

In this chapter, we first identify the particular sociological theories that frame each of these perspectives—and many more. Each is the product of decades (and sometimes centuries) of development, and each has undergone testing, modification, and critique by some of sociology's greatest minds. As you learn about the notable sociological thinkers—both classical and contemporary—and the theories they developed, consider the sociopolitical events that shaped them during their lives. Consider too the events that have shaped, and are shaping, you and your own perspectives on the world. Finally, use those perspectives (yours and those of sociologists) to think about U.S. politics today.

Second, we will look at the major research methods in sociology. Some of them are qualitative, involving observation and interviews. Using those methods, a sociologist interested in the political issues mentioned above could, for example, observe an acrimonious debate in the U.S. Senate or interview senators on both sides of that debate. Quantitative methods include surveys of those involved and experiments involving small groups on either side of a major political issue. Instead of doing their own survey on this issue, sociological researchers could reanalyze relevant data collected by the government or other researchers. Another method involves a historical-comparative analysis to see whether political debates in the United States were more or less heated at other times and/or in other parts of the world. Finally, a researcher could analyze the content of the *Congressional* Record, the official record of daily debates and proceedings in the Congress, to study differences in political debates over time.

The current high level of political tension in the United States gives the theorist and the researcher much to think about and to study.

Theorizing the Social World

Theories are sets of interrelated ideas that have a wide range of applications, deal with centrally important issues, and have stood the test of time (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2018). Theories have stood the test of time when they continue to be applicable to the changing social world and have withstood challenges from those who accept other theories. Sociological theories are necessary to make sense of both the innumerable social phenomena and the many highly detailed findings of sociological research. Without such theories, we would have little more than knowledge of isolated bits of the social world. However, once those theories have been created, they can be applied broadly to such areas as the economy, organizations, religion, society as a whole, and even the