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LA SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE SOCIOLOGIE



Second Edition

Reading Sociology

Canadian Perspectives

Edited by

Lorne Tepperman

Angela Kalyta



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Introduction

This is the second edition of a book that started out in 2004 with the goal of teaching introductory sociology students something about the field of sociology in Canada. We believed that a short book of readings could be useful in two-term introductory sociology courses—whether at universities or community colleges—to complement the main textbook.

We also believed that many instructors of introductory sociology at Canadian colleges and universities would ask their students to read such a book if the selection and editing were effective. Such a book would introduce new Canadian sociology to undergraduate students in small, manageable pieces, and it would let professional sociologists know about some of the newer work emerging at Canadian colleges and universities. Ideally, this book would be revised every few years, to reflect new developments in Canadian sociology. All royalties would go to the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA).

The popular response to the first edition has supported our optimistic belief: the book was a success and was used in many classrooms. So now we are back with new articles and a new edition.

Like the first edition, the second edition of *Reading Sociology: Canadian Perspectives* is organized around the major topic of sociology. It includes pieces selected from the best papers submitted and chosen for presentation at the 2010 CSA Conference in Montreal. As with the first edition, we followed a simple course: presenters were asked to send a brief, readable précis of their paper (roughly 2,000 words long). We, the book editors, checked them for quality and readability, and requested speedy revisions where needed. We then assembled the revised papers into a manuscript and provided it to the publisher a mere three months after the conference: something of a record in academic publishing.

Still, the book in your hands is the result of extensive collaboration between the book editors and the authors of the more than 60 pieces it contains, and between the CSA and Oxford University Press. The book departs in only a few ways from what we originally imagined. Specifically, in some sections, we have included shortened versions of papers recently published in the *Canadian Review of Sociology* (CRS)—the journal of the CSA—to round out the selection.

Unlike the first edition, this second one includes a cross-referencing system to help instructors and students. As instructors are well aware, social processes, and sociological inquiry into them, are not easy to categorize into the simple, focused topics of the introductory text book. In fact, the strength of much sociological research is precisely in its revealing of connections between multiple processes. As such, most of the articles included could have been placed into a number of different sections. Conversely, a grouping of four or five articles could never perfectly reflect the depth and variability of research going on in any one topic. But by considering overlap of topics within chapters, readers can get a broader idea of how Canadian sociologists are thinking about culture, globalization, or any of the other topics.

Instructors and students can use the section titles listed under each article title in the table of contents to consider how any one article is connected to other conceptual topics in the book. Instructors: you can use this system to generate discussion questions, and to help you decide what articles to teach and when. So, if, for example, you don't like some of the papers that we have chosen to place in the States and Government section, you can easily locate other articles to substitute. Perhaps one of the other chapters is closer to your research interests, and thus more

interesting to teach. This system simplifies the searching process, saving the time required to read all of the papers. Students: you can use the system when studying. The cross-references can draw your attention to the processes going on in a paper besides the main topic of focus—aspects that you might not have noticed during your first reading. Instead of just trying to memorize what an article is saying, you can ask yourself, What does this chapter tell me about inequality? work? the life course? or whatever other topics the chapter is cross-referenced with. This thinking process can help you remember more about the chapter.

In the long run, being able to read course materials in this way (conceptually) is useful, regardless of what major you end up choosing. Test graders are always impressed when students demonstrate creative and critical thinking by using their course work in unique ways to formulate answers. And as you go on in academia, such creative, lateral thinking is ever more important. It helps you discover the anomalies, contradictions, or outright voids in existing research that inspire essay ideas in later classes, and research ideas later in your academic career. Some of the connections we have drawn are obvious, and others more conceptual. Practise seeing the connections we have noted, and also remember that there are many more possible conceptual connections among the pieces than we have highlighted. Now that you know what we mean by 'seeing the connections' among different pieces, try finding conceptual connections among sections and chapters that we haven't suggested. We hope that this new element in the second edition proves useful to students and instructors alike.

In preparing this book, we have received wonderful co-operation from the authors of the pieces included: thank you, authors, for your patient help. More importantly, thank you for your insight and creativity—as revealed in the pages of this book. The reader will note that many of the included pieces are by new scholars—doctoral candidates and junior faculty members throughout Canada. The energy and imagination of our youngest sociologists gives us a great deal to look forward to in years to come.

To judge from the papers in this book, Canadian sociology is in a state of creative ferment right now. Here we see evidence of many theoretical and methodological approaches, and a smorgasbord of topics, ranging from the obvious to the surprising. Readers of this book will be struck by the energy, curiosity, and ambition of our authors. So sit back, dip into the book, enjoy, and reflect.

In preparing the book, we received great help from Adrianna Robertson, a recent graduate of the University of Toronto, who assisted with correspondence and administration of the project. Adrianna ensured that everything we received was reviewed and revised, and that nothing got lost. She also invested a great deal of time in putting together the glossary and drafting questions. Thank you, Adrianna.

At Oxford University Press, Allison McDonald developed a plan for the book and made sure that we stayed on track; and after her departure, we were guided by Tamara Capar, who was also helpful and encouraging. Thank you, Allison and Tamara. You made the birth of this book easier, and were fun to work with. In the last stages, we were helped and advised by Tara Tovell, who copy-edited the large, unruly manuscript, bringing it into conformity with scholarly expectations. Thank you, Tara, for making this book finally have the appearance (as well as content) of an Oxford University Press book. We enjoyed working with you.

Thanks go, finally, to the various presidents of the CSA—especially Harley Dickinson and John Goyder—who provided the institutional encouragement a project like this needs.

As expected, the editorial collaboration was an education in itself, with each editor learning something from the other. Mostly it was fun, and we hope you enjoy the book!

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Contents

Introduction xiii

Contributors xv

Note: Most papers could have been placed in more than one section. To help students and instructors, we have listed the names of those other sections under each title. For ideas on how to use these tools, see the introduction on page xiii.

PART I What Is Sociology? 1

Chapter 1 Intellectual Citizenship and Incarnation: A Reply to Stanley Fish 3
Peter Eglin

Education, Inequality & Stratification, Work

Chapter 2 Anticipating Burawoy: John Porter's Public Sociology 7
Rick Helmes-Hayes

Chapter 3 Indigenous Spaces in Sociology 11
Patricia D. McGuire

Culture, Inequality & Stratification

Chapter 4 Reading Reflexively 16
Bruce Curtis

States & Government

Chapter 5 Francophone and Anglophone Sociologists in Canada: Diverging,
Converging, or Parallel Trends? 19
Jean-Philippe Warren

Culture, Globalization, Work

Questions for Critical Thought 24

PART II Culture 27

Chapter 6 Maintaining Control? Masculinity and Internet Pornography 29
Steve Garlick

Sex & Gender, Socialization, Environment, Media

Chapter 7 What a Girl Wants, What a Girl Needs: Examining Cultural Change and Ideas
about Gender Equality in Relationship Self-Help Books, 1960–2009 33
Sarah Knudson

Sex & Gender, Families, Media

Chapter 8 The Bonds of Things 39
Stephen Harold Riggins

Inequality & Stratification

- Chapter 9 Nationalism from Below 42
Slobodan Drakulic
Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, States & Government
Questions for Critical Thought 47

PART III Socialization 49

- Chapter 10 Online Interactions among Men Who Have Sex with Men: Situated Performances and Sexual Education 51
Anthony P. Lombardo
Sex & Gender, Culture, Health, Inequality & Stratification, Aging & Life Course, Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Media
- Chapter 11 The Ecology of College Drinking: Revisiting the Role of the Campus Environment on Students' Drinking Patterns 54
Nancy Beauregard, Andrée Demers, and Louis Gliksman
Education, Health, Culture, Deviance
- Chapter 12 Duality and Diversity in the Lives of Immigrant Children: Rethinking the 'Problem of the Second Generation' in Light of Immigrant Autobiographies 61
Nedim Karakayali
Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Culture, Families, Aging & Life Course
- Chapter 13 'Even If I Don't Know What I'm Doing I Can Make It Look Like I Know What I'm Doing': Becoming a Doctor in the 1990s 64
Brenda L. Beagan
Health, Education, Work, Inequality & Stratification
Questions for Critical Thought 69

PART IV Deviance 71

- Chapter 14 Emotions Contests and Reflexivity in the News: Examining Discourse on Youth Crime in Canada 73
Michael C. Adorjan
Culture, Media
- Chapter 15 Dirty Harry and the Station Queens: A Mertonian Analysis of Police Deviance 77
Patrick F. Parnaby and Myra Leyden
Socialization, Culture, Work, Sex & Gender, Media
- Chapter 16 Legislative Approaches to Prostitution: A Critical Introduction 82
Frances M. Shaver
Work, States & Government, Health, Sex & Gender, Inequality & Stratification

- Chapter 17 Moral Panic and the Nasty Girl 87
Christie Barron and Dany Lacombe
Sex & Gender, States & Government, Media
Questions for Critical Thought 91

PART V Families 93

- Chapter 18 The More Things Change . . . the More We Need Child Care: On the Fortieth Anniversary of the *Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women* 95
Patrizia Albanese
Work, Sex & Gender
- Chapter 19 Keeping the Family Intact: The Lived Experience of Sheltered Homeless Families 99
Annette Tézli
Inequality & Stratification, Health
- Chapter 20 Love and Arranged Marriage in India Today: Negotiating Adulthood 104
Nancy S. Netting
Culture, Globalization, Aging & Life Course
- Chapter 21 Gender Equality and Gender Differences: Parenting, Habitus, and Embodiment (The 2008 Porter Lecture) 107
Andrea Doucet
Gender, Inequality & Stratification
Questions for Critical Thought 113

PART VI Education 115

- Chapter 22 The Rise of the 'Research University': Gendered Outcomes 117
Maureen Baker
Sex & Gender, Work, Family, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 23 Education, Ethnonationalism, and Non-violence in Quebec 122
Matthew Lange
Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 24 From International Universities to Diverse Local Communities? International Students in Halifax and Beyond 126
Sinziana Chira
Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Inequality & Stratification, Work
- Chapter 25 Segregation versus Self-Determination: A Black and White Debate on Canada's First Africentric School 132
Shaun Chen
Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Inequality & Stratification
Questions for Critical Thought 136

PART VII Work 139

- Chapter 26 'Suck it Up Buttercup': A Culture of Acceptable Workplace Violence in Group Homes 141
Reuben N. Roth
Health, Aging & Life Course
- Chapter 27 'Let's Be Friends': Working within an Accountability Circuit 145
Marjorie DeVault, Murali Venkatesh, and Frank Ridzi
States & Government, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 28 Profession: A Useful Concept for Sociological Analysis? 150
Tracey L. Adams
States & Government, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 29 Work Hard, Play Hard?: A Comparison of Male and Female Lawyers' Time in Paid and Unpaid Work and Participation in Leisure Activities 154
Jean E. Wallace and Marisa C. Young
Sex & Gender, Families
- Questions for Critical Thought 161**

PART VIII Aging and the Life Course 163

- Chapter 30 Childlessness and Socio-Economic Characteristics: What Does the Canadian 2006 General Social Survey Tell Us? 165
Zenaida Ravanera and Roderic Beaujot
Sex & Gender, Families, Work, Education
- Chapter 31 'Choice' in Filial Care Work: Moving beyond a Dichotomy 171
Laura M. Funk and Karen M. Kobayashi
Family, Work
- Chapter 32 From Divergence to Convergence: The Sex Differential in Life Expectancy in Canada, 1971–2000 176
Frank Trovato and Nirannanilathu Lalu
Sex & Gender, Health
- Questions for Critical Thought 184**

PART IX Health 187

- Chapter 33 Biocitizenship and Mental Health in a Canadian Context 189
Jeff Stepnisky
States & Government, Education, Inequality & Stratification, Deviance
- Chapter 34 Love and Changes in Health 192
Reza Nakhaie and Robert Arnold
Family, Sex & Gender, Culture

- Chapter 35 Menstruation by Choice: The Framing of a Controversial Issue 197
Carol Berenson

Culture, Deviance

- Chapter 36 Placentations 201
Rebecca Scott

Culture

Questions for Critical Thought 206

PART X Inequality and Stratification 209

- Chapter 37 Pay Equity: Yesterday's Issue? 211
Pat Armstrong

Sex & Gender, Work

- Chapter 38 Red Zones, Empty Alleys, and Giant TVs: Low-Income Youths' Spatial Accounts of Olympic Host Cities 214
Jacqueline Kennelly

Globalization, Deviance

- Chapter 39 Parents and Traffic Safety: Unequal Risks and Responsibilities to and from School 219
Arlene Tigar McLaren and Sylvia Parusel

Health, Families, Work, Sex & Gender, Education

- Chapter 40 Municipal Malaise: Neo-liberal Urbanism in Canada 223
Carlo Fanelli and Justin Paulson

States & Government, Work

Questions for Critical Thought 227

PART XI Sex and Gender 229

- Chapter 41 Gold Diggers and Moms: Representations of Women's Identities in Fort McMurray in *Chatelaine* 231
Sara O'Shaughnessy

Work, Inequality & Stratification, Culture, Deviance, Environment, Media

- Chapter 42 Hyperheterosexualization, Masculinity, and HIV/AIDS Challenges in the Caribbean 235
Wesley Crichlow

Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Health, Deviance, Inequality & Stratification

- Chapter 43 Contested Imaginaries: Reading Muslim Women and Muslim Women Reading Back: Transnational Feminist Reading Practices, Pedagogy and Ethical Concerns 238
Jasmin Zine and Lisa Taylor

Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Culture, States & Government, Globalization

- Chapter 44 Spinsters and Suspects: Gender and Moral Citizenship in Poison Pen Mystery Novels 242
Kathy Bischooping and Riley Olstead
Culture, Deviance, Media
- Chapter 45 Fleshy Histories: Fatness, Sex/Gender, and the Medicalized Body in the Nineteenth Century 246
Kristen A. Hardy
Health, Work, Deviance, Immigration, Race & Ethnicity
Questions for Critical Thought 251

PART XII Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity 255

- Chapter 46 Bridging Understandings: Anishinaabe and White Perspectives on the Residential School Apology and Prospects for Reconciliation 257
Jeffrey S. Denis
States & Government, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 47 The Informal Settlement Sector: Broadening the Lens to Understand Newcomer Integration in Hamilton 262
William Shaffir and Vic Satzewich
Work, Socialization, Education
- Chapter 48 The New Relationship between the Social Sciences and the Indigenous Peoples of Canada 266
Cora J. Voyageur
What is Sociology?
- Chapter 49 Changing Canadian Immigration and Foreign Worker Programs: Implications for Social Cohesion 270
Alan Simmons
States & Government, Work, Education, Inequality & Stratification
- Chapter 50 Voting across Immigrant Generations 276
Monica Boyd and Emily Laxer
States & Government, Socialization
Questions for Critical Thought 281

PART XIII Globalization 285

- Chapter 51 United Nations and Early Post-war Development: Assembling World Order 287
Suzan Ilcan and Rob Aitken
States & Government, Immigration, Race & Ethnicity
- Chapter 52 Policing Terrorism in the Post-9/11 Era: Critical Challenges and Concerns 291
Claudio Colaguori and Carlos Torres
States & Government, Immigration, Race & Ethnicity, Deviance

Chapter 53	Infectious Disease, Environmental Change, and Social Control 295 <i>Harris Ali</i> Health, States & Government
Chapter 54	Does a Place Like This Still Matter? Remaking Economic Identity in Post-Resource Communities 298 <i>Nathan Young</i> Work, Environment Questions for Critical Thought 303
PART XIV States and Government 305	
Chapter 55	Counting, Caste, and Confusion during Census Enumeration in Colonial India 307 <i>Kevin Walby and Michael Haan</i> Immigration, Race & Ethnicity
Chapter 56	Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937–1982 311 <i>Dominique Clément</i> Inequality & Stratification
Chapter 57	The Economy and Public Opinion on Welfare Spending in Canada 314 <i>Robert Andersen and Josh Curtis</i> Work, Inequality & Stratification
Chapter 58	Social Europe and Eastern Europe: Post-Socialist Scholars Grapple with New Models of Social Policy 320 <i>Ivanka Knezevic</i> Culture Questions for Critical Thought 325
PART XV Environment 327	
Chapter 59	'How Can You Decide about Us without Us?': A Canadian Catastrophe in Copenhagen 329 <i>Sherrie M. Steiner</i> States & Government, Globalization, Inequality & Stratification
Chapter 60	The Production of Modernity in Classic American Whale Hunting 333 <i>Katja Neves</i> Culture, Inequality & Stratification
Chapter 61	'Keep it Wild, Keep it Local': Comparing News Media and the Internet as Sites for Environmental Movement Activism for Jumbo Pass, British Columbia 337 <i>Mark C.J. Stoddart and Laura MacDonald</i> States & Government, Culture, Media

- Chapter 62 Regulating Agricultural Biotechnology in Canada: Paradoxes and Conflicts of a Closed System 343
Wilhelm Peekhaus

States & Government

- Chapter 63 The Science and Politics of Polar Ice 348
Mark Vardy

States & Government

Questions for Critical Thought 353

PART XVI Media 355

- Chapter 64 Fallen Women and Rescued Girls: Social Stigma and Media Narratives of the Sex Industry in Victoria, BC, from 1980 to 2005 357
Helga Kristin Hallgrimsdottir, Rachel Phillips, and Cecilia Benoit

Sex & Gender, Work, Health, Inequality & Stratification, Culture

- Chapter 65 Feminist Activists Online: A Study of the PAR-L Research Network 363
Michèle Ollivier, Wendy Robbins, Diane Beauregard, Jennifer Brayton, and Geneviève Sauvé

Inequality & Stratification

- Chapter 66 'Keeping Young Minds Sharp': Children's Cognitive Stimulation and the Rise of Parenting Magazines, 1959–2003 368
Linda Quirke

Aging & Life Course, Inequality & Stratification, Education, Culture

- Chapter 67 Packaging Protest: Media Coverage of Indigenous People's Collective Action 374
Rima Wilkes, Catherine Corrigan-Brown, and Daniel J. Myers

Race & Ethnicity, Immigration, Inequality & Stratification, Culture

Questions for Critical Thought 381

Glossary 383

Credits 391

Part I

What Is Sociology?

Like all scientists, sociologists have their own set of theoretical and methodological tools for studying the world. When we are working through assumptions about *how the world is*, we are dealing with theory. All of us use theories every day. We need accurate assumptions about how the world works to navigate it—to move toward the things we want and avoid the things that we don't. They are tools, like flashlights: amid the mess of reality, they highlight where we should look for causal explanations. For example, you may have chosen to come to university on the assumption that a post-secondary education would help you get a better job.

All sciences have basic theoretical foundations that guide them to examine some causal relationships over others. For example, psychologists explain human action by referring to how the human brain works. They may talk about biological processes like the nervous system, or chemical and hormonal reactions, by way of explanation. Sociologists' theoretical commitment to social context leads them to look at very different things, among them, cultural understandings and practices, positions within a social structure and the relationships that bind them, and distribution of opportunities and constraints.

But the relationship between the external reality around us and the ideas that we have about it is not a simple one. Our ideas—our theories—can be more or less accurate. Just because you assume that school will get you a good job does not make it so. As humans, much of our success is due to being able to constantly go back and forth between theories and reality, bringing our ideas about how the world works closer to how it actually does work so we can act more effectively on it. When we are doubting *how we know what we know*, we are dealing with *methodology*. The way that science resolves these doubts is through empirical observation. For this, we develop methods for extracting information from the world around us. Throughout this book, you will read articles that use various sources of data to make an argument about the social world, including statistical surveys, interviews, historical documents, and cultural texts (newspapers, songs, etc).

But the challenge isn't over once we have information. After that, we must interpret what it means—what it tells us about the world we are trying to understand. In this first section of the book, Bruce Curtis reminds us that data, even seemingly straightforward statistics, do not explain themselves. The sociological interpretation of statistics is always a narrative construction, and sometimes an ideological act. Alone, data are nothing more than fragments of reality that have been snipped apart for us

to more easily see and think about. They are merely pieces of the puzzle. When we are trying to put the pieces together into a bigger picture, we must use theoretical assumptions. Curtis argues that we need to uphold constant vigilance, or in his words, be reflexive: we need to remain willing to interrogate our assumptions of what our data represent and how to make sense of it. We too are social beings, and our context provides us with interpretive habits that we must be aware of. Jean-Philippe Warren helps to make this point by exploring how French- and English-Canadian sociologists produce very different kinds of work, based on different methodological and theoretical practices. Patricia McGuire ponders how mainstream sociological assumptions and practices are rooted in a European way of knowing and making sense of the world. She explores how sociology might be enriched by Aboriginal ways of knowing. There was a widespread feeling among conference attendees that McGuire was at the 'cutting edge' of indigenous studies and was saying much of what needed to be said, however simply.

But there is an even bigger problem of interpretation. We said above that knowing the world makes it easier to act on it effectively, to manipulate the external world in a way that produces a needed result. This is a problem for sociologists: what information should we look for? How should we use the information we find? This is a *normative* dilemma. Doctors are privileged by having a unified idea of the goal of their work: preserving human health—prolonging life, postponing death, curing illness, etc. Few humans would deny this is a worthwhile goal. However, people are often divided about the goals of sociological research, so there can be large political implications when sociologists uncover evidence that favours a particular side. Unlike the molecules, masses, and tissues that other scientists study, our subject matter can hear what we say about it, and use that information to change itself. And so, sociologists are forced to consider the broader social implications of their findings. In doing so, they must decide whether they want to uncover information that works toward one result or another, as well as which discussions they want to stay out of. For sociologists, there is no way out of this normative dilemma.

Throughout the book, we see debates about which methods and theories best clarify specific phenomena. However, in this section, we devote most of our attention to the normative debate about purpose: namely, what is the ultimate goal of sociology (and sociologists)? Eglin describes three different perspectives on the role of the sociologist. Helmes-Hayes, almost by way of illustration, explores the contribution of one prominent Canadian sociologist, John Porter, reminding us of the important role sociologists can play as public intellectuals. Warren explains how and why French- and English-Canadian sociologies have diverged in the later decades of the twentieth century. McGuire displays her commitment to a broader social cause, advocating for an Aboriginal sociology that could create information that helps rather than hinders Aboriginal communities. Curtis reminds us that statistics never speak for themselves—in fact, we have to speak for them; and Warren explains why different communities of sociologists tend to tell different kinds of stories.