**INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Early in the morning, a group of male warriors creeps out of the village and heads for the savannah. They must be careful not to wake the other members of the tribe, lest they be accosted by the women or elders. Once they have regrouped on the plains, the warriors begin preparing for the hunt. The eldest members of the group choose the most qualified hunters, known as *ilmeluaya*, meaning men who are not afraid of death. Warriors who are not selected are sent home in shame.

Once the select group has been chosen, the warriors begin the hunt. They scour the plains for footprints or droppings, and search for dense bushes or tall termite mounds that might conceal their resting prey. The search can take ten minutes to ten hours, but once a lion is found, the warriors quickly move into place.

Selected hunters ring bells and rattle the brush, forcing the lion away from its protected hiding spot. The goal is to face the beast one-on-one on the open savannah. There will be no tricks or cheating, simply warrior against warrior. If all goes as planned, the lion will be brought down with a single spear.

When the warriors return to the village with their trophy, it is the beginning of a weeklong celebration. Although the hunt must be planned in secret, news of the warriors’ success spreads quickly, and all village members come to congratulate the victors. The warrior who wounded the lion first is honoured and given a nickname based on his accomplishment. Songs are sung about the warrior, and from then on he will be remembered and acknowledged throughout the community, even among other tribes.

To the Maasai, lion hunting is about more than food and security. It is a way to strengthen the bonds of community and the hierarchy among the hunters. Disputes over power are settled before the hunt, and roles are reinforced at the end, with the bravest warrior receiving the lion’s tail as a trophy (Maasai Association 2011). Although Maasai society is very different from contemporary Canada, both can be seen as different ways of expressing the human need to cooperate and live together in order to survive.

**4.1. TYPES OF SOCIETIES**

[](http://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2013/12/FIgure_04_01_01a.jpg)

Figure 4.2. Maasai men are hunting with shepherd’s staves and spears. How does technology influence a society’s daily occupations? (Photo courtesy of Abir Anwar/flickr)

Maasai villagers, Iranians, Canadians—each is a society. But what does this mean? Exactly what is a society? In sociological terms, *society* refers to a group of people who live in a definable territory and share the same culture. On a broader scale, society consists of the people and institutions around us, our shared beliefs, and our cultural ideas.

Sociologist Gerhard Lenski (1924–) defined societies in terms of their technological sophistication. As a society advances, so does its use of technology. Societies with rudimentary technology are at the mercy of the fluctuations of their environment, while industrialized societies have more control over the impact of their surroundings and thus develop different cultural features. This distinction is so important that sociologists generally classify societies along a spectrum of their level of industrialization, from preindustrial to industrial to postindustrial.

**Preindustrial Societies**

Before the Industrial Revolution and the widespread use of machines, societies were small, rural, and dependent largely on local resources. Economic production was limited to the amount of labour a human being could provide, and there were few specialized occupations. The very first occupation was that of hunter-gatherer.

**Hunter-Gatherer**

**Hunter-gatherer societies** demonstrate the strongest dependence on the environment of the various types of preindustrial societies. As the basic structure of all human society until about 10,000–12,000 years ago, these groups were based around kinship or tribes. Hunter-gatherers relied on their surroundings for survival—they hunted wild animals and foraged for uncultivated plants for food. When resources became scarce, the group moved to a new area to find sustenance, meaning they were nomadic. These societies were common until several hundred years ago, but today only a few hundred remain in existence, such as indigenous Australian tribes sometimes referred to as “aborigines,” or the Bambuti, a group of pygmy hunter-gatherers residing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hunter-gatherer groups are quickly disappearing as the world’s population explodes.

**Pastoral**

Changing conditions and adaptations led some societies to rely on the domestication of animals where circumstances permitted. Roughly 7,500 years ago, human societies began to recognize their ability to tame and breed animals and to grow and cultivate their own plants. **Pastoral societies** rely on the domestication of animals as a resource for survival. Unlike earlier hunter-gatherers who depended entirely on existing resources to stay alive, **pastoral groups were able to breed livestock for food, clothing, and transportation, creating a surplus of goods.** Herding, or pastoral, societies remained nomadic because they were forced to follow their animals to fresh feeding grounds. Around the time that pastoral societies emerged, **specialized occupations began to develop**, and societies commenced trading with local groups.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS: THE BIG PICTURE**

**The Bedouin**

Throughout Northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula live the Bedouin, modern-day nomads. While many different tribes of Bedouin exist, they all share similarities. Members migrate from one area to another, usually in conjunction with the seasons, settling near oases in the hot summer months. They tend to herds of goats, camels, and sheep, and they harvest dates in the fall (Kjeilen N.d.).

In recent years, there has been increased conflict between the Bedouin society and more modernized societies. National borders are harder to cross now than in the past, making the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouin difficult. The clash of traditions among Bedouin and other residents has led to discrimination and abuse. Bedouin communities frequently have high poverty and unemployment rates, and their members have little formal education (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005).

The future of the Bedouin is uncertain. Government restrictions on farming and residence are slowly forcing them to integrate into modern society. Although their ancestors have traversed the deserts for thousands of years, the days of the nomadic Bedouin may be at an end.

[](http://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2013/12/Figure_04_01_03a.jpg)

Figure 4.3. This photo shows a Bedouin family from eastern Oman. (Photo courtesy of Tanenhaus/Wikimedia Commons)

**BREAKOUT SESSION**

**Amish Societies and Bedouin Societies**

**How will their society respond to the constraints modern society places on a nomadic lifestyle?**

**Horticultural**

Around the same time that pastoral societies were on the rise, another type of society developed, based on the newly developed capacity for people to grow and cultivate plants. Previously, the depletion of a region’s crops or water supply forced pastoral societies to relocate in search of food sources for their livestock. **Horticultural societies** formed in areas where rainfall and other conditions allowed them to grow stable crops. They were similar to hunter-gatherers in that they largely depended on the environment for survival, but since they did not have to abandon their location to follow resources, they were able to start permanent settlements. This created more stability and more material goods and became the basis for the first revolution in human survival.

**Agricultural**

While pastoral and horticultural societies used small, temporary tools such as digging sticks or hoes, *agricultural societies* relied on permanent tools for survival. Around 3000 BCE., an explosion of new technology known as the Agricultural Revolution made farming possible—and profitable. Farmers learned to rotate the types of crops grown on their fields and to reuse waste products such as fertilizer, leading to better harvests and bigger surpluses of food. New tools for digging and harvesting were made of metal, making them more effective and longer lasting. Human settlements grew into towns and cities, and particularly bountiful regions became centres of trade and commerce.

This is also the age in which people had the time and comfort to engage in more contemplative and thoughtful activities, such as music, poetry, and philosophy. This period became referred to as the “dawn of civilization” by some because of the development of leisure and arts. Craftspeople were able to support themselves through the production of creative, decorative, or thought-provoking aesthetic objects and writings.

As agricultural techniques made the production of surpluses possible, social classes and power structures emerged. Those with the power to appropriate the surpluses were able to dominate the society. Classes of nobility and religious elites developed. Difference in social standing between men and women appeared. Slavery was institutionalized. As cities expanded, ownership and protection of resources became a pressing concern and militaries became more prominent.

**Feudal**

In Europe, the ninth century gave rise to **feudal societies**. These societies contained a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership, protection, and mutual obligation. The nobility, known as lords, rewarded knights or vassals by granting them pieces of land. In return for the resources that the land provided, vassals promised to fight for their lords.

[](http://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2013/12/Harold-e1413823367241.jpg)

Figure 4.4. Tapestry from the 1070s in which King Harold swears an oath to become the vassal of Duke William of Normandy (Photo courtesy of Myrabella/Wikimedia Commons)

These individual pieces of land, known as fiefdoms, were cultivated by the lower class of serfs. In return for maintaining and working the land, serfs were guaranteed a place to live and protection from outside enemies. Power was handed down through family lines, with serf families serving lords for generations and generations. Ultimately, the social and economic system of feudalism was surpassed by the rise of capitalism and the technological advances of the industrial era.

**Industrial Society**

In the 18th century, Europe experienced a dramatic rise in technological invention, ushering in an era known as the Industrial Revolution. What made this period remarkable was the number of new inventions that influenced people’s daily lives. Within a generation, tasks that had until this point required months of labour became achievable in a matter of days. Before the Industrial Revolution, work was largely person- or animal-based, relying on human workers or horses to power mills and drive pumps. In 1782, James Watt and Matthew Boulton created a steam engine that could do the work of 12 horses by itself.

Steam power began appearing everywhere. Instead of paying artisans to painstakingly spin wool and weave it into cloth, people turned to textile mills that produced fabric quickly at a better price, and often with better quality. Rather than planting and harvesting fields by hand, farmers were able to purchase mechanical seeders and threshing machines that caused agricultural productivity to soar. Products such as paper and glass became available to the average person, and the quality and accessibility of education and health care soared. Gas lights allowed increased visibility in the dark, and towns and cities developed a nightlife.

One of the results of increased wealth, productivity, and technology was the rise of urban centres. Serfs and peasants, expelled from their ancestral lands, flocked to the cities in search of factory jobs, and the populations of cities became increasingly diverse. The new generation became less preoccupied with maintaining family land and traditions, and more focused on survival. Some were successful in acquiring wealth and achieving upward mobility for themselves and their family. Others lived in devastating poverty and squalor. Whereas the class system of feudalism had been rigid, and resources for all but the highest nobility and clergy scarce, under capitalism social mobility (both upward and downward) became possible.

It was during the 18th and 19th centuries of the Industrial Revolution that sociology was born. Life was changing quickly and the long-established traditions of the agricultural eras did not apply to life in the larger cities. Masses of people were moving to new environments and often found themselves faced with horrendous conditions of filth, overcrowding, and poverty. Social science emerged in response to the unprecedented scale of the social problems of modern society.

It was during this time that power moved from the hands of the aristocracy and “old money” to the new class of rising bourgeoisie who amassed fortunes in their lifetimes. A new cadre of financiers and industrialists (like Donald Smith [1st Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal] and George Stephen [1st Baron Mount Stephen] in Canada) became the new power players, using their influence in business to control aspects of government as well. Eventually, concerns over the exploitation of workers led to the formation of labour unions and laws that set mandatory conditions for employees. Although the introduction of new technology at the end of the 20th century ended the industrial age, much of our social structure and social ideas—like the nuclear family, left-right political divisions, and time standardization—have a basis in industrial society.

[](http://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2013/12/George-Stephen-1865.jpg)

Figure 4.5. George Stephen, one of the Montreal consortium who financed and built the Canadian Pacific Railway, grew up the son of a carpenter in Scotland. He was titled 1st Baron Mount Stephen in 1891. The Canadian Pacific Railway was a risky financial venture but as Canada’s first transcontinental railroad played a fundamental role in the settlement and development of west. (Photo courtesy of McCord Museum, File no. I-14179.1 Wikimedia Commons)

**Postindustrial Society**

**Information societies**, sometimes known as postindustrial or digital societies, are a recent development. Unlike **industrial societies** that are rooted in the production of material goods, information societies are based on the production of information and services.

Digital technology is the steam engine of information societies, and high tech companies such as Apple and Microsoft are its version of railroad and steel manufacturing corporations. Since the economy of information societies is driven by knowledge and not material goods, power lies with those in charge of creating, storing, and distributing information. Members of a postindustrial society are likely to be employed as sellers of services—software programmers or business consultants, for example—instead of producers of goods. Social classes are divided by access to education, since without technical and communication skills, people in an information society lack the means for success.

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