

### Skills Focus

Analyzing data is an important part of sociological research. Review the data from the Vanier Institute below, then analyze it. What trends do you notice? What conclusions can you draw?

## Family

As you know, the family is the primary agent of socialization and the most important institution in Canadian society. Like all institutions, it is continuously adapting to an ever-changing population. The nuclear family was considered the ideal for many generations. Today, Canadians are challenging the notion that nuclear families are the only avenue through which children can be properly socialized. As a result of changing attitudes toward parenting and marriage, the family as an institution has grown to include lone-parent families, same-sex families, and common-law and blended families. More than any other institution, the family has demonstrated that diversity and tolerance are possible in a society as complex as Canada. Even with such remarkable changes, the institution of the family remains a dominant force directing Canadian society. This is true for most cultures around the world, too. The family's influence is hard to dispute.

In all cultures, the institution of the family is responsible for promoting universal functions, such as regulating reproduction and sexual behaviour. It is also responsible for socializing and teaching the youngest members social norms. From day to day, the family helps develop lifelong lessons, such as the importance of respect and obedience. These skills are further explored as children enter school. In this way, the family can be seen as a blueprint for social norms and beliefs. In addition to all its social and practical functions, the family is responsible for the economic maintenance and recreation of its members.

According to the Vanier Institute of the Family, the changing face of Canadian families has left an indelible mark on whom we are as a nation. It also says something about our social values. We have fashioned a dynamic new identity based on a new definition of family. In its analysis of the 2006 Census, the Vanier Institute tracked the changes to the family for over two decades (see the chart below). The nuclear family is clearly not the only option for Canadians today.

### VANIER INSTITUTE OF THE FAMILY AND FAMILY TYPES

#### Percentage Distribution of Census Families by Type (1981–2006)

	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
<b>Families without children* at home</b>						
Married couples	28.2%	28.2%	29.2%	28.6%	29.0%	29.9%
Common-law couples	3.7	4.5	5.8	6.2	7.5	8.5
<b>Families with children* at home</b>						
Married couples	55.0	51.9	48.1	45.1	41.4	38.7
Common-law couples	1.9	2.7	4.0	5.5	6.3	6.9
Lone-parent families	11.3	12.7	13.0	14.5	15.7	15.9
Same-sex couples as % of all couples	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.8%

\* Children of any age who live in the home

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population

The family is the only institution to use nurturance and emotional support as a basis for all its relationships. Other institutions such as religion do so in a limited manner, but the family's ability to nurture self-esteem, creativity, and self-confidence sets it apart. In many ways, the family is the foundation on which well-adjusted young adults emerge ready and capable of fully participating in other institutions and society itself (see Figure 9-32).



↑ FIGURE 9-32 There are many types of Canadian families. How do you define *family*?

- ❓ How does the family act as a blueprint for membership in society? What do the Vanier Institute's findings suggest about changes to the Canadian family?

## Religion

On a personal level, religion can serve a number of purposes. It can provide an individual with a sense of serenity and calm, help celebrate important rituals of life, and provide support in times of grief and personal tragedy. On an intellectual and philosophical level, it can help explain the origins of the world, the universal order that governs it, and the presence of good and evil.

For many individuals, religious beliefs are developed in the family starting at a very young age through initiation rites, such as a Catholic baptism, a Hindu ear-piercing ceremony (Karnavedha), or a Jewish bris. Although different, these ceremonies serve to teach the young faithful about the rituals and beliefs of their religion. Throughout the course of his or her life, a worshipper will attend prayer services, observe important rites, and learn sacred scripture. In this way, religion helps the worshipper explain natural phenomena, such as birth and death.

### Connecting Sociology to Anthropology

From an anthropological perspective, religion helps people to understand ultimate questions, such as why are we here? What is death? Why does evil happen to some people and not to others? How does this compare to the sociological perspective of religion?

In the social arena, religion helps individuals to develop charity, compassion, and altruism. Most of the world's well-known religions are based on these elements. For many cultures around the world, religion is a deeply integrated part of the fabric of society. As such, it exerts a great deal of influence on other institutions as well. In one way or another, organized religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism have been known to create social cohesion as well as social conflict among their believers and their society.

As social institutions, religious organizations serve a social purpose. Many host charity events and community meals and perform public service. The basis for these activities is charity and goodwill. As such, they are not restricted to members of that specific religious organization but are extended to the community as a whole. For many, these gatherings help alleviate the stress and alienation that secular life may bring. In this sense, religion is a constructive force in society. It is also quite common for religious groups to come together to promote peaceful resolution to global issues and, closer to home, work in conjunction with government agencies to alleviate social inequality and injustice locally.

Before 1971, less than 1 percent of Canadians ticked the “no religion” box on national surveys. Two generations later, nearly a quarter of the population, or 23 percent, say they aren't religious. A look at the youngest Canadians suggests the transformation is gathering speed. In 2002, 34 percent of 15 to 29 year olds said religion was highly important to them. Data from Statistics Canada's 2009 General Social Survey show that number tumbled to 22 percent. This demographic shift raises profound questions about our social values, the fate of our cultural heritage, the institutions that once formed the bedrock of our communities, and access to political power. See the chart below.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND ATTENDANCE AMONG CANADIANS AGED 15 AND OLDER

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2004	Percentage Point Change 1985–2004
Population aged 15 and over	100	100	100	100	100	...
No religious affiliation	12	12	15	20	19	7
<b>Frequency of attendance</b>						
Not in the last 12 months	19	23	27	21	25	5
Infrequently <sup>1</sup>	28	28	24	28	25	-3
At least monthly	41	37	33	31	32	-9

<sup>1</sup> Attended religious services, but only a few times a year or less frequently

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey

**?** How does religion promote social cohesion? What patterns do you notice in the chart? Do you think the data in the chart above holds true for all religions?

## Education

On the surface, it would appear that the purpose of going to school is to get good grades by completing your homework and other assignments. That is the most basic purpose of school, but if you consider education an institution that extends beyond the four walls of your classroom, you will realize that it is an institution steeped in traditions, rituals, and rites of passage for many youth all over the world. Of course, not all systems are the same and not all countries value the same set of skills or body of knowledge. Wherever you are a student, the purpose of education is to transmit knowledge, skills, and social values from one generation to the next. The knowledge and skills you learn in school are building blocks for the next phase of your life: entry into the workforce. For some students, that part of education may not be that apparent, while others are more aware of the connection. Moreover, education provides a number of social and life management skills that are meant to lead to students' independence.

### Skills Focus

Use the evidence in the table on this page or the previous page to write a thesis statement and a paragraph that could be used as part of a report. Be sure to cite the evidence in your paragraph using APA conventions.

### Education's Other Functions

Consider the following scenario. Evan and Emmanuel are two students in the same Ontario high school. They share all of the same classes and participate in many of the same extracurricular activities the school offers. Although the goal of education is to instill knowledge and skills that are upheld in society at large, Evan's and Emmanuel's experiences may differ widely. Perhaps Evan is part of a different social class and Emmanuel is part of a visible minority. Both boys bring their individual and cultural differences to the school community, and, as a result, the educational system must respond to those needs equitably. Education must offer both boys access to the same resources and serve them equally as they head out into the workforce. At all levels, education must represent all groups fairly and equitably. Toward that end, important features are entrenched in the institution of education. So, on any given day, both Evan and Emmanuel, and other students like them, are exposed to the same important features. See the chart below for an explanation of the features.

FEATURES OF EDUCATION	
Defining Feature of Education	Explanation
Socialization and roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students learn about punctuality and respect for authority and others.</li></ul>
Discipline and obedience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students come to accept and respect the authority of teachers and rules of the school.</li><li>• Students learn to use self-control in their dealings with peers and others.</li><li>• Students learn to take responsibility for their own actions, including actions taken against others.</li></ul>
Knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students study and complete assignments.</li><li>• Students meet all the expectations outlined in the curriculum and interact with the material critically.</li></ul>
Competition and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities to develop healthy competition.</li><li>• Students must contribute to classroom activities such as debates to help foster collaboration and teamwork.</li></ul>



↑ **FIGURE 9-33** How will technology affect the future of education? What should stay the same? What should change?

### The Future of Education

During the 1950s when the television became a household fixture in North America, it was widely believed that television would revolutionize many aspects of life, including education. Many social commentators saw “old-fashioned” schools becoming a thing of the past as the television craze took hold. More than 60 years later, the “old-fashioned” schools are still with us.

Today the same concerns over technology are surfacing again. This time it is computer technology that stands to threaten the “old-fashioned” system. Many people believe that this is one battle education may actually lose unless educational experts and academics find a way to marry the two traditions. The key is to reconcile the current state of education with the huge potential of technology. As you learned in Chapter 7, some schools are cracking down on cell phone use, but some experts are trying to find more ways to incorporate the technology that has come to define the twenty-first-century learner (see Figure 9-33). This example shows that the structure of our educational system may not adequately reflect the rapid technological changes occurring today. Perhaps the future of

education involves integrating computer technology as a means of building the knowledge and skills that will lead to career paths yet to be developed. Not surprisingly, many experts tell us that we need to continue to honour the oral tradition and communal nature of schools as they have always existed. In other words, there is room for both the old and the new in our classrooms. The concept of socio-economic equity comes into play here as we consider who has access to this technology and who does not, and whether this unequal accessibility suggests different outcomes for children. For example, students who are less familiar with the technology used to present material may be at a disadvantage, and not all students have equal access to this technology at home. Even if there is a computer, it may have to be shared by more than one sibling.

❓ What are the key features of the Canadian educational system? How does technology help you learn? What are some other challenges to using technology in the classroom?

### Government

Every human society is based on a guiding principle that is upheld by authority figures—religious or secular—and by the general population. The guiding principle for most countries is a political idea. For example, the fundamental principle around which Canada was built is democracy. In China or Cuba, the guiding principle is Communism.

Aside from the political idea, society is also defined by distinct roles and obligations that help advance the fundamental beliefs of its members. Laws may be written to facilitate appropriate social conduct for the people (see Figure 9-34). This process is often referred to as the *institutionalization of norms*. Laws give the government ultimate authority to govern people’s social



↑ **FIGURE 9-34** Laws maintain social order, and those who break them are punished. But what if the social order is oppressive to one or more groups?

interaction and to intervene when individuals violate the norm. To some people, this power may appear constrictive, but without laws, society would certainly degenerate into chaos. Our elected officials are given the power to make decisions for society, and we, the citizens, grant them that authority by means of our political vote. As you learned in Chapter 6, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides the standard for which many cases are determined. The role of government in society is multifaceted, and law enforcement represents only a small portion.

Government institutions must provide for the social and economic welfare of their people. With its many social programs and policies, the Canadian government tries to ensure that the most vulnerable and needy receive the support they need. Through these incentives and based on appropriate policies, the government hopes to alleviate social inequalities. However, social inequalities in Canada are on the rise among certain groups, including Aboriginal populations and other marginalized groups. The government also oversees other institutions, such as family and religion.

### Skills Focus

Draft an outline of a formal report representing the teens' side of the tanning-salon issue, which you might deliver to the Minister of Health. Include a strong introduction and thesis, followed by solid arguments supported by evidence. Draw valid conclusions about government involvement in the issue.

## POINT/COUNTERPOINT

### Use of Tanning Salons by Minors

In some cases, the government, through its ministries, suggests proper modes of behaviour and restricts access of certain social groups to certain privileges.

### Should the Government Ban Tanning Salons for People Under 18?

#### Government Needs to Protect Individuals

- Not all parents can make informed decisions for minors about the consequences. For example, some parents don't know that tanning salons increase the risk of melanoma by 75 percent for people under 30.
- We have laws prohibiting minors from buying cigarettes and consuming alcohol.
- New Brunswick, some U.S. states, and some other countries already have laws that restrict the use of tanning salons.
- New research is not always communicated to the public.

#### Individuals Can Make Their Own Decisions

- Parents can make decisions for minors for health care or tanning salons.
- Minors can go to a beach or pool and stay in the sun as long as they or their parents permit without any legislation.
- If parents and teens know the risk, they can make informed choices on their own.
- Tanning salons are legal.

Source: *The Globe and Mail*, July 18, 2010.

### QUESTIONS

1. Create a mind map of social institutions and explain how they relate personally to yourself. Add a third layer that demonstrates a possible scenario if the institution did not exist.
2. How and why does government oversee the family and religion? Debate the need for more or less government involvement in these social institutions.

### Open for Debate

Politicians need votes to be elected. In order to vote, however, you need an address. This makes voting difficult for homeless individuals, so they are less able to vote for politicians who will best represent their interests. Is this system fair?

### Medicine and the Military

While all social institutions work to satisfy the needs of their members, there are some with specific mandates to keep society safe, whether from pandemics or from the threat of violence from an internal or external force. The health care system and the military both serve a safety function in Canadian society (see Figure 9-35). Think about the recent outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus and the Ministry of Health's response shortly thereafter. A massive effort was undertaken to get the vaccine to as many Canadians as possible. Community centres suspended activities so that local residents could receive the vaccine in makeshift clinics.

Canada's health care system consists of 13 provincial and territorial programs. The federal, provincial, and territorial governments work together to manage and deliver health care to Canadians. It is considered universal health care because the system is based on need, rather than the ability to pay, and is available to all residents of Canada.

Similarly, the Canadian military exists to preserve our way of life and to keep our nation safe from external threats. In our peacekeeping capacity, we extend our valued notion of peace and safety to countries around the world in their greatest moments of crisis. Canadian peacekeepers provide humanitarian relief after natural disasters, protect civilians during conflicts, help organize elections, and perform many other functions.

#### Medicine

- Provides health care to all members and prevents disease among population
- Preserves life
- Provides proactive solutions to extend life and ensure a high standard of living for the elderly



#### Military

- Protects a nation from internal and external threats
- Assists in relief efforts around the world and maintains peace
- Promotes honour, patriotism, and nationalism among the population
- Teaches obedience and discipline to soldiers
- Members act as ambassadors around the world for our way of life and beliefs
- Provides domestic protection (e.g., in response to natural disasters)



↑ **FIGURE 9-35** The military and medical communities keep society safe. Which of these has the most impact on your life?

❓ Do we need more or less government involvement in society? Who gains and who loses in each of these choices?

## Economy

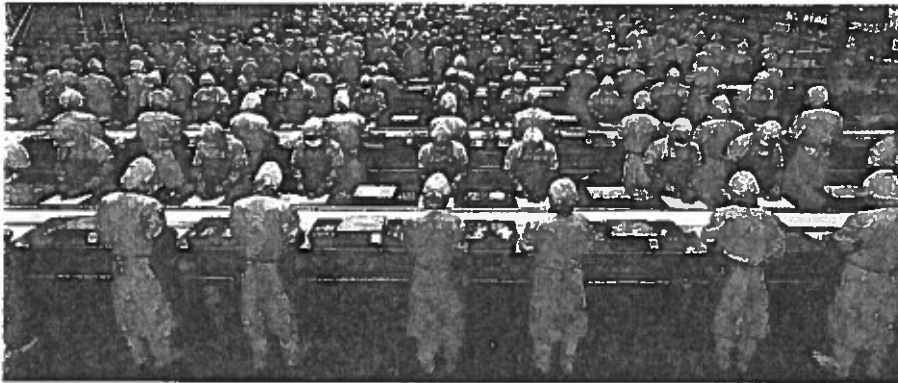
A country's economic institution is closely related to the nation's government. The economy serves a number of important functions, such as the production of goods and the organization of the labour force. The economy and its related institutions, such as small businesses and large corporations, are concerned with the supply and demand of goods and efficient methods to produce profit. In many countries, banks are the most powerful economic institutions. They are the keepers of the nation's currency. The strength of a nation's currency is an important indicator of how a country's economy is performing.

On a more human level, economic institutions provide society with appropriate examples of leadership styles and teach the importance of honesty and a strong work ethic among its employees and workers. They also highlight the importance of ownership and personal financial success in society.

In sociological terms, there are two distinct views about the role of workers in the modern-day economy. The first is somewhat pessimistic and sees the workers as insignificant mechanisms in the larger, more important machine. This view dehumanizes the efforts of the individual. The second, more optimistic view contends that the workers are an integral part of the success of any company and, with encouragement and praise, will produce outstanding results (see Figure 9-36).

### Skills Focus

Stating your hypothesis clearly is important when you write reports. Develop a hypothesis about the role of workers in Canadian society. What kind of study could you conduct to test your hypothesis?



← **FIGURE 9-36** Workers in a Chinese chicken factory and at the Googleplex headquarters in Australia. What message does each workplace send to its workers?

**?** What should an employer provide for its employees? What does an employer provide that social institutions do not?