1 WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

This chapter provides an introduction to the study of sociology and gives you an overview of some of the basic concepts you are likely to encounter in your reading in sociology. It explains how and why developing a 'sociological imagination' in thinking about social life is useful if you would like to understand the world you live in and how it is changing. It also outlines how sociology has changed over time in response to changes in the social context. It ends with some observations on the more recent concerns of sociologists in the contemporary world, with particular reference to Australia.

By the end of the chapter, you will have a better understanding of a number of concepts, topics and issues, including:

- the sociological imagination
- social construction, structure, culture and agency
- socialisation and identity, modernity, colonialism, settler-colonialism and post-colonialism, globalisation and deglobalisation
- the range of sociological perspectives: sociology as science, politics or interpretation
- feminism
- postmodernity
- the historical development of sociology within changing social contexts
- public sociology
- Australian sociology in the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Walk into any café, pub or restaurant today and you are likely to see a couple or a group of friends sitting at a table not talking to each other. Instead, they will be gazing at their mobile phone screens, texting, emailing or playing a game. Every so often, someone will lift their head to share what they are viewing with their companions.

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Today, people around the world spend an enormous amount of time connecting through technology, shopping, playing games, sharing photos and music, looking up information and other activities made possible by the expanding range of 'apps' available for smartphones. Convergence technology is making smartphones the primary means of using the internet and they will soon outnumber computers on the planet.

But what does this new relationship with technology mean for our sense of self, our relationships with each other and the type of society we live in? It is not really possible to answer such questions without paying attention to the social dimensions of this kind of technological change, without the help of a 'sociological imagination'. The technology is new, but we need to ask whether our experience of it is actually all that different from the way people in the past experienced dramatic changes in means of communication—the printing press, radio, television, the telephone.

A sociological imagination locates new social media within processes of globalisation and individualisation. It challenges assumptions that virtual connectivity is damaging for human sociality. It develops concepts such as the 'non-human', 'cyborg society' and 'smart mobs' to explain the effects of increasing human–machine connections. These ideas enable us to go beyond individual experience so that we understand the underlying structure of social relations and modes of communication that affect our relationships with each other.

1. What effects do you think that changing forms of communication (mobile phones, the internet) are having on the way people relate to each other? In what ways do people today experience their family, friends and workmates differently from when there was no internet and no mobile phones?
2. The term 'surveillance society' refers to the increasing use of technology to monitor and regulate human populations. What are some of the ways in which surveillance operates in contemporary Australia? What do you think the implications of this are for the future of democracy?

People study **sociology** mainly because it helps them to understand the social world around them and how it is changing. There are patterns to the ways we relate to each other that are difficult to see and understand without looking at them closely over a period of time and experimenting with different possible explanations. Many dimensions of the world around you cannot be explained simply in terms of individual behaviour or personal choices. This means you need concepts and ways of thinking that can capture those aspects of the world around you, concepts such as 'society', 'culture', 'modernity' and 'globalisation'. At the very least, you need to gather information (data) about what people do, how they think and feel about it, and how their relationships with each other are shaped, in order to come to an informed understanding of any problem or issue. This is what sociological research is concerned with.

The sociological imagination

The classic statement of what it means to 'think like a sociologist', and still one of the best, is the American sociologist C. Wright Mills' (1959) argument for a **sociological imagination**. In Western societies, with the high value placed on ideas of individual 'autonomy' and 'freedom', we tend towards a psychological orientation in our understanding of what happens to ourselves and others. There is a strong inclination in liberal democracies towards seeing human behaviour in terms of individual characteristics, abilities, choices and preferences. Often, people think it is too 'deterministic' to talk about restrictions placed on individual choices. People frequently experience whatever happens in their own lives as unique and private, interpreting what happens to other people as unique and private to them, as *private troubles*.

Sociologists, in contrast, are more interested in establishing the relationship between what happens to individuals in their lives and the larger processes of social, economic and political change that might lie underneath or behind those happenings. The discipline of sociology encourages you to look for the social processes and structures that give a generalised pattern to those private troubles and thus turn them into *public issues*. Mills gave the example of unemployment: when one person is unemployed, that is a private trouble; when three million people are unemployed, that is a public issue. Another example is fertility: when one couple never has a baby, that is a private issue. When ever-increasing numbers of couples are in this situation, it is a public issue known as the declining fertility rate. Sociologists are responsive to the times when it is useful to step outside of our individual experience and see ourselves 'from the outside', as social creatures, part of groups and larger institutions. The sociological imagination, wrote Mills, 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two in society' (1959, p. 6).

> *… sociology is justified by the belief that it is better to be conscious than unconscious and that consciousness is a condition of freedom. To attain a greater measure of awareness, and with it of freedom, entails a certain amount of suffering and even risk. An educational process that would avoid this becomes simple technical training and ceases to have any relationship to the civilizing of the mind.* (Peter Berger 1963, p. 175)

Anthony Giddens (1986, p. 13) argues that the sociological imagination is composed of three distinct kinds of 'sensibility'. First, there is a *historical sensibility*, an appreciation of how the world we live in today is the product of a number of historical processes of social transformation that we need to understand if we are to grasp how and why social life takes the form that it does today. Second, there is *anthropological insight*, which refers to a sensitivity to what is culturally specific about the social world in which any individual lives, and the significant variability in what humans value, how they see the world and how they do things in everyday life. Third, sociology encourages the capacity for **critical thought**, which is underpinned by both of these sensibilities and involves questioning everyday thinking and commonsense assumptions about human behaviour and social life.

Critical thought in sociology is an invitation to look beyond everyday perspectives so that we see the world in a different light, as if we had come from another culture, another period in history or even another planet. It involves challenging the taken-for-granted in order to create new insights and understandings of our experiences. By standing outside our cultural and historical 'skin', we can make new, often unexpected, connections between social phenomena. This can lead to new and more penetrating interpretations of social life that have the potential, at least, of contributing to changes in the way we relate to the world around us.

> *One could say that the main service the art of thinking sociologically may render to each and every one of us is to make us more sensitive; it may sharpen up our senses, open our eyes wider so that we can explore human conditions which thus far had remained all but invisible. Once we understand better how the apparently neutral, inevitable, immutable, eternal aspects of our lives have been brought into being through the exercise of human power and human resources, we will find it hard to accept once more that they are immune and impenetrable to human action—our own action included.* (Bauman 1990, p. 16)

Taking Paris Hilton seriously

When people talk about celebrities like Princess Diana or Paris Hilton, the tendency is to think about them as unique individuals and to attribute their place in the world to their distinctive personalities. The focus is mostly on an endless parade of individuals, rather than seeing what binds these individuals together, what makes 'celebrity' a historically specific social form. With a more sociological imagination, however, one would look more closely and see celebrities as playing a particular social role in society, providing a reference point for identify formation, gossip and social interaction, having much in common with a wide variety of other types of celebrity and with similar celebrities in earlier historical periods. Thinking sociologically makes it possible to look beneath the surface of celebrity identities, to grasp 'the deeper significance of celebrity for our everyday life, our sense of self, and relations of status, recognition and power.' (van Krieken 2012, pp. 1–2).

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS What do you think it could mean to 'take Paris Hilton seriously' using a sociological imagination? Do you think it is true that, as a character in Woody Allen's 1998 film *Celebrity* said, 'You can learn a lot about a society by who it chooses to celebrate'?

This does not mean that sociologists are just aiming to expose flaws and contradictions in commonsense ideas: the relationship between sociological knowledge and our commonsense beliefs about the social world is more complex than that. You could probably say that everyone is an amateur sociologist, and people go through most of their lives at least partially conscious of the rules and structures within which they are embedded, such as their sense of time, their experience of masculinity and femininity, and their adherence to manners and etiquette. There is a great deal of sociological imagination embedded in television series like *Seinfeld*, *Modern Family* and *The Simpsons*: much of their

humour stems from the exposure of unwritten rules and patterns of behaviour and social interaction that are usually simply assumed and left unspoken. At the same time, when people do consciously reflect on social processes—say, the relationship between changing economic forces and family life—sociology has also contributed to and even formed that everyday knowledge. The information and knowledge gathered in social research and the associated analyses of social change often filter through society to become part of the commonsense of most of its members. Examples include the 'lay theories' we all hold about how crime is best prevented, the role that education plays in society and the impact of mass media on the way we think about the world.

The self and social change

The list of changes that our apparently 'intimate' and 'personal' lives have undergone over time is long and constantly expanding. The fact that these changes are as widespread, patterned and systematic as they often are means that the only way to explain them properly is in terms of changing social structures and social relations; in terms of broader social arrangements. For example:

- *Our sense of time:* clocks and watches became widespread only relatively recently, and before their emergence people felt very differently about the passage of time, which played a different role in their lives. This is closely related to the increasing complexity of modern societies and the ever-increasing need to coordinate a growing variety of activities.
- *Manners, emotions and etiquette:* our sense of what is acceptable and desirable behaviour is constantly changing, and is intimately linked to the way our social relationships are organised. For example, it is now much less acceptable to express anger in the workplace; the spread of mobile phones has produced different concerns about phone etiquette; and the management of anger while driving has become a new social problem.
- *Gender relations and sexuality:* what it means to be a man or a woman, and what is acceptable dating or courting behaviour, has been transformed enormously as broader social relations between men and women have changed.
- *Family relations:* what it means to be a mother/father/child, when to have children and how many, and how to balance work and family life are all concerns that we think about differently compared to our parents and grandparents.
- *Mass media and the internet:* the role played by mass media and more recently the internet in providing us with information and 'ways of thinking' about ourselves, society and politics is constantly changing, and this also has an impact on our social relationships and our sense of identity.

The example of the emergence and spread of McDonald's fast-food restaurants is a useful illustration of what can be done with a sociological imagination. In *The McDonaldization of Society* (2012), the American sociologist George Ritzer argues that going to McDonald's or Starbucks is about more than eating hamburgers or drinking coffee. He shows how the manufacture and sale of hamburgers actually characterises a much broader range of organised social activity. For example, he notes that every step in the process is carefully measured and controlled, from the size of the hamburger to the positioning of the cheese. The way that each outlet is organised and run conforms to a precise formula, including the phrases and facial expressions used when serving customers, as well as the furnishings. The amount of time taken to perform each action is carefully calculated and organised for maximum efficiency.

Ritzer argues that the McDonald's phenomenon reflects one of the key features of social organisation today. Building on the ideas of one of the founders of sociology, Max Weber, Ritzer suggests that the principles behind the McDonald's chain reflect contemporary demands for the *rational organisation of social life*. By this he means the process by which the principles of efficiency, control, predictability and calculability are applied to human endeavours, usually with the aim of financial profit. Not only has this technique allowed McDonald's to be a global success, but its impact as a model beyond the world of eating hamburgers means that it is possible to speak of a much more general process of 'McDonaldization', in which this type of rational organisation of social life is spreading throughout society, not just in the United States, but also across the globe. In this sense, it is also a leading example of a particular way of organising our activities: it is about the **globalisation** of culture and everyday life, and the impact that the rational pursuit of profit has on the everyday human experience.

Like Weber, Ritzer argues that this development is essentially 'tragic', because it creates a sense of meaninglessness within our culture and stifles human creativity and freedom. Although our commonsense approach to understanding eating at McDonald's is to treat it simply as somewhere to have a meal, from a sociological perspective it is also a window onto our culture's tendency to measure, calculate and control human experience in the pursuit of individual and corporate wealth.

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS

The aim of most sociological research, writing and argument is to encourage and develop what is called a **reflexive** consciousness of the ways we are socialised within particular

cultural contexts, the social construction of individual behaviour, and the cultural norms underlying what gets regarded as 'normality'. The aim is to engage with the world around us intelligently and above all actively, rather than being passively pushed around by surrounding social forces. As you read through this book, you will encounter many concepts and ideas that are either new or being used in new ways. Much of the process of learning to think sociologically is like learning a new language: the first step is to become familiar with the vocabulary and grammar.

This section begins the process of acquiring a sociological vocabulary by introducing some of the discipline's basic concepts: social construction, structure, culture, agency, socialisation and identity, modernity, colonialism, settler-colonialism and postcolonialism, and globalisation. Many equally important concepts—especially power and inequality—are discussed in later chapters.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS What is meant by the idea that sociology is a reflexive discipline?

Social construction

An important aspect of any critical analysis of social life is the idea of the 'social construction of reality' (Berger & Luckmann 1971). Instead of seeing the social world as natural, God-given or based on relatively unchangeable dimensions of human individuals such as their biology, sociologists generally prefer to place more emphasis on the ways in which human behaviour, interaction and social institutions change over time and vary across different social and cultural contexts. For example, to see gender as 'socially constructed' is to say that what humans understand and experience as 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is not just based on biology, because the ideas, practices and institutions surrounding gender are different in different historical periods and cultural settings.

The role of language is central to the social construction of reality. It makes an enormous difference whether a name for a phenomenon exists at all as well as how it is defined. For example, the term 'child abuse' is relatively recent, becoming widespread only in relation to physical abuse in the 1960s and sexual abuse from the 1980s onwards, even though the behaviours it refers to have always existed. Another example is what it means to be a refugee or an asylum seeker. This is determined not just by the raw facts of the experience itself, but also by the particular form taken by the concept 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' and how it is linked to other concepts such as 'migrant', 'dole bludger', 'terrorist' or 'queue-jumper'. Individuals in that situation will adjust their behaviour and choices in relation to such socially determined definitions.

To the extent that any event or thing only exists *in the human world* subject to human perception and forms of knowledge, which are in turn socially organised, it could be argued that everything is socially constructed, because everything has to pass through the—essentially social—filter of human knowledge production.

Structure and system

The concept of **social structure** expresses the idea that social relations are organised along patterned lines that endure over time and that act as a constraint on the individuals living within them, even though they may not be aware of it. When we are born we are not born into a social vacuum but into an existing set of social arrangements that are accompanied by expectations of how we should behave and the sense that we transgress at our peril. The term 'structure' implies something relatively hard, concrete and immovable, and this association reflects its meaning in sociology.

The recognition of the existence of social structure was central to the emergence of sociology as a distinct discipline. Structuralist perspectives in sociology rest on the assumption that human action should be understood primarily as a product of an underlying *social structure* (or *social system*) composed of a variety of *social institutions*, such as the education system, the family, the economic system, the political system, the mass media, the military and the legal system. A structuralist perspective was nicely captured by the German philosopher Karl Marx when he wrote 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness' (Marx & Engels 1951, p. 329). The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) agreed, writing that:

> *I consider extremely fruitful this idea that social life should be explained, not by the notions of those who participate in it, but by more profound causes which are unperceived by consciousness, and I think also that these causes are to be sought mainly in the manner according to which the associated individuals are grouped. Only in this way, it seems, can history become a science, and sociology itself exist.*
>
> *(1897 in Winch 1990, pp. 23–4)*

Durkheim used the term 'social fact' to express the notion of social structure. He stressed that who we are and how we behave in society necessarily operates within the framework of obligations, expectations and patterns that exist outside of us as individuals. Even if the performance of a man's duties as a brother, husband or citizen, wrote Durkheim, 'conform to my own sentiments, and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them through my education' (1938, p. 1). He defined social facts as 'ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion' (1938, p. 3; see also Chapter 15, pp. 416–418). This did not mean that we are all the same; social life is in

fact characterised by 'a whole scale of individual gradations'. Nonetheless, 'the area of variations that are possible and tolerated is always and everywhere more or less restricted … sooner or later, we encounter … a limit that we cannot transcend' (Durkheim 1964, p. 368).

Structuralist sociology generally makes use of some variety of *functionalist analysis* (so that you may encounter the term 'structural-functionalism') and it can be divided into *consensus* and *conflict* versions. Often only consensus approaches are seen as functionalist, but in fact there are considerable similarities in the ways in which functionalist and conflict theories approach the understanding and explanation of society; the main difference concerns the way they *evaluate* the existing social order. The question of whether or not a sociological approach is functionalist is really quite different from whether it falls within a consensus or conflict perspective.

Culture

Understanding **culture**—what it is, how it changes, who shapes it and how it relates to other aspects of social life—is central to the sociological imagination. It encompasses much of what sociologists mean by the terms 'social' and 'society', and sociologists will often use the concept of culture as an alternative to biological or psychological explanations of social phenomena. Cultural factors have a great deal to do with both how societies change and how societies are maintained. Cultural dynamics at global, national and local levels contribute both to the establishment of communal feeling within groups and to conflict between them.

The concept of culture has its origins in anthropology, where it was used to refer to human artefacts or creations. The 19th-century anthropologist Edward Tylor defined it as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (1891, p. 1). Abercrombie et al. have described it as 'the symbolic and learned, non-biological aspects of human society, including language, custom and convention, by which human behaviour can be distinguished from that of other primates' (1994, p. 98). This meaning of the word 'culture' is broader than when it is used to refer only to activities associated with refinement, manners and art, or 'high culture'. It emphasises the importance of the processes by which meaning is created within a community, which is expressed in a set of values and a way of life that is unique to that community and distinguishes it from other communities. The German sociologist Georg Simmel, for example, analysed what was specific about the cultural life of people living in complex, modern, urban, industrial societies as opposed to life in smaller, traditional, rural settings.

At one level, the importance of culture is obvious. The kind of activities people engage in, the tools they use, the way they earn their living, and their mannerisms and expectations are all shaped by their cultural environment, the ways in which particular meanings are given to all aspects of their lives. At another level, the influence of culture is less apparent. This is the way in which culture shapes our view of the world, influencing the ways in which we think and feel, the outlook we have on life and the meanings we give to situations. Emile Durkheim (1912) pointed this out when he noted that every culture makes assumptions about fundamental phenomena such as relations of time, space and number. These form a framework for the experience of the world and, although they are relative to each culture, they are experienced as absolute, unquestioned truths.

The beliefs that organise people's lives can be seen as constituted by both values and norms. The *values* people hold identify what is worthwhile in life, what they ought to aspire towards—this could include a good education; a well-paid job; having children; living in a city (or a particular part of it); being kind to strangers; a happy childhood; preventing global warming; social equality across lines of gender, class, race and ethnicity; and the fairer distribution of income or wealth around the world. **Norms** are the translation of values into rules of behaviour about how people should behave, such as that one should not steal, kill other human beings, neglect children or use more energy than one needs to. Sometimes there is general consensus about values and norms, but often there is not, with greater or fewer differences across different social and cultural groups. Values and norms can also be inconsistent and contradictory, and there is not always a direct relationship between values and norms on the one hand and actual behaviour on the other—people often act in ways that contradict their own values and norms. These nuances and complexities about values and norms are an important topic of sociological research.

More recently, sociologists influenced by theories of language have emphasised the way that social life is based on a system of signs and symbols that we unconsciously learn and that give meaning to our world (Baudrillard 1983). These symbols (or signifiers) include language, clothes, smells, physical gestures such as hand waving and images such as traffic lights. The words of a language are symbols that have meaning only in so far as we distinguish them from other symbols, rather than having a direct relationship to the external object to which they are meant to refer. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1973, 1984) organises much of his work on contemporary social life around the concept of culture, approaching the symbolic realm of language and meaning as central to the sociological analysis of power, inequality and social change. In a wide variety of fields—education, art, sport, the media, politics, social movements, status differences, even warfare—it is clear that power relations operate as much in the world of symbolic interaction as they do through more objective material means. Just as we can speak of the accumulation and unequal distribution of *economic* capital—money, property, stocks and shares—it makes sense to speak of the accumulation

and unequal distribution of *cultural* capital—education, status, legitimacy, knowledge, information, recognition and fame.

Agency

One problem with structuralist accounts is that they tend to suggest that human beings have no control over their lives but simply act according to the requirements of the social structure. Moreover, we need to explain where the structure itself comes from. After all, individuals and groups make up the social structure and it is their decisions and activities that keep the structure going, not some invisible hand pulling the strings of human puppets. The changing position of women during the last century is a good example of this. We can certainly identify structural forces creating opportunities for women—the effects of World War II, the influence of new forms of contraception and the growth of the service industry—but women themselves acted in ways that influenced that change. On the whole, they tended to embrace the opportunity to move out of the home, and a minority of them actively encouraged women's rights, including their freedom to work as equals with men. There was no objective necessity for this to happen, no iron rule forcing women to change their roles.

> *A more adequate representation of social reality would be the puppet theatre, with the curtain rising on the little puppets jumping about on the ends of their invisible strings, cheerfully acting out the little parts that have been assigned to them in the tragi-comedy to be enacted … We see the puppets dancing on their miniature stage, moving up and down as the strings pull them around, following the prescribed course of their various little parts. We learn to understand the logic of this theatre and we find ourselves in its motions. We locate ourselves in society and thus recognize our own position as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theatre and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom.* (Peter Berger 1963, p. 199)

If the human world is a world of socially constructed meaning in which our actions take place on the basis of shared understandings, this suggests that we are not mechanical dolls blindly following the dictates of social forces, but are reasoning, thinking beings. As the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel argued, the tendency in sociology is often to treat people as 'cultural dopes', by which he meant an individual 'who produces the stable features of society by acting in compliance with pre-established and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides' (1967, p. 68). Garfinkel believed that we construct our own interpretation of our situation and often respond in ways that cannot be reduced to the dull weight of external social forces. These behaviours can be fully explained only by turning to the concept of **human agency**, by understanding how people interpret their situation and negotiate with those around them according to that interpretation and the opportunities available to them. This concern is clear in the sociology of Max Weber and the American symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists, and was later given further emphasis by Stuart Hall (1981) and Anthony Giddens (1979b).

In 1970, Alan Dawe argued that there are in fact 'two sociologies': one that asserts the priority of a social system over its participants, organised around the concepts of 'system' and 'structure'; and one that sees social systems as the creation of their members, organised around the concepts of 'action' and 'interaction'. Anthony Giddens (1984) subsequently popularised seeing this distinction between sociologies of structure and action as a central problem in social theory, and this led many sociology textbooks to highlight the difference between the relative emphasis placed on *social structure* as opposed to *social action*. Giddens proposed a way of transcending this dichotomy with his theory of *structuration*, in which he argued that humans are knowledgeable agents who impose their meaning on the world although they are simultaneously constrained by structural forces.

This idea that people are both created by, and the creators of, society is not in itself new, and in many respects Giddens' theory of structuration was a long footnote to Karl Marx's (1818–83) observation that:

> *Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.* (Marx & Engels 1951, p. 225)

In other words, social formations are the result of human activity and choice, but at the same time this activity and choice is limited by prevailing social arrangements. Or the other way round: human action is constrained by prevailing social arrangements, but those arrangements are themselves the ongoing product of human activity and choice.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS Do you think the most important changes going on around you are primarily structural or cultural? What has been the role of human agency in those changes?

Socialisation, the self and identity

The concept of **socialisation** is used to refer to the transmission or reproduction of culture from one generation to the next.

It captures the way in which human beings learn to develop patterns of behaviour, experiences and identities relevant to their culture. It is a continuous process that takes place from the moment of every individual's birth until their death.

Both sociologists and psychologists are interested in the process of socialisation, but their level of analysis differs. Psychologists tend to focus on the immediate environment of the individual, such as the influence of family, whereas sociologists focus on broader social forces operating at the level of institutions and systems, such as the education system, the state, the economy and the media. They are also concerned to demonstrate that socialisation is not a one-way street in which individuals are moulded into a pattern determined by society. Instead, they see it as a complex process in which individuals make choices, react and respond to the influences around them. They emphasise the way we make our world as well as the way we are shaped by it.

Socialisation takes place at many different levels, from learning the characteristics that make us recognisable members of the species to absorbing the patterns of sexuality that are regarded as normal within the community in which we live. At the most basic level, socialisation is about learning to act like a member of the species. Although we take it for granted that communicating through words and walking upright are an essential component of being a human, there is evidence that suggests that these skills are not inherent but are learned through interaction in human communities. This form of learning is universal. Cases of children brought up with limited human contact (feral or 'wolf' children) suggest that without social interaction, human beings lose most of the qualities we associate with our species (Davis 1940). The basic faculties of speech, reason, human posture and movement are discovered only as a result of contact with other human beings through a process of transmission or unconscious imitation. It is only through living in social groups that we become recognisably human.

However, the type of person we become is dependent on the particular cultural context into which we are born. Sociologists use the term **identity** to refer to the constellation of characteristics that people regard as part of their self, including the way they present themselves to others. It is often assumed that our identities are derived from a combination of our genetic inheritance and our psychological development, especially during our first years of life. This assumption is challenged by sociologists who, although they do not deny the role of genetic inheritance, argue that a substantial part of our identity is derived from our social environment. For example, we tend to take it for granted that our education system encourages us to compete with one another and assesses us according to our individual abilities. Yet this **individualism**, which is so pervasive in the social life of Western countries such as Australia, is culturally specific in the same way that our notions of time and space are. Our experience of being male or female is also filtered through a cultural prism. Aspects of our personality that we unquestioningly accept as part of our innermost being have nonetheless been profoundly influenced by our culture's expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972) argued that the portrayal of the nude in classical European painting unconsciously reflects Western cultural attitudes towards women. The women are portrayed as passive objects, there for the pleasure of the male observer. They present with the self-consciousness and self-awareness of their bodies that is normal for women in our culture. Berger writes: 'Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at' (p. 47). This is quite different from the portrayal of men, whose bodies are displayed in very different ways, and who are constructed as observers of objects external to them, rather than as the object of observation. This suggests that women's sense of themselves as objects of desire and men's sense of assertiveness and power are cultural norms, reflected in Western art and culture. It contrasts with the imagery of other cultures, such as Taoist and Hindu societies, in which nudes of both genders are active participants. The way in which this cultural norm regarding the female body has persisted and evolved in response to the feminist movement is analysed by Naomi Wolf (1991) in her book *The Beauty Myth*. Wolf points out how young women today are subjected to ever-stricter standards of beauty, and she examines the linkages between this cultural expectation and the changing expression of power relations between men and women, as well as the functions of the never-ending search for the perfect body and face for a capitalist consumer economy.

Modernity

Sociology's concern to understand the social forces that shape contemporary life has led to an ongoing focus on the description and analysis of the key features of contemporary societies, the social trends that have shaped them in the past and that are likely to shape them in the future, as well as the problems and conflicts that they generate. These issues were central concerns of the classical sociologists, including Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel, all of whom set out to understand what it was that was distinctive about the societies of their time (that is, Western societies, especially Britain, Western Europe and North America), how they differed from other parts of the world, how those societies had developed from their pre-industrial origins and what the destructive effects of that development were, as well as what its likely future direction was.

Sociologists generally use the term **modernity** to describe the complex range of phenomena associated with the historical process, commencing in the 17th century, which saw Western societies change from an agricultural to an industrial foundation, from a feudal to a capitalist economic

framework, with most of their populations migrating from rural, village settings to towns and cities, as well as moving beyond Western Europe in the process of colonising much of the rest of the world. The origins of modernity are usually seen as lying roughly in 17th-century Europe before becoming the dominant form of social organisation in the 20th century, radically transforming people's lives—sometimes for the better, but often for the worse—in virtually every part of the globe. Sociologists identify the following features as some of the central components of modernity:

- An economic structure that is both *industrial*—organised around mass production, the increasing use of machines, the ever more efficient use of large reserves of energy—and *capitalist*—based on the never-ending accumulation of *profit* and ever-increasing levels of *consumption*.
- The *nation-state* becomes the principal form of political organisation. The emergence of geographic regions with fixed, stable borders and strong, centralised governments that held ultimate military power within their borders was vital for the development of industry and capitalism.
- An increasing adherence to the principles of *rationality*, rather than those of tradition or emotion. Rational principles are those that emphasise the use of logic, observation and experimentation as the basis of what to believe in and what actions to take. This was accompanied by a faith in the power of science to solve society's problems.
- A belief in *progress*. Both human beings and human society are believed to be evolving into a more perfected state in which injustice, poverty and inequality will be eliminated.
- A growing focus on *individuals* as bearers of rights and freedoms, and an increasing recognition of a private sphere of individual choice and preference. The development of *bureaucracy* and the growing intrusion of the state and other organisations into the daily lives of its citizens.
- The 'export' of all these characteristics of modern society beyond Western Europe through the dynamics of *colonialism*, including to North and South America, India, Africa, Australia and South-East Asia.

The concept of 'modernity', therefore, can be used to capture the whole complex of ideas, political forms, economic structures and cultural patterns that have dominated the first Western societies since the Industrial Revolution and then the rest of the world through colonialism and other mechanisms of modernisation. Sociology is often described as essentially a 'critique of modernity'. (See also the discussion of *postmodernity* below, p. 13.)

Colonialism, settler-colonialism and postcolonialism

An important concept to place alongside that of modernity is colonialism, which captures the ways in which European modernity has also been associated with the spread of empire by the English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Germans, Dutch and Belgians in India, South-East Asia, Indonesia, Fiji, New Caledonia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, most of Africa and Central and South America. The primary political and geographical allegiance of European colonists was the 'mother country', which continued to be the source of their political and economic power, while they remained a numerical minority.

It has also become important to recognise the role played by the colonial character of European societies in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the formation of sociological thought. It is possible to see sociology as a discipline that emerged in the attempt to understand the impact of dramatic social changes like industrialisation and urbanisation on the structure of social life. However, R. W. Connell has argued that most early sociology was actually more concerned with the contrast between Western Europe and the rest of the world, or as Connell puts it, the 'metropole' and the 'periphery'. For Connell, then, it is important to see the foundations of sociology as closely linked to the existence of a 'world order' based on a relationship of domination between Europe and many other parts of the world, including Africa, India, South-East Asia and South America. Connell writes: 'Sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism and embodied a cultural response to the colonized world' (1997, p. 151).

Settler-colonialism, in contrast, refers to situations where Europeans take up a more permanent presence in the non-European land and make it more absolutely their 'own'. Settler-colonists tend to outnumber the Indigenous inhabitants and appropriate more land through 'settlement', at times effecting dispossession through genocide (Wolfe 1999). The parts of the world captured in this way include North America, New Zealand, Australia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa (although the last three are particular cases because the European settlers remained outnumbered) (Good 1979, p. 347).

Although the European colonial empires were dismantled in the period after World War II, the effects of the colonial relationship between the European nation-states and their colonies did not simply come to a sudden end, but continued in various forms into the postcolonial period. Many of the characteristics of the modern world beyond the metropole—Africa, the Middle East, South America—have their roots in the colonial period, making it important to see the social structures and dynamics of many parts of the world as

marked by their postcolonial character—that is, as former colonies (for example, Sadiki 2004).

Sociological thought about colonialism and postcolonialism has also been influenced by Edward Said's (1978) argument that the perception of the rest of the world by Europeans remains strongly marked by 'Orientalism', a way of thinking that divides the world into binary opposites—Occident and Orient, West and East, or often just the West and the rest—with the West portrayed as superior and advanced, and the rest of the world as inferior and backward.

Globalisation and deglobalisation

Globalisation can be described as the process by which people's daily lives are increasingly influenced by the growing technological and economic, political and legal, social and cultural integration of people and communities around the world. It includes ideas about mass culture, the effects of information technology, the power of global corporations and the growing web of international agreements that change the nature of national sovereignty. **Deglobalisation** refers to the ways in which globalisation processes can also change direction and go into reverse, so that there are times when the world can become *less* integrated across the dimensions of economics, politics and culture. The period between the two world wars is one example of a period of deglobalisation. (This is explored further in Chapter 2.)

At the cultural level, globalisation is expressed in the idea that today people everywhere are networked into a 'global village' (McLuhan 1962) as a result of mass communication. The internet is only the most recent example of a set of technologies that have made it possible for people to communicate instantaneously across vast distances, to share ideas, information and feelings. The mass media seem to have created a common culture, with television programs such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, *Top Gear*, *House*, *Desperate Housewives*, *The Simpsons*, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Neighbours* being viewed in the homes of people around the world, from Nepal to Israel. Everywhere roughly the same consumer goods can be purchased: Coca-Cola and Nike are as well known in Thailand as they are in the United States.

At the political and economic level, the integrity of the nation-state is increasingly being challenged by a variety of transnational arrangements and organisations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as global corporations like Exxon Mobil, the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China, Walmart, Microsoft, Royal Dutch Shell, BHP Billiton, McDonald's and IKEA. These political and economic organisations all influence the decisions of national governments in ways that directly affect their citizens. Although sociological accounts of globalisation differ (see Chapter 2), it has become widely accepted in sociology that close attention needs to be paid to the way that global as well as national forces shape social life. Sociologists generally argue that the trend towards globalisation is today so strong that any understanding of how society works must place it within the global context.

One of the conceptual consequences of this argument is that sociologists need to move beyond the concept of 'society' being contained within the boundaries of the nation-state, so that we speak of 'Australian' or 'French' society. There is an increasingly complex relationship between the global and the local. It is important to acknowledge *both* the growing cultural, economic and political integration of contemporary social formations across the globe *and* the apparently paradoxical strengthening of local ties. While our everyday actions are linked to a global environment in which what we do, how we live and even what we think are related to global forces, our actions at the local level also have global implications. The way in which globalisation disrupts local cultures and customs and creates material instability has also led to a reassertion of local traditions and identities. This is reflected in deglobalising phenomena such as the rise of nationalist movements around the world, the development of community-based organisations, and the shift to regions as the basis for economic development. At the cultural level, the same goods may be consumed by people across the globe (e.g. McDonald's, IKEA, Coca-Cola), but it is possible to argue that their local meaning and significance may be very different. The concept of globalisation is examined in more detail in Chapter 2.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS What do you think are the main differences between the way you have been socialised throughout your childhood and the way your parents were socialised? What does this tell you about the way that society has changed?

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

We have said that the study of sociology will encourage you to achieve a critical and systematic understanding of the society around you and your place in it. At the same time, it is important to be aware that there is no single, 'correct' way of 'thinking sociologically'. Sociological analysis takes place through an ongoing conversation or debate between a variety of different *perspectives* on any given issue or problem. Sociology, like any science, cannot provide the truth about human society, only a way of understanding it. This may sound surprising or disheartening if you are looking for 'the' truth about anything, but final answers are beyond the reach of any intellectual discipline, including the natural sciences. This is an important aspect of what makes sociology a particularly modern way of thinking about the world, with

its constant testing of its knowledge against different ways of gathering and explaining data.

> ***All knowledge of cultural reality … is always knowledge from particular points of view.***
>
> *(Max Weber 1949, p. 81)*

In 1962 Thomas Kuhn published a book called *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which he analysed how sciences change over time. His argument was that scientific activity operates within a single, shared frame of reference, known as a *paradigm*. A scientific paradigm tells us what the problems are, what the solutions are likely to look like, their central characteristics and the methods by which we can go about looking for them. In other words, scientists set problems before they go about solving them, and the type of problem—as well as the way it is defined—establishes the matrix within which scientific activity occurs. A paradigm constitutes a 'way of seeing' the world that affects both what is seen and how it is seen. As time goes by, scientists tend to accumulate evidence or research results that don't seem to fit their understanding of what they should be, until eventually it becomes clear to someone that the basic framework requires reconstruction—what Kuhn called 'scientific revolutions'. The source of scientific dispute is usually the fact that the old paradigm still works reasonably well most of the time and it is not absolutely clear that the new one will work better.

What is true for the natural sciences is even more true for the social sciences, in that a number of paradigms, or what we are here calling 'perspectives', coexist. Although it is possible to distinguish good and bad sociological reasoning and analysis, no one 'way of understanding' the social world can definitively claim superiority over the others. Sociology is best approached not as a single set of undisputed truths (laws, explanations) but as a set of multiple 'ways of seeing', each of which has something useful to say about human beings and social relations, and each with different and distinctive vocabulary, concepts, modes of analysis, explanations and conclusions.

Throughout this book, in every chapter we will familiarise you with the theoretical perspectives that are most important and influential in relation to that particular topic, and they will not always be the same. There are, however, a number of conceptual standpoints that you will encounter more frequently than others, and in this next section we outline some major issues and debates running through differing sociological perspectives that you are most likely to need to familiarise yourself with.

There are a number of ways, often overlapping, in which we can divide up the field of differing sociological perspectives. For example, a threefold distinction is often made in sociology textbooks between (1) consensus or functionalist theories; (2) conflict theories; and (3) interactionist approaches. Recently Michael Burawoy (2004, 2005) mapped out four different orientations to the production of sociological knowledge: (1) professional; (2) policy; (3) critical; and (4) public sociology (discussed below). In *Perspectives in Sociology*, Cuff, Sharrock and Francis (1998) distinguished between two umbrella perspectives: (1) structuralism and (2) sociological theories of meaning. The first was in turn divided into three sub-perspectives (consensus, conflict and critical theories) and the second into two (**symbolic interactionism** and ethnomethodology). These theoretical orientations are discussed in Chapter 15, which distinguishes between the foundations of four traditions in sociological theory flowing from Durkheim, Marx, Weber and Simmel, and then explores some more recent developments.

In the following section we examine Peter Hamilton's (2002) 'mapping' of the field of sociology, where he outlines what he considers to be the three central 'traditions' in sociology—although we could also call them 'perspectives' or simply 'ways of doing of thinking sociologically'.

Science, politics or interpretation

Hamilton distinguishes between three sociological traditions:

1. a 'rational-scientific' tradition, in which sociology is seen as a 'science of society' and 'an intellectual practice designed to elicit objective information open to scrutiny and debate' (2002, p. 6)
2. a 'political' tradition, in which sociology is seen as 'inherently political because it deals with the organization of society', and the validity of the knowledge produced by sociologists can be established only in practice, in the real world
3. an 'expressionistic' or interpretive tradition, adopting a position detached from both science and politics, taking a more literary or humanities-based approach towards grasping the meaning of human social life, without making any appeal either to the objective validity of its knowledge or to its political effects.

These three perspectives, traditions or approaches are also reflected in the different settings in which sociological work takes place: differing university contexts with varying national intellectual traditions, contract research, and policy research in government and administration. They are not mutually exclusive, in the sense that any particular sociologist or sociological study will often span more than one perspective.

Sociology as science

The question of whether sociology should be approached as the 'science of society' is not entirely settled, but a sociological analysis of any issue or problem is scientific to the extent that it is systematic, by which we mean based

on the collection and analysis of information and data, the making of observations that are recorded and compared with each other, the development of theories and generalisations to explain the data, and an overall concern to relate whatever is said by one sociological researcher to the work of other researchers in the same field.

Sociologists often study the same kinds of topics and issues that are dealt with in novels, television series and films, but their claim to be listened to and taken seriously has a different basis. We experience a work of literature as 'good' or 'true' for reasons that are hard to define, on the basis of how well written it is and how well it resonates with our intuitive understanding and feelings. On the other hand, although the quality of writing of a work of science will make a difference to its persuasiveness, the work bases its claim to having any authority on different qualities: how comprehensive, systematic and well-designed its research is, and how well its analysis and arguments stack up against those of competing explanations.

In this perspective, although sociologists have values and normative preferences like everybody else, if they are to mount persuasive arguments in public debate, they need to appeal to different sorts of legitimisation of their ideas. Key figures in this tradition include Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Robert Merton, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. A strong emphasis is placed on providing support for sociological analysis with empirical evidence, and there is sometimes an inclination to see an affinity between the social and the natural sciences. A core aim in this perspective is *value-freedom*, although the exact meaning of this can range from pure objectivity and complete detachment from any conceptual constraints arising from one's social position or value orientation to the more modest version articulated by Weber, which aims for 'little more than that the sociologists should not openly proclaim their personal views on matters of social fact'.

Sociology as politics and critical theory

The critique of the idea of value-freedom is essentially that it simply is not possible—that is, whether social scientists are aware of it or not, they cannot avoid their value orientations structuring the kinds of questions they ask, the topics they choose to research, the silent premises and presuppositions they place beyond discussion, the approaches they adopt, the answers they are more likely to be responsive to, the audiences they direct their work towards, the debates and issues they choose to highlight and so on. A central example here was the tendency to research social life and social history only in terms of the experiences of men, which was always presented as a neutral, objective perspective to adopt, rather than examining the experiences of women.

From this perspective, the role of sociology is not simply one of accumulating knowledge, but 'one of emancipation and change'. Important inspirations for this approach are two of Karl Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: the eighth, 'All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'; and the eleventh, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx & Engels 1970). A key proponent of this approach to sociology was the American sociologist Alvin W. Gouldner (1920–80), beginning with his 1962 article 'Anti-Minotaur: the myth of value-free sociology', where he suggested that 'the only choice is between an expression of one's values, as open and honest as it can be, this side of the psychoanalytical couch, and a vain ritual of moral neutrality which, because it invites men to ignore the vulnerability of reason to bias, leaves it at the mercy of irrationality' (1962, p. 212). The current proponents of this perspective are more likely to refer to their work as 'critical theory', organised around the idea that all social scientific knowledge is produced from a particular value position and social standpoint, and that this always has to be taken into account in assessing its validity and persuasiveness.

Sociology as interpretation

The third perspective is more influenced by anthropology and literature, aiming to interpret and give expression to interesting aspects of social life 'without pretensions to offer scientific knowledge or to claims of political significance' (Hamilton 2002, p. 27). Although in practice sociology and literature have generally been competitors for authority in interpreting the human condition (Lepenies 1988), this approach moves close to the position of the humanities, simply providing a range of possible perceptions of human social experience, distinguished primarily by a variety of narrative orientations. For Hamilton, philosopher Jean Baudrillard's approach to circulating his work in 'articles in newspapers, books, lectures, photographs, exhibitions and interviews' is a central feature of the 'expressionistic tradition'. Hamilton sees the ideas of Georg Simmel and Erving Goffman as key representatives of this perspective and the prevalence of qualitative methods such as ethnography as an indicator of its ongoing presence in sociological research, even if sometimes combined with claims either to scientific validity or critical impact.

Hamilton suggests that these three traditions 'really exhaust the range of possible perspectives about sociology' (2002, p. 27), but invites us to decide for ourselves whether we agree with his interpretation. There are certainly other ways of mapping the sociological field, as indicated earlier, and next we outline two additional important areas of debate that affect the distinctions between different sociological perspectives.

REFLECTIVE QUESTION For one example of an important aspect of recent social change, explain how it would be approached differently from the perspectives of sociology as science, as politics and as interpretation. Is there a way of combining all three perspectives?

Gender and feminism

Until the advent of **feminist theory** in the 1960s, sociology had virtually ignored half the population—women. Research focused on the male-dominated public world of work and politics, with the domestic sphere considered to be irrelevant to sociological inquiry. Men dominated the discipline, with female sociologists such as Harriet Martineau (1802–76) given little attention. Until recently, no women could be found in the sociology hall of fame. Even today there are fewer women than men in positions of strong influence within the discipline. Professors, writers of textbooks, presidents of sociological associations, journal editors and thesis examiners—the 'gatekeepers'—continue to be predominantly male.

This gender bias was reflected in sociological thought itself: until the 1970s when sociologists referred to 'people' or 'individuals' they were often referring only to men and leaving women's experience out of the picture. For example, studies of **class** focused exclusively on men. The position of women was presumed to be determined by their male partner so that stratification studies dealt only with the partner's occupation. The sociology of work and industry ignored the contribution of women's work—both in the workforce and in the home.

The 1960s saw the re-emergence of the women's movement and with it a new generation of female sociologists who placed women at the centre of their social analysis. They examined the position of women in society, their experiences and the issues that concerned them. They provided explanations for the embedded nature of female inequality. Feminist sociology has made an immense contribution to sociological theory, methods and empirical research, including:

- explaining how gender is socially constructed, challenging assumptions that women are 'natural' carers whose primary role is that of mother and wife
- developing theories that explain the position of women in society, including how this intersects with class and race
- identifying and explaining some of the effects of male regulation and control of women; this began with work pointing to the previously unaddressed issues of male to female violence, especially family violence; it also focused on women's labour market experiences, developing concepts such as the glass ceiling and analysing how and why women dominated the casual, part-time sector; this work was often linked to an activist social agenda concerned with addressing social injustices experienced by women
- understanding cultural aspects of women's experience, especially in relation to the role of the media in gendered constructions of the body
- challenging binary assumptions of human sexual identity and demonstrating the diversity of sexual identity.

Feminist sociological theory is examined in more detail in Chapter 15.

REFLECTIVE QUESTION Explore the possibilities for developing a feminist sociological analysis of an aspect of the world around you that has changed recently and that does not at first glance appear to be amenable to feminist arguments—say, the recent global financial crisis or global warming.

The question of postmodernity

The perspective known as 'postmodernism' first emerged in architecture, where it was used to describe the transition from the ever-progressing rational application of scientific knowledge to one of playful and ironic mixtures of apparently incompatible elements. The influence of postmodernist arguments now extends to the humanities and social sciences. Although there is not unanimity about how concepts like postmodernism and postmodernity should be understood and used, there is, nonetheless, a common core of ideas that relate to the changes that have taken place in society from about the 1960s onwards.

The concept of **postmodernity** refers to the form of social life in which the enlightenment belief in science, rationality and the idea of progress characterising earlier stages of modernity is no longer unquestioningly accepted. People are less likely to believe in 'grand narratives', such as that reason can conquer superstition, that human beings can be perfected or that political change can produce a perfect society (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv). Inequality can be explained as an unavoidable component of postmodern society, the pursuit of its elimination often generating different, sometimes even worse problems. This is associated with growing cynicism about the benefits of science, a questioning of the authority of experts and an associated rise in 'alternative' lifestyles and beliefs. The supposed boundary between science and literature is questioned, and scientific explanation is often approached as another story or 'narrative', a 'truth claim' rather than 'the truth'.

In sociology, this questioning of the directions being taken by modern societies can be understood as centring on the following core observations about how social life works today. First, sociologists need to re-evaluate the importance of the *symbolic* or *cultural* dimensions of the social. Structuralists tend to see the symbolic world of culture and ideology as reflecting the social structures underpinning them, with the latter somehow more 'real' and determining the nature and dynamics of the former. One

of the central observations of postmodernism is that this placement of greater weight and significance on structures and material relations has not applied to social life since the middle of the 20th century. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the representations of social reality, particularly in the mass media, have become more 'real', in the sense of more significant, than what they are supposed to represent. This also means that the role of consumption is much more important in postmodernity than it was in modern society: it is no longer our occupation or profession that defines our identity, but the clothes we wear, the beer we drink and the mobile phone we use. The old modernist concepts of the subject, meaning, truth and reality have been replaced by a new world of information, communication and signs (Baudrillard 1983).

Second, it is important to be sensitive to the way that social life today is characterised by the plurality and fragmentation of social forces, making notions of a unified 'society' or 'social structure' difficult to sustain. Class relations may be important in their own terms, but they need not have any influence at all on politics or culture. A structuralist and modernist would assume that someone with a working-class background would present themselves as a unified 'package': this person would vote for the Australian Labor Party, enjoy going to the footy, drink beer (and dislike people that drink wine) and watch *Neighbours* and *The Footy Show* on television. Structuralist theories had assumed that every individual contained a coherent core that responded to external influences in a consistent fashion. As individuals, it was assumed we had a fixed identity that had integrity and uniformity. A **postmodernist**, on the other hand, would see the possible identity 'package' as much more variable and diverse, with no assumed linkages between different aspects of a person's identity. In a postmodern society, a person can be working class, go to the opera, drink wine and watch both *The Footy Show* and subtitled SBS movies.

The reception of postmodernist ideas in sociology has not, however, been entirely uncritical, and many sociologists see themselves as combining the insights of both modernist and postmodernist sociology. Jürgen Habermas (1996), for example, sees postmodernism as a form of neo-conservatism—its rejection of the metanarratives of rationality and science as a recipe for surrender to existing power relations, and a removal of any basis for genuine critical analysis of social life. (Postmodern sociological perspectives and other approaches to the development of modernity are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 15.)

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS Using today's news reports, which of the perspectives examined above seems most relevant to the material they contain? How would you explain in sociological terms the difference between modernity and postmodernity?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The problems and issues that sociologists engage with are closely related to their social and historical context. Sociological thinking changes in association with the development of society itself, not least because sociologists are subject to the same dynamic interplay between the forces of human agency and social structure as all human beings.

The development of sociology can be divided into a number of phases:

- its origins in the mid-18th century when it was met with optimism as a new science that would help humanity's progress
- its establishment as an academic discipline at the beginning of the 20th century—this phase is associated with the pessimism of this *fin de siècle* (end-of-the-century) period
- an interactionist phase between World War I and World War II
- a functionalist phase from World War II to the early 1960s
- a conflict phase from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s
- the influence of feminism from the 1970s onwards
- increased concern with postmodernity and globalisation
- the question of 'public sociology'
- the increased internationalisation of sociology, often referred to as the emergence of 'Southern' sociology.

Each phase can be distinguished by its relationship with the prevailing social, economic and political climate, its key concerns and its view of its status as a science.

Sociology's European origins in the age of revolutions, 1840s–1870s

The roots of the sociological imagination in Europe are often seen as lying in the 18th century, in the writings of philosophers such as David Hume (1711–76), Adam Smith (1723–90) and Ferguson Adam (1723–1815) in Scotland, John Locke (1632–1704) in England, and Montesquieu (1689–1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) and Voltaire (1694–1778) in France. Its 'take-off' period is generally regarded as lying later in the 18th century, when the French philosophers Claude Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825) and August Comte (1798–1857), who coined the term 'sociology', argued for a 'science of society'.

Two revolutions in this period, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, radically transformed Western

societies. Alongside momentous technological changes, the process of industrialisation triggered massive population movements, rapid urbanisation, changing family structures, enormous changes in social relationships and a range of new ideas. It was associated with an increased responsiveness to science and reason as the legitimate foundations for authority, as opposed to the authority of the Church.

The French Revolution paralleled at the political level the effect of industrialisation, shaking the 18th-century European world to its foundations. The slogans of the French Revolution, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', expressed ideals that were to become embedded in Western political culture. Their roots can be traced back to the Enlightenment, which questioned traditional beliefs and prejudices, especially religious ones, and emphasised the importance of reason, strict scientific method and the possibility of progress to a new and better society. This is why this period in European history is often described as the Age of Reason. It was closely associated with the growing secularisation of social life, in which religious thinking and religious institutions ceased to dominate all aspects of life. Until this period, all knowledge had been located within the framework of a Christian understanding of life, its meaning, values and concerns. Most areas of life were also closely tied to the Church, either directly as in the case of education, or indirectly as in the case of the family. Enlightenment thinking challenged both the institutional dominance of the Church and these religious-based ways of thinking. It sought answers to questions of causation (what causes phenomena to happen) by asking *how* they worked, instead of questions of meaning (*why* they worked). This shifted attention from transcendental, supernatural explanations to worldly, material ones.

The impact of a rational, materialist approach to the study of phenomena was not limited to the natural sciences, but began to pervade many other areas of human thought. Karl Marx (1818–83), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and Auguste Comte (1798–1857) sought to apply this rational approach to the analysis of how society worked. The chaos and violence of this period led some people, such as Claude Saint-Simon (1766–1825) and Comte in France, and Marx in Germany, to inquire into the nature and causes of stability and change. They sought to discover the underlying principles behind what they called 'the social' or 'society' in the hope that they could control human destiny more effectively. This attempt to understand the dynamics of social stability and change has remained a central theme in contemporary sociological thought. The aim of a 'science of society' was to facilitate the emergence of a new era based on reason and equality, one that both transcended the superstition and oppression of the past, and developed a form of social organisation that effectively replaced the positive social bonds of pre-modern social life. From its beginnings, sociology has been both a product and a critique of modernity and Enlightenment thought.

This was reflected in the work of the key social theorists including Marx, Spencer and Comte, who each developed evolutionary theories of social change that argued all societies went through a series of step-like stages of development. In the work of both Marx and Comte, these stages culminated in a utopian or ideal stage in which inequality would be eliminated and humanity would achieve its full potential. They conceived of sociology as a scientific discipline, modelled on the principles of the natural sciences—that is, the use of objective observation, experimentation and measurement of the phenomena being studied. This approach is called **positivism** and it has remained an important, although criticised, approach to the study of social life (for a discussion of positivism, see Chapter 14). It was closely tied to the expectation that society was subject to the same universal laws that natural scientists had discovered applied in the physical world. For the sociologists of this period, their task was to discover these laws in order to enable people to better understand how they should act. Comte believed that the new scientists of sociology would serve as guides and replace the role played by priests in the past.

Sociology's establishment as an academic discipline, 1880s–1910

In the 1850s sociology had not yet found any academic home. No-one was employed to undertake sociological research and there was no systematic attempt to study society. 'Sociology' existed only in the minds of a handful of brilliant, innovative and sometimes eccentric individuals. Durkheim was appointed to the first Chair of Social Science at the University of Bordeaux in France in 1887, while the German lawyer and economist Max Weber pursued his sociological studies from his position as Professor of Economics at the University of Heidelberg.

The Age of Reason had given way to a more realistic assessment of the benefits of industrialisation and a *fin de siècle* pessimism about the direction society was taking. Although industrialisation had brought material benefits to the population, it was accompanied by an increasing regulation of social life. Industrial development required a high degree of organisation, which was expressed in the *bureaucratisation* of large areas of existence, with their increasing subjection to organisation arranged along fixed, hierarchical lines with written rules and regulations. Weber wrote about the dominance of instrumental rationality in all areas of social life and argued that the price of the fruits of industrial capitalism was that the human spirit was placed within an 'iron cage' of discipline and regulation.

Despite this rather bleak picture of life in the industrialising West at the turn of the 19th century, there remained an expectation that sociology could shed light on what made

society work, how it changed and what we needed to do to improve it. The grand evolutionary theories of Marx, Spencer and Comte gave way to an empirically grounded positivism that sought to establish a systematic method for the study of social formations. For Durkheim, society existed *sui generis*—independently of the meanings people brought to a situation. Sociology was about the scientific study of the objective, observable 'social facts' of society, the social patterns that exist separately from subjective interpretations of society. Durkheim believed sociology need not concern itself with how individuals and groups experienced their world and in this sense he continued the positivist tradition of his predecessors.

Weber agreed with Durkheim that sociology was the disinterested study of objectively observable phenomena. However, unlike Durkheim, he argued that sociologists should also account for the *meanings* people brought to their situation. Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) was an example of how a social group's interpretation of the world shaped social development, how Protestantism 'meshed' with the emergence of capitalism. The pessimism of this period also forms the backdrop to Weber's recognition of the limitations of knowledge. He was one of the first writers to point out that all science (including sociology) could do was to tell us *how* something had occurred and what we might do to influence its occurrence in the future. It could not answer the more important questions of what we *should* do or any other question involving a value judgement about what was best for society (Weber 1949).

This period of sociology's development can therefore be characterised as one in which sociology established itself as an academic discipline with realistic, achievable claims about its value to society. Its concerns remained those of the earlier period—how societies change, how order is maintained, the nature and causes of inequality, the relationship between culture and economy—but these were set against a backdrop of disillusionment with industrialisation and a concern with its dehumanising effects.

The development of interpretivist sociology, 1920s–1930s

The early decades of the 20th century saw sociology being only slowly introduced into university departments in the United Kingdom and Europe. Where it was introduced, for example into the London School of Economics in 1904, it was closely linked to a reformist political agenda. Most English sociologists saw the discipline as a means of improving the human condition by describing social problems and discovering solutions to them.

Sociology was introduced earlier and more rapidly into the United States, the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology being founded in 1892 and growing rapidly in the 1920s as a result of a generous endowment from the Rockefeller Foundation. This department attracted some of the best social thinkers of the time, including Albion Small, W. I. Thomas, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. These writers shared a similar social background to their overseas counterparts and, like them, they were concerned with the problems of poverty and urbanisation. Most of them also came from rural areas, and the disorder they encountered in Chicago was in sharp contrast to their previous experiences. At this time Chicago was a rapidly expanding city, taking in migrants from Europe as well as from the countryside. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation created social problems, including juvenile delinquency, vagrancy, organised crime and corruption. Gangs operated by crime figures such as Al Capone ran illegal gambling and drinking businesses, often with the cooperation of corrupt police.

Their belief that sociology was an objective science meant that the sociologists at the University of Chicago sought to develop knowledge for its own sake rather than linking it with the direct improvement of social life. In the seamy underside of Chicago city life in the 1920s they had the perfect social laboratory in which to investigate their ideas and develop their theories. The rapid expansion of Chicago resulted from the migration of groups from a diverse range of backgrounds. They included rural Anglo-Saxon Americans, Italians from cities such as Naples as well as from rural regions, Hispanics and Blacks. These subcultures had values and beliefs that were often distinct from those of mainstream society. In order to understand the existence and behaviour of these groups, the Chicago sociologists developed research methodologies that allowed the investigator to experience and give credence to the world of subcultures.

This development was helped by their incorporation of the work of the social psychologist and philosopher George Herbert Mead, as well as other psychologists and philosophers located at the University of Chicago. Mead made a major contribution to the theory of symbolic interaction, which emphasised the way the meanings people bring to a situation are socially relevant. He also made the seminal observation that we live in a world of meaning that is socially constructed by active agents through the use of symbols, the most important of which is language (see p. 429 in this book). Mead emphasised the extent to which social life is the outcome of an ongoing process of negotiation in which people actively construct their lives and the lives of those around them. This perspective has continued to surface in many forms, including labelling and postmodern theory.

The dominance of functionalist theory, 1940s–1960s

The United States continued to dominate developments in sociology after World War II, but the focus shifted from

the micro-perspective, which is concerned with social interactions at the level of individuals and small groups, to a macro-perspective, which focuses on large-scale institutions and structures.

The person who dominated sociology in the post–World War II era up until the late 1960s was Talcott Parsons (1902–79). His dominance and that of the functionalist theory he helped to develop can be explained by the social context of this period. Parsons' sociology was developed in the economic upheaval of the Depression of the 1930s and the trauma of World War II that followed it. At one of the darkest periods of the 20th century, Parsons sounded an optimistic note with his prediction that the social system not only would survive but also would recover to its former strength. His optimism appeared to be vindicated by the success of the Allies and the prolonged period of affluence that followed. This period was the closest that sociology ever came to having a single set of theoretical principles for the study of social life, leading Kingsley Davis (1959) to assert that **functionalism** was indistinguishable from sociology itself.

Functionalist theories about questions such as the family, politics and social inequality reinforced the values and beliefs of conventional, white, male, middle-class America. Parsons argued that in Western democracies, the answer to the question 'How is order maintained?' lay in the existence of a social consensus in which there was agreement on social arrangements. His views coincided with a period of political stability and economic security, when it seemed that few doubted the enemy was communism and that the United States had God on its side.

CASE STUDY
Politics and misogyny

Although Australia was the second nation to grant women the vote in 1902 it was another 108 years before a female prime minister came to power. Before she took office in 2010 Julia Gillard enjoyed considerable popularity, but political back-flips associated with her minority government and the controversial way she came to power, with the incumbent Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, forced to resign, damaged her standing. When Sydney radio presenter and shock jock Alan Jones branded her 'Juliar', the term became part of political currency. The theme was used in Parliament by the leader of the opposition, Tony Abbott, to challenge her credibility.

Source: AAP Image/Alan Porritt

For some observers, the attacks on Gillard were more than the usual political sparring. There was a sexist quality to the jibes that focused on Gillard's status as a woman. Gillard had raised the issue of misogyny a number of times but it was a speech she made in Parliament in October 2012 that generated worldwide attention. Gillard attacked Abbott, declaring: 'If he wants to know what misogyny looks like in modern Australia, he doesn't need a motion in the House of Representatives, he needs a mirror.' The public debate that followed was divided between those who claimed the attacks on Gillard were no different from what any political leader was subjected to and those who claimed they were disrespectful and demeaning in a way that was distinct from attacks on male politicians.

In a detailed analysis, feminist author and journalist Anne Summers showed the violent and sexualised nature of the words and images used against Gillard. Some were so virulent and aggressive they met Commonwealth definitions of bullying 'in the sense that they are solely designed to demean and diminish her, humiliate and intimidate her' (Summers 2012a). Terms used against Gillard such as 'bitch, barren, childless, hag, slut, witch, cow' had no equivalent in the vocabulary used against male politicians and belonged to a 'vocabulary of words that describe, and demean, women' (Summers 2012b). Like other feminist commentators, Summers argued that the hostile environment that can face female public leaders contributes to the relatively small number of women who enter public life.

Following Gillard's speech, the editors of the Macquarie Dictionary declared their intention to expand the definition of misogyny beyond 'hatred of women' to one more in keeping with its contemporary usage, 'an entrenched prejudice against women' (Woodhead & Daley 2012).

1. Read Summers' analysis of the attacks on Gillard (**http://annesummers.com.au/speeches/her-rights-at-work-r-rated**). How are gendered constructions of the body implicated in these issues?
2. Today women are often regarded as having achieved equality with men. Visit the Australian Bureau of Statistics website (**www.abs.gov.au**) to discover evidence to (a) support and (b) dispute this claim. What is your own view?
3. Some of the attacks using social media are a form of cyberbullying that has generated public debate. How would a sociological analysis of cyberbullying differ from a psychological one?

The rise of conflict theory, 1970s

The political and social conservatism of the two decades following World War II began to crumble in the 1960s. The United States' complacent view of itself was shattered in the face of protest movements that pointed to the continued existence of deep, structural poverty and disadvantage. The black civil rights movement was only one of a number of similar movements that challenged the image of the United States as a land of equality and freedom. The environmental movement pointed out the damage caused by the Western world's high levels of consumption and its technological exploitation of the land. Youth movements in the form of the hippie movement also transformed the cultural scene. These rebelled against the conservative social values of the previous generation and rejected the materialism of American culture. They reacted against the alienation of industrial life, stressing instead human spirituality and creativity. Many of these movements were associated with left-wing politics. They reached their fullest expression in the anti-Vietnam War movement, which drew the American left together in a concerted attempt to get the United States government to withdraw its troops from Vietnam.

These social movements made it very difficult for sociologists to maintain that society was characterised by consensus. The prevailing cultural atmosphere was one of division and disagreement, and it was against this background that different theories began to dominate sociology. This development was fed by the increased availability of Marx's writings, many of which had not previously been available to Western thinkers. These writings were humanistic, emphasising the alienating effects of the capitalist mode of production and stressing human creative self-expression. This, together with Marx's emphasis on inequality and disadvantage, resonated with the cultural climate of the day, in sharp contrast to functionalism.

Conflict theory suggests that contemporary Western societies should be seen as based on the exploitation of the many by the few rather than on harmonious consensus, and that this produces social problems that affect everyone. Although conflict theory shared functionalism's focus on social structure as the explanation of social phenomena, it asked how does society change rather than how is order maintained. It answered this question in terms of structural arrangements for inequality, especially economic inequality in the form of class. It also criticised positivism, arguing that sociologists were part of society and therefore could never be disinterested, objective observers.

Many sociologists were influenced by Marxism and were generally critical of the status quo in Western democracies. Its iconoclastic tendencies made sociology popular among young people who were also rebelling against mainstream social values. For the same reason it was often criticised by conservative politicians and public servants, who saw it as an irrational and destabilising influence on society. Nonetheless, it was during this period that the discipline underwent its most rapid expansion in universities. This included its establishment in Australia, where Morven Brown was appointed to the first chair in 1959, at the University of New South Wales.

This period can therefore be characterised as one in which sociology both reflected and contributed to the radicalism of the late 1960s and 1970s. The primary focus of sociology was on issues relating to power and social inequality in which the Marxist idea of class was the principal explanatory tool. Consequently, the sociology of this period focused on the male world of work and, from the mid-1970s onwards, on the role of the state in the creation and maintenance of unequal access to resources.

Feminist and interactionist sociology, 1970s–1980s

The 1960s saw the resurgence of feminism in many Western societies, including Australia. It was associated with an increasing number of women entering the workforce and higher levels of educational participation. By the 1970s women were entering the academy and their interests and concerns began to influence sociology. Sociologists such as Bryson (1972) in Australia, Oakley (1972, 1974) and Mitchell (1971) in the United Kingdom and Firestone (1972) and Chodorow (1978) in the United States pointed out the gender blindness of sociology. They saw that in disregarding women's experiences and the domestic sphere, sociology had missed areas of social life that were essential for sociological analysis. They also critiqued the methodological approaches of sociology, which emphasised quantitative methods and ignored interpretivist ones that examined meaning and subjectivities. They pointed out that these interpretivist approaches allowed a focus on human agency that was often missing from structuralist accounts.

The work of feminist sociologists on women's housework, their involvement in crime, their experiences in the workplace and their relationship to the state identified new areas of theoretical and empirical knowledge. Studies on gender revealed the complexities of arrangements for inequality, challenging the emphasis on class and economic factors and resulting in approaches that acknowledged the intersection of gender, class and race.

Initially the work of feminist scholars was tied to a social activist agenda that drew attention to formerly unacknowledged areas of female oppression, especially family violence. These approaches drew on Marxist theory, linking women's oppression with ideas of capitalist exploitation. But these accounts provided an inadequate understanding

of the marginalisation of women from public life and provided little insight into women's self-understandings. This eventually resulted in poststructuralist approaches and a social constructionist approach to explanations of gender.

Postmodernity, 1980s–2000s

By the 1980s the increasing presence and consumption of media, the rise of the service sector, multiculturalism and rapidly changing technologies led to an awareness of the inadequacy of positivist sociological approaches. Marxist social theorists came to realise that processes of individualisation were changing contemporary social formations, reducing the salience of collective explanations such as social class. The speed of social transformations further undermined structuralist theories. If society is an ongoing social construction resulting from the creative acts of individuals and groups, Durkheim's dictum to treat social life as a social fact is an impossibility. It seemed, then, that the subject of sociological endeavour is not an objectively observable phenomenon—Durkheim's society *sui generis*—but a world of socially constructed meaning, expressed in symbols. These ideas influenced the development of post-structuralist sociology, which emphasised the relative nature of knowledge and the importance of culture and symbols, especially language. The work of Foucault became influential, especially his concept of discourse, which identified knowledge as the source of power in modern society.

The concepts of modernity, postmodernity and globalisation have become central to sociological theory and research. Just as the founding figures of sociology such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim concerned themselves with the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society, sociologists today analyse where current social trends are taking us. The distinction between modernity and postmodernity signals the idea that technological developments, especially the computer and the internet, have resulted in social transformations as profound as those that occurred at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Modernity is characterised by a belief in progress, industrial production and collective identities. Postmodernity is characterised by risk and uncertainty, consumption and individualisation. Bauman (2005) has described this transition as a movement from a world of 'the way things are' to one of 'the way things are to be made'. He compares the experience of modernity to that of raftsmen, following the course of a river that guides them along their path, and the experience of postmodernity to that of sailors, who are provided with no direction but instead must find a compass to guide them.

Postmodernity is closely tied to the idea of globalisation, discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Globalisation has unsettled the 'world of the way things are' by increasing the speed of social connections so that time and space have become compressed (Giddens 1985). It has brought different cultures into collision with one another, undoing earlier certainties and requiring constant reinvention, and this is one of the central characteristics of contemporary social life associated with the idea of the 'postmodern condition' (Harvey 1990).

REFLECTIVE QUESTION What have been the main stages in the development of sociology in Western Europe and North America, and how has this development been linked to surrounding social changes?

Public sociology

The question of differing sociological perspectives and what Peter Hamilton called the 'political tradition' in sociology and the concept of value-freedom was reinvigorated following Michael Burawoy's 2004 addresses to the North Carolina Sociological Association (Burawoy 2004) and the American Sociological Association (Burawoy 2005). In these addresses, and a number of subsequent articles developing his argument and engaging in the extensive debate that has been generated, Burawoy outlined his own fourfold typology of sociological perspectives across two dimensions: (1) the question of whether sociological knowledge is seen as *instrumental*—focusing on 'providing solutions to predefined problems' (2004, p. 1606)—or *reflexive*—being 'concerned explicitly with the goals for which our research may be mobilized, and with the values that underpin and guide our research' (p. 1606); and (2) the question of the audience for sociological theory and research, which can be either other sociologists, a purely academic audience or various groups outside the academic world, such as policymakers, contract research clients, interest groups, NGOs, social movements or the general public.

Across these two dimensions, it becomes possible to identify four different sociological orientations, traditions or perspectives—professional, critical, policy and public sociology—each with a distinct approach to the nature and legitimation of valid knowledge, to the audience to which it regards itself as accountable, and with its own characteristic forms of politics and pathologies (see Table 1.1).

For Burawoy, the challenge is not to identify which perspective is to be preferred, but rather to establish an ongoing dialogue between all four. As he puts it, 'I look forward to a unity based on diversity—a unity that incorporates a plurality of perspectives' (2004, p. 1612). However, the bulk of the attention has been paid, including by Burawoy himself, to the concept of public sociology—a dialogue between sociologists and the wider public—partly because Burawoy sees the current sociological world as dominated by professional and policy sociology. Highlighting the key American books that fall into this category, he mentions W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), *The Souls of Black Folk*, Gunnar Myrdal (1994), *An American Dilemma*, David Riesman (1950), *The Lonely Crowd* and Robert Bellah et al. (1985), *Habits of the Heart*, saying what they all have in common is that '[t]hey are

Table 1.1 Burawoy's typology of sociological perspectives

	Academic audience	Extra-academic audience
Instrumental knowledge	**Professional sociology**	**Policy sociology**
Knowledge	Theoretical/empirical	Concrete
Legitimacy	Scientific norms	Effectiveness
Accountability	Peers	Clients/patrons
Politics	Professional self-interest	Policy intervention
Pathology	Self-referentiality	Servility
Reflexive knowledge	**Critical sociology**	**Public sociology**
Knowledge	Foundational	Communicative
Legitimacy	Moral vision	Relevance
Accountability	Critical intellectuals	Designated publics
Politics	Internal debate	Public dialogue
Pathology	Dogmatism	Faddishness

Source: Michael Burawoy, '2004 ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, Vol 70, No. 1 (Feb., 2005), Table 3, p. 16.

written by sociologists, they are read beyond the academy, and they become the vehicle of a public discussion about the nature of US society—the nature of its values, the gap between its promise and its reality, its malaise, its tendencies' (2005, p. 7).

Burawoy also distinguishes between 'traditional' public sociology, with sociologists simply having a say in public debate or having their research discussed in the media, and 'organic' public sociology, with 'sociologists working with a labor movement, neighborhood associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, human rights organizations' (2005, pp. 7–8). He notes that his particular mapping of the sociological field is particular to the United States and the global North. For example, he notes in relation to this issue: 'When I travel to South Africa, however, to talk about public sociology—and this would be true of many countries in the world—my audiences look at me nonplussed. What else could sociology be, if not an engagement with diverse publics about public issues?' (2005, p. 21). But for Burawoy this only emphasises the importance for American sociologists at least to exert more effort to institutionalise various forms of public sociology, enabling the discipline to play a more significant and meaningful role in processes of social transformation.

> *In a world tending toward market tyranny and state unilateralism, civil society is at once threatened with extinction and at the same time a major possible hold-out against deepening inequalities and multiplying threats to all manner of human rights. The interest of sociology in the very existence, let alone expansion, of civil society (even with all its warts) becomes the interest of humanity—locally, nationally and globally. If we can transcend our parochialism and recognize our distinctive relation to diverse publics within and across borders, sociologists could yet create the fulcrum around which a critical social science might evolve, one responsive to public issues while at the same time committed to professional excellence.* (Burawoy 2004, p. 1616)

The idea of public sociology has been the subject of considerable debate, and not everyone agrees that it is the best or the only way to understand sociology's position in the world. John Braithwaite (2005), for example, argues that the best 'sociology' is in fact profoundly interdisciplinary. Charles Tittle thinks that public sociology is 'a bad idea because it endangers what little legitimacy sociology currently has, which is precious little' (2004, p. 1641). Tittle argues that by aligning themselves with particular political or normative projects, sociologists lose the one claim they have to intellectual authority and persuasiveness, which is precisely the production of knowledge that is autonomous from politics and morality. Tittle gives the example of a debate in a US state legislature to restore the death penalty, where it became clear that the legislature 'did not regard sociologists or criminologists as scientists, did not believe their research, and most of all, did not trust their motives in interpreting accumulated research and setting forth its implications' (p. 1642). John Holmwood generally agrees, suggesting that 'political neutrality is central to the corporate organization of sociology, not because social inquiry can, or should be, value-neutral, but because corporate political neutrality creates the space for dialogue and is the condition for any sociology to have a voice' (2007, p. 46). Nonetheless, the basic issue to which Burawoy has drawn attention remains a central concern—for whom and for what purposes is sociological knowledge actually useful, and to what extent do sociologists need to converse with more people than just each other?

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS How do you see the relationship between the four approaches to sociology identified by Michael Burawoy: professional, policy, critical and public? What are the arguments for and against the idea of public sociology?

Internationalising sociology

Like the world generally and all academic disciplines, sociology is structured globally in terms of a distinction, very roughly, between a core and a periphery, with a semi-periphery lying between them. Often the core–periphery distinction is termed the North–South division. The origins of social science lie in the North, in the colonial powers of Europe, Great Britain and the United States, and its concerns and points of reference remain there today. The South—Asia, Australia, Latin America—has been incorporated only as a source of exotic data or as an adjunct to northern knowledge. Raewyn Connell, for example, observes that contemporary social theory 'embeds the viewpoints, perspectives and problems of metropolitan society while presenting itself as universal knowledge' (2007, pp. vii–viii).

The Singaporean sociologist Sayed Farid Alatas identifies the core countries as the United Kingdom, the United States and France in their domination of social science production and prestige, although historically one would also have to include Germany and Spain (Alatas 2003, p. 602). There are enormous differences between core and periphery in total research and publication output, the response to sociological theory and research, and the provision of PhD training. Certainly all theoretical development is seen as coming from sociologists in the north, with a special emphasis placed on those located at what are perceived to be the most prestigious universities. A central observation by sociologists concerned with this issue (Alatas 2000a, 2000b, 2006; Keim 2011; Sinha 2000) is that most collaboration between sociologists from the North and South consists of Northern sociologists appropriating the production of knowledge about other parts of the world, while Southern sociologists continue to seek publication in British, European and North American journals and pursue degrees from Cambridge, Princeton or Harvard.

Alatas (2003, pp. 604–5) highlights a number of ways in which social scientists working in the periphery are dependent on those in the core:

1. the production of theory and ideas
2. the distribution of ideas and research results through journals, books and conferences
3. the domination of the technology surrounding the circulation of social science scholarship
4. the funds available to support research activity—research grants, the purchase of books and journals, the support of visiting scholars
5. direct investment in higher education institutions
6. the greater provision of research opportunities in the West, facilitating a 'brain drain'.

Alatas argues that all these forms of global intellectual dependency constitute a serious obstacle to the development of a genuinely international sociology capable of coming to an adequate understanding of the structure and dynamics of a globalised social world.

The problem raised by the critique of the Eurocentrism or North Atlantic domination of sociological theory and research is the question of how sociological thought can or should be modified to address this issue. The next step in addressing this problem is the development of local forms of sociology in the periphery that are connected with local problems. Weibke Keim (2011) gives the example of the sociology of work and industry in South Africa, which has produced analyses of problems and issues in the sociological analysis of labour relations, which in turn have generated a number of important theoretical innovations. Raewyn Connell (2011) adds another step, the development of conceptual concerns that are by definition 'trans-local'. She gives the example of feminist analyses of gender relations (p. 289), but this category would include any form of sociological thought characterised by an explicit awareness of the role of colonialism and postcolonialism in the formation of the modern world.

An important challenge for sociological theory and research now and in the future, then, is how to move beyond the marginalisation of the thinking and research of sociologists in the current core centres of social science production, towards the inclusion of insights developed in all sociological research, wherever it is produced, and a genuine international dialogue that recognises and respects the contributions to sociological thought being made in all parts of the world.

AUSTRALIAN SOCIOLOGY

Sociologists form an international community, sharing a vocabulary, broad conceptual frameworks and research concerns. However, there are also specific features of the types of sociology practised in different parts of the world that make it possible to distinguish between the different sociological perspectives within that international community.

Specific features of Australian history and society make it possible to examine sociological theories, developed in different social and historical contexts, in ways that generate a uniquely Australian sociology. The history of white Australian society as invading and dominating Aboriginal society, the country's period as a British penal colony and then a colony of British immigrants, the particular relationship between state and society in Australia, the multiculturalism generated by successive waves of migration, the particular pattern of urbanisation and suburbanisation, class and gender relations, Australia's geopolitical and cultural relationship with other countries—all these characteristics of Australian culture, history and society are arenas in which sociological arguments can be developed and, at times, challenged.

History

Sociology first gained a significant presence in Australian universities in its own right as late as 1959, when the first chair in sociology was filled by Morven Brown at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. In 1961, the Australian National University in Canberra established a sociology department in its Research School of Social Sciences, after a period of growth in sociological research in the Research School of Pacific Studies since 1950. The professional organisation for Australian sociologists was formed in 1963, initially as the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand and taking its present form of The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) in 1988. The discipline's Australian journal, originally the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* and now the *Journal of Sociology*, was founded in 1965.

The philosopher Francis Anderson introduced sociology to the University of Sydney in 1909, teaching it as part of the Bachelor of Arts course in 1909 and 1910, and then as part of the master's program until 1925; and the economist R. F. Irvine argued along positivist lines for the establishment of sociology in Australia. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) began teaching sociology in 1913, when Meredith Atkinson was appointed director of tutorial classes at the University of Sydney. Atkinson moved to the University of Melbourne in 1918 where he taught sociology as part of the WEA program until his resignation in 1922. He was followed by John Gunn, who taught a version of sociology increasingly oriented towards psychology and eugenics.

Throughout the 1920s, Australian universities continued to ignore the example of their American counterparts and made no serious attempt to develop sociological teaching and research. In some sense this reflected Australia's ties to the British university system, where sociology was also growing only slowly. Jerzy Zubrzycki (1971), however, argued that the relative stability of Australian society generated less interest in the study of social problems and social policy. Leading economists such as D. B. Copland had little respect for sociology as a discipline in general, or for the work of Atkinson and especially Gunn, thus laying the foundations of a dispute between economics and sociology that continues to this day. While on an international tour, Copland wrote that he found 'great scepticism about sociology' (cited in Bourke 1988, p. 58), and on his return the course was dismantled at the University of Melbourne. At the University of Sydney, however, the anthropologist A. P. Elkin supported sociology and, between 1945 and 1950, a significant component of sociological theory and research methods was taught as part of the anthropology program, producing a number of graduates who later came to be employed as sociologists. Sociology has also been part of the social work, education and law curricula at a number of universities, and these three professions can be counted among the important stimulants for sociology teaching in Australia.

Helen Bourke pointed out that economists dominated the social sciences throughout the first half of the 20th century, being far more successful in responding to the dominant political discourse. Economists, she wrote, 'achieved their ascendancy in the social sciences and in national life because they did serve the existing and growing needs of central government' (Bourke 1988, p. 60). The sociologists who did attempt to have a broader impact on public life found that their discipline failed to engage with the current political concerns.

Australian society, and particularly university education, was to change dramatically in the 1960s, enabling the interests of university students to play a greater role in determining the character of university teaching and research. As a result, the teaching of sociology and sociological research expanded considerably during the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the general growth in universities during this period. The growth of sociology was concentrated in the newer universities and colleges: the University of Adelaide and the University of Western Australia still have no distinct sociology program, the University of Sydney began its program in 1991 and the University of Melbourne began teaching sociology in first year in 1995, based in the Department of Political Science. Sociology also forms an important part of a number of professional programs, including education, social work, nursing and the allied health professions. In this relatively short period, sociology has established a fairly secure place in Australian intellectual life, producing a steady stream of graduates and postgraduates and, at times, influencing public debates.

Australian sociological research

The range of research interests that engage Australian sociologists has developed over time: a core of topics that continue to attract attention is accompanied by new areas developed in response to changes in Australian society. The core topics include class, gender and ethnicity; the Australian state, social welfare and social policy; health and illness; patterns of migration and settlement; the family, childhood, domestic labour and fertility; the media, communications and culture; and urban, rural and community studies.

One way to get a sense of the scope of the work undertaken by Australian sociologists is to look over the list of the 10 most influential books in Australian sociology that emerged from a survey of the members of TASA in 2003 (Skrbis & Germov 2004). Out of 66 nominated books, the following were the top 10, in rank order:

1. R. W. Connell (1977), *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture: Studies of Conflict, Power and Hegemony in Australian Life*: on class and class consciousness in Australia
2. M. Pusey (1991), *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-building State Changes its Mind*: a study of

Canberra's senior public servants and the way in which state bureaucrats had shifted from a welfare-state discourse to economic rationalism

3. A. Summers (2002), *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia*: on the hidden role of women in Australian history, and the cultural duality between 'damned whores' and 'God's police'
4. R. W. Connell (1987), *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*: an analysis of the power relations built into gender and sexuality
5. R. W. Connell (1995), *Masculinities*: a study of masculinity as a social construction and its intersection with class, ethnicity and race
6. R. W. Connell, D. W. Ashenden, S. Kessler and G. W. Dowsett (1982), *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division*: a study of the class dimensions of the school system
7. B. Turner (1996), *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*: an outline of how individual concerns and social dynamics are experienced through our bodies; the role of the body in identity formation
8. A. Game and R. Pringle (1983), *Gender at Work*: on the way in which the workplace is a central site for the social construction of gender and gender relations
9. E. Willis (1989), *Medical Dominance: The Division of Labour in Australian Health Care*: a study of the medical profession and its relationship to various forms of inequality
10. J. Braithwaite (1989), *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*: on the role of shame in crime control and the possibilities of less punitive forms of social integration.

The size of Australia's population relative to that of the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe produces a comparatively small marketplace for sociological writing and research, making it more difficult to find publication outlets for studies that focus specifically on Australian society. Consequently, Australian sociologists often look to Europe, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, the United States for new and leading theoretical developments. Australian sociology has generally been derivative of developments in the north at the expense of its self-understanding as a settler society in geographical proximity to Asia and its attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge. In a study of Australian intellectual workers, Connell, Wood and Crawford observed that when '[a]sked whether "In order to keep up with developments in my field, one must read books and journals published abroad", 75 percent of our respondents agreed' (2005, p. 17). In this sense Australia can be described as lying in the semi-periphery of global social science, defined by Alatas as 'a social science community that is dependent on ideas originating in the social science centres, but which themselves exert some influence on peripheral social science communities by way of the provision of research funds, places in their universities for post-graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from the Third World, the funding of international conferences, and so on' (2003, p. 606).

However, the conceptual traffic is not all one way: many sociologists located in Australia have an impact on theoretical developments in sociology worldwide, and many Australian sociologists make important contributions to international sociological discussions. (For a useful overview of sociology in Australia and New Zealand, see Baldock 1994; Germov & McGee 2005.) Locating Southern histories, social thinkers and concerns at the centre rather than assuming them to be less worthy than their Northern equivalents would provide an opportunity for a distinctively Australian sociology that recentres the periphery.

Sociologists have stopped talking about 'society' in a general, abstract sense and are giving increasing recognition to the specifics of geographical location, history and culture. The further we move into the 21st century, it is possible that the old divisions between the core and the periphery of the sociological community may become increasingly irrelevant, so that Australian sociologists will continue to develop their presence in the world sociological community.

Connell provided perhaps the best perspective on how Australian sociologists can and should see themselves in relation to the rest of the world when she argued for a 'locally based social science with the capacity to speak globally … both internationally, and between or across social locations in a region' (1991, pp. 74–5).

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS In what ways do you think Australian sociology should be different from the sociological research undertaken in other countries? In what ways should it be the same?

TUTORIAL EXERCISES

1. **Outline the main features of modernity and give a 'balance sheet' of its positive and negative effects. Include a reference to globalisation and deglobalisation.**
2. **Australia can be described as a settler-colonial society. What aspects of its history as a British colony, and as a colonised continent occupied by Aboriginal people, do you think distinguishes social life in Australia from that in other countries?**
3. **Create a table with two columns. Think of a social issue that interests you, such as youth homelessness, mobile phone etiquette, body piercing or internet dating. In one column identify some commonsense explanations for the social issue and in the other identify some of the ways a sociologist would examine and explain it.**
4. **Give some other examples of private troubles/public issues and explain what difference it makes to analyse them as public issues.**
5. **Sociologists often claim that their discipline can help comprehend a changing world. What are some of the more important changes currently taking place, and how might sociology contribute to a different understanding of them?**
6. **Do you think the world is being 'McDonaldised'? If so, how?**

FURTHER READING

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WEBSITES

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS): www.abs.gov.au

The website of Australia's official statistical data collection agency contains social surveys of Australia and some analyses of many different aspects of Australian social life, including social trends as well as some helpful articles.

Some of the information is free, some involves a fee. Many libraries subscribe to the ABS, so full access to ABS material can be gained through them.

Australian Institute of Family Studies: www.aifs.gov.au

This is the website of Australia's agency for research into family matters. It contains research, publications and links on the family and related areas of Australian social life.

Australian Social Science Data Archive: http://assda.anu.edu.au

This is the social science data archive, which is the main repository of sociological survey research in Australia. Data from quantitative studies and reports are available, although sometimes there is a fee.

International Sociological Association (ISA): www.isa-sociology.org

The site for the international professional association of all the world's sociologists, providing information about forthcoming conferences, the activities of all of ISA's research committees, fellowships, grants and prizes, the Junior Sociologists network and publication opportunities.

Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/undergrad/cetl/ejournal

This online, peer-reviewed journal is dedicated to the publication of high-quality undergraduate student research. It is produced, edited and managed by students and staff at Monash University and the University of Warwick. It is published bi-annually and only houses papers written by undergraduate students.

Sociosite: Social Science Information System based at the University of Amsterdam: www.sociosite.net

Run by Albert Benschop in Amsterdam, this site presents resources and information that are important for the international sociological scene. It links students of sociology to many interesting sociologically relevant locations in cyberspace. The site offers a comprehensive information system that is very easy to use and has become a popular guide for social scientists all over the world.

The Australian Sociological Association: www.tasa.org.au

This site has information about the professional association of Australian sociologists, as well as helpful links to sociology resources in Australia and overseas.