5TH EDITION

SOCIOLOGY

A GLOBAL INTRODUCTION
JOHN J MACIONIS & KEN PLUMMER

THE SOCIOLOGY FILES
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Select from the links in the drop-down menu to access the student study materials.

1. **Internet sociologist** – improve your internet research skills using this tutorial.
2. **Web resources for critical thinking** – links to Part Six of the book. A range of materials that link to films, art and novels of sociological interest. It also includes links to the websites.
3. **Website links** – a major listing of websites of interest to sociologists.
4. **Chapter resources** – a collection of resources including PowerPoint slides for use in classes, interactive questions, an online glossary and revision flashcards.
5. **Reading supplements** – a selection of short pieces to read which will add to each chapter.
6. **Tutor's section** – some comments chapter by chapter which may be of particular interest to tutors.
7. **Podcasts** – introducing each part of the textbook and global voices on sociology.
8. **The Big Vote** – allowing you to give your view on key debates and see what other students think.
9. **The Sociology Blog** – check this regularly for current and 'hot' topics to update your knowledge.
10. **Pearson** – learn more about the textbook, including how to order this title or obtain an inspection copy.

Dedicated to all those involved in the saving of lives through transplant surgery: especially the skills of doctors, the kindness of carers and the greatest gift of life from the donors and their loved ones.

SOCIOLOGY

A GLOBAL INTRODUCTION

FIFTH EDITION

JOHN J. MACIONIS & KEN PLUMMER

P Pearson

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PREFACE: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Welcome to the fifth edition

The book *Sociology : A Global Introduction* has fast become one of the more prominent sociology texts in many countries. This *fifth edition* consolidates some of its past achievements, but also makes clearer its humanistic perspective on global concerns in a rapidly changing high-tech twenty-first century. Its key goals are:

- to introduce all the main areas of study, the key concepts, the historical debates and basic approaches to the discipline of sociology. It assumes you know nothing about sociology; and thus **it is not an advanced text**. It is only an introduction, but a challenging one we hope. It sets its goals as **opening up the field** of enquiry for the very first time; and to stimulate you to want to take it all further. And if you do want to go further, there are suggestions at the end of each chapter for doing this (Mytasklist), guidance at the end of the book (Part Six) as well as a website which has been designed to give you further links, readings, questions and food for thought. Indeed you could see this book as a key resource to link you up to many topics on your own personal website studies.
- to tell a story about the parallel rise of sociology and the modern world and how it is persistently shaped by both technologies and inequalities. This is not meant to be a text which just summarises vast streams of sociological studies. It does not aim to tell you everything that has ever been written on sociology (an impossible task). It aims, rather, to tell a story about how the contemporary world developed from more traditional ones, and how now in the twenty-first century it may well be moving into yet another new – possibly post-modern – phase. The term to be used to discuss this change is one that sociologists constantly discuss. The book provides some suggestions on evaluating whether the modern world is progressing or not.
- to recognise that sociology these days must be global. Many textbooks focus upon one country. Whilst this textbook does often focus on UK and Europe – its

main readership – it also takes its orbit to be the world. It is impossible to understand one country in isolation from others. Indeed, a recurrent theme through this book is that the (post) modern world is becoming progressively globalised. One society cannot be understood in isolation.
- to be wide-ranging and hence to introduce analyses of a number of newer topics that are not always included in introductory sociology textbooks. We have selected some issues that are becoming increasingly critical in the twenty-first century. These include the role of globalisation (Chapter 2); the new areas of body, emotions and identity (Chapter 7); the importance of age, children and the growing number of the elderly (Chapter 13); the significance of disability in the modern world (Chapter 14); the emergence of a humanitarian society (Chapter 14); the importance of human rights regimes (Chapter 16); the rising (global) power of the mass media (Chapter 22); the significance of many countries outside the West that are facing poverty (Chapter 9); the importance of science, cyberspace and the new reproductive technologies (Chapter 23); the global significance of environmental hazards (Chapter 25); the sociological significance of AIDS (Chapter 21); and debates around post-modernity and the new kind of society that may be appearing in the twenty-first century (Chapters 2 and 26 in particular).
- to suggest that all the social sciences should work together and that they are inevitably bound up with political and ethical thought. Social science – despite its pretensions – cannot be value free. The position of this book is quite clear: it is a firm belief in the equal value of all human lives, to reduce human suffering across each generation, and to provide tools to help make the world a better place to live in. You do not have to agree with this, but you must debate the ethical and political foundations of sociology.
- to present all of this in a distinctly fresh and 'user friendly' way. We hope the book looks good with its crisp style, clean design and full colour. Although

we have tried to present it in a highly readable way, there is still a lot of material to digest, even in a book as introductory as this. It is worth spending a little bit of time looking at the book *as a whole* – its chapter organisation, why the Interludes have been written, what Part Six may be used for. There is a definite point to the structure of the book, a logic that should become apparent if you take time to grasp it. But in addition there are a number of tools that have been provided to help study. We hope the book is written in a lively style. Some sections will be easier to read than others. Skip around and enjoy what you find. We have tried to illustrate arguments with visuals, maps, debating boxes and charts which should stimulate discussions. Films and DVD – and sometimes novels – are suggested to take you further in your thinking. We encourage you to use Wikipedia, the YouTube and to blog away! But always – as we suggest throughout the book – work to develop your critical skills in all this: some material on the Internet is garbage and you need to spot it.

The set of *podcasts* – Studying Sociology – are designed to help you do this. These are 10 minute recordings which guide you through the book overall and through each Part. They aim to show you how to use the book as a whole. It is worth spending a little time listening to these. An hour of your time to break up some iPod listening! (Go to www.pearsoned.co.uk /plummer).

Above all, sociology is about lively and critical thinking about society. It is not in our view the learning of facts, theories or names of sociologists. It is driven by a passion to understand just what is going on in the modern world and to make it a better place for all.

Some features of the text and how to use it

Sociology: A Global Introduction not only aims to provide a highly readable text, it also provides a number of special features that will help you to study. We hope that this is a 'user friendly' book pitched at **an introductory level for those who have never studied sociology before**. Amongst the tools in the book that you should note and work with are the following:

1 **The boxes**. These are aimed at focusing you on specific issues. We believe, and hope you do too, that they provide handy tools for thinking and analysing. They come in six forms each identified by an icon.

Public Sociology boxes engage with key sociological issues and people in the real world.
Theory and Thinkers boxes which highlight both Classical and Contemporary Social Thinkers who have shaped or are shaping the discipline of sociology, and provide a capsule guide to some of their ideas.
Worldwatch boxes focus on issues over a range of different countries and provide **Fact Files** detailing these countries.
Research In Action boxes which show sociological research actually being conducted.
Methods and Research boxes examine different methods of sociological research.
Some miscellaneous boxes focus on a range of other issues that are of importance within sociology.

2 **The Interludes**. Each section of the book ends with a short interlude. This is designed to provide a topical issue through which you can now review the issues raised in each section. We hope it will be a good way to review the features of each section and think about what the section has tried to achieve. The topics raised in the Interludes are sport (Part One), food (Part Two), music and inequalities (Part Three), autobiography and lives (Part Four).

3 **Global and national maps**. These are aimed at helping you locate many of the issues discussed in the text through graphic illustration. They come in three forms:

- **The Social Shapes of the World** global maps are sociological maps offering a comparative look at a range of sociological issues such as favoured languages and religions, permitted marriage forms, the degree of political freedom, the extent of the world's rain forests, and a host of other issues.
- **National maps** focus on social diversity within a country or a group of countries.
- **The World at a Glance** at the back of the book suggests very quickly some of the major regional divides in the world and can be used as a handy reference as you are studying the book.

4 **The Time Line**. This three-part time line found at the back of the book (page 1030) locates every era and important development mentioned in the text, and tracks the emergence of crucial trends.

5 **Glossary and Key Concepts**. A listing of key concepts with their definitions appears on the book's website, and a complete **Glossary** is to be found at the end of the book.

6   A numbered **Summary** of each chapter is given at the end of chapters and on the book's website.

7   Each chapter ends with MYTASKLIST. This is a short list of resources for going further. This aims to provide:

- a few key websites
- some probing questions
- a short introductory reading list
- a few videos or films of relevance
- links to other chapters
- and a novel or two that may be of interest

Again, you can take these further on the book's website.

8   **The Big Debate** section at the end of each chapter presents different points of view on an issue of contemporary importance.

9   **Part Six aims to be a handy standby resource centre for you to use in your own researches. Here you will find:**

- A list of suggestions for using the YouTube.
- A guide to the key 'sociological' artwork found in the book with questions to think about.
- Lists of novels and films that may connect to sociology and be of interest.
- A list of best websites (also see 'Search the Web' at the end of Chapter 1, pages 21–23).
- A glossary of key words used throughout the book.
- A consolidated/select end of book bibliography.
- Basic data lists: time lines, maps, statistics and key theorists.

10 In addition the book provides:

- **Images** A key opening image to each chapter as well as numerous photographs throughout.
- **Vignettes** that begin each chapter. These openings, we hope, will spark the interest of the reader as they introduce important themes.
- **Recognition of differences** Readers will encounter the diversity of societies. Although there is an emphasis on Europe and the USA in the book – the dominant Western cultures – there is also a concern with global issues and people from other cultures. There is also an inclusive focus on women and men. Beyond devoting a full chapter to the important concepts of sex and gender, the book mainstreams gender into most chapters, showing how the topic at hand affects women and men differently, and explaining how gender operates as a basic dimension of social organisation.

- **Theoretically clear and balanced presentation** The discipline's major theoretical approaches are introduced in Chapter 2. They are then systematically treated on the book's website and often reappear in later chapters. The text highlights not only the conflict, functional and action paradigms, but incorporates social-exchange analysis, ethnomethodology, cultural theory, sociobiology and developments in the newer postmodern theories where different voices can be heard.
- **A debate on value issues** which leads you into the value base line of this book which can be loosely defined as a critical humanism.
- **Key Theorists** Students are also provided with easy-to-understand brief introductions to important social theorists. The foundational ideas of Max Weber, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim appear in distinct sections.
- **Emphasis on critical thinking** Critical-thinking skills include the ability to challenge common assumptions by formulating questions, identifying and weighing appropriate evidence, and reaching reasoned conclusions. This text not only teaches but encourages students to discover on their own recent sociological research. Part Six provides a major resource for doing this.

Sociology in a fast and hi-tech world

Computers and the new information technology are now playing a major role in sociology. The most common ways in which you use these in your daily studies are:

- Word processing (when you prepare your essays and projects).
- Linking to websites. The World Wide Web is a system that helps you gain systematic access to all the information housed in the vast worldwide computer network known as the Internet. It connects you to libraries, businesses, research centres, voluntary organisations, etc., all over the world.
- Research (when you need statistical techniques such as those discussed in Chapter 2).
- Searching various databases (the most common of which is probably your university library, when you retrieve information on books).

- Using e-mail and blogs to talk to both lecturers and fellow students. Often this can link students and others with similar interests (such as wanting to find out more about postmodern culture, feminism or Marx), who can then communicate readily with each other.
- Simulated gaming. A number of games help you create alternative realities and other societies.

A word of warning

There is a huge amount of sociological data on the Web, and although it can be very easy to access, it can also bring problems. Throughout this book, we will suggest useful websites, but we do so with some anxiety for the following reasons:

- Websites keep changing. There is no guarantee that a site will not be closed or its name changed. Even while preparing this book, we found a number had 'vanished' and others that had opened for just a few weeks.
- The quality of websites is very variable: we have checked most of the sites listed in this book and they were 'good' at that time. But they change, and sometimes they can be the home page of one 'crank' who is really only listing his or her own private interests. So use websites carefully and critically.
- The usage of websites at key times can be very intensive. So a cardinal rule is to be patient!
- And, finally, note that accuracy matters. Do not change addresses from lower-case to capitals, or miss out slashes and points. The website address must be precise.
- Look out for discussions throughout this book of the pitfalls and problems in using these technologies.

Organisation of this text

Part One introduces the foundations of sociology. Underlying the discipline is the sociological perspective, the focus of Chapter 1, which explains how this invigorating point of view brings the world to life in a new and instructive way. Chapter 2 spotlights some of the key sociological perspectives and suggests the importance of globalisation as an idea. Chapter 3 looks at some of the issues involved in the practice of sociology, and explains how to use the logic of science to study human society. It also provides a guide to planning research.

Part Two targets the foundations of social life. It may be useful to see this section as layered: society, culture, groups, interactions and biographies constitute the matrix of the social worlds we live in. Chapter 4 looks at the concept of society, presenting three time-honoured models of social organisation developed by Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber. It also looks at societies of the past and societies of the present. Chapter 5 focuses on the central concept of culture, emphasising the cultural diversity that makes up our society and our world. Chapter 6 offers coverage of groups and organisations, two additional and vital elements of social structure. Chapter 7 provides a micro-level look at the patterns of social interaction and biographical work that make up our everyday lives.

Part Three looks at the Unequal World we live in. It offers a wide discussion of social inequality, beginning with three chapters devoted to social stratification. Chapter 8 introduces major concepts and presents theoretical explanations of social inequality. This chapter is rich with illustrations of how stratification has changed historically, and how it varies around the world today. Chapter 9 extends the analysis with a look at global stratification, revealing the extent of differences in wealth and power between rich and poor societies. Chapter 10 surveys social inequality in a number of Western countries, but mainly the UK, exploring our perceptions of inequality and assessing how well they square with research findings. Race and ethnicity, additional important dimensions of social inequality in both Europe and the rest of the world, are detailed in Chapter 11. The focus of Chapter 12, gender and sexuality, explains how societies transform the distinction of biological sex into systems of gender stratification, and looks at the ways sexuality is produced. Childhood and the ageing process are addressed in Chapter 13. And in Chapter 14, we introduce a major new topic: disabilities and the ways in which equalities evolve around them. We also use it as an opportunity to discuss issues around care and the evolution of a more civilized humanitarian society.

Part Four includes a full chapter on major social institutions and the practices that accompany them. Chapter 15 leads off investigating the economy, consumption and work, because most sociologists recognise the economy as having the greatest impact on all other institutions. This chapter highlights the processes of industrialisation and postindustrialisation, explains the emergence of a global economy, and suggests what such transformations mean. Chapter 16

investigates the roots of social power and looks at the modern development of social movements. In addition, this chapter includes discussion of the threat of war, and the search for peace. Chapter 17 looks at the control process, as well as some of the theories that explain why crime and deviance appear in societies. Chapter 18, on families, examines the many changes taking place around our personal ways of living together in the modern world, looking at some of the diversity of family life. Chapter 19, on religion, addresses the human search for ultimate meaning, surveys world religions, and explains how religious beliefs are linked to other dimensions of social life. Chapter 20, on education, traces the expansion of schooling in industrial societies. Here again, educational patterns in the United Kingdom are brought to life through contrasts with those of many other societies. Chapter 21, on health and medicine, shows how health is a social issue just as much as it is a matter of biological processes, and compares UK patterns to those found in other countries. It also considers a major subject: HIV/AIDS. Chapter 22, on mass media, looks at forms of communications in societies, focusing especially on the rise of the modern global media. Lastly, in Chapter 23, we look at the institution of 'science' and consider some of its most recent manifestations, including the Human Genome Project, the New Reproductive Technologies and the importance of computing and the World Wide Web.
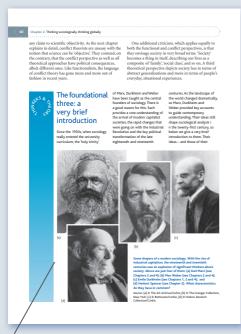
Part Five examines important dimensions of global social change. Chapter 24 focuses on the powerful impact of population growth and urbanisation in Europe and throughout the world. Chapter 25 presents issues of contemporary concern by highlighting the interplay of society and the natural environment. Chapter 26 concludes the text with an overview of social change that highlights traditional, modern and postmodern societies. This chapter rounds out the text by explaining how and why world societies change, and by critically analysing the benefits and liabilities of traditional, modern and postmodern ways of life.

Part Six provides a new, major resource for the critical student. Closely linked to the book's website, it provides 11 key resources which enable students to actively pursue ideas about society on their own. Not only does it provide the usual list of key words (Glossary) and reading lists (References), it also provides a major website listing. For the first time, a new key resource is suggested in the YouTube and a list of suggested searches are provided. In addition, the significance of the humanities for studying social life is indicated through guides for reading novels, watching films, and looking at art.

A note on authorship

This book is a radical re-writing of the highly successful North American textbook *Sociology* by John J. Macionis, which is now in its 13th edition (Macionis, 2010). In 1996, the UK sociologist, Ken Plummer, was commissioned to write an adaptation of this original text in order to make it more suitable for a European audience. Since that time it has grown and changed into a distinctively different book under the revisions progressively carried out by the adapting author working alone. Apart from nine completely new chapters, five 'Interludes', a new Part (Part Six) and substantial changes throughout the text, it also marks a major shift towards both a global and humanistic perspective as its foundation. John J. Macionis has not been involved with how this book has subsequently evolved, but a debt should be acknowledged to the original organisation of the American text, along with the original content, some of which endures in this latest European edition. This European edition of *Sociology: A global introduction*, 5th edition, is available worldwide, but not in the USA. Since sociology is a changing and conflictual discipline, neither author necessarily agrees with everything the other has written. But there is strong agreement that sociology is a lively and challenging discipline that should be presented in a lively and challenging way. We hope that this book succeeds in this aim.

GUIDED TOUR

Living in the C21st boxes highlight contemporary aspects of the topic.

Theory & Thinkers focus on key thinkers and their ideas in context.

Public Sociology and **World Watch** engage with key sociological issues from around the world.

Methods & Research examine different methods of social research, while **Research In Action** boxes show real sociological research being conducted.

The **Mytasklist** for each chapter collects together key related sources – websites, key reading, novels, films and big debates – for you to follow up and consider.

Part Six: **Web Resources for Critical Thinking** brings together key words, film lists, a major webliography, YouTube themes, topical art works and key organisations.

Making sense of sociological data 73

The population census

A **census** is *a count of everyone who lives in the country*. It is seen as crucial for broad planning and the shaping of policies. Most countries try to have one, but the problems it can pose are formidable. India has a population in 2011 of around 1,210,000,000 (1.21 billion – the second largest population in the world) and its census started in 1872 – a history of 140 years. It conducted the most recent in 2011 – and every time it is a major challenge.

In the UK, the census has been held every ten years since 1801 (with the exception of 1841) when the population was 9 million. In 2001, it cost £255 million – but the 2011 census is well over half a million pounds. Run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), it tries to count every person in the UK at the same moment. Although a lot of attention is given to the design of the questionnaire, it is getting longer and longer. By 2011 it

had become a 32 page booklet. And for the first time it was also accessible online. (There was also a follow-up survey – some 4,000 professional interviewers conducting some 32,000 ten-minute interviews.)

It was becoming clear that the scale of the census is heading towards trouble and the census of 2011 is predicted by many to be the last in the UK. It now is too unwieldy, too costly and too unreliable. Some statisticians often choose to ignore its data because its return rate was only 96 per cent, and indeed was much lower in some inner-city regions. Nowadays, the figures do not seem to tally: in 2001, there were some 900,000 people fewer than predicted – this was eventually put down to an increased emigration (possibly of young men). But there were other discrepancies. In Westminster, the population was revised downwards by a quarter, and in Manchester by a tenth. All this mattered because lower populations meant lower government grants.

Among the most commonly cited problems with the census are:

- *Undercounting*: some councils have complained that their populations are undercounted, and are suggesting a recount.
- *Cost*: as populations grow, the costs of a census can become prohibitive.
- *Distribution*: it is becoming harder both to get the forms to the right people and to get them to complete and return the forms.
- *Immigration*: there were more immigrants and some cannot read English.
- *Civil liberties*: there are suspicions about the nature of the questions in the census and how they impinge on civil liberties.
- *Ethics*: the questions asked are becoming more and more numerous – and more personally intrusive.

The census may be discontinued from 2011. Follow up the debates on the UK census, see www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/index.html; on the India census, see http://censusindia.gov.in; on wordwide census, see www.census.gov/ipc/www/cendates.

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hypotheses suitable for scientific testing. This time, the researcher's thinking goes from the general to the specific: 'I have this hunch about human behaviour; let's put it in a form we can test, collect some data, and see if it is correct.' Working deductively, the researcher first states the theory in the form of a hypothesis and then selects a method by which to test it. To the extent that the data support the hypothesis, we conclude that the theory is correct; data that refute the hypothesis alert the researcher that the theory should be revised or perhaps rejected entirely.

Just as researchers commonly employ several methods over the course of one study, they typically make use of *both* types of logical thought. Figure 3.2 illustrates the two phases of scientific thinking: inductively building theory from observations and deductively making observations to test our theory.

Finally, it is worth noting that statistics, too, play a key part in the process of turning facts into meaning. Commonly, sociological researchers provide quantitative data as part of their research results. And precisely how they present their numbers affects the conclusions their readers draw. In other words, data presentation always provides the opportunity to 'spin' reality in one way or another.

Often, we conclude that an argument must be true simply because there are statistics to back it up. However, readers must use a cautious eye when encountering statistical data. After all, researchers choose what data to present, they offer interpretations of the statistics, and they may use tables or graphs to encourage others to reach particular conclusions. *The big debate* at the end of this chapter takes a closer look at these important issues.

Asking questions of photographs

In a general study of photography, Akeret (1973) coins the term 'photoanalysis' and suggests the following useful scheme of questions to be asked. We suggest you keep this questions list to hand – and add some of your own – when you look at some of the photos in this book.

What is your immediate impression (of the photograph)? Who and what do you see? What is happening in the photo? Is the background against which the photo was taken of any significance, either real or symbolic? What feelings does it evoke in you? What do you notice about physical intimacy or distance? Are people touching physically? How are they touching? How do the people in the photo feel about their bodies? Are they using their bodies to show them off, to hide behind, to be seductive, are they proud of ...

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to allow for intensive observation; quantitatively, it permitted controlled comparisons across family units; and qualitatively, it encouraged a sensitivity to the subtlety, immediacy and wholeness of life.

4 Letters

Letters remain a relatively rare document of life in the social sciences. The most thoroughgoing use of letters is still to be found in Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant* (see p. 77), where on discovering that there was extensive correspondence between Poles and Polish émigrés to America, an advertisement was placed in a Chicago journal offering to pay between 10 and 20 cents for each letter received. Through this method they were able to gain many hundreds of ...

CONNECT UP: Turn to Part 6 of this book for key resources and link up with the book's website which links to these resources SEE: www.pearsoned.co.uk/plummer

MYTASKLIST

Ten suggestions for going further

1 Connect up with Part Six and the Sociology Web Resources

As you work through ideas and think about the issues raised in this chapter, look at the accompanying website and the resource centre at the end of this book which connects to it. There is a lot here to help you move on. To link up, see: www.pearsoson.co.uk/plummer.

2 Review the chapter

Briefly summarise (in a paragraph) just what this chapter has been about. Consider: (a) What have you learned? (b) What do you disagree with? Be critical. And (c) How would you develop all this? How could you get more detail on matters that interest you?

3 Pose questions

(a) What does it mean to state that there are various kinds of truth? What is the basic rationale for relying on science as a way of knowing? Is sociology a science? Should it be? And if so, what kind? Identify several ways in which sociological research is similar to – and different from – research in the natural sciences.

(b) What sorts of measure do scientists adopt as they strive for objectivity? Why do some sociologists consider objectivity an undesirable goal?

(c) Dissect any sociological study in order to evaluate its methodology.

(d) If there can be a feminist methodology, can there also be an anti-racist methodology, or a gay/queer methodology?

(e) Examine the ways in which the internet and new technologies are changing the nature of social research.

4 Explore key words

Many concepts have been introduced in this ... You can review them from the website or fr... at the back of this book. You might like to g... attention to just five words and think them ... how would you define them, what are they ... and do they help you see the social world n... or not?

See Victor Jupp, *The Sage Dictionary of S... Methods* (2006).

5 Search the Web

Be critical when you look at websites – see ... p. 939 in the Resources section. Some useful ... this chapter are:

The Qualitative Report
www.nova.edu/ssss/QR – an online journal ... a major listing of qualitative research websi...

Data on the Net
http://3stages.org/idata – based at the Univ... California at San Diego, this is a useful site ... data. It houses some 850 sources for gather...

National Statistics
www.statistics.gov.uk – the British governm... for all official statistics.

UK Data Archive
www.data-archive.ac.uk – this site, based at ... University, is home for most of the major s... researches conducted in the UK.

Mytasklist 93

6 Watch a DVD

- Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1951): a much celebrated introduction to the idea of different perspectives capturing a common reality.

It will be valuable now to watch *some classic documentary films* and consider whether they can offer more to understanding than conventional sociological research. For example, see:

- Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922): a classic early documentary about the Innu.
- Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935): a controversial documentary made at the start of Hitler's rule.
- Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932): a very disturbing introduction to deviance, not really a documentary. See also Chapter 14.

These give you a little sense of how new film-makers in the earliest days attempted to capture social life – and, indeed, how they often got this very wrong.

7 Think and read

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). This has already been introduced in Chapter 1. It has a very useful appendix on how to do sociology and is strongly recommended.

Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (3rd edn, 2008). This is one of a large number of wide-ranging textbooks that cover the whole field.

Ann Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies* (2003). A helpful guide to methods for cultural studies.

Robert Kozinets, *Netnography* (2010). A guide to researching online communities.

Karen O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods* (2nd edn, 2011). A useful guide to fieldwork in sociology.

Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (2nd edn, 2007). A good general introductory textbook on visual research.

Gerard Delanty, *Social Science: Philosophical and Methodological Foundations* (2005). A good background guide to the philosophical issues of social science.

8 Connect to other chapters

- Inspect some of the many tables and statistics throughout this book. Ask how they were produced and how valid and reliable they are. View them critically.
- See the life stories in the *speaking lives* boxes throughout this book. What are the problems with such stories?
- For more on the growth of multiple voices and feminism, see Chapter 2.

9 Relax with a novel

Several novels have tried to capture the life o... a social researcher. See Alison Lurie's *Imagina... (1967), which looks at the researchers of a ... religious cult.

Gang, for example, contains nearly 40 photos of boys and boy gangs. The lead has primarily come from anthropologists and in particular the pioneering work [of] Margret Mead (1942), who ... relied entirely on photographic [data about] the Balinese. The photo ...

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94 Chapter 3 Studying the social: an introduction to sociological method

10 Engage in THE BIG DEBATE

Damned lies and statistics: so do statistics tell the truth?

'"Fact, fact, fact!" said the gentleman . . . "You are to be in all things regulated and governed" . . . by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether.'
(Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Chapter 2)

You will soon notice that this book is littered with statistics. That is the sociologist's weakness, and you cannot trust him or her! As the English politicia Benjamin Disraeli once noted wryly: 'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics!' Every method of data collection is prone to error, and data do not speak for themselves. Throughout this book – as well as in much of the press – you will find a generous sprinkling of 'statistics' as well as 'statistical tables' that aim to summarise much data. Indeed, we live in a world that bombards us with 'scientific facts' and 'official figures' and it is well worth pausing to consider what such 'statistical evidence' means. People are so fond of saying 'As the evidence shows . . . ' But what does it show?

As you find statistics in this book, ask yourself some of the questions below. You will soon learn that statistics should never be taken at simple face value and you will start to see that some seem more reasonable than others. Some of the questions you should ask of data include:

1 Are the statistics valid? Do they measure what they say they are trying to measure – like the 'suicide rate, the 'crime' rate or 'human development'? If you simply think of the problems of just how 'suicide' (see Chapter 1), 'crime' (Chapter 17, 'class' (Chapter 10) or 'human development' (Chapter 4) can be defined (and indeed what they mean), you should soon see some of the problems.

2 Are the statistics possible to disaggregate or break down into different parts? Thus statistics can conceal differences between groups – such as men and women, or young and old, or region to region. Is it possible to break the statistics down to see these differences at work?

3 Are the statistics consistently measured over time? Statistics may be produced at different times using different measuring devices. Again, you need to check how the statistics were made in order to see if they were measuring the same things.

4 Who created this statistic? There is always someone who made the statistic – from a big world agency like the United Nations to the smallest undergraduate survey. Knowing a bit about them may help you see possible sources of error and bias.

5 Why was this statistic created? What were the author(s) trying to achieve by making these statistics? For example, if it is a poverty statistic produced by campaigners against poverty, it is good to know this. And if it is a measure of church memberships produced by devout Christians, it is good to know this too!

6 How was this statistic actually created? Was it, for example, part of a multi-million-pound bureaucratic enterprise involving the filling in of many forms by many different people across the world? If it was bureaucratically produced, how did the various contributors play their role – what rules guided them?

7 How is the statistic being used? Was the statistic produced as part of a political campaign and is it being used perhaps to get more resources? How statistics are used may give clues to hidden biases. There are usually plenty of statistics available for people on all sides of a political debate to use as ammunition to bolster their arguments. Watch out for over-use, under-use, misuse, political abuse and oversimplification.

8 Why was this statistic selected to be presented? Often the data we confront are not wrong; they just do not tell the whole story.

9 How is the statistic being presented? Very often graphs and charts can be used to 'spin' the truth. The picture tells only part of the story. A graph of the crime rate over only the last several years, for example, would reveal a downward trend; shifting the time frame to include the last few decades, however, would show a sharp increase.

PART 6

WEB RESOURCES FOR CRITICAL THINKING

CREATING SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATIONS

On the web

Visit www.pearsoned.co.uk/plummer
to find a wide range of resources to help
you revise, test yourself and investigate
further as well as engage with real
sociology people and participate in
real sociology debates!

Use the **Internet Sociologist** for a
quick course on using web resources
critically, discerningly and wisely.

The Podcasts include an introduction
to each Part from the author, seven
'Global voices' on sociology from
students around the world, and
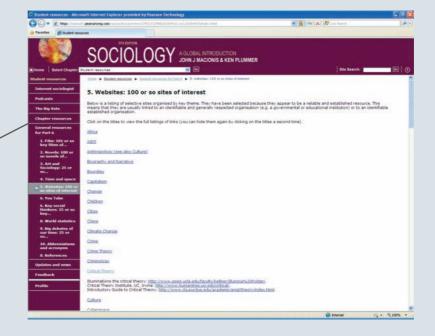additional podcasts on specific issues
related to the book.

After you read a chapter, explore the related resources online: test your understanding of the text with **true/false questions,** use the interactive flashcards and key concepts explored to test your understanding of key terms, and explore the **links to websites and videography** for more information on films that deal with sociological issues.

In the **General Web Resources for Part 6** you will find a wealth of information to help you go way beyond the textbook. Follow the links to films, key websites, YouTube clips, novels, art and much more to enrich your study of sociology.
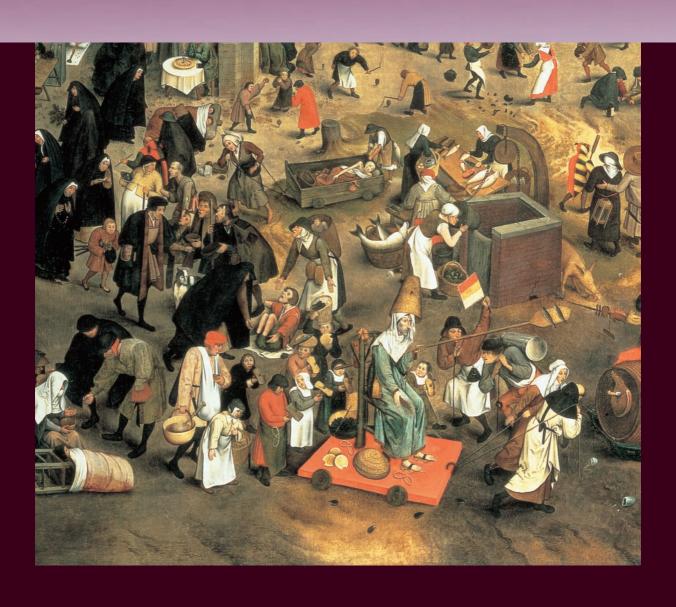
INTRODUCING SOCIOLOGY

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

IMAGINE YOU WERE BORN SOME 300 YEARS AGO, IN THE YEAR 1700. Although this is very recent in terms of the billions of years of the existence of planet earth, you would still be living in a remarkably different world. You would probably be living in a very small community and you would not have travelled anywhere except perhaps to a nearby town.

You would never have been to a shop, let alone a shopping centre. You would not have encountered the world of railways, cars, telephones, cameras, PCs, faxes, mobile phones, planes, videos, McDonald's, holiday tours, laptops or DVDs. And more than this, the idea of voting for your government, going to a university, choosing your religion, or even choosing your identity would all have been bizarrely rare. And a map of the world would have been very different. Welcome, then, to our twenty-first century world!

Now imagine again: this time that you were born and living in Afghanistan, one of the poorest and most conflict-torn places in the world today. Your life expectancy at birth would be no more than 44.5 years. By contrast, if you were born in Japan, your expectations would be nearly double this. Indeed, in Afghanistan, 150 children out of every thousand born die shortly after birth; in Japan (and Sweden), it is less than 3 per thousand. Your chances of extended education will be low: boys will have on average 8 years of education whereas it is double that in Japan (or the United Kingdom). The situation is worse for girls: they are likely to have only four years of schooling and less than 15 per cent will be literate. Some 53 per cent of people live below the poverty line and 40 per cent are unemployed. In Norway, by contrast, some 2.5 per cent are unemployed and poverty seems too low to be recorded! Media communications are also different: in Afghanistan, there are 500,000 internet users; in Japan there are 90 million.

But now have another leap of imagination: this time to a world that is yet to come – the world perhaps of your own grandchildren or great grandchildren. We cannot, of course, predict the future, but we can often see trends. For instance, 'babies in test tubes' and the new genetic engineering are now commonplace. The miniaturisation of electronics as new computers, cameras and I-phones become pocket size is ubiquitous in the rich world. Already these new technologies are being implanted into our bodies and secreted in public spaces. The home of the future will be driven by these. Medicine is prolonging many lives: and with many more people living longer and longer, some even predict that we may become immortal! Our music and media, shops and work situations, families and government structures are all changing beyond today's recognition. What once looked like science fiction a hundred years ago is the reality we now live in. Think up your own projections for the futuristic landscape of your old age!

The power of sociology is to demonstrate just how strong are the social forces that organise society in very, very different ways – and to demonstrate it in time (past societies, present societies and future societies) and space (across the 200 countries or so throughout the world). In this book, over and over again, you will see the variety of societies and the different opportunities that people have within them. Just where you were born – and when – has radically shaped much of what you know and what you can do. Having encountered sociology, you may never see the world with the same eyes again.

tip
For more information and data on all this, and indeed for every country in the world, search online *The World Fact Book* compiled by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). For full details: type www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html.

Note this is produced and kept up to date by the government of the United States of America.

The first wisdom of sociology is this: things are not what they seem.

Peter Berger

In this chapter, we ask:

- **What is sociology?**
- **How can sociological perspectives help us understand everyday life?**
- **What do sociologists do?**
- **How did sociology develop?**

(Left) Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, 1559

Source: *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* (oil on canvas). Brueghel, Pieter the Younger, (*c.* 1564–1638)/ Private Collection, Johnny Van Haeften Ltd, London/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Note: For more information, see: www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/bruegel_the_younger_pieter.html; http://wwar.com/masters/b/brueghel-pieter.html.

Q Brueghel's painting is a world classic. Examine it closely. What issues of social life does it depict? Can you imagine what a contemporary version of this would look like?

What is sociology?

Welcome to sociology – the *systematic, sceptical and critical study of the social.* It studies the way people do things together. At the heart of sociology is a distinctive point of view. It should be more than you find in a good documentary on a social issue. It is certainly more than listings of facts and figures about society. Instead it becomes *a form of consciousness, a way of thinking, a critical way of seeing the social.* It takes a while, sometimes years, for this 'consciousness' to become clear. And it brings the potential to change your life forever.

So a health warning is needed. Sociology could change your life – maybe even damage it! Contrary to the popular view that sociology is just common sense, it often strains against the common sense. Once it becomes ingrained in your thinking, it will always be asking for you to 'think the social', and it will entail *challenging the obvious, questioning the world as it is taken for granted*, and *de-familiarising the familiar.* This is personally enlightening, even empowering, but it can also make you a very critical person. It helps develop critical thinking and can help make critical citizens.

In this section, and subsequently in the whole book, we ask: what is distinctive about this way of seeing, this new consciousness? To get you going, the box below gives a few standard definitions to consider.

Seeing the general in the particular

Peter Berger's short book *Invitation to Sociology* (1963) has tempted several generations of students into seeing this perspective. In it he characterised the

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PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

So they ask me: what is sociology?

When you start to study sociology, people – friends, families, even strangers – will probably ask you what it is. You may well mumble something about 'the study of society', but that is very vague. Prepare a practical answer to give people. The following definitions might help you a little in this (but they all raise more questions than they resolve):

> The sociologist . . . is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is scientific.
>
> (Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, 1963: 27)

> Sociology is . . . first and foremost a *way of thinking* about the human world . . . [It asks how] does it matter that humans live always (and cannot but live) in the company of, in communication with, in an exchange with, in competition with, in cooperation with other human beings? . . . Its questions 'defamiliarise the familiar'.
>
> (Zygmunt Bauman, *Thinking Sociologically*, 1990: 8, 15)

> The 'human world', or the 'world of humans', is the distinctive realm of human experience and existence . . . and the subject matter with which sociology is concerned.
>
> (Richard Jenkins, *Foundations of Sociology*, 2002: 3)

> The term has two stems – the Latin *socius* (companionship) and the Greek *logos* (study of) – and literally means the study of the processes of companionship. In these terms, sociology may be defined as the study of the bases of social membership. More technically, sociology is the analysis of the structure of social relationships as constituted by social interaction, but no definition is entirely satisfactory because of the diversity of perspectives.
>
> (Nicholas Abercrombie, *Sociology*, 2004: 232)

> The science or study of the origin, history and constitution of human society.
>
> (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*)

> Defined in dictionaries as the science or study of society. The term was coined by Comte (1830), linking the Latin *socius* (originally a people, tribe or city allied to Rome, but later a society) to the Greek *logos* (reason or knowledge). The term spread rapidly and is now used in virtually all languages to denote any relatively rigorous, reasoned study of society.
>
> (Michael Mann, *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1983: 370)

> A social science having as its main focus the study of the social institutions brought into being by the industrial transformations of the past two or three centuries . . . [It involves] an historical, an anthropological and a critical sensitivity.
>
> (Anthony Giddens, *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn, 1986: 9, 13)

sociological perspective as a way of *seeing the general in the particular*. He meant that sociologists can identify general patterns of social life by looking at concrete specific examples of social life. While acknowledging that each individual is unique, in other words, sociologists recognise that society acts differently on various *categories* of people (say, children compared to adults, women versus men, the rich as opposed to the poor). We begin to think sociologically once we start to realise how the general categories into which we happen to fall shape our particular life experiences.

Each chapter of this book illustrates the general impact of society on the actions, thoughts and feelings of particular people. For example, seeing the world sociologically also makes us aware of the importance of gender – as we will see in Chapter 12. Every society attaches meanings (though often different meanings) to gender, giving women and men different kinds of work, family responsibilities, dress codes and even differing expectations across the life cycle. At the same time, the lives of men and women in modern Iraq, North America and China have very significant differences. And as societies change, so do these meanings: the expectations around men and women now, at the start of the twenty-first century, are very different from what they were at the start of the twentieth and they are often loaded with political conflict across many countries around the world. In this book, for instance, we will address the low pay of women (Chapter 15), their lack of power (Chapter 16), the violence against them (Chapter 12), the issues debated around Muslim women and the veil (Chapter 11), and the emergence of controversies around transgender and gay/homosexual/queer life (Chapter 12). Individuals experience the workings of society as they encounter advantages and opportunities characteristic of each sex.

The images on pages 6–7 suggest that there are many factors that shape our lives; Table 1.1 suggests some of the different 'levels' of reality we need to consider.

Seeing the strange in the familiar

Especially at the beginning, using the sociological perspective amounts to *seeing the strange in the familiar*. As Peter Berger (1963: 34) says in his *Invitation to Sociology*, 'the first wisdom of sociology is this: things are not what they seem'. Or as Zygmunt Bauman (1990: 15) says in his *Sociological Thinking*, we need to 'defamiliarise the familiar'. For instance, observing

Table 1.1	The architecture of social life: the layers of reality

- *Cosmic* – the widest presence in the universe/cosmos. This is a vast level of reality and we do not often look at it – but it is important to be aware of it as the infinitely complex presence behind the way we think about our humanly constructed social world.

- *World and globe* – the interconnectedness of the social and cultural across the world: the global flows and movements of economies, political systems, people, media messages, the internet, etc.

- *Social and cultural* – communities, societies, institutions and nation-states that have an existence independently of us, and that have definite structures and symbolic meanings over and above us.

- *Interactional* – the experience of the world in the immediate face-to-face presence and awareness of others: self, inter-subjectivity, and encounters with family, friends, groups and strangers in specific places.

- *Individual* – the inner world: the psychic world of human subjectivity and the inner biological workings of genetics, hormones, brain structure and the like.

sociologically requires giving up the familiar idea that human behaviour is simply a matter of what people *decide* to do and accepting instead the initially strange notion that society guides our thoughts and deeds.

Learning to 'see' how society affects us may take a bit of practice. Asked why you 'chose' your particular college or university, you might offer any of the following personal reasons:

I wanted to stay close to home.

This college has the best women's rugby team.

A law degree from this university ensures a good job.

My girlfriend goes to university here.

I wasn't accepted by the university I really wanted to attend.

What else could I do? I just drifted here.

Such responses are certainly grounded in reality for the people expressing them. But do they tell the whole story? The sociological perspective provides deeper insights that may not be readily apparent.

Thinking sociologically about going on to further or higher education, we might first realise that, for most people throughout most of the world and for most of history, university is all but out of reach. Moreover, had we lived a century or two ago, the 'choice' to go to university was only an option for the smallest elite.

But even in the here and now, a look around the classroom suggests that social forces still have much to do with whether or not one pursues higher education. Typically, college students are relatively young – generally between 18 and 24 years of age. Why? Because in our society going to university is associated with this period of life. But it needn't be – there are many 'mature students' and there is a 'University of the Fourth Age'. Likewise, higher education is costly, so college students tend to come from families with above-average incomes – young people lucky enough to belong to families from the service (middle) classes are some ten times more likely to go to university than are those from manual working-class families. And in many low-income societies such as Afghanistan, the length of time spend in education is drastically reduced. There are also significant variations by ethnicity and gender.

So, at the broadest level, sociology sets out to show the patterns and processes by which society shapes what we do.

Individuality in social context: the strange case of suicide

The sociological perspective often challenges common sense by revealing that human behaviour is not as individualistic as we may think. For most of us, daily living seems very individual. We think we make our own choices, and have our own personal responsibilities – and we congratulate ourselves when we enjoy success and kick ourselves when things go wrong. Proud of our individuality, even in painful times, we resist the idea that we act in socially patterned ways. Yet much of social life is

Society as a prison
A key to sociological thinking is the basic idea that society guides our actions and life choices. In this painting, human beings are located at the centre of numerous social forces. Think about the forces that have shaped your own life – and consider how your life would be very different if you had been born into other languages, institutions or societies.

Maybe think of the 'walls of our imprisonment' – the constraints on our lives – as being linked to issues of:
· cultures (see Chapter 5)
· social divisions (see Part Three)
· economies (see Chapter 15)
· power structures (see Chapter 16)
· families (see Chapter 18)
· religion (see Chapter 19)
· education (see Chapter 20)
· media (see Chapter 22)
· science and technologies (see Chapter 23).

Source: *Withdrawn Man*.
© Paul Schulenburg/Stock Illustration Source.

Multiple lives

Differences are a key feature of social life. The power of society over the individual can easily be grasped by looking at the world through different cultures. (a) Teenage girl, Mali; (b) Teenage boy, England; (c) man, Egypt; (d) woman, Ivory coast; (e) Muslim woman

Sources: (a), (c), (d), (e) Getty Photodisk; (b) Pearson Education Ltd/BananaStock.

indeed shaped, even determined, by factors outside of our control.

Perhaps the most intriguing demonstration of how social forces affect human behaviour can be found in the study of suicide. It is a topic that has fascinated sociologists precisely because no act seems more individualistic – more driven by personal 'choice' – than the decision to take one's own life. This is why Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), a pioneer of sociology

writing a century ago who will reappear many times in this book, chose suicide as a topic of research. If he could show that an intensely individual act like suicide was socially shaped, then he would have made a strong case for sociological analysis. And many think he did! He showed that social forces help shape even the apparently most isolated act of self-destruction.

Durkheim began by examining suicide records in and around his native France. The statistics of

his time (and 'statistics' was also a newly emerging field of study at this time) clearly showed that some *categories of people* were more likely than others to take their own lives. Specifically, Durkheim found that men, Protestants, wealthy people and the unmarried each had significantly higher suicide rates when compared with women, Roman Catholics and Jews, the poor and married people, respectively. Durkheim deduced that these differences corresponded to people's degree of *social integration: how they bonded, connected and tied into society*. Durkheim claimed that low suicide rates characterised categories of people with strong social ties; high suicide rates were found among those who were more socially isolated and individualistic. Working from this he developed a social classification (or typology) of different kinds of suicide. Too little integration – common at times of massive social change and social breakdown – could lead to *anomic suicide*; whilst too much integration could lead to *altruistic suicide*. A good example of this latter group would be suicide bombers, whose allegiance to a religion or a political group is so strong that they are literally willing to lay their lives down for it. (Durkheim also saw levels of regulation as another key to understanding suicide. He saw too little regulation leading to *egoistic suicide*, and too much to what he called *fatalistic suicide*; but we will not consider these here.)

Durkheim's analysis was poignant for the time he was writing, at the end of the nineteenth century. It was the time of the Great Transformation when the old order was breaking down (see pp. 17–19) and when industrialisation and market capitalism had led to a breakdown of the old integration. Suicide seemed to be on the rise everywhere. Durkheim started to make connections. And more: in the male-dominated societies studied by Durkheim, men certainly had more autonomy than women. Whatever freedom's advantages for men, concluded Durkheim, autonomy meant lower social integration, which contributed to a higher male suicide rate. Likewise, individualistic Protestants were more prone to suicide than Catholics and Jews, whose rituals fostered stronger social ties. The wealthy clearly have much more freedom of action than the poor but, once again, at the cost of a higher suicide rate. Finally, single people, with weaker social ties than married people, are also at greater risk of suicide.

Durkheim's study was very influential in helping people think about social influences and many of his correlations still hold. We discuss his work further in Chapters 2 and 4. But contemporary sociologists now claim that, as we have moved into the twenty-first century, and societies have continued to change, many

of the factors that Durkheim raised are no longer so significant. Two recent French sociologists – Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet (2008) – have examined world changes and concluded that, although suicide is shaped by social factors, these have changed somewhat since the time that Durkheim was studying. Suicide, for example, has declined amongst the wealthy and grown amongst the poor.

The Chinese exception

Each year worldwide, approximately 1 million individuals die of suicide, 10–20 million attempt suicide and many more are affected by it. In some parts of the world, such as Iraq, suicide rates are very low; but Asia accounts for 60 per cent of the world's suicides. Table 1.2 shows a range of suicide rates across the world. Thus, for example, in almost every country of the world, men are more likely to commit suicide than women. Yet in China, this is not so. The statistics emerging from China on suicide – and they are quite hard to get, and we cannot be sure of their validity – suggest a very different pattern from the mainly Western one described by Durkheim. China, with 22 per cent of the world's people, accounts for some 40 per cent of suicides worldwide: a staggeringly higher rate. Indeed, suicide is the fifth largest cause of death in China, and each year more than a quarter of a million people take their own lives (and 2 million more attempt to do so). And whereas male suicides in the industrial West outnumber female suicides by roughly three or four to one, in China women's suicides outnumber men's. Likewise, whereas in the West suicide is linked to city life, in China it is three times higher in the countryside. Thus, suicide now accounts for a third of all deaths among women in the countryside. Sociologists, then, look at these statistics to detect broad social patterns that then need explaining.

Methods and research: what sociologists do

Throughout this book you will find a selection of boxes which highlight key issues in sociology. One set of boxes are organised under the theme of *Methods and research* (look out for them). In these boxes, we will give you some idea of the kind of practical work that sociologists do – along with a sense of the methods they use. Often these boxes

SUICIDE RATES AROUND THE WORLD: STUDY THE TABLE

Study this table and look at other countries on the original and fuller table which is accessible online.

Table 1.2	Selected suicide rates around the world per 100,000 population by country and gender (as of 2009)		
Country	**Year of latest data**	**Males**	**Females**
Argentina	2005	12.7	3.4 i
Australia	2004	16.7	4.4 d
Brazil	2005	7.3	1.9
Canada	2004	17.3	5.4 d
Chile	2005	17.4	3.4 i
China (selected rural and urban areas)	1999	13.0	14.8
China (Hong Kong SAR)	2006	19.3	11.5 i
Columbia	2005	7.8	2.1 i
Croatia	2006	26.9	9.7 d
Cuba	2006	19.6	4.9 d
Cyprus	2006	3.2	1.8
Czech Republic	2007	22.7	4.3 d
Denmark	2006	17.5	6.4 d
Estonia	2005	35.5	7.3 d
Finland	2007	28.9	9.0 d
France	2006	25.5	9.0 d
Germany	2006	17.9	6.0 d
Greece	1999	5.7	1.6
Iceland	2007	18.9	4.6 d
India	1998	12.2	9.1
Iran	1991	0.3	0.1 [?]
Ireland	2007	17.4	3.8
Israel	2005	8.7	3.3
Italy	2006	9.9	2.8 d
Japan	2007	35.8	13.7 d
Kazakhstan	2007	46.2	9.0
Latvia	2007	34.1	7.7 d
Lithuania	2007	53.9	9.8 d
Norway	2006	16.8	6.0 d
Portugal	2004	17.9	5.5 i
Russian Federation	2006	53.9	9.5 i
Spain	2005	12.0 d	16.8 i
Sweden	2006	18.1	8.3
United Kingdom	2007	10.1	2.8
United States of America	2005	17.7	4.5
Zimbabwe	1990	10.6	5.2

i = increasing; d = decreasing

Source: This has been adapted from World Health Organization (2009) www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/index.html.

Note in general that:
- The eastern Mediterranean region and the central Asian republics have the lowest suicide rates.
- World suicide *rates* are highest amongst men in Russia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, Khazakistan and the Ukraine. They are also high in Japan and Sri Lanka.
- The largest *numbers* of all suicides worldwide occur in India and China (some 30%).
- 55% of suicides are aged between 15 and 44 years and 45% are aged 45 years and over.
- Youth suicide is increasing at the greatest rate.

1 Consider what patterns are revealed.
2 Why do you think there are these variations?
3 Can you really trust such statistics? Start making a list of problems with statistics. You will encounter a lot of statistics during this book but they should always be read critically (see pp. 94–5 and 289).

will sample key studies. In them we will explore what sociology is for and what sociologists do. Here we look briefly at some of the key roles that a sociologist performs in a modern society.

First, sociologists are *researchers*: they document the nature of the social times we live in. We need data about the human world – otherwise we would be living in the dark. You will find a lot of 'data' in this book, and ways of finding more, and sociology maps information on such things as population size, economic functioning, shifts in religious belief, the move to the cities, the functioning state of whole countries and regions – along with concerns over crime, migration patterns, family life and the nature of social class.

A second task of the sociologist is that of the *theorists*: they aim to foster deeper understanding of what is going on, and provide a way for sociological knowledge to become cumulative – wisdom can be passed on and developed from generation to generation. Data from research never just speaks for itself. We need more than information and data: we need wider understanding and the capacity to make connections, sense links with the rich heritage of thinkers from the past, and shun seeing facts in isolation and out of context. Sociologists develop wider ideas and help facilitate theoretical and analytical thinking about society. Random facts and information are of little value.

A third role is the sociologist as *critic* (and, often, change agent). As we have already seen, sociology fosters a critical attitude to social life, seeing that things are never quite what they seem, and common sense never quite that common. Sociologists question and interrogate the taken-for-granted society, and connect it to other possible worlds. They subvert the thinking as usual. Behind this, quite often sociologists seek progress and a 'better' world. Sociology developed as tool to build an emancipatory knowledge: to help us understand the world in order to advance it.

Next comes the sociologist as *educator and teacher* (and these days the media disseminator and the web coordinator of social knowledge). Amongst the many things that sociologists can do in this applied role is writing and teaching. But they also can provide governments (and world organisations and non-governmental organisations) with information that helps in planning future

pathways for society, and nowadays they also work in media of all kinds (from journalism to websites), helping society to find its way around social knowledge.

There are many other roles for sociologists. Sociologists can be *artists*, generating ideas that can inform and enhance human creativity. Sociological ideas feed into worlds of art, literature, music, poetry and film. Sociologists can be *policy shapers*, advising governments and groups on the nature of the social world. They can also be *commentators* and *public intellectuals*, providing a social diagnosis of the ills of our time. Sociologists can help make a contribution to the human world by clarifying options, sensing alternatives and signposting directions for the future.

They are also *dialogists*, creating organised dialogues across the multiple different voices to be heard in a society. At every level of social life we confront conflicts, and sociologists can facilitate listening to different voices and maybe evolving common ground as a basis for discussions. They look at global conflicts (e.g. wars between nation-states, and conflicts between men and women), at national conflicts (e.g. ethnic, religious), at local conflicts (e.g. community politics, splits between social movements), and even at personal conflicts (e.g. domestic violence, breakdown of trust between friends). In all this, they can help lay out different arguments and sources of tension, and seek greater understanding on both sides.

Finally, then, sociology has a wide and generic role in society: the sociologist becomes the *critical citizen in society*. This is the most general and possibly the most valuable role of the sociologist. Here we *can all help create a widespread social awareness and what might be called social thinking*, which is often in contradistinction to common sense, which usually sees the world in more individualising and 'natural' terms. Sociology helps people to challenge what is taken for granted, to look at their social world creatively, and to make the link between the private problems of individuals and the public problems of cultures. Sociologists can help people to make social connections and can foster aware citizens who know what is going on around them. Sociology *can help create critical, socially aware citizens*, who can make informed and knowledgeable decisions.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

What is public sociology?

Sociology involves multiple audiences and groups, as Figure 1.1 shows. It is an academic discipline to be studied (sometimes rather remotely) by students and lecturers in colleges and universities. But its subject matter also means that it is a matter of great general concern to the wider public. As you will see throughout this book, sociology's subjects are 'hot topics': the environment, pollution, family breakdown, religious conflicts, extreme differences of wealth and poverty, violence, terrorism, war, cyberspace, 'youth', women and men – and so on. Most people have views on such matters, and often like a good argument with friends and family about them. So sociology potentially has a very wide 'popular audience'. But can sociology help with all these issues?

Well, yes. Sociology's history can certainly show a strand of work that is indeed very aloof. But many sociologists have

wanted to make their work more accessible and less 'ivory tower'. They have also shown a passion for social change. Marx, for example, was a revolutionary, wanting to see the overthrow of the entire social order to bring about greater equality and social justice. He wrote very academic books, but also produced very readable tracts – see his *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels, 1894). Others have not been so extreme but, as you will see throughout this book, over and over again, many sociologists study the world in order to provide a better understanding and achieve an improved social world. They want to make a difference. They work with social movements, speak through the media, write books, engage with public policy formation. Sociology is not all moribund theory abstraction and neither is it senseless fact grabbing: it often shows a deep concern and engagement with the social world and how sociology's findings and ideas can be made more accessible. It lives at the interface between everyday life, public life and academic/intellectual work. Throughout this book there will be

'boxes' where you can consider some of the issues involved.

We will look at the ways in which public sociology can:

- Understand the audiences it is trying to reach – help us to see how the understanding of students, a television audience, a website reader, a social activist, a policy-maker, a social worker or a politician will start from different positions; and the sociologist may well have to approach these different audiences in different ways.
- Clarify language and definitions – help us to know which words to use, to understand 'new words' which keep appearing, and to appreciate the pitfalls of jargon and the advantages of clear speaking.
- Recognise positions – help us to see the moral and political positions which surround all arguments.
- Provide basic knowledge backgrounds – such as legal frameworks and information databases (now made so much easier through access to the internet).
- Assist in understanding research findings – so we know enough about the methods of researchers to make sense of their data.
- Present public debates – help us to understand the issues involved on various sides.
- Appreciate the different kinds of media that can present these issues – from television and film to debate and website blogging.
- Identify key spokespeople and organisations that work on these public issues.

You can find out a great deal about public sociology on Michael Burawoy's website, including the original article. *See*: http://burawoy.berkeley.edu. You can also hear him lecturing on public sociology on YouTube.
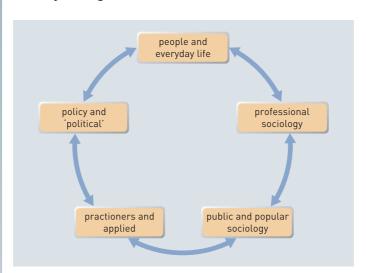

Figure 1.1 **The 5 Ps: the circle of sociological life**
Source: Plummer (2010: 192).

The sociologist as critical citizen: sociology in everyday life

Sociology and social marginality

Sociological thinking is especially common among social 'outsiders'. Social marginality is something we all experience from time to time. For some categories of people, however, being an outsider is part of daily living. Great literature often speaks from an outsider's point of view: Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* or Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, for example. The more acute people's social marginality, the more likely they are to be keenly aware of their surroundings and to see the world from a different perspective. To an extent, sociology is an outsider discipline.

No Turkish guest worker in Germany or Pakistani in England lives for long without learning how much 'race' affects personal experience. But white people, because they are the dominant majority in these countries, think about 'race' only occasionally and often take the attitude that race affects only people of colour rather than themselves as well.

Much the same is true of women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, the homeless and the very old. All those who can be relegated to the outskirts of social life typically become more aware of social patterns that others take for granted. Turning the argument around, for any of us to develop a sociological perspective we must step back a bit from our familiar routines to look on our lives with a new awareness and curiosity. Sociology leads to a questioning of all that is taken for granted. Seeing the world through the eyes of others 'on the margins' can help us to see the way the world works more clearly. And it raises challenging questions about how margins and boundaries come about.

Sociology and social crisis

Periods of massive social change or social crisis throw everyone a little off balance, and this, too, stimulates sociological vision. C. Wright Mills (1959), a noted US sociologist, illustrated this principle by recalling the Great Depression of the 1930s. As the unemployment rate in the United States soared to 25 per cent (as it did elsewhere – the depression was 'global'), people out of work could not help but see general social forces at work in their particular lives. Rather than personalising their plight by claiming 'Something is wrong with me. I can't find a job', they took a more sociological approach, observing: 'The economy has collapsed. There are no jobs to be found!'

Conversely, sociological thinking often fosters social change. The more we learn about the operation of 'the system', the more we may wish to change it in some way. As women and men have confronted the power of gender, for example, many have actively tried to reduce the traditional differences that distinguish men and women.

In short, an introduction to sociology is an invitation to learn a new way of looking at familiar patterns of social life. At this point, we might well consider whether this invitation is worth accepting. In other words, what are the benefits of learning to use the sociological perspective?

Benefits of the sociological perspective

As we learn to use the sociological perspective, we can readily apply it to our daily lives. Doing so provides four general benefits.

1 *It becomes a way of thinking, a 'form of consciousness' that challenges familiar understandings of ourselves and of others*, so that we can critically assess the truth of commonly held assumptions. Thinking sociologically, in other words, we may realise that ideas we have taken for granted are not always true. As we have already seen, a good example of a widespread but misleading 'truth' is that Europe is populated with 'autonomous individuals' who are personally responsible for their lives. Thinking this way, we are sometimes too quick to praise particularly successful people as superior to others whose more modest achievements mark them as personally deficient. A sociological approach becomes a way of thinking with an ingrained habit of asking awkward questions. It prompts us to ask whether these beliefs are actually true and, to the extent that they are not, why they are so widely held. Sociology challenges the 'taken for granted'.

2 *It enables us to assess both the opportunities and the constraints that characterise our lives.* Sociological thinking leads us to see that, for better or worse, our society operates in a particular way. It helps

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

Looking across divides: sociology and other disciplines

Sociology is a branch of the academic field of social science and the humanities, and hence has many friends it can work alongside. Of course, sociology does have its own distinctive take on matters, as we show in the text, but it overlaps with many other fields. At points in this book you will sense sociologists' close affinity to historians, philosophers, anthropologists, students of literature and many others. This should not be seen as a problem. Connecting with these, not breaking from other ways of thinking, is a feature of twenty-first-century thought.

To start with, you may like to consider how sociology connects to:

- *History*. All social phenomena – from politics, economies, religions and wars to shopping, celebrities, cooking, lovemaking and space travel – have histories. All social actions must be located in time. Sociologists must ask: 'Just when did this happen, and what were the circumstances that led to it?'

- *Philosophy*. Behind all theories and research findings are ideas and assumptions which shape them – about 'human nature', 'freedom', the 'reality of the world' and even what 'knowledge really is'. Philosophy is the under-labourer of all knowledge: it digs around in these assumptions and can help us to clarify them. (But if we are not careful, it can lose us in language that does not help.) Sociologists must ask: 'Just what are the assumptions – of human nature, of choice, of social order – that lie behind sociological study?'

- *Anthropology*. This is the study of people's ways of life and is the cornerstone of understanding 'ethnocentrism' – *the practice of judging another culture by the standard of one's own culture*. Sociology must always recognise that people inhabit very different social worlds, and anthropology – especially the variant that is called 'cultural anthropology' – is a great helper in this. Sociologists must ask: 'How are social things organised in different ways across different cultures?'

- *Literature*. Novels – and drama, poetry, film, art, music – are all visions of human life. They create little worlds we can enter to appreciate the nature of the social and the human. Sociologists have a similar task – though they do not create imaginary worlds so much as study existing ones. But common themes and understandings are everywhere. Sociologists must ask: 'What are the different social worlds that humans inhabit and create. Can we imagine other worlds in other times and places?'

We could ask similar questions through economics, politics, art and biology. In addition, there are also newer disciplines – found mainly towards the end of the twentieth century – which can play prominent roles within sociology. Thus, look for help from *women's/feminist studies*, *media/film studies*, *cultural studies*, *cyber studies*, *ethnic and race studies*, *human rights*, *postcolonial studies*, *citizenship studies*, *queer studies* and the like. Most of these newer disciplines focus on a particular issue – women, gender, media and human rights – and tend to be more interdisciplinary. But they all assist in our thinking about the social.

Sociology has much to offer, but it does not stand on its own. A sample of introductions to other disciplines includes the following:

John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 2009

Nigel Warburton, *Philosophy*, 4th edn, 2004

Peter Metcalf, *Anthropology*, 2005

Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory*, 2007

us to see the pattern and order that is found in all societies. Moreover, in the game of life, we may decide how to play our cards, but it is society that deals us the hand. The more we understand the game, the more effective players we will be. Sociology helps us to understand what we are likely and unlikely to accomplish for ourselves and how we can pursue our goals most effectively.

3 *It helps us to be active participants in our society.* Without an awareness of how society operates, we are likely to accept the status quo. We might just think that this is how all societies are, or how all people behave 'naturally'. But the greater our understanding of the operation of society, the more we can take an active part in shaping social life. For some, this may mean embracing society as it is;

others, however, may attempt nothing less than changing the entire world in some way. The discipline of sociology advocates no one particular political orientation, and sociologists themselves weigh in at many points across the political spectrum. But it does have a built-in 'critical' tendency. And evaluating any aspect of social life – whatever one's eventual goal – depends on the ability to identify social forces and to assess their consequences. Some 50 years ago, C. Wright Mills claimed that developing what he called the 'sociological imagination' would help people to become more active citizens. This major sociological thinker is highlighted in the box on p. 21. Other notable sociologists are featured throughout this book.

4 *It enables us to recognise human differences and human suffering and to confront the challenges of living in a diverse world*. Sociological thinking highlights both the world's remarkable social variety and its sufferings, real and potential. 'The British', for example, represent only a small proportion of the world's population, and, as the remaining chapters of this book explain, many human beings live in dramatically different societies. People everywhere tend to define their own way of life as proper and 'natural', and to dismiss the lifestyles of those who differ. But the sociological perspective encourages us to think critically about the relative strengths and weaknesses of all ways of life – including our own. It also encourages us to see the many forms of suffering that occur – poverty,

THINKERS & THEORY

The Enlightenment and the Age of Reason

Key idea: the world can be made better through the application of human reason.

'Modern Sociology was born of Enlightenment Thinking. Its approximate boundaries are represented by – at its emergence – the work of Rene Descartes (1596–1650) born in France but spending much of his adult life in Holland, and, at its conclusion, the work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) living and working in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century' (Evans, 2007: 23). Descartes wanted to know 'How do I know? And can I be certain?' He concluded with the famous aphorism: I think therefore I am. *Cogito ergo sum*. Kant characterised his difficult work as a bridge into eighteenth-century rationalism and empiricism.

The Enlightenment began in England (with Locke) and Scotland (with Adam Smith (1723–90) and David Hume (1711–76)) and was developed in France in the eighteenth century (with Diderot, Voltaire and the Encyclopaediasts). In its broadest sense it takes in artists such as Hogarth, authors such as Jonathan Swift and maybe Jane Austen, and composers such as Mozart. Just as today we sense a new spirit of the times with the growth of the new information technology, this was also a time when new intellectul currents swept Europe. Rationality, science, progress and a certain questioning of religious dogma were among the hallmarks.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) said: 'Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.' This famous quote from Chapter 1 of *The Social Contract* opens up debates as to what human nature is and ultimately suggests that living under the 'general will' provides a remedy for the corruption by greed and meanness of the perfect state of nature into which man is born 'the noble savage'.

Voltaire (1694–1778) said: 'In this best of all possible worlds . . . all is for the best.' In his widely read work *Candide*, Voltaire suggests this is not true – indeed quite the opposite is shown as 'our hero' Candide travels the world to face one horror after another. Life is not easy! It is better to cultivate one's own small garden and to ignore the rest, said Voltaire, ('Il faut cultiver son jardin'; Chapter 30).

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) said: 'No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.' Living through Britain's civil wars, Hobbes suggests in *Leviathan* that people should hand over power to a sovereign state and agree to live by its laws. The ruler's authority must be absolute, or there would be chaos.

John Locke (1632–1704) stated that knowledge depends upon our senses – we need to look at the material and empirical world. We need to recognise the supreme authority of the law; but it is conditional on an implied contract between subject and ruler. The ruler's authority is not absolute.

A good guide to the Enlightenment is: Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader* (2003).

marital breakdown, illness, war and so on – and to see how such problems often arise because of the ways in which societies are organised.

Some opening problems with the sociological perspective

While approaching the world sociologically brings many benefits, it also harbours some distinctive problems. Three can be mentioned at the outset.

1 *Sociology is part of a changing world*. One of the difficult things about studying sociology is that we are studying a moving object: society can change just as quickly as we study it! A 'finding' from one day may soon be proved wrong when situations and circumstances change. And, since it is a feature of the modern world that societies are changing extraordinarily rapidly, we can expect our knowledge about them to change rapidly too. For instance, many of the statistics you find in this book will be out of date by the time you read them.

2 *Sociologists are part of what they study*. 'I have seen society, and it is me.' As we are all part of society, we are all part of what we study. This cannot be otherwise, but it makes the tasks of a sociologist very difficult. Many other 'sciences' study objects that are separate from the human species, but sociologists do not. Since we are part of the very world we study, we may find it hard to distance ourselves from this world. A sociologist born in Europe may have all kinds of European assumptions which do not hold in Thailand or Brazil. With the best intentions in the world, much sociology remains *ethnocentric* – bound to a particular cultural view. Sociologists have to be *reflexive* and see themselves as part of the very things they study.

3 *Sociological knowledge becomes part of society*. The research and study that sociologists do – the books they write, the arguments they make – eventually become part of a society's knowledge about itself. Sociologists create ideas that can shape the ways in which societies work. Their work is *recursive* – it feeds back on to itself. Findings on crime – for example, that crime rates are soaring – can be reported in the media, and people then become more conscious of crime. As a result, even more crime is reported and sociologists may even study it more! There is an odd circle or cycle of knowledge at work in society and sociology, being part of this, has an impact on society.

Social change and the Great Transformation 1

The origins of Western sociology

Major historical events rarely just happen. They are typically products of powerful social forces that are always complex and only partly predictable. So it was with the emergence of sociology itself. Having described the discipline's distinctive perspective and surveyed some of its benefits, we can now consider how and why sociology emerged in the first place.

Although human beings have mused about society since the beginning of our history, sociology is of relatively recent origin. In many ways it was the product of the **Enlightenment**. The *French philosophes* were the cornerstone of such thinking, a 'solid, respectable clan of revolutionaries' (Gay, 1970: 9) that included Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire. Such thinking signposted the arrival of the 'modern world'. The world-view of the Enlightenment highlighted, amongst other things, the following ideas:

1 Rationality and reason became a key way of organising knowledge.
2 Empiricism – we need facts and observations apprehended through the senses.
3 Science – linked especially to experimental scientific revolution.
4 Universalism – the search was on for general laws of the universe (and society).
5 Progress – the 'human condition' can be improved.
6 Individualism – the starting point for all knowledge.
7 Toleration – in the world of religious conflicts, beliefs of other nations and groups are not inherently inferior to European Christianity and different religions should be tolerated.
8 Freedom – the human condition was that of a choosing self.
9 Human nature was uniform: rational, individual and free.
10 Secularism – despite toleration, or because of it, the Enlightenment was often opposed to the Church (Hamilton, 1996).

Later – as we shall see – thinkers became very critical of this kind of thinking, but it is still pervasive in much of the modern Western world. (Watch out for the ideas of Foucault (Chapter 17) and Adorno (Chapter 22).)

THINKERS & THEORY

Auguste Comte: the French Revolution and positivism

Key idea: the study of sociology is a science.

What sort of person would invent sociology? Certainly someone living in times of momentous change. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) grew up in the wake of the French Revolution, which brought a sweeping transformation to his country. And if that wasn't sufficient, another revolution was under way: factories were sprouting up across continental Europe, recasting the lives of the entire population. Everyone living in this era became keenly aware of the state of society.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857) is usually seen as both the founder of sociology and of positivism in the social sciences. He sees them as the 'religion of humanity'. For an analysis of his work, see Mike Gane: *Auguste Comte* (2006)

Source: akg-images.

Drawn from his small home town by the bustle of Paris, Comte was soon deeply involved in the exciting events of his time. More than anything else, he wanted to understand the human drama that was unfolding all around him. Once equipped with knowledge about how society operates, Comte believed, people would be able to build for themselves a better future. He divided his new discipline into two parts: how society is held together (which he called social statics), and how society changes (social dynamics). From the Greek and Latin words meaning 'the study of society', Comte came to describe his work as sociology. He evolved an influential account of the stages of society – theological, metaphysical and positivist – and claimed that sociology should be part of this positivist, or scientific, phase (see pp. 63–5).

However, only in 1839 did the French social thinker Auguste Comte (introduced in the above box) coin the term *sociology* to describe a new way of looking at the world.

Science and Western sociology

The nature of society was a major topic of enquiry for virtually all the brilliant thinkers of the ancient world, including the Chinese philosopher K'ung Futzu, also known as Confucius (551–479 BCE), and the Greek philosophers Plato (*c*. 427–347 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE).[1] Similarly, the medieval thinker St Thomas Aquinas (*c*. 1225–74), the fourteenth-century Muslim Ibn Khaldun and the French philosopher Montesquieu (1689–1755) all examined the state of human society.

[1] Throughout this text, the abbreviation BCE designates 'before the common era'. We use this terminology in place of the traditional BC ('before Christ') in recognition of religious plurality. Similarly, in place of the traditional AD (*anno Domini*, or 'in the year of our Lord'), we employ the abbreviation CE ('common era'). See also the timelines at the front of the book. This reaming is controversial, and does not seem to be widely used yet in Europe. It shows the relativity of categories. But to use a Christian-based chronology is seen by many as offensive in a world where billions are not Christian.

There have been many such social thinkers. Yet, as Emile Durkheim noted almost a century ago, none of these approached society from a truly sociological point of view.

> **Looking back in history . . . we find that no philosophers ever viewed matters [with a sociological perspective] until quite recently . . . It seemed to them sufficient to ascertain what the human will should strive for and what it should avoid in established societies . . . Their aim was not to offer us as valid a description of nature as possible, but to present us with the idea of a perfect society, a model to be imitated.**

(Durkheim, 1972: 57; orig. 1918)

What sets sociology apart from earlier social thought? Prior to the birth of sociology, philosophers and theologians mostly focused on imagining the ideal society. None attempted to analyse society as it really was. Pioneers of the discipline such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Toennies (see below) reversed these priorities. Although they were certainly concerned with how human society could be improved, their major goal was to understand how society actually operates.

The key to achieving this objective, according to Comte, was developing a scientific approach to society. Looking back in time, Comte sorted human efforts to comprehend the world into three distinct stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific (1975; orig. 1851–54). The earliest era, extending through to the medieval period in Europe, was the *theological stage*. At this point, thoughts about the world were guided by religion, so people regarded society as an expression of God's will – at least in so far as humans were capable of fulfilling a divine plan.

With the Renaissance, the theological approach to society gradually gave way to what Comte called the *metaphysical stage*. During this period, people came to understand society as a natural, rather than a supernatural, phenomenon. Human nature figured heavily in metaphysical visions of society: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), for example, posited that society reflected not the perfection of God as much as the failings of a rather selfish human nature.

What Comte heralded as the final, *scientific stage* in the long quest to understand society was propelled by scientists such as Copernicus (1473–1543), Galileo[2] (1564–1642) and Isaac Newton (1642–1727). Comte's contribution came in applying this scientific approach – first used to study the physical world – to the study of society.

Comte was thus a proponent of **positivism**, defined as *a means to understand the world based on science*. As a positivist, Comte believed that society conforms to invariable laws, much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other laws of nature. Even today, most sociologists agree that science plays a crucial role in sociology. But, as Chapter 3 explains, we now realise both that human behaviour is often far more complex than natural phenomena and that science is itself more sophisticated than we thought before. Thus human beings are creatures with considerable imagination and spontaneity, so that our behaviour can never be fully explained by any rigid 'laws of society'. Likewise, the universe may be much more 'chaotic' and 'emergent' than we previously thought, making observations and laws much more difficult.

[2] Illustrating Comte's stages, the ancient Greeks and Romans viewed the planets as gods; Renaissance metaphysical thinkers saw them as astral influences (giving rise to astrology); by the time of Galileo, scientists understood planets as natural objects behaving in orderly ways.

Change, transformation and sociology

Sociology was born out of the 'massive social transformation' of the past two centuries. Two great revolutions – the French Revolution of 1789 and the more general 'Industrial Revolution' traced to England in the eighteenth century – 'have all but totally dissolved the forms of social organisation in which humankind has lived for thousands of years of its previous history' (Giddens, 1986: 4). Striking transformations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, then, drove the development of sociology. As the social ground trembled under their feet, people understandably focused their attention on society. Traditions were crumbling.

First came scientific discoveries and technological advances that produced a factory-based industrial economy. Second, factories drew millions of people from the countryside, causing an explosive growth of cities. Third, people in these burgeoning industrial cities soon entertained new ideas about democracy and political rights. Finally, the stable communities in which most people had lived for centuries started to decline. We shall briefly describe each of these four changes – though they all reappear for more detailed analysis during this book.

1 A new industrial economy: the growth of modern capitalism

During the European Middle Ages, most people tilled fields near their homes or engaged in small-scale *manufacturing* (a word derived from Latin words meaning 'to make by hand'). But by the end of the eighteenth century, inventors had applied new sources of energy – first water power and then steam power – to the operation of large machines, which gave birth to factories. England, the home of the Industrial Revolution, was transformed. The landscape changed radically as new cities were built. And now, instead of labouring at home, workers became part of a large and anonymous industrial workforce, toiling for strangers who owned the factories. This drastic change in the system of production generated huge poverty and mass suffering; it weakened families and 'demoralised societies'; it eroded traditions that had guided members of small communities for centuries. For many, the progress of the new machines was also the breakdown of any kind of society or social order as we previously knew it. The development of modern capitalism is considered in Chapter 4.

2 The growth of cities

Factories sprouting across much of Europe became magnets, attracting people in need of work. This 'pull' of work in the new industrialised labour force was accentuated by an additional 'push' as landowners fenced off more and more ground, turning farms into grazing land for sheep – the source of wool for the thriving textile mills. This 'enclosure movement' forced countless tenant farmers from the countryside towards cities in search of work in the new factories.

   Many villages were soon abandoned; at the same time, however, factory towns swelled rapidly into large cities. Such urban growth dramatically changed people's lives. Cities churned with strangers, in numbers that overwhelmed available housing. Widespread social problems – including poverty, disease, pollution, crime and homelessness – were the order of the day. This was the world that Charles Dickens so vividly described in some of his nineteenth-century novels. Such social crises further stimulated development of the sociological perspective. We consider the rise of modern cities in Chapter 24.

3 Political change: control and democracy

During the Middle Ages, as Comte noted, most people thought of society as the expression of God's will. Royalty claimed to rule by 'divine right', and each person up and down the social hierarchy had some other part in the holy plan. Indeed, throughout history people have rarely seen themselves as being in control of their own lives. With economic development and the rapid growth of cities, changes in political thought were inevitable. Starting in the seventeenth century, every kind of tradition came under spirited attack. In the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke (1632–1704) and Adam Smith (1723–90), we see a distinct shift in focus from people's moral obligations to remain loyal to their rulers, to the idea that society is the product of individual self-interest. The key phrases in the new political climate, therefore, were *individual liberty* and *individual rights*. Echoing the thoughts of Locke, the American Declaration of Independence asserts that each individual has 'certain unalienable rights', including 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'.

Table 1.3	Some early sociologists and how they viewed the social change of their time		
Sociologist	**Earlier societies**	**Newer societies arriving**	**Explanatory dynamic?**
Smith and Montesquieu	Hunting, herding, agricultural	Commercial	Rise of free markets
Comte	Theological, metaphysical	Scientific, positivist	Science
Maine	Status	Contract	Changes in law
Spencer	Homogeneous – simple, militant	Heterogeneous – complex, industrial	Changes in population
Toennies	*Gemeinschaft* – community based	*Gesellschaft* – association based	Community shifts
Marx	Primitive communism, slavery, feudalism	Capitalism (but leading to socialism)	Economic exploitation
Durkheim	Mechanical solidarity	Organic solidarity	Population density and division of labour
Weber	Traditional	Rational-bureaucratic, secular	Changes in religion and economy (capitalism and its affinity with the Protestant ethic)
Simmel	Primitive production	Money and modernity	Circulation of money; Group size grows

Source: Plummer (2010: 77).

The political revolution in France that began soon afterwards, in 1789, constituted an even more dramatic break with political and social traditions. As the French social analyst Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59) surveyed his society after the French Revolution, he exaggerated only slightly when he asserted that the changes we have described amounted to 'nothing short of the regeneration of the whole human race' (1955: 13; orig. 1856). In this context, it is easy to see why Auguste Comte and other pioneers of sociology soon developed their new discipline. Sociology flowered in precisely those societies – France, Germany and England – where change was greatest.

4 *The loss of* Gemeinschaft: *the eclipse of community*

The German sociologist Ferdinand Toennies produced the theory of **Gemeinschaft** and **Gesellschaft** (see also Chapter 24). Toennies (1963; orig. 1887) saw the modern world as the progressive loss of *Gemeinschaft*, or human community. He argued that the Industrial Revolution had undermined the strong social fabric of family and tradition by fostering individualism and a business-like emphasis on facts and efficiency. European and North American societies gradually became rootless and impersonal as people came to associate mostly on the basis of self-interest – the condition Toennies dubbed *Gesellschaft*. Toennies' thesis was that traditional societies, built on kinship and neighbourhood, nourished collective sentiments, virtue and honour. Modernisation washes across traditional society like an acid, eroding human community and unleashing rampant individualism.

Through much of the twentieth century, at least some areas of the Western world approximated Toennies' concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Families that had lived for generations in rural towns and villages were tightly integrated into a hard-working, slow-moving way of life. Before telephones (invented in 1876) and television (introduced in 1939, widespread after 1950), families and communities entertained themselves, communicating with distant members by letter.

Before private cars became commonplace after the Second World War, many people viewed their home town as their entire world. Inevitable tensions and conflicts – sometimes based on race, ethnicity and religion – characterised past communities. According to Toennies, however, the traditional ties of *Gemeinschaft* bound people of a community together, 'essentially united in spite of all separating factors' (1963: 65; orig. 1887).

The modern world turned societies inside-out so that, as Toennies put it, people are 'essentially separated in spite of uniting factors' (1963: 65; orig. 1887). This is the world of *Gesellschaft* where, especially in large cities, most people live among strangers and ignore those they pass on the street. Trust is hard to come by in a mobile and anonymous society in which, according to researchers, people tend to put their personal needs ahead of group loyalty and a majority of adults claim that 'you can't be too careful' in dealing with people (Russell, 1993).

Toennies' work displays a deep distrust of the notion of 'progress', which he feared amounted to the steady loss of traditional morality. Toennies stopped short of claiming that modern society was 'worse' than societies of the past and he made a point of praising the spread of rational, scientific thinking. Nevertheless, the growing individualism and selfishness characteristic of modern societies troubled him. Knowing that there could be no return to the past, he looked to the future, hoping that new forms of social organisation would develop that would combine modern rationality with traditional collective responsibility.

tip   To develop timelines, see the inside cover of this book and examine:

Wikipedia Timeline of Sociology
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_sociology

Hyper soc Timeline
www.timelineindex.com/content/view/160

Timeline of the American Sociological Association
www.asanet.org/cs/root/leftnav/asa_history/
a_history_of_asa_2005_appendix_1

Timeline Western sociology: some early landmarks in thinking about society

Before Western sociology

551–479 BCE Confucius, *Analects of Confucius*
469–399 BCE Socrates and Western philosophy
384–322 BCE Aristotle, *Poetics*; *The Nicomachean Ethics*
360 BCE Plato, *The Republic*
973–1048 Al-Biruni, Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad, Qanun-i-Masoodi
1332–1406 Ibn-Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*

Renaissance and Enlightenment

1651 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
1739 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
1751 William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*
1755 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*
1759 Voltaire, *Candide*
1776 Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
1784 Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*

Origins and classics

1839 Comte defines sociology as a discipline – the term is invented.
 (published 1824 August Comte's *System of Positive Politics*: introduced the term 'sociology')
1846 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*: the theory of materialist history is outlined.
1987 Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* – suicide statistics show just how it varies socially.
1889 William E. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* – first major study of the American Negro.
1904 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* – ideas shape history, and here religion shapes capitalism.
1900 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* – changes in organisation of money shift human relations.

The rise of US sociology

1912 Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and Social Order*.
1905 American Sociological Society formed (becoming American Sociological Association in 1959).
1915–30 The tradition of the 'Chicago School' associated with Robert Park and the examination of urban life.
1918–20 W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* – highly regarded five volumes of innovative method, theory and data on migrants and city life.
1921 Park and Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* – first major textbook from a major new sociology department at Chicago University with a stress on city conflict.
1929 Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown* – small-town community life (Muncie) in the USA observed closely and especially through its class system.
1934 George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*.

Mid-twentieth-century sociology

1944 Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* – asks 'why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism'.
1950 David Riesman et al.'s *The Lonely Crowd* – society has moved from tradition directed to outer directed.
1951 British Sociological Association founded.
1951 Indian Sociological Association founded.
1951 Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* – theoretical treatise about the integrated social order.
1956/59 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Everyday Life* – micro sociological argument about social life as drama.
1957 Peter Wilmott and Michael Young, *Family and Kinship in East London* – charts changes in community and family life in post-Second World War England.
1959 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* – left critique of grand theory and overworked methodology in sociology.

C. Wright Mills: the sociological imagination

THINKERS & THEORY

C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) was an outspoken, radical, and left wing sociologist of the mid twentieth century. His book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) has been extremely influential on several generations of sociologists

Source: Archive Photos/Stringer/ Getty Images.

Charles Wright Mills (1916–62) managed to cause a stir with almost everything he did. Even arriving for a class at New York's Columbia University – clad in a sweatshirt, jeans and boots, astride his motorcycle – he usually turned some heads. During the conservative 1950s, Mills not only dressed a bit out of the mainstream, but he also produced a number of books that challenged most of the beliefs the majority of us take for granted. He was an American Marxist and he acquired both adherents and adversaries.

As Mills saw it, sociology is not some dry enterprise detached from life. Rather, he held up sociology as an escape from the 'traps' of our lives because it can show us that society – not our own foibles or failings – is responsible for many of our problems. In this way, Mills maintained, sociology transforms personal problems into public and political issues. For Mills, 'The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise . . .' (Mills, 1967: 4; orig. 1957).

In the following excerpt, Mills describes both the power of society to shape our individual lives, and the importance of connecting our lives (biographies) to history and society:

When a society becomes industrialised, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change . . . The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the society in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kind of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of men and society, of biography and history, of self and world . . .

What they need . . . is a quality of mind that will help them to [see] . . . what is going on in the world and . . . what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality . . . that . . . may be called the sociological imagination. Always keep your eyes open to the image of man – the generic notion of his human nature – which by your work you are assuming and implying; and also to the image of history – your notion of how history is being made. In a word, continually work out and revise your views of the problems of history, the problems of biography, and the problems of a social structure in which biography and history intersect. Keep your eyes open to the varieties of individuality, and to the modes of epochal change. Use what you see and what you imagine as the clues to your study of the human variety . . . know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues – and in terms of the problems of history making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time.

(Mills, 1967: 3–5, 225–6; orig. 1957)

This triple focus, on *biography, history and structure*, is sociology's heritage (see Bipul Kumar Bhadra, 1998).

(Notice that in this excerpt Mills uses male pronouns to apply to all people. It is interesting – even ironic – that an outspoken critic of society like Mills reflected the conventional writing practices of his time as far as gender was concerned. But he was writing in the 1950s, before gender became a key issue for sociology.)

Sociology and the significance of change

Living through the momentous changes brought about by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution must have been both exciting and dangerous. It is hard for the twenty-first-century person to grasp what it must have been like. But this was precisely the period that the earliest sociologists lived through and why they were driven to understand such changes and to consider where it may all have been heading. Sociology was born out of this firmament of change.

Yet sociologists reacted differently to the new social order then, just as they respond differently to society today. Some, including Auguste Comte and later Ferdinand Toennies, feared that people would be uprooted from long-established local communities and overpowered by change. So, in a conservative approach, Comte sought to shore up the family and traditional morality.

In contrast, Karl Marx (1818–83) worried little about the loss of tradition. But he could not condone the way industrial technology concentrated its great wealth in the hands of a small elite, while so many others faced hunger and misery. We examine his ideas at length in Chapter 4.

Clearly, Comte and Marx advanced radically different prescriptions for the problems of modernity. Yet they had in common the conviction that society rests on much more than individual choice. The sociological perspective animates the work of each, revealing that people's individual lives are framed by the broader society in which they live. This lesson, of course, remains as true today as it was a century ago.

Social change and the Great Transformation 2

The digital-information-network-cyborg society

Sociology may have been born of the Industrial Revolution but it has fast moved into the Cyber Revolution. In the twenty-first century, living in society – and studying it – is very different from the days of sociology's founders. The development of digital technologies, the spread of information technologies and the creation of new ways of communicating across the world since the later twentieth century has been an extraordinarily rapid development. In many countries across the world, it has become part of mainstream life in less than 20 years. Bearing in mind that the World Wide Web was not launched until 1991, already over 180 countries are connected and there are now over 100 million users in the United States alone. A new generation, the Net Generation, for whom the use of personal computers, information technology and the internet is taken for granted, is growing up. Brought up on Nintendo games and computers, they create a huge generation gap, often reversing adult–child roles as children come to know so much more about these things than either their teachers or their parents. Many 'users' are young, male and relatively wealthy: these are what Douglas Rushkoff (1999) calls the 'Digital Kids'. That said, more and more women are becoming involved; information technology is spreading through the classes and ethnicities; and it is moving through more groups across the world. One report in 2010 suggested that young people spent on average seven hours a day using the new technologies of various kinds; another recorded that there were at least 250 million Facebook sites in use by mid-2010. Growth in mobile phone use has been dramatic, as has growth in internet usage. Table 1.4 shows the numbers using the internet worldwide in 2009.

It is not quite clear yet what is the best term to use to describe this rapid change. Various suggestions have been made and we will use and discuss them variously though this book – as they highlight different aspects of the broad social change we are flagging here. They are:

- *The Digital Age*. This highlights the computerisation of life, the shift from analogue to digital, and the miniaturisation of these technologies which can now be found in all the smallest gadgets and gizmos of everyday life – from washing machines to watches to iPads and iPhones. Digitalisation is the key process here.

- *The Cyborg Age*. This highlights the ways in which human beings are more and more becoming adapted to and compelled to live with all manner of technologies, from transplants to space travel (see Chapter 20).

- *The Information Age*. This highlights the rapid growth of production and availability of all kinds of data and information. No society in history has been flooded with so much data that is available to so many. Wikipedia alone has in excess of 14 million articles – bigger than any encyclopedia ever imagined in the past.

Table 1.4	World internet usage and population statistics: 2010				
World regions	**Population (2010 est.)**	**Internet users 31 Dec. 2000**	**Internet users Latest data**	**Penetration (% population)**	**Growth 2000–10**
Africa	1,013,779,050	4,514,400	**110,931,700**	10.9%	2,357.3%
Asia	3,834,792,852	114,304,000	**825,094,396**	21.5%	621.8%
Europe	813,319,511	105,096,093	**475,069,448**	58.4%	352.0%
Middle East	212,336,924	9,284,800	**63,240,946**	29.8%	1,825.3%
North America	344,124,450	108,096,800	**266,224,500**	77.4%	146.3%
Latin America/Caribbean	592,556,972	18,068,919	**204,689,836**	34.5%	1,032.8%
Oceania/Australia	34,700,204	7,620,480	**21,263,990**	61.3%	179.0%
WORLD TOTAL	6,845,609,960	360,985,492	**1,966,514,816**	**28.7%**	444.8%

Notes: (1) Internet usage and world population statistics are for 30 June 2010. (2) Demographic (population) numbers are based on data from the US Census Bureau. (3) Internet usage information comes from data published by Nielsen Online, the International Telecommunications Union, GfK, local regulators and other reliable sources.

Source: www.internetworldstats.com. Copyright © 2000–10, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.
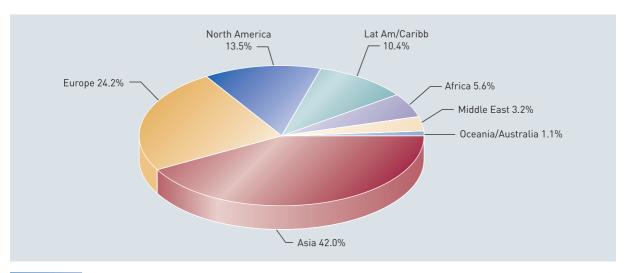

Figure 1.2	Internet users in the world: distribution by regions, 2010

Source: Internet World Stats, www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm © 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group.

- *The Network Society*. This highlights the ways in which new ways of communicating and relating have developed. Mobile phones have put us in 'perpetual contact' and Facebook (with some 500 million global users in mid-2010) has given us new ways of building friendship networks.

  (Both of these latter terms are used by the sociologist Manuel Castells in his major three volume book, *The Information Society* (see p. 200).)

- *The Virtual Age*. This highlights the mediated nature of reality. The twenty-first-century world is increasingly a world where reality is less direct and instead mediated through some technology – a mobile phone, a screen, a bar code.

Sociology and the new information order

In the face of this, sociology is changing its nature. It is doing this in two ways:

• *New topics*. Sociologists now have a vast array of new fields to examine – from digital dating to digital democracies. The list in the *Living in the twenty-first century* box shows some of the new topics that are emerging in sociology and which will be featured in this book.

• *New methods*. Sociologists now have a vast array of new tools with which to study society – along with new problems in doing research. How do Google, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter and Facebook help sociology? This is a challenge for contemporary sociology. What is the role of the new technologies (digital television, web, mobile, MP3, digital imagery, cybercam, etc.), their formats (Wikipedia,

LIVING IN THE C21ST

Living the digital life

The Information Age is no longer new. It is well settled into twenty-first-century life across the world and many now move seamlessly across 'real' and 'virtual' worlds, making them interconnected on a daily basis. The recognition of this has had profound effects on sociological thinking. Here, together, is a guide to some of the issues raised about digital life in this book.

Studying sociology	Web search and Wikipedia (Chapter 1)
Globalisation	Network theory and global networks (Chapter 2)
Doing research	Transformation of research methods on line: Google, YouTube, network groups (Chapter 3)
Society	Post-industrial society (Chapter 4)
Culture	The arrival of texting; the flow of information; the culture of the internet (Chapter 5)
Organisations	Mobile phones, blogging, Facebook: the Network Society, Manuel Castells (Chapter 6)
Interactions	Cyber-self; internet communication; network groups like Facebook; 'Hi-Tech Harry Potters' (Chapter 7)
Inequalities	The digital divide (Chapters 8–14); the new ICT4
Economy	The global economy; outsourcing; teleworking, 'Disneyisation' (Chapter 15)
Polity	Online social movements; digital democracies (Chapter 16)
Crime	The surveillance society; identity theft; cybercrimes (Chapter 17)
Families and personal life	Households and personal cultures: transformations of intimate life through internet and mobile phones (Chapter 18)
Religion	Cyber-churches; growth of e-religions (Chapter 19)
Education	The 'e-revolution'; digital ways of thinking; Wikiworld (Chapter 20)
Health	Cyber-health (Chapter 21)
Media	Digitalisation; iPods; YouTube; Baudrillard (Chapter 22)
Science	Donna Haraway; biotechnology; space travel; cyberworlds (Chapter 23)
Cities	The digital city (Chapter 24)
The environment	High costs of all this to the environment (Chapter 25)
Part 6: Resources	This whole section is designed to connect you up with the large number of electronic resources available to the student (e.g. websites, YouTube, electronic maps) and also give a few more tips on things like 'developing a critical cyber attitude' and 'thinking visually'.

blogs, video-sharing websites, Google searches, etc.) and new social processes (e.g. e-education, i-labs, etc.) in social research? How can the new IT, which is clearly here to stay but is also likely to change in unexpected ways, be fruitfully and carefully used in doing sociology? We look at this more throughout the book but especially in Chapter 3 (and see the 'Big debate' on Wikipedia at the end of this chapter).

We now live in social worlds saturated with information about society and a startling array of ways of accessing it. We can access large amounts of social life at the press of a button – something our ancestors could not do. And we can find – on television, through photography, in film and documentary, in the everyday press and interviews, in the work and research of a myriad of pressure groups and non-governmental organisations – a staggering amount of stuff about society. In a way, everybody can now be their own sociologist: the material is there to be thought about. But thinking is just what is required. No data or information is just the automatic truth about society. The new technologies change patterns of communication and create new virtual worlds for many. They are profoundly shaping our relationship to information and knowledge. How does information technology shift the ways in which we do both our everyday life and our intellectual work? How does living in the Information Age shape the ways we now do sociology? These will be ongoing concerns in this book.

Futures: a world brimming with change

Just as the changes brought by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were momentous, so too are the changes that are happening now in the twenty-first century. This is an era which is being revolutionised by digital technologies, new media, new sciences such as the new reproductive technologies, and new transnational movements and global interconnections. It is an era when traditional families, religions, patterns of work and government are often being rethought. More and more, people are not given a clear blueprint on how to live their lives, as they often were in the past. Instead they have to ask: what kind of life do I want to lead? They become more individualised, less committed to common standards, more prone to self-reflection. It is an era when divisions and inequalities of class, ethnicity, age and gender have become more and more noticeable and often increased, and it is a world where significant new conflicts over religion and culture seem rife. All of these ideas will need defining, describing, analysing and explaining, and this is the continuing task for sociologists in the new century – as well as the task for this introductory book. Just as sociology was born of the Industrial Revolution, now it finds renewed excitement at the challenge of what we shall call the postmodern or information society.

In subsequent chapters of this book, then, we delve into some of these changes. We will look at the steady move to modernity and modern societies, and how these days this may be transforming into other kinds of (global, digital, postmodern) society. We will discuss the major issues that concern contemporary sociologists. These pivotal social forces include culture, inequality, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, the economy and the family. They all involve ways in which individuals are guided, united and divided in the larger arena of society. Sociology is a challenging discipline, highly relevant to a world brimming with change. This book sets out to explore a little of this. Welcome to the challenge.

SUMMARY

1 Sociology is the systematic and critical study of society. It questions what people take for granted. It looks at social worlds as humanly produced.

2 The sociological perspective reveals 'the general in the particular' or the power of society to shape our lives. Because people in Western countries tend to think in terms of individual choice, recognising the impact of society on our lives initially seems like 'seeing the strange in the familiar' – 'defamiliarising the familiar'.

3 Public sociology tries to engage sociology with the wider world and the wider public. The circle of sociological life suggests groups involved in sociological knowledge. Sociologists have many roles and tasks to perform: as researchers, theorists, critics, educators, practitioners and critical citizens.

4 Socially marginal people are more likely than others to perceive the effects of society. For everyone, periods of social crisis foster sociological thinking.

5 There are at least four general benefits to using the sociological perspective. First, it challenges our familiar understandings of the world, helping us separate fact from fiction; second, it helps us appreciate the opportunities and constraints that frame our lives; third, it encourages more active participation in society; and fourth, it increases our awareness of social diversity locally and in the world as a whole.

6 There are three problems in studying sociology. First, societies change very rapidly; second, we are part of the societies we study; and third, sociology itself becomes a part of society.

7 Auguste Comte gave sociology its name in 1838. Whereas previous social thought had focused on what society ought to be, Comte's new discipline of sociology used scientific methods to understand society as it is. Sociology emerged as a reaction to the rapid transformation of Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

8 A first major transformation shows that four key dimensions of change – the rise of an industrial economy, the explosive growth of cities, the emergence of new political ideas and the decline of community – helped focus people's attention on the operation of society.

9 A second major transformation might be appearing, variously called the Digital, Cyborg, Information, Network or Virtual Age. Quite what it is to be called and what its features are will be raised throughout the book.

MYTASKLIST

Ten suggestions for going further

1 Connect up with Part Six and the Sociology Web Resources

As you work through ideas and think about the issues raised in this chapter, look at the accompanying website and the resource centre at the end of this book which connects to it. There is a lot here to help you move on. To link up, see: www.pearson.co.uk/plummer.

- For a start, just spend some time surfing around and glancing over the final section of this book.

2 Review the chapter

Briefly summarise (in a paragraph) just what this chapter has been about. Consider: (a) What have you learned? (b) What do you disagree with? Be critical. And (c) How would you develop all this? How could you get more detail on matters that interest you?

3 Pose questions

(a) Consider how sociology differs from economics, politics, psychology, history, literature and journalism. Using the box on p. 4, try to define sociology and see what is distinctive about it.
(b) How does using the sociological perspective make us seem less in control of our lives? In what ways does it give us greater power over our surroundings?
(c) Give a sociological explanation of why sociology developed where and when it did. Examine whether it had 'biases' and, if so, what they were.
(d) Read or watch some science fiction, then write a futuristic account of the society in which your grandchildren will live, based upon your current knowledge of any new social trends.

(e) Discuss the nature of public sociology. What does the term mean? Scan the book to see what sorts of things are going to be discussed in these boxes.

4 Explore key words

Many concepts have been introduced in this chapter. There is a glossary of key concepts at the end of this book, but sometimes you will wish to explore the meanings of concepts more fully. For this, you will need a dictionary of sociology. There are many available. Among them are:

The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology (5th rev. edn, 2006)
The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (4th edn, 2009)
The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology (1st edn, 2006)
Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod, *The Complete A–Z Sociology Handbook* (4th edn, 2009)
The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology (1st edn, 2010)

5 Search the Web

Be critical when you look at websites – see the box on p. 940 in the Resources section.

There are now a large number of websites devoted to social science and to sociology. There is a major list in Part 6 of this book – usually with links on the book's website.

For a general start look at:

The Internet Sociologist
www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/sociologist

This is one of a national series of tutorials written by qualified tutors, lecturers and librarians from across the UK. It is part of the Intute: Virtual Training Suite, funded by JISC.

The following sites may also be helpful:

Sociology Central
www.sociology.org.uk

The Sociolog
www.sociolog.com

SocioSite
www.pscw.uva.nl/sociosite

The SocioWeb
www.socioweb.com/~markbl/socioweb

6 Watch a DVD

Each chapter will suggest a few films that may be worth a look. As an opener, you might like to look at three 'classic' films that hold very different views of what society is like:

- Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926): a futuristic account.
- Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946): a tale of small-town America.
- David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986): another tale of small-town America but one that is very different and not for the weak-hearted or squeamish (be warned: this last film is strong stuff and not recommended for all).

A comparison of the three kinds of society depicted would make for an interesting discussion! Look also at:

- Harold Ramis's *Groundhog Day* (1993): in which everybody pretty much does the same thing every day. It is a good way of thinking about the ways in which everyday life is often routine and taken for granted.

A good book that will help you to 'see' films sociologically is Jean-Anne Sutherand and Kathryn Fettey *Cinematic Sociology* (2010).

7 Read and think

Two classic introductions to the field, now read by millions of students and still worth a look at are:

Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (1963)

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)

There are many other recent ones: see for example:

Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace and Melissa Tyler, *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives* (3rd edn, 2005) – an introductory text which provides a strong feminist perspective.

Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May, *Thinking Sociologically* (rev. edn, 2001) – a leading sociologist updates his views on what it means to be a sociologist.

Charles Lemert, *Social Things* (4th edn, 2008) – a very lively, often personal but also comprehensive coverage. Strongly recommended.

Ken Plummer, *Sociology: The Basics* (2010) – from one of the authors of this book, eight pathways into sociology are introduced for fostering a sociological imagination.

A useful guide to the Enlightenment is:

Paul Hyland, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader* (2003)

A good overview of Western society is:

Mary Evans, *A Short History of Society* (2006).

Newspapers, magazines and journals

Much useful reading is contained in magazines or journals which come out at regular intervals, and all sociologists must read the news (but maybe on websites) regularly. In fact, sociologists can become very dependent on these for the latest findings. Key world newspapers (such as the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post* and *Le Monde*) all have their own websites.

tip Make sure you read a good newspaper – one with world news and serious discussion. Search for its home page by its title, then make it an online favourite so you can look at it regularly.

Two very readable popular magazines for sociology students – even worth subscribing to – are:

- *Sociology Review*: Search Philip Allan Publishers. Published four times a year. Full of short, up-to-date articles on key issues in sociology and well illustrated. With a strong focus on the UK, this is useful for the emerging sociologist. See: www.philipallan.co.uk/sociologyreview/index.htm

- *New Internationalist*. Search New Internationalist. Published monthly. This takes a clear political stance and is packed full of valuable information on the 'global state' of the world. The magazine is a must for world activists for change. See: www.newint.org

8 Connect and integrate

Many of the ideas in this chapter can also be developed by looking at other chapters. For example:

- For more on the positivist method, see Chapter 3.
- For more on explanations of social change, see Chapter 4.
- For more on anomie and suicide, see Chapter 17.
- Get clear the ideas of *Public sociology* (p. 11) and *Living the digital life* (p. 24) – and follow these features as they appear throughout the book.
- But, of course, this is just the introductory chapter. Read the book!

9 Relax with a novel

A good start for thinking about Enlightenment thought is to read some classics of Enlightenment literature like Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

10 Engage in THE BIG DEBATE

Debate Wikipedia and other digital tools for a digital generation

Sociology was born of the Industrial Revolution and used the growing tools of 'science' to develop. Now, in the twenty-first century, we live in the world of information science and high tech. Studying society now is very different from in the past. We are now fortunate enough to be able to access large amounts of social life at the press of a mouse, something our ancestors could never do. There are now a very large number of websites devoted to social science and to sociology – but a much vaster number which are simply devoted to social life in all its forms around the world. Quickly, and across the world, students now have access to sociology writings and world statistics online. You have access to almost any social 'scene', subculture or group you wish to know about (from alcoholics anonymous to asexuals; from xenophobia to extreme sports). You can enter the worlds of film, television and music too – saving them, filing them, editing them later. You can make digital images of anything instantly. You can chat with many specialist groups on Facebook. Indeed, you can blog and tweet your life away. It seems that the new young generation may spend as many as seven hours of each day living life through the new electronic gadgets.

All this means that the ways of doing sociology have changed. Even the way you read this book will be different – it has a website that accompanies it, and this will link you up immediately with thousands of online sites of interest. These are massive resources that were simply unavailable for students or sociologists before. As we have seen, sociology is becoming a very different enterprise. In every chapter of this book you will confront it head on. Old methods and old theories are changing: in many ways, you are the first true digital generation – the new pioneers with new challenges. These are exciting times for you. In this book you will find:

- key resources listed at the end of each chapter
- a major listing of websites and video-sharing resources in Part 6 of the book. This connects to our online website, which is very full and includes podcasts.

We no longer always use full addresses, as this is a fast-moving world and many will have changed.

But a few seconds on a search engine will usually take you there. You might want to create some home pages and 'favourites'.

So here you are, living in the digital world. And now, at the start of your course, is the time to debate some of the problems it raises. To start with, why not just look at the pros and cons of a number of the tools you are likely to use? As an exercise, spend some time surfing the net and looking for sociological entries on:

- *Google*: sensitises the first approximation of a field of inquiry and provides access to seemingly unlimited data resources.
- *Wikipedia*: raises issues about the democratisation of knowledge.
- *Amazon*: can suggest the books we want to read before we even know it ourselves.
- *YouTube*: shows the significance of a new visual (and blip) screen culture.
- *Blogs*: suggest that ongoing diaries, life stories and interviews are being made before our very eyes.
- *Facebook*: brings together new group styles that are shifting identities and patterns of communication.

tip Remember, four matters are usually seen as important in evaluating material found on a website (Wilson and Carson, 2007). These concern:

- *The source*. Where does the information come from?
- *The objectivity of the author*. Might they have a particular point to push? Could it be 'propaganda'?
- *The logic of the argument*. Does it actually make sense?
- *Independent sources for the arguments or claims made*. Can you check them out elsewhere?

1 **Discuss Wikipedia.** This is the web's ever-expanding online encyclopedia. Many students rush to it these days. It seems to have all the answers, and can easily be cribbed for your essays! But this whole site also raises the question: *Just what is an encyclopedia and what is it for?* Conventionally, an encyclopedia provides stable answers to problems provided by experts in their fields. It does not change, so an encyclopedia often gets out of date quite quickly. But with Wikipedia, anyone can provide information and it will be as up to date as anyone wants to make it. It is also wide open to abuse: anyone could put anything on it! A lot of errors could be posted. And this raises the issue about what knowledge is. Is it to be fixed by experts – as in the past – or is it to be more

open, fluid and even democratic? But if this is to be the case, do you really want to risk filling up your minds with false, misleading information? This is a hot and contentious issue and now is the time for you to discuss it and ponder its implications.

Wikipedia raises major issues for the sociology of knowledge. Comparing it with any standard book encyclopedia will lead to a discussion of at least four critical issues. First, *how is this knowledge actually assembled – is it just there as a given, or is it selected by human agency?* And if it is the latter (which it is), then how does this social process take place. 'What are the social conditions for organising knowledge?' can become a topic for discussion.

Secondly, *what is the authority of the author for doing this?* Why should you trust an ageing professor who writes the entry to a standard published encyclopedia more than your friends who know nothing about it really but who can – if they want – submit entries? I know who I would trust more. A discussion of how knowledge, truth and authority are being questioned can follow.

Thirdly, *how can encyclopedias deal with the ways in which knowledge changes rapidly?* In their book forms, they often remain static for decades. Wikipedia opens up the possibility of an encyclopedia being dynamic and constantly responding to changes.

Fourthly, some of the above discussions could lead to a consideration of the democratisation of knowledge: *can ideas and knowledge be more usefully assembled through collective work than through individual expertise?* It would help here if you did a case study of the way in which Wikipedia entries are constructed – maybe constructing one, or modifying an entry. Guidelines for doing this can be found on Wikipedia itself, as well as in the useful handbook by John Broughton, *Wikipedia: The Missing Manual* (Cambridge: O'Reilly, 2008) – which perhaps your library should purchase.

To have an informed discussion on all these issues, look through some of the myriad back-up pages to Wikipedia, which show how entries are made, how changes can be made, and how records are kept for

all to see of who writes the entries and of all record modifications. Thousands of dedicated people all over the world are working to improve a fallible system, and it is good to understand this wider social process at work.

tip For a really positive assessment of how Wikipedia mighty radically change the world for the better, see Juha Suoranta and Tere Vaden, *Wikiworld* (2010).

2 **Discuss Google searches** for something that interests you. Discuss the process of surfing with your friends, and share what you have come up with. Consider some of the problems that such data raise. Is all the information equally reliable, valid and truthful? Does it even make sense? Is it hurtful or even hateful in some way? What is its bias? What sources do you think you can rely on most?

3 **Discuss YouTube.** Now look at the lists of DVDs at the end of each chapter and see if you can track any of them down. Take this further: how central to social life now is the textual image? Is it becoming more important than books?

4 **Finally, read a book!** Consider whether reading books and articles is a better way to deal with issues than surfing. Does anyone in the class use an e-reader? Will books survive? Should they survive?

Later in the book we will suggest key issues to consider in using the digital world (see especially p. 939). Remember that the net is a public space – information on your site travels to you in complicated ways and leaves traces in many places. Watch out for sensitive and personal information and make sure it is restricted or encrypted. As we will see later in the book, many forms of 'deviance' have emerged around the net. And there are problems of surveillance, we will discuss in Chapter 17.

tip Remember, since access to websites is open to anybody, anything could be said with no regard to truth, logic, rationality or even human kindness! So watch out and always scrutinise your data. *Develop a cyber critical attitude*: see p. 940.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY, THINKING GLOBALLY

IN THE MILLENNIUM YEAR OF 2000, the earth was home to some 6 billion people who lived in the cities and countryside of nearly 200 nations (by 2010 it had already grown another million). To grasp the social 'shape' of this world, imagine for a moment the planet's population reduced to a single settlement of 100 people. A visit to this 'global village' would reveal that more than half (61) of the inhabitants are from Asia, including 21 from the People's Republic of China and 17 from India. Next, in terms of numbers, we would find 13 from Africa, 12 from Europe, 8 from South America, 5 from North America and 1 from Oceania.

A study of this settlement would reveal some startling conclusions. People believe in very different 'gods': of the 100 people, 32 are Christian, 19 Muslim, 13 Hindus, 12 practise folk religions (like shamanism), 6 are Buddhists, 2 belong to other religions like Confucianism and the Bahai'i faith, 1 is Jewish and 15 are non-religious. There are some 6,000 languages but over half of the 100 speak Chinese, 9 English, 8 Hindi, 7 Spanish, 4 Arabic, 4 Bengali, 3 Portugese and 3 Russian.

The village is a rich place, with a vast array of goods and services for sale. Yet most people can do no more than dream of such treasures, because 80 per cent of the village's total income is earned by just 20 individuals.

Food is the greatest worry for the majority of the population. Every year, workers produce more than enough food to feed everyone; even so, half the village's people – including most of the children – go hungry. The worst-off 20 residents (who together have less money than the richest person in the village!) lack food, safe drinking water and secure shelter. They are weak and unable to work. Every day some of them fall ill with life-threatening diseases. Another 50 do not have a reliable source of food and are hungry much of the time.

Villagers talk of their community's many schools, including colleges and universities. Of 38 school-aged villagers, 31 attend school but few (7.5) reach university. Half of the village's people can neither read nor write.

The sociological perspective reminds us of these many differences in the world. Our life chances and our very experiences of social life will differ dramatically according to what kind of society we are born into. Human lives do not unfold according to sheer chance; nor do people live isolated lives, relying solely on what philosophers call 'free will' in choosing every thought and action. On the contrary, while individuals make many important decisions every day, we do so within a larger arena called 'society' – a friendship, a family, a university, a nation, an entire world. The essential wisdom of sociology is that the social world guides and constrains our actions and life choices just as the seasons influence our choices of activities and clothing. It sets the framework in which we make decisions about our lives. And, because sociologists know a great deal about how society works, they can analyse and predict with insight and a fair degree of accuracy how we all behave. Many of the achievements we attribute to our personal abilities are products of the privileged position we occupy in the worldwide social system.[1]

[1] Global village scenario adapted from United Nations data. This is now widely taught in primary schools, and has been developed in posters and on T-shirts. In my view, it is still worth citing. See Smith and Armstrong (2003).

Queremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos. We want one world, one that can accommodate many worlds.

The Zapatistas, Chiapas, Mexico

From now on, nothing that happens on our planet is only a limited local event.

Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (2000)

Globalization debates transform many existing sociological controversies. . . . .

John Urry, *Global Complexity* (2003)

In this chapter, we ask:

- **What are the 'classical' ways of thinking about society and how are they being challenged and modified by a range of new perspectives?**

- **Why do we need a global perspective in sociology?**

- **What is meant by globalisation and how will it be developed as an idea in this book?**

(Left) Michael Simpson, *World in Sky*
Source: Getty Images/Taxi/Michael Simpson.

Q Where are you in this image? What does the image say about you and your position in the world? What does it say about the 7 billions of planet earth's population?

How to think about society: a short tour of sociological theory

The task of weaving isolated observations into understanding brings us to another dimension of sociology: theory. Students are often put off by theory, believing it to be obscure and difficult. In fact, theory is what makes sociology different from, say, journalism or popular documentary television of social issues. For a **theory** is a *statement of how and why specific facts are related*. In a sense, we all theorise or generalise all the time. But sociology aims to do this more systematically (see Lee and Newby, 1983; Craib, 1992). Recall that Emile Durkheim observed that certain categories of people (men, Protestants, the wealthy and the unmarried) have higher suicide rates than others (women, Catholics and Jews, the poor and the married). He explained these observations by creating a theory: a high risk of suicide stems from a low level of social integration.

Of course, as Durkheim pondered the issue of suicide, he considered any number of possible theories. But merely linking facts together is no guarantee that a theory is correct. To evaluate a theory, as the next chapter explains, sociologists use critical and logical thinking along with an array of research tools to gather evidence. 'Facts', as we shall see, are always a bit of a problem – consider, for example, how the very idea of a suicide rate used by Durkheim brings problems. Just what does such a rate measure? Does it really record all the suicides? How can we really tell that a death has been a suicide? Nevertheless, sociologists do strive for 'facts', which often allow them to confirm some theories while rejecting or modifying others. As a sociologist, Durkheim was not content merely to identify a plausible cause of suicide; he set about collecting data to see precisely which categories of people committed suicide with the highest frequency.

Poring over his data, Durkheim settled on a theory that best squared with all the available evidence.

In attempting to develop theories about human society, sociologists face a wide range of choices. What issues should we study? How should we link facts together to form theories? What assumptions might underpin our theories? In making sense of society, sociologists are guided by one or more theoretical 'road maps' or perspectives. A **theoretical perspective** can be seen as *a basic image that guides thinking and research*.

We noted earlier that two of sociology's founders – Auguste Comte and Karl Marx – made sense of the emerging modern society in strikingly different ways. Such differences persist today as some sociologists highlight how societies stay the same, while others focus on patterns of change. Similarly, some sociological theorists focus on what joins people together, while others investigate how society divides people according to gender, race, ethnicity or social class. Some sociologists seek to understand the operation of society as it is, while others actively promote what they view as desirable social change.

In short, sociologists often disagree about what the most interesting questions are; even when they agree on the questions, they may still differ over the answers. Nonetheless, the discipline of sociology is far from chaotic. Like many disciplines, it has built-in controversies and has multiple perspectives, containing *an array of basic images that guide thinking and research*. See Figure 2.1 for a summary of various positions. Over the past hundred years, sociologists have developed three major theoretical ways of thinking about society. We will introduce these next – and they will reappear at various points in the book. They may be called the *classical perspectives* that have shaped sociology in the past. But, like any growing discipline, these are constantly being refined and developed, while at the same time newer ones are appearing alongside them. After outlining these mainstream, or classical, stances, we will turn to some *emerging perspectives*.
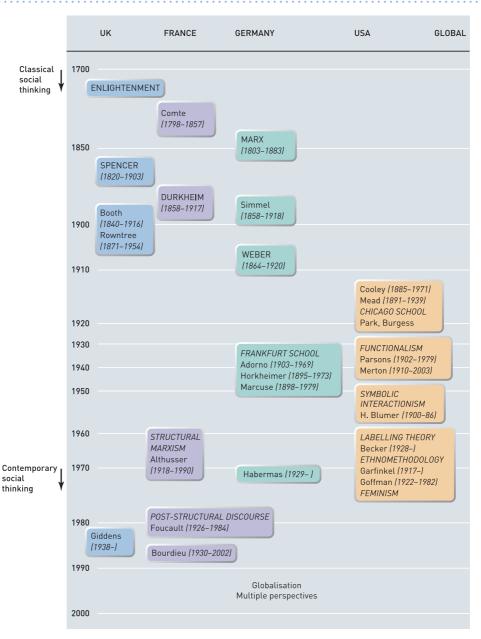
	UK	FRANCE	GERMANY	USA	GLOBAL

Classical social thinking →

1700

ENLIGHTENMENT

Comte
(1798–1857)

1850

MARX
(1803–1883)

SPENCER
(1820–1903)

DURKHEIM
(1858–1917)

Simmel
(1858–1918)

1900

Booth
(1840–1916)
Rowntree
(1871–1954)

1910

WEBER
(1864–1920)

Cooley *(1885–1971)*
Mead *(1891–1939)*
CHICAGO SCHOOL
Park, Burgess

1920

1930

FRANKFURT SCHOOL
Adorno *(1903–1969)*
Horkheimer *(1895–1973)*
Marcuse *(1898–1979)*

FUNCTIONALISM
Parsons *(1902–1979)*
Merton *(1910–2003)*

1940

1950

*SYMBOLIC
INTERACTIONISM*
H. Blumer *(1900–86)*

1960

*STRUCTURAL
MARXISM*
Althusser
(1918–1990)

LABELLING THEORY
Becker *(1928–)*
ETHNOMETHODOLOGY
Garfinkel *(1917–)*
Goffman *(1922–1982)*
FEMINISM

Contemporary social thinking →

1970

Habermas *(1929–)*

1980

POST-STRUCTURAL DISCOURSE
Foucault *(1926–1984)*

Giddens
(1938–)

Bourdieu *(1930–2002)*

1990

Globalisation
Multiple perspectives

2000

Figure 2.1 A simplified map of Western sociological theory, 1700–2000

The sociological map shows some key Western sociologists – when they were born and where. When presented like this, it is easy to detect a very strong male bias.

Source: Plummer, with suggestions from Tabitha Freeman.

THINKERS & THEORY

Herbert Spencer: the survival of the fittest

The most memorable idea of the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was his assertion that the passing of time witnesses 'the survival of the fittest'. Many people associate this immortal phrase with the theory of species evolution developed by the natural scientist Charles Darwin (1809–82). The expression was actually Spencer's, however, and he used it to refer to society, not to living creatures. In it, we find not only an example of early structural–functional analysis, but also a controversial theory that reflects the popular view in Spencer's day that society mirrored biology.

Spencer's ideas, which came to be known as social Darwinism, rested on the assertion that, if left to compete among themselves, the most intelligent, ambitious and productive people will inevitably win out. Spencer endorsed a world of fierce competition, thinking that as the 'fittest' survived, society would undergo steady improvements.

Society rewards its best members, Spencer continued, by allowing a free-market economy to function without government interference. Welfare, or other programmes aimed at redistributing money to benefit the poor, Spencer maintained, do just the opposite: they drag society down by elevating its weakest and least worthy members. For such opinions, nineteenth-century industrialists loudly applauded Spencer, and the rich saw in Spencer's analysis a scientific justification for big business to remain free of government regulation or social conscience. Indeed, John D. Rockefeller, who built a vast financial empire that included most of the US oil industry, often recited Spencer's 'social gospel' to young children in Sunday school, casting the growth of giant corporations as merely the naturally ordained 'survival of the fittest'.

But others objected to the idea that society amounted to little more than a jungle where self-interest reigned supreme. Gradually, social Darwinism fell out of favour among social scientists, though it still surfaces today as an influential element of conservative political thought. From a sociological point of view, Spencer's thinking is flawed because we now realise that ability only partly accounts for personal success, and favouring the rich and powerful does not necessarily benefit society as a whole. In addition, the heartlessness of Spencer's ideas strikes many people as cruel, with little room for human compassion.

For a positive appraisal of Spencer's life and work, see Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (2007).

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY:

A MULTI-PARADIGMATIC DISCIPLINE WITH MANY THEORIES AND WAYS OF THINKING

A key challenge for sociology is to search for general ways of understanding social life. Sociologists are always developing sociological theories to help us make sense of this social world, and in this book you will be briefly introduced to a wide range of them. What you will find is that they tend to provide partial accounts – they take an angle, adopt a perspective and give you one way of seeing the world. Sociology is best seen as multi-paradigmatic and suggests a range of perspectives on social life. At its best it draws together a wide range of these perspectives to help provide the fullest picture.

We suggest you start your sociological theorising by trying to grasp the broadest 'image' of each theory. Table 2.1 provides some details of where you can find them discussed more in this book. Finally, if you want to take any theory further, look at some of the suggestions for further reading at the end of the chapter and book.

Table 2.1

Look at the social as:	Key theories and ideas to develop	Follow up in this book by looking at:
A series of unfolding stages.	Evolutionary theories of society.	Early versions are Comte (Ch. 1); Spencer (Ch. 1). Modern variants such as 'multiple modernities' are discussed in Ch. 4.
An integrated whole where the parts and institutions work to hold it all together. Sometimes it falls apart and things do not function well.	Functionalism and neofunctionalism; ecological theory; modern social systems theory and cybernetics.	Classic version is Durkheim (Ch. 2 and 4); and Park (Ch. 24). Parsons' systems theory (Ch. 2); Mary Douglas and the natural order (Ch. 14); and Jeffrey Alexander (neofunctionalism and civic society, Ch. 26).
Composed of different groups with different interests which are in conflict. Dominant groups over exploited and dominated groups. These are commonly identified as class, race, gender, nation, sexual, disability and age interests.	Conflict theories of many and all kinds: which can include Marxism, feminism, anti-racist theories, queer theory, and postcolonial theories. They are also widely found in cultural studies, in the idea of hegemony and in notions of symbolic violence.	Can be found in Marx (Ch. 2 and 4); C. Wright Mills (Ch. 1); Du Bois (Ch. 11); Patricia Hill Collins (Ch. 11); Feminism (Ch. 2 and 12); queer theory (Ch. 12); Paulo Freiere (Ch. 20); Intersections (Ch. 8).
Ways in which we orientate ourselves to meaning and interact with each other and develop culture and symbols – society is meaningful interaction.	Action theory, symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, constructionism.	Most explicitly found in the works of Max Weber (Ch. 2 and 4); G. H. Mead (Ch. 7) and Goffman (Ch. 7).
The habits we create, change and live with in different arenas of life.	The psychology of William James on 'habits'; institutionalisation theory; the idea of habitus.	See especially Pierre Bourdieu (Ch. 8 and 10).
Drama, the roles we play and the selves we present.	Role theory, dramaturgy, theories of identity; ideas of performativity. Symbolic interactions.	See especially discussions of self and Goffman (Ch. 7) and Judith Butler (Ch. 12); Norman Denzin (Ch. 3).
Languages and discourses we live our lives through. Communication.	Social linguistics, conversational analysis, ethnomethodology, discourse analysis and hermeneutics. Symbolic interaction	Key recent influence is the work of Foucault (Ch. 17). Present in linguistics (Ch. 5), narrative and ethnomethodology (Ch. 7); Habermas.
A civilizing process	Configurational theory	Key proponent is Norbert Elias (see Ch. 7).
Creating a bridge between action and structure	See action–structure debate	See the big debate at the end of Ch. 2 and Giddens (Ch. 16).
Underlying forms of sociability and sociation	Formal sociology	See Simmel (Ch. 6).
Networks and flows	Network theory, mobilities theory. The term 'network' is used in a number of different ways: simple mapping of friends and contacts to a new cybernetic reality of high tech.	See discussions in Ch. 6. Note in particular the work of Manuel Castells. The work of Zygmunt Bauman on fluid society (Ch. 4) and of John Urry on mobilities (Ch. 26) see society as a flow.
Logo and brand	Many recent theories have been developed by a focus on a specific brand.	Most famous is George Ritzer's McDonaldisation of society (Ch. 6); see also Disneyisation etc.
Flourishing capabilities	Human capabilities theory, being developed by human development theorists like Nussbaum and Sen.	Discussed mainly in Ch. 9 and 14.
Global	Globalisation, world systems, cosmopolitanism.	See chart on p. 53.

The 'classical', traditional perspectives of sociology

Broadly, three perspectives dominated sociological thinking for a long while, and it is important to know about them. We will return to them in many chapters of this book. The three traditions are called by many different names but we will identify them very simply as *functionalism*, *conflict* and *action theory*. These terms are now old fashioned, but the ideas they capture are still very much alive today. Here, we briefly describe each.

1 The functionalist perspective: a world of balance

Functionalism is *a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together and interconnect – often to promote solidarity and stability*. This perspective begins by recognising that our lives are guided by **social structure**, meaning relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. Social structure is what gives shape to the family, directs people to exchange greetings on the street, or steers events in a university classroom. Second, this perspective leads us to understand social structure in terms of its **social functions**, or consequences for the operation of society. All social structure – from family life to a simple handshake – contributes to the operation of society, at least in its present form.

Functionalism owes much to the ideas of Auguste Comte who, as we have already explained, sought to promote social integration during a time of tumultuous change. A second architect of this theoretical approach, the influential English sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), is introduced in the box on p. 36. Spencer was a student of both the human body and society, and he came to see that the two have much in common. The structural parts of the human body include the skeleton, muscles and various internal organs. These elements are interdependent, each contributing to the survival of the entire organism. In the same way, reasoned Spencer, various social structures are interdependent, working in concert to preserve society. The structural–functional perspective, then, organises sociological observations by identifying various structures of society and investigating the function of each one.

In France, several decades after Comte's death, Emile Durkheim continued the development of sociology. Durkheim did not share the social Darwinist thinking of his English colleague Spencer; rather, his work is primarily concerned with the issue of *social solidarity*, or how societies 'hang together'. Because of the extent of Durkheim's influence on sociology, his work is detailed in Chapter 4.

As sociology developed in the United States, many of the ideas of Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim were carried forward by Talcott Parsons (1902–79). The major US proponent of the functional perspective, Parsons treated society as a system, identifying the basic tasks that all societies must perform to survive and the ways they accomplish these tasks. All societies, he argued, need to be able to adapt, achieve their goals, maintain themselves and have members who are well socialised into their order. Without this, societies may begin to break down.

A contemporary of Parsons was the major US sociologist Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) , who expanded our understanding of the concept of social function in novel ways. Merton (1968) explains, first, that the consequences of any social pattern are likely to differ for various members of a society. For example, conventional families may provide crucial support for the development of children, but they also confer privileges on men while limiting the opportunities of women.

Second, Merton notes, people rarely perceive all the functions of a particular social structure. He described as **manifest functions** the *recognised and intended consequences of any social pattern*. By contrast, **latent functions** are *consequences that are largely unrecognised and unintended*. To illustrate, the obvious functions of higher education include providing people with the information and skills they need to perform jobs effectively. But perhaps just as important, although rarely acknowledged, is a university's function as a chance to meet potential partners. Another function may be to keep millions of young people out of a labour market where, presumably, many of them would not find jobs. And a third, less obvious function may well be to reinforce a system of prestige and inequality – by excluding those who do not go to universities from all sorts of work.

Merton makes a third point: not *all* the effects of any social structure turn out to be useful. Thus we designate as **social dysfunctions** *any social pattern's undesirable consequences for the operation of society*. And, to make matters still more complex, people may well disagree about what is useful or harmful. So some might argue that higher education promotes left-wing thinking that threatens traditional values. Others might dismiss such charges as trivial or simply wrong; higher education is dysfunctional for conferring further

privileges on the wealthy (who disproportionately attend university), while poorer families find a university course beyond their financial reach.

Critical comment

The most salient characteristic of the functional perspective is its vision of society as a whole being comprehensible, orderly and stable. Sociologists typically couple this approach with scientific methods of research aimed at learning 'what makes society tick'.

Until the 1960s, the functional perspective dominated sociology. In recent decades, however, its influence has waned. How can we assume that society has a 'natural' order, critics ask, when social patterns vary from place to place and change over time? Further, by emphasising social integration, functionalism tends to gloss over inequality based on social class, race, ethnicity and gender – divisions that may generate considerable tension and conflict. This focus on stability at the expense of conflict and change can give the functional perspective a conservative character. In the main, functionalism is a theory that is much less discussed and used these days.

2 The conflict perspective: a world of difference

The **conflict perspective** is *a framework for building theory that sees society as an arena of differences and inequalities that generate conflict and change*. This approach complements the functional perspective by highlighting not solidarity but division based on different interests and potential inequality. Guided by this perspective, sociologists investigate how factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, sex, disability and age are linked to unequal distribution of money, power, education and social prestige. We look at these in detail in Part Three of this book. A conflict analysis points out that, rather than promoting the operation of society as a whole, social structure typically benefits some people while depriving others.

Working within the conflict perspective, sociologists spotlight ongoing differences and conflict between dominant and disadvantaged categories of people – the rich in relation to the poor, white people as opposed to black, men versus women. Typically, those on top strive to protect their privileges; the disadvantaged counter by attempting to gain more resources for themselves.

To illustrate, a conflict analysis of our educational system might highlight how schooling perpetuates

inequality by helping to reproduce the class structure in every new generation. The process may start in primary schools and continue as secondary schools stream students. From a functional point of view, this may benefit all of society because, ideally, students receive the training appropriate to their academic abilities. But conflict analysis counters that streaming often has less to do with talent than with a student's social background, as well-to-do students are placed in higher streams and poor students end up in the lower ones.

In this way, privileged families gain favoured treatment for their children from schools. And, with the best schooling behind them, these young people leave university to pursue occupations that confer both prestige and high income. By contrast, the children of poor families are less prepared for college. So, like their parents before them, these young people typically move straight from secondary school into low-paying jobs. In both cases, the social standing of one generation is passed on to another, with schools justifying the practice in terms not of privilege but of individual merit (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; and see Chapter 20).

Social conflict extends well beyond schools. Later chapters of this book highlight efforts by working people, women, racial, ethnic, gay and lesbian minorities to improve their lives. In each of these cases, the conflict perspective helps us to see how inequality and the conflict it generates are rooted in the organisation of society itself.

Finally, many sociologists who embrace the conflict perspective attempt not just to understand society but to reduce social inequality. This was the goal of Karl Marx, the social thinker whose ideas underlie the conflict perspective. Marx did not seek merely to understand how society works. In a well-known declaration (inscribed on his monument in London's Highgate Cemetery), Marx asserted: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.'

Critical comment

The conflict perspective developed rapidly during the 1960s and the 1970s. Yet, like other approaches, it has come in for its share of criticism. Because this perspective highlights inequality and division, it glosses over how shared values or interdependence generate unity among members of a society. In addition, say critics, to the extent that the conflict approach explicitly pursues political goals, it can relinquish

any claim to scientific objectivity. As the next chapter explains in detail, conflict theorists are uneasy with the notion that science can be 'objective'. They contend, on the contrary, that the conflict perspective as well as *all* theoretical approaches have political consequences, albeit different ones. Like functionalism, the language of conflict theory has gone more and more out of fashion in recent years.

One additional criticism, which applies equally to both the functional and conflict perspectives, is that they envisage society in very broad terms. 'Society' becomes a thing in itself, describing our lives as a composite of 'family', 'social class', and so on. A third theoretical perspective depicts society less in terms of abstract generalisations and more in terms of people's everyday, situational experiences.
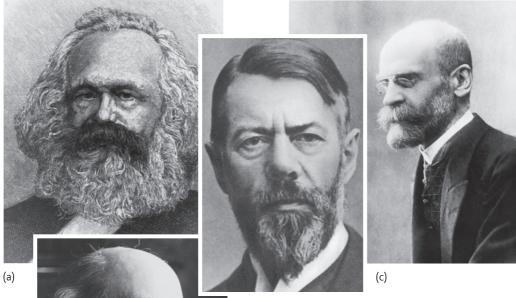
THINKERS & THEORY

The foundational three: a very brief introduction

Since the 1950s, when sociology really entered the university curriculum, the 'holy trinity'

of Marx, Durkheim and Weber have been taught as the central founders of sociology. There is a good reason for this. Each provides a core understanding of the arrival of modern capitalist societies, the rapid changes that were going on with the Industrial Revolution and the key political transformation of the late eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. As the landscape of the world changed dramatically, so Marx, Durkheim and Weber provided key accounts to guide contemporary understanding. Their ideas still shape sociological analysis in the twenty-first century, so below we give a very brief introduction to them. Their ideas – and those of their

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

Some shapers of a modern sociology. With the rise of industrial capitalism, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw an explosion of significant thinkers about society. Above are just four of them: (a) Karl Marx (see Chapters 2 and 4); (b) Max Weber (see Chapters 2 and 4); (c) Emile Durkheim (see Chapters 1, 2 and 4); and (d) Herbert Spencer (see Chapter 2). What characteristics do they have in common?

Source: (a) © Pearson Education Ltd/The Illustrated London News Picture Library/Ingram Publishing/Alamy; (b) © The Granger Collection, New York; (c) © Bettmann/Corbis; (d) © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis.

THINKERS & THEORY

contemporary followers – are discussed more fully throughout the book.

Marx (1803–83)

Marx claimed that 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle' (opening statement in *The Communist Manifesto*) and saw a flow of conflict between groups as the hallmark of histories everywhere. People are born into a history that is not of their making; but people also make history. People can change the world they are born into. In the nineteenth century, Marx saw that industrial capitalism (see Chapter 4) was developing into a system which would bring exploitation and a suffering lower class. As people became aware of their situation, so change – revolution – would come about; and create a new order of equality.

Marx's work has had a huge impact upon intellectual life, political activity and society. Few people have heard of Weber and Durkheim, but Marx became a household name in much of the twentieth century. He argued that 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it' and claimed that 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'. His work had a profound impact on the development of communist societies such as the Soviet Union and Mao's China. In the middle part of the twentieth century, more than a fifth of the world lived in communist societies inspired by him. Whilst these societies are now considered short-term failures which harboured deeply authoritarian structures and major genocidal tendencies,

many of his ideas have remained influential. In sociology, his work continues to flag the centrality of oppression and conflict in social life and the ubiquitous nature of inequality and exploitation.

Born in Germany, he eventually had to leave it because his relentless social criticism got him into trouble with the authorities. He lived much of his later life in relative poverty in Victorian London and was buried at Highgate Cemetery in 1883.

Durkheim (1858–1917)

Durkheim saw societies as changing too. They were moving from societies based on great similarities to ones characterised by a rapid growth of division of labour. This increased differentiation (which he called a shift from mechanical society to organic society), which could become associated with a breakdown of integration and ultimate anomie – a state of normlessness. He suggested that new groups (guilds) could create a new sense of community and belonging. He was one of the main architects of the structural–functional tradition we locate throughout this book. His influence can be found today in the many theories of community and social bonding, as well as in studies of the power of symbols and rituals in everyday life.

Durkheim was the only one of our 'holy three' to work in a sociology department and identify as a sociologist. He outlined how sociology should study the social world – to '*treat social facts as things*', as matters that arise outside human consciousness and which shape the way we live in the world.

Weber (1864–1920)

Weber saw societies as becoming increasingly dominated by rational thought. He highlighted the growth of bureaucracies (which we discuss in Chapter 6). While this brought benefits, it also brought an increasing 'disenchantment' with the world – men became trapped in an 'iron cage' in which they had little hope of change. Religions were likely to decline. Capitalism came about mainly because of shifts in the organisation of religion – the rise of an individualistic Protestant ethic (see Chapter 4).

Weber was very concerned with the ways in which human actions and meanings played their role in social life. His work ranged over many areas: music, religion, love, law, the economy, politics. He looked at a wide range of civilisations. He also engaged with politics (and his wife, Marianne, was a leading feminist of her time). He struggled with the balance between his personal political commitments and his view of sociology as being scientifically neutral – or value-free. He was the most pessimistic of our three thinkers. And, indeed, in his personal life he waged war with perpetual depression.

tip Brush up on your Marx, Durkheim and Weber. If you want to understand how sociological ideas have developed, you could read:

John Hughes, Wes Sharrock and Peter Martin, *Understanding Classical Social Theory: Marx, Weber, Durkheim* (2nd edn, 2003)

Kenneth Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought* (2006)

Most of the originals of these authors can be found online (see end of chapter).

3 The social action perspective: a world of meaning

Both the functional and conflict perspectives share a **macro-level orientation**, meaning *a focus on broad social structures that characterise society as a whole*. Macro-level sociology takes in the big picture, rather like observing a city from high above in a helicopter, noting how highways carry traffic from place to place and the striking contrasts between rich and poor neighbourhoods. Action theory, by contrast, starts with the ways in which people (or actors) orientate themselves to each other, and how they do so on the basis of meanings. This provides a *micro-level orientation*, meaning *a focus on the emerging meanings of social interaction in specific situations*. The distinction between macro and micro is an important one in sociology and it appears in a number of guises. The *Big debate* at the end of the chapter introduces some of these ideas.

One founder of the action perspective – a micro-theory that focuses on how actors assemble social meanings – is the highly influential Max Weber (1864–1920), a German sociologist who emphasised the need to understand a setting from the point of view of the people in it. Weber's approach is presented at length in Chapter 4, but here a few ideas can be introduced.

His approach emphasises how human meanings and action shape society. Weber understood the power of technology, and he shared many of Marx's ideas about social conflict. But he departed from Marx's materialist analysis, arguing that societies differ primarily in terms of the ways in which their members think about the world. For Weber, ideas – especially beliefs and values – have transforming power. Thus he saw modern society as the product not just of new technology and capitalism, but of a new way of thinking. This emphasis on ideas contrasts with Marx's focus on material production, leading scholars to describe Weber's work as 'a debate with the ghost of Karl Marx' (Cuff and Payne, 1979: 73–4).

In all his work, Weber contrasted social patterns in different times and places. To sharpen comparisons, he relied on the ideal type, an abstract statement of the essential, though often exaggerated, characteristics of any social phenomenon. He explored religion by contrasting the ideal 'Protestant' with the ideal 'Jew', 'Hindu' and 'Buddhist', knowing that these models precisely described no actual individuals. These 'ideal types' can then be contrasted with actual, empirical forms found in reality. Note that Weber's use of the word 'ideal' does not mean that something is 'good' or 'the best'; we could analyse 'criminals' as well as 'priests' as ideal types.

Closely allied to Weber is the American tradition of symbolic interactionism. The perspective emerges in the work of the philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), who looked at how we assemble our sense of self over time based on social experience. His ideas are explored in Chapter 7. The theory is also connected to the Chicago School of Sociology (explored more in Chapter 24), which examined city life in this way. The theory leads to careful observation of how people interact. **Symbolic interactionism**, then, is *a theoretical framework that envisages society as the product of the everyday interactions of people doing things together*. In order to understand such interactions, great emphasis is placed on studying everyday social life through tools such as life stories and observation. Sociology must proceed in this view through an intimate familiarity with everyday real-life events and not through abstract social theory.

How does 'society' result from the ongoing experiences of tens of millions of people? One answer, detailed in Chapter 7, is that society arises as a shared reality that its members construct as they interact with one another. Through the human process of finding meaning in our surroundings, we define our identities, bodies and feelings, and come to 'socially construct' the world around us.

Of course, this process of definition varies a great deal from person to person. On a city street, for example, one person may define a homeless woman as 'a no-hoper looking for a handout' and ignore her. Another, however, might define her as a 'fellow human being in need' and offer assistance. In the same way, one pedestrian may feel a sense of security passing by a police officer walking the beat, while another may be seized by nervous anxiety. Sociologists guided by the symbolic interaction approach, therefore, view society as a mosaic of subjective meanings and variable responses.

On this foundation, others have devised their own micro-level approaches to understanding social life. Chapter 7 presents the work of Erving Goffman (1922–82), whose *dramaturgical analysis* emphasises how we resemble actors on a stage as we play out our various roles before others. Other sociologists, including George Homans and Peter Blau, have

developed *social exchange analysis*. In their view, social interaction amounts to a negotiation in which individuals are guided by what they stand to gain and lose from others. In the ritual of courtship, for example, people typically seek mates who offer at least as much – in terms of physical attractiveness, intelligence and social background – as they provide in return.

Critical comment

The action perspective helps to correct a bias inherent in all macro-level approaches to understanding society. Without denying the usefulness of abstract social structures such as 'the family' and 'social class', we must bear in mind that society basically amounts to *people interacting*. Put another way, this micro-level approach helps convey more of how individuals actually experience society and how they do things together (Becker, 1986).

The trouble is that by focusing on day-to-day interactions, these theorists can obscure larger social structures. Highlighting what is unique in each social scene risks overlooking the widespread effects of our culture, as well as factors such as class, gender and race.

Table 2.2 summarises the important characteristics of the functional, conflict and action perspectives. As we have explained, each perspective is partially helpful in answering particular kinds of question. By and large, however, the fullest understanding of society comes from linking the sociological perspective to all three. Sociologists examine the social world by looking at *functions and dysfunctions*, *conflicts and consensus*, *actions and meanings*. The three theoretical perspectives certainly offer different insights, but none is more correct than the others, and all three have become increasingly modified in the light of newer theories.

Table 2.2	Three traditional perspectives: a summary		
Theoretical perspective	**Orientation**	**Image of society**	**Core questions**
Functional	Macro-level	A system of interrelated parts that is relatively stable based on widespread consensus as to what is morally desirable; each part has functional consequences for the operation of society as a whole	• How is society integrated? • What are the major parts of society? • How are these parts interrelated? • What are the consequences of each one for the operation of society?
Conflict	Macro-level	A system characterised by social inequality; each part of society benefits some categories of people more than others; conflict-based social inequality promotes social change	• How is society divided? • What are the major patterns of social inequality? • How do some categories of people attempt to protect their privileges? • How do other categories of people challenge the status quo?
Symbolic interaction	Micro-level	An ongoing process of social interaction in specific settings based on symbolic communications; individual perceptions of reality are variable and changing	• How is society experienced? • How do human beings interact to create, sustain and change social patterns? • How do individuals attempt to shape the reality perceived by others? • How does individual behaviour change from one situation to another?

LIVING IN THE C21ST

The capitalist world: the neoliberal model

One of the key challenges for social theory is to grasp the changing nature of capitalism – which, in the twenty-first century, has become the dominant system organising principle of most societies. **C**apitalism is *the economic system in which resources and the means of producing goods and services are privately owned*. There are many kinds of capitalist economy, but commonly there will be three distinctive features:

1 *Private ownership of property*. A capitalist economy supports the right of individuals to own almost anything. The more capitalist an economy is, the more private ownership there is of wealth-producing property such as factories and land. The downside of this can be a mass accumulation of profits by relatively few people, which can generate polarisation and cleavages between groups – the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. A potential for conflict is generated.

2 *Pursuit of personal profit*. A capitalist society encourages the accumulation of private property and defines a profit-minded orientation as natural and simply a matter of 'doing business'. The classical Scottish Enlightenment economist Adam Smith (1723–90) claimed that the individual pursuit of self-interest helps an entire society prosper (1937: 508; orig. 1776). Others argue that it leads to the exploitation of the mass by the few, and consolidates a class system.

3 *Free competition, consumer sovereignty and markets*. A purely capitalist economy would operate with no government interference, sometimes called a *laissez-faire* approach. Adam Smith contended that a freely competitive economy regulates itself by the 'invisible hand' of the laws of supply and demand.

Capitalism takes many different forms across the world and we look at these in more detail in Chapter 15. But it is important to grasp how central the free market, the pursuit of profit and freed competition are in structuring much of world social life. The most prevalent system which was developed under the government of President Reagan in the USA and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is often called Reaganism, Thatcherism or more formally neoliberalism (the term used by the economist Friedrich Hayek who championed it). *Neoliberal market capitalism* involves highly competitive, decentralised, open markets. It is anti-trust and unions, and seeks the freest flows of capital markets. There should be minimum state involvement and planning and the maximising of returns to owners of capital. It champions the free individual – but is uncritical of the way it fosters poverty and injustice for large numbers of people.

For more on capitalism, see p. 503 *et seq*; and pp. 533–5. Read: Geoffrey Ingham, *Capitalism* (2008); and on neoliberalism, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (2005).

Contemporary perspectives in sociology: multiple perspectives, other voices and the postmodern

Although functionalism, conflict theory and action sociology are still common positions within sociology, many others have emerged over the past three decades. As we have seen, sociology is often seen as containing multiple perspectives, which means that it takes on many perspectives for looking at social life rather than just one. It is the sign of a lively subject that, as society changes, so too do some of the approaches being adopted within it.

Some of them are really just further developments of the above theories. Thus, they may, for example, focus on different aspects of 'action', such as language and conversation (**conversational analysis** is an approach which does this: see Chapter 7). Or they may develop the idea that societies are structures through a focus either on the system of signs and languages that often organise them (as **semiotics** does: see Chapter 5) or on the way the state works (as in Althusserian Marxism: see Chapter 22). We will say a little more about these theories when we discuss the mass media later in the book (Chapter 22).

Other developments, however, are seen by some to go deeper than this. A number of critics of sociology suggest that the discipline has now entered a stage of 'crisis' in which many of its older ideas and perspectives are seen as being too narrowly conceived. Broadly, the newer approaches highlight **different** *perspectives*, *standpoints*, *cultures* or *voices*: they are much more self-conscious that all of sociology has to come from a perspective, a position or a point of view. We can never grasp the 'full truth' of a society, a completely full picture of it, even though we should try. Hence we should be more open about the partial perspectives we adopt and understand where we stand in relation to these partial perspectives. Sociology will always be selective. Max Weber himself recognised this long ago when he said:

> There is no absolutely 'objective' scientific analysis of culture or . . . of 'social phenomena' independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints according to which . . . they are selected, analysed and organised.

(Weber, 1949: 72)

This recognition of *perspectives*, *points of view*, *different cultures* or *standpoints* from which analysis proceeds has become more and more important for modern sociology. And this means that it helps to be explicit and open about the perspective we take. At its most critical, many of the new perspectives suggest that the major perspective of the past has been that of white, Western, Anglo-American, heterosexual men. This may sound a cliché, but as you read this book you should look for authors and sociologists who lie outside this tradition. They will, sadly, be somewhat hard to find. Whether using a functionalist, conflict or (inter)action perspective, they all shared common assumptions derived from their male and Western position.

In contrast, the newer perspectives generally see a range of other voices that were missed out of sociology in the past. Taken together, they provide a lot more 'angles' from which to approach society as a whole. They help to enrich the openness of the discipline to the range of ways of seeing society. This does *not* mean that everything is relative and anything goes. Quite the opposite: it means that, by carefully and systematically unpacking different perspectives, we can come to see societies more deeply and in a more rounded way. The aim of sociology is still to be 'objective' even if, as we shall see in Chapter 3, this is much harder than sociologists used to think and even if we can only ever approximate truth.

Many of these newer approaches are very critical of the dominant, earlier approaches – what we have called

the classical perspectives. At present, however, it may be most helpful to see them as complementing and challenging these earlier perspectives, but not as entirely replacing them. They do, however, disagree with these early theories whenever they suggest they are telling the whole story of society: only partial stories are now possible in this newer view. Some of these newer sociologies thus speak of the 'death of the metanarrative' – a term coined by the French philosopher Lyotard – as a way of rejecting any idea that there is one, and only one, 'Big Story of Sociology'.

What, then, are these new voices? They include women, racial and ethnic minorities, colonised peoples throughout the world, gays and lesbians, the elderly, disabled people and various other marginalised or overlooked groups. You may well belong to one or more of these many groups, and should read this book with this in mind.

Taken together, a number of criticisms of classical sociology can be briefly summarised as follows:

1   That sociology has mainly been by men for men and about men – and for 'men', read white and heterosexual and usually privileged and relatively affluent. As such, it has had a persistently limited, even biased approach.
2   That areas of significance to other groups – 'racism' for ethnic groups, 'patriarchy' for women, 'homophobia' for gays, 'colonisation' for many non-Western groups, 'disablement' for disabled people – have often been overlooked. You may like to think about what each of these terms means; they will be introduced later in this book.
3   That these areas of significance, when they have been included, have often been presented in a distorted fashion: often sociology has been sexist, racist, homophobic, etc.

Many voices have been missing in sociology, and they have led to a number of newer sociological stances that will be introduced throughout the book.

An example: the case of a feminist sociology and the missing voice of women

To illustrate: the most apparent absence until the 1970s was that of women's voices. Until then, sociology had mainly been by men, about men and for men. All this started to change with the development of a second wave of feminism (see Chapter 12), which helped to

A multicultural world. Sociology used to be the study of white Western men by white Western men. This is no longer always so. It has become far more multicultural and listens more attentively to the voices of a whole array of different groups: (a) Pataxou Indians in Brazil; (b) a lesbian couple in New York; (c) a Navaho matriarch in Arizona

Source: (a) © Mike Goldwater/Alamy; (b) © Homer Sykes; Archive/Alamy; (c) © Eve Arnold; Magnum Photos.

foster both a *feminist sociology* and a *feminist methodology*. Broadly, these place either women or gender at the centre of their specific analysis. They do this because they see the need for a more political role for sociologists in trying to reduce or eliminate women's subordination and oppression in societies across the world. Although you will find a chapter in this book that looks at gender specifically (Chapter 12), you will also find that gender as an issue will be considered in nearly every chapter. Bringing a feminist gender perspective to any analysis helps to widen and deepen understanding (see Abbott and Wallace, 1992).

Once we enter a feminist sociology, however, we will find that there is no one or unified voice here either! To put it bluntly, not all women are the same across the globe! When we start suggesting that women are all the same, we start to engage in what has been called essentialist thinking – **essentialism** is the belief in essences that are similar. It is to suggest here that there is an 'essence' or pure core to what it is to be a woman. Yet we will find a plurality of women's stances too – ranging, as we shall see, from those who adopt

conflict perspectives to those who focus more on action perspectives; from those who highlight postcolonialist perspectives to those who focus on 'black' perspectives. For example, the experiences of a black woman living in poverty in Sierra Leone are very different from those of most white women studying in European universities.

Some do try to bring all these different voices together. But to do this, there has to be a major recognition that voices are not unified but fragmentary and multi-situated. As you will start to sense, this is no easy task!

And other voices: postmodernism and a multi-paradigmatic sociology

Following on from all this, then, there are many new developments in sociology and you will encounter these throughout this book. For instance, Chapter 5

introduces ideas around multiculturalism; Chapter 7 introduces ideas around social constructionism; Chapter 11 debates postcolonial theory; Chapter 12 will extend feminist theory and introduce queer theory; Chapter 17 introduces ideas around Foucault's 'discourse theory'; Chapter 21 will introduce disablement theory; while Chapter 26 will further present some ideas around postmodern social theory. As in any introduction, we cannot take these newer ideas very far. But at least you will sense that sociology is a continuously growing and changing discipline of study that is always bringing new challenges to its students.

Some sociologists have started to suggest that in the twenty-first century a new generation of sociology is in the making, and that it is bringing what has sometimes been called a postmodern stance. Although sociology was born of the modern world – industrialisation, capitalism, the growth of big cities, the rise of democracies, the decline of traditional communities, etc. – it is now finding itself in a world where the features of modernity are accelerating: modernity is speeding up and going faster. It is what Giddens has called 'a runaway world' (Giddens, 1999). Over the past 30 years or so, there have been many rapid changes both within society and in our understanding of ways of approaching society. Sociology itself, therefore, has had to rethink some of its key ideas to at least accommodate these changes – which have been increasingly identified as 'postmodern' or a 'late modern turn' (see Giddens, 1992).

For some thinkers these changes have been so extreme as to question the very foundations of sociology. Two French thinkers, for example, have more or less proclaimed the death of sociology and suggested that we have moved into a postmodern world. Thus Baudrillard writes that:

> **It has all been done. The extreme limit of . . . possibilities has been reached. It has destroyed itself. It has deconstructed its entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces – that is post-modern.**

(Baudrillard, 1984: 24)

This is an extreme position which will not be adopted in this book. Rather, this textbook will tell the story of the shift from a traditional form of society, one which was usually authoritarian with strong religious commitments to an overarching belief system, towards what we might see as *a more provisional world – one that is altogether less sure of itself*. Modernity has

In the early days of sociology, men dominated its concerns. Today, there has been the growth of a much more feminist-based sociology. Jane Addams (above) is often seen as a pioneer of sociology through her concern with city life in Chicago. Some have argued that she is the true founder of the Chicago School (see Chapter 24)
Source: © Bettmann/Corbis.

brought many changes; and in the twenty-first century this modern world is an accelerating one where there is an increased sensitivity to diversities and differences. In this view the world becomes less dominated by generalities and 'master narratives', and there is a turn towards 'local cultures' and their 'multiplicity of stories'. We could see postmodernism as:

> **. . . the liberation of differences, of local elements, of what could generally be called dialect. With the demise of the idea of a central rationality of history, the world of generalised communication explodes like a multiplicity of 'local' rationalities**

Table 2.3	Summary: six recent political influences on sociological thinking	
Theory	**Search for**	**Challenge**
Feminism	Equality of sexes	Analyse gender differences
Anti-racism	Equality of ethnicities	Analyse nation and ethnicities
Queer theory	Equality of sexualities	Analyse sexualities
Post-colonialism and multiculturalism	Equality of cultures	Analyse different cultural positions and understandings
Postmodernism	Recognition of differences	Analyse differences, multiplicities and complexities
Globalisation	Interconnections across cultures	Globalisation and glocalisation as key social processes

– ethnic, sexual, religious, cultural or aesthetic minorities – that finally speak up for themselves. They are no longer repressed and cowed into silence by the idea of a single pure form of humanity that must be realised irrespective of particularity and individual finitude, transience and contingency . . .

(Vattimo, 1992: 8–9)

All this leads to a new approach to sociology, but not one that has to reject its past. Rob Stones suggests that a postmodern sociology has three concerns:

Postmodernists argue . . . for respecting the existence of a plurality of perspectives, as against a notion that there is one single truth from a privileged perspective; local, contextual studies in place of grand narratives; an emphasis on disorder, flux and openness, as opposed to order, continuity and restraint.

(Stones, 1996: 22)

Thinking globally: a global perspective in sociology

Part of this shift in voice and concern within sociology over recent years has involved recognising the position of different, local voices around the world. In recent years, as even the furthest reaches of the earth have become more easily accessible through advances in technology, many academic disciplines have been forced to incorporate a **global perspective**, *the study of the larger world and each society's place in it*. Instead of the overwhelming dominance in sociology of Western

voices, we can now pay attention to voices heard in all parts of the world – from various African states to those found in Latin American countries. They often see the world in radically different ways and it is important, if sociology is to develop, to take these voices seriously.

Many sociology textbooks in the recent past have tended to focus on one country only. While this certainly deepens understanding of *one* society, it is insular and limited. This book therefore tries to look outwards to a range of societies, while at the same time maintaining some kind of focus on Europe and the UK, the societies which most of its readers are likely to come from, and maybe therefore the societies that will probably interest the readers of this book most. But we have tried to avoid too much of a bias towards 'the West'.

How does a global perspective enhance sociology?

Very often sociology looks too narrowly at specific cultures – usually of the West. Yet global awareness is a logical extension of the sociological perspective and greatly enhances it. Sociology's basic insight is that where we are placed in a society profoundly affects individual experiences – and the position of a society in the larger world system affects everyone. The opening story provided a brief sketch of our global village, indicating that people the world over are far from equal in their quality of life. Every chapter of this text will highlight life in the world beyond the borders of our own society. Here are three reasons to consider why global thinking should figure prominently in the sociological perspective.

THINKERS & THEORY

Raewyn Connell: from men's studies to globalisation and southern theory

Raewyn Connell is one of Australia's leading sociologists, professor at the University of Sydney and globally influential. Her earliest work was on class and education, and she was extremely influential in the 1980s and 1990s in the development of 'men and masculinity' as a sociological problem of study. She suggested the importance of '**hegemonic masculinity**' – *the dominant way of being a man in society* – and the variety of global masculinities (ways of being men) that could be discovered (see Chapter 12).

Her work broadened out in the 1990s to study the development of sociology itself and she was not very happy with what she found. She discovered that sociology was not only a product of men, but of a certain kind of men. They were part of the Western, male Enlightenment; and as such they provided a rather specialised and limited view of the world. Her subsequent work turned to ideas about society that had been developed in different countries around the world. She examined the poetry and oral traditions in Africa and the development of an 'indigenous sociology'. The work of Al-Afghani and the Nigerian sociologist Akinsola Akiwowoo were considered. And then she reviewed developments and sociologists around the world: Raul Prebisch in Latin America, Ali Shariati in revolutionary Iran, Paulin Hountondji in Benin, Vienna Das and Ashes Nandi in India – and many others. Her aim was to introduce 'Western sociology' to a wider range of theorists and thinkers beyond the West, which should start to shape sociology in the future. Her book *Southern Theory* (2007) is a major challenge to the tradition of Western sociology and is likely to have a major impact on twenty-first-century sociology.

Raewyn Connell is a transsexual woman and was formally known as R. W. Connell or Robert Connell.

National flags provide unique symbolic identities in a global world. Here are the flags for Pakistan, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, and Iran. Can you identify which is which?

Source: Corel Flags of the World.

1   *Societies the world over are increasingly interconnected.* A feature of the world over the past 300 years or so has been the ways in which countries have become more and more internationally connected, initially through 'the great explorers', then through colonialism, slavery and mass migrations, and nowadays through high finance, tourism and the electronic world. In recent times, the world has become linked as never before. Jet aircraft whisk people across continents in hours, while new electronic devices transmit pictures, sounds and written documents around the globe in seconds.

One consequence of this new technology, as later chapters explain, is that people all over the world now share many tastes in music, clothing and food. With their economic strength, high-income nations

cast a global shadow, influencing members of other societies who eagerly gobble up American hamburgers, dance to British 'pop music' and, more and more, speak the English language.

Commerce across national borders has also propelled a global economy. Large corporations manufacture and market goods worldwide, just as global financial markets linked by satellite communications now operate around the clock. Today, no stock trader in London dares to ignore what happens in the financial markets in Tokyo and Hong Kong, just as no fisherman in Scotland can afford to ignore the European common fishing policy! But as the West projects its way of life on to much of the world, the larger world also reacts back. All of this is linked to the process of **globalisation**, *the increasing interconnectedness of societies*. This process will be discussed further in the next section and in many parts of this book.

2 *A global perspective enables us to see that many human problems we face in Europe are far more serious elsewhere*. Poverty is certainly a serious problem in Europe, and especially eastern Europe. But, as Chapter 9 explains, poverty is both more widespread and more severe throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia. Similarly, the social standing of women, children and the disabled is especially low in poor countries of the world. And, although racism may be pronounced in the UK,

it has even harsher forms throughout many parts of the world. Ethnic cleansings in Bosnia, 'Islamophobia', and hostility to German 'guest workers' are three examples that will be considered later (Chapter 11). Then, too, many of the toughest problems we grapple with at home are global in scope. Environmental pollution is one example: as Chapter 25 demonstrates, the world is a single ecosystem in which the action (or inaction) of one nation has implications for all others.

3 *Thinking globally is also an excellent way to learn more about ourselves*. We cannot walk the streets of a distant city without becoming keenly aware of what it means to live in western Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Making global comparisons also leads to unexpected lessons. For instance, Chapter 9 transports us to a squatter settlement in Madras, India. There we are surprised to find people thriving in the love and support of family members, despite a desperate lack of basic material comforts. Such discoveries prompt us to think about why poverty in Europe so often involves isolation and anger, and whether material things – so crucial to our definition of a 'rich' life – are the best way to gauge human well-being.

In sum, in an increasingly interconnected world, we can understand ourselves only to the extent that we comprehend others.

Goma Zaire Rwandan refugee camp near Goma. Cholera victims July 1994. Baby sitting next to her sick mother
Source: © Jenny Mattthews/Alamy.

Table 2.4	Making the modern global world: Roland Robertson's six stages of globalisation
1 1400–1750s (germinal)	Start of modern geography, Gregorian calendar, a bringing together of ideas about humanity
2 1750s–1870s (incipient)	Emergence of nation states; transnational regulation and communication; nationalism versus internationalism
3 1875–mid-1920s (take-off)	Growth of global communications; First World War; League of Nations; Olympics
4 1920s–mid-1960s (struggle for hegemony)	United Nations formed in 1942; worldwide conflicts and growth of concern over common humanity; expansion of capital and capitalism
5 1969–early 1990s (uncertainty)	Number of global 'problems', organisations and movement sharply increases – facing nuclear destruction and environment crisis
6 Late 1990s (antagonism)	World Trade Organization; Kyoto Agreements, terrorism, the internet, global media, global capitalism

Source: Based on Giulianto and Robertson (2009).

Globalisation and sociology

Since the 1990s, sociologists have increasingly used the term 'globalisation' to capture the movements across world cultures. It has become one of the most influential of sociological ideas in the past two decades and it is still (in 2011) at the centre of many of its debates. The term itself is used across the globe: for the Germans it is *Globalisierung*; in Spain and Latin America it is *globalización*; and in France it is *mondialisation*! Yet even though it translates into many languages, its meaning is far from clear. It has now almost become a cliché and the term is often trotted out with little meaning. Most simply, we can start by defining **globalisation** as capturing *the increasing interconnectedness of societies*.

But hereafter we will find a lot of disagreement about the term. It brings different 'ideological baggage'. Some people embrace the term, seeing globalisation as everywhere and usually doing a lot of good. Thus it creates greater awareness of diversity and **hybridisation**; it stimulates international markets and wealth; it helps towards a more universal humankind – through awareness of common environmental problems, and international organisations like the United Nations. This is the dawning of the global age and it is to be celebrated. (David Held and others call those holding this view 'transformationalists' or 'hyperglobalisers'; Held et al., 1999: 10).

Critics, by contrast, suggest that there is nothing new about globalisation. History, they argue, shows that nations have a constant tendency to exploit, colonise and raid other cultures, and matters are getting worse. 'Global' in contemporary times usually means that dominant (capitalist) societies are taking over the finances and cultures of other societies (indeed, for some it means Americanisation, not globalisation!). Thus certain trading blocks and nation-states (largely in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim) have become stronger, so there is no great tendency towards a greater universality at all. (These critics of globalisation are sometimes called 'sceptics'; see Hirst and Thompson, 2009).

The *Public sociology* box suggests a number of other definitions you may like to consider.

At the most basic, the term 'globalisation' can be grasped through the imagery of worldwide multicultural companies such as *Coca-Cola*, *McDonald's* and *Nike*. These companies exist across the globe – and in a number of ways. They *produce* goods across many countries; they *market* goods across many countries; and they *present* their logos and images which travel the globe ahead of them. Think of how McDonald's can be found across the world – even though it had its origins in the United States (see Chapter 5). Likewise, a Nike shoe – with its characteristic logo of the swoosh – is produced in many parts of the poorer world and yet sold everywhere. As we shall see, they are simultaneously loved by millions and hated by millions – as signs of convenience and the modern world, and as signs of corporate takeover of mass culture. We will have a lot more to say on all this in later chapters. They capture the economic, social and cultural impact of this process and simultaneously symbolise what may be good and bad about it. Globalisation is thus a controversial term.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

Some meanings of globalisation

Ideas of the 'global' and 'globalisation' are widespread in public debate and discussion. The term itself has been given many different meanings. Listen to discussions of globalisation and consider which position it might be coming from, and to get you going here are some recent discussions of its meaning:

- Globalization has something to do with the thesis that we all now live in one world . . . (Anthony Giddens, *A Runaway World*, 1999: 7)
- Globalization is the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual. (David Held et al., *Global Transformations*, 1999: 14–16)
- Globalization . . . denotes the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks. (Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, 2000b: 11)
- The Global Age involves the supplanting of modernity with globality . . . [This includes] the global environmental consequences of aggregate human activities; the loss of security where weaponry has global destructiveness; the globality of communication systems; the rise of a global economy; and the reflexivity of globalism, where people and groups of all kinds refer to the globe as the frame for their beliefs. (Martin Albrow, *The Global Age*, 1996: 4)
- Globalization is a transplanetary process . . . involving increasing liquidity and growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places, and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows. (George Ritzer, *Globalization: A Basic Text*, 2010: 519)

As we shall see (Chapter 16), major social movements have developed in the past few years to protest against it: in Seattle, in Prague, in London, in Genoa. For the time being we will just suggest a few of the key features of globalisation. We suggest that globalisation:

1 *Shifts the borders of economic transactions* – bringing a marked change in the pace of economic development in the world. Business companies, banking and investment now cross more national borders than ever before. In many instances these huge companies (TNCs or *transnational corporations*) have incomes and expenditures which are bigger than those of whole countries! Many argue that this has led to growing inequalities across the world, both within countries and between them. We will consider this in Chapters 9 and 16.

2 *Expands communications into global networks.* Television satellites, digital media, personal computers, mobile phones and all the information technologies help to 'shrink the world'. This has led to a major rethinking of ideas of *space and time*. We now no longer think mainly in terms of very local places. Instead we have entered a world where telephones, jet planes and now the internet make communications with others all over the globe instantaneous and hence very different from the past. Think especially of the phenomenal growth in the use of the mobile phone – handies, cellphones, etc. – and how this makes communications so much less restricted to face-to-face relations. Of course, telephones are not new, but the idea of being able to keep a phone on one's body wherever you are does make for a different pattern of communication. For growing numbers of people the whole world can be accessed instantly. Whereas a few hundred years ago it would take years for people to know what was happening in other parts of the world, now ideas can be moved instantly. We will consider this further in Chapters 22 and 23.

3 *Fosters a new, widespread 'global culture'*. Many urban areas come to look like each other, and many television programmes, much music, film and so on travels easily around the world. MTV has become a global youth form. And if you go to your local record store, the chances are you will now find quite a large section on global music! Not only do we have Hollywood but we have Bollywood. We will consider all this in Chapters 5 and 22.

4 *Develops new forms of international governance.* Some suggest that globalisation means the weakening of the nation-state. Though this is controversial, what is not in doubt is the growth of international agencies such as the United Nations, the European Court of Human Rights and the World Health Organization. These enact programmes that are publicly committed to what has been called 'the

democratisation of the world' – a growing belief that democracy as a political system will become dominant in the world. We consider this in Chapter 16.

5 *Creates a growing awareness of shared common world problems*. It is harder and harder to think of the world's problems as just the problems belonging to any one country. For instance, crime – as we shall see in Chapter 17 – has become increasingly global: drugs markets spread across continents, cyber-crimes push against the laws of any one country, international courts proclaim international justice. Likewise, the major impact of industrialisation on the environment becomes a compelling common problem in all countries (which is discussed in Chapters 24 and 25). Meanwhile, world poverty studies highlight growing inequalities both between and within nations; while debates on migration, refugees, wars and terrorism bring an international focus.

6 *Fosters a growing sense of risk* – what the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) has called the *World Risk Society*. New technologies are generating risks which are of a quite different order from those found throughout earlier human history. Of course, past societies were risky and dangerous places too – whole populations could be wiped out by major earthquakes, floods or plagues, for example. Life for most people throughout history has been nasty, brutish and short. Nature brought with it its own dangers and risks. But Beck argues that new kinds of risk appear with the industrial world which are not 'in nature' but 'manufactured'.

These risks are associated with the many new technologies which generate new dangers to lives and the planet itself. These are humanly produced, may have massively unforeseen consequences, and may take many, many thousands of years to reverse. These 'manufactured risks' are taking us to the edge of catastrophe: to 'threats to all forms of life on this planet', to 'the exponential growth of risks and the impossibility of escaping them'. Risk, then, is associated with a globalising world that tries to break away from tradition and the past, and where change and the future become more valued. All these changes – from the railway to the computer, from genetic engineering to nuclear weapons – have unforeseen consequences that we cannot easily predict. The list of examples of new risks could be quite long: the changes in work and family patterns, fallout from the atomic bomb, the spread of networks of cars and planes throughout the planet,

the arrival of AIDS as a major world pandemic, the development of genetically modified crops, the cloning of animals (and people), the deforestation of the planet, 'designer children and surrogate mothering', the intensity of computer games and the new ways of relating (or not relating!) this might bring, and the arrival of new forms of terrorism where suicide bombers are willing to fly into major buildings (such as happened at the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001), and on and on. All have consequences which may be far reaching and are at present unpredictable. In some of the chapters that follow, we look at some of these main 'risks' and how they affect all countries and people. We consider this in many places, but especially in Chapters 23, 24 and 25.

7 *Leads to the emergence of 'transnational global actors' who 'network'*. From Greenpeace to Disneyworld, from the United Nations to tourism, from the Moonies to the women's movement, there are more and more people who move in networks that are not just bound to a fixed spatial community. Instead, they connect across the globe, making the global their local. They are global citizens.

The globalisation guide

You can find more detail on globalisation throughout the book:

1 *Global economy*: Chapters 9 and 16.
2 *Global politics, war and terrorism*: Chapter 16.
3 *Global media, networks and communications*: Chapters 6, 22 and 23.
4 *Global inequalities*: Chapters 8–14
5 *Global people – migration, trafficking, refugees, the rich*: especially Chapter 11.
6 *Global education*: Chapter 20.
7 *Global technologies*: outer space, computer revolution: Chapter 23.
8 *Global culture/culture industries*: Chapters 5 and 22.
9 *Global conflicts, governance and social movements*: Chapter 16.
10 *Globalisation of crime*: Chapter 17.
11 *Global world problems*: Chapters 9, 24 and 25.
12 *Global environment and the risk society*: Chapters 23, 24 and 25.
13 *Global religions*: Chapter 19.
14 *Global cities*: Chapter 24.

See also Martell (2010) and Ritzer (2010).

In recent years, as ideas around globalisation have grown, many different stances have been taken on the relevance and usefulness of the idea. Two can be singled out here. *Globalisers* argue that there is a growing global economy which is transcending nations and providing the motor force of change. They tend to be the 'modernisers' and see the dynamic of international capitalism as a force for generating more and more wealth, from which more and more countries will be able to gain. By contrast, there are the *sceptics* who are critical of the globalisation thesis. They argue that there is much more economic independence among individual states than globalisers allow for. They also claim that there has been little real convergence of state policies across the globe. For them, real inequalities across countries can be shown to have actually grown. Sceptics often mirror a newer version of dependency theory (for example, Hirst and Thompson, 2009; Held et al., 1999).

WORLD WATCH

The globalisation of music: Hip Hop in Japan

In the past, except for the very rich and the world travellers, music has been limited to the local community and handed on by tradition. But today, music increasingly flows through worldwide cultures. Music has become part of the globalisation process. We can now find 'world music', cultures of international music celebrities, worldwide fan cultures, and the creation of music media companies worldwide that dominate music markets across the world. We can see examples of world music cultures everywhere: from global music festivals (often to raise money for charities) to 'global musicals' like *Les Misérables* – seen by 55 million people worldwide in some 40 countries and recorded in 21 languages. When the the Three Tenors (Domingo, Carreras and Pavarotti) performed at the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy in 1990, it led to a mass global phenomenon continuing well into 2005 and a new interest in classical music 'for the millions' (though the term has two different meanings!). Music is now part of the world economy and world media.

You can see how widespread globalisation has been by looking at different musical forms and youth culture styles and dress. The rap of late 1970s black US ghettos turns into 1980s hip-hop and then travels the world, being modified in the process by different cultures. Depicted here is Japanese hip-hop

Source: © PYMCA/Alamy.

Central to all this, and indeed to much of globalisation, is the idea of **commodification** (*aspects of life are turned into things – commodities for sale*). Music has been turned into a

WORLD WATCH

sellable object. This has meant not just the selling of concerts, CDs, DVDs and music generally – but also an aggressive merchandising of adjuncts like posters, books, concert programmes and the like. Tickets for a world tour concert of the singer Barbara Streisand in 2007 were sold out at £500 a ticket! Globalisation leads to developed markets around the world for music. Up to 90 per cent of the global music market is accounted for by just five corporations: EMI Records, Sony, AOI Time Warner, BMG and Vivendi Universal. The latter is the largest with 29 per cent of the market share, and owning operations in some 63 countries. But it is interesting to note that certain areas of the world are not well marketed by the 'Big Five'. India resists their domination because it has its own very large industry (for example, in what has been called Bollywood). Africa's weak economic situation also means that, outside South Africa, the market does not seem attractive.

Global music appears to be increasingly Westernised. To some extent local cultures all over the world have been invaded by Western music – from 'classical concerts and opera'

(often seen as a sign of status), to modern rock, pop, MTV and all the spin-offs that largely reproduce the Western status quo. Some have claimed that this is a new form of colonialism, where local cultures lose their musical traditions at the expense of Western dominance. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the convergence of youth cultures and the convergence in their musical styles.

But global music is also shaped and adapted to local trends and cultures. Sociologists might call this 'the **glocalisation** of world music'. (Glocalisation *means the process by which local communities respond differently to global changes* – see Chapter 5.) Musical traditions are rarely 'pure': they get spliced into hybrid forms. Classical music goes 'light' with Classic FM; rap, itself a hybrid of African-American black music becomes Japanese hip hop. Japan has a vibrant hip hop scene which has borrowed heavily from Afro-American music and been remade in Tokyo clubs and recording studios. In a major study of this process, Ian Condry went to more than 120 hip hop performances in clubs in and around Tokyo, sat in on dozens of studio recording sessions, and

interviewed rappers, music company executives, music store owners and journalists. He shows how young Japanese combine the figure of the samurai with American rapping techniques and gangsta imagery, and how self-described 'yellow B-Boys' express their devotion to 'black culture'. Here there is mix (a blend, a hybridity) of black and yellow, classical Japanese and black America. Condry shows how rappers manipulate the Japanese language to achieve rhyme and rhythmic flow. This is a fascinating study (which could probably be redone in many other cultures). It shows how cultural musical globalisation often depends on grassroots connections and individual performers rather than just the control of big media corporation markets (though they may have initially started the popular concern). Hip hop is constantly made and remade in specific locations through local activities and for particular audiences (Condry, 2006). Local cultures embrace musical forms from other cultures while modifying them.

Look at YouTube for examples of 'Japan hip hop'. And see the website by Ian Condry at http://web.mit.edu/condry/www/jhh.

Futures: a multi-paradigm discipline in a global world

This chapter has aimed to introduce you to some of the perspectives needed to think about society. We have suggested some classical ways (looking at society as functions, as structures, as actions, as conflicts, as consensus) and some emerging ways (looking at societies as an array of competing perspectives: from feminism to the postcolonial). We have suggested that some of the classical ways are now being questioned by

what might be seen as a postmodern perspective. These diverse positions suggest that sociology is not one position but many: sociologists call this **multi-paradigmatic**. This is a view we take throughout this book, and you will hence find a range of views – some of which many even conflict. Do not expect sociology to give you neat answers and tidy solutions!

Perhaps the most significant development in all this has been to push for sociology to focus on not just one country, but many. Here we have suggested that sociologists should take a global perspective and a helpful idea in doing this is globalisation. We will regularly return to all this throughout the book.

SUMMARY

1 Building theory involves linking insights to gain understanding. Various theoretical perspectives guide sociologists as they construct theories.

2 The functional perspective is a framework for exploring how social structures promote the stability and integration of society. This approach minimises the importance of social inequality, conflict and change, whereas the conflict perspective highlights these aspects. At the same time, the conflict approach downplays the extent of society's integration and stability. In contrast to these broad, macro-level approaches, the action perspective is a micro-level theoretical framework that focuses on face-to-face interaction in specific settings. Because each perspective spotlights different dimensions of any social issue, the richest sociological understanding is derived from applying all three. Sociological thinking involves the action–structure debate.

3 Newer developments in sociological theory have highlighted how all sociology must work from perspectives or different voices. It is multi-paradigmatic. Classically, sociology has heard only the voices of white, Western, heterosexual men: other voices are now being heard. Feminist sociology is a prime example. Postmodernism suggests that a new social order is in the making that is accelerating social change and creating a more 'provisional' world. Postmodern sociology stresses the need to look at multiple perspectives, takes seriously the local elements, and tries to keep a provisional 'openness' in its ideas.

4 A key feature of the modern word is that it is organised through capitalism. It highlights private ownership of property, pursuit of personal profit and free competition.

5 A global perspective enhances the sociological perspective because, first, societies of the world are becoming more and more interconnected; secondly, many social problems are most serious beyond the borders of European countries; and, thirdly, recognising how others live helps us better understand ourselves. Globalisation is an emerging widespread process by which social relations acquire relatively distanceless and borderless qualities. Globalisation highlights the interconnectedness of business and TNCs, the development of global media, and the emergence of global cultures, international governance and world citizens.

MYTASKLIST

Ten suggestions for going further

1 Connect up with Part Six and the Sociology Web Resources

As you work through ideas and think about the issues raised in this chapter, look at the accompanying website and the resource centre at the end of this book which connects to it. There is a lot here to help you move on. To link up, see: www.pearson.co.uk/plummer.

2 Review the chapter

Briefly summarise (in a paragraph) just what this chapter has been about. Consider: (a) What have you learned? (b) What do you disagree with? Be critical. And (c) How would you develop all this? How could you get more detail on matters that interest you?

3 Pose questions

(a) Start keeping a list of sociologists you encounter throughout this book. Locate them historically, the name of the theory they are identified with, some examples of what they looked at and examined, and the key features and problems of their theories.

(b) What are the key theories discussed in this chapter? Be guided by some of these theoretical perspectives and ask yourself what kinds of question might a sociologist ask about (i) television, (ii) war, (iii) sport, (iv) colleges and universities, and (v) men and women?

(c) Start keeping a 'sociological glossary' of key new words you find in sociology. Try to make sure you can say (i) what the word means, (ii) what debates and research it is applied in, and (iii) whether you find it helpful or not: does it enable you to see society more sharply or does it confuse and hinder?

(d) Is globalisation a new phenomenon and is it really such a different world from that of the past? Consider what the term means and draw out some illustrations of it. How has your own life been touched by globalisation?

4 Explore key words

Many concepts have been introduced in this chapter. You can review them from the website or from the listing at the back of this book. You might like to give special attention to just five words and think them through – how would you define them, what are they dealing with, and do they help you see the social world more clearly or not? A useful additional dictionary for this chapter might be:

Andrew Jones *Dictionary of Globalization*, Polity (2006)

You may find it useful to have by you three books by John Scott:

Sociology: The Key Concepts (2006)

Fifty Key Sociologists: The Formative Theorists (2006)

Fifty Key Sociologists: The Contemporary Theorists (2006)

5 Search the Web

Be critical when you look at websites – see the box on p. 940 in the Resources section. For this chapter look at:

Sociological theory

SocioSite www.sociosite.net/topics/theory.php – provides a general introduction.

Durkheim

www.emile-durkheim.com
www.faculty.rsu.edu/~felwell/Theorists/Durkheim/index.htm
http://durkheim.itgo.com

Marx

www.marxists.org
www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/TUmarx.htm
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx
www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/marx_karl.shtml

www.historyguide.org/intellect/marx.html
www.faculty.rsu.edu/~felwell/Theorists/Marx

Weber

Verstehen: Max Weber's home page
www.faculty.rsu.edu/~felwell/Theorists/Weber/Whome.htm
Weberian sociology of religion
www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma

Feminism

Feminist theory website
www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/enin.html

Globalisation

Two introductory sites are:

The globalization website
www.sociology.emory.edu/globalization

Globalization 101: a student's guide
www.globalization101.org

See also:
Forces of globalisation
www.humanities.uci.edu/critical/html/Projects%20
+%20Events/Forces.html

International Forum on Globalization (IFG)
www.ifg.org

World Bank: globalisation
www.worldbank.org/globalization

World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization
www.ilo.org/public/english/wcsdg

6 Watch a DVD

Look at the films of other cultures across the world
and see how they are interconnecting with your own.
One way into issues of globalisation is through international
film and video. A good source for such films is
http://worldfilm.about.com – a major site for world films.

On globalisation, see: Tom Zaniello, *The Cinema of
Globalization: A Guide to Films about the New Economic
Order* (2007).

For some opening examples, try:

- Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993): a romantic
comedy about a gay Asian man in the USA who marries
a Chinese girl to please his parents.
- Carlos Saura's *Blood Wedding* (1981): a powerful dance
movie based on a Garcia Lorca story, starring Antonio
Gades and Christina Hoyos.
- Bahman Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000): a
film about the suffering and hard lot of Kurdish children.
- Marziyeh Meshkini's *The Day I Became a Woman* (2001):
a disturbing portrayal of the role of women in Iran.

7 Think and read

Introduction to social theory

Michele Dillon, *Introduction to Sociological Theory* (2009)
is a clear and illustrated introductory tour. Shaun Best,
A Beginner's Guide to Social Theory (2003) and E. C. Cuff,
Wes Sharrock and D. Francis, *Perspectives in Sociology*
(5th rev edn, 2006) outline most of the major positions.

Rob Stones (ed.), *Key Sociological Thinkers* (2nd edn, 2008)
provides 21 short and readable essays on many of the
key sociologists, past and present.

Charles Lemert (ed.), *Social Theory: The Multicultural and
Classic Readings* (3rd edn, 2004) is a major compendium
of articles that debates the full range of sociological
theories – classical and newer. It is a very large volume!
But for anyone very interested in the full range of
sociological theory from the original authors it is an
invaluable starting point.

Introductions to globalisation

Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*
(1998) and Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How
Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (1999) provide two
short, readable guides to the idea of globalisation.

Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture* (2004)
and Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (2000) are also short
but more detailed and systematic treatments – a little
more advanced.

George Ritzer, *Globalization: A Basic Text* (2010) and Luke
Martell, *The Sociology of Globalization* (2010) are both
major readable textbooks which introduce key ideas
around globalisation.

David Held et al., *Global Transformations* (2nd edn, 2007).
This is an altogether more advanced, very detailed and
long account of globalisation. A shorter version is
Globalization/Anti Globalization: Beyond the Great Divide
(with Andrew McGrew) (2nd edn, 2007).

Understanding Global Issues: The Facts behind the News is a
very useful series of booklets which are issued regularly and
cover current global issues. Details can be accessed on its
website at: www.global-issues.co.uk/index.php

8 Relax with a novel

You will get the idea of a postmodern novel from reading:
John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Umberto Eco's
The Name of the Rose, and Brett Easton's *American Pyscho*
(all are also films). Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul: Jet Lag,
Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (2000) could be fun!

9 Connect to other chapters

- For more on Marx, Durkheim and Weber, see Chapter 4.
- For more on action and interaction, see Chapter 7.
- For more on feminism and queer theory, see Chapter 12.
- For more on globalisation, see all chapters but especially Chapters 9 and 22–25.

10 Engage in THE BIG DEBATE

The sociological puzzle: do we make social life or does social life make us?

Which comes first: the chicken or the egg? This classic conundrum has a parallel question for sociology which has persisted throughout the discipline's history. It can be put like this: which comes first – society or the individual? And like the chicken and egg problem, there is no simple solution. Indeed, what has to be recognised is that one does not come first – eggs cannot simply come before chickens, any more than chickens can simply come before eggs. Both are needed. And it is the interaction of the two that has to be seen. You cannot, in short, have one without the other. And the same is true for individuals and societies. What sociologists do is look at both individuals and societies, and at their best they look at them together through dialectical thinking which requires looking at two seeming opposites (like individual and society) and how a new form emerges through them.

Making it happen: individuals and action

One phase of sociological analysis is indeed to look at human beings. Not as a psychologist would – in terms of individual attributes like drives or personalities. Rather, the task is to look at the ways in which human beings are orientated towards action, to being world makers, creators of history and social life. Human beings make history, and sociology should look at the ways this happens.

For instance, if you want to understand how our current education system works, one task is to look at the ways in which people make it what it is. This means examining the ways in which legislators passed laws that provided the framework for schools, teaching, curriculum and exams. These did not just happen: they were made, and sociologists need to look at how they were made. Likewise, a pupil arrives in a class and, along with other students and teachers, sets about making the class happen. Sociologists like to get into the classrooms and observe this 'action' – to see just how human beings make the social world work.

Pattern and prison: social structures as maps

Yet people are also born into worlds that are not of their own making. Indeed, as the sociologist Peter Berger says, 'society is the walls of our imprisonment' (Berger, 1963: 109). We are born into families, communities and nations over which we have little immediate control; our lives are heavily shaped by the class, gender and ethnicity we are born into; indeed, even the very language we think with and talk with helps set a pattern to our life. And we had no initial choice over which language we speak: it is given to us from early childhood. (It would be very odd, if you were born in England, if you were made to speak Swahili.) Thus, one moment of sociological analysis is to look at these broadest patterns of social organisation that shape our lives. Recurrent and habitual patterns of social life may be seen as structures. Think for a moment of the ways in which your own life is 'imprisoned'.

Putting 'action' and 'structure' together

So, a structural approach tends to map out society as a whole, while an action approach tends to examine the ways in which individuals and small groups come to make their social worlds. Of course, ideally both will be done. This is a task for more advanced social theory.

British sociologist Anthony Giddens, for example, has introduced the idea of structuration to focus on both simultaneously, to suggest a process whereby action and structure are always two sides of the same coin (Giddens, 1984). For him, people engage in social actions that create social structures, and it is through these social actions that the structures themselves are produced, maintained and eventually changed over time. Language is a good example of this. Language is a structure of rules, but people speak, write and act it in different ways, changing it as they go along. Without the rules, they would be incomprehensible, so the structures are needed. But just slavishly adhering to the structure would allow for no change, no creativity, no humanity. Looking at both individuals and structures at the same time is what is required. This is no easy task.
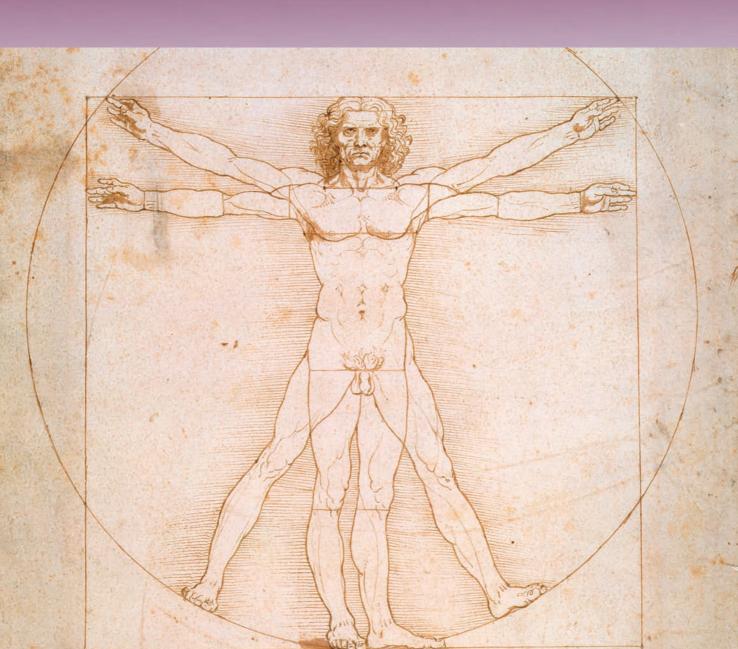
As you read this book, keep this puzzle in mind. And take the discussion further.

Continue the debate

1 Do you see yourself as 'determined' by social structure? Look at the image on p. 6 again (Society as a prison).
2 How much control do you have over your life? How far do you think you can change the world? Are you a world maker?
3 Look at attempts that have been made to resolve the problem between individual and society.

STUDYING THE SOCIAL: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL METHOD

SUDHIR VENKATESH STYLES HIMSELF AS A 'ROGUE SOCIOLOGIST'. He was a student and a budding sociologist at the University of Chicago in the late 1980s, but is now a major professor at New York's Columbia University. When at university he started long walks around the city and found himself intrigued by the neighbourhood that bordered his elite university. Right next to the elite Chicago University stands a major Chicago ghetto. Sudhir Venkatesh decided to study it.

There is a very long tradition of researching the life of this city (often called Chicago Sociology) and much of it has focused on delinquents, gangs and the race issue. For a decade in the 1990s, Sudir hung around with some of the most violent gangs of Chicago for his sociological studies. The Black Kings operated a hugely profitable drug ring – selling crack in the corridors of old buildings and extorting protection money from residents. They were not averse to violence. Sudhir got to know some of the dealers, the prostitutes, the pimps, the organisers, the cops and the officials – a good few of whom were corrupt and willing to take money from the gang for looking the other way. He watched them all 'misbehave' in many criminal situations and he became so accepted that for one day he was delegated with key decisions – acting as a 'Gang Leader for a Day'. He saw how they laundered money; he had to organise the selling and distribution of drugs; he lived the criminal life to see how it was done. His supervisors back at the university were not too keen on his approach – he seemed to be taking a lot of personal risks. After all the gang was quite a heavy one, even capable of killing! To start with Sudhir was indeed very uneasy, but bit by bit he started

to build up a strong bond with J.T., a gang leader, and he spent the better part of a decade inside the projects under JT's protection. Whilst he started the project thinking he would do a multiple-choice survey on urban poverty, he soon learnt that this was not a good way to get his data.

Sudhir was not the first to do this. William Whyte half a century before him had produced his famous study *Street Corner Society*, and many a young sociologist has spent their formative days studying 'youth cultures'. But Sudhir's work was written up in a way that made it very accessible – it reads like a good novel, with no academic jargon or references at all. Yet it bristles with sociological insights. It rapidly became a kind of sociological pop best seller – you will probably find it a local good bookshop in a Penguin paperback. This does not happen a lot in sociology.

You can find more about Sudhir Vankatesh and his projects on his website at: www.sudhirvenkatesh.org. Here you can:

- find reviews and press coverage for *Gang Leader for a Day*
- watch online video interviews with Sudhir Venkatesh
- listen to audio interviews with Sudhir Venkatesh

He is also on YouTube – reading extracts from his work.

I have striven not to laugh at human actions, not to weep at them, not to hate them, but to understand them.

Benedict Spinoza

There is no best way to tell a story about society. Many genres, many methods, many

formats – they can all do the trick. Instead of ideal ways to do it, the world gives us possibilities among which we choose. Every way of telling the story of a society does some of the job superbly but other parts not so well . . .

Howard S. Becker

In this chapter, we ask:

- **How can we do sociological research?**
- **What is the nature of sociological knowledge, evidence and 'truth'?**
- **What are the key tools of sociological research?**
- **What are the major political and ethical issues in research?**
- **What are the new developments in research methods?**

(Left) Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, c. 1492

Source: Bridgeman Art Library Ltd/Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy/BAL.

Note: For more information go to: www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/leonardo_da_vinci.html; www.willamette.edu/cla/exsci/info/history/vitruvian.htm; http://leonardodavinci.stanford.edu/submissions/clabaugh/history/leonardo.html; and elsewhere in this chapter too.

Q **Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was one of the leading figures in Renaissance art. Why is this particular drawing so significant? Consider how you have seen it represented over and over again in the modern world. What does this suggest to you about studying social life?**

Just how do social scientists get their data? The sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh went into the field and observed the daily life of a Chicago gang. Others interview, survey, give out questionnaires, draw upon documents of all kinds, set up focus groups. Some even monitor their own conduct. Such research may then get written up as stories and narratives; other researchers turn them into statistical reports. The ways of doing social science are many and varied. In this chapter we provide a brief review of some of the issues involved in 'doing social science'.

As we have seen, sociology involves a way of thinking; but it also involves a way of doing. It is a practice that looks at problems and then digs out the best 'data', 'evidence' or 'facts' that it can. This chapter will look at some of the ways sociologists actually go about studying the social world. It will ask about the very nature of 'knowledge'. It will highlight the methods that sociologists use to conduct research, and suggest appropriate questions to raise in assessing the value of any particular sociological study or 'finding'. Along the way, we shall see that sociological research involves not just procedures for gathering information but also controversies about whether that research should strive to be objective or to offer a bolder prescription for social change. Can it be neutral or is it bound up with politics and values? Sociologists are divided on all these issues.

The issues this chapter raises should help you think about the adequacy of the methods used in the sociological studies you read about. It should also enable you to start thinking about how you could conduct your own research – the chapter ends with some basic guidelines for you to plan your own project.

The basics of sociological investigation

Sociological investigation begins with two simple requirements. The first was the focus of Chapters 1 and 2: *look at the world using the sociological perspective*. Suddenly, from this point of view, all around us we see curious patterns of social life that call out for further theoretical study. This brings us to the second requirement for sociological investigation: *be curious and critical by asking sociological questions*.

These two requirements – seeing the world sociologically and asking critical sociological questions – are fundamental to sociological investigation. Yet they are only the beginning. They draw us into the

social world, stimulating our imagination. But then we face the challenging task of finding answers to our questions. To understand the kinds of insight sociology offers, it helps to divide the research process into the following three types of issue:

- *Theoretical/epistemological questions.* Here we ask about the *kind* of truth we are trying to produce. Do we, for example, want to produce a strong 'factual' scientific kind of truth with lots of evidence? Or do we wish to provide a wider theoretical understanding of what is going on? As we shall see, there are different versions of sociology and it helps to be clear which kind of sociology is being done.

- *Technical questions.* Here we ask questions about how to use tools and procedures which enable our 'findings' to be as good as they can be. There is the matter of the kinds of research tool to use – interviewing, observing, questionnaires, statistical calculations, for example; and then making sure they perform their tasks well and do not mislead us. We must always remember, though, that methods like this are a means to an end and should never be an end in themselves (sadly, a lot of social science forgets this and elevates the idea of methods to a fetish).

- *Ethical, political and policy questions.* Here we ask questions about the *point* of doing the research and consider what consequences it might have: for us, for our research subjects, and even for the wider world. All sociology is embroiled with politics and ethics: if it looks like it is being neutral, you may well want to be suspicious.

The discussion in this chapter will be framed by these questions. You can use them as a guide for thinking about your own research projects. But they are only a guide, and suggestions for taking them further will – as usual – be found at the end of the chapter.

What is a sociological 'truth'? Matters of epistemology

A key question to ask of social investigation is a very hard one: 'What kind of truth am I trying to produce?' This raises questions of **epistemology**, *that branch of philosophy that investigates the nature of knowledge and truth*. Our opening concern is to realise that there are different kinds of 'truth'.

People's 'truths' differ the world over, and we often encounter 'facts' at odds with our own. Imagine being a volunteer with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and arriving in a small, traditional village in Africa. With the job of helping the local people to grow more food, you take to the fields, observing a curious practice: farmers carefully planting seeds and then placing a dead fish directly on top of each one. In response to your question, they reply that the fish is a gift to the god of the harvest. A local elder adds sternly that the harvest was poor one year when no fish were offered as gifts.

From that society's point of view, using fish as gifts to the harvest god makes sense. The people believe in it, their experts endorse it, and everyone seems to agree that the system works. But, with scientific training in agriculture, you have to shake your head and wonder. The scientific 'truth' in this situation is something entirely different: the decomposing fish fertilise the ground, producing a better crop.

Our VSO worker example does not mean, of course, that people in traditional villages ignore what their senses tell them, or that members of technologically advanced societies reject non-scientific ways of knowing. A medical researcher using science to seek an effective treatment for cancer, for example, may still practise her religion as a matter of faith; she may turn to experts when making financial decisions; and she may derive political opinions from family and friends. In short, we all embrace various kinds of truth at the same time.

But science represents a very distinctive way of knowing, and one that has come to dominate in the modern Western world.

Common sense versus scientific evidence

Scientific evidence sometimes challenges our common sense. Here are four statements that many people might assume to be 'true', even though each is at least partly contradicted by scientific research.

1 *Poor people are far more likely than rich people to break the law*. Watching a crime show on TV, one might well conclude that police arrest only people from 'bad' neighbourhoods. And, as Chapter 17 explains, poor people are arrested in disproportionate numbers. But research also reveals that police and prosecutors are likely to treat apparent wrongdoing by well-to-do people more leniently. Further, some researchers argue that our society drafts laws in such a way as to reduce the risk that affluent people will be criminalised.

2 *We now live in a middle-class society in which most people are more or less equal*. Data presented in Chapter 9 show that a very small group of people throughout the world control wealth. If people are equal, then some are much 'more equal' than others.

3 *Differences in the behaviour of females and males reflect 'human nature'*. Much of what we call 'human nature' is created by the society in which we are raised, as Chapter 5 details. Further, as Chapter 12 argues, some societies define 'feminine' and 'masculine' very differently from the way we do.

4 *Most people marry because they are in love*. To members of our society, few statements are so self-evident. But, surprising as it may seem, research shows that, in most societies, marriage has little to do with love. Chapter 18 explains why.

These examples confirm the old saying that 'It's not what we don't know that gets us into trouble as much as the things we *do* know that just aren't so.' We have all been brought up believing conventional truths, bombarded by expert advice, and pressured to accept the opinions of people around us. Sociology teaches us to evaluate critically what we see, read and hear. Like any way of knowing, sociology has limitations, as we shall see. But sociology gives us the tools to assess many kinds of information.

A starting point: the positivist and humanistic traditions

The trouble is that precisely what is meant even by 'science' is not agreed upon by philosophers of knowledge. Traditionally, they take one of two views: positivist or humanist (often called interpretivist).

Positivism is *a logical system that bases knowledge on direct, systematic observation*. It usually seeks out law-like statements of social life that can be tested. The work of Durkheim on suicide introduced in Chapter 1 would be an instance of this. Scientific knowledge rests on **empirical evidence** (for Durkheim, recall, these were suicide rates), meaning *information we can verify with our senses*. But even here there is controversy among philosophers over the true nature of science, as we shall soon see.

The second position is interpretivism or humanism. **Humanist epistemology** sees that studying the human world is very different from studying the physical, biological or material world. There is a focus on the human and the symbolic. As such, social science must produce a different kind of knowledge, one that seeks

to understand meanings. Research in this tradition will look at the empirical world (as in positivism) but will highlight the importance of understanding and interpretation.

Below, we will look at these two basic positions in a little more detail.

The positivist baseline

Positivist sociologists apply science to the study of society in much the same way that natural scientists investigate the physical world. Whether they end up confirming a widely held opinion or revealing that it is completely groundless, sociologists use scientific techniques to gather empirical evidence. The following sections of this chapter introduce the major elements of positivist investigation.

The ideal of objectivity

Assume that ten writers who work for a magazine in Amsterdam are collaborating on a story about that city's best restaurants. With their editor paying, they head out on the town for a week of fine dining. Later, they get together to compare notes. Do you think one restaurant would be everyone's clear favourite? That hardly seems likely.

In scientific terms, each of the ten reporters probably operationalises the concept 'best restaurant' differently. For one, it might be a place that serves Indonesian food at reasonable prices; for another, the choice might turn on a superb view of the canals; for yet another, stunning decor and attentive service might be the deciding factors. Like so many other things in life, the best restaurant turns out to be mostly a matter of individual taste.

Personal values are fine when it comes to restaurants, but they pose a challenge to scientific research. On the one hand, every scientist has personal opinions about the world. On the other, science endorses the goal of **objectivity**, *a state of personal neutrality in conducting research*. Objectivity in research depends on carefully adhering to scientific procedures in order not to bias the results. Scientific objectivity is an ideal rather than a reality, of course, since complete impartiality is virtually impossible for any researcher to achieve. Even the subject a researcher selects to study and the framing of the questions are likely to grow out of personal interest. But scientists cultivate detachment and follow specific methods to lessen the chance that conscious or unconscious biases will distort their work.

As an additional safeguard, researchers should try to identify and report their personal leanings to help readers evaluate their conclusions in the proper context.

The influential German sociologist Max Weber expected personal beliefs to play a part in a sociologist's selection of research topic. Why, after all, would one person study world hunger, another investigate the effects of racism, and still another examine one-parent families? But Weber (1958; orig. 1905) warned that, even though sociologists select topics that are *value-relevant*, they should conduct research that is *value-free* in their pursuit of conclusions. Only by being dispassionate in their work (as we expect any professional to be) can researchers study the world *as it is* rather than telling others how they think *it should be*. In Weber's view, this detachment was a crucial element of science that sets it apart from politics. Politicians, in other words, are committed to a particular outcome; scientists try to maintain an open-minded readiness to accept the results of their investigations, whatever they may be.

By and large, sociologists accept Weber's argument, though most concede that we can never be completely value-free or even aware of all our biases. Moreover, sociologists are not 'average' people: most are white people who are highly educated and more politically liberal than the population as a whole. Sociologists need to remember that they, too, are affected by their own social backgrounds.

One strategy for limiting distortion caused by personal values is **replication**, *repetition of research by other investigators*. If other researchers repeat a study using the same procedures and obtain the same results, they gain confidence that the original research (as well as their own) was conducted objectively. The need for replication in scientific investigation is probably the reason why the search for knowledge is called *research* in the first place.

In any case, keep in mind that the logic and methodology of science hold out no guarantee that we will grasp objective, absolute truth. What science offers is an approach to knowledge that is *self-correcting* so that, in the long run, researchers stand the best chance of overcoming their own biases and achieving greater understanding. Objectivity and truth, then, lie not in any particular research method, but in the scientific process itself.

Some limitations of scientific sociology

The first scientists probed the operation of the natural world. Many sociologists use science to study the social

world; however, the scientific study of people has several important limitations.

1   *Human behaviour is too complex to allow sociologists to predict precisely any individual's actions.* Astronomers calculate the movement of planets with remarkable precision, announcing years in advance when a comet will next pass near the earth. But planets and comets are unthinking objects; humans, by contrast, have minds of their own. Because no two people react to any event in exactly the same way, the best that sociologists can do is to show that categories of people typically act in one way or another. This is no failing of sociology; it is simply consistent with the nature of our task: studying creative, spontaneous people.

2   *Because humans respond to their surroundings, the mere presence of a researcher may affect the behaviour being studied.* An astronomer gazing at the moon has no effect whatever on that celestial body. But people usually react to being observed. Some may become anxious, angry or defensive; others may try to 'help' by providing the answers or actions they think researchers expect of them.

3   *Social patterns change constantly; what is true in one time or place may not hold true in another.* The laws of physics apply tomorrow as well as today; they hold true all around the world. But human behaviour is too variable for us to set down immutable sociological laws. In fact, some of the most interesting sociological research focuses on social diversity and social change.

4   *Because sociologists are part of the social world they study, being value-free when conducting social research can be difficult.* Barring a laboratory mishap, chemists are rarely personally affected by what goes on in test tubes. But sociologists live in their 'test tube' – the society they study. Therefore, social scientists face a greater challenge in controlling – or even recognising – personal values that may distort their work.

5   *Human behaviour differs from all other phenomena precisely because human beings are symbolic, subjective creatures.* Human beings – unlike planets or molecules – are always constructing meaning. And what marks us off from other animals is the elaborate symbolic systems we weave for ourselves. Therefore, sociologists cannot simply study societies from outside; they have to take on board ways of 'entering' these worlds of meaning.

The humanistic stance: the importance of subjective interpretation

As we have explained, scientists tend to think of 'subjectivity' as 'bias' – a source of error to be avoided as much as possible. But there is also a good side to subjectivity, since creative thinking is vital to sociological investigation in three key ways.

First, science is basically a series of rules that guide research, rather like a recipe for cooking. But just as more than a recipe is required to make a great chef, so scientific procedure does not, by itself, produce a great sociologist. Also needed is an inspired human imagination. After all, insight comes not from science itself but from the lively thinking of creative human beings (Nisbet, 1970). The genius of physicist Albert Einstein or sociologist Max Weber lay not only in their use of the scientific method, but also in their curiosity and ingenuity.

Second, science cannot account for the vast and complex range of human motivations and feelings, including greed, love, pride and despair. Science certainly helps us gather facts about how people act, but it can never fully explain the complex meanings people attach to their behaviour (Berger and Kellner, 1981).

Third, we also do well to remember that scientific data never speak for themselves. After sociologists and other scientists 'collect the numbers', they face the ultimate task of *interpretation* – creating meaning from their observations. For this reason, good sociological investigation is as much art as science.

Sociology and the humanities

The recognition of all these limitations leads many sociologists to adopt a somewhat different stance towards their study. They do not claim to be scientists as above, but instead try to make sociology a more humanistic discipline concerned with understanding. In his study of *Sociology as an Art Form*, Nisbet reflects 'How different things would be . . . if the social sciences at the time of their systematic formation in the nineteenth century had taken the arts in the same degree they took the physical science as models' (Nisbet, 1976: 16).

This corrective sociology may be called 'humanistic' and has at least four central criteria. It must pay tribute to *human subjectivity and creativity*, showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble social worlds. It must deal with concrete

Being observed. A basic lesson of social research is that being observed affects how people behave. Researchers can never be certain precisely how this will occur; while some people resent public attention, others become highly animated when they think they have an audience
Source: © Jenny Matthews/Alamy.

Q Does the camera ever tell the truth? How do people behave in front of cameras? What does this suggest to you as a major problem for all research?

human experiences – talk, feelings, actions – through their *social, and especially economic, organisation* (and not just their inner, psychic or biological structuring). It must show a naturalistic *intimate familiarity* with such experiences – abstractions untempered by close involvement are ruled out. And there must be a self-awareness by the sociologist of the ultimate *moral and political role* in moving towards a social structure

in which there is less exploitation, oppression and injustice and more creativity, diversity and equality. A list like this is open to detailed extension and revision, but it is hard to imagine a humanistic sociology which is not so minimally committed to these criteria.

Table 3.1 summarises some of the wide-ranging contrasts between the positivistic and humanistic approaches to sociological investigation.

Table 3.1	**A bridgeable divide? Humanistic and positivist research contrasted**	
	Towards the humanities	**Towards the sciences**
Foci	Unique and idiographic	General and nomothetic
	Human-centred	Structure-centred
	The inner: subjective, meaning, feeling, experience	The outer: objective, 'things', events, facts
Epistemology	Phenomenalist	Realist
	Relational/relativist	Absolutist/essentialist
	Perspectivist/pragmatist	Logical positivist
Task	Interpret, understand	Causal explanation
	Describe, observe	Measure
	Appreciate	Theorise
Style	'Soft', 'warm'	'Hard', 'cold'
	Imaginative	Systematic
	Valid, 'real', 'rich'	Reliable, 'replicable'
	Personal research	Large-scale funding
Theory	Inductive and grounded	Deductive and abstract
	'Storytelling'	'Operationalism'
Values	Ethically and politically committed	Ethically and politically neutral
	Egalitarianism	'Expertise and elites'

Source: Adapted from Plummer, 2001a: 9.

Emergent epistemologies

The traditional debates in sociology over epistemology have been between the positivist stance and the humanist stance. Unfortunately, matters are not quite as simple as this, as there are a number of other positions that are important. We will look further at science in Chapter 23. But here we briefly raise five others: realism, critical stances, standpoints, queer theory and postmodernism.

1 The realist stance: theorising science

Realism is *a theoretical system of concepts that are evolved to handle a particular problem* (like how the economy, our minds or even the solar system works). While it may also gather empirical evidence, this is not central to its research – since it argues that 'empirical evidence' is never straightforward. We can never be sure of 'facts'. What we need, therefore, are strong explanations – built up from theoretical tools that will help us do this. The work of Marx is usually seen as a realist theory. For him, the problem was how capitalism works. To explain this, he did not simply go out and talk with people or simply look at documents (although he did do both these things). Instead he developed the idea of the **mode of production**, *the way a society is organised to produce goods and services*. From this concept, he could start to evolve an understanding of how societies work and change.

2 Critical sociology

Critical sociology developed in reaction to positivist science, and is often inspired by Marx. It rejects the idea that society exists as a 'natural' system open to discovery. Critical sociologists suggest that not only should the social world be understood, it should ultimately be changed. They see the task of sociology as avowedly political, tying knowledge to action. They look at *all knowledge as harbouring political interests and the task of sociology as being critically to unmask what is actually going on*. Thus, for example, much sociology may suggest that we are free-thinking rational agents with choices: critical sociology would take this as a problem and try to show how all of this is shaped by social institutions. It subverts societies' dominant ideologies and beliefs. (For more on this, see Chapter 5, p. 163.)

3 Standpoint theory/standpoint epistemologies

Linked to the 'voices' raised in Chapter 1, **standpoint epistemologies** suggest that knowledge always comes out of specific kinds of social experience. *All knowledge is grounded in standpoints and standpoint theory enables groups to analyse their situation (problems and oppressions) from within the context of their own experiences*. The standpoint for most of social science has routinely been that of white, heterosexual, middle-class and middle-aged men – conventionally the dominant group in studying society. They have made their own standpoint appear to be 'the truth'.

But there is a range of other standpoints in the world: just as we saw in Chapter 2, there may be a feminist standpoint, which arises from the experiences and situations of women; a black standpoint, which arises from the situation of black people; or a gay standpoint, which arises from the experiences of lesbians and gays. The starting point, then, of this kind of epistemology is with the experience of these varied groups. The point is that starting from the (many different) daily activities of, for instance, lesbians enables us to see things in the social world that might otherwise have been invisible to us, not just about those lives but about heterosexual women's lives and men's lives, straight as well as gay (Harding, 1991: 252).

But problems can soon arise. For in taking, say, a feminist standpoint, it soon becomes clear that there is not just one position or stand to take – there is no universal (or essential) women's view. Women in low-income societies will almost certainly have different standpoints from those of middle-class white feminists in high-income societies. As we have already seen (Chapter 2), to work from a position which suggests there is only one standpoint of women would be to engage in **essentialism** – *the belief that qualities are inherent (essential to) specific objects*. A non-essentialising stance has to be taken which recognises how standpoints interweave (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991).

4 Queer theory

Queer theory argues that *most sociological theory still has a bias towards 'heterosexuality' and that non-heterosexual voices need to be heard*. Such theorists would argue that all the topics discussed in this book – from stratification and ethnicity, to religion and economy – would be greatly enhanced if the position of 'non-heterosexual voices' were placed at the centre.

For example, it suggests that many religions have been organised around 'homophobic' persecutions; that a new form of economy is emerging that is based upon the spending power of young middle-class gay men – the pink economy; and that the experience of being lesbian or gay can differ significantly across different ethnic minority communities (Seidman, 1996). New insights can be provided for all the traditional concerns of sociology once we give a focus to a different group such as 'queers'. This is a position that is a little like standpoint theory. It is discussed further in Chapter 12.

5 Postmodern methodology

We could go on with other standpoints. As we have seen in Chapter 2, a number of different approaches have emerged within sociology over the past two decades which stress differing voices and an anti-essentialism. Most prominently, and most generally, there has been the arrival of what may be called postmodern methodology.

This suggests that any strong search for *the* truth (like the positivism discussed above) is part of the (now doomed) Enlightenment project of science. Postmodernists hold that this view of an absolute, scientific truth has now been discredited: truths are much more multiple, fluid, changing and fragmentary. Postmodern epistemology would highlight the following:

- The death of the meta-narrative, i.e. the end of any one big claim to truth.
- The need for local knowledges produced out of particular contexts, i.e. our truths must be located in specific situations.
- The need to be aware of the contexts which shape this knowledge. Part of this means a much greater self-awareness on the part of the researchers – knowing how they come to do this research and their involvement in it.
- The need to understand the ways in which this knowledge is then told – how it is represented through 'writing strategies'. This means an awareness of how knowledge is represented. Metaphors such as stories, discourses and narratives become part of this. Part may also be the visual turn – the importance given to film, video, cam-recording and the like as new tools for gathering data and new tools for presenting it.
- The need to know why this knowledge is being produced and how it will be used. Here sociological knowledge is rarely just 'knowledge for knowledge's

sake': it is bound up with moral, political and ethical judgements. Sociology becomes a moral and political tale.

A caution

We have to be careful. Ever since its birth, sociology has been locked into controversy as to its true character. A lot of recent debates are not in the end that recent – they have often been voiced, slightly differently, at earlier moments. The work of C. Wright Mills, for example, introduced in Chapter 1, was an earlier version of some of these ideas. What is important for you to sense at this stage is that the character of sociological knowledge itself has always been discussed and has led to many battles. These still continue today.

Making sense of sociological data

Whichever epistemology is to be claimed, sociological research also always involves learning some 'tricks of the trade'. These are very practical matters – tools that are needed to make sure that you are doing the research as best you can.

1 Concepts, variables and measurement

A crucial element of all 'science' is the **concept**, *a mental construct that represents some part of the world, inevitably in a simplified form*. 'Society' is itself a concept, as are the structural parts of societies, including 'the family' and 'the economy'. Sociologists also use concepts to describe individuals, by noting, for example, their 'sex', 'race' or 'social class'.

A **variable** is *a concept whose value changes from case to case*. The familiar variable 'price', for example, changes from item to item in a supermarket. Similarly, people use the concept 'social class' to evaluate people as 'upper class', 'middle class', 'working class' or 'lower class'.

The use of variables depends on **measurement**, *the process of determining the value of a variable in a specific case*. Some variables are easy to measure, such as adding up income at tax time. But measuring many sociological variables can be far more difficult.

For example, how would you measure a person's 'social class'? You might be tempted to look at clothing, listen to patterns of speech, or note a home address. Or, trying to be more precise, you might ask about someone's income, occupation and education.

Researchers know that almost any variable can be measured in more than one way. Having a very high income might qualify a person as 'upper class'. But what if the income is derived from selling cars, an occupation most people think of as middle or even working class? And would leaving school at 16 make a person 'lower class'? To resolve such a dilemma, sociologists sensibly (if somewhat arbitrarily) combine these three measures – income, occupation and education – into a single composite assessment of social class, called socioeconomic status, which is described in Chapters 8 and 10.

Sociologists also face the challenge of describing thousands or even millions of people according to some variable of interest such as income. Reporting an interminable stream of numbers would carry little meaning and tell us nothing about the people as a whole. Hence sociologists use *statistical measures* to describe people efficiently and collectively. The box below explains how.

Measurement is always a bit arbitrary because the value of any variable depends, in part, on how one defines it. **Operationalising a variable** means *specifying exactly what one is to measure in assigning a value to a variable*. If we were measuring people's social class, for example, we would have to decide whether we were going to measure income, occupational prestige, education or something else and, if we measure more than one of these, how we will combine the scores. When reporting their results, researchers should specify how they operationalised each variable, so that readers can evaluate the research and fully understand the conclusions.

2 Reliability and validity of measurement

Useful measurement involves two further considerations. **Reliability** is *the quality of consistent measurement*. For a measure to be reliable, in other words, repeating the process should yield the same result. But consistency is no guarantee of **validity**, which is *the quality of measuring precisely what one intends to measure*. Valid measurement, in other words,

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PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

Knowing your 'averages': three useful (and simple) statistical measures

We all talk about 'averages': the average price of a litre of petrol or the average salary for graduates. Sociologists, too, are interested in averages, and they use three different statistical measures to describe what is typical. They often say 'means, medians or modes'. What does this mean?

Assume that we wish to describe the salaries paid to seven members of a company: £23,000, £28,500, £27,800, £28,000, £23,000, £52,000 and £23,000.

The simplest statistical measure is **the mode**, defined as *the value that occurs most often in a series of numbers*. In this example, the mode is £23,000 because that value occurs three times, while each of the others occurs only once. If all the values were to occur only once, there would be no mode; if two values occurred three times (or twice), there would be two modes. Although the mode is easy to identify, sociologists rarely make use of it because this statistic provides at best only a crude measure of the 'average'.

A more common statistical measure, **the mean**, refers to *the arithmetic average of a series of numbers*, and is calculated by adding all the values together and dividing by the number of cases. The sum of the seven incomes is £205,300; dividing by 7 yields a mean income of £29,329. But notice that the

mean is actually higher than the income of six of the seven members. Because the mean is 'pulled' up or down by an especially high or low value (in this case, the £52,000 paid to one member who also serves as a director), it has the drawback of giving a distorted picture of any distribution with extreme scores.

The median is *the value that occurs midway in a series of numbers arranged in order of magnitude* or, simply, the middle case. Here the median income for the seven people is £27,800, because three incomes are higher and three are lower. (With an even number of cases, the median is halfway between the two middle cases.) Since a median is unaffected by an extreme score, it usually gives a more accurate picture of what is 'average' than the mean does.

means more than getting the same result time and again – it means obtaining a *correct* measurement.

To illustrate the difficulty of valid measurement, say you want to investigate how religious people are. A reasonable strategy would be to ask how often they attend religious services. But, in trying to gauge *religiosity* in this way, what you are actually measuring is *attendance at services*, which may or may not amount to the same thing. Generally, religious people do attend services more frequently, but people also participate in religious rituals out of habit or because of a sense of duty to someone else. Moreover, some devout believers shun organised religion altogether. Thus, even when a measurement yields consistent results (making it reliable), it can still miss the real, intended target (and lack validity). In sum, sociological research is no better than the quality of its measurement.

3 Relationships among variables

Once they achieve valid measurement, investigators can pursue the real pay-off, which is determining how variables are related. The scientific ideal is **cause and effect**, *a relationship in which we know that change in one variable causes change in another*. A familiar cause-and-effect relationship occurs when a girl teases her brother until he becomes angry. *The variable that causes the change* (in this case, the teasing) is called the **independent variable**. *The variable that changes* (the behaviour of the brother) is known as the **dependent variable**. The value of one variable, in other words, is dependent on the value of another. Why is linking variables in terms of cause and effect important? Because doing so is the basis of **prediction**: that is, *researchers using what they do know to predict what they don't know*.

Because science puts a premium on prediction, people may be tempted to think that a cause-and-effect relationship is present whenever variables change together. Consider, for instance, that the marriage rate in the United Kingdom falls to its lowest point in January, exactly the same month our national death rate peaks. This hardly means that people die because they fail to marry (or that they don't marry because they die). In fact, it is the dreary weather during January (and perhaps also the post-holiday blues) that causes both a low marriage rate and a high death rate. The converse holds as well: the warmer and sunnier summer months have the highest marriage rate as well as the lowest death rate. Thus, researchers often have to untangle cause-and-effect relationships that are not readily apparent.

To take a second case, sociologists have long recognised that juvenile delinquency is more common among young people who live in crowded housing. Say we operationalise the variable 'juvenile delinquency' as the number of times (if any) a person under the age of 18 has been arrested, and assess 'crowded housing' by looking at the total square footage of living space per person in a home. We would find the variables related: that is, delinquency rates are, indeed, high in densely populated neighbourhoods. But should we conclude that crowding in the home (the independent variable) is what causes delinquency (the dependent variable)?

Not necessarily. **Correlation** is *a relationship by which two (or more) variables change together*. We know that density and delinquency are correlated because they change together, as shown in Figure 3.1(a). This relationship *may* mean that crowding causes misconduct, but often some third factor is at work, causing change in both the variables under observation. To see how, think what kind of people live in crowded housing: people with less money, power and choice – the poor. Poor children are also more likely to end up with police records. Thus, crowded housing and juvenile delinquency are found together because *both* are caused by a third factor – poverty – as shown in Figure 3.1(b). In other words, the apparent connection between crowding and delinquency is 'explained away' by a third variable – low income – that causes them both to change. So our original connection turns out to be a **spurious correlation**, *an apparent, though false, association between two (or more) variables caused by some other variable*.

Unmasking a correlation as spurious requires a bit of detective work, assisted by a technique called **control**, *holding constant all relevant variables except one in order to see its effect clearly*. In the example above, we suspect that income level may be behind a spurious connection between housing density and delinquency. To check, we control for income (that is, we hold it constant) by using as research subjects only young people of the same income level and looking again for a correlation between density and delinquency. If, by doing this, a correlation between density and delinquency remains (that is, if young people living in more crowded housing show higher rates of delinquency than young people with the same family income in less crowded housing), we gain confidence that crowding does, in fact, cause delinquency. But if the relationship disappears when we control for income, as shown in Figure 3.1(c),

we confirm that we have been dealing with a spurious correlation. Research has, in fact, shown that virtually all correlation between crowding and delinquency disappears if income is controlled. So we have now sorted out the relationship among the three variables, as illustrated in Figure 3.1(d). Housing density and juvenile delinquency have a spurious correlation; evidence shows that both variables rise or fall according to people's income.

(a)

If two variables vary together, they are said to be correlated. In this example, density of living conditions and juvenile delinquency increase and decrease together.

(b)

Here we consider the effect of a third variable: income level. Low income level may cause both high-density living conditions and a high delinquency rate. In other words, as income level decreases, both density of living conditions and the delinquency rate increase.
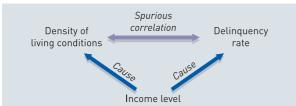
(c)

If we control income level – that is, examine only cases with the same income level – do those with higher-density living conditions still have a higher delinquency rate? The answer is no. There is no longer a correlation between these two variables.

(d)

This finding leads us to conclude that income level is a cause of both density of living conditions and the delinquency rate. The original two variables (density of living conditions and delinquency rate) are thus correlated, but neither one causes the other. Their correlation is therefore spurious.

Figure 3.1   Correlation and cause: an example

To sum up, correlation means only that two (or more) variables change together. Cause and effect rests on three conditions: (1) a demonstrated correlation, but also (2) that the independent (or causal) variable precedes the dependent variable in time, and (3) that no evidence suggests a third variable is responsible for a spurious correlation between the two.

Natural scientists identify cause-and-effect relationships more easily than social scientists because the laboratories used for study of the physical world allow control of many variables at one time. The sociologist, carrying out research in a workplace or on the streets, faces a considerably more difficult task. Often, sociologists must be satisfied with demonstrating only correlation. In every case, moreover, human behaviour is highly complex, involving dozens of causal variables at any one time.

4 Issues of sampling

One of the key issues of research is to know just how representative of a wider group are the people you study. For example, if you want to speak about the population of Australia as a whole, it would be sheer folly just to interview Australian students on campus. They would not be representative. You would need a much wider sampling frame – maybe a list of everybody who lives in Australia. But clearly, obtaining such a list would be very costly, and contacting everybody on it would be prohibitively expensive and time consuming. Hence full-scale population surveys – the census found in many countries – usually take place only every ten years or so. The United States census for 2000 (which can be found on the website www.census.gov) and the UK census for 2001 are the most recent of such censuses and are discussed in the *Methods and research* box, below (see www.census.ac.uk).

Much more commonly, social scientists engage in *sampling*. Usually, a researcher begins a survey by designating a **population**, *the people who are the focus of research*. For example, if you wanted a random sample of your college or university, you would initially need a sampling frame of everybody attending it. Researchers then collect data from a **sample**, *a part of a population that represents the whole*. The now familiar national political surveys utilise a sample of some 1,500 people to gauge the political mood of the entire country. You use the logic of sampling all the time. If you look around a lecture room and notice five or six students nodding off, you might conclude that the class finds the day's lecture dull. Such a conclusion

Argentine family answers questions during the nationwide Census

Source: Reuters/Corbis.

involves making an inference about *all* the people (the 'population') from observing *some* of the people (the 'sample'). But how do we know whether a sample actually represents the entire population? There are a number of different sampling strategies.

The main distinction made in sampling theory is usually between probability sampling and non-probability (convenience) sampling. The former is more sophisticated, for each of the elements of the sample has the same probability of being included. This is the only approach for a truly representative sample. It usually comes in two forms – simple random samples (something like every tenth person), or stratified random samples (where the population is divided into known strata or groups in advance, such as gender or age). In *random sampling*, researchers draw a sample from the population in such a way that every element in the population has the same chance of ending up in the sample. If this is the case, the mathematical laws of probability dictate that the sample they select will, in the vast majority of cases, represent the population with a minimal amount of error. Experienced researchers use special computer programs to generate random samples. Novice researchers, however, sometimes make the mistake of assuming that 'randomly' walking up to people on the street produces a sample representative of an entire city. This is a serious error, for such a strategy does not give every person an equal chance to be included in the sample. For one thing, any street – whether in a rich or

a poor neighbourhood or in a 'university city' – contains more of some kinds of people than others. For another, any researcher is apt to find some people more approachable than others, again introducing a bias.

Examples of non-probability samples include *quota samples* and *snowball samples*. A quota sample represents the group of people it wants to make statements about. Thus interviewers may be told how many respondents with particular kinds of characteristic are needed for the study: if we know that the population has equal numbers of men and women, then interviewers are asked to interview equal numbers of each. If we know that it is likely to be an older group, then we make sure the sample contains an appropriate mix of ages. This is not a random sample, but one that is purposely constructed with people in their correct proportions or ratios.

Snowball sampling also does not aim at real representativeness and is usually associated with case studies and qualitative research, often in areas of research where respondents are hard to find. The basic method relies upon searching out more respondents from the respondents you interview, and building up a network of contacts through each interview. In a research project on drug users or alcoholics, for example, it is impossible to find a full sampling frame that lists 'all drug users', from which you can draw a random sample. Instead, a more common method is to make contact with some drug users and then ask about their friends and acquaintances and subsequently interview them. Such a method, of course, can never provide a truly representative sample, but it is convenient.

Although good sampling is no simple task, it offers a considerable saving in time and expense. We are spared the tedious work of contacting everyone in a population, while obtaining useful results.

5 Sociological thinking: the interplay of theory and method

Sociological investigators move back and forth between facts and theory. **Inductive logical thought** is *reasoning that transforms specific observations into general theory*. In this mode, a researcher's thinking runs from the specific to the general, something like this: 'I have some interesting data here; what are the data saying about human behaviour?'

A second type of logical thought works 'downwards' in the opposite direction. **Deductive logical thought** is *reasoning that transforms general theory into specific*

METHODS & RESEARCH

The population census

A **census** is *a count of everyone who lives in the country*. It is seen as crucial for broad planning and the shaping of policies. Most countries try to have one, but the problems it can pose are formidable. India has a population in 2011 of around 1,210,000,000 (1.21 billion – the second largest population in the world) and its census started in 1872 – a history of 140 years. It conducted the most recent in 2011 – and every time it is a major challenge.

In the UK, the census has been held every ten years since 1801 (with the exception of 1841) when the population was 9 million. In 2001, it cost £255 million – but the 2011 census is well over half a million pounds. Run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), it tries to count every person in the UK at the same moment. Although a lot of attention is given to the design of the questionnaire, it is getting longer and longer. By 2011 it

had become a 32 page booklet. And for the first time it was also accessible online. (There was also a follow-up survey – some 4,000 professional interviewers conducting some 32,000 ten-minute interviews.)

It was becoming clear that the scale of the census is heading towards trouble and the census of 2011 is predicted by many to be the last in the UK. It now is too unwieldy, too costly and too unreliable. Some statisticians often choose to ignore its data because its return rate was only 96 per cent, and indeed was much lower in some inner-city regions. Nowadays, the figures do not seem to tally: in 2001, there were some 900,000 people fewer than predicted – this was eventually put down to an increased emigration (possibly of young men). But there were other discrepancies. In Westminster, the population was revised downwards by a quarter, and in Manchester by a tenth. All this mattered because lower populations meant lower government grants.

Among the most commonly cited problems with the census are:

- *Undercounting*: some councils have complained that their populations are undercounted, and are suggesting a recount.
- *Cost*: as populations grow, the costs of a census can become prohibitive.
- *Distribution*: it is becoming harder both to get the forms to the right people and to get them to complete and return the forms.
- *Immigration*: there were more immigrants and some cannot read English.
- *Civil liberties*: there are suspicions about the nature of the questions in the census and how they impinge on civil liberties.
- *Ethics*: the questions asked are becoming more and more numerous – and more personally intrusive.

The census may be discontinued from 2011. Follow up the debates: on the UK census, see www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/index.html; on the India census, see http://censusindia.gov.in; on wordwide census, see www.census.gov/ipc/www/cendates.

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hypotheses suitable for scientific testing. This time, the researcher's thinking goes from the general to the specific: 'I have this hunch about human behaviour; let's put it in a form we can test, collect some data, and see if it is correct.' Working deductively, the researcher first states the theory in the form of a hypothesis and then selects a method by which to test it. To the extent that the data support the hypothesis, we conclude that the theory is correct; data that refute the hypothesis alert the researcher that the theory should be revised or perhaps rejected entirely.

Just as researchers commonly employ several methods over the course of one study, they typically make use of *both* types of logical thought. Figure 3.2 illustrates the two phases of scientific thinking: inductively building theory from observations and deductively making observations to test our theory.

Finally, it is worth noting that statistics, too, play a key part in the process of turning facts into meaning. Commonly, sociological researchers provide quantitative data as part of their research results. And precisely how they present their numbers affects the conclusions their readers draw. In other words, data presentation always provides the opportunity to 'spin' reality in one way or another.

Often, we conclude that an argument must be true simply because there are statistics to back it up. However, readers must use a cautious eye when encountering statistical data. After all, researchers choose what data to present, they offer interpretations of the statistics, and they may use tables or graphs to encourage others to reach particular conclusions. *The big debate* at the end of this chapter takes a closer look at these important issues.
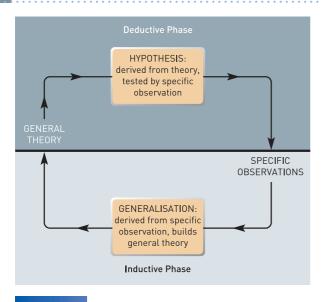
Figure 3.2   Deductive and inductive logical thought

The tools of sociological research

A **research tool** is *a systematic technique for conducting research*. The *Methods and research* box suggests a wide range of research tools that can be used by sociologists, and this section then briefly discusses a few of them. None is inherently better or worse than any other. Rather, in the same way that a carpenter selects a particular tool for a specific task, researchers choose a tool according to what they wish to learn. Each one of these requires their own skill – and there are numerous books published that provide such advice on all the above (see the guide at the end of the chapter).

To give some order to all of this, such data are often divided into *quantitative* materials involving statistics and requiring numeracy skills; and *qualitative* materials involving less measurable matter and requiring interpretive skills. Surveys and formal questionnaires are good examples of the former; and historical documents and fieldwork are good examples of the latter (but their paths often cross: there is statistical history and qualitative surveys). And although sociologists often make much of this divide (they split into 'the hard', with statistical tables, and the 'soft', without any tables), sociologists usually need both kind of data. The former help them make generalisations and often map trends – even when blind to inner meanings and idiosyncrasy; the latter help provide a deeper sense of meaning and

understanding – even if they fail to help map out broader trends. They are correctives to each other.

Core tools

1 The experiment

The logic of positivist science is most clearly expressed in the **experiment**, *a research method for investigating cause and effect under highly controlled conditions*. This is used rarely by sociologists, but more commonly by psychologists and social psychologists. However, it is a pure form of research: it is *explanatory*, and asks not just what happens but why. Typically, researchers turn to an experiment to test a specific **hypothesis**, *an unverified statement of a relationship between variables*.

Ideally, we evaluate a hypothesis in three steps. First, the experimenter measures the dependent variable (the 'effect'); second, the investigator exposes the dependent variable to the independent variable (the 'cause' or 'treatment'); and third, the researcher again measures the dependent variable to see if the predicted change took place. If the expected change did occur, the experiment lends support to the hypothesis; if not, the hypothesis is discounted.

2 The survey

A **survey** is *a research method in which subjects respond to a series of items in a questionnaire or an interview*. Surveys are particularly well suited to studying attitudes that investigators cannot observe directly, including political and religious beliefs or the subjective effects of racism. Although surveys can shed light on cause and effect, most often they yield *descriptive* findings, as researchers seek to paint a picture of subjects' views on some issue.

3 Questionnaires

A **questionnaire** is *a series of written questions that a researcher supplies to subjects requesting their responses*. One type of questionnaire provides not only the questions but a series of fixed responses (similar to a multiple-choice examination). This *closed-ended format* makes the task of analysing the results relatively easy, yet narrows the range of responses in a way that might distort the findings. By contrast, a second type of questionnaire, using an open-ended format, allows subjects to respond freely, expressing various shades of opinion. The drawback of this approach is that the researcher later has to make sense out of what can be a bewildering array of answers.

METHODS & RESEARCH

The research tool kit

Sociological data are the various bit of information that sociologists collect. In the past, the sociologist has been characterised as a person who uses interviews, surveys and statistics – but this is now a very limited view and only partially true. Research tools are used across a wide range of fields, and sociologists' work is much broader than this. Where possible, we signpost where you can find examples of research tools in this book.

30 research tools for sociologists

1. Artefacts and things (personal possessions, archaeological 'finds', consumer objects), e.g. p. 87
2. Art, e.g. pp. 930–5
3. Attitudes, e.g. pp. 152; 356
4. Autobiographies/life stories, e.g. pp. 77; 509; 613; 714
5. Auto/ethnographies/personal experience, e.g. p. 86
6. Biography, e.g. pp. 823–5
7. Census, e.g. p. 73
8. Conversation analysis, e.g. p. 226
9. Cybermethods/netnography, e.g. pp. 24; 84–5
10. Diaries, e.g p. 78
11. Discourse analysis, e.g. p. 594
12. Documentary, e.g. p. 75
13. Ethnography, *see* Participant observation
14. Field research, *see* Participant observation
15. Experiments, e.g. pp. 178–80
16. Fiction, e.g. *mytasklist* (each chapter); Part 6
17. Film and video, e.g. p. 87; youth; Part 6
18. Historical research, e.g. pp. 186; 363
19. Interviews, e.g. p. 255
20. Letters, p.79
21. Longitudinal, panel and cohort, e.g. pp. 218–9; 825
22. Maps, e.g. p. 936
23. Narratives and stories, e.g. p. 824
24. Oral history, e.g. p. 506
25. Participant observation, e.g. pp. 61; 155; 225; 507; 699
26. Performance, e.g. pp. 86–7; 222
27. Photographs, e.g. pp. 79–82
28. Postcodes, e.g. p. 325
29. Statistics and surveys, e.g. pp. 8–9; 282–3; 288; 585–7
30. Video, *see* film

Drama and documentary in sociology
Nick Broomfield is a leading UK documentary film-maker. In a style he calls 'Direct Cinema', he uses non-actors to play themselves. In 2006, he completed a drama called *Ghosts* for Channel 4 which was inspired by the 2004 Morecambe Bay Cockling Disaster (You can read about this in the opening of Chapter 15). In this incident, 23 immigrants were drowned after being cut off by the tides. *Ghosts* won numerous awards and helped raise nearly half a million pounds to help the victims' families. In many ways it is a more striking document than a lot of mainstream sociology and really worth a look. You can find most of it on YouTube. Think about and discuss the value of documentary film, drama and performance as sociological methods

See also: http://www.nickbroomfield.com/home.html and especially: http://www.nickbroomfield.com/ghosts.html.

Source: Nick Broomfield, from the film *Ghosts*.

4 Interviews

An **interview** is *a series of questions a researcher addresses personally to respondents*. Interviews come in several forms. In a *closed-ended* interview, researchers would read a question or statement and then ask the subject to select a response from several alternatives. Generally, however, interviews are *open-ended* so that subjects can respond in whatever way they choose and researchers can probe with follow-up questions.

Closed-ended and open-ended interviews are both relatively formal. But there is another kind of informal conversational interview, which is more commonly used in the qualitative field research described in the next section. With this mode of interviewing, the goal is to encourage the respondent to participate fully and equally in discussion with the interviewer. Certain key themes provide the shape for the discussion, but there is no questionnaire as such, and the relationship between interviewer and respondent is much more casual, friendly and egalitarian. This mode of research is more suitable to gaining 'in-depth' understanding and for researching more sensitive topics. The 'conversations' are usually taped. This can lead to problems of a mass of data that are much less organised and accessible to analysis than the data found with more formal interviewing. See Table 3.2 for some key differences in interview forms.

Table 3.2	A continuum of interview forms
Positivist	**Interpretative**
Interviews 'collect' data	Interviews 'construct' data
Standardised	Flexible
Mass	Formative
Focused	Open
Structured	Unstructured
Survey	Ethnographic
'Objective'	Phenomenological/'subjective'
Passive	Active
Short	Long

Source: Plummer (2001a).

5 Fieldwork, ethnography and participant observation

The most widely used strategy for humanistic field study is **participant observation**, *a method by which researchers systematically observe people while joining in their routine activities*. Researchers choose participant observation in order to gain an inside look at social life in settings ranging from nightclubs to religious seminaries. Cultural anthropologists commonly employ participant observation (which they call *fieldwork*) to study communities in other societies. They term their descriptions of unfamiliar cultures *ethnographies*; sociologists prefer to describe their accounts of people in particular settings as *case studies*.

At the outset of a field study, social scientists typically have just a vague idea of what they will encounter. Thus, most field research is *exploratory* and *descriptive*. Researchers might have hypotheses in mind, but it is just as likely that they may not yet realise what the important questions will turn out to be.

As its name suggests, participant observation has two facets. Gaining an 'insider's look' depends on becoming a participant in the setting – 'hanging out' with others, attempting to act, think and even feel the way they do. Compared to experiments and survey research, then, participant observation has fewer hard-and-fast rules. But it is precisely this flexibility that allows investigators to explore the unfamiliar and to adapt to the unexpected.

Unlike other research methods, participant observation requires a researcher to become immersed in the setting, not for a week or two, but for months or even years. For the duration of the study, however, the researcher must maintain some distance as an 'observer', mentally stepping back to record field notes and, eventually, to make sense of the action. The tension inherent in this method comes through in the name: 'playing the *participant*' gains for the researcher acceptance and access to people's lives; yet 'playing the *observer*' affords the distance and perspective needed for thoughtful analysis. The twin roles of 'insider' participant and 'outsider' observer, then, often come down to a series of careful compromises.

Most sociologists carry out participant observation alone, so they must remain mindful that results depend on the interpretations of a single individual.

An aside: qualitative and quantitative research

Participant observation is typically **qualitative research**, meaning *investigation by which a researcher gathers subjective, not numerical, data*. (The informal conversational interviews we encountered earlier are also part of this approach.) Unlike experiments or surveys, participant observation and informal

interviews usually involve little **quantitative research**, *investigation by which a researcher collects numerical data*. Some scientists disparage a 'soft' method such as participant observation as lacking in scientific rigour. Yet, much qualitative research has become very rigorous in recent years, even to the point of having computer programs such as *NVivo, Atlas, The Ethnograph* and *NUDIST* to enable a rigorous analysis of 'soft' data. Furthermore, its personal approach – relying so heavily on personal impressions – is also a strength: while a highly visible team of sociologists attempting to administer formal surveys would disrupt many social settings, a sensitive participant-observer can often gain considerable insight into people's natural day-to-day behaviour.

tip For Advice on using qualitative software in research, see:

Computer assisted qualitative data analysis
http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/index.html

6 Secondary and historical analysis

Not all research requires investigators to collect their own data personally. In many cases, sociologists engage in **secondary analysis**, *a research method in which a researcher utilises data collected by others*.

The most widely used statistics in social science are gathered by government agencies. The Office for National Statistics in the UK continuously updates information about the UK population, and offers much of interest to sociologists. Comparable data on Europe are available via *Eurostat*, from the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities in Luxembourg. Global investigations benefit from various publications of the United Nations and the World Bank. And much of the data of previous research is housed in archives such as the Social Science Research Data Archive at the University of Essex, UK. In short, a wide range of data about the whole world is as close as the university library. And most of these data sets, these days, are available on CD-Rom or on the World Wide Web.

Clearly, using available data – whether government statistics or the findings of individuals – saves researchers time and money. Therefore, this approach holds special appeal to sociologists with low budgets. Just as important, the quality of government data is generally better than what even well-funded researchers could hope to obtain on their own.

Still, secondary analysis has inherent problems. For one thing, available data may not exist in precisely the form one might wish; furthermore, there are always questions about the meaning and accuracy of work done by others. For example, in his classic study of suicide, Emile Durkheim realised that he could not be sure that a death classified as an 'accident' was not, in reality, a 'suicide' and vice versa. And he also knew that various agencies use different procedures and categories in collecting data, making comparisons difficult. In the end, then, using second-hand data is a little like shopping for a used car: bargains are plentiful, but you have to shop carefully to avoid being stuck with a 'lemon'.

Emerging research tools: from life stories to visual sociology

So far, we have described the four most common tools used by sociologists to dig out data and understand the world. They are compared in Table 3.3. But there are others that are becoming increasingly common: we call them *documents of life* (see Plummer, 2001a). These are accounts of people's lives told by themselves – usually in words, but sometimes through other media such as video. The world is crammed full of these personal documents. People keep diaries, send letters, take photos, make their own video diaries, write memos, tell biographies, scrawl graffiti, publish their memoirs, write letters to the papers, leave suicide notes, inscribe memorials on tombstones, shoot films, paint pictures, make music and try to record their personal dreams. All of these expressions of personal life are hurled out into the world by the millions and can be of interest to anyone who cares to seek them out. They are all in the broadest sense 'documents of life', and are there to be gathered and analysed by sociologists. They come in a number of forms, which include the following.

1 Life stories

The life history method was established with the 300-page story of a Polish émigré to Chicago, Wladek Wisniewski, written in three months before the outbreak of the First World War. It was one volume of the massive study by W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, first published between 1918 and 1920. Wladek describes the early phases of his life in the Polish village of Lubotynborn as the son of a rural blacksmith, his early schooling, his entry to the baker's trade, his migration to Germany to seek work, and his ultimate arrival in Chicago and his plight there. Following the classic work, life histories became an important tool in the work of Chicago and

Table 3.3	Four classic research methods: a summary		
Method	**Application**	**Advantages**	**Limitations**
Experiment	For explanatory research that specifies relationships among variables; generates quantitative data	Provides greatest ability to specify cause-and-effect relationships; replication of research is relatively easy	Laboratory settings have artificial quality; unless research environment is carefully controlled, results may be biased
Survey	For gathering information about issues that cannot be directly observed, such as attitudes and values; useful for descriptive and explanatory research; generates quantitative or qualitative data	Sampling allows surveys of large populations using questionnaires; interviews provide in-depth responses	Questionnaires must be carefully prepared and may produce a low return rate; interviews are expensive and time consuming
Participant observation	For exploratory and descriptive study of people in a 'natural' setting; generates qualitative data	Allows study of 'natural' behaviour; usually inexpensive	Time consuming; replication of research is difficult; researcher must balance roles of participant and observer
Secondary analysis	For exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research whenever suitable data are available	Saves time and expense of data collection; makes historical research possible	Researcher has no control over possible bias in data; data may not be suitable for current research needs

Polish sociologists. The authors have claimed this to be the best form of sociological method.

> **We are safe in saying that personal life records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material, and that if social science has to use other materials at all it is only because of the practical difficulty of obtaining at the moment a sufficient number of such records to cover the totality of sociological problems, and of the enormous amount of work demanded for an adequate analysis of all the personal material necessary to characterise the life of a social group.**

(Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958: 1832–3)

2 Diaries

For Allport (1942: 95), the diary is the document of life *par excellence*, chronicling as it does the immediately contemporaneous flow of public and private events that are significant to the diarist. The word 'contemporary' is crucial here, for each diary entry – unlike life histories – is sedimented into a particular moment in time. In some recent research on sexual behaviour and AIDS, researchers have asked subjects to keep diaries of their sexual activities and they have then analysed them (Coxon, 1997).

3 'Logs' and 'time budgets'

Sorokin pioneered this method when he asked informants to keep detailed 'time-budget schedules' showing just how they allocated their time during a day (Sorokin and Berger, 1938). The anthropologist Oscar Lewis's particular method focused on a few specific families in Mexico, and the analysis of a 'day' in each of their lives. Of course, his actual familiarity with each family was in no way limited to a day. He 'spent hundreds of hours with them in their homes, ate with them, joined in their fiestas and dances, listened to their troubles, and discussed with them the history of their lives' (Lewis, 1959: 5). But in the end he decided that it would be analytically more valuable, for both humanistic and scientific purposes, to focus upon 'the day' as a unit of study. Thus each family – Martinez, Gomez, Gutierez, Sanchez and Castro – is first presented as a 'cast of characters' and then followed through one arbitrarily chosen but not untypical day of their life. Lewis believed that a study of a day had at least a threefold value: practically, it was small enough

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Asking questions of photographs

In a general study of photography, Akeret (1973) coins the term 'photoanalysis' and suggests the following useful scheme of questions to be asked. We suggest you keep this question list to hand – and add some of your own – when you look at some of the photos in this book.

What is your immediate impression (of the photograph)? Who and what do you see? What is happening in the photo? Is the background against which the photo was taken of any significance, either real or symbolic? What feelings does it evoke in you? What do you notice about physical intimacy or distance? Are people touching physically? How are they touching? How do the people in the photo feel about their bodies? Are they using their bodies to show them off, to hide behind, to be seductive, are they proud of their bodies, ashamed? What do you notice about the emotional state of each person? Is (s)he shy, compliant, aloof, proud, fearful, mad, suspicious, introspective, superior, confused, happy, anxious, angry, weak, pained, suffering, bright, curious, sexy, distant, etc.? Can you visualise how those emotions are expressed in facial dynamics and body movement? If there is more than one person in the photo, what do you notice about the group mood? Is there harmony or chaos? How do people relate? Are they tense or relaxed? What are their messages towards each other? Who has the power, the grace? Do you see love present? What do you notice about the various parts of each person? Look carefully at the general body posture and then the hands, the legs, the arms, the face, the eyes, the mouth. What does each part tell you? Are the parts harmonious or are there inconsistencies? Pay particular attention to the face, always the most expressive part of the person. Learn to read any photo as you would read a book from left to right then downwards. Go over it again and again, each time trying to pick out something you have missed. Ask yourself more general questions, as many as you can think of. What is obvious and what is subtle? What is the sense of movement or is there any? What memories and experiences does the photo stir in you? How do you identify with the people in the photo? How are you alike, how different? What moves you most about the photo? What do you find distasteful about it? Is there anything that disturbs you? Try to define the social and economic class of the people photographed. What is their cultural background? If it is a family, would you want to be a member of it? Would you want your children to play with theirs? If the photos are personal – of you, your family, friends or associates – try to remember the exact circumstances of the photo session. How have you changed since then? How have you remained the same? (Akeret, 1973: 35–6).

to allow for intensive observation; quantitatively, it permitted controlled comparisons across family units; and qualitatively, it encouraged a sensitivity to the subtlety, immediacy and wholeness of life.
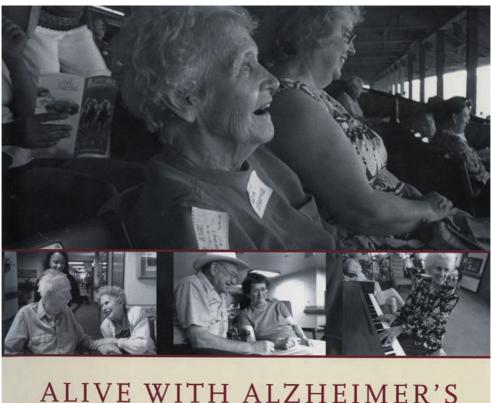
4 Letters

Letters remain a relatively rare document of life in the social sciences. The most thoroughgoing use of letters is still to be found in Thomas and Znaniecki's *Polish Peasant* (see p. 77), where on discovering that there was extensive correspondence between Poles and Polish émigrés to America, an advertisement was placed in a Chicago journal offering to pay between 10 and 20 cents for each letter received. Through this method they were able to gain many hundreds of letters, 764 of which are printed in the first volume of their study, totalling some 800 pages and arranged in 50 family sequences. Each sequence is prefaced with a commentary that introduces the family members and the main concerns.

5 Visual sociology: photography

Invented at approximately the same time as sociology, photography has only occasionally figured in sociological research. It is true that in the earliest days of the *American Journal of Sociology*, photographs were a regular feature of its muck-raking, reformist articles: between 1896 and 1916, 31 articles used 244 photographs. Likewise many early fieldwork studies were illustrated with photographs. Thrasher's *The Gang*, for example, contains nearly 40 photos of boys and boy gangs. The lead has primarily come from anthropologists, and in particular the pioneering work of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead (1942), who provided a volume devoted entirely to photographic images from the culture of the Balinese. The photo

Cathy Greenblat combines sociology with photography. Working to dispel myths and cut into common assumptions, her work focuses on care for the dependent elderly and for the end of life. She looks especially at those with Alzheimer's and dementia and shows how people with these illnesses are far from being 'empty shells' but come alive in diverse ways. Her work combines photographs with text – the images do not stand on their own; and she finds still photography a better medium to work in than film because, as she says, 'People need time to stop and reflect on the images, to deal with their emotions and thoughts at their own pace'. Her book *Alive with Alzheimer's* (2002) can be found online at her website: http://www.cathygreenblat.com/category.cfm?nL=0&nS=9

We also use some of her images in Chapters 13 and 21.

Source: Cathy Greenblat.

below is drawn from this book. Oddly, one of the most frequent places to find visuals is in sociology textbooks like this one. Indeed, throughout this book you will find many images: you may like to consider their value and use in sociology as you look at them (see the *Research in action* box above).

In the main, sociologists have not taken much interest in what should now be viewed as a major tool for investigation. Yet recently there has been growing interest in what has been called *visual sociology*.

Thus Cathy Greenblat takes photos of residents in an Alzheimer's home – her book shows their daily round of ordinary activities (Greenblat, 2004); Mitch Dunier worked with Hakim Hassan to study the street vendors in New York City (Duneier, 2000) whilst Kevin Bales worked with documentary photographers to show the nature of contemporary slavery (2009). Douglas Harper is one of the leading developers of visual sociology. His work can be found in a range of studies looking at migrant labour in Hong Kong, agricultural change and human values, the sociology of the small shop, and *The Italian Way*, a study of food in family life in contemporary Italy. These books include innovative uses of photography as well as other qualitative methods, and highlight the ways in which

Balinese cockfighting

Source: Bateson and Mead (1942: 140). Reprinted by permission of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Q **This image comes from one of the earliest attempts to use photography in field research. The authors – Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead – were leaders in this field for much of the twentieth century. What does this picture depict? Why might it be significant? Consider the role of images in sociology.**

See: The Institute for Intercultural Studies: www.interculturalstudies.org/resources.

sociologists are starting at last to take the visual much more seriously in their research.

6 Visual sociology: film and video

The twentieth century has been called by Norman Denzin 'the cinematic century' (1995). Film, and later television, video and DVD, became prime modes for looking at social life. Yet few sociologists have seriously engaged with it as a tool for research.

It is the documentary film-makers and anthropologists who have been most adept at exploiting this medium to date. At the start of the century, ethnographers started to film various tribal peoples engaged in social rituals. In 1901 Spencer filmed Australian aborigines in kangaroo dances and rain ceremonies, while in 1914 Curtis filmed the Kwakiutl Indians. But the birth of the documentary film is commonly agreed to be Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) about 'Eskimo' life.

Flaherty, a compassionate romantic appalled by the dehumanisation of modern technology, lived in 'Eskimo' country for 11 years, and shot his film under the most adverse conditions on the life of one specific individual – Nanook. In this film he reveals the constant struggle for life in a hostile environment. Sensitively, the power of the image is left behind.

One of Flaherty's most successful visual techniques was to follow an exotic act visually, showing it step by step as it developed, not explaining it in words. In one sequence we see Nanook tugging on a line leading into a hole in the ice. We are engaged in that act, and think about it. Eventually, the suspense is broken: our questions are answered when Nanook pulls out a seal. Flaherty creates the same visual involvement when Nanook makes the igloo, especially at the end of the sequence, when Nanook cuts a slab of ice for a window, sets it in place, and fixes a snow slab reflector along one side. For a time we are puzzled and, therefore, involved.

But when Nanook steps back, finished, we understand (Heider, 1976: 24).

In the main sociologists have either ignored the medium or used the documentaries created by film-makers like Frederick Wiseman. His films perhaps come closest to embodying sociological concerns: most deal directly with the ways in which individuals, in their social hierarchies, cope (or fail to cope) with the day-to-day pressures of social institutions. As he puts it:

> **What I'm aiming at is a series on American institutions, using the word 'institutions' to cover a series of activities that take place in a limited geographical area with a more or less consistent group of people being involved. I want to use film technology to have a look at places like high schools, hospitals, prisons, and police, which seems to be very fresh material for film; I want to get away from the typical documentary where you follow one charming person or one Hollywood star around. I want to make films where the institutions will be the star but will also reflect larger issues in general society.**

(In Rosenthal, 1971: 69)

Hence Wiseman's 'documents' treat not 'lives' but 'institutions' – the police in *Law and Order* (1969), hospitals for the criminally insane in *The Titicut Follies* (1969), army life in *Basic Training* (1971) as well as films on *Welfare* (1975), *High School* (1968) and *Hospital* (1970).

Feminist methodology: gender and research

One major development in sociology over the past 30 years has been the development of feminist methodology. Sociologists have (gradually) come to realise that gender often plays a significant part in their work. Margrit Eichler (1988) identifies the following five threats to sound research that relate to gender.

1   *Androcentricity*. Androcentricity (*andro* is the Greek word for 'male'; *centricity* means 'being centred on') refers to approaching an issue from a male perspective. Sometimes researchers enter a setting as if only the activities of men are important while ignoring what women do. For years, for example, researchers studying occupations focused on the paid work of men while overlooking the housework and childcare traditionally performed by women.

Clearly, research that seeks to understand human behaviour cannot ignore half of humanity.

Eichler notes that the parallel situation of *gynocentricity* – seeing the world from a female perspective – is equally limiting to sociological investigation. However, in our male-dominated society, this narrowness of vision arises less frequently.

2   *Overgeneralising*. This problem occurs when researchers use data drawn from only people of one sex to support conclusions about both sexes. Historically, sociologists have studied men and then made sweeping claims about 'humanity' or 'society'. Gathering information about a community from a handful of public officials (typically, men) and then drawing conclusions about the entire community illustrates the problem of overgeneralising. Here, again, the bias can occur in reverse. For example, in an investigation of child-rearing practices, collecting data only from women would allow researchers to draw conclusions about 'motherhood' but not about the more general issue of 'parenthood'.

3   *Gender blindness*. This refers to the failure of a researcher to consider the variable of gender at all. As we note throughout this book, the lives of men and women typically differ in virtually every setting. A study of growing old in Europe that overlooked the fact that most elderly men live with spouses while elderly women generally live alone would be weakened by its gender blindness.

4   *Double standards*. Researchers must be careful not to distort what they study by applying different standards to men and women. For example, a family researcher who labels a couple as 'man and wife' may define the man as the 'head of household' and treat him accordingly, while assuming that the woman simply engages in family 'support work'.

5   *Interference*. In this case, gender distorts a study because a subject reacts to the sex of the researcher in ways that interfere with the research operation. While studying a small community in Sicily, for instance, Maureen Giovannini found that many men responded to her as a woman rather than as a researcher, compromising her research efforts. Gender dynamics precluded her from certain activities, such as private conversations with men, that were deemed inappropriate for single women. In addition, local residents denied Giovannini access to places considered off-limits to members of her sex.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with focusing research on one sex or the other. But all sociologists, as well as people who read their work, should stay mindful about how gender can affect the process of sociological investigation.

Feminist research

Sociology's pervasive attention to men in the past has prompted some contemporary researchers to make special efforts to investigate the lives of women. Advocates of feminist research embrace two key tenets: (1) that their research should focus on the condition of women in society, and (2) that the research must be grounded in the assumption that women generally experience subordination. Some proponents of feminist research advocate the use of conventional scientific techniques, including all those described in this chapter. Others maintain that feminist research must transform the essence of science, which they see as a masculine form of knowledge. Whereas scientific investigation has traditionally demanded detachment, feminists deliberately foster a sympathetic understanding between investigator and subject. Moreover, conventional scientists take charge of the research agenda by deciding in advance what issues to raise and how to study them. Feminist researchers, by contrast, favour a less structured approach to gathering information so that participants in research can offer their own ideas on their own terms (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Nielsen, 1990; Stanley, 1990; Reinharz, 1992).

Such alterations in research premises and methods have led more conventional sociologists to charge that feminist research is less science than simple political activism. Feminists respond that research and politics should not – indeed cannot – ever be distinct. Therefore, traditional notions that placed politics and science in separate spheres have now given way to some new thinking that merges these two dimensions.

Twenty-first-century methods: new directions ahead

Although we can find traces of twenty-first-century developments in research methods and methodologies tracing back over generations and decades, there is a certain 'turning point' – even 'tipping point' – at the start of the twenty-first-century which has rendered some trends more and more significant for certain clusters of researchers. Eight major trends can be detected and in your studies it will be worth looking out for them.

1 'New' technologies and research

Most conspicuous is the development of the new technologies which are profoundly shaping the ways we do sociology. What once might have taken months to unearth can now be found at the click of a mouse. Major data sets can be created, stored, found and analysed through a large range of statistical and qualitative research packages. Large data sets such as those provided by the United Nations, the European Union and most governments can now be accessed instantly. Any research can usually start with a Google search or an Amazon book search and you will be on your way. Wikipedia can sometimes be a valuable resource and is usually a good first point of call. The ability to create images and videos – and store and present them easily – via web cam, digital camera, YouTube, PowerPoint and the rest has brought the visual world to sociology in a much more accessible way. Facebook can be homed into friends researching the same area. Blogs can provide access to research groups. Postcode searches can open up routes into lifestyle analysis. And so on. Table 3.4 suggests some of the ways in which the new technologies – not available a quarter of a century ago – are now to be found everywhere and shaping sociological research. Many of the older tools – interviews or surveys – are also being reshaped through these new technologies.

2 Global research

These new tools also aid in research that is going global. The internet is not bound to one country and so more and more research becomes accessible not just to one local community but to global ones. If you want to find people with a common experience – sickness, migration, work, families, sex or sport – you can find people to interview, blog, web cam or tweet online across many countries and even as they travel. It has made the possibilities of global research more and more possible – even for students. No longer is there the practical need for research to simply stay local – it can go global. But there is more than just a practical

Table 3.4	Digital culture and the transformation of twenty-first-century research	
Research tasks	**New digital research methods**	**A few examples (this is not meant to be comprehensive)**
Preliminary overview of the field	Do key word online searches, which will help you sketch out an area of research and see what already exists.	Search engines like Lycos (formed in 1994), Google (formed in 1998, and the world leader) and Bing (formed in 2009). The now ubiquitous Wikipedia which, despite its limitations, is 'good enough' for a starting point.
Accessing data	Get data. A core feature of the twenty-first-century world is its developing and managing of information which has never been possible before. You can now access both primary and secondary data online, with ease and little cost, as never before.	For secondary data, major statistical resources are provided by organisations, such as *Eurostats* (on the EU), *World Factbook* (CIA) and *United Nations Statistics*. But there are also databases for films (IMDb), literature (Project Gutenberg), and online archives for newspapers, sociology books, etc. (see Part Six of this book for much more on this).
Using internet tools for accessing original data	Do original research. Web 2 is highly interactive and enables you to gather data from your informants in many different ways.	Online and phone interviewing. Online ethnographies of networking groups from many spheres of social life (netnography). Analysing life stories and data found on blogs, Twitter and other sources.
Storing and managing the data you collect	Put in folders and files, and use table management. This is a core function of the information technologies.	Save your own data in well-organised and easily accessible files and folders on well-labelled and coded discs and memory sticks. Use programmes which analyse content of data.
Organising your research project	Plan frames and lists. Set up your research website, possibly including a blog where you can communicate with an emerging online research community working in similar areas.	Apart from setting up a website, this is where skills with Facebook, blogging and other network sites become important.
Constructing and managing bibliographies and reading	Nearly all sociologically relevant books and articles are electronically catalogued – often with abstracts, sometimes in e-book format.	Become familiar with the systems of your local library; use INTUTE; use search engines for recent books – and sites like Amazon. Keep all this catalogued in a database programme like EndNote.
Taking seriously the visual side of social life	Much sociology of the past has ignored the visual world but new technologies have created key ways of capturing and storing the world we live in through photographs and video.	The use of digital cameras makes on the spot image possible. Digital camera for ease of documentary work. Ubiqitous web cams. Visual websites like Flickr (for photo sharing). The value and use of YouTube.