Sociology transition activity 2025

This work is designed to prepare you for studying A-level Sociology. As we don't offer Sociology at GCSE at The Grey Coat Hospital so it is important that you arrive in September with a basic knowledge of sociological concepts and perspectives. I don't mind if you complete the work as a word document, in writing or as an amended version of this document.

What is Sociology?

Task 1

- Read an 'introduction to sociology Anthony Giddens and Philip Sutton' then answer the questions.
- Do not write any more than 2 sides.

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How did this world come about? Why are the conditions of life today so different from those of the past? Why is the human world riven with such gross inequalities? Where are today's societies heading in the future? If you have ever asked yourself such large questions, then consider yourself a novice sociologist. These and many more are among the prime concerns of sociology, a field of study that has a fundamental role to play in modern life.

Sociology can be simply defined as the scientific study of human life, social groups, whole societies and the human world as such. It can be a dazzling and compelling enterprise, as its subject matter is our own behaviour as social beings in relationships with many other people. The scope of sociology is extremely wide, ranging from the analysis of passing encounters between individuals on the street to the investigation of crime, international relations and global forms of terrorism.

Most of us see the world in terms of the familiar features of our own lives – our families, friendships and working lives, for example. But sociology insists that we take a broader view in order to understand why we act in the ways we do. It teaches us that much of what we regard as natural, inevitable, good and true may not be so, and that things we take for granted are actually shaped by historical events and social processes. Understanding the subtle yet complex and profound ways in which our individual lives reflect the contexts of our social experience is basic to the sociologist's outlook.

What to expect from this chapter

This chapter is the first of a block of three. Taken together, these provide a broad introduction to sociology: what it is, where it came from, how it developed over time, how sociologists go about their work and what kinds of explanations they use. As the opening to the whole book, this chapter provides a brief introduction to what sociology is, how and why it came into existence and what it is used for. Chapter 2 then covers how sociologists actually 'do' sociology. It describes the questions they ask, the wide range of research methods they use to answer those questions and how they assess their findings. It also tackles the thorny issue of whether sociology is a science at all.

Chapter 3 looks at sociological theories. Theories are an essential part of all academic subjects because they allow us to provide explanations rather than simply listing a series of facts. For example, we might find that the proportion of married women in the UK who are in work today is higher than in the 1950s. The bare statistics are certainly useful, but they are crying out for an explanation – *why* are more married women working today than in the past? – and that is what good theories provide. They try to tell us why something has happened or changed and in that way they broaden our knowledge. In chapter 3 you will find some important modern sociological theories such as feminism, functionalism, structuration theory, figurational studies, postmodernism and more. You should not be put off by these apparently difficult terms. They are really just a shorthand way of describing the different ways that sociologists interpret and understand the social world.

In the rest of this chapter we first discuss sociology as *a way of thinking* about the world or as a different way of seeing which, once you have mastered it, becomes very difficult to avoid. In short, once a sociologist, always a sociologist! World events, personal relationships, family life, international politics and much more: you will see all of these in a different light once you have developed a sociological way of seeing and thinking.

Second, we introduce the ideas of some of the very earliest sociological thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – those who essentially founded modern sociology as an academic discipline. We connect these thinkers to the times they lived through in order to illustrate the new social problems they tried to solve and how they went about

it. We then discuss some of the approaches to sociology that came afterwards. However, this is not a comprehensive list, and you will need to read chapter 3 on 'Theories and Perspectives' for the more recent theories.

Third, we look at some of the uses of sociology. Many students are attracted to sociology because they have a desire to help others and see the subject as a way into a suitable 'people-centred' career. For example, sociology graduates find careers in the caring professions, social work, teaching or the criminal justice system. Others use their research skills and knowledge to good effect in management, market research, local and national government administration or research consultancy. Still others (after more study) become professional sociologists working in universities and colleges. Studying sociology can be the first step on the path to a rewarding and satisfying career. However, others study sociology simply because they want to understand better the world we live in. This is sociology as a kind of personal enlightenment, which may or may not lead down a particular career path.

Some sociologists use their training and skills to try to improve the world by intervening to change an existing situation. This is 'applied sociology', and much of the research on social problems such as homelessness, poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, self-harm, and so on, is applied research. Based on their findings, applied researchers may try out possible solutions or make recommendations for changes to government policies or service provision.

Finally, the chapter ends with recent ideas of the need for sociologists to engage with the general public and the media if sociology is to have a greater impact on society. We are used to seeing psychologists, historians and political scientists as experts on television news and documentaries, but rarely do we see sociologists. This section discusses why this is so and what sociologists can do about it. However, we begin by outlining what it means to 'think sociologically' – a basic prerequisite to the practice of 'doing sociology'.

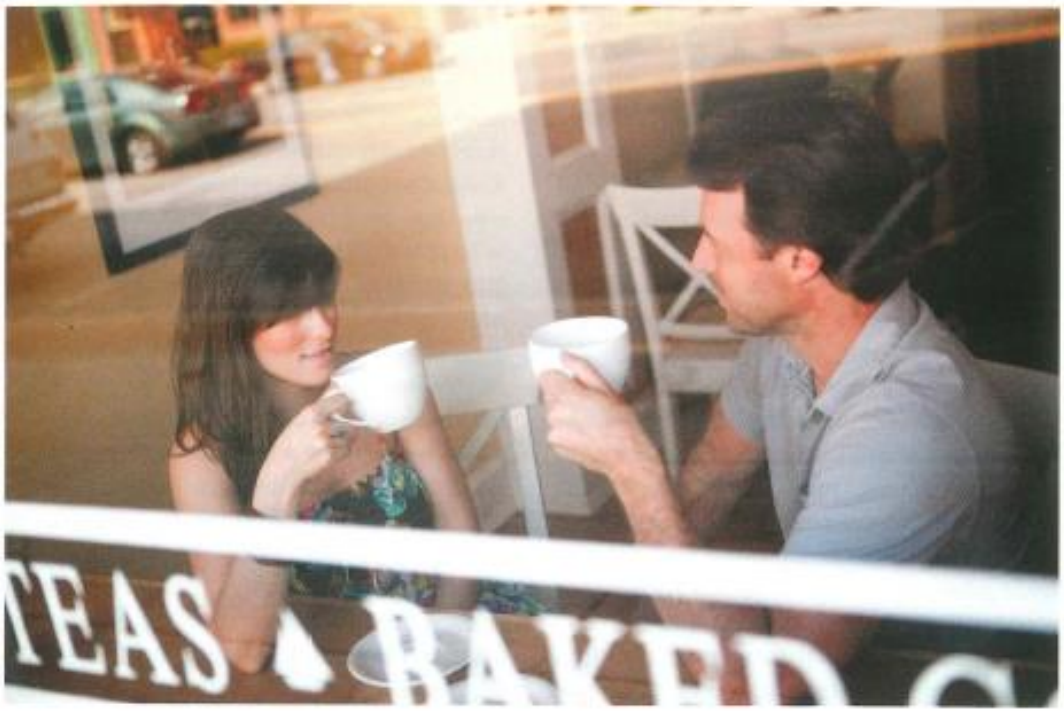
The sociological imagination

Learning to think sociologically means cultivating our imagination. Studying sociology is not just a routine process of acquiring knowledge from books like this one. A sociologist has to be able to break free from the immediacy of their personal circumstances to see things in a wider social context. Doing sociological work depends on developing what the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1970), in a famous phrase, called a sociological imagination.

The sociological imagination demands that we should 'think ourselves away' from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them from a new point of view. The best way to illustrate this is with something many millions of people do every day without a second thought, the simple act of drinking a cup of coffee. What could we possibly find to say, from a sociological point of view, about such a commonplace and uninteresting act?

First, coffee is not just a refreshing drink but it has symbolic value as part of our day-to-day social activities. Often the rituals associated with coffee drinking are more important than consuming the drink itself. The morning cup of coffee is often the centrepiece of a personal routine and an essential first step to starting the day. Morning coffee can then be followed later in the day by coffee with others – the basis of a group, not just an individual ritual. Two people who arrange to meet for coffee are probably more interested in socializing and chatting than drinking coffee. In all societies, drinking and eating provide occasions for social interaction, and these offer a rich subject matter for sociological study.

Second, coffee contains caffeine, a drug which has a stimulating effect on the brain, and many people drink coffee for the 'extra lift' it provides. Long days at the office or late nights studying sociology – some students do this, we are told – are made more tolerable by regular coffee breaks. Coffee is a habit-forming substance, but coffee addicts are not regarded as 'drug users'. This is because, like alcohol,



Meeting friends for coffee is part of a social ritual which also situates people within their broader social context.

coffee is a socially acceptable drug, whereas cocaine and heroin, for example, are not. Yet some societies tolerate the consumption of cocaine but frown on both coffee and alcohol. Sociologists are interested in why these differences exist and how they came about.

Third, when we drink a cup of coffee we are unwittingly caught up in a complex set of social and economic relationships that stretch right across the planet. Coffee links people in the wealthiest and the most impoverished parts of the world. It is consumed mainly in the relatively rich countries but grown primarily in relatively poor ones. Coffee is one of the most valuable commodities in international trade, providing many countries with their largest source of foreign exchange. The production, transportation and distribution of coffee require continuous transactions between people thousands of miles away from the coffee drinker. Studying such global connections is an important task for sociologists.

Fourth, sipping coffee is not 'natural' but presumes a long process of social, political and economic development. Along with other familiar items of Western diets – like tea, bananas, potatoes and white sugar – coffee became widely consumed only from the late 1800s, though it was fashionable among social elites before then. The drink originated in the Middle East, but its mass consumption dates from the period of Western colonial expansion more than 200 years ago. Virtually all the coffee we drink today comes from areas such as South America and Africa that were colonized by Europeans. The drink is not a 'natural' part of the Western diet, however normal buying and consuming coffee appears to people today.

Finally, coffee has been 'branded' and politicized within current debates about globalization, international fair trade, human rights and environmental damage. The decisions consumers make about what kind of coffee to drink and where to buy it are political as well as lifestyle choices. Some people drink only organic coffee, decaffeinated coffee or coffee that is 'fairly traded' through schemes that

Coffee is more than a pleasant drink for these workers, whose livelihoods depend on the coffee plant.

pay the full market price to small producers in developing countries. Others patronize 'independent' coffee houses rather than 'corporate' chains such as Starbucks and Costa.

When we begin to develop a sociological imagination, our morning coffee becomes a thing of great fascination which we approach with a new understanding. Indeed, as we will see throughout the book, the best sociological studies always tell us something we did not know before or make us see the familiar routines and patterns of life in new ways.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Sociology deepens our understanding of routine activities such as coffee drinking, but it has been argued that sociological research findings could also lead to changes in behaviour. In what ways might a wider understanding of the 'sociology of coffee' lead individuals to alter their own behaviour?

Studying people and societies

It is often said that sociology is simply the 'science of society'. But what then is 'society'? When sociologists speak of a society, they generally mean a group of people living in a bounded territory who share common cultural features such as language, values and basic norms of behaviour. Hence we can discuss, say, French society, Danish society or Argentinian society. However, 'society' also includes institutions – such as particular types of government, education systems and family types – and the relatively stable relationships between them. The enduring patterns formed by relationships among people, groups and institutions form the basic social structure of a society. When we start thinking about social life through the concepts of society, institutions and social structures, we are beginning to use a sociological imagination and to 'think sociologically'.

Adopting a sociological imagination allows us to see that events that affect the individual

person actually reflect larger social issues. Divorce, for instance, may be emotionally traumatic for someone who goes through it – what Mills calls a 'personal trouble'. But the level of divorce is also a significant 'public issue' that has an impact on pension provisions, welfare benefit systems and housing need. Similarly, losing a job and being unable to find another one quickly may be a personal tragedy for the individual. However, it is far more than a matter of private despair when millions of people find themselves in the same situation; it is a public issue expressing broad economic and social trends.

Try to apply a sociological imagination to your own life. It is not necessary to think only of troubling events. Consider why you are turning the pages of this book at all – why did you decide to study sociology? You could be a reluctant sociology student (surely not?) taking a course to fulfil the degree requirement for a career in law, teaching, journalism or management. Or you might just be enthusiastic to understand better the world you live in. Whatever your motivation, you are likely to have a good deal in common, without necessarily knowing it, with other sociology students. This is because your private decision also reflects your position within the wider society.

Do any of the following characteristics apply to you? Are you young? White? From a professional or white-collar background? Have you done, or do you still do, some part-time work to boost your income? Do you want to find a good job when you finish your education but are not especially dedicated to studying? More than three-quarters of readers will answer 'yes' to all of these questions. That is because university students are not typical of the population as a whole but tend to be drawn from more privileged social groups, and their attitudes generally reflect those held by friends and acquaintances. The social backgrounds from which we come have a great deal to do with the kind of lifestyle choices we make.

On the other hand, none of the characteristics above may apply to you. You might come from a minority ethnic group, from a working-class family or from a background of relative poverty. You may be in mid-life or older. All the same, we can make some tentative assumptions about you. You are likely to have had to struggle to get where you are; you probably had to overcome hostile reactions from friends and others who thought you were quite mad to give up a decent job, take on a large debt or risk failing, and you may well be combining higher education study with full-time parenthood. For sociologists, there is no such thing as the 'isolated individual' who makes choices without any reference to other people.

While we are all influenced by social context, our behaviour is never determined entirely by that context. Sociology investigates the connections between what society makes of us and what we make of society and ourselves. Our activities both structure – or give shape to – the social world around us and, at the same time, are structured by that world. The social contexts of our lives are not a mass of completely random events and actions; they are structured, or patterned, in distinct ways. There are certain regularities in the ways we behave and in the relationships we have with one another.

Although the idea of a 'structure' reminds us of a building, social structures are not really like physical structures, which, once built, exist independently of our actions. Human societies are always in the process of structuration (Giddens 1984). That is, they are reconstructed at every moment by the very 'building blocks' that compose them – human beings like us. Consider again the case of coffee. A cup of coffee does not drop into your hands. You *choose* to go to a particular coffee shop, you *choose* whether to drink a latte, a cappuccino or an espresso. As you make those decisions, along with millions of other people, you also help to shape the world market for coffee, and that affects the lives of coffee producers in distant countries whom you will never meet.

In recent decades, the malleable character of social structures has been dramatically demonstrated. The communist regimes of Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union, collapsed rapidly in the late 1980s and 1990s as ordinary people took to the streets to

protest at the lack of freedom and economic development. No one foresaw that the apparently solid and unyielding social structures of communism would wilt as people simply withdrew their legitimacy from the regimes and their leaders. In 2011, countries of the Middle East and North Africa saw numerous uprisings against authoritarian governments in the region as people expressed their dissatisfaction and called for change. In Libya, the 42-year regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was ended and, in Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak was forced from office after protesters took over Tahrir Square in the capital city, Cairo. Such revolutionary events show us that social structures are always 'in process' and are never set in stone, however solid or 'natural' they may feel.

Recent political developments, including those noted here, are further discussed in chapter 21, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements', and chapter 22, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'.

The development of sociological thinking

When they begin studying sociology, many students are puzzled by the diversity of theories they encounter. Sociology has never been a discipline where a single body of ideas is accepted as valid by everyone, though some theories have been more widely accepted than others. Sociologists often disagree about how to study human behaviour and how research findings should be interpreted. This is quite normal and is an aspect of all scientific subjects. However, unlike physics or chemistry, sociology involves studying ourselves, and this can severely challenge our long-held views and attitudes. Sociology can be very unsettling and disturbing. Nonetheless, we have to make every effort to set aside our emotional and political commitments, at least while we are in the process of 'doing sociology'. If we do not, then there is a risk that we will be misled and our findings will not be valid.

Theories and theoretical perspectives

It is a fact that I bought a cup of coffee this morning, that it cost a certain amount of money and that the coffee beans used to make it were grown in Central America. But in sociology we also want to know *why* things happen, and that means we have to construct theories which explain the bare facts. For instance, we know that many millions of people now use the Internet and social networking sites to stay in touch with friends or maintain an online diary. But this is a very recent development which begs some questions. Why did Internet use spread so rapidly? Why did online social media come about and why do so many people get involved with them? Why are younger people more likely to use social media than older people? What impact is social media having on earlier forms of communication? To address questions such as these, we need to collect and assemble the evidence and engage in theorizing.

Theorizing means constructing abstract interpretations of events using a series of logically related statements that explain a wide variety of empirical or 'factual' situations. A theory about social media, for example, would be concerned with identifying how communications technology has developed over time and what were the prerequisites for their success. In the best sociology, factual research and explanatory theories are closely related. We can only develop valid theoretical explanations if we are able to test them by means of empirical research; sociological theories are not mere speculation. Contrary to popular belief, the facts do *not* speak for themselves; they need to be interpreted, and interpretation takes place within a set of underlying theoretical assumptions. Many sociologists work primarily on factual research projects, but, unless they are guided by some knowledge of theory, their work is unlikely to *explain* satisfactorily the complexity they find. This is

In this painting by Brueghel, a chaotic range of often bizarre activities can be seen which collectively make little sense. However, the title – *Netherlandish Proverbs* – provides the key to interpreting the painting. There are more than a hundred proverbs illustrated here that were common in the sixteenth century. For example, at the bottom left someone is 'banging their head against a brick wall', on which sits a man who is 'armed to the teeth'. The evidence collected by sociologists can appear similarly unintelligible unless it is set within the context of a general theory which guides our interpretation of the facts.

true even of research carried out with strictly practical objectives.

Many people see themselves as essentially practical and 'down to earth' and are suspicious of theorists and theories which seem far removed from their everyday life. Yet all apparently practical decisions make some theoretical assumptions. The manager of a business, for example, may have no regard for 'theory'. Nonetheless, she might also believe that her employees are motivated by monetary rewards and that the promise of these leads them to work hard. This is a simple underlying theoretical interpretation of human behaviour, which the manager takes for granted without realizing or acknowledging it. An alternative view is that most people work in order to make a decent life for their families and monetary reward is merely a means to that less individualistic end. Once we begin to look for satisfactory interpretations of human actions we have to become interested in competing theories.

Without some kind of theoretical approach, we do not even know what to look for when beginning a study or when interpreting results at the end of the research process. But the interpretation of factual evidence is not the only reason for theorizing. Theoretical thinking must also tackle general problems of how social life can and should be studied in the first place. Should sociological methods be modelled on the natural sciences? How can we conceptualize human consciousness, social action and social institutions? How can sociologists avoid introducing personal bias into

their research? Should they even try? There are no easy answers to such questions, which have been answered in different ways since the emergence of sociology in the nineteenth century.

Founders of sociology

Human beings have long been curious about the sources of their own behaviour, but for thousands of years attempts to understand people relied on ways of thinking passed down from generation to generation. Before the rise of modern sciences, 'folkways' – traditional knowledge and practices passed down though generations – held sway in most communities, and these persisted well into the twentieth century. One example is people's understanding of their health or illness. Older people, with a good knowledge of a community's folkways, provided advice on how to prevent illness and cure diseases. Reflecting on his American childhood in Lawrence County, Kentucky, Cratis Williams gives us a flavour of the Appalachian culture of the time (Williams 2003: 397–8):

> A plaque of lead suspended on a string around a child's neck warded off colds and kept witches away while the child was sleeping. Children plagued by nightmares could wear these lead charms to assure themselves of sweet sleep and pleasant dreams, for nightmares were caused by witches and evil creatures that could not operate in the presence of lead. Adults given to snoring and nightmares sought relief by smelling a dirty sock as they went to sleep.

In today's modern societies, very few people advocate such measures or hold similar beliefs. Instead, a more scientific approach to health and illness means that children are vaccinated against previously common diseases and taught that nightmares are normal and generally harmless. Pharmacies do not routinely sell smelly socks to cure snoring either. The origins of systematic studies of social life lie in a series of sweeping changes ushered in by the French Revolution of 1789 and the mid-eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution in Europe. These events shattered older, traditional ways of life, and the founders of sociology looked to understand how such radical changes had come about. But, in doing so, they also developed more systematic, scientific ways of looking at the social and natural worlds, which challenged conventional religious beliefs.

The process of industrialization is discussed in chapter 4, 'Globalization and Social Change', and chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life'. Some of the damaging consequences of industrialization are outlined in chapter 5, 'The Environment'.

Auguste Comte

No single individual can found a whole field of study, and there were many contributors to early sociological thinking. However, particular prominence is usually given to Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who invented the word 'sociology' around 1840. Comte had originally used the term 'social physics' to describe the new subject, but some of his intellectual rivals at the time were also using that term. To distinguish his own approach from theirs he coined the term 'sociology' – the systematic study of the social world.

Comte's thinking reflected the turbulent events of his age. He looked to create a science of society that would discover the 'laws' of the social world, just as natural science had discovered laws in the natural world. Although he recognized that each scientific discipline has its own subject matter, Comte thought that a similar logic and scientific method could be applied to them all. Uncovering the laws that govern human societies could help us to shape our destiny and improve the welfare of all humanity.

Comte wanted sociology to become a 'positive science' that would use the same rigorous methods as astronomy, physics and chemistry. Positivism is a doctrine which says that science should be concerned only with observable entities that are known directly to

experience. On the basis of careful observation, laws can then be inferred that explain the relationships between those observed phenomena. By understanding the causal relationships between events, scientists can then predict how future events will occur. A positivist approach in sociology aims to produce knowledge about society based on evidence drawn from observation, comparison and experimentation.

Comte argued that human efforts to understand the world have passed through three broad stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. In the theological stage, thinking was guided by religious ideas and a belief that society was an expression of God's will. In the metaphysical stage, society came to be seen in natural rather than supernatural terms, with events being explained by reference to natural laws. The positive stage, ushered in by the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, encouraged the application of scientific methods. Comte regarded sociology as the last of the sciences to develop, but he argued that it was also the most significant and complex.

In the latter part of his career, Comte was keenly aware of the state of the society in which he lived and was concerned with the inequalities produced by industrialization and the threat they posed to social cohesion. The long-term solution, in his view, was the production of moral consensus through a new 'religion of humanity' to hold society together despite the new patterns of inequality. Although Comte's vision was never realized, his contribution in founding a science of society was important to the later professionalization of sociology as an academic discipline.

Emile Durkheim

The ideas of another French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), had a more lasting impact on sociology than those of Comte. Durkheim saw sociology as a new science that turned traditional philosophical questions into sociological ones which demanded real-world – empirical – research studies. He argued that we must study social life with the same objectivity as scientists study the natural world, which he summed up in his famous injunction to 'study social facts as things'. By this he meant that social institutions have a hard, objective reality that enables them to be analysed as rigorously as objects in the natural world.

But what is a social fact? Durkheim explains that social facts are all those institutions and rules of action which constrain or channel human behaviour. For the individual, social facts can feel rather like an external force, though most of the time they are simply taken for granted as 'natural' or 'normal' parts of life. For instance, the monetary system is a social fact we rarely think about. We are paid in money, we borrow money from banks to buy a car or a house, and if we have not been good at managing money we will be considered a high risk and may not be allowed to borrow. But the monetary system was already in place before we were born and, as we are forced to use it if we want to take part in our society, we are subject to its rules. In that sense, the system constrains or shapes our actions. This is typical of all social facts; they exist independently of the individual and shape their choices and actions.

In his analysis of suicide rates, Durkheim used the concept of social facts to explain why some countries have higher suicide rates than others (see the 'Classic study', p. 13). Suicide seems to be a purely individual act, the outcome of extreme unhappiness or perhaps deep depression. Yet Durkheim showed that social facts such as religion, marriage, divorce and social class all exert an influence on suicide rates. And, as there are regular patterns across different countries, these patterns must be explained in a sociological not a psychological way.

Durkheim was preoccupied with the changes transforming society in his own lifetime and was particularly interested in social and moral solidarity – what it is that binds society together. Solidarity is maintained when individuals are integrated into social groups and regulated by a set of shared values and customs. In *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim (1984 [1893]) argued that the advent

Classic Studies 1.1 Emile Durkheim's study of suicide

The research problem

One of the more unsettling aspects of our lives is the phenomenon of suicide, which often leaves those left behind with more questions than answers. Why do some people decide to take their own lives? Where do the pressures they experience actually come from? One of the early sociological classics which explores the relationship between the individual and society is Emile Durkheim's analysis of suicide rates, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Durkheim 1952 [1897]). Even though people see themselves as individuals exercising free will and choice, Durkheim's study showed that even a highly personal act such as suicide is influenced by what happens in the social world.

Research had been conducted on suicide before Durkheim's study, but he was the first to insist on a sociological explanation. Previous writers had acknowledged the influence of 'racial type', climate or mental disorder to explain an individual's likelihood of committing suicide. But Durkheim argued that the suicide rate – the percentage of suicides per 100,000 of the population – was a social fact that could only be explained by other social facts and that suicide rates vary widely across the world's societies (see figure 1.1).

By examining official statistics in France, Durkheim found that certain social groups were more likely to commit suicide than others. He discovered that more men committed suicide than women, more Protestants than Catholics, the wealthy more than the poor, and single people more than those who were married. The question was, why?

Durkheim's explanation

These findings led Durkheim to conclude that there are social forces *external to the individual* which influence suicide rates. He related his explanation to the idea of social solidarity and to two types of bonds within society – social integration and social regulation. Durkheim argued that people who were strongly integrated into social groups, and whose desires and aspirations were regulated by social norms, were less likely to commit suicide. From this he

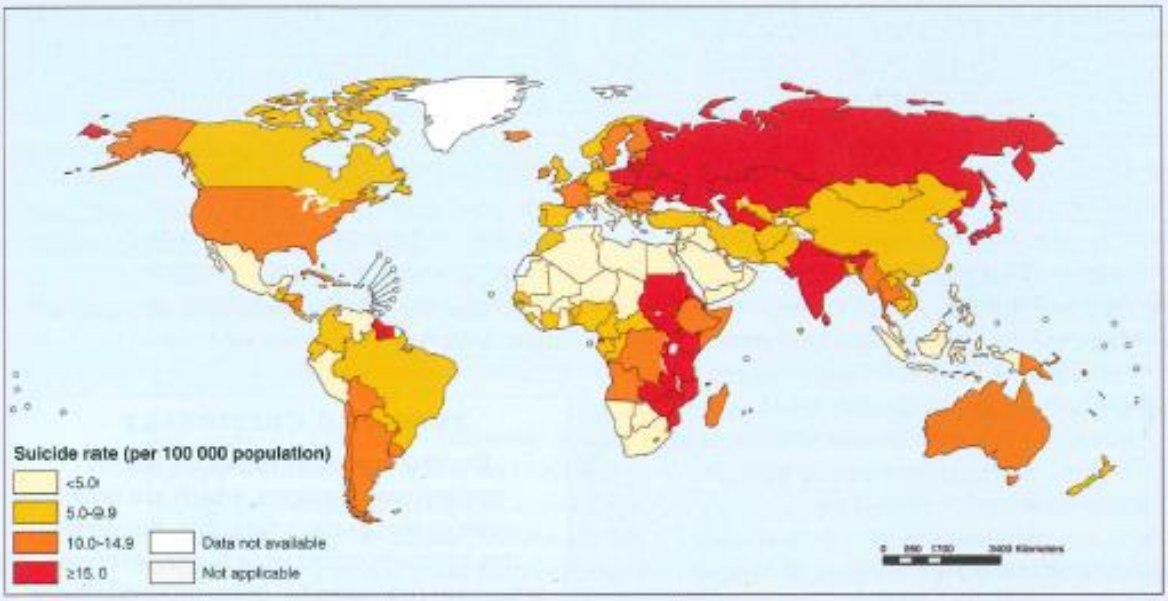


Figure 1.1 Age-standardized suicide rates by country and region, 2012

Source: WHO (2014b).

deduced four types of suicide, in accordance with the relative presence or absence of integration and regulation.

1. *Egoistic suicides* are marked by low integration and occur when an individual becomes isolated or when their ties to a social group are weakened or broken. For example, the low rates of suicide among Catholics could be explained by their strong community, while the personal and moral freedom of Protestants meant that they 'stand alone' before God. Marriage protects against suicide by integrating the individual into a stable social relationship, while single people remain more isolated.
2. *Anomic suicide* is caused by a lack of social regulation. By this, Durkheim referred to the condition of *anomie*, when people are rendered 'normless' as a result of rapid change or economic instability. The loss of a fixed point of reference for norms and desires – such as in times of economic upheaval or in personal troubles such as divorce – can upset the balance between people's circumstances and their desires such that they no longer know how to carry on.
3. *Altruistic suicide* occurs when an individual is 'over-integrated' – social bonds are too strong – and comes to value the group more than him- or herself. In such a case, suicide becomes a sacrifice for the 'greater good'. Japanese kamikaze pilots or Islamist 'suicide bombers' are examples. Durkheim saw these as more common in traditional societies where mechanical solidarity prevails.
4. The final type is *fatalistic suicide*. Although Durkheim saw this as of little contemporary relevance, it occurs when an individual is over-regulated by society. The oppression of the individual in dictatorial regimes can result in feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Suicide rates vary across societies but are also quite stable ***within*** particular societies over time. Durkheim took this as evidence that there are consistent social forces that influence suicide rates, and therefore we can see that general social patterns can be detected even within individual actions.

Critical points

Since its publication, many objections have been raised to Durkheim's study of suicide, particularly in relation to his uncritical use of official statistics, his dismissal of non-social influences and his insistence in classifying all types of suicide together. Some critics have shown that it is vitally important to understand the social process involved in collecting data on suicides, as coroners' definitions and criteria influence the number of deaths that are recorded as 'suicides' in the first place. Because of this, suicide statistics may be highly variable across societies, as Durkheim suggests, but this is not necessarily because of differences in suicidal behaviour; rather, it is due to divergent practices adopted by coroners in recording 'unexplained deaths'.

Contemporary significance

The arguments of his critics are legitimate, yet Durkheim's study remains a sociological classic. It helped to establish sociology as a discipline with its own subject – the study of social facts – and his fundamental argument retains much of its force: that to grasp fully even the apparently most personal act of suicide demands a sociological explanation rather than simply one rooted in the exploration of personal motivation. Durkheim's identification of suicide *rates* as a subject for study is today widely accepted, and the study is also important for its demonstration that social phenomena are amenable to systematic, scientific analysis using a rigorous methodology.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Durkheim's study relied on official government statistics, which are now seen as somewhat unreliable. But does this criticism undermine his underlying argument that 'suicide' is not an exclusively personal act and therefore it requires a sociological rather than individualistic psychological explanation?

of the industrial age also led to a new type of solidarity.

According to Durkheim, older cultures with a low division of labour (specialized roles such as work occupations) are characterized by mechanical solidarity. Most people are involved in similar occupations and bound together by common experiences and shared beliefs. But the development of modern industry and the enlargement of cities produced an expanding division of labour which broke down mechanical forms of solidarity. With the increasing specialization of tasks and roles, a new type of organic solidarity was created. As the division of labour expands, people become increasingly dependent upon one another, because each person needs goods and services that those in other occupations supply. Like the human 'organic' body, each part or organ depends on all the others if the whole society or body is to function properly.

Nonetheless, Durkheim thought that social change in the modern world was so rapid and intense that major difficulties could arise. As societies change, so do lifestyles, morals, beliefs and accepted patterns of behaviour. But, when change is rapid and continuous, the old values lose their grip on people without any new ones becoming established. Durkheim called such an unsettling condition anomie – deep feelings of aimlessness, dread and despair, as many people are left perceiving that their lives lack meaning and structure without clear guidelines for action. The big question is whether people can ever get used to continuous rapid change as the 'normal' condition of living in conditions of modernity.

Karl Marx

The ideas of Karl Marx (1818–83) contrast sharply with those of Comte and Durkheim, though he too sought to explain the changes associated with the Industrial Revolution. When he was a young man, Marx's political activities brought him into conflict with the German authorities, and after a brief stay in France he settled permanently in exile in Britain, where he saw the growth of factories and industrial production as well as growing inequality. His interest in the European labour movement and socialist ideas were reflected in his writings, and much of his work concentrated on political and economic issues. Yet, since he connected economic problems to social institutions, his work was rich in sociological insights.

Although he wrote about the broad sweep of human history, Marx's primary focus was on the development of capitalism: a system of production that contrasts radically with all previous economies. Marx identified two main elements of capitalism. The first is capital – that is, any asset, including money, machines or even factories, that can be used or invested to make future assets. The accumulation of capital goes hand in hand with the second element, wage-labour. Wage-labour refers to the pool of workers who do not own any means of production themselves but must find employment provided by the owners of capital.

Marx argued that those who own capital – capitalists – form a ruling class, while the mass of the population make up a class of waged workers – the working class. As industrialization spread, large numbers of peasants, who used to support themselves by working the land, moved to the expanding cities and helped to form an urban industrial working class, which Marx also called the proletariat. For Marx, this means that capitalism is a class system in which relations between the two main classes are characterized by an underlying conflict. Although owners of capital and workers are dependent on each other – capitalists need labour, workers need wages – this dependency is unbalanced. Workers have little or no control over their labour, and employers are able to generate profit by appropriating the products of the workers' labour – paying them less than their labour is worth.

Marx saw conflicts between classes as the motivation for historical development; as he put it, they are the 'motor of history'. Marx and Engels (2008 [1848]) wrote at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto*, 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' According to Marx, there have been a series of historical stages, beginning with

So-called Occupy protests around the world target 'greedy' forms of capitalism in which vast wealth accumulates among a tiny percentage of the population while 'the 99 per cent' majority struggle to make a living. Twenty-first-century anti-capitalist movements continue to take their inspiration from the analyses of Marx and Engels, though they rarely advocate communism as their preferred alternative.

'primitive communist' societies of hunters and gatherers and passing through ancient slave-owning systems and feudal systems with landowners and peasant farmers. The emergence of a new commercial or capitalist class displaced the landed nobility, and, just as capitalists had overthrown the feudal order, so too would the capitalists be overthrown by the proletariat.

Marx theorized that a workers' revolution would bring about a new society in which there would be no large-scale division between owners and workers. He called this historical stage communism. This does not mean that all inequalities would magically disappear, but society would no longer be split into a small class that monopolizes economic and political power and a mass of people who benefit little from their labour. The economic system would be under communal ownership and a more humane, egalitarian society would slowly emerge.

Marx's ideas had a far-reaching effect on the twentieth century. Until only a generation ago, more than a third of the Earth's population lived in societies whose governments derived inspiration from Marx's ideas. However, since the revolutionary wave that began in Poland in 1989 and swept aside communist regimes across Eastern Europe, ending with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union

itself in 1991, Marx's ideas have lost ground. Even in China, where a communist party still holds political power, capitalist economic development has taken a firm hold. In spite of the spread of capitalism around the world, the working-class revolution that Marx looked forward to seems further away today than it did in Marx's own time.

Max Weber

Like Marx, Max Weber (1864–1920) was not just a sociologist; his interests ranged across many areas. He was born in Germany, where he spent most of his academic career, and his work covered economics, law, philosophy and comparative history as well as sociology. He was also concerned with the development of capitalism and how modern societies differed from earlier types. In a series of studies, Weber set out some of the basic characteristics of modern industrial societies and identified key issues that remain central to sociology today.

Weber recognized class conflict but saw it as less significant than Marx did. In Weber's view, economic factors *are* important, but ideas and values can also bring about social change. His celebrated and much discussed work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992 [1904–5]) proposed that religious values – especially those associated with Puritanism – were of fundamental importance in creating a capitalistic outlook. Unlike the other early sociologists, Weber argued that sociologists should study social action – the subjectively meaningful actions of people that are oriented towards others. It is the job of sociology to understand the meanings behind all of those individual actions.

An important element in Weber's sociological perspective is the ideal type. Ideal types are models that are created to alert us to some social phenomenon and to help us to make sense of it. These hypothetical constructions can be very useful in pointing researchers towards a subject. For example, we could construct a simple ideal-typical 'terrorist group', based on the most striking aspects that have been observed in the cases of the IRA in Northern Ireland, ETA in Spain, the Red Brigades in Italy and the global networks of al-Qaeda. We might note that all these groups operate outside mainstream politics; they use violence against the state and they often target civilians to demonstrate their power. We can then use this ideal type to analyse other real-world instances of political violence.

Of course, in reality there are many differences between our four groups. The Red Brigades were communist, the IRA was an Irish nationalist group, ETA is a Basque separatist organization and al-Qaeda is a global Islamist network. Nonetheless, using our ideal type we can accommodate these differences while also recognizing that they share enough features to be described collectively as 'terrorist groups'. It is important to note that, by 'ideal' type, Weber did not mean that the conception was perfect or desirable. Ideal types are 'pure' or 'one-sided' forms of real social phenomena. But constructing an ideal type of terrorism (or anything else) from common aspects of many observed cases is more effective and useful than using one real terrorist group as a template for others.

Weber saw the emergence of modern society as accompanied by important shifts in patterns of social action. People were moving away from traditional beliefs grounded in superstition, religion, custom and longstanding habit. Instead, they engaged increasingly in rational, instrumental calculation that took into account efficiency and the future consequences of the action. In industrial society, there was little room for sentiment or doing things just because they had 'always been done that way'. The emergence of science, modern technology and bureaucracies was described by Weber as rationalization – the organization of social life according to principles of efficiency and on the basis of technical knowledge. If religion and longstanding customs previously guided people's attitudes and values, modern society was marked by the rationalization of politics, religion, economic activity and even music.

Weber had major concerns about the outcome of the rationalization process. He feared that the spread of bureaucracy, which is the most efficient form of administration, would stifle creativity and imprison

Some of the major trade and economic transactions today take place on the stock market in highly rationalized format, with barely any personal interactions between global traders. This is in stark contrast to the personalized bartering and market stall negotiations which continue in many local communities.

individuals in a 'steel-hard cage' from which there would be little chance of escape. This bureaucratic domination, although based on rational principles, could crush the human spirit by over-regulating every aspect of life. For Weber, the seemingly progressive agenda of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment, of scientific progress, rising wealth and increasing happiness, also brought with it a dark side with new dangers.

Three theoretical traditions

As we have seen, the classical founders of sociology – Durkheim, Marx and Weber – adopted different approaches to their studies. Durkheim emphasized the coercive strength of social forces in generating shared values and consensus. Marx also saw social structures as powerful, but argued that conflict and inequality were endemic in all societies. On the other hand, Max Weber focused attention on the meaningful character of social life and the social actions of individuals. These basic differences have persisted throughout the history of sociology, developing into three broad sociological traditions: functionalism (Durkheim), conflict theory (Marx) and social action or 'interactionist' approaches (Weber).

The three traditions are introduced briefly

Although Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber are, without doubt, foundational figures in sociology, there were some in the same period and others from earlier times whose contributions should also be taken into account. Sociology, like many academic fields, has not always lived up to its ideal of acknowledging the importance of every thinker whose work has intrinsic merit. Very few women or members of minority ethnic groups had the opportunity to become professional sociologists during the 'classical' period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In addition, the few who *were* given the opportunity to do sociological research of lasting importance have frequently been neglected. Important scholars such as Harriet Martineau and the Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun have attracted the attention of sociologists in recent years.

Harriet Martineau (1802–76)

Harriet Martineau has been called the 'first woman sociologist', but, like Marx and Weber, she cannot be thought of simply as a sociologist. She was born and educated in England and was the author of more than fifty books as well as numerous essays. Martineau is now credited with introducing sociology to Britain through her translation of Comte's founding treatise, *Positive Philosophy* (see Rossi 1973). In addition, she conducted a first-hand, systematic study of American society during her extensive travels throughout the United States in the 1830s, the subject of her book *Society in America* (Martineau 1962 [1837]). Martineau is significant to sociologists today for several reasons.

First, she argued that, when one studies a society, one must focus on all its aspects, including key political, religious and social institutions. Second, she insisted that an analysis of a society must include an understanding of women's lives, something that only became commonplace in mainstream sociology with feminist interventions in the 1970s. Third, she was the first to turn a sociological eye on previously ignored issues, among them marriage, children, domestic and religious life, and race relations. As she once wrote: 'The nursery, the boudoir, and the kitchen are all excellent schools in which to learn the morals and manners of a people' (1962 [1837]). Finally, she argued that sociologists should do more than just observe; they should also act in ways to benefit a society. As a result, Martineau was an active proponent of both women's rights and the emancipation of slaves.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406)

The Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun was born in what is today Tunisia and is famous for his historical, sociological and political-economic studies. He wrote many books, the most widely known of which is a six-volume work, the *Muqaddimah* ('Introduction'), completed in 1378. This is viewed by some scholars today as essentially an early foundational work of sociology (see Alatas 2006). The *Muqaddimah* criticized existing historical approaches and methods as dealing only with description, claiming instead the discovery of a new 'science of social organization' or 'science of society', capable of getting at the underlying meaning of events.

Ibn Khaldun devised a theory of social conflict based on understanding the central characteristics of the 'nomadic' and 'sedentary' societies of his time. Central to this theory was the concept of 'group feeling' or solidarity (*asabiyyah*). Groups and societies with a strong group feeling were able to dominate and control those with weaker forms of internal solidarity. Ibn Khaldun developed these ideas in an attempt to explain the rise and decline of Maghribian and Arab states, and in this sense he may be seen as studying the process of state-formation – itself a main concern of modern, Western historical sociology. Nomadic Bedouin tribes tended towards a very strong group feeling, which enabled them to overrun and dominate the weaker sedentary town-dwellers and establish new dynasties. However, the Bedouin then became settled into more urbanized lifestyles and their previously strong

group feeling and military force diminished, thus leaving them open to attack from external enemies once again. This completed a long cycle in the rise and decline of states. Although Western historians and sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century referred to Ibn Khaldun's work, only in very recent years has it again come to be seen as potentially significant.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why do you think Harriet Martineau's sociological ideas on marriage, children and the domestic life of women were largely ignored in her own time? How might we account for the renewed interest in Ibn Khaldun's fourteenth-century ideas in the twenty-first century?

below, but you will encounter arguments and ideas that draw upon them throughout the book. After a while you should be able to identify which tradition any particular research study you come across is closest to.

We look in detail at more recently developed theoretical approaches, such as feminism, postmodernism and figurational studies, in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives'.

Functionalism

Functionalism holds that society is a complex system whose various parts work together to produce stability and that sociology should investigate their relationships. For example, we can analyse the religious beliefs and customs of a society by showing how they relate to other institutions because the different parts of a society always develop in close relation to one another. Functionalists, including Comte and Durkheim, have often used an organic analogy, comparing the operation of society to a living organism. They argue that the parts of society work together, just as the various parts of the human body do, for the benefit of society as a whole. To study a bodily organ such as the heart, we need to show how it relates to other parts of the body. By pumping blood around the body, the heart plays a vital role in the continuation of the life of the organism. Similarly, analysing the function of a social institution such as the education system means showing the part it plays in the smooth running of a society.

Functionalism emphasizes the importance of moral consensus in maintaining order and stability. Moral consensus exists when most people in a society share the same values. Functionalists regard order and balance as the normal state of society, and this social equilibrium is grounded in the moral consensus among society's members. For instance, Durkheim argued that religious beliefs reaffirm people's adherence to core social values, thereby contributing to the maintenance of social cohesion.

Until the 1960s, functionalism was probably the leading theoretical tradition in sociology, particularly in the United States. Talcott Parsons (1902–79) and Robert K. Merton (1910–2003) were two of its most prominent exponents. Merton's version of functionalism has been particularly influential. He distinguished between manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those known to, and intended by, the participants in a specific type of social activity. Latent functions are consequences of that activity of which the participants are unaware. For instance, Merton examined the rain dance performed by the Hopi tribe of Arizona and New Mexico. The Hopi believe that this ceremony will bring the rain they need for their crops (a manifest function). But the rain dance, Merton argued, also has the effect of promoting group cohesion of Hopi society (its latent function). A major part of sociological explanations, according to Merton, consists in uncovering the latent functions of intentional social activities and institutions.

Merton also distinguished between

Sport is part of the school curriculum ostensibly to encourage healthy living. However, from a functionalist perspective, sport is also an important part of socialization, teaching children both competitiveness and how to work as part of a team.

functions and dysfunctions. To look for the dysfunctional aspects of social behaviour means focusing on features of social life that challenge the existing order of things. For example, it is mistaken to suppose that religion is always functional and that it only contributes to social cohesion. When religious groups disagree with one another the result can be major social conflict, causing widespread social disruption. Thus, wars have often been fought between religious communities – as can be seen in the struggles between Protestants and Catholics in Europe or between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East.

Since the late 1970s the popularity of functionalism has waned as its limitations have become apparent. Though it is not true of Merton, many functionalist thinkers focused on stability and social order, minimizing social divisions and inequalities based on factors such as class, ethnicity and gender. Functionalism also placed too little emphasis on the role that creative social action can play within society. Many critics argued that functional analysis attributes to societies social qualities that they do not have. For instance, many functionalists often wrote as though whole societies have 'needs' and 'purposes', even though these concepts make sense only when applied to individual human beings. Just as significantly, in the 1960s and 1970s there emerged a wave of so-called new social movements – involving, among others, students, environmentalists and peace movements – which functional analysis seemed particularly ill-equipped to understand and explain.

Conflict theories

Like functionalists, sociologists using conflict theories emphasize the importance of social structures, and they advance a comprehensive 'model' to explain how society works. However, conflict theorists reject functionalism's emphasis on consensus. Instead, they highlight the importance of divisions in society and, in doing so, concentrate on issues of power, inequality and competitive struggle. They tend to see society as composed of distinct groups, each pursuing its own interests, which means the potential for conflict is always present. Conflict theorists examine the tensions between dominant and disadvantaged groups, looking to understand how relationships of control are established and maintained.

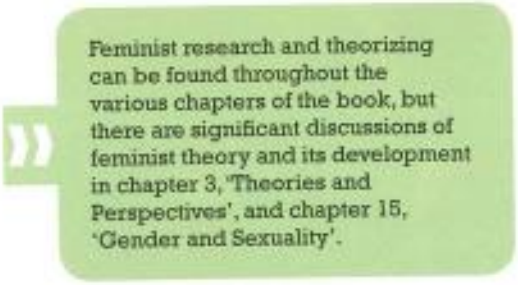
Both Marx and later Marxist approaches have been highly influential in conflict theory, though it is important to note that by no means

all conflict theories are Marxist. Feminism, for example, is a form of conflict theory which concentrates on gender inequality – the unequal situation between men and women that exists in most societies. For some feminist theorists, gender inequality is more significant than class-based inequality and has a much longer history. Male domination of society continues even today, though women's political activism has made an impact in many areas of life, bringing about a measure of equality (Abbott et al. 2005).

As a conflict perspective in sociology, feminism draws attention to issues that sociologists previously ignored. In particular, feminist research and theorizing looks at the micro level as well as the macro world of large social structures. For example, feminists have studied unequal gender relations in domestic situations and other 'private' spheres of life (such as sexual relations), a controversial move in the 1960s and 1970s (Rahman and Jackson 2010). Feminists have also carried out research into the use of gender stereotypes and language in interactions, pointing out and challenging many taken-for-granted 'malestream' assumptions (favouring men over women) built into the structure of how we describe and think about the world. We can see this in numerous everyday words and expressions, such as chairman, mankind (to discuss humanity as such) and man-made. This is a simple illustration of the myriad ways in which women's subordinate position in society is reflected in the unacknowledged male domination of language itself.

Of course feminists do not ignore the macro level either. Feminist studies have shown that gender inequality is embedded within modern social structures such as legal systems, education and schooling, government and politics, and many more. Similarly, in order to demonstrate the extent and scope of gender inequality, feminist work has made use of official statistics and examined patterns of change over long time periods. Feminist theorizing has continually developed into new areas and types of theory, and these are covered in more detail later in the book.

The conflict tradition in sociology has benefited from feminist research and theorizing. In particular, combining macro- and micro-level studies has shown that evidence of structured inequality can be found in the private sphere of social life every bit as much as in its large social structures. The 1970s slogan 'the personal is political' adequately summarizes why conflict sociology cannot ignore the personal aspects of our everyday lives (Jackson and Jones 1998).



Symbolic interactionism

Weber's social action approach inspired many 'interactionist' forms of sociology. One of the most influential has been symbolic interactionism, which also owes much to the American social philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Symbolic interactionism springs from a concern with language and meaning. Mead argues that language allows us to become self-conscious beings – aware of our own individuality and able to see ourselves 'as others see us'. The key element in this process is the symbol. A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, words that refer to objects are symbols which represent what we mean. The word 'spoon' is a symbol we use to describe the utensil that we use to consume soup. Non-verbal gestures and forms of communication are also symbols. Waving at someone or making a rude gesture both have symbolic value.

Symbolic interactionism directs our attention to the details of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make sense of what others say and do. Sociologists influenced by symbolic interactionism often focus on face-to-face interactions in the context of everyday life. They stress the role interactions

In many service industries, workers' skills extend to the management of the public display of their emotions.

play in creating society and its institutions. Max Weber was an important indirect influence on this theoretical approach because, although he acknowledged the existence of social structures, he held that these were created through the actions of individuals.

While the symbolic interactionist perspective has yielded many insights into the nature of our actions in the course of day-to-day social life, it has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and social structure and how these serve to constrain individual action. However, one very good example of interactionism that does take into account such issues is Arlie Hochschild's (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Hochschild observed training sessions and carried out interviews at Delta Airlines' Stewardess Training Centre in Atlanta, USA. She watched flight attendants being trained to manage their feelings as well as learning other skills. Hochschild recalled the comments of one instructor, a pilot: 'Now girls, I want you to go out there and really smile', he instructed. 'Your smile is your biggest asset. I want you to go out there and use it. Smile. Really smile. Really lay it on.'

Hochschild's research found that, as Western economies have become increasingly based on the delivery of services, the emotional style of the work we do needs to be understood. Her study of 'customer service' training might be familiar to anyone who has worked in fast food restaurants, shops or bars. Hochschild calls this training a form of 'emotional labour' – labour that requires the management of feelings in order to create a publicly observable and acceptable facial and bodily display. According to Hochschild, companies providing services increasingly lay claim not only

to workers' physical activity but also to their presentation of emotions.

This research considered an aspect of life that most people took for granted and showed that sociology could deepen our understanding of it. Hochschild found that service workers – like physical labourers – often feel a sense of distance or alienation from the particular aspect of themselves that is given up in work. The physical labourer's arm, for example, might come to feel like a piece of machinery and only incidentally a part of the person moving it. Likewise, service workers often told Hochschild that their smiles were *on* them but not *of* them. In other words, they felt distanced from their own emotions. Hochschild's book is an influential application of symbolic interactionism, and many other scholars have built on her ideas to expand the interactionist tradition.

Traditions and theories

Functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism are theoretical traditions – broad, overall orientations to the subject matter of sociology. However, we can make a distinction between these broad *traditions* and the particular *theories* which develop from them. Theories are more narrowly focused and are attempts to explain particular social conditions, events or social changes. For example, feminism is part of the conflict tradition, as feminists see a basic conflict in society between the interests of men and women. But feminist sociologists have also devised numerous narrower theories to explain specific aspects of gender relations (patterned relationships between men and women), such as why more married women are entering paid work, why women are still seen as responsible for childcare, or why young men now do less well in education than young women. Many theories of this kind have been developed in the different areas of life that sociologists study.

The fact that sociology is not dominated by a single theoretical tradition might seem to be a sign of weakness, but this is not the case. The jostling of rival traditions and theories is an expression of the vitality of the sociological enterprise. In studying human beings – ourselves – theoretical diversity rescues us from dogma and stagnation. Human behaviour is many-sided, and it is unlikely that a single theoretical perspective could cover all of its aspects. Diversity in theoretical thinking provides a rich source of ideas which stimulate the creative capacities that are so essential to progress in social scientific work.

Levels of analysis: microsociology and macrosociology

One important distinction between different theoretical perspectives involves the level of analysis at which each is directed. The study of everyday behaviour in situations of face-to-face interaction is usually called microsociology, while macrosociology is the analysis of large-scale social structures and long-term processes of change. At first glance, it might seem that microanalysis and macroanalysis are entirely distinct from each other, but in fact the two are closely connected (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel 1981; Giddens 1984).

Macroanalysis is essential if we are to understand the institutional backdrop of daily life. The ways in which people live their everyday lives are influenced by social institutions, as is obvious when we consider the impact on our lives of the education system, the political framework and the system of laws by which we live. Similarly, while we may choose to send an acquaintance an email message, we can also choose to fly thousands of miles to spend the weekend with a friend. Neither of these communications would be possible without the amazingly complex global infrastructure of our world and the many people, organizations and institutions required to build and operate them.

Microanalysis is in turn necessary for illuminating the details of such broad institutional patterns. Face-to-face interaction is clearly the main basis of all forms of social organization, no matter how large the scale. Suppose we are studying a business corporation. We

can understand its activities by looking at face-to-face behaviour – the interaction of directors in the boardroom, workers in the various offices, or workers on the factory floor. We may not build up a complete picture of the whole corporation this way, but we could certainly make a significant contribution to understanding how the organization works 'on the ground'.

Of course, people do not live their lives as isolated individuals, nor are their lives completely determined by large social structures. Sociology tells us that everyday life is lived in families, social groups, communities and neighbourhoods. At this level – the meso (or 'middle') level of society – it is possible to see the influence and effects of both micro- and macro-level phenomena. Many sociological studies of local communities deal with the macrosociological impact of huge social changes, such as economic restructuring, but they also explore the ways in which individuals, groups and social movements cope with such changes and turn them to their advantage.

For example, when in the mid-1980s the British government decided to reduce the role of coal in its energy policy, this was disastrous for traditional mining communities, as people's livelihoods were threatened by mine closures and unemployment. However, many former miners retrained with local companies to find work in other industries (Waddington et al. 2001). Similarly, the 2008 financial crisis led to rising unemployment and falling living standards, but this also forced some people to learn new skills or start their own small businesses. Individuals are not simply at the mercy of large-scale social and economic changes but adapt creatively to them. Studying the community level of social life provides a window through which to observe the interaction of micro and macro levels of society. Much applied research (research with a practical aim) in sociology takes place at this *meso* level of social reality.

In later chapters, we will see further examples of how interaction in micro contexts affects larger social processes, and how macro systems in turn influence more confined settings of social life. However, there remains one fundamental issue to be tackled in this chapter: what exactly is sociology for?

What is sociology for?

Sociology has several practical implications for our lives, as C. Wright Mills emphasized when developing his idea of the sociological imagination. First, sociology gives us an awareness of cultural differences that allows us to see the social world from many perspectives. Quite often, if we properly understand how others live, we also acquire a better understanding of what their problems are. Practical policies that are not based on an informed awareness of the ways of life of people they affect have little chance of success. For example, a white English social worker operating in a predominantly Latin American community in South London will not gain the confidence of its members without being sensitive to the different experiences of ethnic groups in the UK.

Second, sociological research provides practical help in assessing the results of policy initiatives. A programme of practical reform may simply fail to achieve what its designers sought or may produce unintended consequences of an unfortunate kind. In the years following the Second World War, large public housing blocks were built in city centres in many countries. These aimed to provide high standards of accommodation for low-income groups from slum areas. However, research later showed that many people who had moved from their previous dwellings to large apartment blocks felt isolated and unhappy. High-rise apartment blocks often became dilapidated and provided breeding grounds for crime.

Third, many sociologists concern themselves directly with practical matters as professionals. People trained in sociology are to be found as industrial consultants, researchers in 'think tanks', urban planners, social workers and personnel managers, as well as in many other careers. An understanding of society and

social relations can also be useful for future careers in law and criminal justice, journalism, business and the health professions.

Fourth, and in some ways most importantly, sociology can provide us all with self-enlightenment or increased self-understanding. The more we know about why we act as we do and about the overall workings of our society, the more likely we are to be able to influence our own future. Sociology does not just assist powerful groups or governments. The knowledge sociologists produce is made available to everyone and is often used by voluntary agencies, charities and social movements to bolster their case for change. However, sociological research findings, in themselves, are 'neutral'. That is, they can tell us what society is like, how it 'works' and how it changes over time, but they cannot advise on whether it *should* be that way. That is the proper subject of competing political and moral debates involving everyone.

Public and professional sociology

In recent years, some sociologists have argued that sociology has not engaged enough with the public and has concentrated too much on internal professional debates. In 2004, in his presidential address to the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy argued for a new 'public sociology' that would forge relationships with audiences beyond the narrow confines of universities. He maintains that the professionalization of sociology in the twentieth century has been beneficial, but it also led to sociologists talking more to each other than to the public 'out there' (Burawoy 2005).

Burawoy says there are four types of sociology: professional sociology, public sociology, policy sociology and critical sociology. *Professional sociology* is the conventional, university-based, scientific sociology which generates large research programmes and bodies of knowledge and provides academic careers. *Policy sociology* includes all those studies which pursue goals defined by clients, such as funding bodies and government departments looking to tackle social problems. *Critical sociology* is 'the conscience of professional sociology', pointing out the assumptions of research projects and professional sociology (Burawoy 2005: 9). Feminist theory is one example of this strand, drawing attention to the lacunae in and unstated biases of scientific sociology. *Public sociology* is the fourth type and is rooted in dialogue. That is, public sociology speaks with social groups such as trade unions, social movements, faith groups and organizations in civil society in a genuine conversation about the future direction of society. In this sense, the suggestion is that a more politically engaged sociology is necessary, though this is not something that all sociologists would support.

For Burawoy and others, public sociology still depends on professional sociology, but the two exist in a relationship of 'antagonistic interdependence'. Scientific sociology produces research methods, empirical evidence and theories which are necessary for public sociology's engagement with non-academic audiences. But, unlike professional sociology, the public version opens up a dialogue with those audiences, allowing the discipline itself to be partly shaped by the concerns of non-sociologists.

Critics point out that this is a very stark dividing line. In practice, much of today's professional sociology already tries hard to engage with participants and outside audiences. There is also much more overlap between the four types described (Calhoun 2005; Ericson 2005). Many feminist studies, for instance, are not simply critiques of scientific sociology but are empirical themselves, using research methods and questionnaires and contributing to professional sociology. Critics also argue that there is a danger that the discipline will become subordinated to the political motives of social movements and activist groups. If the image and reputation of professional sociology is tainted, then it may, paradoxically, have serious consequences for public support for the discipline. And if public sociology really is dependent on the hard-won scientific credibility of professional sociology, it too could suffer.

Nonetheless, in spite of such criticisms, the basic argument that professional sociology has not done enough to engage with public concerns has been quite widely welcomed. The lack of a public presence for sociology is seen as damaging to the public awareness of sociological theories and evidence, which leaves a gap to be filled by other disciplines such as political science, history or psychology. Professional associations, such as the British Sociological Association, have taken steps to encourage their members to develop more of a media presence as an initial move towards raising the profile of sociology in society, and we can probably expect this trend to continue.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that sociology has developed as a discipline in which we set aside our personal view of the world in order to look more carefully at the influences that shape our lives and those of others. Sociology emerged as a distinct intellectual endeavour with the development of modern societies, and the study of such societies remains a central concern. However, in an increasingly interconnected global world, sociologists must take a similarly global view of their subject matter if they are properly to understand and explain it. During the founding period of sociology, society's central problems included social class conflict, wealth distribution, the alleviation of poverty and the question of where the process of modernization was headed.

In the contemporary period, though most of these issues remain, it can be argued that sociology's central problems are shifting. Today, societies are grappling with other issues, such as rapid globalization, international terrorism, environmental damage, global risks with potentially high consequences, multiculturalism and gender inequality, to name just a few. This means that sociologists have to question whether the theories designed to grasp the problems of an earlier period have any purchase on the problems of today. If not, then they will need to design new theories that are able to perceive what Karl Mannheim once called 'the secret of these new times'. The ongoing debate about the status and continuing relevance of the classical sociological theories occurs throughout this book.

Sociology is not just an abstract intellectual field, but has practical implications for people's lives. Learning to become a sociologist should not be a dull or tedious endeavour. The best way to make sure it does not become so is to approach the subject in an imaginative way and to relate sociological ideas and findings to situations in your own life. In that way, you should learn important things about yourself, societies and the wider human world.

Now you have read the chapter, based on what you have read answer the following questions. (Feel free to say as much or as little as you like)

(This will be checked so I can get a sense of your writing style)

1 What is Sociology and what is it for?

2 Explain 2 disagreements between sociologists in the chapter.

3 Briefly explain 3 of the sociological traditions covered in the chapter.

Task 2: <u>SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES</u>

<u>Based on your reading you are going to decide which perspectives agree and disagree and which you agree with most.</u>

Consensus theories believe society arises from agreement. Consensus theories are social theories that hold that the political and economic systems within the state or states under investigation tend to be functional (see mainstream political American and European attitudes towards capitalism), and that social change should take place gradually within the social institutions provided by it. **Conflict theories** are theories that see society as being made up of two or more groups with competing and incompatible interests. They are interested in how society arises from conflict and exploitation. There are a huge variety of perspectives that you will encounter in your study of sociology here are a few of the most significant:

1. **Functionalists** : these sociologists believe society runs smoothly, and is made up of different parts which all work together to keep society stable. They believe the majority of people agree on what is important (there is a value consensus) and people generally conform to the norms of society. They tend to focus on the positive functions of different parts of society.

2. **Marxists** : based on the ideas of Karl Marx, they focus on inequalities based on social class (how much or little economic, social and cultural capital someone has someone has). They believe this is the main inequality in society. They argue there are two main classes: the working class (proletariat) and ruling class (bourgeoisie) and believe the ruling class own and exploit the workers, treating them badly and giving them low pay so they can make more money for themselves.

3. **Feminists** : see gender inequality, inequality between men and women, as the main inequality in society. They argue women are treated badly and exploited by men, and that society is patriarchal (male-dominated). Feminism is often seen as passing through different waves. **The first** being about women gaining property and voting rights. **The second** wave was concerned with sexuality, family, domesticity, equality in the workplace, reproductive rights and official legal inequalities. **The third** wave was postcolonial in character and developed around the idea that not all women have the same experience exploitation and inequality. The third wave saw the emergence of ideas such as intersectionality, sex positivity, ecofeminism, transfeminism, and postmodern feminism. Whilst for many the Third wave is not yet over It appears as if a distinct **Fourth-wave** is emerging online. Fourth wave feminism became a movement for women to speak up and share their experiences online about sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, the objectification of women, and sexism in the workplace. The internet gave women the opportunity for their voices to be heard around the world in a matter of seconds. Social media offered women the opportunity to speak freely about sensitive topics on their own time and on their terms. As women all over the world began sharing their personal stories, they realized the magnitude of the problem and how it was happening everywhere. Internet activism is a key feature of the fourth wave.

4. **Postmodernism**: Postmodernism argues that the grand narratives of religion, politics and science have failed. That we must accept the condition of post-modernity, in which meta-narratives that claim to account for the whole of reality are replaced with a whole series of local mini-narratives that are far more modest in their claims. In the post-modern world there is a plurality of different stories for us to choose from. None of them can legitimately claim to be ultimately true, and we are therefore free to pick and choose between them. The criteria for our choice is no longer that one is true and that all others are false, but simply that I 'like', 'desire', 'prefer' or simply 'get on better' with the narratives and accounts of the world I have chosen to identify myself with. A postmodern society traditionally will have experienced globalisation which means new religions will be integrated into society. Therefore, society will be more likely to experience a ‘pick and mix’ culture when deciding a religion as individuals will choose a religion that best suits their lifestyle and choices. In a postmodern society individuals have become much freer to choose the lifestyle that meets their needs. Faced with many choices families have become more diverse but relationships have become more unstable.

5. **Interpretivism / interactionism**: Interactionists and interpretivists have a bottom up view of society. Society exists in our heads and in our actions as small groups. In how we act towards each other and interpret those actions. They think society arises from our own ideas and behaviour rather than being a 'thing' that is out there causing us to act in certain ways. Interactionists and interpretivists look at how society is preserved and created through repeated interactions and interpretations of those actions between individuals. They believe society exists in the interpretation process that occurs between interactions and helps create and recreate meaning. Society being the shared understanding and interpretations of meaning that affect the interaction between individuals. Individuals act on the premise of a shared understanding of meaning within their social context.

6. **New Right theory**: The New Right combines neo-liberal economics (free markets and minimal government intervention) with more traditional conservative views on social issues (such as a traditional views on family life, nationalism, gender identity, school discipline, sexuality and law and order). New Right ideas were instrumental in changing modern conservatism in the 1970s and were highly influential on both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, New Right Ideas remain popular in Republican and Conservative policy making communities. It would be possible to argue that the New Right is a political movement rather than a sociological theory; its observations on those groups in society with very different and conflicting norms and values. The modern new right sees sociological schools such as Marxism, Queer Theory and Critical Race Theory as being dangerous and corrosive to the norms and values of society.

7. **Critical Race Theory:** CRT developed in the USA as a result of the civil rights movement but also has been used to research the experiences of populations who moved from colonized countries to the states that colonized them. Such the experience as south Asian and afro Caribbean populations in Britain. A key CRT concept is intersectionality the way in which different forms of inequality and identity are affected by interconnections of race, class, gender, and disability. Scholars of CRT view race as a social construct with no biological basis. One tenet of CRT is that racism and disparate racial outcomes are the result of complex, changing, and often subtle social and institutional dynamics, rather than explicit and intentional prejudices of individuals. CRT scholars argue that the social and legal construction of race advances the interests of White people at the expense of people of color, and that the liberal notion of law as "neutral" plays a significant role in maintaining a racially unjust social order, where formally "colour-blind" laws continue to have racially discriminatory outcomes.

8. **Queer Theory.** Queer Theory is a theoretical approach that critically deconstructs and challenges binaries such as male and female or heterosexual and homosexual. The term can have various meanings depending upon its usage, but has broadly been associated with the study and theorisation of gender and sexual practices that exist outside of heterosexuality, and which challenge the notion that heterosexual desire is 'normal'. Queer theorists are often critical of what they consider essentialist views of sexuality and gender. Instead, they study those concepts as social and cultural phenomena, often through an analysis of the categories, binaries, and language in which they are said to be portrayed.

Answers to be used group work and a 'where do you stand' activity in lesson 1 & 2 **(they will not be marked)**

Which of the 8 theories do you think are consensus theories?

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

Which do you think are conflict theories?

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

Which do you think are neither?

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

Which of these theories do you think will agree with each other?

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

Which of these theories do you think will disagree with each other?

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

Is there one you are particularly interested to know more about? And Which is the one that sounds most correct.

_____
_____
_____

Did you agree with the 3 others in your group of 4?

In first the lesson you will be asked to choose which you agree with most as part of a 'where do you stand' activity

There will also be a 'balloon debate' based on the theories