

Chapter review



- 1 What aspects mark out the sociological imagination as different from the perspective of the individual person? What is sociology's main subject matter?
- 2 What were the social, economic and political problems that the early sociologists sought to understand and solve?



- 3 List the main contributions made to the founding of sociology by Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. What assumptions about societies are shared by all four and in what ways do their perspectives diverge?



- 4 Theoretical disputes are difficult to resolve even in the natural sciences, but what makes them peculiarly problematic in sociology?
- 5 Outline the three central theoretical traditions in Euro-American sociological theory. Is it fair to suggest that sociology needs all three if it is to be successful, or does one tradition have a better grasp of social reality? What issues have risen to prominence since the latter part of the twentieth century that none of the three traditions has adequately incorporated?



- 6 Using examples of ethnicity or gender, explain how micro and macro levels of social life are connected. What is meant by the meso level of social reality?
- 7 What are the practical implications and applications of sociological research? List the ways in which sociology can make a valuable contribution to improving social life.



- 8 Should sociologists become more involved in political debates in order to influence policies or should they just get on with their research and let others decide how their findings should be used? Can you think of any reason why sociologists might withhold their findings for political reasons? Should they?

Research in practice



We have seen that the concept of emotional labour was developed initially by Arlie Hochschild from within the symbolic interactionist tradition. Workers who engage in emotional labour often say that it is exhausting. But why is this the case? Sechelski and Story (2018) look into this issue in relation to academic advisors in the USA.

Read their article online and try the questions that follow:



Sechelski, A. N., and Story, C. V. (2018) 'So This is Why I'm Exhausted: Emotional Labor Explained', *Academic Advising Today*, 41(2); www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/So-This-Is-Why-Im-Exhausted-Emotional-Labor-Explained.aspx.



- 1 What kind of research is this? Where do the researchers gather their evidence from?
- 2 In relation to emotional labour, what is meant by 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'?
- 3 Why do the authors say the deep acting is less exhausting than surface acting?
- 4 What can the advisors do to avoid exhaustion and 'burnout'? Do you agree with the authors' conclusions?



Thinking it through



Sociological theories have long been distinguished from each other by their focus primarily on social structure or human agency or the extent to which people are shaped by their society, or vice versa. Anthony Giddens suggests that the process of **structuration** helps us to avoid focusing on *either* structure *or* agency. Examples we provide in the chapter are the way that communist regimes collapsed in the late 1980s and the 1990s and popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011–12 challenged the existing authorities.



Do your own research into both sets of events. What are the main similarities and differences between these historical revolts and their eventual outcomes? Can we say that there is always scope for changing the existing social structure? Are social structures really as malleable as structuration theory says? Does structuration theory pay too little attention to the power of existing authorities to resist radical change from below?



Society in the arts



Read the following statement carefully.



... to speak of art and social theory as equal partners is to say that art represents a source of existential social knowledge that is of its own worth and is not inferior to the knowledge of social science. It is to say that there are certain things that art can tell us about society that social science cannot tell us ... Novels, plays, films, paintings and drawings tell us different things about social life from the things a piece of social scientific research can tell us about social life, and to the extent that they tell us these different things, they tell us *more things*. (Harrington 2004: 3)



Consider a novel, play, film, painting or other work of art you have recently read, seen or heard. What does this work tell us about social life that is a) *different from* what sociology tells us and b) *more than* sociological knowledge? Can the knowledge provided by the work be compared to social scientific findings or are they just incommensurable?



Further reading



For those who are new to sociology, Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May's (2019) *Thinking Sociologically* (3rd edn, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell) is an up-to-date guide to developing and using your sociological imagination, with many everyday examples. Something closer to a personal view of sociology can be found in Richard Jenkins's (2002) *Foundations of Sociology: Towards a Better Understanding of the Human World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), which explores the role of sociology and sociologists in an age of globalization.



One other useful resource is a good sociology dictionary. John Scott's (2014) *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (4th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press) and Bryan S. Turner's (2006) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) are reliable and comprehensive. For a guide to some of the key

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?



concepts used in sociological work, see our own companion, Giddens and Sutton's *Essential Concepts in Sociology* (3rd edn, Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

For a collection of readings covering the range of sociology, see the accompanying *Sociology: Introductory Readings* (4th edn, Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

Internet links



Additional information and support for this book at Polity:

www.politybooks.com/giddens9

The International Sociological Association – represents sociologists around the world:

www.isa-sociology.org/



The European Sociological Association – aims to facilitate research into European issues:

www.europeansociology.org/



The British Sociological Association – some helpful information on graduate careers from the BSA:

www.britisoc.co.uk/what-is-sociology/sociologist-careers.aspx



SocioSite – the Social Science Information System, based at the University of Amsterdam:

www.sociosite.net/index.php



Public Sociology – Michael Burawoy's version of public sociology and some of his critics:

<http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS.Webpage/ps.mainpage.htm>