



4th edition

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

An introduction to
Australian society

Edited by
**JOHN GERMOV &
MARILYN POOLE**

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

John Germov is Professor of Sociology, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Charles Sturt University. He is the author and editor of 24 books including *Second Opinion: An Introduction to Health Sociology*, *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite* (with Lauren Williams), *Histories of Australian Sociology* (with Tara McGee), and *Hunter Wine: A History* (with Julie McIntyre).

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**An introduction to
Australian society**


ALLEN & UNWIN
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

This edition published in 2019
Third edition published in 2015
Second edition published in 2011
First edition published in 2007

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Allen & Unwin
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Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

ISBN 978 1 76063 254 0

Internal design by Squirt Creative
Index by Puddingburn Publishing Services Pty Ltd

Set in 11/13 pt Bembo by Midland Typesetters, Australia
Printed by Hang Tai Printing Company Limited, China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Public Sociology*. Well over a decade has passed since the first edition was published and we continue to be pleased by the positive responses to the book, which have made it one of the foremost introductory sociology texts in Australia.

While the book continues to present a wide range of sociological topics in a user-friendly and accessible way, we have taken the opportunity to carry out some extensive revisions, bringing the text up to date in a fast-changing social world, reflecting the latest sociological debates in response to changing lifestyles and evolving political landscapes. Where appropriate, we have incorporated new information, ideas, and debates to provide a contemporary text that still links to, and builds upon, the major issues and theories in sociology; which is particularly pertinent in a ‘post-truth’ age.

NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

We have improved the reader-friendly dual-colour format to enhance the key features of the book, and updated statistics, research findings, and citations of the scholarly literature. In addition, we have added a completely new chapter, ‘Gender and sexualities’ by Julia Coffey and Akane Kanai, with expanded discussion of LGBTIQ+ and intersectionality matters; brought the text up to date with contemporary issues, such as marriage equality, the #MeToo movement, fake news, and ‘alt facts’; included images of key thinkers throughout the two chapters on sociological theories; expanded the glossary; and refreshed the chapter-opening vignettes and images throughout the book.

WHY PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY?

The first reaction from one of our colleagues upon seeing the original outline for this book was, ‘Not another introductory sociology textbook!’ He even wondered with amusement if there were ‘statistics available on whether the total weight of the world’s introductory sociology textbooks is greater than the total weight of the world’s first-year sociology students’. While we have some sympathy with his view, we are convinced that our book offers a unique introduction to Australian sociology, and we chose the title *Public Sociology* to reflect this.

Public sociology—a re-imagining of C. Wright Mills’ notion of critical sociology—is premised on the principles of theoretical and methodological pluralism, and highlights the utility and relevance to Australian social life of an empirically grounded sociological perspective. It aims to encourage reflexivity

among students so they can apply a sociological gaze to their own lives and to the communities in which they live.

Sociology has many publics, and the theme of *Public Sociology* is that sociology must reach out beyond the academy—particularly to policy, business, community, and student audiences. All contributors to this book have addressed current public debates and highlighted the contribution of Australian sociological research wherever possible. This book is primarily aimed at the student public, particularly the first-year student about to encounter sociology for the first time.

In keeping with the aim of both engaging our readers and meeting the needs of our student public, we have ensured that all chapters are accessible, topical, and lively. We have also included a broader range of foundational and topic-based chapters, such as two separate theory chapters (foundational and contemporary), a chapter that explains the main research methods used by sociologists and offers advice on how to evaluate research studies, and chapters on current social issues such as terrorism, globalisation, the digital age, sport, consumption, contemporary Indigenous issues, ethnicity, youth, education, health and illness, licit and illicit drugs, and religion.

We are also keenly aware of the need to supplement the text with pedagogic features that will aid not only the student, but also the academic public of tutors and lecturers. Each chapter begins with a brief **‘real-life’ vignette** to spark the reader’s interest and encourage a questioning and reflexive approach to the topic. **Key concepts** are highlighted in bold in the text and defined in separate margin paragraphs as well as appearing in a **glossary** at the end of the book. Each chapter also contains **Sociology Spotlight** breakout boxes offering brief summaries of cutting-edge sociological empirical studies and debates. End-of-chapter material includes **Visual Sociology Icebreakers** (using the opening chapter images to stimulate discussion), **Sociological Reflections** (brief self-directed or class-based discussion starters that help students apply their learning and highlight the relevance of sociological analysis), a **summary of main points, discussion questions, recommended further reading, and chapter-specific websites, films, and documentaries**. The final module of the book provides advice on how to research, write, and reference sociology essays, and outlines the capabilities students should expect to develop when majoring in sociology.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The book assumes no prior knowledge of sociology and is intended for undergraduate students. It is structured to provide a foundation in sociology in an Australian context and organised into the following learning modules:

- Module 1: Doing public sociology
- Module 2: Social identities
- Module 3: Social differences and inequalities
- Module 4: Social transformations
- Module 5: Future directions

—John Germov and Marilyn Poole

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First thanks must go to the contributors for producing chapters of such high quality.

Warm thanks are due to our original publisher, Elizabeth Weiss, and more recently Sandra Rigby, for encouraging us to produce this book and for constructive feedback on all aspects of the writing process. We thank Jenny Noble for her expert editing of the entire manuscript and for managing the process of producing this book and updating its web material.

Thanks also to copyeditor Matthew Sidebotham, our in-house editor Rebecca Allen, and designer Simon Rattray.

Finally, we thank our families, who have graciously supported us throughout the many editions of this book, and extend our gratitude for their forbearance when research and writing intrude into family life.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge the original sources for all material reproduced in this book. Where the attempt has been unsuccessful, the authors and publisher would be pleased to hear from the copyright holder concerned to rectify any omissions.

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Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia (Garrett Publishing, 2007) and the author of *Religion, Culture and Society: A Global Approach* (Sage, 2014).

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AFL	Australian Football League
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIIS	Australian Institute of Sport
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
AMA	Australian Medical Association
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ANZJS	<i>Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology</i>
APA	American Psychiatric Association
APAFT	Australian Public Affairs Full Text
APAIS	Australian Public Affairs Information Service
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ARC	Australian Research Council
ASD	Australian Signals Directorate
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AuSSA	Australian Survey of Social Attitudes
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCTV	closed-circuit television
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
COAG	Coalition of Australian Governments
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DIY	Do-it-yourself
DSM	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i>
DZ	dizygotic
EU	European Union
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
GDP	Gross domestic product

GFC	Global Financial Crisis
HILDA	Households, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
HREC	Human research ethics committees
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICT	Information and communication technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMA	Illegal Maritime Arrival
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Islamic State
IT	Information technology
IVF	In-vitro fertilisation
JIT	Just-in-time
JOS	<i>Journal of Sociology</i>
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
LSAY	Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth
LSE	London School of Economics
LTAS	Learning and Teaching Academic Standards
MANAA	Media Action Network for Asian Americans
MMORPG	Massively multiplayer online role-playing games
MOOC	Massive open online courses
MOW	Meaning of Work
MZ	monozygotic
NADA	Network of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDARC	National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre
NDRI	National Drug Research Institute
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NESB	Non-English-speaking backgrounds
NGA	National Gallery of Australia
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NSA	National Security Authority
NSW	New South Wales
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

PIN	Personal identification number
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
RCT	Randomised controlled trials
SAANZ	Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SES	Socio-economic status
SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRA	Shared responsibility agreements
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
STF	Sexually transmitted fadom
TAFE	Technical and further education
TASA	The Australian Sociological Association
TFR	Total fertility rate
TNC	Transnational corporations
TQM	Total quality management
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
WASP	White Anglo-Saxon Protestant
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency
WHO	World Health Organization
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

GUIDED TOUR

PEDAGOGIC FEATURES AND SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

agency

The ability of individuals and collective lives and the

Key concepts: highlighted in bold in the text and defined in separate margin paragraphs, as well as appearing in a glossary at the end of the book



Introductory vignettes: each chapter begins with a short 'real-life' vignette (or hypothetical) to spark the reader's interest, encourage a questioning and reflexive approach to the topic, and show the application of a sociological perspective



Sociology spotlights: short boxed summaries of cutting-edge sociological empirical studies



Visual sociology icebreakers: using the opening chapter images to stimulate sociological reasoning



Sociological reflections: end-of-chapter, self-directed or class-based discussion starters that help students apply their learning and highlight the relevance of sociological analysis



CrossLinks: related material cross-referenced to different chapters



Summary of main points



Discussion questions



Further reading: short annotated lists of key recommended readings



Recommended chapter-specific **websites**



Recommended chapter-specific **films and documentaries**



References



Online teaching and learning resources for lecturers and students via the book website:

- ▶ PowerPoint lecture slides of book diagrams, illustrations, and tables (lecturers only);
 - ▶ a test bank of multiple-choice questions (lecturers only);
 - ▶ weblinks; and
 - ▶ access to supplementary readings online from Allen & Unwin's back catalogue.
-

MODULE 1

DOING PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

This module aims to provide foundational knowledge in the discipline of sociology. It explores what sociology is and examines the contribution of Australian sociologists, as well as key early and contemporary theories and theorists from across the globe. It also offers information on how to evaluate social research.

THIS MODULE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS:

- 1 The sociological gaze: Linking private lives to public issues**
- 2 Sociological foundations: Early theorists and theories**
 - 3 Contemporary sociological theorists and theories**
 - 4 Sociological investigations: Doing social research**



CHAPTER 1

The sociological gaze: Linking private lives to public issues

John Germov and Marilyn Poole



Fake News, 'Alt Facts', and the Post-truth Era: Facebook and the Cambridge Analytica Scandal

Fake news and alternative facts ('alt facts') gained prominence with the election in 2016 of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America, with allegations that fake news stories distributed via social media and presenting distorted information and blatant lies as factual accounts may have swayed people's vote in the election. In March 2018, the media reported on the use of Facebook data shared with third parties that allowed the extraction of personal data about users and their friends without their knowledge. According to *The Guardian*, Facebook had known about this security breach for two years, but did nothing to protect its users (Cadwalladr 2018) as this was one of the main ways Facebook earned revenue (Verrender 2018). One third-party app developer, Cambridge researcher Aleksandr Kogan, used a simple personality test app to extract information on more than 87 million Facebook users (Wong 2018; Cadwalladr 2018). Facebook users completed the test voluntarily, but were not made aware that their personal information, and that of their Facebook friends, would be transferred to a privately held company, political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, for the purpose of data analysis and subsequent targeting of political messaging.

The services of Cambridge Analytica were employed in both the 2016 Trump presidential campaign and the 'Leave Campaign' in the Brexit (EU membership) referendum. The data was used to develop personality profiles of users in order to tailor individual messages to voters through 'fake news' without the individual's knowledge. How influential Cambridge Analytica's methods were in these political processes is still contested.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal highlights sociological issues related to ethics, trust, free speech, privacy, consent, industry regulation, and surveillance in the digital age, not to mention the threat to representative democracy—particularly given ongoing accusations that the Russian Government attempted to manipulate the US election outcome via fake news. Amid the continuing scandal, Cambridge Analytica announced in early May 2018 that it would cease operations and file for insolvency (Solon & Graham-Harrison 2018).

Sociologists argue that the claims made regarding fake news should be treated with caution. People are critical consumers of social media and many recognise the inherent unreliability of such information—they are often sceptical of what they see, hear, and read on social media. Being exposed to fake news does not automatically mean people will believe it, or change their vote based on it. Nonetheless, the tailoring of news—even fake news—to social media users' apparent prejudices and predispositions, so that most of the information they receive reinforces what they already believe, suggests that the era of biased reporting and politicised opinion masquerading as evidence and reasoned argument has reached new levels of intensity and public reach.

INTRODUCING THE SOCIOLOGICAL ENTERPRISE

Sociology is a thing, which if it didn't exist, would have to be invented . . .

—Leonard Broom (2005, p. 210)

If you are new to sociology, and trying to get your head around exactly what it entails, you probably do not realise that you have encountered it many times already. Sociological analyses feature regularly in media commentary and public debate, and concepts such as globalisation, economic rationalism, socialisation, class, social status, deviance, alienation, and lifestyle all have sociological origins. As US sociologist Robert Merton noted some time ago, 'ours has become an age pervaded by sociology', and sociological concepts have 'drifted into our everyday language' (1981, p. 42). This familiarity with the subject matter of sociology—we are all members of society and thus, by definition, should be experts on the topic—can too often lead to the dismissal of the sociological enterprise as mere common sense. As you will soon find out, it is not that simple.

Sociology involves a methodical study of human behaviours and societies (Macionis & Plummer 2008). It is the study of the relationship between the individual and society, investigating how human thought, action, and interaction shape and are shaped by society—or how 'we create society at the same time as we are created by it' (Giddens 1986, p. 11). The 'sociological gaze' exposes the link between individual experience and the social context in which we live, work, and play. Many authors have offered definitions that attempt to capture the essence of the sociological enterprise. Some of the main definitions of sociology can be found in Sociology Spotlight 1.1.



1.1 DEFINING SOCIOLOGY

Many sociologists have attempted to encapsulate the nature of sociology in a concise statement, and some of the most commonly cited of these are reproduced below. The word 'sociology' comes from the Latin *socius*, meaning 'companion', and the Greek suffix *logia*, meaning 'study of'. According to its Latin and Greek roots, sociology means the study of companionship—that is, the study of human relationships and, more generally, the study of society (Abercrombie 2004).

Charles Wright Mills

The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society . . . It is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities (Mills 1959, pp. 6, 15).

Peter Berger

We see the puppets dancing on their miniature stage, moving up and down as the strings pull them around, following the prescribed course of their various little parts. We learn to understand the logic of this theatre and we find ourselves in its motions. We locate

ourselves in society and thus recognize our own position as we hang from its subtle strings. For a moment we see ourselves as puppets indeed. But then we grasp a decisive difference between the puppet theatre and our own drama. Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom (Berger 1963, p. 199).

Anthony Giddens

Sociology is the scientific study of human life, social groups, whole societies and the human world as such. It is a dazzling and compelling enterprise, as its subject matter is our own behaviour as social beings (Giddens 2009, p. 6).

Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May

By examining that which is taken-for-granted, it has the potential to disturb the comfortable certitudes of life by asking questions no-one can remember asking and those with vested interests resent even being asked . . . To think sociologically can render us more sensitive and tolerant of diversity. It can sharpen our senses and open our eyes to new horizons beyond our immediate experiences in order that we can explore human conditions, which, hitherto, have remained relatively invisible. Once we understand better how the apparently natural, inevitable, immutable, eternal aspects of our lives have been brought into being through the exercise of human power and resources, we shall find it much harder to accept that they are immune and impenetrable to subsequent actions, including our own (Bauman & May 2001, pp. 10–11).

NO SUCH THING AS SOCIETY?

Any dictionary will somewhat unhelpfully define sociology as ‘the study of society’. Expanding on this base, we can define sociology as the methodical study of the ways in which people construct and contribute to society, and how they, in turn, are influenced by society. When former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher infamously said ‘there is no such thing as society’, and went on to say that ‘there are individual men and women, and there are families’ (Thatcher, quoted in Keay 1987), she was making a (Conservative) political statement that reverberated around the world. The implication is that ‘society’ is just a collective term for a group of individuals occupying a particular geographic location, but we know it is much more than that. When we think of national cultures, languages, and traditions, we acknowledge the communal ties that bind them together. Many people speak of ‘society’ as an entity, reifying it as if it has a life of its own—particularly when media commentators state that society is dysfunctional or disintegrating. It is not uncommon to hear people ask, ‘What is society coming to?’ in response to gangland killings, youth drug-taking, or the exploitation of the aged by scammers. All of this implies that there is an entity called ‘society’ based on shared cultural values, norms, practices, institutions, and so on that create a sense of cohesion and order in our daily lives. These social factors represent the subject matter of sociology.

THE STRUCTURE–AGENCY DEBATE

Many of us believe that, as individuals, we are free agents, making independent decisions about our lives. A sociologist will ask, ‘How free are those choices?’ Consider the choices you make about the clothes you wear, the music to which you listen, the movies you see, and the clubs, bars, and social events you frequent. Would those choices be the same if you lived on the other side of the world? If you were of the opposite sex? If your financial situation were different?

agency

The ability of people, individually and collectively, to influence their own lives and the society in which they live.

While we all make our own decisions about how we live our lives—what sociologists refer to as human **agency**—we do not make them entirely free of social constraints and influences. Why do we buy certain consumer goods? Why do we find we must have some things? One of the important characteristics of a sociologist is to be curious, to look behind and beyond the familiar and the obvious (Berger 1963). Thus, a sociologist would study, for example, the impact of the marketing strategies that create demand for particular products. Our tastes and choices may be influenced by decisions made in corporate boardrooms or in advertising companies, and by celebrity endorsements and peer–group pressure. Our individual choices, tastes, and behaviours are often shaped by external (social) influences. As Peter Berger (1963, p. 23) puts it, ‘things are not what they seem’, and sociology involves analysing the taken-for-granted world to identify ‘the general in the particular’. By exposing social influences and social patterns, sociology helps to improve our understanding of why things are as they are and offers the potential to consider how they could be otherwise.

Sociologists are concerned with patterned social relationships referred to as **social structures**, and they assume that social relationships are not

social structure

The recurring patterns of social interaction through which people are related to each other, such as social institutions and social groups.

determined solely by the idiosyncratic characteristics of the individuals involved. The **structure–agency debate** addresses an age-old philosophical question about the extent to which humans can exercise free will as opposed to their thoughts and actions being determined by external factors. Sociologists see humans as social animals who are substantially influenced by the way their social environment is organised—that is, individuals are shaped by the social structures they inhabit, create, and reproduce. It is not difficult to imagine that we are influenced by our cultural values and traditions, or that **social institutions** have a major impact on our lives, but how much agency do we actually have? There is no simple answer to this question, but sociologists maintain that structure and

structure–agency debate

A key debate in sociology over the extent to which human behaviour is determined by social structure.

social institutions

Formal organisations that address public needs such as education, healthcare, government, and welfare.

agency are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. That is, it is not a matter of preferring agency over structure—as simplistic media commentary often does when it characterises certain views as blaming the individual versus

blaming society for various social ills. The point is that individuals both shape and are shaped by society. While we are born into a world not of our own personal making, and are socialised through a particular culture and exposure to various social institutions (such as education, religion, the legal system), we are not just ‘puppets on strings’. As sentient (self-aware) beings, we have the capacity to think and act, individually and collectively, to change the society in which we live. As Anthony Giddens (1986) puts it, we have the ability to consider ‘alternative futures’.

It is important not to conflate issues of structure and agency with positive or negative associations. For example, structures can be both constraining and enabling of human agency; laws, regulations, and social policies can enhance our lives by protecting us from exploitation and providing support for health, education, and work. Social structures are thus an essential part of any society and can enable us to exercise our agency better; they also protect us from the unconstrained agency of others to potentially deprive, harm, or exploit us. According to C. Wright Mills (1916–62), the individual ‘contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove’ (1959, p. 6). Interestingly, many decades after Mills wrote that statement, his use of the masculine pronoun ‘he’ reads as dated and sexist—he was clearly a product of the society of his time.

SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING

What, specifically, does sociological analysis, or thinking sociologically, entail? A useful starting point is the **sociological imagination**, a concept developed

sociological imagination

A term coined by C. Wright Mills to describe the sociological approach to analysing issues. We see the world through a sociological imagination, or think sociologically, when we make a link between personal troubles and public issues.

by Mills, who defined it as a ‘quality of mind’ that ‘enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society’ (Mills 1959, pp. 6, 15). Mills suggested that sociologists aim to imagine the connection between individuals and larger social processes. He argued that no matter how personal or individual we may think our experiences are, they are significantly influenced by larger social forces, such as the political, economic, and cultural

factors that set the social context in which individual experiences occur.

Mills considered the sociological imagination to be the distinction between *personal troubles* and *public issues*. As Mills (1959, p. 226) stated, ‘many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues . . . public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles’. The well-known example given by Mills is that of unemployment. When one person is unemployed, that is a personal trouble and one may seek to explain it in terms of skills, motivation, or opportunities. However, if hundreds of thousands of people are unemployed within a nation, unemployment is no longer a matter of personal failure; it becomes a public issue that requires economic and political interventions. This is what Mills meant by the distinctiveness of

a sociological perspective—that is, the ability to imagine a link between the personal and public spheres.

There are many other examples connecting personal troubles and public issues, such as the environmental impact of pollution, workplace safety, and access to healthcare and education. In all these cases, individuals may face personal troubles, such as exposure to hazardous pollution from car exhausts or to toxic chemicals at work, or the need to deal with the costs of personal ill-health and self-education. When personal troubles are experienced collectively, sociologists highlight underlying social patterns and social influences. Where social factors can be identified, social interventions—such as environmental, occupational, and health and education policies—may be possible to alleviate collectively experienced personal troubles.

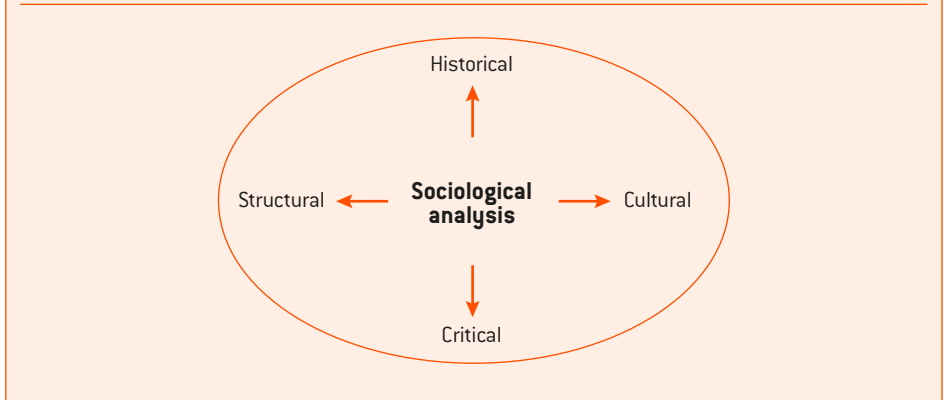
Mills did not mean that we should look at what happens to us fatalistically, as though we have no influence on the course of our own lives. Rather, if we are conscious of the impact of social forces on our own lives, then we are able to recognise that the solution to our personal problems is not just a matter of changing our situation, but changing what is happening in society. This is how social change occurs. In the late 1960s, second-wave feminism adopted the very sociological saying that ‘the personal is political’. The personal rights for which many individual women were fighting, such as access to safe contraception, no-fault divorce, safety from domestic violence, protection from sex discrimination, and the availability of affordable child care, along with maternity leave and equal pay, were also public issues that could be placed on the public agenda for political resolution. Indeed, the social reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, such as equal pay legislation, equal opportunity policies, and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), were clear acknowledgements of the linkages between private troubles and public issues—the sociological imagination in action.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION TEMPLATE: A MODEL OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Many students ask, ‘How do you do sociological analysis? What are its distinctive features?’ Following the work of Mills (1959) and Giddens (1986), Australian sociologist Evan Willis (2004) suggests that the sociological imagination can be conceptualised as involving four interdependent sensibilities: historical, cultural, structural, and critical. To help operationalise the sociological imagination, we have envisaged it as a template, shown in Figure 1.1.

When you want to remember what the sociological imagination entails and need to analyse a topic sociologically, recall this diagram and imagine applying its four features to your topic of study. ‘Doing sociology’ involves considering the role of the four factors and asking the following questions:

1. *Historical factors*: How have past events influenced the present?
2. *Cultural factors*: What influence do tradition, cultural values, and particular belief systems have on our behaviour and social interaction?

FIGURE 1.1 The sociological imagination template

In what ways has cultural change occurred? What subcultures exist? How does our own cultural background influence our sociological gaze?

3. *Structural factors*: How do various forms of social organisation and social institutions affect our lives? How do these vary over time and between countries and regions?
4. *Critical factors*: Why are things as they are? How could they be otherwise? Who benefits and who is disadvantaged by the status quo? What 'alternative futures' are possible? How do sociological insights relate to our own life experiences?

Clearly, a model such as this simplifies the practice of sociological analysis. As the remaining chapters in the first module of this book show, there are many theoretical and methodological issues that need to be considered when conducting sociological analysis. Furthermore, in practice the four features of the model are interrelated and overlapping, so it is not always useful to differentiate historical factors from structural and cultural factors. Some aspects may feature more prominently than others, depending on what is being studied. Nonetheless, the sociological imagination template provides a useful starting point for sociological analysis and highlights the issues and questions budding sociologists need to consider.

Adopting a sociological imagination or applying a sociological gaze to the world can often take us out of our comfort zone. It involves challenging the status quo and the taken-for-granted aspects of our lives. In this sense, it is important to be reflexive about sociological knowledge and to remember that the sociological gaze turns inwards as well as outwards. It can challenge what we personally believe, so we need to be open to questioning our own views and assumptions about the world. This type of thinking demands that we look at our place in the world and our role within the social structures and situations in