



AUSTRALIAN
SOCIOLOGY

4

a changing society

HOLMES HUGHES JULIAN

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Pearson Australia
707 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3008

www.pearson.com.au

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Cover design by Natalie Bowra
Cover illustration by: PILart/Shutterstock
Typeset by Aptara®, Inc.

Printed in Malaysia

1 2 3 4 5 19 18 17 16 15

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Author: Holmes, David, author.

Title: Australian sociology : a changing society / David Holmes,
Kate Hughes, Roberta Julian.

Edition: 4th edition.

ISBN: 9781486003310 (paperback)

Subjects: Sociology—Australia.
Social change—Australia.
Australia—Social conditions.

Other Authors/Contributors:
Hughes, Kate Pritchard, author.
Julian, Roberta, author.

Dewey Number: 301.0994

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CONTENTS



	Preface	ix
	Acknowledgements	xiii
CHAPTER 1	WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY? <i>David Holmes</i>	1
	What does sociology study?	4
	How does sociology study? the sociological imagination	6
	
	Conclusion	15
	Critical thinking questions	15
	References	16
CHAPTER 2	CLASS <i>David Holmes</i>	17
	Measuring inequality	19
	Theories of class	22
	Classes in australia	30
	
	Conclusion	36
	Critical thinking questions	36
	References	37
CHAPTER 3	ABORIGINALITY AND AUSTRALIA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES	
	<i>Roberta Julian (with Carol Pybus)</i>	39
	Structural inequality	42
	Colonialism and dispossession	45
	Aboriginal identity: who is an aborigine?	50
	Demographic and social profile	53
	Racism and reconciliation: 'uneasy conversations' and emergent dialogues	60
	
	Conclusion	62
	Critical thinking questions	62
	References	63
CHAPTER 4	THE USES OF GENDER <i>Kate Hughes</i>	68
	'Sex' and 'gender' are not synonymous	69
	At the individual level	72
	Gender in wider society	78
	
	Conclusion	88
	Critical thinking questions	88
	References	89
CHAPTER 5	ETHNICITY AND IMMIGRATION: CHALLENGING THE NATIONAL IMAGINARY? <i>Roberta Julian</i>	90
	The meaning of 'ethnicity'	91
	Ethnicity, migration and settlement	100
	Trends in Australian immigration	102
	Settlement policy: from assimilation to multiculturalism	107

	Immigrants in Australia	110
	Ethnicity and national identity	119
	
	Conclusion	121
	Critical Thinking Questions	121
	References	122
CHAPTER 6	THE KNOWLEDGE GENERATION <i>Kate Hughes</i>	130
	Who is doing it—and why?	131
	What does education do to you?	134
	Secondary education	139
	Gender and class in secondary education	142
	Tertiary education	148
	The new knowledge economy	149
	
	Conclusion	151
	Critical thinking questions	152
	References	152
CHAPTER 7	ILLNESS, HEALTH AND THE PURSUIT OF WELLBEING <i>Kate Hughes</i>	155
	What is 'health'?	156
	Ways of defining and managing illness and health	159
	The clinical gaze	166
	The distribution of health and illness	169
	
	Conclusion	176
	Critical thinking questions	176
	References	176
CHAPTER 8	PERSONAL LIVES <i>Kate Hughes</i>	179
	The way we were	180
	A period of transition	184
	The way we are	188
	
	Conclusion	201
	Critical thinking questions	202
	References	202
CHAPTER 9	DEVIANCE OR DIFFERENCE? <i>Roberta Julian</i>	205
	What is deviance?	206
	Explaining deviant behaviour—theories of deviance	208
	Deviance and social order	209
	Deviance and culture	211
	Deviance and power	213
	Deviance and social control	215
	Deviance and difference	218
	Crime and deviance in Australia	220
	
	Conclusion	228
	Critical thinking questions	228
	References	228
CHAPTER 10	THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT <i>Shaun Wilson</i>	233
	The industrial revolution, the division of labour and classical sociology	234

	The labour process after the industrial revolution	236
	Work, classes and industrial relations	240
	Work, gender and family	244
	Unemployment and its solutions: are we facing an 'end of work'?	248
	
	Conclusion	251
	Critical thinking questions	252
	References	252
CHAPTER 11	POWER AND THE STATE <i>Alastair Greig</i>	256
	The democratic basis of modern power	258
	The class basis of modern power	262
	The rational basis of modern power	265
	Foucault and the reconceptualisation of power	268
	The state of the future	272
	
	Conclusion	275
	Critical thinking questions	275
	References	276
CHAPTER 12	RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY <i>Roberta Julian</i>	278
	What is religion?	279
	Theories of religion	281
	Religion and social change	284
	Religion in Australia	287
	Religious expression in modernity and postmodernity	288
	
	Conclusion	298
	Critical thinking questions	298
	References	299
CHAPTER 13	GLOBALISATION AND THE CITY <i>David Holmes</i>	303
	Economic globalisation	304
	The phases of imperialism	305
	Global inequalities	309
	Cultural globalisation and mobility	312
	Globalisation and the commodification of everything	316
	The city and cultural globalisation	318
	The city and economic globalisation	321
	
	Conclusion	323
	Critical thinking questions	324
	References	324
CHAPTER 14	FROM MASS MEDIA TO SOCIAL MEDIA <i>David Holmes</i>	327
	What is 'the media'?	328
	The media in Australia	329
	Theories of mass media	334
	The media as an ideological state apparatus	336
	The media and the industrialisation of culture	337
	The media as popular culture	338
	The mass media as 'simulacra'—Jean Baudrillard	340
	The medium is the message—Marshall McLuhan	341
	The networked society	341

	The social media Leviathan	343
	Rituals of media	346
<hr/>		
	Conclusion	347
	Critical thinking questions	348
	References	348
<hr/>		
CHAPTER 15	CHANGING THE CLIMATE: MODERNITY AT ITS LIMITS <i>David Holmes</i>	350
	The science of global warming	354
	Climate change impacts for Australia	362
	The politics of climate change	367
	The sociology of science and technology	370
	Technoscience and climate change	371
<hr/>		
	Conclusion	372
	Critical thinking questions	372
	References	373
<hr/>		
CHAPTER 16	SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY <i>David Holmes</i>	374
	The great transformation	375
	Intellectual precursors of sociology	377
	The emergence of sociology as a discipline	378
	Twentieth-century sociological theory	395
	The anthropocene and the end of the social sciences	408
<hr/>		
	Conclusion	410
	Critical thinking questions	410
	References	411
<hr/>		
	Glossary	413
	Index	000

PREFACE



Welcome to the fourth edition of *Australian Sociology: A Changing Society*.

This book provides an overview of the discipline of sociology through an analysis of Australian society. In doing so, it draws on a diverse range of perspectives as well as a myriad of topics that go to issues at the core of Australian social life.

Some of these issues, such as social division and inequality, raise questions about the structure of Australian society; while others, such as health, religion, media, work and deviance, point to how this structure is reproduced over time.

The study of social structure inherits perspectives that have survived since the founding of sociology as a discipline. These perspectives, which are presented in the Sociological Theory chapter in a more compact form—now located at the end of the volume—continue to frame the way sociology adapts to social change. But the study of altogether new social realities, such as the speed of globalisation today, profound changes in the nature of identity in the modern world, and the global threat to social organisation posed by climate change, requires new and interdisciplinary forms of analysis.

In this edition, recent changes affecting traditional divisions of class, race, ethnicity and gender have been documented and analysed with the latest statistics. These include the Northern Territory ‘intervention’ and the use of comparative statistics in the ‘Closing the Gap’ policy, new health statistics for Indigenous Australians, and the ‘stress’ epidemic and its relation to rising trends in mental illness. The rise of neo-liberalism, and the impact of globalisation on education are covered, while the sociological implications of new education policies are also examined. Economic models of education delivery are investigated, such as the changing funding formulas for secondary schools and the emergence of free courses at universities delivered by MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Perhaps the most extensive revisions are evident in the chapter on class, not simply with the statistics but by exploring new ways of measuring class stratification. Global inequality is also re-examined in the chapter on globalisation and the city—much expanded in the world today, with more than half the world’s population living in metropolitan cities.

Three chapters that stand out for the way they suggest a shift in the field of sociology itself are Personal Lives (Chapter 8), Changing the Climate: Modernity at its Limits (Chapter 15) and From Mass Media to Social Media (Chapter 14). The former chapter is premised on the observation that the modern ‘family’ as a unit is no longer recognisable as it once was. The once-heralded social unit of the nuclear family continues its steady decline, as blended families and postmodern living arrangements such as heteronormativity, living alone, living apart together, living with friends, and the living patterns of adult children of divorce become increasingly common forms of the household unit. The importance of friendship networks and the complex influences

on personal life have eclipsed the sociology of the family to the point where an entire branch of sociology needs to be recast.

The chapter that perhaps presents a dramatic challenge to the sociological field itself is that on climate change. This chapter, which first appeared in the last edition and is fully updated here, tackles what is arguably the most pressing issue facing global society—the threat that climate change poses to the continuation of modern social life. The idea that human society has evolved during the relatively climate-stable period of the Holocene, roughly the 10 000 years leading up to 1750, come to be challenged by the terraforming and climate-altering impact of humans, now recast as the Anthropocene human history since 1750, when industrial emissions of greenhouse gases began. The chapter explores the science of climate change in depth, climate change scepticism and radicalism, the debate about human-induced causes of climate change, and the sociology of technology that informs understandings of the conflict between nature and culture.

The Changing the Climate chapter is very well supported by the re-orientation of many of the other chapters towards environmental issues. Chapter 3 includes new material on the relation of Indigenous Australia to the environment. The link between patriarchal culture and environmental destruction is drawn in Chapter 4, while the impact of climate change on health and wellbeing is explored in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 considers the consumer impact of so many more people living alone, duplicating the use of resources and increasing waste. Environmental crime as a new form of deviance is examined in Chapter 9, while nature, religions and the environment are discussed in Chapter 12. And the question of whether environmental sustainability curricula should be embedded in curricula at schools and universities is addressed in Chapter 6. By way of this intertextuality, climate and environment becomes a substantive issue in itself, as well as a paradigm case study of the sociological imagination.

A third major standout area that is featured in this book is the extraordinary take-up of social media in Australia and around the world. Australians are the heaviest per capita users of social media in the world today, with 66 per cent of the population logging in daily to Facebook alone. The social media leviathan has really confounded the forecasts of the early 1990s when the internet became fully domesticated, as the importance of using the internet to continue social relationships that people already have offline has proven to be much more important than the anonymous communication of the avatar.

But more important still, is the ability to personalise our relationships with social media, to feel like we have control over them with our privacy settings, our profile pages and the way we can present a self-for-others. In a way, social media sits at the heart of a paradox in modern social life, which is the simultaneous expansion and contraction of everyday life. On the one hand, social media is a networking technology of global scale, the culmination of a truly connected world. On the other hand the basis of our connection can be as small as the smartphone in our pocket or the thumbnail of smart apps depicted on the front cover of this book. But between

the incredible reach of this global connectivity to the private rituals of how we use our phone, there is the possibility that the public sphere in between these extremes has begun to disappear, as the street, our institutions and the social forms founded on physical assembly have been overtaken by the electronic assembly.

Aside from the sociological material, the book includes a number of crucial teaching and learning tools in order to make it an easy and productive book to use by both students and lecturers. You will find at the start of each chapter, for example, a chapter outline which is a summary of its contents, and throughout each chapter a set of learning outcomes. Within each chapter there are a number of feature boxes, which highlight or expand an issue discussed, or offer a case study. In addition, you will find highlighted key terms defined and their use discussed in the margin notes and consolidated in the glossary at the end of the book.

At the conclusion of each chapter there are a number of features which will assist students to develop their learning further. There are a series of critical thinking questions, which challenge readers to interrogate some of the issues raised in the chapter. On the companion website there is a list of texts which are recommended as further reading, or as reference books. Here you will also find an annotated list of websites and other multimedia that can assist with everything from statistical data to discussion groups to non-government organisations interested in the material discussed in the chapter.

In conclusion, we hope that you enjoy *Australian Sociology* and that it enables you to understand more clearly both the society we live in and the ways in which it is likely to develop in the future. Most important of all, we hope it helps you to do this critically.

David Holmes

Kate Hughes

Roberta Julian