**Chapter Exercises**

**Chapter 15: Work, Consumption and the Economy**

1. In this chapter, you learned that key innovations have been important drivers of major economic transformations: for example, the plow helped spur the agricultural revolution; the harnessing of steam and water power contributed to the rise of industrial societies; and the creation of the microchip helped usher in the digital age in which we live today. Talk with a class partner about the future of the world economy (yes, it’s a big topic!). Specifically, speculate about what kind of innovation could change the development path of modern economies. You may want to represent your ideas with a drawing or a written description. Share and compare with other classmates.
2. Fifteen years ago, there were no such job titles as webmaster and social media analyst or strategist. It is often said that some of the jobs of the future will be jobs we cannot today imagine. Try to imagine them! Write a sample example of a job that could exist in 15 years. Then, recalling labor market trends discussed in the chapter, write down some jobs that might not exist in 15 years.
3. Recall from the chapter the discussion of “emotional labor,” which sociologist Arlie Hochschild suggests is a characteristic of the modern service economy. Emotional labor is, in a sense, the new physical labor—sold for a wage, used for a company’s profit, and perhaps a source of alienation and exploitation. Think about jobs you have held or currently hold and talk to a small group of classmates about your job experiences. Have any of you held jobs requiring “emotional labor?” Do you agree with Hochschild’s characterization of these jobs? Why or why not?
4. While we often associate the informal economy with deviant behavior such as drug sales and prostitution, many people work “off the books” from time to time. Make a list of paid work you have done in the formal economy and work you have done in the informal economy. Discuss your list with other students. Do any of your findings surprise you? Do they shed light on any of the chapter’s points about the positive and negative aspects of the informal economy for workers themselves?
5. For 3–4 days, keep a list of all your purchases, noting whether the item or service was a “need” or a “want.” Classify all the purchases, but note items for which the category is difficult to choose. When you complete your list, think about the sociological factors that drove your “wants.” In other words, how would you as a sociologist explain *why* you were willing to spend money on things you only wanted rather than needed?
6. With a group of peers make up a list of economic interactions that have become increasing automated during your lifetimes (e.g., voicemail response systems versus live operators, atm machines versus bank tellers, self-checkout lines versus cashiers). Discuss what the social impact of this automation has been for consumers, for workers, for business owners, and for communities. Is automation increasing or decreasing social solidarity? Is automation increasing or decreasing social conflict?
7. Read a major newspaper for a week. Examine all the stories dealing with economic issues. What are the economic issues being discussed? Are the articles focused on the impact of events on businesses, capitalists, shareholders, workers, or communities? Whose economic interests are being well represented and whose are not being well represented? Do you see evidence of Marx’ reserve army of labor? Do you see evidence of ideas related to scientific management?