

SOCIOLOGY

Analysis and Application

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Cover photograph: The observer is as fascinated with the relationship as the children are with each other. (Photo: Copyright Washington Post; Reprinted by permission of the D. C. Public Library)

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Preface

Sociology: Analysis and Application is based on the assumption that it is useful for students to know something about the academic discipline of sociology, because it offers the broadest and most comprehensive approach to the understanding of society.

What distinguishes the sociologists' view of society from the laypersons' is the attempt to formulate descriptions and explanations that are both logical and empirically verified. To do just this, we chose to open the book with a chapter on social theory, followed by a chapter that introduces research methods. It is through the use of theory and methods that we come to understand, and sometimes to help change, the world we live in.

Theory and methods are not introduced and then dropped, as they are in so many introductory textbooks. In subsequent chapters, the importance of theoretical perspectives are illustrated by looking at the same phenomenon from different vantage points, and additional methodological materials are added by including a methodological insert in each chapter, beginning with Chapter Two. Because theory is produced by real people, we use the device of a biographical insert in each chapter to tell students something about the particular interests of a sociologist, as well as something of the times in which he or she lived and worked.

Sociology: Analysis and Application thus provides a sociological perspective for understanding human thought, feelings, and action within a social context. And because the focus of the text is analytic as well as applied, all chapters, beginning with Chapter Two, offer a section on either analysis or application that illustrates how sociological knowledge is used to understand and perhaps change a particular social phenomenon.

The world is shrinking, and it is important to understand both the interconnectedness and differences between ourselves and others. For this reason the book is also comparative and historical. As a point of comparison, each chapter, starting with Chapter Four, has a segment, written by the anthropologist Peter Black, about the island of Tobi in Micronesia. Tobi has a population of less than 100 living on an island of .244 square miles.

Part Two of the book turns to one of the key features of societies: the differences created in people's lives by the distribution of prestige, power, and wealth. In the section on stratification and inequality, particular attention is paid to topics of gender, class, and national origin.

Part Three looks at key pieces of the social scene including culture, social structure, and social control and deviance and how they affect and are affected by the individual as he or she functions in daily life.

Part Four takes a closer look at society by examining six basic social institutional orders. In the debates about what is wrong with American society, debates as old as the society itself, each person usually argues from his or her own particular perspective. Some say the problem is with religious values and their loss, while others point to problems of the economy, education, politics, or the mass

media. The reality is that these institutions are not only important in their own right, but are interrelated. To understand and to change social life it is necessary to appreciate the interrelationship of institutional orders. For that reason, each chapter in Part Four has a section that stresses the interrelationship of the institutional orders.

Part Five picks up a theme that has run throughout the book: social change. Here again, we stress the power of theory to understand social change. We look at the industrialization and urbanization of the world and how this affects the world's population. The study of population (demography) often seems overly technical the first time it is encountered, and we have tried to address this problem. We end *Sociology: Analysis and Application* by focusing upon issues of aging and the changing demographics of societies. Thus a link is forged between the macro interests (social structures) of demography and the more micro interests (the individual) of the life cycle.

The book has other features: it is current, well researched, nonsexist, and challenging to the student. It incorporates the findings of other disciplines and aids the student with a comprehensive glossary, bibliography, and specific suggestions for further readings.

In the final analysis, though, we offer not just an introduction to a discipline but an introduction to a quality of mind. Through the use of "the sociological imagination," C. Wright Mills recognized that what one person sees as individual pain (or joy) is similar and related to that of others. This understanding of the structural sources of human misery and contentment provides the insight that allows students to see the relationship between public issues and private troubles. It allows us to put aside, to some extent, our personal biases and to look for evidence that can be accepted by anyone regardless of ideology.

To recognize the relation between the personal and the social is to understand that it is necessary to live under conditions that support us in becoming and remaining the kinds of people we wish to be. To change the world, or to accept it as it is, we must first understand it. To understand the social world and our place within it, it is necessary to observe and to make sense of our observations. To apply such knowledge, many skills are required—not the least of which is the sociological imagination.

This book has been the result of a long collaboration that has required the help and forbearance of a number of people. It is at this point we would like to thank them.

Jay Atkinson and Tom Pashler provided encouragement. Kevin Avruch, Tom Dietz, David Friedrichs, Lois Horton, Linda Kalof, Karen Rosenblum and B.D. Webster read and commented on various drafts. Roy Beasley, as always, provided insightful comments. Sheila Smith tracked down references with a humor that helped get the authors through the final stages, when everything seemed, if not a catastrophe, at least an insurmountable obstacle. Deborah Conn was an author's dream, a copy editor who makes the writing so much better without intruding upon the meaning. Ray Herndon, our editor, was also a delight to work with.

And finally, thanks to Elsie, Kirsten, and Faith Scimecca, who were there through it all and who, as always, make it all worthwhile.

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