

# sociology



exploring the architecture of everyday life

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*DePauw University*



PINE FORGE PRESS

An Imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc.

Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

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*For information:*



Pine Forge Press  
A Sage Publications Company  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
E-mail: [order@sagepub.com](mailto:order@sagepub.com)

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative  
Industrial Area  
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044  
India

SAGE Publications Ltd.  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP  
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific  
Pte. Ltd.  
33 Pekin Street #02-01  
Far East Square  
Singapore 048763

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Newman, David M., 1958-  
Sociology: Exploring the architecture of everyday life/David M. Newman.—8th ed.  
p. cm.  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 978-1-4129-7813-2 (pbk.: acid-free paper)  
1. Sociology. I. Title.

HM585.N48 2010  
301—dc22

2009035741

Printed on acid-free paper.

09 10 11 12 13 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## About the Author

**David M. Newman** is Professor of Sociology at DePauw University. In addition to the introductory course, he teaches courses in research methods, family, social psychology, deviance, and mental illness. He has won teaching awards at both the University of Washington and DePauw University. His other written work includes *Identities and Inequalities: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* (2005) and *Families: A Sociological Perspective* (2008). He received his PhD from the University of Washington.



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## Preface

It was the first day of the fall semester in 1994. I had just finished making the final adjustments to the first edition of this book, which was due to be published the following January. I felt good, like I'd just accomplished something monumental. Even my two sons were impressed with me (although not as impressed as the time we went to a professional hockey game and I leaped out of my seat to catch an errant, speeding puck barehanded). I walked into the first meeting of my Contemporary Society class eager to start teaching wide-eyed, first-year students a thing or two about sociology.

In my introductory comments to the class that day, I mentioned that I had just written this book. The panicked look in their eyes—a curious combination of awe and fear—calmed when I told them I wouldn't be requiring them to read it that semester. I assured them that the process of writing an introductory text helped me immensely in preparing for the course and that I hoped to pass on to them the knowledge I had accumulated.

The next day after class, one of the students—a bright, freshly scrubbed 18-year-old—approached me. The ensuing conversation would leave a humbling impression even 15 years later:

*Student:* Hi. Umm. Professor Newman . . . I called my parents last night to, like, tell them how my first day in college went. I think they were, like, more nervous than I was. You know how parents can be.

*Me:* Yes, I sure do. I'm a parent myself, you know.

*Student:* Yeah, whatever. Anyway, I was telling them about my classes and my professors and stuff. I told them about this class and how I thought it would be pretty cool. I told them you were writing a book. I thought that would impress them, you know, make it seem like they were getting their money's worth and everything.

*Me:* Well, thanks.

*Student:* So, they go, "What's the book about?" [He laughs sheepishly.] I told them I didn't know, but I'd find out. So that's what I'm doing . . . finding out.

*Me:* Well, I'm glad you asked. You see, it's an introductory sociology textbook that uses everyday experiences and phenomena as a way of understanding important sociological theories and ideas. In it I've attempted to . . .

*Student:* Wait, did you say it was a textbook?

*Me:* Why, yes. You see the purpose of the book is to provide the reader with a thorough and useful introduction to the sociological perspective. I want to convey . . .

*Student:* [quite embarrassed now] Oh . . . Professor Newman, I'm really sorry. I misunderstood you. I thought you had written a real book.

*Real book. Real book. Real book.* Those words rang in my head like some relentless church bell. At first, I tried to dismiss the comment as the remarks of a naïve kid who didn't know any better. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized what his comment reflected. The perception that textbooks aren't *real* books is pervasive.

I once heard a radio ad for a local Red Cross book drive that asked listeners to donate any unused or unwanted books *as long as they weren't textbooks*. Torn copies of *The Cat in the Hat*? Fine, they'll take 'em. Grease-stained owners' manuals for 1976 Ford Pintos? Sure, glad to have 'em. Textbooks? No way!

Sadly, these sorts of perceptions are not altogether unwarranted. Textbooks hover on the margins of the literary world, somewhere between respectable, intellectual monographs on trailblazing research and Harlequin romance novels. Historically, they've been less than titillating: thick, heavy, expensive, and easily discarded for a measly five bucks at the end-of-semester "book buy-back."

My goal—from that very first edition to this one—has always been to write a textbook that reads like a *real* book. In the first seven editions I tried to capture simultaneously the essence and insight of my discipline and the reader's interest. From what reviewers, instructors, and students who've read and used the book over the years have said, I think I've been fairly successful. People seem to like the relaxed tone and appreciate the consistent theme that ties all the chapters together. Many instructors have commented on how the book enables students to truly understand the unique and useful elements of a sociological perspective.

## Features of the Eighth Edition

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To my younger son—who believes that I have nothing relevant to say about anything anyway—continually revising this book has always been clear evidence of my incompetence. When he was in middle school, he once asked me, "Why do you keep writing the same book over and over? My English teacher once made me rewrite a book report on *To Kill a Mockingbird* because I answered a few questions wrong. Is that what's going on here? Is your publisher making you write the book over because you've put too much wrong stuff in it?" I told him no and that I'd make him read the book—cover to cover—if he continued to ask these questions. He stopped.

Despite his concerns, sociology textbooks do need to be revised regularly and frequently. No book can be of lasting value if it remains static, locked into a particular style and content. I constantly keep my ears and eyes open, always looking for some new example or current issue to include in the book. My office overflows with boxes of newspaper clippings, photocopied journal articles, Post-it notes, and shreds of paper napkins containing scribbled ideas that I write to myself at the breakfast table when I hear something interesting on the radio.

When revising a book, it's easier to add new material than it is to cut out the old stuff. But simply inserting bits and pieces here and there tends to make books fat and unwieldy. So I've tried to streamline the book wherever possible. I've replaced outdated material with new material where appropriate; revised all the statistical information; condensed, deleted, or moved some sections; and changed the order of others.

Here are some of the specific changes I've made in this eighth edition to enhance the features that worked so well in the previous editions.

### Updated Examples and Statistical Information

As in the first seven editions, each chapter is peppered with anecdotes, personal observations, and accounts of contemporary events. Many of the examples

you will read come from incidents in my own life; others are taken from today's news headlines.

It would be impossible to write an introduction to the discipline of sociology without accounting for the life-altering occurrences—wars, natural disasters, political upheavals, legal developments, economic meltdowns, Lindsey Lohan's latest late-night escapades—that we hear about every day. So throughout this book, I've made a special effort to provide some sociological insight into contemporary events and trends, both large and small. In doing so, I intend to show you the pervasiveness and applicability of sociology in our ordinary everyday experiences in a way that, I hope, rings familiar with you.

Two events, in particular, have occurred since I wrote the last edition that have had—and will continue to have—a dramatic impact on sociological thought and on people's everyday lives: the global economic recession and the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States. As you will see throughout the book, it is impossible to understand what happens to us in our personal lives without taking into consideration broader social and historical phenomena. When the economy suffers, everyone—from tycoons to welfare recipients—experiences some kind of alteration in their day-to-day routine. As I was writing this edition, it was quite a challenge to try to keep up with the most up-to-date information on unemployment, layoffs, home foreclosures, spending patterns, and so on. Likewise, major political events can change what we know and what we take for granted. Although it's still too early to know its extent, the election of the country's first black president will no doubt influence perceptions of race and race relations, locally, nationally, and maybe even globally. Hence, I have made reference to these events throughout the book to illustrate the interconnections between private life and massive historical occurrences.

I've also tried to provide the most current statistical information possible. I've updated all the graphic exhibits and, in the process, changed some of them from statistical tables to more readable charts and graphs, making trends and relationships more obvious. Most of the new statistical information is drawn from the most recent data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Population Reference Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

### Updated “Sociologists at Work” and “Micro-Macro Connections”

In the first seven editions, I provided many in-depth features that focused either on a specific piece of sociological research or on some issue that illustrates the connection between the everyday lives of individuals and the structure of their society. These extended discussions link social institutions to personal experiences and provide insight into the methods sociologists use to gather information and draw conclusions about how our world works.

Instructors and students alike have found these features very useful in generating classroom discussion. The features that I've updated from the previous edition focus on topics such as suicide, parents' rights, the language of war, cell phones, cultural conceptions of obesity, dual-earner couples, clergy sexual abuse, the cultural impact of antidepressants, human trafficking, homelessness, the global health divide, multiracial identity, gender harassment in the military, media images of thinness, and the shifting politics of immigration. In addition, I've added two new Micro-Macro Connections on emotions and residential segregation.



## New Articles in the Companion Reader

Jodi O'Brien, a sociologist at Seattle University, and I have carefully edited a companion volume to this book, consisting of short articles, chapters, and excerpts written by other authors. These readings are provocative and eye-opening examples of the joys and insights of sociological thinking. Many of them vividly show how sociologists gather evidence through carefully designed research. Others are personal narratives that provide firsthand accounts of how social forces influence people's lives. The readings examine common, everyday experiences; important social issues; global concerns; and distinct historical events that illustrate the relationship between the individual and society. We've taken great pains to include readings that show how race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to influence everyday experiences.

Of the 40 or so selections in this edition of the reader, 17 are new. The new selections touch on important and relevant sociological issues such as diversity among same-sex couples, inner-city violence among teenage girls, the effect of pregnancy and post pregnancy on women's body image, ethnicity and youth identity, language difficulties in immigrant families, the social construction of legal and illegal drugs, compassion and poverty, teen childbearing in poor communities, the plight of Muslim Americans after 9/11, gentrification in African American neighborhoods, and the immigrant rights movement. In addition, we've moved several readings to different chapters to improve their usefulness and applicability.

## Teaching Resources and Web Site to Accompany the Book and Companion Reader

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The *Teaching Resources Guide* is available for instructors at [www.pineforge.com/newman8e](http://www.pineforge.com/newman8e), and testing material is available separately on CD. The manual provides comprehensive, thorough coverage of the material in both the text and the companion reader, including the following:

- Chapter summaries
- *Class exercises and discussion topics* (suggestions for writing exercises, discussion topics, and student assignments to use both in and outside class): This section also provides suggestions for how to use this book's Your Turn activities.
- Literary and visual resources
- Selected Internet resources
- *Testing materials* (multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions): The test bank was developed to test students' understanding of the material so instructors can encourage students to move beyond basic memorization of material toward application and critique. The multiple-choice questions are organized as recall questions and application questions. Recall questions are based more directly on the information presented in the textbook, and application questions assess students' comprehension of the material and their ability to apply concepts, theories, and research findings.
- Summaries of classic sociological studies
- *Teaching resource materials*: These include an annotated bibliography of resources useful in preparing for and designing classes, suggestions for how to manage teaching interactions and elicit and evaluate student performance, and techniques for handling any challenges that arise in class.

Students can also access an Internet study site for this book at [www.pineforge.com/newman8e](http://www.pineforge.com/newman8e). This site includes additional material not included in

the book as well as test questions that can be used to gauge understanding of the book's contents.

## **A Word About the “Architecture of Society”**

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I have chosen the image of architecture in the subtitle to convey one of the driving themes of this book: Society is a human construction. Society is not “out there” somewhere, waiting to be visited and examined. It exists in the minute details of our day-to-day lives. Whenever we follow its rules or break them, enter its roles or shed them, work to change things or keep them as they are, we are adding another nail, plank, or frame to the structure of our society. In short, society—like the buildings around us—couldn't exist were it not for the actions of people.

At the same time, however, this structure that we have created appears to exist independently of us. We don't usually spend much time thinking about the buildings we live, work, and play in as human constructions. We see them as finished products, not as the processes that created them. Only when something goes wrong—the pipes leak or the walls crack—do we realize that people made these structures and people are the ones who must fix them. When buildings outlive their usefulness or become dangerous to their inhabitants, people must renovate them or, if necessary, decide to tear them down.

Likewise, society is so massive and has been around for so long that it *appears* to stand on its own, at a level above and beyond the toiling hands of individual people. But here, too, when things begin to go wrong—widespread discrimination, massive poverty, lack of affordable health care, escalating crime rates—people must do something about it.

So the fascinating paradox of human life is that we build society, collectively “forget” that we've built it, and live under its massive and influential structure. But we are not “stuck” with society as it is. Human beings are the architects of their own social reality. Throughout this book, I examine the active roles individuals play in planning, maintaining, or fixing society.

## **A Final Thought**

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One of the greatest challenges I face as a teacher of sociology is trying to get my students to see the personal relevance of the course material, to fully appreciate the connection between the individual and society. The true value of sociology lies in its unique ability to show the two-way connection between the most private elements of our lives—our characteristics, experiences, behaviors, and thoughts—and the cultures, groups, organizations, and social institutions to which we belong. The “everyday-life” approach in this book uses real-world examples and personal observations as a vehicle for understanding the relationship between individuals and society.

My purpose is to make the familiar unfamiliar—to help you critically examine the commonplace and the ordinary in your own life. Only when you step back and examine the taken-for-granted aspects of your personal experiences can you see that there is an inherent, sometimes unrecognized organization and predictability to them. At the same time, you will see that the structure of society is greater than the sum of the experiences and psychologies of the individuals in it.

It is my conviction that this intellectual excursion should be a thought-provoking and enjoyable one. Reading a textbook doesn't have to be boring or, even worse, the academic equivalent of a trip to the dentist (although I personally have nothing against dentists). I believe that part of my task as an instructor is to provide my students with a challenging but comfortable classroom atmosphere in which to learn. I have tried to do the same in this book. Your instructor has chosen this book not because it makes his or her job teaching your course any easier but because he or she wants you, the student, to see how sociology helps us to understand how the small, private experiences of our everyday lives are connected to this thing we call society. I hope you learn to appreciate this important message, and I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Have fun,

*David M. Newman*  
*Department of Sociology and Anthropology*  
*DePauw University*  
*Greencastle, IN 46135*  
*E-mail: dnewman@depauw.edu*

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## Acknowledgments

A book project such as this one takes an enormous amount of time to develop. I've spent thousands of hours on this book—typing away at my computer, searching the Web, fretting over what I should and shouldn't include—all while holed up in my isolated and very cluttered third-floor office. Yet as solitary as this project was, I could not have done it alone. Over the years, many people have provided invaluable assistance to make this book a reality. Without their generous help and support, it wouldn't have been written, and you'd be reading some other sociologist's list of people to thank. Because I have revised rather than rewritten this book, I remain indebted to those who have helped me at some point during the writing of all eight editions.

First, I would like to thank the former publisher and president of Pine Forge Press, Steve Rutter. Early on, he pushed, prodded, and cajoled me into exceeding my expectations and overachieving. The numerous suggestions he offered on the early editions of this book made it a better one. Likewise, my former editor, Becky Smith, must be thanked for helping me through the maze of details and difficulties that cropped up during the many previous versions of this book.

As for this edition, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to editorial assistant Nancy Scrofano and project editor Sarah Quesenberry at SAGE, copy editor Shamila Swamy and her team from QuADS, and acquisitions editor Dave Repetto at Pine Forge for their insight and guidance in putting together this newest edition. Having already written seven editions, I was definitely an old dog with absolutely no desire to learn any new tricks when these individuals became involved. To their credit, they let me write as I have always written. For that, I am eternally grateful.

I would also like to express my thanks to Kevin Lamarr James of Indiana University South Bend for creating an excellent instructor's manual, Dr. Mark J. Guillette of Valencia Community College for creating the student study site materials, and to Sheri Gilbert for securing copyright permissions.

And very special thanks go to my research assistant, Michael Kane, whose meticulousness and keen eye for detail were invaluable as he helped me update the massive amount of statistical information in the book. Being a former undergraduate student himself, Mike was extraordinarily helpful in pointing out places in the book where my age showed.

I appreciate the many helpful comments offered by the reviewers of the eight editions of this book:

Sharon Abbott, Fairfield University

Deborah Abowitz, Bucknell University

Stephen Adair, Central Connecticut  
State University

Rebecca Adams, University of North  
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Judith Wittner, Loyola University, Chicago

Cynthia A. Woolever, Hartford Seminary

Don C. Yost, Mountain State University

Ashraf Zahedi, Stanford University

Stephen Zehr, University of Southern Indiana

I also want to express my appreciation to the many colleagues and friends who have offered cherished assistance throughout the production of all eight editions of this book and have put up with my incessant whining about how hard it all was. Some offered advice on specific topics; others provided general support and encouragement, which helped me retain my sanity. In particular, Rebecca Upton and Christopher Bondy were especially helpful in providing cross-cultural examples and intellectual inspiration, and Jodi O'Brien graciously reminded me from time to time that there's more to life than writing a book. My administrative assistant, Krista Dahlstrom, provided invaluable support on an earlier compilation of the bibliography.

And finally, I would like to express gratitude to my family and my students, who, throughout the years, have kept me curious and prevented me from taking myself too seriously.

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