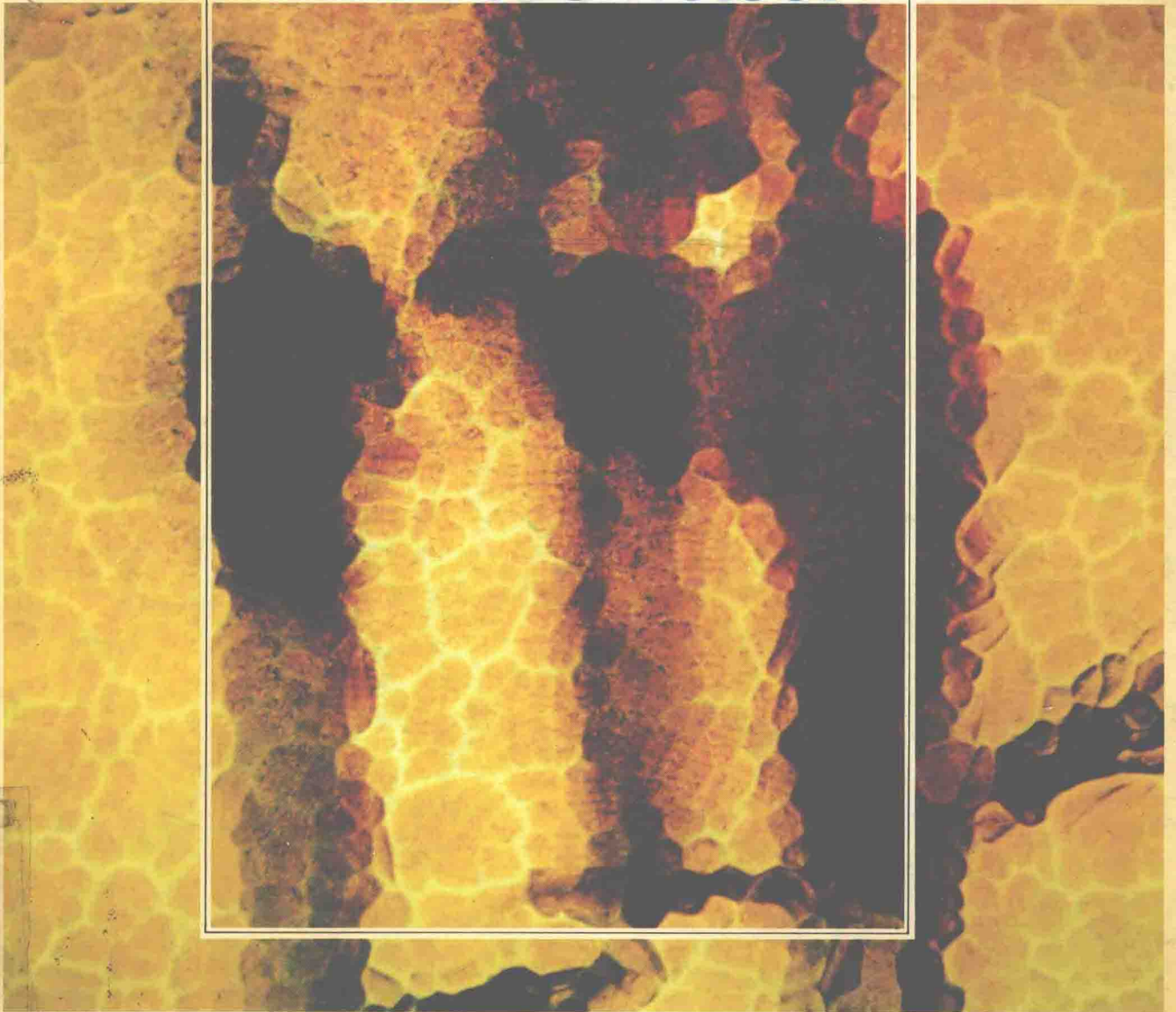


Sociology

Neil J. Smelser



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Sociology

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Preface

Sociology is a huge field. There is a sociological aspect to almost everything in the human condition, and there is a sociology of almost everything—a sociology of religion, a sociology of leisure, a sociology of architectural style. Furthermore, sociologists have divided their field in a variety of ways. Some subfields of sociology are named after the social problems on which they originally focused and continue to focus—for example, the sociology of mental illness or poverty. Some subfields refer to the major types of social groups in society—the sociology of small groups or formal organizations. Some subfields refer to the major institutions of society—the sociology of religion, medicine, or education. Some subfields refer to some kind of social process, such as social movements or economic development.

From this vast array of possible ways of organizing and introducing the field of sociology, we have selected the strategy of building from the simple to the complex, from the specific to the general, and from the microscopic to the macroscopic. We followed this strategy in organizing the four major units of the book, and we followed it, when possible, within each chapter. The introductory chapter is entitled “The Sociological Enterprise.” In the titles of the units of the book, I use the words “building blocks,” “contours,” and “constructions,” all of which refer to working, building things, and things built. The symbolism in these titles is deliberate. I believe that the imagery of work and accomplishment is deeply rooted in the American tradition, is likely to continue to be a preoccupation of teachers and students for the coming decade, and might well fire the imaginations of the “competitive generation.” That generation has been much in evidence in the 1970s, and, given the demographic, economic, and occupational realities that we foresee in the 1980s, may continue for some time to come. Aside from this “sociological” diagnosis of the condition of youth in the next decade, I believe it is advantageous to have some kind of recurring symbolism as a basis for integrating the book as a whole.

Thus, Unit I consists of a series of discussions on the fundamentals of social life, out of which larger structures and processes are forged. In Unit II, we acknowledge that institutional life is invariably organized along “vertical” lines as well, that is, stratified by rank and reward. In

this part, we examine a number of the basic ways in which rank and reward stratification, and various other inequalities, develop in society. In Unit III, we turn to the “horizontal” organization of structures in society, concentrating on a number of the main institutions in which all members of society are involved in one way or another at some time in their lives. Finally, in Unit IV we turn to a variety of processes by which the previously discussed ingredients of social life change over time. By this organization, we hope we have arranged the students’ exposure to sociology in a series of ever more comprehensive circles of knowledge about society.

Within each unit as well we move from the small to the large. In Unit I, we begin with the person and examine the ways in which he or she develops from a helpless, amoral, illiterate infant into a more or less responsible member of society. We move to the arena of relations between or among persons, and we examine the fundamental processes of social interaction, social roles, and social structure. We then examine those occasions when individuals do not conform to the normative arrangements of some society or group, and examine the various kinds of efforts to control this deviance. Chapter 5 analyzes groups, which we regard as more or less organized collections of people who are capable of directed action. Then, building up to more complex concepts, we take up the topic of organizations, which are often characterized by very complex divisions of labor and authority systems. That topic leads us to the study of community (which is a complex mix of social groups, organizations, and patterns of social interaction) and to the more inclusive concept of society (which constitutes the broadest meaningful organizing principle for the coordination and control of social life). Finally, we examine the most comprehensive organizing basis for social life—the *culture*—which includes the norms, values, ideologies, and philosophies by which all of social life is cemented.

Within Unit II, we begin generally, with an examination of the contours of ranking systems, and, in particular, with the development of social classes, which are the purposeful groups that arise out of stratification systems. We move next to two of the universal and most pervasive aspects of ranking in society, namely, the ranking of people according to how old they are and where they are in the life cycle and ac-

ording to which gender or sex they have received at birth. Finally, we move to another fundamental basis of stratification that is especially evident in heterogeneous societies like that of the United States: the stratification by race and ethnic membership, which a person also usually receives at birth.

In Unit III, we begin with the most intimate of institutions, the family, and examine the processes and structures of that remarkable institution. We move next to the sociology of education and religion, both of which are intimately connected with the family as agencies of socialization and social control. Then, moving toward a more macroscopic side of social life, we include chapters on economic and political life. While our discussion of these institutions involves the analysis of major structures of their regulation, we are attentive to the fact that these institutions constitute the basis for generating strain and conflict in society and, also, constitute the arenas in which social struggles occur.

Finally, in Unit IV, we selectively study a series of changes in the society. We look at the concept of human population and examine some of the dynamics of population growth, transformation, and decline, as well as the dynamics of spatial arrangements of populations—particularly in the community and urban life. Then we study the phenomena that arise when groups make more or less deliberate efforts to modify some component of the social order, efforts that manifest themselves in episodes of collective behavior and social movements. The final chapter involves the largest scale of change of all, the one that occurs when societies and cultures as a whole undergo transformations. In that chapter, we concentrate on processes of growth and changes related to growth, but we also examine the possibilities of stagnation and the decline of societies.

Features

Excerpts from nonsociological literature Throughout the book, but set off from the regular text, we have included pieces of nonsociological writing to illustrate sociological concepts. Selections include, for example, a passage on computers from Lewis Thomas’s *The Medusa and the Snail*. This discusses the impossibility of ever programming a fully human computer, since we would have to give it all the information a human learns in the course of socializa-

tion. We have passages from an old etiquette handbook, *Gentlemen Behave*, to illustrate the idea of norms and social class. The paragraph dramatizing social class instructs a young gentleman on how to behave in the presence of servants. We use an excerpt from Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* to illustrate group norms and values. Other selections are taken from Joseph Heller's *Something Happened*, Lillian Hellman's *Pentimento*, a short story by Isaac Asimov, and *Real Property*, by Sara Davidson.

Methods and measures There are boxes on a number of methodological themes at appropriate points in the text. Issues covered include: the ecological fallacy, unobtrusive measures, the meaning of crime statistics, participant observation, ethical issues, and measuring things in comparative contexts.

Eye-on These are essays about issues that are of current interest on the American scene or of special concern to students. Subjects include: disco as a case of cultural diffusion; cleaning up toxic wastes, the issue of corporate responsibility; Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple; leaving home; regional conflict in the United States; taking the national census; and night as the new frontier.

Basic concepts Key sociological concepts are highlighted in color and are carefully defined when they are first introduced.

Glossaries The definitions of the basic concepts appear again in a glossary at the end of each chapter and also in a master glossary at the end of the book.

Summaries Each chapter has a brief summary to aid students in their review of the chapter. The summaries are intended to key the student to the most important ideas and information in the chapter.

Suggested readings A brief annotated bibliography follows each chapter. The sources listed should serve as good initial leads for papers or other outside assignments.

Photographs, illustrations, tables, graphs A number of photographs have been carefully selected to enhance the text visually and to add an additional context for understanding the text ma-

terial. In addition, where appropriate, clear illustrations, tables, and graphs are used to present important and interesting data in an effective manner.

Supplements

Accompanying the text are a *Study Guide and Workbook*, an *Instructor's Manual*, and a *Test Item File*. The *Study Guide and Workbook* enable students to review important points and to see the relationship between major concepts and ideas. And the self-test sections of the *Study Guide* enable the students to receive immediate feedback to their responses.

The *Instructor's Manual* will undoubtedly prove to be an invaluable aid to the teacher. In addition to detailed outlines for all chapters, it contains suggested examples for lecture use and topics for class discussions, suggested topics for papers and research projects, and a list of essay-type questions. A separate *Test Item File* of objective questions is also available.

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Publishing an introductory text involves more than one person, and indeed I have had help, criticism, and encouragement from a number of people in both the academic and publishing worlds.

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N. S.

Berkeley, California

Sociology



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