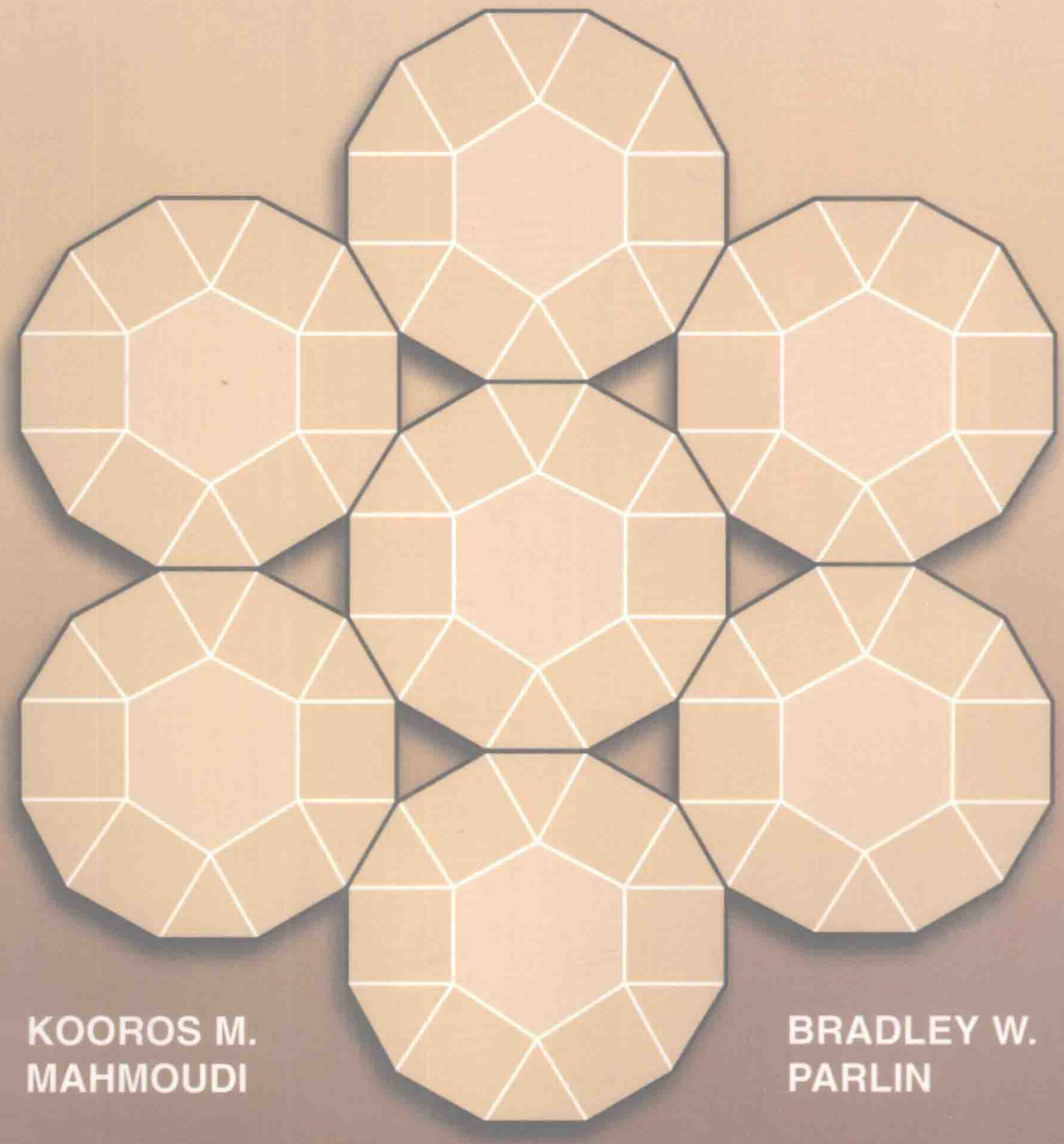
SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Seventh Edition



KOOROS M. MAHMOUDI

BRADLEY W. PARLIN

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SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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To our students, anonymous reviewers, and the many others who made this book possible.

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◆ PREFACE TO THE 7TH EDITION

We live in a dynamic and rapidly changing social world at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Sociology as a discipline engages the examination and understanding of our social worlds. This anthology is developed to help you understand the challenges of present and future societies. As you prepare to study sociology, you might begin by asking: "How can this course add to my understanding of the world?"

The goal of this anthology is to present you with readable and provocative articles that deal with important themes within the study of sociology. The men and women who wrote these articles share two characteristics. First, they take a humanistic perspective in their analysis of social phenomena, and second, they accept as a fundamental premise that social structure has a strong and enduring impact on the individual. In this collection of readings, we have attempted to develop a topical and engaging introduction to the sociological enterprise through the points of view of sociological researchers, social communicators and policy makers. Articles have been selected to generate a sense of the promise of sociology as an analytical tool to help you understand how social structure influences the circumstances of our lives and our relationships with the world around us. The readings are meant to reflect the craftsmanship and broad humanistic concerns of the discipline.

As in previous editions, an important goal is to familiarize the student with contemporary social problems and to encourage critical thinking in this regard. As we now have arrived in the twenty-first century, fundamental changes in the fabric of society are occurring. The globalization of markets, de-industrialization, the emergence of a services-based economy and entry into the age of information are forces showing profound impact on our institutions and ways of life. The sociological imagination reflected in the articles chosen for the 7th edition provided a framework for clarifying our understanding of the processes of societal change and adaptation.

The organization of this anthology is compatible with most introductory sociology and social problem texts. Some of the readings selected are among classics of the discipline. Additionally, the selections have a "problems" orientation to the study of social life, making this edition useful for introductory sociology as well as undergraduate classes that study various social problems.

We are indebted to many students and colleagues who have provided positive reinforcement in the course of the development of this book. Additional thanks must also be given to our colleagues, Professors Warren Lucas, James Derry and David Musick for helpful criticisms and suggestions in the preparation of this volume. A special acknowledgment is necessary for Mary Ann Parlin and Maya Mahmoudi for

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PART

Sociological Inquiry

It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem.

Peter Berger

Introduction

Stripped to its essence, the discipline of sociology seeks to understand the dynamics of human groups.

> Sociology is the study of human behavior as shaped by group life, including both collective forces (group construction) and the ways in which people give meaning to their experiences (self-reflections) (Hess, Markson, & Stein, 1996, p. 2).

But why such fascination with groups? A central concern of sociologists is the intimate relationship between *social structure* and the individual: the nexus of person to

society. Thus, the sociologist's preoccupation with the way groups come to exist derives from an interest in understanding, explaining and predicting human social behavior.

Although the list is not exhaustive, social structure consists of *statuses* (positions in society), *roles* (expected behaviors), *groups*, *institutions* and *sanctions*. Sanctions are rewards or punishments designed to ensure compliance with normative and role expectations. Sanctions such as violence against nonconformists, control over individual beliefs, ridicule, trickery and threats of ostracism decrease the probability that people will deviate from group norms.

Cuzzort and King (1976) describe the relationship between society and the individual. They succinctly illustrate the way in which social structure impacts human behavior:

> Society is an external force, as coercive and constraining as the physical and biological environments with which we have to cope . . . and it guards us closely: even quite harmless acts, like growing a beard or mispronouncing a word, are apt to bring ridicule or some other form of social constraint . . . Moreover, society is internal as well as external. Not only are people within society: society is within people. The very ways one comes to see oneself, the daydreams one has, the aspirations and longings which come to dominate one's thoughts, are not random or independent of society. They are subjective social actions which parallel the larger society. Thus, one might daydream of military exploits as a jet pilot, or of intellectual attainments as a great writer, or of business successes as an industrialist—or one might dream of murder. Even so, the form of the daydream—distorted by the individual's ignorance and desires—will conform generally to the model provided by the society (p. 280).

Sociologist C. Wright Mills further illustrates the relationship of the individual to society through his insightful distinction between private troubles and public issues, elaborated in his classic work, *The Sociological Imagination*. Mills (1959) suggests that:

> Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relationships with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware . . . A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened . . . An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened . . . An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements (p. 8).

Mills' best examples of the troubles/issues dichotomy are drawn from the institutions of the economy and family.

> Insofar as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. Insofar as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless—

> with or without psychiatric aid—to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposed upon him. Insofar as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves, and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution . . .
>
> What we experience in various and specific milieu, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieu we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieu. To be able to do that is to possess the *sociological imagination* (p. 9).

Structural Explanation

A central concern of the sociologist is the way in which the various elements of social structure affect the behavior of group members. Sociological inquiry is sometimes difficult for students to grasp because most, by and large, come to the classroom with a different orientation. Instead of looking at the structure of society as a cause of social problems, they look for character defects in individuals to explain social ills (Mulkey, 1995).

For example, teenage pregnancy is seen as a failure of family values and moral irresponsibility. However, sociologists study the problem's root causes and consequences in the context of social organization. These include ineffective sex education, accessibility to contraception or lack of political will to deal with youth problems such as unemployment.

In some part, this is cultural: In the U.S., we are socialized to think in terms of *individual explanations*. This tendency is derived from the preeminence of *individualism* in the hierarchy of American values. Individual explanations of human behavior center on some attribute peculiar to the individual as a cause for the success or failure of actors within a social system. This kind of explanation is what sociologist William Ryan (1971) has called "blaming the victim."

> Consider some victims. One is the miseducated child in the slum school. He is blamed for his own miseducation. He is said to contain within himself the causes of his inability to read and write well. The short hand phrase is "cultural deprivation," which, to those in the know, conveys what they allege to be inside information: that the poor child carries a scanty pack of cultural baggage as he enters school. He doesn't know about books and magazines and newspapers, they say. (No books in the home: The mother fails to subscribe to *Reader's Digest*.) They say that if he talks at all—an unlikely event

> since slum parents don't talk to their children—he certainly doesn't talk correctly. (Lower-class dialect spoken here, or even—God-Forbid!—Southern Negro.) (Ici on parle nigra.) If you can manage to get him to sit in a chair, they say, he squirms and looks out the window. (Impulse-ridden, these kids, motoric rather than verbal.) In a word he is "disadvantaged" and "socially deprived," they say, and this, of course, accounts for his failure (his failure, they say) to learn much in school. . . .
>
> What is the culturally deprived child doing in the school? What is wrong with the victim? In pursuing this logic, no one remembers to ask questions about the collapsing buildings and torn textbooks, the frightened, insensitive teachers, the six additional desks in the room, the blustering, frightened principals, the relentless segregation, the callous administrators, the irrelevant curriculum, the bigoted or cowardly members of the school board, the insulting history-book, the stingy tax payers, the fairy-tale readers, or the self-serving faculty of the local teacher's college. We are encouraged to confine our attention to the child and to dwell on all his alleged defects. Cultural deprivation becomes an omnibus explanation for the educational disaster area known as the inner-city school. This is blaming the victim (pp. 3–4).

Clearly, individual explanations (*blaming the victim*) often confuse the intimate relationship between the person and society. The sociologist, on the other hand, looks for structural reasons to explain behavior.

Through history, biography and social process, each of us plays a part in the evolution of social structure. At the same time, we are subject to powerful influence of social structure in our day-to-day behavior. To the extent that we, as individuals, understand our interdependence with the social structural milieu, we are better able to seek workable solutions to both our *personal troubles* and *public issues*.

C. W. Mills (1959) provides a good summary of the interdependence of humans and society:

> Man in the course of his existence contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove. The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relationship between the two within society (p. 9).

The first selection in this reader was chosen to introduce you to the scope of sociological inquiry. In the now classic "Invitation to Sociology" (Chapter 1), Professor Berger thoughtfully describes the unique domain of sociology. Berger stresses the primacy of groups by looking at the interdependence of social structure and human behavior as the focal point for understanding the social landscape. Berger's work provides a good starting point for the study of sociology.

Methods of Inquiry

Sociology is both art and science. Some sociologists study groups impressionistically, using empathy and observation, while others value the precision of laboratories and mathematical models. Both approaches require imagination as well as critical thinking.

However, our understanding of the dynamics of society is not complete. It has developed slowly, by fits and starts, with success and failure. Robert Lynd (1967) observed:

> From one important point of view, it may be said of the social sciences, as of philosophy, that: "the history of human thought . . . is the record, not of the progressive discovery of truth, but of our gradual emancipation from error" (p. 8).

When we search for truth, we often rely on common sense and tradition. In science, these are augmented by methods that emphasize precise observation. This is the *scientific method* and it guides the development of sociological knowledge through research. In addition to its precision, the scientific method is committed to *naturalistic perspectives, objectivity, empiricism, moral* and *ethical neutrality* and a healthy dose of skepticism (Hoover, 1992). As applied to the social world, science is a systematic approach that guides the collection of reliable and valid information about human behavior.

In "The Goals of Science" (Chapter 2), Marty Zusman explains the way in which sociology applies the concepts and tools of science in social research. Although meaningful research begins with artful questions, the goal of sociology is description, explanation and prediction of human social behavior. Thus, while science has limitations, it remains an indispensable element of sociology's intellectual craftsmanship.

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◆ CHAPTER 1

INVITATION TO SOCIOLOGY

Peter L. Berger

The sociologist (that is, the one we would really like to invite to our game) is a person intensively, endlessly, shamelessly interested in the doings of men. His natural habitat is all the human gathering places of the world, wherever men come together. The sociologist may be interested in many other things. But his consuming interest remains in the world of men, their institutions, their history, their passions. And since he is interested in men, nothing that men do can be altogether tedious for him. He will naturally be interested in the events that engage men's ultimate beliefs, their moments of tragedy and grandeur and ecstasy. But he will also be fascinated by the commonplace, the everyday. He will know reverence, but this reverence will not prevent him from wanting to see and to understand. He may sometimes feel revulsion or contempt. But this also will not deter him from wanting to have his questions answered. The sociologist, in his quest for understanding, moves through the world of men without respect for the usual lines of demarcation. Nobility and degradation, power and obscurity, intelligence and folly—these are equally *interesting* to him, however unequal they may be in his personal values or tastes. Thus his questions may lead him to all possible levels of society, the best and the least known places, the most respected and the most despised. And, if he is a good sociologist, he will find himself in all these places because his own questions have so taken possession of him that he has little choice but to seek for answers.

It would be possible to say the same things in a lower key. We could say that the sociologist, but for the grace of his academic title, is the man who must listen to gossip despite himself, who is tempted to look through keyholes, to read other people's mail, to open closed cabinets. Before some otherwise unoccupied psychologist sets out now to construct an aptitude test for sociologists on the basis of sublimated voyeurism, let

us quickly say that we are speaking merely by way of analogy. Perhaps some little boys consumed with curiosity to watch their maiden aunts in the bathroom later become inveterate sociologists. This is quite uninteresting. What interests us is the curiosity that grips any sociologist in front of closed door behind which there are human voices. If he is a good sociologist, he will want to open that door, to understand these voices. Behind each closed door he will anticipate some new facet of human life not yet perceived and understood.

The sociologist will occupy himself with matters that others regard as too sacred or as too distasteful for dispassionate investigation. He will find rewarding the company of priests or of prostitutes, depending not on his personal preferences but on the questions he happens to be asking at the moment. He will also concern himself with matters that others may find much too boring. He will be interested in the human interaction that goes with warfare or with great intellectual discoveries, but also in the relations between people employed in a restaurant or between a group of little girls playing with their dolls. His main focus of attention is not the ultimate significance of what men do, but the action in itself, as another example of the infinite richness of human conduct. So much for the image of our playmate.

In these journeys through the world of men the sociologist will inevitably encounter other professional Peeping Toms. Sometimes these will resent his presence, feeling that he is poaching on their preserves. In some places the sociologist will meet up with the economist, in others with the political scientist, in yet others with the psychologist or the ethnologist. Yet chances are that the questions that have brought him to these same places are different from the ones that propelled his fellow trespassers. The sociologist's questions always remain essentially the same: "What are people doing with each other here?" "What are their relationships to each other?" "How are these relationships organized in institutions?" "What are the collective ideas that move men and institutions?" In trying to answer these questions in specific instances, the sociologist will, of course, have to deal with economic or political matters but he will do so in a way rather different from that of the economist or the political scientist. The scene that he contemplates is the same human scene that these other scientists concern themselves with. But the sociologist's angle of vision is different. When this is understood, it becomes clear that it makes little sense to try to stake out a special enclave within which the sociologist will carry on business in his own right. Like Wesley the sociologist will have to confess that his parish is the world. But unlike some latter-day Wesleyans he will gladly share this parish with others. There is, however, one traveler whose path the sociologist will cross more often than anyone else's on his journeys. This is the historian. Indeed, as soon as the sociologist turns from the present to the past, his preoccupations are very hard indeed to distinguish from those of the historian. However, we shall leave this relationship to a later part of our considerations. Suffice it to say here that the sociological journey will be much impoverished unless it is punctuated frequently by conversation with that other particular traveler.

Any intellectual activity derives excitement from the moment it becomes a trial of discovery. In some fields of learning this is the discovery of worlds previously unthought and unthinkable. This is the excitement of the astronomer or of the nuclear physicist on the antipodal boundaries of the realities that man is capable of conceiving. But it can also be the excitement of bacteriology or geology. In a different way it can be

the excitement of the linguist discovering new realms of human expression or of the anthropologist exploring human customs in faraway countries. In such discovery, when undertaken with passion, a widening of awareness, sometimes a veritable transformation of consciousness, occurs. The universe turns out to be much more wonderful than one had ever dreamed. The excitement of sociology is usually of a different sort. Sometimes, it is true, the sociologist penetrates into worlds that had previously been quite unknown to him—for instance, the world of crime, or the world of some bizarre religious sect, or the world fashioned by the exclusive concerns of some group such as medical specialists or military leaders or advertising executives. However, much of the time the sociologist moves in sectors of experience that are familiar to him and to most people in his society. He investigates communities, institutions and activities that one can read about every day in the newspapers. Yet there is another excitement of discovery beckoning in his investigations. It is not the excitement of coming upon the totally unfamiliar, but rather the excitement of finding the familiar becoming transformed in its meaning. The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives. This also constitutes a transformation of consciousness. Moreover, this transformation is more relevant existentially than that of many other intellectual disciplines, because it is more difficult to segregate in some special compartment of the mind. The astronomer does not live in the remote galaxies, and the nuclear physicist can, outside his laboratory, eat and laugh and marry and vote without thinking about the insides of the atom. The geologist looks at rocks only at appropriate times, and the linguist speaks English with his wife. The sociologist lives in society, on the job and off it. His own life, inevitably, is part of his subject matter. Men being what they are, sociologists too manage to segregate their professional insights from their everyday affairs. But it is a rather difficult feat to perform in good faith.

The sociologist moves in the common world of men, close to what most of them would call real. The categories he employs in his analyses are only refinements of the categories by which other men live—power, class, status, race, ethnicity. As a result, there is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about his familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology.

Let us take a specific example. Imagine a sociology class in a southern college where almost all the students are white Southerners. Imagine a lecture on the subject of the racial system of the South. The lecturer is talking here of matters that have been familiar to his students from the time of their infancy. Indeed, it may be that they are much more familiar with the minutiae of this system than he is. They are quite bored as a result. It seems to them that he is only using more pretentious words to describe what they already know. Thus he may use the term "caste," one commonly used now by American sociologists to describe the Southern racial system. But in explaining the term he shifts to traditional Hindu society, to make it clearer. He then goes on to analyze the magical beliefs inherent in caste taboos, the social dynamics of commensalism and connubium, the economic interests concealed within the system, the way in which religious beliefs

relate to the taboos, the effects of the caste system upon the industrial development of the society and vice versa—all in India. But suddenly India is not very far away at all. The lecture then goes back to its Southern theme. The familiar now seems not quite so familiar any more. Questions are raised that are new, perhaps raised angrily, but raised all the same. And at least some of the students have begun to understand that there are functions involved in this business of race that they have not read about in the newspapers (at least not those in their hometowns) and their parents have not told them—partly, at least, because neither the newspapers nor the parents knew about them.

It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem. This too is a deceptively simple statement. It ceases to be simple after a while. Social reality turns out to have many layers of meaning. The discovery of each new layer changes the perception of the whole.

Anthropologists use the term "culture shock" to describe the impact of a totally new culture upon a newcomer. In an extreme instance such shock will be experienced by the Western explorer who is told, halfway through dinner, that he is eating the nice old lady he had been chatting with the previous day—a shock with predictable physiological if not moral consequences. Most explorers no longer encounter cannibalism in their travels today. However, the first encounters with polygamy or with puberty rites or even with the way some nations drive their automobiles can be quite a shock to an American visitor. With the shock may go not only disapproval or disgust but a sense of excitement that things can *really* be that different from what they are at home. To some extent, at least, this is the excitement of any first travel abroad. The experience of sociological discovery could be described as "culture shock" minus geographical displacement. In other words, the sociologist travels at home—with shocking results. He is unlikely to find that he is eating a nice old lady for dinner. But the discovery, for instance, that his own church has considerable money invested in the missile industry or that a few blocks from his home there are people who engage in cultic orgies may not be drastically different in emotional impact. Yet we would not want to imply that sociological discoveries are always or even usually outrageous to moral sentiment. Not at all. What they have in common with exploration in distant lands, however, is the sudden illumination of new and unsuspected facets of human existence in society. This is the excitement and, as we shall try to show later, the humanistic justification of sociology.

People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and the maxims of what Alfred Schutz has called the "world-taken-for-granted," should stay away from sociology. People who feel no temptation before closed doors, who have no curiosity about human beings, who are content to admire scenery without wondering about the people who live in those houses on the other side of that river, should probably also stay away from sociology. They will find it unpleasant or, at any rate, unrewarding. People who are interested in human beings only if they can change, convert or reform them should also be warned, for they will find sociology much less useful than they hoped. And people whose interest is mainly in their own conceptual constructions will do just as well to turn to the study of little white mice. Sociology will be satisfying, in the long run, only to those who can think of nothing more entrancing than to watch men and to understand things human.