

## Core Concepts in Sociology

# **Core Concepts in Sociology**

*Edited by J. Michael Ryan*

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## Introduction

The idea for this project was borne not only from my experience as an academic sociologist but also from my 15 years of experience working as a senior managing editor for Wiley Blackwell. Starting in my second year of graduate school until the present day, I have been involved in managing, advising on, and/or co-editing over a dozen major sociological reference works with Wiley totaling more than three dozen individual volumes. These experiences have given me an unusual perspective in that I have been continually exposed to the broad range of fields and subfields within the discipline, including topics extending far outside the realm of my own individual research and interests. This broad exposure to topics, people, and writings from across the sociological spectrum is what inspired this project.

This volume is designed to be a handy reference for anyone working in, studying, or simply interested in the field of sociology. Contributions have been written to provide the reader with a general overview of many of the concepts widely considered to be at the heart of the field today. The volume has been envisioned in such a way so as to be useful to everyone from the novice undergraduate student taking their first introduction to sociology course up to the seasoned expert in the field looking for a quick refresher on a critical concept.

The first major challenge when conceptualizing this project was to determine what exactly is a “core” concept in sociology. To do so I consulted a range of sources including introductory textbooks, headword lists from a dozen sociology-related encyclopedias, and my own experience (itself a concept that could be considered anathema to any broad-based sociological endeavor!) and came up with a list of 90 or so concepts that I thought fit the bill. That list was then circulated amongst several “big names” in the field who each came back with their own recommendations on what was missing and what might be a bit superfluous. This project represents a synthesis of that research and feedback. It is fair to assume that most readers of this volume will no doubt be able to identify concepts that they feel are glaringly absent and probably also point out a few that seem peripheral to the field. Such reactions are inevitable with a project of this nature.

Building on the above, there is no doubt that the idea of a core concept will vary depending not just on one’s personal background and interests but also on where they are (no doubt such a list compiled in France or Japan or Kenya might look a bit different), when they are (one can imagine how this list might have looked 25 years ago, or will look 25 years from now), who they are (as good sociologists we recognize that one’s personal