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Review of Murray Hausknecht, *The Joiners: A Sociological Description of Voluntary Association Membership in the United States*

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At the time of publication, author Charles R. Wright was affiliated with the University of California Los Angeles. Currently, he is a faculty member at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Review of Murray Hausknecht, *The Joiners: A Sociological Description of Voluntary Association Membership in the United States*

Abstract

Certain sociological problems are less likely than others to be studied through primary field research. Some deal with topics that do not seem important enough to warrant the expense of a full-scale field inquiry; others treat subjects about which most people believe the facts are known; some involve events and opinions in the past which cannot be measured among current populations. Under these and other circumstances a partial solution to the problem is sometimes provided by secondary analysis—the re-examination of data that were collected for another purpose in order to illuminate a new problem and test new hypotheses. *The Joiners* presents an excellent example of the kind of problem that sociologists can explore profitably through secondary analysis of past public opinion polls and social surveys.

Disciplines

Communication | Place and Environment | Politics and Social Change | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology | Work, Economy and Organizations

Comments

At the time of publication, author Charles R. Wright was affiliated with the University of California Los Angeles. Currently, he is a faculty member at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

The final chapter, "Urban Social Organization," covers power and politics—some of which is directly relevant to urban areas. With the exception of the two chapters noted earlier and an occasional passage elsewhere, this reader can find little to recommend to students of urban social structure.

STANLEY LIEBERSON

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The Joiners: A Sociological Description of Voluntary Association Membership in the United States. By MURRAY HAUSKNECHT. New York: Bedminster Press, 1962. Pp. 141.

Certain sociological problems are less likely than others to be studied through primary field research. Some deal with topics that do not seem important enough to warrant the expense of a full-scale field inquiry; others treat subjects about which most people believe the facts are known; some involve events and opinions in the past which cannot be measured among current populations. Under these and other circumstances a partial solution to the problem is sometimes provided by secondary analysis—the re-examination of data that were collected for another purpose in order to illuminate a new problem and test new hypotheses. *The Joiners* presents an excellent example of the kind of problem that sociologists can explore profitably through secondary analysis of past public opinion polls and social surveys.

Membership in voluntary associations rarely has been the central focus of primary research, at least on a nationwide scale. It is a subject about which there are many popular beliefs (e.g., that we are a nation of joiners). It has been discussed by sociologists concerned with urban life, political sociology, social organization, and other areas. It has been treated theoretically by Wirth, Williams, Rose, Barber, and others. Finally, there are several primary studies, usually limited to local populations, that provide empirical generalizations about memberships which bear upon hypotheses that can be tested by secondary analysis of survey data from larger, general populations. Therefore the data which the author presents in *The Joiners* are welcome additions

to the growing literature on voluntary associations.

The data come from two national surveys that contained incidental items on the voluntary association memberships of adults: one conducted in 1954 by the American Institute of Public Opinion and the other in 1955 by the National Opinion Research Center. The analysis treats the relationships between membership and stratification, urbanization, sex, age, marital status, and social integration. Information is provided on membership in a variety of types of associations and certain consequences of membership. The discussion concludes with a chapter on the functions of voluntary associations.

Forty-seven pages of tables are presented. This is fortunate, for it enables the reader to study the data and interpret them. It is important that the reader do so because there are a number of unfortunate discrepancies between the data in the tables and their description and interpretation in the text.

In certain places errors in reporting the base for percentages result in serious misstatements about the findings. To illustrate, the text (p. 79) states that 43 per cent of the respondents in heavily populated areas join civic and service organizations; but Table 5:7 shows that the 43 per cent is not based on the total respondents in these areas but on persons who are members of any association. Recalculation shows that 14 per cent of the total respondents in these areas belong to civic organizations, not 43 per cent as reported. The text (p. 93) states that 51 per cent of *non-members* with elementary education read no magazines; in Table 6:5 the 51 per cent is based on *members*. The text (p. 98) reports that "of those who *thought* they knew the sponsor [of March of Dimes] 14 per cent of the non-members . . . with an elementary school education answered correctly." But Table 6:12 actually shows that 14 per cent of *all* the non-members with elementary education answered correctly. Recalculation of the proportion who gave correct answers among those non-members with elementary education who *thought* they knew the sponsor gives 74 per cent, not 14 per cent as reported. Other instances could be provided. Since the tables are grouped at the end of each chapter it is not always easy for the reader to spot such discrepancies.

At other places certain interpretations of the data are questionable. As an example, the text (p. 33) states that Table 3:6B shows a general tendency for men up to the age of 44 to have a higher rate of membership than women. But the data in the table do not appear to support this statement. In interpreting certain other tables the analyst fails to take account of the marginal frequencies, with misleading consequences. Consider, as an example, the discussion of educational status and organizational membership (p. 80) in the light of the marginals at the bottom of Table 5:9. At times the interpretation and the discussion are confused by the inconsistent treatment of the same variables as independent and test factors, reversing them here and there, and not introducing the proper test variable at the appropriate place in the discussion. Examples are found in the treatment of sex and age (p. 33) and home ownership and age (p. 48) in relation to membership. Finally, there are unexplained discrepancies among the tables themselves. To illustrate, the total number of cases shifts from 853 to 799 to 839 to 853 among Tables 5:1 through 5:4.

This reviewer regards the types of errors illustrated above as especially regrettable because, on the whole, the book presents a valuable set of data about American life and many interesting cross-tabulations by important sociological variables. The findings suggest areas for further research and point to parts of our current theories that need to be re-examined. To illustrate, one survey shows a *negative* relation between membership and size of community—contrary to what might be expected on the basis of urban theory. Obviously this finding needs to be followed up, either directly or by additional secondary analyses. (The second survey is not so clear on this relationship. Indeed, there are several differences between the findings from the two surveys that could be examined in more detail.)

The book is beautifully printed: the tables are neat and clear and the figures are easy to read. These are welcome and genuine virtues in the publication of a research monograph.

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Mastery of the Metropolis. By WEBB S. FISER. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962. Pp. x+168. \$1.95 (paper).

Anatomy of a Metropolis. By EDGAR M. HOOVER and RAYMOND VERNON. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1962. Pp. ix+338. \$1.45 (paper).

Increasing urbanization has necessitated a detailed analysis of the changes and problems existing in the metropolis. Although speaking to different audiences, both of the books discussed here address themselves to this task. *Anatomy of a Metropolis*, the first volume of the New York Metropolitan Region Study, is for the sociologist the more important of the two. The book is comprehensive in scope; the authors examine employment (locational pressures, special industries, the white-collar corps, and the "pursuit of consumers") and the people (their distribution in terms of needs for spacious living versus easy access). Always, too, they anticipate future interrelations between jobs and people. Particularly noteworthy is the authors' cognizance that what happens in New York turns in good part on what happens in the rest of the country—something often missed by the sociologist generalizing about the city. The book as a whole must be commended as an excellent account of New York and its environs, rich both in detail and illustration.

Mastery of the Metropolis is written on another level. It is Professor Fiser's thesis that institutions and citizens form the key to cities "realizing their potentials." Rather than giving spot "emergency" attention to single problems (e.g., transportation, parking, shopping, and the like), Fiser wants city planners to treat the metropolitan region as a whole. Thus, to take one example, urban renewal is viewed on the individual level, while at all times the economic, educational, and social implications for the entire city are considered. Certainly, city planners realize this; and, from the criticism of redevelopment in the popular press, this is an idea to which little more than lip-service has been given. Because Fiser's volume is based on secondary sources and is footnoted only sporadically, the extent to which his work meets this need must be questioned. But this may be unfair in that the book is a theoretical one. In enumerating concepts in terms of the individual values held by