

(/)

Home (/) / A-Z Publications (/content/publications) / Annual Review of Sociology (/content/journals/soc) / Volume 23, 1997 (/content/journals/soc/23/1) / Article

**ANNUAL REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY** (/content/journals/soc) **Volume 23, 1997** (/content/journals/soc/23/1)

## Sociological Rational Choice Theory

Michael Hechter (/search?value1=Michael+Hechter&option1=author&noRedirect=true)<sup>1</sup>, and Satoshi Kanazawa (/search?value1=Satoshi+Kanazawa&option1=author&noRedirect=true)<sup>2</sup>

 View Affiliations

Vol. 23:191-214 (Volume publication date August 1997)

© Annual Reviews

Although rational choice theory has made considerable advances in other social sciences, its progress in sociology has been limited. Some sociologists' reservations about rational choice arise from a misunderstanding of the theory. The first part of this essay therefore introduces rational choice as a general theoretical perspective, or family of theories, which explains social outcomes by constructing models of individual action and social context. "Thin" models of individual action are mute about actors' motivations, while "thick" models specify them ex ante. Other sociologists' reservations, however, stem from doubts about the empirical adequacy of rational choice explanations. To this end, the bulk of the essay reviews a sample of recent studies that provide empirical support for particular rational choice explanations in a broad spectrum of substantive areas in sociology. Particular attention is paid to studies on the family, gender, and religion, for these subareas often are considered least amenable to understanding in terms of rational choice logic.

**Keyword(s):** empirical research (/search?value1=%22empirical+research%22&option1=pub\_keyword), general theory (/search?value1=%22general+theory%22&option1=pub\_keyword), macrosociology (/search?value1=%22macrosociology%22&option1=pub\_keyword), micro-macro link (/search?value1=%22micro-macro+link%22&option1=pub\_keyword)

**Article Type:** Review Article

### Most Read This Month

#### **Climate Change and Society** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054614)

Thomas Dietz (/search?value1=Thomas+Dietz&option1=author&noRedirect=true), Rachael L. Shwom (/search?value1=Rachael+L.+Shwom&option1=author&noRedirect=true) and Cameron T. Whitley (/search?value1=Cameron+T.+Whitley&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
pp. 135–158 (24)

#### **What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054857)

Steven Vallas (/search?value1=Steven+Vallas&option1=author&noRedirect=true) and Juliet B. Schor (/search?value1=Juliet+B.+Schor&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
pp. 273–294 (22)

#### **Theories of the Causes of Poverty** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-073018-022550)

David Brady (/search?value1=David+Brady&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
pp. 155–175 (21)

#### **The Society of Algorithms** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-090820-020800)

Jenna Burrell (/search?value1=Jenna+Burrell&option1=author&noRedirect=true) and Marion Fourcade (/search?value1=Marion+Fourcade&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
pp. 213–237 (25)

#### **The Social and Sociological Consequences of China's One-Child Policy** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-soc-090220-032839)

Yong Cai (/search?value1=Yong+Cai&option1=author&noRedirect=true) and Wang Feng (/search?value1=Wang+Feng&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
pp. 587–606 (20)

### Most Cited

 (/rss/content/journals/soc/mostcitedarticles?fmt=rss)

#### **Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415)

Miller McPherson (/search?value1=Miller+McPherson&option1=author&noRedirect=true), Lynn Smith-Lovin (/search?value1=Lynn+Smith-Lovin&option1=author&noRedirect=true), and James M Cook (/search?value1=James+M+Cook&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
Vol. 27 (2001), pp. 415–444

#### **Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology** (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1)

Alejandro Portes (/search?value1=Alejandro+Portes&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
Vol. 24 (1998), pp. 1–24

**Conceptualizing Stigma (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363)**

Bruce G. Link (/search?value1=Bruce+G.+Link&option1=author&noRedirect=true), and Jo C. Phelan (/search?value1=Jo+C.+Phelan&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
Vol. 27 (2001), pp. 363–385

**Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611)**

Robert D. Benford (/search?value1=Robert+D.+Benford&option1=author&noRedirect=true), and David A. Snow (/search?value1=David+A.+Snow&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
Vol. 26 (2000), pp. 611–639

**Organizational Learning (/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.so.14.080188.001535)**

Barbara Levitt (/search?value1=Barbara+Levitt&option1=author&noRedirect=true), and James G. March (/search?value1=James+G.+March&option1=author&noRedirect=true)  
Vol. 14 (1988), pp. 319–338

+ More

**About Annual Reviews:**

- [What We Do \(/about/what-we-do\)](#)
- [Press and News \(/about/press-center\)](#)
- [Careers \(/page/about/careers-at-annual-reviews\)](#)
- [Contact Us \(/page/about/contact-us\)](#)
- [FAQ \(/page/about/faq\)](#)
- [Help \(/help/main\)](#)

**Discover Content:**

- [Journals A-Z \(/content/publications\)](#)
- [Impact Factor Rankings \(/about/impact-factors\)](#)
- [Publication Dates \(/journal/pubdates\)](#)
- [Online Events \(/page/events\)](#)
- [Article Collections \(/page/collectionarchive\)](#)
- [Knowable Magazine \(https://knowablemagazine.org/\)](#)
- [\(https://annurev.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/annurev/tca/\)Against the Grain \(https://www.charleston-hub.com/about/about-against-the-grain/\)](#)


**Libraries and Institutions:**

- [Subscribe to Open \(S2O\) \(/S2O\)](#)
- [Librarian Resource Center \(/page/librarians/librarian-resource-page\)](#)
- [Institutional Administration Dashboard \(https://www.annualreviews.org/admin\)](#)
- [Institutional Pricing \(/page/subscriptions/instchoice\)](#)
- [\(action/showInstitutionUsageReport\)Against the Grain \(https://www.charleston-hub.com/about/about-against-the-grain/\)](#)

**Author Resources:**

- [Article Preparation Submission \(/page/authors/get-information\)](#)
- [Editorial Principles Policies \(/page/authors/edit-policies\)](#)
- [Contact Us \(/page/authors/contact-us\)](#)
- [Copyright and Permissions \(/page/about/copyright-and-permissions\)](#)
- [Article Proposals \(/page/authors/author-instructions/unsolicited-authors\)](#)

in


[\(https://www.linkedin.com/company/annual-reviews/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/annual-reviews/)