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**Review of *The Social Edges of Psychoanalysis*. Neil J. Smelser.  
Reviewed by Daniel Coleman.**

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a clear starting point, a way to get grounded and specific guidance for approach the literature.

Such a small book (just 159 pages of text) cannot be expected to cover everything completely and the book has some gaps. Most perplexing is Rose's neglect of evaluation in the applications section. After such a useful introduction to evaluation one wonders why he didn't provide more examples of effective, feasible evaluation designs.

Mention is made of cultural competence and inter-cultural issues are featured in the section on peer relationships. Cultural issues in design are less fully treated in the other chapters.

The growing field of learning disorders may deserve greater attention than it gets here. Perhaps the development of group technologies has not proceeded to the point where a separate chapter could be written. However, this is certainly a problem that would benefit from more experimentation with group interventions for children, parents and teachers.

Nonetheless, Rose's *Group work with Children and Adolescents*, is an effective marriage of theory and practice that will be valuable reading for group work and school social work students and a useful tool for school social workers.

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Neil J. Smelser, *The Social Edges of Psychoanalysis*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999. \$35.00 hardcover, \$24.00 papercover.

Neil Smelser's book is composed of a series of papers written over an academic career. They all spring from the creative tension inherent in being an academic sociologist while training and practicing as a psychoanalyst. Smelser is one in a long tradition of intellectuals in other fields who have been influenced by psychoanalysis, including anthropologist Alfred Kroeber and Sanskrit scholar (now turned man of letters) Jeffrey Masson. Depending on one's perspective, psychoanalysis is either long dead, or continues to be a central influence in the understanding of human beings. It is arguable that the ongoing presence of intense debate

is itself reflective of the persistent vitality and relevance of psychoanalytic thought. Even for a reader from the camp that is hostile to psychoanalysis, Smelser provides a valuable examination of the salient issues in multidisciplinary discourse that transcends both psychoanalysis and sociology.

The essays in this book were originally published over a span of thirty years. The preface includes a brief and intriguing biographical note. Smelser reflects about being influenced by an older generation of sociologists who were themselves influenced by psychoanalysis, including Talcott Parsons. Later he braved criticism as an academic sociologist in undergoing psychoanalytic training himself. The limited life story information was just enough to create an interest in knowing more about the personal determinants of Smelser's choices of both sociology and psychoanalysis. The biographical information, and lingering questions, added a personal dimension to reading the rest of the essays.

The book is organized not chronologically but by four themes: Disciplinary Articulations, Psychoanalytic Sociology, Ambivalence, and Micro-Macro Connections. The first essay, coauthored by Robert Wallerstein, initiates a theme repeated in several other essays in the book. The authors analyze the way in which disciplines form their boundaries and scopes of inquiry, through the examples of psychoanalysis and sociology. Disciplines identify certain variables as having primary interest and make assumptions about other related variables. For example, psychoanalysis assumes social influences to be constant in highlighting the importance of the intrapsychic. Through several examples the strengths and perils of a transdisciplinary analysis are articulated. The analysis of the "edges" of academic disciplines, and the challenges inherent in multidisciplinary inquiry, is clear and brilliant. This paper would be a welcome addition to any social science seminar.

In the section headed "Ambivalence," Smelser devotes two papers to a social and psychoanalytic analysis of the dynamics of Affirmative Action in research universities. In the first, he carefully constructs the ambivalence for all parties affected by Affirmative Action: for example, for liberal academics the value conflicts of a meritocracy on one hand and the appeal of social justice on the other hand. The second paper on Affirmative Action

analyzes the processes and politics of implementing policies on the Berkeley campus. Smelser portrays how value based ambivalence becomes enacted in ambiguous and at times contradictory policies. These papers are of great interest to any one interested in issues of multicultural communities, in particular in academic settings. There are certain areas left unexplored in these papers, however. An assumption is made that academia is a meritocracy where academic ability and achievement are rewarded. This assumption neglects the power wielded by academics to define what constitutes "merit" in scholarship.

The essays in this book are not all serious conceptual papers like those that examine theoretical issues in interdisciplinary inquiry, or that take on weighty social issues such as those on diversity and affirmative action. One essay in particular, "The myth of the good life in California," is playful while providing a compelling analysis of the social and psychological dimensions of the California mythology. Smelser points out that the California myth is not only a utopian vision of a place of plenty and guilt-free pleasures, but has also an apocalyptic dimension in the threat of earthquake and a strong presence of what Smelser terms "pessimistic futurists."

It is interesting that an academic book on the synthesis of the psychoanalytic and the social perspectives would have no mention of social work. Since the 1920s social work has worked and reworked bringing available psychological theory to assist those suffering from social problems. The absence of an awareness of social work reflects that Smelser's perspective centers in academia, and not in the world of professional practice. Although he practiced briefly as an analyst, there is little case material or other reflection of clinical experience that comes through in these papers. This book might more aptly be titled the "psychoanalytic edges of sociology," as the author uses sociology as a foundational perspective. The criticisms and limitations noted do not point out serious flaws in this book, but suggest the types of reflection that these papers inspire. This is an engaging volume with much to offer to those with interests in the academic dimensions of sociology and psychoanalysis.

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