



# World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space

*Lyn H. Lofland*

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In traditional human societies, the stranger was a threat, to be disarmed at once by an act of force or by a ritual of hospitality. Under no conditions could a stranger be ignored or taken for granted. Yet in all great cities today, human beings seem to live out their entire lives in "a world of strangers." How did it become possible for millions of people to do this? How is city life possible? The unique value of *A World of Strangers* lies in Dr. Lofland's expert use of rich historical and anthropological sources to answer these questions. She demonstrates that "a potentially chaotic and meaningless world of strangers was transformed into a knowable and predictable world of strangers by the same mechanism humans always use to make their world livable: it was ordered." Lofland offers a brilliant analysis of the various devices used at different times in history to create social and psychological order in cities, concluding with an analysis of the contemporary city, in which the location of the encounter between strangers has come to replace personal appearance as a means of evaluating others. Dr. Lofland also describes how city people initially learn and then act upon the ordering principles dominant in their society. *A World of Strangers* is a wonderfully wise and readable account of how we have come to live as we do.

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