



The Social Experience

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Second Edition

James W. Vander Zanden

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James W. Vander Zanden

The Ohio State University

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*To today's students:
The citizens of the twenty-first century.*

The Social Experience: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

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Preface

What should students *know* and what should they be able to *do* by the end of the first course in sociology? I have asked myself this question countless times while teaching my own courses and writing this text. I find the question a good way to pare down introductory sociology to its essentials: I work backward from what I would like to accomplish to what I will need to bring to a course and a text.

What Should Students Know?

Judged by the content and organization of most introductory textbooks, a broad consensus holds among most sociologists regarding what they would like their students to know: the historical roots of sociology; the discipline's principal theoretical perspectives; sociology's primary research methods; a familiarity with such basic concepts as culture, social structure, formal organization, socialization, social interaction, and deviance; an appreciation for the social implications of class, race, age, and gender inequalities; a grounding in the major social institutions; and a grasp of the dynamics of social change. Our task, then, becomes one of effectively imparting this material to students.

The work of educational and developmental psychologists strongly suggests that furious note taking and memorization is no substitute for processing information in an interactive and personal manner. By providing students with multiple forms and opportunities to grapple with material, we can enhance their mastery of it. Through the opening vignettes, numerous examples, *Thinking Through the Issues* inserts, photos, and cartoons, I seek to draw students into the learning process as active participants.

What Should Students Be Able to Do?

Sociology is a core discipline for preparing students to cope with the radically changing institutions and new and perplexing problems that await them in an uncertain future. From introductory sociology they should acquire a new vision of the social experience and a sharpening of their observational and analytical skills. In their classes in sociology, students should have the opportunity to

probe the implicit, taken-for-granted theories—the unexamined or unconscious belief systems—that function as the lens and filter for their everyday experiences, dictating what they perceive and how they interpret it. As a result, students should never again see social life in quite the same way.

So in addition to imparting the foundations of the sociological heritage, we can assist our students in developing those habits of mind that emphasize intellectual curiosity, logical thinking, and critical analysis, including abilities that permit thoughtful responses to problems and arguments that involve quantitative data. The educated person of the twenty-first century will be a person who is flexible, adaptable, creative, innovative, and comfortable with new and different things—not only a bearer of society's traditions but also one who has the ability to integrate and apply knowledge wisely and so contribute to society's improvement. A number of this textbook's features are provided for the specific purpose of furthering the knowing and doing goals I have set myself.

Chapter-Opening Vignettes

Each chapter opens with an absorbing vignette portraying how our individual experiences are tied to the social world around us. In the tradition of C. Wright Mills, the vignettes demonstrate that our personal fortunes and fates overlap and interpenetrate with the larger structure and history of our society. The stuff of sociology is everyday life and, even more significantly, the issues that confront us as we endeavor to lead fuller, richer, and more fruitful lives. The vignettes are designed to inspire the motivation, curiosity, and interest that will lead students to explore the material further. But additionally, the first course in sociology can increase student awareness of social issues, such as those related to race, gender, poverty, health care, and the environment. Not only should students learn about the social world in which they are immersed, but they should also discover how they can contribute to a more truly human community. In keeping with this emphasis, I have added a chapter, "The Global Society," to this edition.

The Boxes

Education is more than a mere piling up of more and more definitions and bits and pieces of information. We want to encourage our students to think critically and strengthen their desire to recognize problems and attack them logically. Textbooks that are bereft of controversy and unanswered questions leave students believing that facts are the stuff of education. Students derive from them a false sense of security born of cramming their heads with information rather than refining their minds with analysis. This text offers students an opportunity to think critically about sociological information and its relation to their personal lives and world. Many of the boxes are organized by the theme *Issues That Shape Our Lives*. The material in the boxes reveals sociology not as an ivory tower discipline but as one that informs about the human condition. Controversies are presented in ways that students can ponder. Other boxes, organized by the theme *Cultivating a Sociological Consciousness*, shows students how to focus the sociological perspective on a wide range of topics. Successful living in these complex times requires us to reflect on the assumptions underlying our actions and consider new ways of looking at the world and living in it. Nearly half of the boxes are new to this edition.

Thinking Through the Issues Inserts

The *Thinking Through the Issues* inserts can be a powerful adjunct for discussion sessions. Instructors can use them in making sociology classes a time for intellectual enthusiasm—occasions for students to examine, question, prod, and poke and so develop skills in reasoning and problem solving. Sociology, therefore, emerges not as the light and the truth but as a search for light and truth. It is curiosity, discovering things, and asking “Why? Why is it so?” Traditionally, social scientists conceived of thought as something that originates inside each person and then comes to be expressed socially. But increasingly they are coming to realize that thought emerges primarily as a social process and becomes internalized as it is socially expressed. Because reflecting and working together with others is so important in our daily lives and because a substantial portion of our ability to think originates outside ourselves, it behooves us to see class discussion as more than just a peripheral part of an introductory course. One of the best ways instructors foster critical thinking is by serving as facilitators and simultaneously recognizing, that they, too, are learners. Be-

cause individual differences abound, highly stylized procedures for promoting higher-order thinking do not work for everyone. Students must ultimately find out what methods of problem finding and problem solving work best for them.

Lifelong Learning

Education is not the sum of eight, twelve, sixteen, or even twenty years of schooling but a lifelong habit. It should not attempt to train students for a certain job or entitle them to a given amount of income. Rather, education is a lifelong exploration, a striving for growth and for wise living. It is something that we retain when we have lost our texts, burnt our lecture notes, and forgotten the minutiae we have learned by rote for an examination. In the past several years the narrow vocationalism of many programs in higher education has become the focus of critical reports and the subject of controversy (see Chapter 17). Indeed, many colleges and universities have undertaken a soul-searching revamping of their curricula so that their graduates will be prepared to take a larger role in society. Students need to be more than technological mercenaries; they must be capable not only of solving problems but of framing them as well. Moreover, there are better ways of calculating the profit and loss associated with a bachelor's degree than by merely looking at starting salaries. Few people stay in the same line of work over the life course; they switch jobs and even professions. Established jobs and occupations will also disappear, and new ones will emerge. Given the difficulty of predicting which skills will be in demand in the years ahead, students' best career preparation is one that prepares them for lifelong learning.

Using the Text

Clearly, there is no one “right” way to teach introductory sociology. The chapters are sufficiently independent that they can be reordered in their assignment without posing problems for students. Users of this text should make it serve their unique teaching objectives and their students' needs. *The Social Experience* is meant to be a tool. Accordingly, instructors should feel free to omit chapters that do not meet their teaching needs. For those who would prefer a more compact text, I have written *Sociology: The Core*, which contains 12 chapters and is published by McGraw-Hill/Alfred A. Knopf. My experience and success with the core introductory text served as an inspiration in writing *The Social Experience*.

Supplements

There is an excellent assortment of ancillaries available for use with *The Social Experience*. Available directly from McGraw-Hill, or through your local McGraw-Hill sales representative, many of these supplements were specifically designed and developed by P.S. Associates for use with *The Social Experience*:

The **INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCE MANUAL** contains ideas for enriching your course; annotated lists of books, pamphlets, journals, magazines, films, and videos to use in class or recommend for your students' additional use; chapter outlines and resources; chapter organizers and goals; ideas for building upon the text's chapter-opening vignettes in class; sample essays; and a host of other useful resources.

The **TEST BANK** contains approximately 1750 questions (about 75 multiple-choice questions for most chapters). These items have been carefully screened and reviewed for quality and accuracy. It is also available in electronic form for use with IBM and Apple computers.

The **STUDY GUIDE WITH CLASSIC READINGS**, which is very reasonably priced to be affordable for your students, contains study summaries, chapter objectives, outlines, true-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. It also contains selections from the classic sociological literature of Ralph Linton's *On Status and Role* and Weber's *On Science As a Vocation*.

Also available from McGraw-Hill are a number of very high-quality generic supplements:

An extensive, colorful set of acetate transparencies complements the text and goes beyond it to clarify concepts and illustrate them with current information on U.S. and global society.

An extensive, highly impressive set of videos, produced by such major networks as PBS, is also available.

A variety of high-quality software programs is available to run on most major makes of microcomputers.

McGraw-Hill is constantly developing additional tools for your classroom use. Contact McGraw-Hill or your local McGraw-Hill representative to discuss your course needs.

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James W. Vander Zanden

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