

ANNA LEON-GUERRERO

social PROBLEMS

FOURTH EDITION

COMMUNITY, POLICY, AND SOCIAL ACTION



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ANNA LEON-GUERRERO

Pacific Lutheran University

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Preface

During the 2012 presidential campaign, Americans identified the economy, unemployment, and health care as our most important social problems. The candidates, President Barack Obama and Governor Mitt Romney, offered contrasting perspectives on the causes and solutions of these problems. Voters were asked to consider which candidate could handle these problems best.

Although social problems are an important part of our lives, many of us still do not understand the problems we face. Perhaps you are like my students who have never interacted with a homeless person, never been a victim of a violent crime, or never experienced discrimination. How much do you really know about homelessness, violent crime, or discrimination?

I wrote this text with two goals in mind: to offer a better understanding of social problems and to begin working toward real solutions. In the pages that follow, I present three connections to achieve these goals. The first connection is the one between sociology and the study of social problems. Using your sociological imagination (which you'll learn more about in Chapter 1), you will be able to identify the social and structural forces that determine our social problems. I think you'll discover that this course is interesting, challenging, and sometimes frustrating (sort of like real-life discussions about social problems). After you review these different social problems, you may ask, "What can be done about all this?" The second connection that will be made is between social problems and their solutions. In each chapter, we review selected social policies along with innovative community programs that attempt to address or correct these problems. The final connection is the one that I ask you to make yourself: recognizing the social problems in your community and identifying how you can be part of the solution.

Learning Features of This Text

The three connections are made evident in each chapter and throughout the text through a variety of specific learning features:

- A focus on the basis of social inequalities. Using a sociological perspective, we examine how race and ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and age determine our life chances. Chapters 2 through 6 focus specifically on these bases of social inequality and how each contributes to our experience of social problems.

- A focus on the global experience of social problems. Throughout the text, the consequences of social problems throughout the world are highlighted, drawing upon data and research from international scholars and sociologists. In a boxed chapter feature, *Taking a World View*, specific social problems or responses are examined from a global perspective. We look at Japan's educational tracking system (Chapter 8), Mexico's maquiladoras (Chapter 9), India's all-female international news organization (Chapter 11), and alcoholism in Scotland (Chapter 12).
- A focus on social policy and social action. Each chapter includes a discussion on relevant social policies or programs. In addition, each chapter highlights how individuals or groups have made a difference in their community. The chapters include personal stories, some from professionals in their field, whereas others come from ordinary individuals who accomplish extraordinary things. Several feature college-age activists. For example, in Chapter 8, you'll meet Wendy Kopp, the woman behind the Teach for America program; in Chapter 13, you'll meet Max Kenner, student founder of the Bard Prison Initiative, an educational program for prisoners; and in Chapter 17, you'll read the story of Camila Vallejo, who began her activism while she was a student at the University of Chile. The text concludes with a chapter titled "Social Problems and Social Action" that identifies ways you can become more involved.
- What Does It Mean to Me? and Internet and Community Exercises. Each chapter includes questions or activities that can be completed by small student groups or on your own. Some of the exercises ask you to reflect on the material in the chapter. But many of them require you to collect data and information on what is going on in your own state, city, or campus. These exercises take you out of the classroom, away from the textbook, and into your community!

Highlights of the Fourth Edition

I have made a number of revisions in response to comments and feedback received from the many instructors adopting the earlier editions and from other interested instructors and their students.

- Expanding the sociological perspectives. Four theoretical perspectives (functionalist, conflict, feminist, and interactionist) are presented in each chapter, identifying how each perspective defines the causes and consequences of specific problems. Additional material has been incorporated in Chapter 3 (multiracial and ethnic attrition), Chapter 7 (the changing definition of the family), Chapter 11 (media coverage of female political candidates), Chapter 12 (the influence of the peer subculture and pressure on drug use), Chapter 13 (race, class, and media coverage of crime), and Chapter 16 (the politics of fear). In Chapter 1 I've included a general overview of basic sociological terms and concepts.
- Keeping it current. The focus of this text is unlike most other social problems texts, featuring a strong emphasis on social policy and action. It is necessary with each edition to provide an update on significant social policy decisions and debates. In this edition, the following social policy discussions have been updated: immigration (Chapter 3), same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (Chapter 5), No Child Left Behind (Chapter 8), and an expanded discussion on health care reform, including the

U.S. Supreme Court 2012 ruling on the Affordable Care Act (Chapter 10). The impact of the Great Recession was hard to ignore, with revised discussion on the impact of the economy on the affordability of a college education (Chapters 1 and 8), working poor (Chapter 2), older workers (Chapters 6 and 9), the poor (Chapter 3), and the average American worker (Chapter 9).

- Data matters. The chapters focusing on problems, Chapters 2 through 16, have been updated to include U.S. and global data, as well as new U.S. state maps for Chapters 3 through 6. Data are important for understanding the extent of our social problems and recognizing populations vulnerable to them.

I wanted to write a book that captured the experiences that I've shared with students in my own social problems course. I sensed the frustration and futility that many felt by the end of the semester—imagine all those weeks of discussing nothing else but “problems”! I decided that my message about the importance of *understanding social problems* should be complemented with a message on the importance of *taking social action*.

Social action doesn't just happen in Washington, DC, or in your state's capital, and political leaders aren't the only ones engaged in such efforts. Social action takes place on your campus, in your neighborhood, in your town, in whatever you define as your “community.”

There were stories to be told by ordinary people—community, church, business, or student leaders—who recognized that they had the power to make a difference in the community. No act is too small to make a difference. Despite the persistence and severity of many social problems, members of our community have not given up. For example, my community was affected by an act of violence Thanksgiving weekend 2009. Four police officers from my hometown of Lakewood, Washington, were gunned down in a local coffee shop. Though the site of horrific violence, the coffee shop was transformed into a makeshift memorial site as individuals and families left flowers, balloons, condolences, and stuffed animals to honor the dead officers. Thirteen days after the shooting, the coffee shop reopened at 8:13 a.m., the exact time of the shootings. The Lakewood police chief was the first in line and behind him were some 150 other customers—fellow officers, family members, friends, and residents—all recognizing the importance of reclaiming the site. The coffee shop and the community continue to thrive today. Stories like this and others inspired me and my students to find our own paths to social action.

I hope that by the time you reach the end of this text, with your newfound sociological imagination, you will find your own path to social action. Wherever it leads you, I wish you all the best.

Instructor Teaching Site

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A password-protected instructor teaching site provides one integrated source for all instructor materials, including the following key components for each chapter:

- A test bank offers a diverse set of test questions and answers for each chapter in the book. Multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer/essay questions for every chapter will aid instructors in assessing students' progress and understanding.
- PowerPoint presentations are designed to assist with lecture and review, highlighting essential content, features, and artwork from the book.
- Lecture notes summarize key concepts on a chapter-by-chapter basis to help with preparation for lectures and class discussions.
- Lively and stimulating ideas for class activities are suggested that can be used in class to reinforce active learning.
- Chapter-specific discussion questions help launch classroom interaction by prompting students to engage with the material and by reinforcing important content.
- Each chapter includes audio links related to important topics and designed to supplement key points within the text. Carefully selected, web-based video links feature relevant interviews, lectures, personal stories, inquiries, and other content for use in independent or classroom-based explorations of key topics.

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An open-access student study site provides a variety of additional resources to build students' understanding of the book content and extend their learning beyond the classroom. Students will have access to the following features for each chapter:

- Mobile-friendly eFlashcards reinforce understanding of key terms and concepts that have been outlined in the chapters.
- Mobile-friendly web quizzes allow for independent assessment of progress made in learning course material.
- Web resources direct students to relevant sites on the Web for further research on important chapter topics.
- Video and audio links feature meaningful content for use in independent or classroom-based exploration of key topics.

Interactive eBook

An *Interactive eBook* version of the text is available to students and provides a contemporary, multimedia-integrated presentation for learning. In addition to a full electronic textbook, students can link directly to video, audio, additional enrichment readings, glossary terms, and other relevant resources, bringing sociology to life in a way that a traditional print text cannot.

Audio



Video



CQ Researcher



Research/Social Impact



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Reference



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About the Author



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