

SOCIOLOGY

in our times

the essentials

Diana Kendall



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Baylor University



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PREFACE

Visiting with instructors and students across the United States and Canada, I learned that three questions are paramount in people's minds about a sociology textbook: Is this book interesting and relevant to students' lives? Is the book well organized and easy to understand? Does it show how sociological theory and research can be applied to everyday life and to the pressing social issues we face in our diverse society and rapidly changing world? *Sociology in Our Times* was written with these three questions in mind, and responses from faculty and students since it was first published have been most gratifying: the answer to all three questions is an emphatic *yes*. An example comes from Tonesha Harris, who was a student in Professor John Zipp's introductory sociology course at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, when she was asked what she liked most about *Sociology in Our Times*.

Very contemporary in regards to the ever changing society. Every time I read something from one of the chapters, minutes later it was on the primetime news. . . . This book made me feel like part of my generation's history simply because many of the issues pertained to me, friends, family, etc. It was like you understand my generation and its changes and you showed this by talking about it. Thanks! (Correspon-

dence with author, April 13, 1996, used with student's permission.)

Comments such as Tonesha's have been so positive that I created *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* to present the essentials of sociology in a less expensive, paperback edition for colleagues who want to provide students with an outstanding core text that highlights the major topics found in the longer, hardcover version but minimizes the cost to students.

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials is not a cut-and-paste version of the hardcover book. Care has been taken to make sure that it is a cutting-edge book that emphasizes the relevance of sociology for students. It does this in at least two ways: (1) by including a diversity of classical and contemporary theory, interesting and relevant research, and lived experiences that accurately mirror the diversity in society itself; and (2) by showing students that sociology involves important questions and issues that they confront both personally and vicariously (for example, through the media). This text speaks to a wide variety of students and captures their interest by taking into account their concerns and perspectives. The research used in this text includes the best work of classical and established contemporary sociologists—including many white women and people of color—and it

weaves an inclusive treatment of *all* people into the examination of sociology in *all* chapters. Although a number of introductory sociology texts give the *appearance* of inclusion, most existing texts initially were written with class, race, and gender neatly *compartmentalized* into their “appropriate” chapters and perhaps an occasional “diversity” box. Not only does that approach *marginalize* an increasing proportion of the students in introductory sociology classes—as well as in the U.S. population—but it also leads many students to view race, class, and gender as nothing more than variables in sociological research (for example, statistics on welfare, crime, and homelessness). That approach downplays the significance of the interlocking nature of class, race, and gender in all topics examined by sociologists.

I would encourage you to read a chapter in the book and judge for yourself the writing style, which I have sought to make both accessible and engaging for students and instructors. Not only are concepts and theories presented in a straightforward and understandable way, but also the wealth of concrete examples and lived experiences woven throughout each chapter makes the relevance of sociological theory and research abundantly clear to students.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials is divided into fifteen chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces students to the sociological imagination and traces the development of sociological thinking. The chapter sets forth the major theoretical perspectives used by sociologists in analyzing compelling social issues and provides a thorough description of both quantitative and qualitative methods of sociological research. The next five chapters focus on the nature of social life and core sociological concepts. In **Chapter 2**, culture is spotlighted as either a stabilizing force or a force that can generate discord, conflict, and even violence in societies. Cultural diversity and hate

crimes are discussed as contemporary cultural issues. Unique coverage is given to popular culture and leisure and to divergent perspectives on popular culture. **Chapter 3** looks at positive and negative aspects of socialization and presents an innovative analysis of gender and racial-ethnic socialization. **Chapter 4** examines social structure and social interaction in detail, using homelessness as a sustained example of the dynamic interplay of structure and interaction in society. Unique to this chapter are discussions of the sociology of emotions and of personal space as viewed through the lenses of race, class, gender, and age. **Chapter 5** analyzes groups and organizations, including innovative forms of social organization and ways in which organizational structures may differentially impact people based on race, class, gender, and age. **Chapter 6** examines diverse perspectives on deviance, crime, and the criminal justice system. Key issues are dramatized for students through an analysis of recent research on gangs and the lived experiences of gang members. In the next three chapters, we examine social differences and social inequality, looking at issues of class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender. **Chapter 7** addresses global systems of stratification and the major perspectives on the U.S. class system. The chapter analyzes the causes and consequences of inequality and poverty. The ideology and accessibility of the American Dream is a recurring theme in the chapter. **Chapter 8** extends the discussion to race and ethnicity, using as an illustration the historical relationship (or lack of it) between sports and upward mobility by persons from diverse racial-ethnic groups. A thorough analysis of prejudice, discrimination, theoretical perspectives, and the experiences of racial and ethnic groups is presented, along with global racial and ethnic issues in the twenty-first century. **Chapter 9** examines sex and gender with special emphasis on gender stratification in historical perspective. Linkages between gender socialization and contemporary gender inequality are described and illustrated by lived experiences and perspectives on body image.

Next are four chapters that examine social institutions, making students more aware of their importance and showing how problems in one social institution have a significant impact on others. Families and age are explored in **Chapter 10**, which begins by focusing on families in global perspective. The chapter next looks at families throughout the life course and the diversity found in U.S. families today. It presents an analysis of transitions in family life and how aging affects both individuals and their families. Education and religion in global perspective are presented in **Chapter 11**, and important sociological theories pertaining to education and religion are discussed in detail. **Chapter 12** discusses the intertwining nature of politics, government, and the military. Political systems are examined in global perspective, and politics and government in the United States are analyzed with attention to governmental bureaucracy and the military-industrial complex. The issues of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and the military are recurring themes in the chapter. **Chapter 13** delves into the economy and work, examining global economic systems, the social organization of work in the United States, unemployment, and worker resistance and activism. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the global economy in the twenty-first century.

The final two chapters focus on social dynamics and social change. **Chapter 14** examines population, urbanization, and medicine, looking at demography, global population change, and the process and consequences of urbanization. Special attention is given to the crisis in health care. **Chapter 15** ends the textbook with a discussion of collective behavior and social change. Environmental activism is used as a sustained example to help students grasp the importance of collective behavior and social movements in producing social change. The concluding section on the twenty-first century takes a final look at the physical environment, population, technology, social institutions, and change.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

The following special features are specifically designed to reflect the themes of relevance and diversity in *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*, as well as support students' learning.

INTERESTING AND ENGAGING LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGHOUT CHAPTERS

Authentic first-person accounts are used as opening vignettes and throughout each chapter to create interest and give concrete meaning to the topics being discussed. Lived experiences provide opportunities for students to examine social life beyond their own experiences and for instructors to systematically incorporate into lectures and discussions an array of interesting and relevant topics demonstrating to students the value of applying sociology to their everyday lives. Some examples of lived experiences include:

- Drew Barrymore, an actress well known to students, describes how she was the victim of abuse as a child (Chapter 3, "Socialization").
- Ricardo Lopez, a former gang member, writes a letter to the son he hopes to have some day, explaining why he hopes the boy will never get involved in gangs (Chapter 6, "Deviance and Crime").
- Ben Hamper describes his first day working as a riveter on the General Motors assembly line (Chapter 13, "The Economy and Work").
- Lois Gibbs tells how she became an environmental activist after learning that her Niagara Falls, New York, neighborhood was polluted by chemical waste (Chapter 15, "Collective Behavior and Social Change").

FOCUS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Each chapter has a brief quiz that relates the sociological perspective to the pressing social issues presented in the opening vignette. (Answers

are provided on the subsequent page.) Topics such as these will pique students' interest:

- "How Much Do You Know About Homeless Persons?" (Chapter 4, "Social Structure and Interaction in Everyday Life")
- "How Much Do You Know About Race, Ethnicity, and Sports?" (Chapter 8, "Race and Ethnicity")
- "How Much Do You Know About Body Image and Gender?" (Chapter 9, "Sex and Gender")

EMPHASIS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* analyzes our interconnected world and reveals how the sociological imagination extends beyond national borders. Global implications of all topics are examined throughout each chapter and in the "Sociology in Global Perspective" box found in each chapter. Here are a few examples:

- Hostility toward immigrants in Western Europe (Chapter 2, "Culture")
- Sexual harassment in the former Soviet Republic and other regions (Chapter 5, "Groups and Organizations")
- Slavery in Brazil today (Chapter 7, "Social Stratification and Class")

USING THE MEDIA TO ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING Like most people in our society, students get much of their information about the social world from the media. A significant benefit of a sociology course is encouraging critical thinking about such information. Here are the topics of a few "Sociology and Media" boxes that will foster critical thinking skills:

- "The Simpsons: An All-American Family" (Chapter 10, "Families and Aging")
- "In the Media Age: The Electronic Church and the Internet" (Chapter 11, "Education and Religion")

- "Labor Unions in the Cartoon World" (Chapter 13, "The Economy and Work")
- "AIDS in the News" (Chapter 14, "Population, Urbanization, and Medicine")

NEW FEATURES IN *SOCIOLOGY IN OUR TIMES: THE ESSENTIALS*

The new features in *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* enhance the materials in the text by providing students with an opportunity to get involved. Here is a summary of the new features:

NEW BOX: "YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!" HELPS GET STUDENTS INVOLVED IN EACH CHAPTER "You Can Make a Difference!" addresses the ways in which students can find out how the chapter theme affects their own lives. For example:

- "Responding to a Cry for Help" (Chapter 1) makes students aware of the warning signs of suicide and provides addresses for getting more information on suicide prevention.
- "Understanding People from Other Cultures" (Chapter 2) passes on techniques developed by Daisy Kabagarama for communicating across cultures. It also provides information on Web sites on the Internet that focus on multicultural issues and cultural diversity.
- "Helping Victims of Stalking and Battering" (Chapter 10) describes the work of some Austin, Texas, college students who serve as volunteers at a center for women who are victims of domestic violence and gives safety tips for people who fear for their personal safety.

INTERNET ASSIGNMENTS AND SOURCES *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials* not only has its own home page on the Internet, but it also provides outstanding assignments and exercises that help students use the Internet. Exercises are referenced in each chapter and compiled at the end of the text so that students will have access to all exercises in

one location. These were drafted by Allan Liska and are designed to help students find sociological data on the Internet and to reinforce the theories and research discussed in the text.

END-OF-CHAPTER SUMMARY IN QUESTION-AND-ANSWER FORMAT

Chapter summaries provide a built-in review for students by re-examining material covered in the chapter in an easy-to-read question-and-answer format to review, highlight, and reinforce the most important concepts and issues discussed in each chapter.

IN-TEXT LEARNING AIDS

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials includes a number of other pedagogical aids to promote students' mastery of sociological perspectives. These include:

- **Chapter Outlines.** A concise outline at the beginning of each chapter gives students an overview of major topics and a convenient aid for review.
- **Questions and Issues.** After the opening lived experience in each chapter, a series of introductory questions invites students to think about the major topics discussed in that chapter. New to *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*—A “Chapter Focus Question” linking the chapter topic to the compelling social theme analyzed in the chapter.
- **Key Terms.** Major concepts and key terms are concisely defined and highlighted in bold print within the text to avoid disrupting students' reading. These concepts and terms are also listed at the end of the chapters and in the Glossary at the back of the text.
- **Questions for Critical Thinking.** Each chapter concludes with “Questions for Critical Thinking” to encourage students to reflect on important issues, to develop their own critical-thinking skills, and to highlight how ideas presented in one chapter often build on those developed previously.

STUDY GUIDE

I created the *Study Guide* to give students further opportunities to think sociologically. It includes a chapter summary, learning objectives, a chapter outline, key terms, a section for analyzing and understanding chapter boxes, sample test questions, and “Diversity Issues”—a series of questions that encourage critical thinking about the implications of race, class, and gender on issues discussed in the chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials would not have been possible without the insightful critiques of these colleagues who have reviewed some or all of this book. My profound thanks to each and every one for engaging in this time-consuming process. They are:

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I invite you to send your comments and suggestions about this book to me in care of:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Kendall received a Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin, where she was invited to membership in Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Her areas of specialization and primary research interests are sociological theory, complex organizations and institutions, race/ethnicity, and gender. In addition to *Sociology in Our Times*, she is author—along with Jane Lothian Murray and Rick Linden of the University of Manitoba—of *Sociology in Our Times*, First Canadian Edition (ITP Nelson, 1997). She also is the author of *Race, Class, and Gender in a Diverse Society: A Text-Reader* (Allyn and Bacon, 1997), and *Social Problems in a Diverse Society* (1998). Her articles and presented papers primarily focus on nontraditional students (white women and people of color) in medical schools, and she is currently

writing a book entitled *Still Square Pegs in Round Holes? White Women and People of Color in the Medical Profession*. Diana Kendall is currently a sociology professor at Baylor University, where she teaches Introduction to Sociology every semester, as well as an undergraduate course in Social Theory and a graduate seminar in Advanced Sociological Theory. She also enjoys teaching courses in race and ethnic relations, gender studies, and social stratification. Previously, she chaired the Social and Behavioral Science Division at Austin Community College. Professor Kendall is a member of the council of the undergraduate education section of the American Sociological Association. She is also a member of the Sociologists for Women in Society and the Society for the Study of Social Problems.



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CHAPTER 1

The Sociological Perspective



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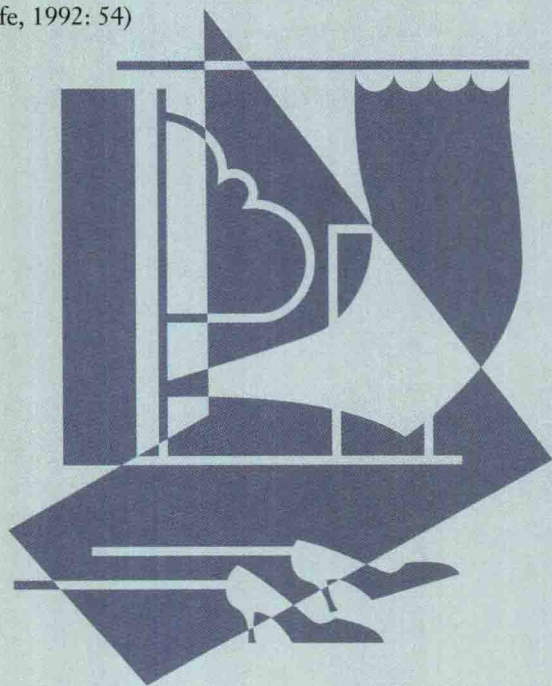
Ethical Issues in Sociological Research



Several years ago, the former director of the New York Governor's Office of Motion Picture and Television Development (who was unemployed and having major financial problems) climbed out onto the windowsill of her ninth-floor Manhattan apartment and jumped to her death. Portions of her suicide note provide us with insights on the thoughts of a person about to kill herself:

I want so much to have something profound to say, but I don't—just that I wish it had been different, but it wasn't. [I] can't quite believe I'm doing this—so please don't anyone blame themselves. It's no one's fault. I'm just hurting too much, with no way to make it stop. . . . The fact that it's spring makes it worse! Spring is for hope, for new beginnings, and I have none! All I have is shame and disappointment. That's not a lot to show for all the years that I've already lived. . . .

I just can't do it anymore—I guess my needs are too great and my ability to fulfill them too meager. I've tried my best. I truly have—I just don't have it in me anymore to keep trying, to keep working. (Wolfe, 1992: 54)



Why do people commit suicide? Can sociological research help us understand the seemingly individualistic act of taking one's own life? Do individuals (at least under some circumstances) have a right to end their own lives? These questions, as is true with others posed in this book, may produce strong responses. In this chapter, suicide is used as an example of a problem that sociologists examine. We also will see how sociological research methods might be used to answer complex questions, and we wrestle with some of the difficulties in attempting to study human behavior.

People in various occupations may have different perspectives on suicide. A journalist may wonder whether a suicide is "newsworthy." Is either the deceased or the family well-known? Did the suicide occur at an unusual time or location? A physician might assess the nature and extent of the physical injuries that caused death to occur. A psychiatrist might evaluate the mental state of the deceased prior to committing suicide. A minister or a social worker might consider the appropriate counseling for the family. Law enforcement officers might want to determine if the death was in fact a suicide or whether charges should be brought against someone for causing or assisting in the death.

What, then, is the sociologist's perspective on the problem of suicide? The sociological perspective is a point of view that helps us understand human behavior in the larger social context in which it occurs. Accordingly, sociologists would focus on the social environment in which suicide occurs, seeking explanations by analyzing *why* and *under what circumstances* that behavior takes place.