



## FOREWORD

We hardly need another introductory sociology text, so the question is, Why do we need *Sociology in Action*? My answer is quite simple. This is a book that definitely will accomplish what the author intends, provided that those who adopt it require students to use it. This is a book that students will not be able to skim or read occasionally. They will have to use it, reread parts of it, pause and think and discuss and write about what they've read, and apply what they've read to understand and solve problems and issues presented to them in case studies. David Hachen has written a book that will require students to *take* action to understand sociology *in action*. The reasons for this are the two pedagogical techniques around which the book is organized: the use of case studies and the critical inquiry method of teaching and learning. As the author states in the Preface, "In contrast to standard textbooks in which coverage of sociological ideas, theories, and research is the primary objective, this book is designed to teach students how to *use* sociological ideas and knowledge" (pp. xvii-xviii).

To my knowledge, this is the first introductory book in sociology that has a very high potential to develop fundamental skills systematically, skills that every educated person should possess, and to provide an excellent introduction to the discipline of sociology. *Sociology in Action* is designed to contribute explicitly to several general education, liberal arts learning goals: critical thinking, problem solving,

and both oral and written communication. As students learn about sociology, they are asked to deconstruct sociologically a variety of case studies through problem solving, critical reasoning, and oral and written communication.

Hachen begins each chapter with a case study and then introduces the reader to a thoughtful, complete, and compelling sociological analysis of the issues and problems the case study presents. In this way, the author models for students what he expects each of them to learn and to be able to do from using his book. Each chapter builds on the preceding one. Each chapter gradually introduces students to key ideas and concepts that are necessary to understand social connections and then asks students to apply these ideas and concepts to a case study at the end of each chapter so they can learn to see through sociological eyes. In this thoughtful, organized way, students are given plenty of opportunity to practice sociological analysis and to sharpen their skills as they learn to see not only the world as a sociologist does, but also how sociology can be used to solve problems that emerge from social connections and interaction. By doing this, students will learn incrementally to do something that they could not do before encountering this text—use critical thinking and problem solving along with sociological knowledge to understand a complex social situation.

The proof of this is in the pudding. If students are asked during the first day of class to analyze and comment on the first case study presented in Chapter 1 and then are asked to do the same assignment again on the last day of class, the results will be dramatic. Using this book, students will leave the introductory course knowing and seeing what they have learned and taken away from it. There will be no guessing on their part. What they learn about sociology will not be a mystery, for students will know at the very beginning that they do not have a sociologist's ability to analyze cases that present real issues and problems. After practice with other cases, following Hachen's model of seeing with a sociological eye, students will gain increasing competency and understanding, and they also will be able to gauge their

increasing sophistication with sociological analysis. The best form of learning is when students are able to know what it is they have learned and to be confident about it.

The case study method is long overdue in sociology. Professional programs—nursing, business, medicine, law, engineering—long have used the case method of instruction with great success. Cases present real-world problems and issues that do not have simple, linear answers. They are a good fit with the sociological perspective and with sociological analysis. It is also long overdue that an introductory textbook is designed not only to teach students sociology but also to help them learn some of the fundamental learning goals of a liberal arts education—how to think more clearly and critically, how to problem solve, and how to write and speak more coherently about what they are learning.

In brief, this book has the merit of bringing together in a wonderful ensemble the rudiments of sociological knowledge, critical thinking, and sociological analysis about case examples. In the strange anthropological world of the text as we know it, this is no small accomplishment.

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## P R E F A C E

I have created this book for educators who want to use an active learning approach to introduce their students to sociology. As such, this book differs in three important ways from standard introductory books:

1. The book's objective is to help students develop a *skill*—their ability to “read” and analyze situations sociologically.
2. Development of student skills and their “sociological eyesight” is facilitated through practice using *decision cases*, relatively short problem-centered narratives that promote critical thinking.
3. The book's structure promotes the *progressive* and *incremental* development of this skill. Subsequent chapters build on and return to previous material so that as the course proceeds, student competencies are enhanced and expanded.



### OBJECTIVE: SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The objective of the book is the development of a *skill*—the ability to “read” and analyze situations sociologically. In contrast to standard textbooks in which coverage of sociological ideas, theories, and research is the primary objective, this book is designed to teach

students how to *use* sociological ideas and knowledge. Upon completing a course that uses this book, students should be able to do things they could not have done prior to taking the course. Among the important skills students should acquire are the ability to do the following:

- Identify and describe the social connections (social relationships, groups, networks, organizations) among social actors in a given situation
- Use multiple theoretical perspectives to reframe and see situations from different angles
- Decode the culture in a given situation by analyzing symbols, stories, and worldviews so that situations can be understood from the point of view of the social actors
- Uncover inequalities by examining the distribution of resources and power to see how class, race, and gender differences affect the ability of people to pursue their interests
- Imagine futures by investigating how driving forces can propel social change

These skills are taught through the materials contained in the five chapters in Part I of the book: “Seeing Society,” “Using Theory,” “Decoding Culture,” “Uncovering Inequalities and Power,” and “Imagining Futures.” In each chapter, core sociological ideas are introduced by showing how they can be used to analyze real situations. Each chapter concludes with a “Sociological Eye Analysis Guide” consisting of questions that students can use to guide themselves through a sociological analysis of a situation using the skills they have acquired in the chapter.

By emphasizing skill development, this book also is designed to enhance four student competencies that all college graduates should possess:

1. *Analysis*: the ability to think clearly and critically, to dissect situations, to develop rigorous arguments for conclusions, and to evaluate evidence for and against claims that are being made.
2. *Perspective*: the ability to investigate situations from different perspectives, to take others' points of view, to compare and contrast different perspectives, and to be cognizant of one's own assumptions.
3. *Problem Solving*: the ability to diagnose a problem, to formulate various solutions and strategies creatively, to link proposed solutions to analyses of the situation, to evaluate alternative courses of action systematically, and to imagine implementation problems.
4. *Communication*: the ability to convey to others ideas, analysis, and arguments; to write, read, speak, and listen effectively; to work with others on collaborative projects; and to vary communication styles based on different types of audiences and settings.

### PEDAGOGY: DECISION CASES

Because developing skills requires practice, the pedagogy of this book focuses on creating opportunities for students to do sociology. Practice in doing sociology is facilitated by the use of *decision cases*, relatively short written narratives of some real-life situation in which a person, group of people, organization, or community faces a problem or dilemma. Many educators in professional schools (business, teacher training, and public administration) now use decision cases to develop students' higher-order critical thinking skills. Decision cases challenge students to use acquired knowledge because they involve problem-centered learning. Usually, a social actor in a case has to make a decision and there is uncertainty about how she or he should proceed. Cases typically are written in such a way that the final outcome is unknown and there is uncertainty about what happened and

why. As a result, cases are open to multiple interpretations, allowing students to use acquired sociological concepts and theories to develop “readings” of the case. Through practice with decision cases, students learn how to analyze situations they could encounter not in a naive fashion but in a manner informed by a sociological perspective.

Because practice is so important, this book contains a wide variety of decision cases. Included are cases about conflicts, problems, and dilemmas in schools and hospitals, within families and businesses, among friends and within communities. These cases deal with an array of sociological issues, including social inequalities, identities, cultural differences, organizational change, the environment, and sexism and racism. In each of the five chapters in Part I, there are two cases. Each chapter begins with a decision case. The body of the chapter introduces sociological ideas and concepts by using them to analyze the first decision case. The chapter concludes with another decision case so that students can practice the specific skills that they have acquired using that chapter’s Sociological Eye Analysis Guide. Part II contains additional decision cases, providing more opportunities for students to practice their skill at reading situations sociologically.

### ORGANIZATION: INCREMENTAL LEARNING

The book is structured under the assumption that learning occurs incrementally, with new ideas and skills building on and enhancing previous ideas and skills. In contrast to standard textbooks that organize material by content topics, this book organizes material in terms of a series of skills. The five chapters in Part I are designed to help students acquire progressively higher-order skills. The material in Chapter 1 helps students see situations sociologically by identifying and describing a variety of social connections among social actors. Chapter 2 builds on this skill by showing students how they can use theories to develop multiple readings of social situations and to shift perspectives.



The materials in Chapters 3 through 5 are designed to help students situate cases within various contexts. Chapter 3 looks at the importance of investigating situations from the point of view of the social actors and shows students how to do this by decoding a culture's symbols, stories, and worldviews. Chapter 4 examines the inequalities that often characterize situations. Students learn how to uncover social class, race/ethnic, and gender inequalities and how to use their knowledge of social inequalities to understand the varying power different social actors have. Finally, with the material in Chapter 5, students learn how to imagine future scenarios by examining how the driving forces of demography, technology, and collective action can lead to social change.

The way in which each chapter is organized also highlights for students how subsequent skills build on prior skills. Chapters begin with a brief reading of that chapter's introductory case using the skills that were emphasized in the previous chapters. Then, at the end of the chapter, I summarize the new material by discussing how acquired skills allow students to do something new and different. I also foreshadow material in the next chapter by noting issues that are not addressed with these skills.

The incremental nature of this book allows students to revisit earlier cases and reread them using the new skills that they have acquired in a specific chapter. Through both the ordering of the chapters and the internal structure of each chapter, students can see the progressive series of skills that they are acquiring. Therefore, as students proceed through the course, they will be able to gauge their increasing competence and sophistication at analyzing situations sociologically.



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