To my fellow instructors of sociology, who strive for creative teaching and the development of their students’ sociological perspective.

With my sincere admiration and appreciation,

[Signature]

Jim Henslin
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# The Sociological Perspective

## Part I

### THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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WELCOME TO SOCIOLOGY! I’ve loved sociology since I was in my teens, and I hope you enjoy it, too. Sociology is fascinating because it is about human behavior, and many of us find that it holds the key to understanding social life.

If you like to watch people and try to figure out why they do what they do, you will like sociology. Sociology pries open the doors of society so you can see what goes on behind them. Mastering Sociology stresses how profoundly our society and the groups to which we belong influence us. Social class, for example, sets us on a particular path in life. For some, the path leads to more education, interesting jobs, higher income, and better health, but for others it leads to dropping out of school, dead-end jobs, poverty, and even a higher risk of illness and disease. These paths are so significant that they affected your chances of making it to your first birthday, as well as of getting in trouble with the police. If you marry, they will even influence how you relate to your spouse, how many children you will have, and how you will rear them.

When I took my first course in sociology, I was “hooked.” Seeing how marvelously my life had been influenced by these larger social forces opened my eyes to a new world, one that has been fascinating to explore. I hope that you will have this experience, too.

From how people become homeless to how they become presidents, from why people commit suicide to why women are discriminated against in every society around the world—all are part of sociology. This breadth is what makes sociology so intriguing. We can place the sociological lens on broad features of society, such as social class, gender, and race–ethnicity, and then immediately turn our focus on the smaller, more intimate level. If we look at two people interacting—whether quarreling or kissing—we see how these broad features of society are being played out in their lives.

One of sociology’s many pleasures is that as you study life in groups (which can be taken as a definition of sociology), whether those groups are in some far-off part of the world or in some nearby corner of your own society, you gain new insights into who you are and how you got that way. As you see how their customs affect them, the effects of your own society on yourself become more visible.

This book, then, can be part of your intellectual journey, an adventure that can lead you to a new way of looking at your social world—and in the process, help you to better understand both society and yourself.

I wish you the very best in college—and in your career afterward. It is my sincere desire that Mastering Sociology will contribute to that success.

Jim Henslin
Department of Sociology
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

P.S. I enjoy communicating with students, so feel free to comment on your experiences with this text. Because I travel a lot, it is best to reach me by e-mail: henslin@aol.com
I am pleased that you have chosen Mastering Sociology, a new approach to teaching sociology. From the beginning to the end, this book is a learning-centered text. It is designed to teach students, not simply to present information. You will be pleased at how well your students learn from this text and how well it complements your teaching.

Let me tell you why I wrote this book and then give you an overview of how it is laid out.

I have taught intro students for decades—with an enthusiasm for sociology that stays with me and that you should see shining through in this text. I always enjoyed the intro course, as the students responded favorably to innovative teaching. And I was always experimenting, finding new ways of reaching students. As I did this, I didn’t hold back on the content, as it was my responsibility to teach sociology. I felt that if I approached teaching in this way, students would learn. And they did. And we both enjoyed the course.

But two things bothered me. First, students often asked me, “What should I learn in this chapter?” and my answer was, “Learn it all.” And, of course, when I said this, the students would leave perplexed. Mastering Sociology solves this problem. From the way I have designed this book, the students will know precisely what they are expected to learn—and they will know if they learned it.

Second, I taught at an average college, with students whose backgrounds were highly diverse. Some students were highly qualified academically, while others had difficulty with basic academics. Many of these latter students would do poorly, and I kept thinking that there must be a way to reach all students, no matter their level of preparation. But how?

Mastering Sociology solves this problem, too. Built upon solid pedagogical principles, this text is an exceptionally effective teaching tool. You, of course, are the judge as you use this book in the classroom. I certainly hope that your experience matches my expectations and confirms these goals.

Today’s students are not the same as the students of previous decades. They have no less ability, but they have grown up in an instantaneous world. Their experience is that of quick snapshots of events swirling around them. Their way of thinking is built around short bursts. Instead of lamenting this orientation, this book is designed to capture the approach that students have to their world.

As will become apparent as you teach from this text, I have not sacrificed sociological content. Students will learn sociology, not just some puffery trying to pass itself off as sociology, a masquerade that most of us find quite distasteful.

You now have the “why,” the “who,” and the “what.” Let’s get an overview of the “how,” so you can see how this book works and precisely what makes it so different. I expect that you will find this text to be the most effective you have ever used. This is a bold statement, but I think this will be the result that you will have the pleasure of enjoying. Let’s see why I expect you to have such a positive teaching experience.

The Modular Approach

The modular approach is not new, but combined with the personalization of sociology in this text, along with the reviews I have built into the chapters, your students will learn well.

I have broken each chapter into short, coherent units, which enhance learning by matching the students’ approach to thinking. Each unit is self-contained, so after students complete a unit, they can take a break and do something else if they prefer. Following each unit is a series of questions that are an essential part of the learning process. Sequential with the unit’s presentation, the questions do not just let students know...
how they are doing, but they also teach. Repeating the unit's main points, the questions are a form of review. These questions are such an essential part of the learning process that I have written each one myself. If they were the usual add-on, I would have had the publisher get someone to write them. Writing the questions so they would accomplish this teaching/learning goal was highly time-consuming, but this form of evaluative review is essential to the goal of *Mastering Sociology*.

But I get ahead of myself. Let me back up and give you an overview of the book, starting with how the chapters are laid out.

**Getting Started**

This short opening to each chapter is designed to arouse the students’ interest by showing how the coming chapter is relevant to their life.

**Unit Heading**

Each unit heading is marked clearly by its unit number and title. The title indicates the topic that follows.

**What Am I Supposed to Learn?**

Here I spell out the unit’s learning objectives. Each learning objective is numbered and written clearly. Students will know precisely what they are to learn.

**The Narrative**

After the learning objectives comes the presentation of the sociological materials. I have written the narrative clearly, directing it in a personal fashion to the student. Students should gain the impression that I am talking to them directly, as this is precisely what I am trying to do. If teaching/learning is to be successful, it is important to engage the students in the process, which is what the narrative does.

To attain clarity of learning objectives and to personalize the presentation of sociological concepts and research, it is not necessary to sacrifice sociological content. Although *Mastering Sociology* makes learning both easy and enjoyable, what the students learn in this text matches the content of standard courses. Students will be introduced to sociology’s major ideas, theories, and research. *Mastering Sociology* changes the form, not the content.

**Testing Myself: Did I Learn It?**

Following the content of each unit comes a self-test. I have written these questions both to match the learning objectives and to provide a review of the unit. The questions are direct and straightforward, designed to measure learning. After studying a unit, students should have little trouble answering these questions correctly. If students miss a question, they will be able to spot their weakness and go back to the unit to learn that particular material.

Everything in this text revolves around learning, including these self-test questions. As I said earlier, these questions are such an essential part of the learning process that I have written them myself. They are a way to help students attain mastery of the learning objectives.

*This sequence repeats throughout each chapter: Getting Started, the unit number and title, the learning objectives, the sociological narrative, and the self-test.*

**Pulling It All Together**

The last unit of each chapter is followed by *Pulling It All Together*. Here I again reinforce the students’ learning by reviewing the chapter’s learning goals. I have written a brief summary for each learning objective, answers that are inadequate for students to memorize, but that serve as a solid review.
Five Additional Features that Enhance Learning

These additional features are:

**MAKING IT PERSONAL**

This is probably my favorite feature of the entire book, the one whose writing gave me the most pleasure. In this feature, I have picked up some element of the sociological presentation and have related it directly to the students’ life. To point out how directly sociology is connected to what the students are experiencing in society lets them see that sociology is not something that belongs only in the classroom. By personalizing sociology, students not only learn more but they do so in a much more enjoyable way.

You will find that *Making It Personal* enhances your teaching. Students will grasp sociological concepts and ideas in a new, refreshing way. This feature, which helps students see how society has impacted their lives, even their intimate orientations to life, truly helps make sociology come alive. *Making It Personal* can also serve as an essential tool to stimulate provocative discussions that enliven your classroom.

**FROM ANOTHER STUDENT**

Many students have written me over the years, pointing out how my text has helped them in one way or another. The content of *Mastering Sociology* is the same, so in this feature I reproduce some of these notes, always with permission of the students who wrote them. The intention of this feature is simple, to encourage students to read the text and learn sociology.

**IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE**

This feature points to items that I have written on particular topics. As students read these one-page pieces online, they will better see how their world is immersed in sociology. Because these short analyses are built on interesting events, you might want to incorporate some of them into your course. They feature local, national, and international events, as well as other matters of human interest. In them, I make the sociology explicit, so the student can see the connection between life events and sociology. These items are available free to students in the *SocLab* that Allyn and Bacon provides.

**THE PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS**

You can take photos for granted, as all texts have them. But in *Mastering Sociology*, I have chosen each photo myself and have written each caption. Each photo illustrates some particular sociological content, and the caption makes a photo’s purpose explicit.

In addition, I have designed the captions not only to inform students but also to engage them. Many captions ask students to apply sociological content. Since the photos and captions are so integrated in the text, you can use them to promote discussion in your classroom.

**THROUGH THE AUTHOR’S LENS**

In personalizing this text with the goal of making sociology come alive for students, I have developed photo essays called *Through the Author’s Lens*. These photo essays let your students look over my shoulder as I take them on sociological journeys—from a visit to people who live and work in a dump in Cambodia to people in the USA who are putting their lives together after a tornado devastated their neighborhood. Some of the photos I took challenge common assumptions. In the photo essay on India, for example, students will see women doing extremely hard labor on construction crews. This caused me to rethink gender, and might do the same for your students.

**Some Final Remarks**

You will find the pedagogy of this text sound. Its learning-centered principles are based on reinforcement. I have designed the text to help all students learn sociology, including students whose academic background is considerably less than ideal. A more advanced student who read a sample chapter said, “I wish I had had this to learn from. The units make it so clear and easy!” This was music to my ears, as I want to reach all students.
I know that having your students do well is your goal in teaching. This text is designed specifically to help you reach this goal. The principle I followed as I wrote this text is: Students can learn and do well. They just need the right materials to help them achieve.

My goal is for students, after studying a unit and taking the self-test, to say, “Yes, I can do it. I learned this. I’m going to make it in college!”

I say this from personal experience, having come from a family in which I was the first college graduate. My mother dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, while my father didn’t even make it to high school, dropping out after the 7th grade. I know the self-doubts that students bring with them to college and the obstacles they face. I designed *Mastering Sociology* as a tool to help students overcome their self-doubts, a major obstacle to their success. As they learn, they will know they can succeed.

I eagerly await your reaction to using this text with your class. You can write me at the following address. I would appreciate it if you would share your experience with me. This will help me to better meet the needs of students, my continuous goal.

Jim Henslin
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I want to thank the hard-working, creative team I have had the privilege of working with at Pearson. I especially want to thank Brita Mess, who has supported this project from the manuscript stage to the printed page; Jenn Auvil, who coordinated many aspects in the book’s initial stages; Dusty Freedman, who stepped in on an unexpected basis and valiantly saw the book through its latter stages; Kate Cebic, for some photo research; and the many people behind the scenes who checked manuscript and did innumerable tasks of which I am only dimly aware. A hearty and heartfelt thanks to them all.

I also want to thank my fellow sociology instructors who were kind enough to share their reactions to the *Mastering Sociology* manuscript. It has been my privilege to follow many of their suggestions.
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Karl Wielgus, Anoka Ramsey Community College
I was born in a rented room in a little town on the bitterly cold Canadian border in Minnesota. My mother hadn’t completed high school, and my father hadn’t even made it beyond the 7th grade. From the rented room, we moved to a house, a converted garage that didn’t have indoor plumbing. One of my colder memories goes back to age 11 when I froze my nose while delivering newspapers in my little northern village. I was elated at age 16 when my parents packed up the car and moved to sunny California, where I graduated from high school and junior college. During the summer following high school graduation, while working as a laborer on construction projects, I took a correspondence course in Greek from the University of California at Berkeley. Indiana was where I graduated from college. I was awarded scholarships at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where I earned my master’s and doctorate in sociology. After winning a competitive postdoctoral fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health, I spent a challenging year studying how people adjust to the suicide of a family member.

My primary interests in sociology are the sociology of everyday life, deviance, and international relations. One of my main goals in sociology is to make sociological concepts and research findings down to earth. Among my books are Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach (Pearson), in its 11th edition; Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings (Free Press), going into its fifteenth edition; and Social Problems (Pearson), now in its 11th edition. I have published widely in sociology journals, including Social Problems and American Journal of Sociology. The topics range from the esoteric ethnomethodological locationalities to the everyday nitty-gritty of cabdrivers shooting midnight craps in St. Louis alleys.

While a graduate student, I taught at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. After completing my doctorate, I joined the faculty at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, where I am Professor Emeritus of Sociology. I’ve always enjoyed teaching the introductory course. What a pleasure to see students’ faces light up when they first glimpse the sociological perspective and begin to see how society has become an essential part of how they view the world!

I enjoy reading (obviously), but also fishing, kayaking, and a little weight lifting. My two favorite activities are writing and traveling. I especially enjoy visiting other cultures, even living in them. This brings me face to face with behaviors and ways of thinking that challenge my perspectives, begging me to explore why they and I view the world so differently. These cultural excursions take me beyond the
standard research and make sociological principles come alive. In the photo essays in this book, I am able to share some of these experiences with you.

My mother once told me that I had “gypsy blood” in me. She was speaking figuratively, of course, but I can’t seem to settle in any one spot. The “other side” keeps beckoning, and I can’t get rid of this urge to explore it. Hitchhiking around northern Africa and Europe was one way that I have satisfied this desire. I recently married a woman from Latvia, an Eastern European country formerly dominated by the Soviet Union. There, I became an immigrant, certainly an eye-opening experience for me. I later gave up the immigrant status, but while in Latvia I observed how people were struggling to adjust to capitalism. I also interviewed aged political prisoners who had survived the Soviet gulag. After this, I moved to Spain, where I was able to observe how people adjust to a deteriorating economy and their reactions to the immigration of people from contrasting cultures. (Of course, for this I didn’t need to leave the United States.) To better round out my cultural experiences, which I find fascinatingly enjoyable and which keep my writing down to earth, I am making plans for extended stays in India and South America. There, and wherever else my sociological odyssey may take me, I expect to do more photo essays to reflect contrasting cultures. In the meantime, I’m back in the States, where among other activities I am documenting our economic crisis and deteriorating infrastructure.

I am grateful to be able to live in such exciting social, technological, and geopolitical times—and to have access to portable broadband Internet while I pursue my sociological imagination.