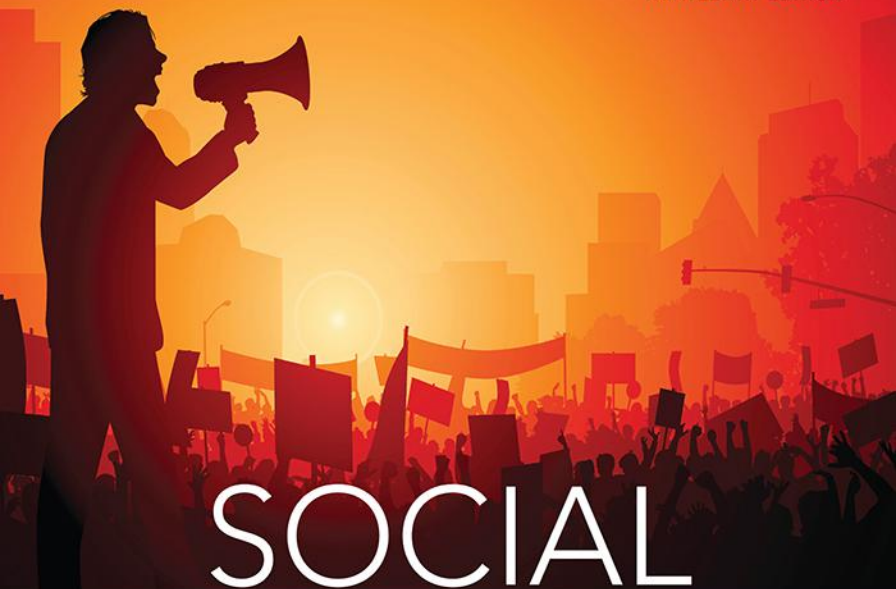


THIRTEENTH EDITION



SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A Down-to-Earth Approach



**JAMES M.
HENSLIN**

Social Problems

A Down-to-Earth Approach

THIRTEENTH EDITION

James M. Henslin

Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

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Brief Contents

1	How Sociologists View Social Problems: The Abortion Dilemma	1	8	Racial–Ethnic Relations	213
2	Interpreting Social Problems: Aging	23	9	Inequalities of Gender and Sexual Orientation	251
3	Social Problems Related to Sexual Behavior	47	10	Medical Care: Physical and Mental Illness	289
4	Alcohol and Other Drugs	76	11	The Changing Family	324
5	Violence in Society: Rape and Murder	111	12	Urbanization and Population	360
6	Crime and Criminal Justice	142	13	The Environmental Crisis	400
7	Economic Problems: Poverty and Wealth	178	14	War, Terrorism, and the Balance of Power	439

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Contents

Preface	xvii	A Global Glimpse: Japan's Tidal Wave of Elderly	29
About the Author	xxiv	Functionalism and Social Problems: A Summary	29
1 How Sociologists View Social Problems: The Abortion Dilemma	1	Conflict Theory and Social Problems	30
The Sociological Imagination	2	The Development of Conflict Theory	30
What Is the Sociological Imagination?	2	Applying Conflict Theory to Social Problems	31
Applying the Sociological Imagination to Personal Troubles	2	Conflict Theory and Social Problems: A Summary	33
Social Location	3	Introducing Feminist Theory	33
The Significance of Social Location	3	The Development of Feminist Theory	34
Predictions from Social Location: The Group, Not the Individual	4	Applying Feminist Theory to Social Problems: Focusing on Gender	34
What Is a Social Problem?	5	Symbolic Interactionism and Social Problems	35
The Characteristics of Social Problems	5	The Significance of Symbols in Social Life	35
A Global Glimpse: Only Females Eligible: Sex-Selection Abortion in India—and the United States	6	When Symbols Change, Perceptions Change	35
Issues in Social Problems: A Problem for Some Is a Solution for Others: The Relativity of Social Problems	7	From Personal Problem to Social Problem	36
The Natural History of Social Problems: Four Stages	8	Spotlight on Social Research: Studying Young People Who Became Old	36
The First Stage: Defining the Problem, the Emergence of Leaders, and Beginning to Organize	9	The Development of Symbolic Interactionism	37
The Second Stage: Crafting an Official Response	10	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Making Sense of Suicide: Socially Constructing Reality	39
The Third Stage: Reacting to the Official Response	10	Applying Symbolic Interactionism to Social Problems	40
The Fourth Stage: Developing Alternative Strategies	11	Symbolic Interactionism and Social Problems: A Summary	40
The Role of Sociology in Social Problems	14	The Future of the Problem: The Pendulum Swings	41
Sociology as a Tool for Gaining an Objective Understanding of Social Problems	14	Changing Objective Conditions and Subjective Concerns	41
Sociology and Common Sense	16	The Emerging Struggle	43
Methods for Studying Social Problems	16	Issues in Social Problems: The Genetic Lottery and the New Centenarians	43
Four Basic Research Designs	16	Issues in Social Problems: What Do You Mean, Gray Panthers?	44
Four Methods for Gathering Information	17	Summary and Review 46 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 2 46 • Key Terms 46	
Striving for Accuracy and Objectivity	18	3 Social Problems Related to Sexual Behavior	47
Spotlight on Social Research: An Overview of This Feature	19	Sexual Behavior: Objective Conditions and Subjective Concerns	48
Should Sociologists Take Sides?	20	Spotlight on Social Research: Studying Sex in America	49
The Issues Involved in Taking Sides	20	Prostitution	50
Summary and Review 22 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 1 22 • Key Terms 22		Getting the Larger Picture	50
2 Interpreting Social Problems: Aging	23	Prostitution Today	51
Sociological Theories and Social Problems	25	A Global Glimpse: Sex Tourism	52
Functionalism and Social Problems	25	Prostitution Viewed Theoretically: Applying Functionalism	52
The Development of Functionalism	26	The Social Functions of Prostitution	52
Applying Functionalism to Social Problems	27	The Conflict/Feminist Perspective	53

Research on Prostitution	54	Looking at the Problem Theoretically	79
Types of Prostitutes	54	Symbolic Interactionism	80
Technology and Social Problems: “Female College Student Available: Wants Sugar Daddy”	55	Issues in Social Problems: Sociology and Common Sense: Legal and Illegal Drugs	81
Becoming a Prostitute	56	Functionalism	81
Issues in Social Problems: Me, a Prostitute?	56	Personal Account: Addiction: Not Just the Individual	82
The Pimp and the Prostitute	58	Conflict Theory	83
Male Prostitutes	59	RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE USE AND ABUSE OF DRUGS	84
Prostitution as a Social Problem:	60	Medicalizing Human Problems	84
A Summary of Subjective Concerns	60	Expanding the Medical Model	84
Pornography	60	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Doping Problem Kids: ADHD and the Ritalin Riddle	84
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Just What Is Pornography? And What Makes It a Social Problem?	61	Abusing Prescription Drugs	85
Background: Getting the Larger Picture	61	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Unexpected Death: The Opioid Crisis	86
Pornography Viewed Theoretically:	62	Drug Use by College Students	87
Applying Symbolic Interactionism	62	Research Findings: The Recreational Mood Elevators	88
Child Pornography	62	Nicotine	88
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Restitution for Child Pornography?	63	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: “Vaping: Cool, Fun—and Dangerous?”	90
Controversy and Research on Pornography	64	Alcohol	91
A National Response to Pornography	64	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: How Can You Tell If You Have a Drinking Problem?	92
Cause, Effect, and Concerns about Morality	65	Marijuana	93
Science versus Social Action	67	Issues in Social Problems: “It Drives You Crazy and Makes You Kill”: The Crusade against Marijuana	94
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: The Pornifying of America: Crushing Resistance and Co-Opting Feminists	68	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Driving High	95
Social Policy	68	Issues in Social Problems: Medical Marijuana Dispensaries and Legalizing Marijuana	96
The Question of Making Consensual Behavior Illegal	68	Cocaine	97
Alternatives to Making Consensual Behavior Illegal	69	Research Findings: Hallucinogens	98
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Should We Legalize Prostitution?	69	LSD	98
Issues in Social Problems: What Happened When Prostitution Became Legal? Problems in Knowing	70	Peyote and Mescaline	99
The Matter of Children	72	Psilocybin	99
Issues in Social Problems: Applying Sociology: Taking Back Children from the Night	72	PCP	99
The Future of the Problem	73	Ecstasy	100
Prostitution and the Future	73	Research Findings: Amphetamines and Barbiturates	100
Technology and Social Problems: Cyborg Sex Partners	73	Amphetamines	100
Pornography and the Future	74	Barbiturates	101
Technology and Social Problems: Pornography on the Internet	74	Research Findings: Steroids	101
Summary and Review 75 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 3 75 • Key Terms 75		Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Steroids and Athletes	102
4 Alcohol and Other Drugs	76	Research Findings: Narcotics—From Opium to Heroin and Morphine	102
The Problem in Sociological Perspective	77	Heroin	102
A Quick Historical Background	77	Morphine	103
The Scope of the Problem	78	Heroin, Crime, and the Law	104
A Personal Problem or a Social Problem?	78	Social Policy	104
Addiction to Drugs	79	The Dilemma Facing Policy Makers	104
		A Global Glimpse: Drugs, Death, and Corruption in Mexico	105

A Global Glimpse: Uruguay's Solution to the Marijuana Problem	106	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Enough Is Enough: The Social Movement to Limit Gun Ownership	139
Deciding Social Policy	106	The Future of the Problem	140
Principles of Successful Social Policy	108	Summary and Review 140 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 5 141 • Key Terms 141	
The Future of the Problem	109		
Summary and Review 109 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 4 110 • Key Terms 110			
5 Violence in Society: Rape and Murder	111	6 Crime and Criminal Justice	142
The Problem in Sociological Perspective	112	The Problem in Sociological Perspective	143
The Scope of the Problem	113	The Essential Nature of Crime: The Law	143
What Makes Violence a Social Problem?	113	The Relativity of Crime	143
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Why So Few Pakistani Women Are Raped—Or Why We Have to Be Cautious about Crime Statistics	115	Making Something Criminal: A Political Process	144
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	116	The Scope of the Problem	144
Comparing Non-Sociological and Sociological Approaches to Understanding Violence	116	Why Is Crime a Social Problem?	144
Symbolic Interactionism	117	Why Is Crime Universal?	145
Spotlight on Social Research: Studying Violence among "The Lions"	119	LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM THEORETICALLY	145
Functionalism	120	Symbolic Interactionism	145
Conflict Theory	121	The Saints and the Roughnecks: Social Class and Labeling	145
RESEARCH FINDINGS: RAPE	122	Functionalism	147
The Natural History of Rape as a Social Problem	122	Crime and Society's Core Values	147
The Feminist-Conflict View: Transforming Rape from a Personal to a Social Problem	123	Social Class and Illegitimate Opportunities	148
The Social Patterns of Rape	124	Conflict Theory	149
Basic Social Patterns	124	Power and Social Class: Inequality in the Legal System	149
Profiling the Rapist	126	TYPES OF CRIME	150
Issues in Social Problems: Making Campuses Safer: Date (or Acquaintance) Rape	128	Juvenile Delinquency	150
Reactions to Rape	128	The Origin of Juvenile Delinquency: A Perceptual Shift	150
The Trauma of Rape: A Spiral of Despair	128	Subjective Concerns about Juvenile Crime	151
Dealing with the Legal System	129	Neutralizing Deviance	152
A Global Glimpse: When Gangs Take Control	130	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: How to Be "Bad" But Think of Yourself as "Good"	152
RESEARCH FINDINGS: MURDER	130	Delinquent Subcultures	152
The Social Patterns of Murder	130	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Islands in the Street: Urban Gangs in the United States	153
The "Who" of Murder	131	Education and Delinquency	153
The "What" of Murder	132	White-Collar Crime	153
The "When" of Murder	133	Criminogenic Subcultures	154
The "Where" of Murder	133	White-Collar Crimes That Kill	154
The "Why" of Murder	134	Embezzlement and Employee Theft	155
Mass Murder and Serial Murder	135	Social Class and Crime	156
Mass Murder	135	Gender in White-Collar Crime	156
Serial Murder	136	Professional Crime	157
Spotlight on Social Research: Doing Research on a Serial Killer	136	Personal Account: Operating a "Chop Shop"	157
Have Mass and Serial Murders Become More Common?	137	Organized Crime	158
Social Policy	137	The Mafia: Origins and Characteristics	158
Global Concerns: Preventing Violence	138	Why Was the Mafia Successful?	158
Issues in Social Problems: Rape Kits: A Shameful Neglect	138	The Weakening of the Mafia	159
		The Criminal Justice System	159
		Plea Bargaining	159
		Assembly-Line Justice	160

Issues in Social Problems: You Don't Have to Be Poor to Go to Jail—But It Helps	161
Bias in the Criminal Justice System	161
The Revolving Door of America's Prisons	163
The Death Penalty	165
The Prison Experience: The Zimbardo Experiment	166
Shaming: An Alternative to Prison?	167
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Public Shaming as Social Policy	167
Social Policy	168
Retribution: Paying for the Crime	168
Deterrence: Frightening People Away from Crime	169
Rehabilitation: Resocializing Offenders	170
Incapacitation: Removing Offenders from Society	171
Goals and Principles of Sound Social Policy	172
Spotlight on Social Research: Doing Research on Criminals	174
The Future of the Problem	175
Changes in Crime	175
The Criminal Justice System	175
The Need for Fundamental Change	175
Summary and Review 176 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 6 176 • Key Terms 177	
7 Economic Problems: Poverty and Wealth	178
The Problem in Sociological Perspective	179
Economic Problems Facing the United States	179
What Is Poverty?	180
The Scope of the Problem	182
Subjective Concerns and Objective Conditions	182
The Poverty Line: Problems and Significance	183
Social Inequality	184
Distribution of Income and Wealth	185
The Impact of Poverty: From Houses and Mortgages to Education and Criminal Justice	187
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	188
Symbolic Interactionism	188
Functionalism	190
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Why We Need the Poor: How Poverty Helps Society	190
Conflict Theory	191
Summary of Theoretical Approaches	192
Research Findings	192
Who Are the Poor?	192
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
How to Avoid Poverty	195
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Being Homeless in the Land of the American Dream	196
Is There a Culture of Poverty?	197
Spotlight on Social Research: Demonizing the Poor	197
Who Rules the United States?	199
Inequality and Global Poverty	201

A Global Glimpse: Killing Kids for Fun and Profit	201
Social Policy	203
Changing Views and Changing Social Policy	203
Progressive Taxation	205
Public Assistance Programs	206
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Welfare: How to Ravage the Self-Concept	206
Feminized Poverty and Child Support	207
Private Agencies and Faith-Based Programs	207
The Purpose of Helping the Poor	208
Jobs and Child Care	209
Education Accounts	209
The Future of the Problem and Universal Basic Income	209
Summary and Review 211 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 7 211 • Key Terms 212	

8 Racial–Ethnic Relations 213

The Problem in Sociological Perspective	214
Minority and Dominant Groups	214
Ideas of Racial Superiority	217
Race as an Arbitrary Social Category	218
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Can a Plane Ride Change Your Race?	218
The Scope of the Problem	219
Immigrants and the Melting Pot:	
Invitations and Walls	220
Spotlight on Social Research: Being a “Foreign” American	220
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
What Should We Do about Hate Speech?	221
Institutional Discrimination	222
Implications of Cold Numbers	224
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	225
Symbolic Interactionism: Labels	225
Spotlight on Social Research: Studying Neo-Nazis and Klans	226
Functionalism: Costs and Benefits	227
Conflict Theory: The Labor Market	229
Summary of the Theoretical Perspectives	231
RESEARCH FINDINGS	231
Latinos (Hispanics)	232
An Umbrella Term	232
Unauthorized Immigrants	233
Issues in Social Problems: The Illegal Travel Guide	233
Residence of Latinos	234
Spanish	234
Social Conditions	234
Politics	234
African Americans	235
Civil Disobedience and American Apartheid	235
Rising Expectations and Urban Revolts	236

From Militancy to Moderacy	236	Research Findings	261
Continued Gains	237	Are There Natural Differences between the Sexes?	261
Current Losses	237	Everyday Life	264
Race or Social Class? A Sociological Debate	238	Education	264
Asian Americans	239	Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Intercontinental Railroad, Discrimination, and Segregation	239	Affirmative Action for Men?	266
Spillover Bigotry	240	The Mass Media	267
Another Umbrella Term	240	Body Images in the Mass Media	268
Reasons for Financial Success	241	Peer Groups	269
Politics	241	Spotlight on Social Research: Sitting In on Adolescent Conversations	269
Native Americans	241	The World of Politics	271
Another Umbrella Term	241	The World of Work	273
Social Policy	244	Sexual Harassment	276
Encouraging Cultural Pluralism and Integrating Groups into the Mainstream Culture	244	Spotlight on Social Research: Sexual Harassment at Two Magazines	278
Using the Legal System to Prevent Discrimination	245	LGBT	279
The Dilemma of Affirmative Action	245	Sexual Orientation as a Social Problem	279
The Future of the Problem	246	Homosexuality Viewed Theoretically: Applying Conflict Theory	281
Progress	246	Research on Homosexuality	281
An Ongoing Struggle	247	Violence against Women	283
Disparities in Education	247	Gendered Violence: Rape, Murder, and Abuse in the Family	283
An Underclass	248	Social Policy	284
Militancy	248	The Radical Extremists	284
The American Dilemma	248	The Conservative Extremists	285
Summary and Review 249 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 8 249 • Key Terms 250		Middle-of-the-Road Policies	285
9 Inequalities of Gender and Sexual Orientation	251	The Future of the Problem	285
The Problem in Sociological Perspective	252	Sexual Minorities and the Future	285
Women as a Minority Group	252	The World of Work: "At Work" and at Home	286
Setting the Context: The Development of Gender Discrimination as a Social Problem	252	Changing Gender Stereotypes and Orientations	286
The Scope of the Problem	253	Summary and Review 287 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 9 287 • Key Terms 288	
Is Male Dominance Universal?	253	10 Medical Care: Physical and Mental Illness	289
The Sexual Stratification of Work	253	The Problem in Sociological Perspective:	
Major Areas of Discrimination	254	The Social Nature of Health and Illness	290
LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM THEORETICALLY	254	Not Just Biology	290
Symbolic Interactionism: Socialization into Gender	254	Iatrogenesis	291
Socialization into Gender	255	Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Socialization into Genders	255	How Incompetent Can a Doctor Be?	291
Interpreting Classic Research	255	Changing Ideas about Health and Illness	292
The Dominant Symbolic Interactionist Position	256	Environment and Disease on a Global Level	292
Functionalism: Two Theories of the Origin of Gender Discrimination	256	A Global Glimpse: Solving Medical Mysteries: Cholera, Bats, and Ticks	293
Rewards for Warriors	256	The Problem in Sociological Perspective:	
Reproduction	257	The Social Organization of Medicine	294
A Global Glimpse: Female Circumcision	257	An Explosion in Medical Costs	294
Conflict/Feminist Theory: The Struggle for Equality	259	Medicine for Profit: A Two-Tier System of Medical Care	295
Four Principles of Power	259	Medicine for Profit: Cesarean Delivery	295
The Struggle for Equality: Past and Present	259		

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Physical Illness as a Social Problem	297
Life Expectancy	297
Infant Mortality	297
Lifestyle	298
Heroic and Preventive Medicine	299
Uneven Distribution of Doctors	299
Mental Illness as a Social Problem	300
Measuring Mental Illness	300
A Two-Tier System of Mental Health Delivery	300
The Social Nature of Mental Illness	301
Issues in Social Problems: Suicide:	
The Making and Unmaking of a Social Problem	301
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	302
Symbolic Interactionism	303
Functionalism	304
Conflict/Feminist Theory	306
Research Findings	307
Historical Changes in Health Problems	307
Infectious Diseases	308
Technology and Social Problems: Superbugs in the Global Village	309
How Disease Is Related to Behavior and Environment: HIV/AIDS and Other STDs	310
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: “I Did Not Have Sexual Relations with That Woman”:	
What Is Sex, and So What?	311
Social Inequalities in Physical Illness	312
Social Class and Mental Illness	312
Social Policy	314
Prepaid Medical Care	314
Being Paid to Stay Healthy	315
Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners	315
Training Physicians	315
Home Health Care	316
Preventive Medicine	317
Spotlight on Social Research: Solving a Medical Mystery	319
Humanizing Health Care	319
Issues in Social Problems: Doctors, Please Wash Your Hands!	321
The Future of the Problem	321
Technological Advances	321
Technology and Social Problems: “Need a New Body Part? Turn on Your Printer”	322
A Final Note	322
Summary and Review 323 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 10 323 • Key Terms 323	

11 The Changing Family 324

The Problem in Sociological Perspective	325
Effects of the Industrial Revolution on the Family	325

The Scope of the Problem	328
Divorce	328
One-Parent Families	331
Other Problems	334
Looking at the Problem Theoretically:	
Why Is Divorce Common?	335
Symbolic Interactionism: Changing Symbols	335
A Global Glimpse: Arranged Marriage in India: Probing Beneath the Surface	336
Functionalism: Declining Functions	339
Conflict and Feminist Theory: Shifting Power Relations	340
Research Findings	342
Postponing Marriage	342
Cohabitation	343
Remaining Single	343
Couples without Children	344
Spotlight on Social Research: Choosing Not to Have Children	344
Family Violence	346
Spotlight on Social Research: Intimate Partner Violence	346
Issues in Social Problems: “Why Doesn’t She Just Leave?” The Dilemma of Abused Women	348
Sexual Abuse: Marital Rape	350
Sexual Abuse: Incest	351
Old Age and Widowhood	352
The End of Marriage and the Traditional Family?	353
Social Policy	356
Intrusions by Professionals and the Coming Therapeutic Society	356
The Dilemma of Family Policy: Taking Sides	357
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: “You Want Birth Control, Little Girl?”	357
The Future of the Problem	357
Social Change	357
Anticipating the Future	358
The Ideological Struggle	358
Summary and Review 358 • Thinking Critically about Chapter 11 359 • Key Terms 359	

12 Urbanization and Population 360

URBANIZATION	361
Urbanization: The Problem in Sociological Perspective	361
The Evolution of Cities	361
From Rural to Urban	362
A Global Glimpse: Why City Slums Are Better Than Living in the Country	363
The Scope of the Problem	364
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	364
Symbolic Interactionism	365
Functionalism	366
Conflict Theory	367

Research Findings	368	The Scope of the Problem	403
Alienation in the City	368	“Everything Is Connected to Everything Else”	403
Community in the City	369	Looking at the Problem Theoretically	405
Who Lives in the City?	370	Symbolic Interactionism	405
Urban Violence: Youth Gangs	371	Functionalism	407
Urban Violence: Schools	373	Conflict Theory	408
Population Shift: Regional Restrification	373	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: How to Get	
Social Policy	374	Paid to Pollute: Corporate Welfare and Big Welfare Bucks	409
Empowerment Zones	374	Research Findings: Pollution	409
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:		Air Pollution	409
Reestablishing Community: A Twist in the		Global Warming	411
Invasion–Succession Cycle	375	Land Pollution	413
Educating the Poor	376	Water Pollution	414
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:		Chemical Pollution	415
Reestablishing Community: Educating for Success	377	A Global Glimpse: The Giant Roulette Wheel	
The Future of the Problem	378	of Environmental Disaster	416
Higher Costs and Lower Income	378	Nuclear Pollution	418
The Homeless	378	Food Pollution	419
Gentrification	378	Research Findings: Conflicting Interpretations	423
Principles for Shaping the Future	379	The Pessimistic Environmentalists	423
POPULATION	379	Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
Population: The Problem in Sociological Perspective	379	From the Toilet to the Tap: Overcoming the	
A Population Mystery	379	Yuck Factor	424
Demographers in Debate	380	The Optimistic Environmentalists	425
The Scope of the Problem	383	Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Put Your	
Sitting on the Shoulders of the New Malthusians	383	Money Where Your Mouth Is: The Simon–Ehrlich Bet	426
Sitting on the Shoulders of the Anti-Malthusians	383	Reconciling the Positions	428
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	385	Resource Destruction: The Tropical Rain Forests	428
Symbolic Interactionism	385	Social Policy	429
Functionalism	386	Oppositional Viewpoints: Pessimistic and	
Conflict Theory	389	Optimistic Assumptions	429
Research Findings	390	Specific Social Policies	430
The New Malthusians	390	Thinking Critically about Social Problems:	
The Anti-Malthusians	391	Social Policy and Moral Dilemmas in a Global Age	433
Has the Population Explosion Peaked?	391	The Future of the Problem	433
A Global Glimpse: “I’d Like to Have 20 Children”	392	Driverless Cars	433
Social Policy	392	Technology and Social Problems: Peering into	
Policy Implications of the Anti-Malthusians	392	the Future: Consequences of Driverless Cars	434
Policy Implications of the New Malthusians	393	Energy	434
The Future of the Problem	395	Pollution	435
The New Malthusians: The Pessimistic View	395	Spotlight on Social Research: The Marriage	
The Anti-Malthusians: The Optimistic View	396	of Community and Environment	435
Which Will It Be?	396	Environmental Injustice	436
Concluding Dilemma	396	The Environmental Pessimists and Optimists	436
Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Mass		Summary and Review 437 • Thinking Critically about	
Migration: Latinos, Muslims, Conflict, and Confusion	397	Chapter 13 438 • Key Terms 438	
Summary and Review 398 • Thinking Critically about			
Chapter 12 398 • Key Terms 399			
13 The Environmental Crisis	400	14 War, Terrorism, and the Balance	439
The Problem in Sociological Perspective	401	of Power	
Environmental Destruction in the Past: The Myth		The Problem in Sociological Perspective	441
of the Noble Savage	401	Why Is War Common?	441
The Tragedy of the Commons	403	A Global Glimpse: Nourishing Aggression:	
		The Yanomamö	442
		Why Do Some Groups Choose War?	443

The Scope of the Problem	443	Repressive Terrorism	467
War in the History of the West	444	State-Sponsored Terrorism	468
Measuring War in Terms of Deaths	444	Criminal Terrorism	468
Looking at the Problem Theoretically	445	Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)	469
Symbolic Interactionism	445	Technology and Social Problems: Our Future:	
Functionalism	446	Biological Terrorism	469
Conflict Theory	449	Social Policy	470
Research Findings: War	450	Terrorism	470
Spotlight on Social Research: Adventures		Nuclear Threats as a Path to Peace	471
in Military Sociology	450	Potential Policies for Peace	472
What Reduces War?	451	Interlocking Networks	472
Money Spent on War	452	Survival as a Mutual Benefit	473
Deaths from War	454	The Future of the Problem	473
Dehumanization in War	454	The Global Killing Machine	473
The Military–Industrial Complex	457	Terrorism	475
The Possibility of Accidental War	461	Summary and Review 476 • Thinking Critically about	
Chemical and Biological Warfare	462	Chapter 14 476 • Key Terms 476	
Cyber Warfare	463	Glossary 478	
Thinking Critically about Social Problems:		References 485	
Cyber War and Cyber Defense	463	Name Index 511	
Research Findings: Terrorism	464	Subject Index 517	
Revolutionary Terrorism	464		
A Global Glimpse: Why They Hate Us: Al-Qaeda,			
ISIS, and Lost Power and Glory	465		

Boxed Features

The boxed inserts are one of my favorite features of the text. I especially enjoyed writing them because many focus on provocative ideas. These boxed features, which take stu-

dents to the cutting edge of social problems, can be a source of stimulating class discussions.

■ A Global Glimpse

- Only Females Eligible: Sex-Selection Abortion in India—and the United States 6
- Japan's Tidal Wave of Elderly 29
- Sex Tourism 52
- Drugs, Death, and Corruption in Mexico 105
- Uruguay's Solution to the Marijuana Problem 106
- When Gangs Take Control 130
- Killing Kids for Fun and Profit 201
- Female Circumcision 257
- Solving Medical Mysteries: Cholera, Bats, and Ticks 293
- Arranged Marriage in India: Probing Beneath the Surface 336
- Why City Slums Are Better Than Living in the Country 363
- "I'd Like to Have 20 Children" 392
- The Giant Roulette Wheel of Environmental Disaster 416
- Nourishing Aggression: The Yanomamö 442
- Why They Hate Us: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Lost Power and Glory 465

■ Issues in Social Problems

- A Problem for Some Is a Solution for Others: The Relativity of Social Problems 7
- The Genetic Lottery and the New Centenarians 43
- What Do You Mean, Gray Panthers? 44
- Me, a Prostitute? 56
- What Happened When Prostitution Became Legal? Problems in Knowing 70
- Applying Sociology: Taking Back Children from the Night 72
- Sociology and Common Sense: Legal and Illegal Drugs 81
- "It Drives You Crazy and Makes You Kill": The Crusade against Marijuana 94
- Medical Marijuana Dispensaries and Legalizing Marijuana 96
- Making Campuses Safer: Date (or Acquaintance) Rape 128
- Rape Kits: A Shameful Neglect 138
- You Don't Have to Be Poor to Go to Jail—But It Helps 161

The Illegal Travel Guide 233

Suicide: The Making and Unmaking of a Social Problem 301

Doctors, Please Wash Your Hands! 321

"Why Doesn't She Just Leave?" The Dilemma of Abused Women 348

■ Technology and Social Problems

- "Female College Student Available: Wants Sugar Daddy" 55
- Cyborg Sex Partners 73
- Pornography on the Internet 74
- Superbugs in the Global Village 309
- "Need a New Body Part? Turn on Your Printer" 322
- Peering into the Future: Consequences of Driverless Cars 434
- Our Future: Biological Terrorism 469

■ Thinking Critically about Social Problems

- Making Sense of Suicide: Socially Constructing Reality 39
- Just What Is Pornography? And What Makes It a Social Problem? 61
- Restitution for Child Pornography? 63
- The Pornifying of America: Crushing Resistance and Co-Opting Feminists 68
- Should We Legalize Prostitution? 69
- Doping Problem Kids: ADHD and the Ritalin Riddle 84
- Unexpected Death: The Opioid Crisis 86
- "Vaping: Cool, Fun—and Dangerous?" 90
- How Can You Tell If You Have a Drinking Problem? 92
- Driving High 95
- Steroids and Athletes 102
- Why So Few Pakistani Women Are Raped—Or Why We Have to Be Cautious about Crime Statistics 115
- Enough Is Enough: The Social Movement to Limit Gun Ownership 139
- How to Be "Bad" But Think of Yourself as "Good" 152
- Islands in the Street: Urban Gangs in the United States 153

Public Shaming as Social Policy	167
Why We Need the Poor: How Poverty Helps Society	190
How to Avoid Poverty	195
Being Homeless in the Land of the American Dream	196
Welfare: How to Ravage the Self-Concept	206
Can a Plane Ride Change Your Race?	218
What Should We Do about Hate Speech?	221
Affirmative Action for Men?	266
How Incompetent Can a Doctor Be?	291
"I Did Not Have Sexual Relations with That Woman": What Is Sex, and So What?	311
"You Want Birth Control, Little Girl?"	357
Reestablishing Community: A Twist in the Invasion–Succession Cycle	375
Reestablishing Community: Educating for Success	377
Mass Migration: Latinos, Muslims, Conflict, and Confusion	397
How to Get Paid to Pollute: Corporate Welfare and Big Welfare Bucks	409
From the Toilet to the Tap: Overcoming the Yuck Factor	424
Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is: The Simon–Ehrlich Bet	426
Social Policy and Moral Dilemmas in a Global Age	433
Cyber War and Cyber Defense	463

Spotlight on Social Research

An Overview of This Feature	19
Phyllis Moen: Studying Young People Who Became Old	36
Edward Laumann: Studying Sex in America	49
Ruth Horowitz: Studying Violence among "The Lions"	119
Jim Henslin: Doing Research on a Serial Killer	136
William Chambliss: Doing Research on Criminals	174
Herbert Gans: Demonizing the Poor	197
Nazli Kibria: Being a "Foreign" American	220
Raphael Ezekiel: Studying Neo-Nazis and Klans	226
Donna Eder: Sitting In on Adolescent Conversations	269
Kirsten Dellinger: Sexual Harassment at Two Magazines	278
William Cockerham: Solving a Medical Mystery	319
Cynthia and Robert Reed: Choosing Not to Have Children	344
Kathleen Ferraro: Intimate Partner Violence	346
Robert Gottlieb: The Marriage of Community and Environment	435
Morten Ender: Adventures in Military Sociology	450

Guide to Social Maps

Social maps illustrate the old Chinese saying, “A picture is worth 10,000 words.” They allow you to see at a glance how social characteristics are distributed among the 50 U.S. states or among the nations of the world. The U.S. Social Maps are a concise way of illustrating how our states compare on such factors as divorce, voting, safety, or women in the workforce. The global Social Maps show how the world’s nations compare on such characteristics as income, the percentage of the elderly, and the number of large cities.

These Social Maps are unique to this text. I have produced them for you from original data. At a glance, you

can see how your state compares with your region and the other states—or you can see how the United States compares with other countries. If you have suggestions for other Social Maps that you would like to see in the next edition, please let me know.



henslin@aol.com

The Social Maps

- | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---------------------|--|
| Figure 5.5 | The “Where” of Rape: The Rape Rate by State 125 | Figure 10.4 | The Geography of Death: Infant Mortality Rates 298 |
| Figure 5.10 | The “Where” of Murder: The Murder Rate by State 133 | Figure 10.6 | Where the Doctors Are 300 |
| Figure 6.4 | Executions in the United States, by State 166 | Figure 11.5 | Divorce and Geography 330 |
| Figure 7.6 | The Geography of U.S. Poverty 193 | Figure 11.8 | Families Headed by Single Parents 332 |
| Figure 8.4 | The Distribution of Dominant and Minority Groups in the United States 232 | Figure 12.1 | How Urban Is Your State? The Rural–Urban Makeup of the United States 362 |
| Figure 9.4 | What Percentage of Women Are in the State Legislatures? 272 | Figure 12.12 | How Long Will It Take for a Population to Double? 388 |
| Figure 9.5 | How Likely Are Women to Work for Wages? 274 | Figure 13.4 | Hazardous Waste Sites on the National Priority List 417 |
| | | Figure 14.2 | The Nuclear Club: Members, Former Members, and Aspiring Members 459 |

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Preface

The Exciting Potential of Social Problems

Social Problems is perhaps the most exciting, enticing course in the sociological curriculum. In this course, you will focus on events of life that rivet your students' attention. You will touch on matters that elicit not only fears, but also the hope for constructing a better society. The scope of the problems reviewed in this text is equally as broad, focusing on such intensely individual topics as abortion and rape as well as on such global problems as poverty and war. You can expect emotional reactions, probing questions about causation, and discussions on how we can change our current situation. This text is designed to stimulate critical thinking and guide students in evaluating current social problems and their potential solutions.

The goal of this book is to make the study of social problems down to earth, that is, to present the analysis of social problems clearly and to show how social problems relate to the student's own life. Instructors and students alike have responded positively to this text. Instructors have commented on how the clear presentation of the sociological perspective helps their teaching, and students have written to say that this text stimulates their thinking and learning. A primary reason for this positive response is that I have personalized social problems—an approach that continues in this pleasant milestone of the 13th edition.

You can expect that this text will enliven your classroom. It will elicit emotional reactions, probing questions about causation, and discussions on how we can change our current situation. You can also expect the text to be a source of provocative discussions about major issues facing our society. The potential is that from the ideas presented in the fascinating topics of this text, your students will learn a perspective from which they can view social life and their place in it.

Here are some of the major features of this text.

Spotlight on Social Research

The thirteenth edition enhances the popular and unique feature called *Spotlight on Social Research*, in which sociologists share their personal research experiences with students. Writing specifically for *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*, these researchers explain how they became interested in a particular social problem and how they collected their data. As they do this, they take students "into the field" with them, offering an over-the-shoulder look as they recount how they confronted and solved difficulties in their real-world study of social problems.

The authors who share their research experiences are

Chapter 2: Phyllis Moen, Discovering that the elderly are "young people who got old"

Chapter 3: Edward Laumann, Studying human sexuality—and the stigma that comes from doing this research

Chapter 5: Ruth Horowitz, Getting an insider's perspective on Chicano gangs

Chapter 5: Jim Henslin, Doing research on a serial killer

Chapter 6: William Chambliss, A personal journey into the study of crime

Chapter 7: Herbert Gans, Doing research on the exploitation of people in poverty

Chapter 8: Nazli Kibria, Studying identity problems of Asian Americans

Chapter 8: Rafael Ezekiel, How a Jew entered the world of Neo-Nazis and Klans

Chapter 9: Donna Eder, Sitting in on adolescent conversations

Chapter 9: Kirsten Dellinger, Discovering how the meaning of sexual harassment changes with work settings

Chapter 10: William Cockerham, Solving the medical mystery of unexpected deaths in Russia

Chapter 11: Cynthia and Robert Reed, Choosing not to have children

Chapter 11: Kathleen Ferraro, Gaining an unwelcome insider's view of intimate violence

Chapter 13: Robert Gottlieb, Discovering changing meanings of the environment

Chapter 14: Morten Ender, What I do as an "embedded" sociologist in the military

Scope and Coverage of the 13th Edition

Social Problems is a pleasure to teach. The fascinating and often controversial matters you will review with your students range from prostitution and pornography to inequalities of social class, race-ethnicity, and gender. Part of the pleasure of teaching this course is to experience with your students the broad range of vision these social problems encompass. At times, your students will focus on the comparative safety or danger of their own neighborhoods, while at other times their eyes will be on the changing relationships of power among the nation-states of the world. All of the problems are significant, whether they are as intensely personal as suicide and individual victimization or as broad as global stratification and capitalism.

In this text, your students will explore the vital social issues that face our nation and the world and events and conditions that influence their present and their future. Not only will your students gain a sociological understanding of these problems, but also they will be able to explore—and evaluate—their own ideas and opinions about specific social problems. As the course progresses, your students will attain greater awareness of the social forces that shape not only their orientations to social problems but also their perspectives on social life. The ideas in this book, then, can penetrate students' thinking, giving shape to a lasting sociological perspective, one they will take out of the classroom and into their everyday lives.

The Sociological Task: The Goal of Objectivity

This process of insight and self-discovery—so essential to sociology and good teaching—is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching *Social Problems*. But teaching a class in social problems presents a special challenge because it requires objectivity in the middle of deep controversy, objectivity while examining emotion-producing topics, some of which may threaten your own values. In this text, I attempt to present both sides of controversial topics objectively. I know, of course, that it is impossible to achieve total objectivity, no matter how ardently we may desire or pursue it, but objectivity should be the hallmark of *Social Problems*. I have tried to attain it in this text.

When you turn to Chapter 1, you will immediately see this purposed attempt to bring objectivity to the text. In this opening chapter, I use abortion as a substantive issue to illustrate basic sociological principles. Beginning the text with this topic helps jump-start your course, as it places your students squarely in the middle of one of the most controversial and heated issues in the United States. This topic also brings deep-seated attitudes to the surface. Used creatively, this approach allows us to illustrate the social origin of ideas, which is essential to the objective understanding of social problems.

To determine whether I had achieved objectivity on this sensitive issue, I sent the first chapter to national officers of both pro-choice and right-to-life organizations for review. I was elated when *both sides* responded with practically the same words—that their side was represented accurately but that the text seemed “too fair” to the other side.

Within this framework of objectivity, the goal of this text is to present the major research findings on social problems, explain their theoretical interpretations, and describe clearly the underlying assumptions and implications of competing points of view. In endeavoring to reach this goal, I strive to present the most recent research on the sociology of social problems and to introduce competing views fairly. If I have been successful, your students should not only find themselves content when they read views with which they agree, but they should also attain a clear understanding of views with which they disagree. This should hold true for students of all persuasions, whether “radical,” “liberal,” “conservative,” or anywhere in between. In short, this text can serve as a strong foundation for an exciting class.

Incorporating Theory into Your Teaching

Students often find the word *theory* to be frightening. Many expect to land squarely in the center of vague, abstract ideas, where they wander blindly in a foggy marsh. But theories don't have to be like this. Students can find theories clear and easy to understand—even enjoyable—if they are presented clearly and creatively. I have been pleased with how students and instructors have reacted favorably to how sociological theories are presented in this text. One of

the main reasons for this favorable reaction is that I embed the theories in clarifying contexts. For example, when I first introduce the theories in Chapter 2—symbolic interactionism theory, functional theory, conflict theory, and feminist theory—I make them concrete. The topical focus of this chapter is aging, so I apply each theory to problems that the elderly confront. This makes the theories much easier to understand.

In the following chapters, I consistently apply most of the theories to *each* social problem. This approach helps give students a cohesive understanding of what otherwise might appear to be a disparate collection of events and issues. The effect is cumulative, for each new chapter allows students to broaden their understanding of these perspectives. As one reviewer said, some texts in social problems mention theory in an initial chapter and then dispense with it thereafter, but this text follows through with the “theoretical promise” of its introductory chapters.

Chapter Organization and Features

To help your students do well in this course, I use a consistent structure within each chapter. This gives your students a “road map” to guide them through each social problem, letting them know what to expect as they read the chapters. Except for the first two introductory chapters that orient students to social problems and the sociological perspective, I use the following framework to analyze each social problem:

Opening Vignette This brief opening story presents essential elements of the social problem, arousing student interest in the social problem and stimulating the desire to read more about it.

The Problem in Sociological Perspective This broad sociological background sets the stage for understanding the particular social problem.

The Scope of the Problem Presenting basic data on the extent or severity of the problem helps students grasp the problem's wider ramifications.

Looking at the Problem Theoretically These theoretical analyses of the problem or some major aspect of it generally begin on the more personal level, with symbolic interactionism theory, moving from there to functional theory and concluding with conflict theory. Feminist theory is usually presented as part of conflict theory.

Research Findings The current and classic sociological studies presented in this section, supplemented by studies from other academic disciplines, introduce students to primary research. In addition, the feature written by researchers themselves, *Spotlight on Research*, helps students understand how a researcher's personal background leads to interest in a social problem and how research on social problems is actually done.

Social Policy This focus on actions that have been taken or could be taken to try to solve the social problem highlights the assumptions on which social policies are based and the dilemmas that social policies create.

The Future of the Problem As we look at the direction a social problem is likely to take, given what we know about the problem's dimensions and trends, students get a glimpse into what lies ahead and its possible effects on their lives.

Summary and Review This succinct point-by-point summary of the main ideas in the chapter reinforces what the students are learning. Your students may find this summary helpful for review purposes, especially for refreshing their memory before a test. Some students also find it useful as a preview of the chapter, reading the summary *before* they read the chapter.

Key Terms When a term first appears in the text, it is set in bold and is defined in context.

Thinking Critically about the Chapter The questions that follow each chapter help students evaluate what they have read. Many of these questions lend themselves to stimulating class discussions.

New in This Edition

You can assume that I have updated the topics, figures, and tables from the previous edition, so in the following list of changes I won't include these numerous updates. Instead, I will list just the new tables, figures, and boxes and the many new topics.

Chapter 1 The number of abortions performed each year has dropped to the lowest since abortion became legal • 26 states require that a woman who seeks an abortion have a sonogram

Chapter 2 Residents of nursing homes who are given psychotropic drugs die sooner than those who do not receive them • New examples of inhumane treatment in nursing homes • About 5 million elderly in Japan suffer from dementia • Only 1 of 6,000 reaches age 100, but for every man who is a centenarian, there are *five and one half* women centenarians • About 1 of 5 million Americans becomes a supercentenarian (age 110) • The dependency ratio (workers to retired) has dropped to 3.6 to 1

Chapter 3 *Issues in Social Problems: What Happened When Prostitution Became Legal? Problems in Knowing* • *Technology and Social Problems: Cyborg Sex Partners* • Figure 3.1 Spurious Correlations • Table 3.3 Rhode Island's Rape Rates since Indoor Prostitution became Illegal • Table 3.4 Rhode Island's Gonorrhea Rates since Indoor Prostitution became Illegal • Apps connect prostitutes and customers, allowing them to negotiate prices and services • Nevada's brothels ("ranches") are ranked on the Internet • Women in their 30s and 40s are the typical customer for men selling sex to women • Adult websites have more monthly visitors than Amazon, Netflix, and Twitter combined • Under a new federal law, victims of child pornography have the right to restitution for their sexual exploitation • Chinese officials are using optical character recognition to censor the Internet

Chapter 4 *Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Unexpected Death, The Opioid Crisis* • *Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Vaping: Cool, Fun—and Dangerous?* • Figure 4.1 Opioid Crisis-Intervention Stages • Racism in Congressional hearings regarding the Chinese and opium in the late 19th century • Juuls and vaping among high school students • Most states permit the sale of marijuana for medical purposes, and others allow smoking marijuana for pleasure • Marijuana is being used to relieve chronic pain and various medical conditions, including multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease, but we don't know marijuana's effects on health • Continued drug violence in Mexico, including corruption of local governments by drug dealers • Profits by pharmaceutical companies are at the basis of the opioid crisis

Chapter 5 *A Global Glimpse: When Gangs Triumph* • *Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Enough is Enough, The Social Movement to Limit Gun Ownership* • Figure 5.6 Arrests for Rape, by Age • New examples of the revenge rapist • Rape victims continue to be disbelieved by the legal system • Only 28% of rape victims report their rape to the police • About 10 percent of U.S. rape victims are males • The high school shooting in Parkland, Florida • The federal government appropriated \$80 million to test stored rape kits

Chapter 6 Table 6.4 U.S. Prisoners, by Race-Ethnicity • New research on in-group bias by judges in sentencing white and African American juvenile offenders • The criminogenic subculture of Wells Fargo • The public and sociologists continue to debate incapacitation and electronic monitoring of offenders • The future: implants in an offender's brain that send pain if the individual deviates from scheduled activities

Chapter 7 Figure 7.4 Income of Families by Race-Ethnicity • What happens when workers are replaced by robots and automation • How a universal basic income might work • Attacks on the Gilens-Page research that supports the power elite thesis of U.S. policy making • A revolving door between Wall Street and the White House: whether an Obama or a Trump is in the White House, you see representatives of Goldman Sachs

Chapter 8 Proposals to build a wall along the Mexican border as a divisive political issue • Data on individuals claiming two or more race-ethnicities added to Table 8.3 • One in four Native Americans dies before the age of 25, compared with the national average of one in seven • The rate of alcoholism for Native Americans is higher than the national average • Casinos continue to cause division among Native American tribes • The wealthiest tribe (the Mdewakanton Sioux of Minnesota) distributes \$1 million to each adult member of the tribe each year, which erodes the incentive to go to college or to work

Chapter 9 Figure 9.2 The Five Countries with the Least Literacy • To reduce female circumcision, WHO declared an International Day of Zero Tolerance on Female Genital

Mutilation/Cutting • Female circumcision has dropped 25 percent globally • Janelle Monáe illustrates greater fluidity in gender images in music • An indicator of fundamental change: some children's books feature transgender children • In advertising, women are still more likely to be shown in the kitchen and men are twice as likely to be shown with paid work • In video games, only 8 percent of the main characters are female • Between 8 and 9 million more women than men are of voting age • The #MeToo Social Movement reveals how far reaching sexual harassment is • The case against Harvey Weinstein as a catalyst of the #MeToo movement

Chapter 10 The birth of a baby now costs 100 times more than it did in 1962 • Slight declines in life expectancy of Americans are likely linked to deaths from the country's opioid crisis • With an increase in U.S. suicide rates, experts are trying to get people to think of suicide as a social problem instead of a personal problem • The Internet, especially online discussion groups for rare diseases, has helped patients gain some control over their medical care • That people's emotional well-being is worse the lower they are on the social class ladder continues to be supported by research • Health experts fear a global outbreak of drug-resistant typhoid • Forty percent of Americans are now obese

Chapter 11 Figure 11.13 Living Arrangements of the Elderly in Old Age • The U.S. divorce rate continues to be high, but lower than its peak of 20 years ago • Cohabitation continues to increase, reaching the highest levels in our history • Couples who are comfortable financially depend less on adult children for emotional support; couples who are financially squeezed get more satisfaction from adult children • Middle-aged adults are likely to help their parents and receive satisfaction from doing so • Many adult children create *virtual intimacy* with remote elderly parents, using digital devices and technology to share pictures and maintain communication • Critics of the Middletown research point out that the researchers missed the experience of minorities

Chapter 12 54 percent of the world's people live in cities • Publicity campaigns during gentrification focus on rehabbed buildings and renewal, but more areas of the city are deteriorating than are gentrifying and property values there are declining • With African women averaging 4.7 children each, 41 percent of Africans are under the age of 15 • In 30 years, Africa's population will double from today's 1.2 billion people to 2.5 billion

Chapter 13 *Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Social Policy and Moral Dilemmas in a Global Age* • The ozone layer is repairing itself, but won't be fully healed until 2065 • As a result of the Clean Air Act of 1970, acid rain is no longer an environmental threat • Water contaminated from cooling the nuclear fuel at the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster leaks into the ocean • New outbreaks of salmonella from

contaminated turkey, dried coconut, raw sprouts, chicken salad, and Kellogg's Honey Smacks cereal • Contaminated Romaine lettuce sickened 210 people and killed five from listeria • Artificial flavors used in baked goods, candy, and ice cream may contain cancer-causing chemicals • In 35 states, 160 million pounds of radioactive wastes that last thousands of years are stored in temporary containers • The United States withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement • Brazil is building roads in the rain forest • Today's average car gets 77 percent better fuel mileage than cars did 45 years ago • Electric cars contribute to pollution from the manufacturing process and production of electricity

Chapter 14 Figure 14.1 The World's Top Ten Military Spenders • Russia's risk of war by annexing the Crimean Peninsula added to the chapter opening vignette • The United States spends \$610 billion a year on national defense • The verification process for the reduction of nuclear arms, including SLBMs (submarine launched ballistic missiles), in Russia and the United States has gone well • Iran suspended its nuclear program • 19 nations have terminated their nuclear programs • 90 percent of the world's stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed • The New Cold War • South Korea and the United States threatened to annihilate one another in a nuclear storm • Russian agents poisoned a former colonel in the Russian intelligence who was living in England

Suggestions for Using This Text

An author of a social problems text, as well as those who teach this course, must decide whether to begin with a more "micro" or "macro" approach to social problems. Each approach has much to recommend it. The choice in this text is to introduce the micro level and go from there to the macro level. I begin by focusing on problems of personal concern to students—issues about which they are already curious and have questions they want answered. In my teaching experience, this approach provides a compelling context for helping students become familiar with the sociological perspective and sociological theory. From there, we examine broader social problems—those whose more apparent connections to global events often make them seem more remote to students.

This is nothing more than a preference, and it is equally as logical to begin with problems that involve large-scale social change and then to wrap up the course with a focus on more individualistic problems. Instructors who wish to begin with the more macro problems can simply move Part II of this text to the end of their course. Nothing else will be affected.

Invitation for You to Respond

This text flows from years of teaching social problems, with students from diverse backgrounds. The reactions of students to my teaching have been a powerful factor in writing

this text. Similarly formative has been the feedback that instructors have graciously shared. I have designed this text to help make your course more successful—so it would both challenge students’ thinking and make the sociological perspective clear and readily understandable. What matters, of course, is how this text works in *your* classroom. I would appreciate your feedback—whether positive or negative—as this is one of the ways I continue to be a lifelong student of social problems and develop more effective ways of teaching students. If you would, please let me know about your classroom experience with this text. You can reach me at henslin@aol.com

Acknowledgments

A successful textbook depends not only on an author having the right background and skills, but also on a team of people who have the right background and skills—and who wholeheartedly support the project through its many phases. I want to acknowledge the contributions of the people I have worked with on this edition. Thanks go to Jennifer Plum Auvil for coordinating the many related items that must coalesce if a text is to appear; to Kate Cebik for looking for just the “right” photos; and to Jeff Marshall for fielding problems in the production of the text.

I am also grateful to the many instructors who have offered valuable comments during the development of *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. I would like to acknowledge these reviewers, too.

Reviewers

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 Allison Camelot, *Saddleback College*
 Carole A. Campbell, *California State University–Long Beach*
 Cheryl Childers, *Washburn University*
 Susan Claxton, *Floyd College*
 Shawna Cleary, *University of Central Oklahoma*
 Al Cook, *Trinity Valley Community College*
 Sandra Emory, *Pensacola Junior College*
 David Fasenfest, *Wayne State University*
 Wayne Flake, *Eastern Arizona University*
 Michael W. Flota, *Daytona Beach Community College*
 David O. Friedrichs, *University of Scranton*
 Michele Gigliotti, *Broward Community College*
 Rosalind Gottfried, *San Joaquin Delta College*
 Charles Hall, *Purdue University*
 Daniel Hall, *South Puget Sound Community College*
 Carl M. Hand, *Valdosta State University*
 Rosa Haritos, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*
 Rachel Ivie, *South Plains College*
 Sharon Jackson, *Fontbonne University*
 Cardell Jacobson, *Brigham Young University*

Joseph F. Jones, *Portland State University*
 Victor M. Kogan, *Saint Martin’s College*
 Rosalind Kopfstein, *Western Connecticut State University*
 Wilbrod Madzura, *Normandale Community College*
 Paul Magee, *North Lake College*
 Marguerite Marin, *Gonzaga University*
 Daniel Martorella, *Quinnipiac College*
 Stephanie Medley-Rath, *Lake Land College*
 Amanda Miller, *University of Central Oklahoma*
 Mark Miller, *East Texas Baptist University*
 John Mitrano, *Central Connecticut State University*
 Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *University of Colorado–Boulder*
 Kevin R. Ousley, *East Carolina University*
 Lesli Overstreet, *Bridgewater State College*
 Dennis L. Peck, *The University of Alabama*
 Carla Pfeffer, *Purdue University North Central*
 Bonni Raab, *Dominican College*
 Adrian Rapp, *Lonestar College*
 Richard P. Rettig, *University of Central Oklahoma*
 Barbara L. Richardson, *Eastern Michigan University*
 Daniel M. Roddick, *Rio Hondo College*
 Edwin Rosenberg, *Appalachian State University*
 Annette M. Schwabe, *Florida State University*
 James P. Sikora, *Illinois Wesleyan University*
 Sheryl Skaggs, *University of Texas, Dallas*
 Stephen Soreff, *Boston University*
 K. S. Thompson, *Northern Michigan University*
 Melodie Toby, *Kean University*
 Richard T. Vick, *Idaho State University*
 Brian Ward, *University of Maryland*
 Linda Whitman, *Johnson County Community College*
 Gary Wyatt, *Emporia State University*

Authors of Supplements

I want to also thank those who have written the supplements, which help incorporate other components into the teaching experience.

I hope this text provides understanding and insight into the major problems facing our country, many of which have global ramifications—and all of which have an impact on our own lives.



James M. Henslin
 Professor Emeritus
 Department of Sociology
 Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

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Revel for Social Problems:
A Down-to-Earth Approach

Revel offers a fully interactive digital experience that allows students to investigate and understand social problems while using various types of interactives and assessment. These activities are directly related to the author’s narrative and enhance the learning experience.

- **Hearing from the Author Audio Clips** are a new Revel feature in which Jim Henslin personalizes the content and engages the students by commenting on personal photos, graphs, and other, and topics. He also reads the opening vignettes. This feature gives students additional context for understanding more difficult topics, while the interweaving of observations and personal experiences reinforces how social problems affect us on a personal and global level. This is a hallmark of the instructional design, as Jim’s goal is to make sociology “down to earth.” To help students grasp the fascination of sociology, he continuously stresses sociology’s relevance to their lives. As both instructors and students have commented, this helps make sociology “come alive.”
- The *Pearson Original docuseries videos* highlight stories that exemplify and humanize the concepts covered in Sociology courses. These videos illustrate a variety of

social issues and current events, bringing key topics to life for students while creating opportunities to further develop their understanding of sociology. Therefore, students not only connect with the people and stories on a personal level, but also view these stories and individuals with greater empathy all while contextualizing core course concepts. These videos are incorporated into the chapters and can also be easily accessed from the instructor’s Resources folder within Revel.

- **Interactive figures and tables** feature Social Explorer technology to show data in interactive graphs with rollover information to support the data and show movement over time. Some figures utilize Social Explorer’s predictive graphing, which allows students to see trends in social life and to make predictions on how these trends might continue. PowerPoint presentations with every Social Explorer Visualization can be accessed from the instructor’s Resources folder within Revel.

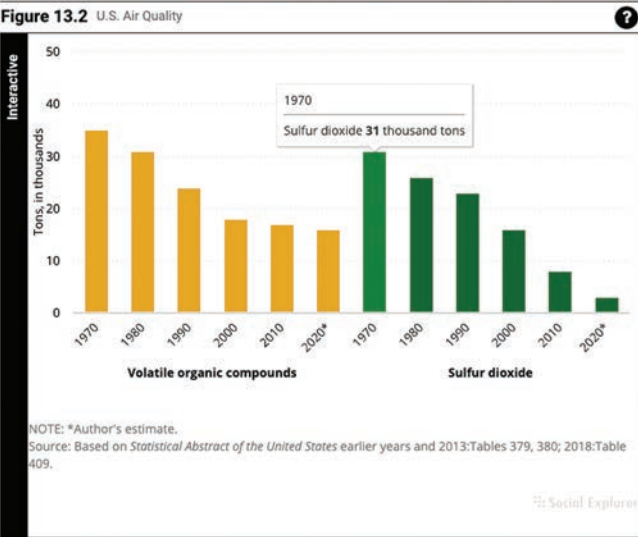


Table 6.6 Prisoners Executed, by Race-Ethnicity

Scroll to see the rest of the table.

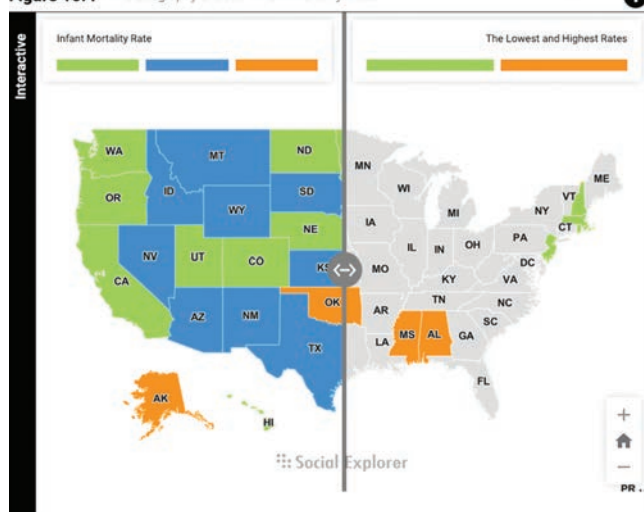
Year	White		African American		Native American/ Asian American		Latinos		Total
Before the death penalty was abolished	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
1930–39	827	50%	816	49%	24	1%			1,667
1940–49	490	38%	781	61%	13	1%			1,284
1950–59	336	47%	376	52%	5	1%			717
1960–69	98	51%	93	49%	0	0%			191
Totals	1,751	45%	2,066	54%	42	1%			3,859
Since the death penalty was reinstated	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	

Source: Based on Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1998; Table 6.88; 2004; Table 6.86; 2012; Table 8.86; Death Penalty Information Center 2018.



- **Surveys** consider their own opinions on a variety of social problems and see how their responses compare to those of other students who have taken the survey.
- **Interactive Maps** are based on the Social Maps Jim has created for *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. These Social Maps illustrate how social problems vary among the states and by regions of the country. Using Social Explorer, students can click through these maps. They can hover over their own state, if they want to, and consider how it compares with the rest of the country.

Figure 10.4 The Geography of Death: Infant Mortality Rates



- **Interactive Review the Chapter** summaries utilize flashcards that feature key terms and definitions to allow students to review and reinforce the chapter's content.
- **Assessments**, which are tied to each chapter's major sections, allow instructors and students to track progress and get immediate feedback. It is the same with the full chapter tests.

Question 1 / 5

Worth 3 points

_____ involves making judgments about others based on preexisting notions.

☐ Misogyny

☐ Discrimination

☒ Superiority > Consider This: These are feelings that people have about others, usually including assumptions about them even before meeting them. 8.1 Distinguish between minority and dominant groups, know the origin and goals of minority groups and the policies of dominant groups, and explain why race is a social category.

☐ Prejudice

2 attempts remaining

☒ Incorrect. Try again.

- **Integrated Writing Opportunities** help students reason and write more clearly. Each chapter offers the following writing prompts:

- **Journal prompts** invite students to reflect on a chapter's content and to consider how social problems affect their country, communities, and personal lives.
- **Shared writing** prompts invite students to sharpen their critical thinking skills while sharing their own views and responding to each other's reactions and opinions. Students reflect on and consider issues related to the social problems highlighted in each chapter.
- **Essay prompts** are from Pearson's Writing Space, where instructors can assign both automatically graded and instructor-graded prompts. Writing Space is the best way to develop and assess concept mastery and critical thinking through writing. Writing Space provides a single place within Revel to create, track, and grade writing assignments, access writing resources, and exchange meaningful, personalized feedback quickly and easily to improve results. For students, Writing Space provides everything they need to keep up with writing assignments, access assignment guides and checklists, write or upload completed assignments, and receive grades and feedback—all in one convenient place. For educators, Writing Space makes assigning, receiving, and evaluating writing assignments easier. It's simple to create new assignments and upload relevant materials, see student progress, and receive alerts when students submit work. Writing Space helps students be more focused and effective. They also are able to express themselves with personalized feedback. Writing Space can also check students' work for improper citation or plagiarism by comparing it against the world's most accurate text comparison database available from Turnitin.

Journal 8.1: Racial-Ethnic Classifications

How do you think our racial-ethnic classifications will change in the future?

The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Question

Worth 20 points

Minority groups share five characteristics: unequal treatment, distinctive traits, solidarity, membership by birth, and marriage within their own group. Pick any minority group in the United States and give examples of how these five characteristics apply to that group.

A minimum number of characters is required to post and earn points. After posting, your response can be viewed by your class and instructor, and you can participate in the class discussion.

0 characters | 140 minimum

About the Author

I was born in a rented room in a little town on the bitterly cold Canadian border in Minnesota. My mother was a teenager who hadn't completed high school, and my father hadn't even made it beyond the seventh grade. Our next home, a converted garage, didn't have indoor plumbing. One of my colder memories goes back to age 10 or 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 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* (Allyn and Bacon), in its 14th edition, and *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (Allyn and Bacon), in its 12th edition. There is also *Mastering Sociology* (Allyn and Bacon), in its first edition. I have published widely in sociology journals, including *Social Problems* and *American Journal of Sociology*. The topics range from the esoteric ethnomethodological localities to the everyday nitty-gritty of cab drivers 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. With its fascinating variety and its focus on the major issues facing the nation, *Social Problems* has always been a joy to teach.



What a pleasure to introduce students to the sociological context of issues that have such far-reaching effects on both their current lives and their future experiences!

I enjoy research and 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. They provide a more global context for interpreting social problems, which I am able to share with you in this text.

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.

A Note from the Publisher on Supplements

Supplements

Make more time for your students with instructor resources that offer effective learning assessments and classroom engagement. Pearson's partnership with educators does not end with the delivery of course materials; Pearson is there with you on the first day of class and beyond. A dedicated team of local Pearson representatives will work with you to not only choose course materials but also integrate them into your class and assess their effectiveness. Our goal is your goal—to improve instruction with each semester.

Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach*. Several of these supplements are available to instantly download from Revel or on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc to register for access.

- **TEST BANK** Evaluate learning at every level. Reviewed for clarity and accuracy by author, James M. Henslin, the Test Bank measures this material's learning objectives with multiple-choice and essay questions. You can easily customize the assessment to work in any major learning management system and to match what is covered in your course. Word, BlackBoard, and WebCT versions are available on the IRC, and Respondus versions are available on request from www.respondus.com.
- **PEARSON MYTEST** This powerful assessment generation program includes all of the questions in the

Test Bank. Quizzes and exams can be easily authored and saved online, and then printed for classroom use, giving you ultimate flexibility to manage assessments anytime and anywhere. To learn more, visit www.pearsonhighered.com/mytest.

- **INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCE MANUAL** Create a comprehensive road map for teaching classroom, online, or hybrid courses. Designed for new and experienced instructors, the Instructor's Resource Manual includes a chapter overview, learning objectives, chapter outline, lecture suggestions, activities for in or out of class, discussion questions, suggested short and long assignments, suggested films/TV shows, readings, and websites, as well as a Revel features section. Available within Revel and on the IRC.
- **POWERPOINTS** in order to support varied teaching styles while making it easy to incorporate dynamic Revel features in class, two sets of PowerPoint presentations are available for this edition: (1) A set of accessible lecture PowerPoint slides outlines each chapter of the text. (2) An additional set of the lecture PowerPoint slides includes LiveSlides, which link to each Social Explorer data visualization and interactive map within the Revel product. These presentations are available to adopters in electronic formats at the Instructor's Resource Center (www.pearsonhighered.com/irc) or in the Instructor's Resources folder within the Revel product.

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Chapter 1

How Sociologists View Social Problems: The Abortion Dilemma



Alex Milan Tracy/SIPA/AP Images



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1.1** Understand the sociological imagination (sociological perspective) and explain the difference between personal and social problems.
- 1.2** Explain the significance of social location and explain why sociologists can use social location to predict *group* behavior but not *individual* behavior.
- 1.3** Explain why a social problem consists of both objective conditions and subjective concerns and why social problems are relative.
- 1.4** Identify the four stages through which social problems evolve.
- 1.5** Describe the contributions that sociologists can make in studying social problems.
- 1.6** Explain why common sense is not adequate to understand social problems.
- 1.7** Understand the four basic research designs and research methods that sociologists use to study social problems.
- 1.8** Summarize the disagreement in sociology regarding whether or not sociologists should choose sides.

Lisa felt desperate. The argument with her grandmother seemed to have gone on forever, and they both were now at their wits' end.

"You don't know what you're doing, Lisa. You're taking the life of an innocent baby!" her grandmother said once again.

**"But you don't understand!
It's not a baby!"**

"You're wrong! There's only one life involved here—mine!" said Lisa. "I told you. It's my body and my life. I've worked too hard for that manager's job to let a pregnancy ruin everything."

"But Lisa, you have a new responsibility—to the baby."

"But you don't understand! It's not a baby!"

"Of course, you're carrying a baby. What do you think it is, a puppy?"

"You're being ridiculous! You're trying to judge my life by your standards. You never wanted a career. All you ever wanted was to raise a family."

"That's not the point," her grandmother pressed. "You're carrying a baby, and now you want to kill it."

"How can you talk like that? This is just a medical procedure—like when you had your appendix taken out."

"I can't believe my own granddaughter is saying that killing a baby is like taking out an appendix!"

Lisa and her grandmother look at each other, knowing they are worlds apart. They both begin to cry inside.

The Sociological Imagination

1.1 Understand the sociological imagination (sociological perspective) and explain the difference between personal and social problems.

Like Lisa and her grandmother, when we are confronted with problems, we usually view them in highly personal—and often emotional—terms. Our perspective is usually limited to our immediate surroundings. With our eyes focused on things that are close to us, the larger social forces recede from view. Yet it is these broader social patterns that shape the problems we experience. In this text, you will learn how to connect your personal life with the larger social context. You will also understand how social problems develop and how we might be able to solve them.

What Is the Sociological Imagination?

One of the goals of this text is to help you develop your **sociological imagination** (also called the *sociological perspective*). This term, coined by sociologist C. Wright Mills, refers to looking at people's actions and attitudes in the context of the social forces that shape them. As Mills (1959b) said, to understand our experiences in life, we must understand our historical period and the social forces that are sweeping the time in which we live.

Another way of saying this is that we want to understand how our **personal troubles** (the problems we experience) are connected to the broader conditions of our society. As with Lisa and her grandmother, for example, attitudes toward abortion don't "come out of nowhere." These attitudes arise from conditions in society: in this case, technology (birth control and surgical techniques), gender (ideas about how women and men should relate to one another), and the law (abortion being legal or illegal). Change these conditions, and ideas about abortion will change.

As we apply the sociological imagination in this text, you will discover how forces greater than yourself set the stage for the personal troubles that you experience.

Applying the Sociological Imagination to Personal Troubles

To better understand the connection between personal troubles and historical change, let's apply the sociological imagination to Lisa and her grandmother. This means that we want to examine the larger context that shaped their views about abortion. When

Lisa's grandmother was growing up, marriage and motherhood were considered a woman's destiny, her purpose in life. Without them, a woman was considered incomplete. At this time, careers for women were an interlude between completing education and marriage. Abortion was illegal, and almost everyone agreed that abortion was murder. Some women who had abortions were taken to their destination blindfolded in a taxi. They endured unsanitary surgery, risking postoperative infection and death.

Lisa grew up in a different society. To be sure, it was the same society geographically, but not socially. Lisa learned different ideas about herself and her place in life. The women's movement had transformed ideas about women's education, career, marriage, and motherhood. It had also changed women's ideas about the choices they could make about their bodies, including the right to terminate a pregnancy. Some say that a woman's right in this area is absolute: She can choose to have an abortion at any point in her pregnancy, even if she is 9 months along. If married, she does not even have to let her husband know about it.

Neither Lisa nor her grandmother saw this finely woven net that had been cast over them, one that was turning their lives upside down, making them confront one another like opponents instead of the close friends they are.

You and I are like Lisa and her grandmother. Although the winds of social change affect what we think and feel and what we do, we tend to see life from a close-up perspective—the immediate things that are affecting us. In contrast, the sociological imagination (also called the **sociological perspective**) invites us to place our focus on the social context, to see how broader forces shape or influence our ideas and actions, even our attitudes and emotions.

Our social context, which has such remarkable influence on us, has three levels: the broad, the narrow, and the intimate. The *broad* social context includes historical and current events such as war and peace, economic booms and busts, depression and prosperity. The *narrow* social context includes our gender, race–ethnicity, religion, and social class. The *intimate* social context refers to our relationships with family, friends, or coworkers. These are not just abstract ideas, things irrelevant to your life. Rather, these three levels merge into a powerful force that shapes the way you look at life.

Social Location

1.2 Explain the significance of social location and explain why sociologists can use social location to predict *group* behavior but not *individual* behavior.

The term **social location** refers to where you are located in society. It includes, of course, physical places, such as your neighborhood and city and where you go to school. But social location also refers to what your family and friends are like and to your personal characteristics, such as your education, age, sex, race–ethnicity, and marital status.

The Significance of Social Location

Few of us know how significant our social location is. We are aware that we have a social location and that it has an impact on our lives, of course, but our awareness is foggy. We are so caught up in the immediate present—the things that we have to do to get through everyday life—that the impact of our social location becomes practically invisible. Yet our social location influences almost all aspects of our lives. For example, if you are a woman, social location even influences whether or not you will have an abortion.

You might think that I am exaggerating to make a sociological point, but I'm not. Look at Table 1.1, and you will see the differences in abortion by age, race–ethnicity, marital status, and length of pregnancy. Look at age: Women in their early 20s are the most likely to have abortions. You can see how much lower the rate of abortion is before the early 20s and how sharply it drops after this age. Now look at the influence of race–ethnicity. As you can see, African American women are by far the most likely to have abortions. Their rate is more than three times that of white women, more than double that of Latinas. Another striking difference—one that cuts across both age and race–ethnicity—is marital status: You can see that almost all women who have abortions are unmarried. You can also see that most abortions take place before the 9th week of pregnancy, and that close to half of the women who have an abortion have had one, or more, before.

Table 1.1 Who Has Abortions?

Abortions	Number of Abortions	Percentage of All Abortions	Abortion Rate per 1,000 Women ¹
Total Abortions	653,000	100%	16
Age			
Under 15	1,600	0.3%	0.5
15–19	54,100	10.4%	7.5
20–24	166,400	32.2%	21.3
25–29	138,100	26.7%	18.4
30–34	88,600	17.1%	11.9
35–39	50,000	9.7%	7.2
40 and over	18,700	3.6%	2.6
Race–Ethnicity			
Whites	149,400	38.0%	7.5
African Americans	141,800	36.0%	26.6
Latinas	72,100	18.3%	12.3
Others ²	30,200	7.7%	13.5
Marital Status			
Married	48,200	15%	NA ³
Unmarried	280,600	85%	NA
Length of Gestation			
Less than 9 weeks	295,200	67%	NA
9 to 13 weeks	108,000	24.6%	NA
14 to 15 weeks	14,600	3.3%	NA
16 to 17 weeks	8,800	1.9%	NA
18 to 20 weeks	8,200	1.9%	NA
21 weeks or more	5,600	1.3%	NA
Number of Prior Abortions			
None	251,100	55%	NA
1	112,300	25%	NA
2	52,800	12%	NA
3 or more	39,100	9%	NA

¹Based on the number of women in the category.

²The source uses this general category to include everyone other than African Americans, Latinas, and whites.

³Not Available or Not Applicable.

Note: The totals in the source vary from category to category.

Source: By the author. Based on Jattaoui et al. 2017:Tables 3,7,12,15,17,19.

Now apply this to the women on your campus who become pregnant. Can you see how much more likely they are to have an abortion if they are single than if they are married? During the first two months of pregnancy than after this point?

Predictions from Social Location: The Group, Not the Individual

It is important to emphasize that social location does *not* determine our actions. Rather, it means that people in each corner of life are surrounded by a bundle of ideas, beliefs, and expectations. As each of us grows up in our particular social location, we are exposed to influences that help shape our ideas and actions.

For example, you are of a certain race–ethnicity and age. You are also either married or single. But this does *not* mean that because of these characteristics you will do some

particular thing, such as, if you are a woman and pregnant, having or not having an abortion. Social location makes a profound difference in your attitudes and actions, but in any individual case, including your own, it is impossible to know in advance the result of those influences. We can't predict that any particular woman will have an abortion. But—and this is important—as Table 1.1 makes apparent, sociologists can make predictions about *groups* because groups do follow well-traveled social avenues.

In Sum Sociologists stress the need to use the sociological imagination (or perspective) to understand how personal troubles are related to conditions in society and to people's social location. The sociological perspective helps make us aware of how the social context—from our historical era to our smaller social locations—influences our ideas, actions, and personal troubles.

I would like to stress that the social context also shapes our views of what is or is not a social problem and of our ideas about how to solve social problems. Let's look more closely at how this shaping takes place.

What Is a Social Problem?

1.3 Explain why a social problem consists of both objective conditions and subjective concerns and why social problems are relative.

Because **social problems**—conditions in a society that a large number of people are concerned about and would like changed—are the focus of this text, it is important to understand clearly what social problems are. We might think that social problems are natural things, like hurricanes and earthquakes. But they are not. Social problems are *socially constructed*. This means that people decide if some condition of society is or is not a social problem. This will become clearer as we examine this process.

The Characteristics of Social Problems

For a social problem to exist, two characteristics *must* be present: objective conditions and subjective concerns. After reviewing these essential conditions, we will see how social problems evolve and why they are relative.

Social Problems: Objective Conditions and Subjective Concerns Social problems have two essential components. The first is **objective conditions**, conditions of society that can be measured or experienced. With abortion, objective conditions include whether abortions are legal, who obtains them, and under what circumstances. The second essential component is **subjective concerns**, the concerns that a significant number of people (or a number of significant people) have about the objective conditions. For abortion, subjective concerns go in two directions: Some people are concerned that some women give birth to unwanted children, while others are concerned that some women terminate their pregnancies.

Because people around the world live in different cultures, they develop different ideas about life, including social problems. The differences in subjective concerns from one culture to another can be extreme, as you will see in the following *Global Glimpse*.

Social Problems Are Dynamic, Evolving As societies change, so do people's concerns. Because social problems are built around people's concerns, this means that social problems are always evolving. Let's see how this applies to abortion. Until 1973, abortion was illegal in the United States, and any doctor who performed an abortion could be arrested and put in prison. But in that year, a significant event transformed this social problem: The U.S. Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in a case known as *Roe v. Wade*.

Here is how the Court's ruling affected the two essential elements of this social problem—its objective conditions and subjective concerns. Before 1973, the *objective conditions* were based on abortion being illegal, especially the dangerous conditions in

A Global Glimpse

Only Females Eligible: Sex-Selection Abortion in India—and the United States

“May you be the mother of a hundred sons” is the toast made to brides in India. Indians rejoice at the birth of a son, but the birth of a daughter brings them tears of sadness.

Why such a toast? In India, a son continues the family name, keeps wealth and property in the family, takes care of aged parents (the elderly have no social security), and performs the parents’ funeral rites. Hinduism even teaches that a man without a son cannot achieve salvation.

A daughter, in contrast, is a liability. Men want to marry only virgins, and the parents of a daughter bear the burden of having to be on guard constantly to protect her virginity. For their daughter to marry, the parents must also pay a dowry to her husband. A common saying in India reflects the female’s low status: “To bring up a daughter is like watering a neighbor’s plant.”

This cultural context sets the stage for female infanticide, the killing of newborn baby girls, a practice that has been common in India for thousands of years. Today, much female infanticide has been replaced by sex-selection abortion. No longer must prospective parents wait until birth to see whether their newborn baby will be a boy or girl. Prenatal tests give them an immediate answer, letting them decide now if they will abort the fetus.

And if women are reluctant to abort their female fetuses? Medical personnel have developed techniques to nudge them in the right direction. In one clinic, nurses reach under the counter where they keep the preserved fetuses of twin girls. When a woman sees these bottled fetuses, the horror of double vigilance and two dowries is often sufficient to convince her to have an abortion.

The national legislature passed a law forbidding doctors to tell would-be parents the sex of their fetuses. Physicians who violate the law can be sent to prison. One ingenious way doctors get around the law is to use a code. “Come back to see me on **M**onday” means the child will be a male, while “I’ll see you this coming **F**riday” means it will be a female. The anti-daughter social context is so strong in India that an eminent physician made this public statement: “The need for a male child is an economic need in our society, and our feminists who are raising such hue and cry



Henslin, James M.

Sons are greatly preferred in India, for the reasons explained in this box. You can see the joy this son is bringing his mother. In my travels in India, I have seen daughters just as loved by their mothers.

about female feticide should realize that it is better to get rid of an unwanted child than to make it suffer all its life.”

How extensive is the assault on females in India? Around the world for each 100 baby girls, there are 105 baby boys. In India, for every 100 baby girls, there are 112 baby boys. Between sex-selection abortion and female infanticide, *India has 10 to 15 million fewer girls and women than it would have if these practices didn’t exist.*

In an interesting twist, sex-selection abortion is coming to the United States. As U.S. demographers pored over their data, they found that immigrants from India have fewer female children than they would by chance.

Based on Wheeler 2009; Jha 2011; Nelson 2014; Gupta 2017; “Illegal Abortions...” 2018.

For Your Consideration

- Granted the cultural situation that Indians face, do you think that Indians in poverty should practice sex-selection abortion? Why or why not?
- Do you think that the U.S. Congress should pass a law against sex-selection abortion for Americans?

which most abortions took place. And the *subjective concerns*? People were upset about two main things—that women who wanted abortions could not get them and that women faced dangers from botched underground abortions.

As concerns grew that women could not have legal abortions, some people began to work to change the law. Their success turned the problem on its head: The *Roe v. Wade* decision, which made abortion legal, upset large numbers of people. Convinced that abortion is murder, these people began their own campaigns to change the law, in this case to repeal *Roe v. Wade*. Activists who favor legal abortion opposed each step these people took. We’ll look more closely at this process in a moment, but at this point I simply want you to see that social problems evolve, *that they take shape as groups react to one another.*

Social Problems Are Relative *What some view as a social problem, others see as a solution.* As you can see from how people line up on either side of the abortion issue, what people consider to be a social problem depends on their values. A **value** is a belief about whether something is good or bad. People's values contrast so sharply that some view the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 as a moral victory, while others see it as a moral disaster. It is the same with other social problems. Mugging, for example, is not a social problem for muggers. Nor do Boeing and other corporations that profit from arming the world consider the billions of dollars spent on weapons to be a social problem. In the same way, nuclear power is not a social problem for the corporations that use it to generate electricity.

In the following *Issues in Social Problems*, we explore the relativity of social problems.

Issues in Social Problems

A Problem for Some Is a Solution for Others: The Relativity of Social Problems

Here is a basic sociological principle: As we interact with others—from our family and friends to people at school and work—their perspectives tend to become part of how we view life. Among these perspectives are ways we view social problems.

Our views might be firm, but they are not written in stone. Many of us think the subjective concerns we have about some social problem are the only right and reasonable way of viewing some objective condition. But from where did our views originate except from our experiences with particular groups and our exposure to certain ideas?

Just as our social locations are the source of our subjective concerns, so our views can change if our journey in life takes us to different social locations. Going to college is an example. There, we experience new groups and encounter different ideas, attitudes, and information. These experiences tug and pull at our own ideas and

attitudes, reshaping them. On rare occasions, these experiences even transform our ideas and attitudes.

Keep in mind that we do not have to go to a different physical location, such as from home to college, for our subjective concerns to change. This process occurs when we are exposed to competing views and values, which can happen at home while we are reading a book, watching television, or talking to a friend.

And changes in our subjective concerns do not have to occur. When confronted with different views, we can dig in all the deeper to hold onto what we consider to be the absolute truth of reality. Or we might consider the contrasting view ridiculous and not worth considering.

This relativity of subjective concerns is central to the social problem of abortion. How do you define the status of the unborn? Is the fetus a human being, as some believe, or only a potential human, as others believe?

Let's look at the two main opposing views.



Sebastian Kautzki/Fotolia

How people define the unborn is the essence of how they view abortion. Look at the photo. That which is pictured here is about eleven weeks' gestation. What is it? Those on one side of the abortion controversy use terms such as "fetus" and "product of conception," while those on the other side call it a "baby."

The Fetus Is *Not* a Human Being

This is the position of most people who believe that abortion is a woman's right. "The fetus is a potential person that looks increasingly human as it develops" (NARAL Pro-Choice America). It follows, then, that abortion is not killing, but rather, a medical procedure that removes a potential person, with the emphasis on *potential*. Women should have the right to have an abortion for *any* reason. The reason might include health problems or financial pressures, but it also might be to attain goals, to limit family size, to finish school, or simply to win a promotion at work. The reason should be solely up to the woman. The state has no business limiting women's rights and should permit abortion on demand.

What Do You Think?

The Fetus *Is* a Human Being

This is the position of most people who oppose abortion. It follows, then, that abortion is murder—the killing of unborn babies, the most defenseless of all humans. How can anyone justify murdering a baby? We need to protect and nourish babies, not kill them. To say that women have a right to abortion is the equivalent of saying that women have the right to murder their children. It is not just the woman's body that is involved in a pregnancy: There are two bodies, and the other one is a baby. The exception to this concept of abortion is that rare situation when another human life, the mother's, lies in the balance. The state has no business legalizing murder, and abortion should be illegal.

What Do You Think?

Subjective concerns, although relative and evolving, are extremely important in determining how we view social problems. Look at Table 1.2. You can see that whether people view abortion as favorable or unfavorable colors the way they view everything connected with abortion. Subjective concerns about social problems, then, can sort people into such contrasting worlds that, like Lisa and her grandmother, it becomes difficult for people to communicate with one another.

Table 1.2 How People’s Definitions of Abortion Affect Their Views

	THE VIEWS (DEFINITIONS) OF		
	People Who Favor Abortion	People Who Oppose Abortion	People Who Do Abortions
What Is Abortion?	A woman’s right	Murder	Part of my work
What Is Aborted?	A fetus	A baby	A fetus
Who Is the Woman?	An individual exercising her rights	A mother	A client
What Is the Act of Abortion?	A service to women	Killing a baby	A medical procedure
Who Is the One Who Does the Abortion?	A skilled technician	A killer	A professional

Source: By the author. Modified from Roe, Kathleen M. “Private Troubles and Public Issues: Providing Abortion Amid Competing Definitions.” *Social Science and Medicine*, 29, 10, 1989:1191–1198.

Competing Views As you know, our pluralistic society is filled with competing, contrasting, and conflicting groups. This variety certainly makes life interesting, as it means that we are exposed to competing, contrasting, and conflicting views of life. But in our dynamic world where some groups fiercely promote their particular ideas and values, whose definition of a social problem wins? The answer centers on **power**, the ability to get your way despite resistance.

After abortion became legal, most observers assumed that because the opponents of abortion had lost, they would quietly fade away. What a naïve assumption this turned out to be. Feelings were so strong that groups that had been hostile to one another for centuries, such as Roman Catholics and Baptists, began to work together to try to stop abortion. Shocked at what they considered the killing of babies, they took to the streets and to the courts, fighting battle after battle over this issue.

These, then, are central characteristics of social problems: objective conditions, subjective concerns, change, relativity, and competing views. Let’s see how these fascinating characteristics of social problems help us to understand how abortion became a social problem.

The Natural History of Social Problems: Four Stages

1.4 Identify the four stages through which social problems evolve.

Social problems go through four stages, called *the natural history of social problems*. To illustrate this process, we will look at abortion in the United States. To do so, we need to stress again that abortion used to be illegal in all fifty states. Abortion was allowed only under special circumstances, such as when pregnancy endangered the mother’s life.

To see how this changed, we need to go back to an outbreak of German measles that hit Hawaii in 1964 and 1965. During this time, many obstetricians aborted fetuses to prevent them from being born with deformities. This was a turning point for Hawaii’s physicians. They began to change their views on abortion, and the rate of abortion in Hawaii never fell back to its pre-1964 level. In 1970, Hawaii changed its law, making abortion a private, noncriminal act.

Now that we’ve set this brief background, we can trace the natural history of abortion as a social problem in the United States. For a summary of the four stages of social problems, look at Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 The Four Stages of Social Problems

1. The Beginning: Pressures for Change
Defining the problem Emergence of leaders Initial organization
2. The Official Response
Reactions to the growing pressure Reprisal, condemnation, accommodation, cooptation
3. Reacting to the Official Response
Taking sides Acts of approval and disapproval Further divisions of dissident elements
4. Alternative Strategies
Continuing controversy New strategies to overcome the opposition

Source: By the author.

Before we look at these four stages in detail, it is important to note that our society is marked by unrest and agitation about numerous matters, but very few of these issues turn into social problems. Most remain diffuse matters of discontent. Around some social issues, however, social movements develop. The trigger that sometimes launches a social movement is a dramatic event that captures the imagination, desires, or discontent of large numbers of people. Following a precipitating incident, decades of simmering discontent can erupt in sudden and violent acts of rage, which burn out, with no social movement. Or a simmering discontent that goes back decades can lead to an ongoing social movement, as with abortion in the United States. What often transforms these emotions into a dynamic force for change is organizing of some sort.

Let's look at these stages:

The First Stage: Defining the Problem, the Emergence of Leaders, and Beginning to Organize

As we begin with the earliest stage of a social problem, we'll pick up events in Hawaii, and go from there.

Defining the Problem As you have just seen, for a social problem to come into being, people have to become upset about some objective condition in society. This concern involves a shift in outlook, a questioning of something that people had taken for granted. This change in perspective often comes about when values change, making an old, established pattern no longer look the same. This is what happened with abortion. The 1960s were a period of turmoil that brought wrenching social change to the United States. Young people—primarily teenagers and those in their 20s—began to challenge long-established values. The women's movement was especially significant, encouraging women to speak out and demand equality. Within this agitational and supportive context, many women decided that they should not have to break the law to terminate a pregnancy—that they had the right to safe, legal abortions.

The Emergence of Leaders As people discussed their concerns about abortion being illegal, leaders emerged who helped to crystallize the issues. In Hawaii, Vincent Yano, a Roman Catholic state senator and the father of 10, took the public stage. He argued that if abortion were a sin, it would be better to have no abortion law than to have one that allowed it under certain circumstances (Steinhoff and Diamond 1977). This reasoning allowed Yano to maintain his religious opposition to abortion while favoring the repeal of Hawaii's law against abortion.

Organizing around the Issue Another leader emerged: Joan Hayes, a former Washington lobbyist. She went even further, arguing that the major issue was the right of pregnant women to choose whether or not to have a baby. Hayes used the media

effectively. Concentrating on influential people, she organized leaders in medicine, business, labor, politics, religion, education, and the media. Focusing on women's choice, she aroused public support for her position.

The Second Stage: Crafting an Official Response

It is important to stress that the stages of a social problem don't have neat boundaries. The edges are blurry, and the stages overlap. In the years before Hawaii changed its law, legislators had introduced several bills to soften the state's abortion law. These bills were not passed, but since their purpose was to broaden the circumstances under which abortion would be permitted, they were attempts to redefine abortion. You can see that the first stage of defining the social problem and the second stage of developing an official response to it were intertwined.

The turning point in Hawaii came when Senator Yano announced that he would support the repeal of the abortion law. This stimulated other official responses from organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Roman Catholic Church. Public forums and legislative hearings were then held, which generated huge amounts of publicity. This publicity served as a vital bridge between the passive public at large and the leaders who were advocating repeal of Hawaii's abortion law. As Hawaiians became keenly aware of the abortion issue, polls showed that most favored repealing the law. In 1970, Hawaii did just that.

The Third Stage: Reacting to the Official Response

An official response to a social problem certainly does not mean the end of a social problem. Some will be disappointed and angry at the official response, giving them new reason to continue their struggle.

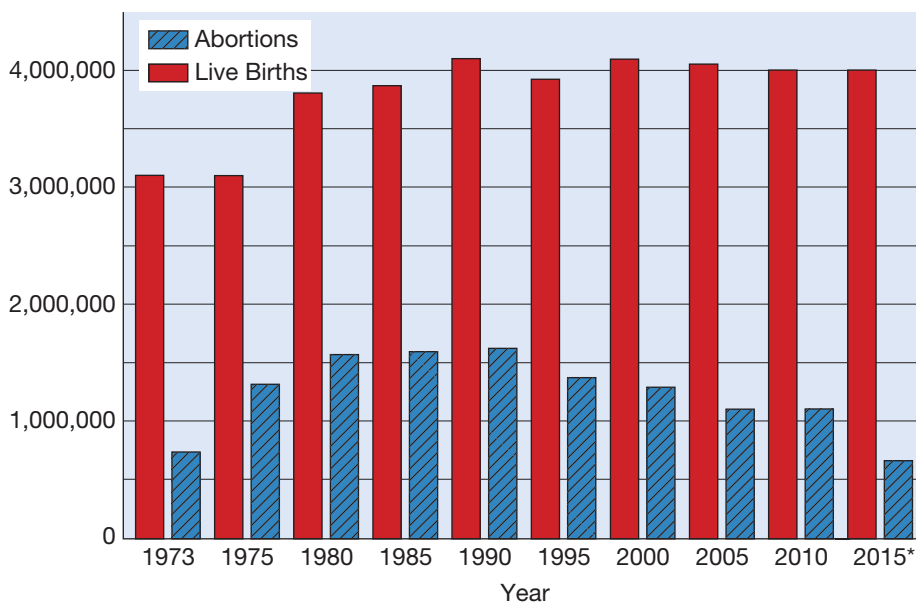
Invigorating Activists and Stimulating Change Official responses can invigorate activists, and this is just what happened with abortion. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court

agreed with the Hawaiian legislation and struck down all state laws that prohibited abortion. Incensed by what they saw as legalized murder, antiabortion groups held protests, trying to swing public opinion to their side.

Besides inspiring new opposition, an official response can also stimulate efforts to bring about even more change. In this case, those who had fought to strike down the abortion laws were also dissatisfied: Their Supreme Court victory fell short of what they wanted. It was still difficult for women to obtain abortions, as most U.S. counties did not have facilities to perform them. To solve this, proabortion groups began to promote the development of abortion clinics around the country.

Figure 1.1 shows the success of their efforts. In 1973, the first year of legal abortion, 745,000 abortions were performed. This number climbed quickly to one million, then to a

Figure 1.1 Number of Abortions and Live Births



*The latest year available.

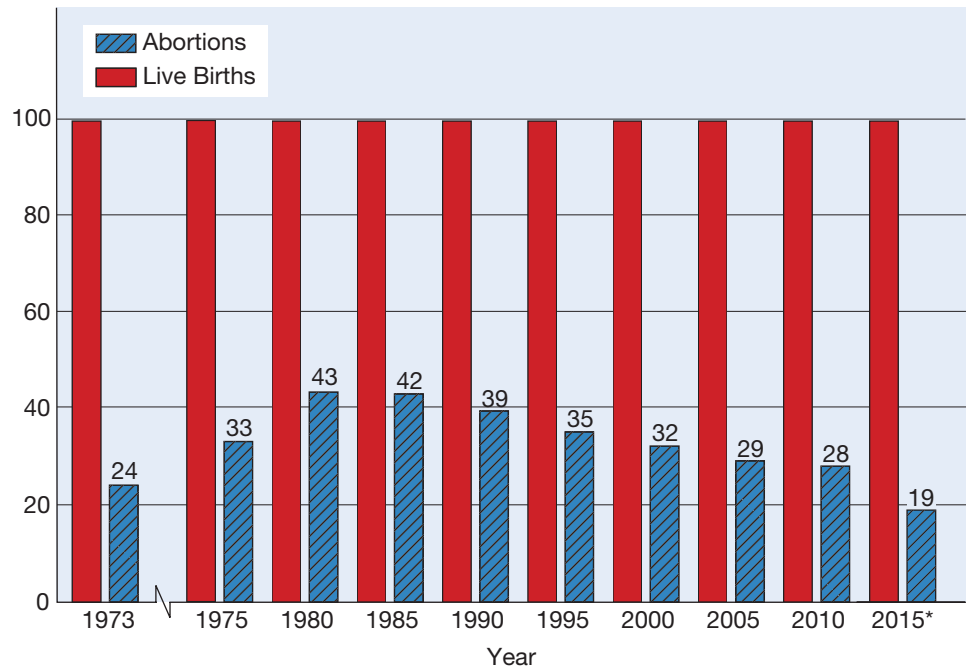
Sources: By the author. Based on Jatlaoui et al. 2017 (see Above); Jones and Jerman 2017 (Jones, Rachel K., and Jenna Jerman. "Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2014." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 49 (1), 2017.); *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2003:Tables 83,95,104; 2014:Table 109; 2018:Table 81; CDC 2018j.

million and a half, where it reached a plateau. In 1995, the total began to drop, and now, at 638,000, it is the lowest since abortion became legal.

Figure 1.2 gives us another overview of abortion. From this figure, you can see that the number of abortions per live births climbed sharply after abortion was legalized. After plateauing for about 10 years, the number of abortions then began to drop, which it has done steadily since then. Today, for every 100 live births there are 19 abortions, the lowest ratio since data were collected on abortion.

A Note on Terms Before we look at the fourth stage of social problems, it is good for us to pause and consider terms. Terms are always significant, but especially so when we deal with sensitive matters. You probably noticed that I just used the term *pro-abortion* to refer to those who favor the legal right to abortion and *anti-abortion* to refer to those who oppose this legal right. (The longer terms would be *pro-legal-abortion* and *anti-legal-abortion*.) I am going to avoid the terms *pro-choice* and *pro-life*, which are used by advocates on each side of this social problem, because they represent one-sided, hardened attitudes and positions. (As discussed in the Preface, neither side involved in the abortion issue prefers the terms I have chosen.) If I have succeeded in my intentions, even if you do not like the terms I have chosen, whether you favor the legal right to abortion or oppose it, you will feel that I am providing a balanced presentation of your view.

Figure 1.2 Number of Abortions per 100 Live Births



*In light of growing, huge deficits, the federal government has reduced expenditures on gathering, analyzing, and reporting statistics. I regret that 2015 is currently the latest year available.

Sources: By the author. *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1988: Tables 81,103; 2014:Table 98; 2016: Table 86, 110; Centres for Disease Prevention and control, 2016d; Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1988:Tables 81,103; 2014:Table 98; 2018:Table 85; CDC 2018j.

The Fourth Stage: Developing Alternative Strategies

The millions of legal abortions that took place after the Supreme Court's landmark 1973 ruling led to pitched battles in a controversy that is still with us today, especially evident when a vacancy occurs in the U.S. Supreme court. Let's look at some of the alternative strategies that the pro- and antiabortion groups use to promote their positions.

Alternative Strategies of the Antiabortionists After the Supreme Court made its *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, antiabortion groups began to try to persuade Congress to restrict abortion. They first succeeded in eliminating federal funding of abortions for military personnel and their dependents, federal prisoners, and workers with the Peace Corps. Their major victory on the federal level also took place early: In 1976, they persuaded Congress to pass the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits Medicaid funding for abortions unless the woman's life is in imminent danger. A more recent victory is on the state level, getting 26 states to require that a woman who seeks an abortion have a sonogram (Talbot 2017). The goal is for women to change their minds when they see the fetus moving.

The antiabortion groups also established "crisis pregnancy centers." Women who call "pregnancy hotlines" (sometimes called life lines or birth lines) are offered free pregnancy testing. If the test shows that a woman is pregnant, she

is directed to counselors who encourage her to give birth. The counselors inform her about fetal development and point her to sources of financial aid and social support during pregnancy. They also advise women on how to find adoptive parents or how to obtain financial support after the birth. Some activists also operate maternity homes and provide adoption services.

Strategies of Moderates We can classify antiabortionists as moderates or radicals, depending on the techniques they use to support their views. The strategies that moderates choose are mild, such as forwarding e-mail to their friends, running newspaper ads, writing their representatives, posting blogs, and operating Internet sites. As speakers at conferences, the moderates feature women who have had abortions, but who regret their decision. Taking their cue from the civil rights movement of the 1950s, in the years after *Roe v. Wade* many practiced passive resistance to laws they considered unjust. Lying immobile in front of abortion clinics, they would go limp as the police carried them to jail. The battle grew fierce, and arrests of abortion protesters became a regular part of the nightly news. After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was legal to restrict demonstrations at clinics and the homes of clinic staff, however, this tactic practically disappeared. Although the Supreme Court ruled in 2014 that some restrictions violate the right of free speech, confrontations have been few.

Strategies of Radicals To try to stop abortions, radical activists choose more extreme methods. Some have thrown blood on the walls of abortion clinics, unplugged abortion equipment, jammed clinic doors with superglue, and set off stink bombs. Others have called women who had abortions and played recordings of babies screaming. Radical activists have burned and bombed abortion clinics and killed eleven people, including abortion doctors (Cruz 2018). In the town in which I taught, Edwardsville, Illinois, radicals kidnapped a physician and threatened his life if he did not shut down his abortion clinics. These extreme acts have been condemned by both proabortionists and antiabortionists alike.

Alternative Strategies of the Proabortionists Proabortion groups see the right to choose abortion as central to women's freedom from the dominance of men. One of their alternative strategies is to stress how dangerous it used to be for women to have abortions. They use the stories of women who had abortions when it was back-alley business—blindfolded in taxis, taken to unknown destinations, and kitchen table abortions with unclean instruments—to warn the public about what it would be like if the courts take away women's legal right to abortion. Their ultimate message is that thousands of women will die from underground abortions if it does not remain legal.

Like Lisa and her grandmother in the chapter's opening vignette, why might this grandmother and granddaughter have different opinions about abortion? Both were born and raised in the United States. What does it mean to say they grew up in different societies?



AshTproductions/Shutterstock

Central to the efforts of the proabortionists is protecting *Roe v. Wade*. They work tirelessly to prevent the antiabortionists from chipping away at the ruling. They fear that *Roe* might be overturned, and one counterattack, so far unsuccessful, is to try to get the right to abortion written into state constitutions.

Making Mutual Accusations Each side follows the same key strategy: pointing a finger at the other. As each side promotes its own point of view, it paints the other as grotesque, uncaring, even evil. Proabortionists accuse antiabortionists of being concerned about fetuses but not about pregnant women. They also point to the killing of physicians as evidence of hypocrisy—people who say they stand for life killing others. For their part, anti-abortionists accuse proabortionists of suppressing information about the health risks of abortion—and of murdering unborn children.

The Controversy Continues: The Supreme Court after *Roe v. Wade*. In the abortion debate, the U.S. Supreme Court remains the final arbiter. If either side on this issue succeeds in getting a law passed, the Supreme Court decides whether that law is constitutional. Consequently, each side uses the same key alternative strategy, trying to influence whom the president nominates to fill vacancies on the Supreme Court and how the Senate votes on them. For the past four decades, U.S. presidents have taken strong positions on abortion and have proposed nominees for the Supreme Court who reflect their position. We can expect this stacking of the Court to continue.

Three Supreme Court rulings since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision are especially significant. The first is *Webster v. Reproductive Services* (1989). In this ruling, the Court concluded that the states have no obligation to finance abortion. Individual states can ban abortions at state hospitals and refuse to fund counseling services for women who are considering abortion.

The second significant decision is *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* (1992). In this ruling, hailed as a victory by the antiabortionists, the Supreme Court ruled that to get an abortion, women under the age of 18 must first obtain the consent of at least one parent. This ruling also requires a waiting period of 24 hours before an abortion can be performed. During this waiting period, the woman must be given materials on fetal development, as well as a list of adoption agencies in the area. In a nod to the proabortionists, the Court ruled in this same decision that a wife has no obligation to inform her husband before she has an abortion.

The third major Supreme Court decision came in 2007. In *Gonzales v. Carhart*, the Court upheld the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban that Congress had passed in 2003. This law bans a procedure in which the doctor dilates the woman's cervix, then pulls the fetus through the birth canal feet first until only the head remains inside. Using scissors or another sharp instrument, the doctor then punctures the head and compresses the skull, so it, too, can fit through the dilated cervix (Rovner 2006).

This ruling highlights the significance of terms. The proabortionists call this procedure intact dilation and extraction, a dry-sounding medical term, while the antiabortionists call it partial birth abortion, an emotionally evocative term. That Congress called its law the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban indicates the success that the antiabortion groups had in formulating this law and in this Supreme Court ruling.

The Controversy Continues: More Supreme Court Decisions As you have seen, both sides use alternative strategies, and both sides have been successful in getting laws passed that favor their position. The antiabortionists managed a stunning victory when the Supreme Court ruled on a Massachusetts law that required protestors to stay 35 feet away from women who are entering an abortion clinic. The Court said the law was unconstitutional because it infringed on the right of free speech (Kendall et al. 2014). The proabortionists also managed a stunning victory when they succeeded in getting abortion covered by the Affordable Care Act. This aroused intense opposition from several religious groups, including Baptists and Roman Catholics, as it violates their religious beliefs and conscience. So far, the Supreme Court has avoided making a ruling on this matter by sending cases back to lower courts (Feldman 2016). In coming years, the Supreme Court will continue to rule on law after law that states pass regarding abortion.

No Middle Ground The depth of feelings and convictions on *both* sides of this issue run so deeply that alternative strategies pursued by proabortionists and antiabortionists are merely skirmishes in a drawn-out war. Each side is seeking total victory, and neither is satisfied with strategies that bring anything less. What the antiabortionists want is a *Federal Right to Life Law*, a constitutional amendment that would assert that human life begins at conception. Abortion would then be officially classified as a type of murder. For their part, what the proabortionists want is a *Federal Freedom of Choice Law* that would remove all state and federal restrictions on abortion. You can see that the views and goals of abortion activists are totally incompatible.

The final results of this struggle for and against legal abortion are still unclear. On *each* side of this issue are highly motivated people who consider their view the *only* “right” way of looking at the world. Each views the other as misinformed and unreasonable. Each is rationally and emotionally dedicated to their own view of morality: One argues that the only moral course of action is to outlaw abortion because it kills babies. The other argues that the only moral course of action is to keep abortion legal because it is part of women’s freedom to make decisions about their own bodies. With no middle ground to bridge this chasm, there is no end in sight to this bitter, determined struggle, and the groups are likely to continue to confront one another for some time.

The Role of Sociology in Social Problems

1.5 Describe the contributions that sociologists can make in studying social problems.

As you have seen with the example of abortion, social problems are filled with conflicting emotions, views, and values. In the midst of such turmoil, how can sociology help?

A basic human characteristic is to think of our world in personal and moral terms. In the chapter’s opening vignette, for example, Lisa may think that her grandmother is narrow-minded, and her grandmother may wonder how Lisa acquired such casual morals. Most of us are convinced that our views on moral issues are right, and that people who hold contrary views are ignorant, short-sighted, and wrong. Our defenses go up when anyone questions our moral positions.

It is difficult to penetrate such self-protective attitudes and defenses, especially since they go beyond the rational and are clad in emotions. Let’s see how **sociology**, the systematic and objective study of human groups, can help us see past the emotions that surround social problems.

Sociology as a Tool for Gaining an Objective Understanding of Social Problems

So how can sociology penetrate emotions and provide an objective understanding of social problems? This is a tall order, but sociology is in a unique position to do this. Let’s look at five ways.

Five Contributions That Sociologists Can Make

1. *Sociologists can measure objective conditions.* In the case of abortion, sociologists can gather information on the number of abortions performed in clinics and hospitals, trends in the number of abortions and who has them, and how the states differ on making abortion accessible. They also can determine how women make their decisions to have or to not have an abortion, how women adjust to their decisions, and how their decisions affect their relationships with their husbands, boyfriends, or significant others.
2. *Sociologists can measure subjective concerns.* To determine social policies about a social problem, it is useful to know people’s attitudes and views. Sociologists can also measure these. Establishing sound social policy involves more than measuring public opinion, of course, but accurate measurements can guide policy makers.

For an example, look at Table 1.4, which summarizes Americans' attitudes about the legality of abortion. I stressed earlier how significant *social location* is for people's attitudes, and here you can see how attitudes toward abortion are related to people's sex, race–ethnicity, age, education, and politics.

Table 1.4 Should Abortion Be Legal or Illegal?

A representative sample of Americans was asked if they thought abortion should be legal in all cases or in most cases, or illegal in all cases or most cases.

	Legal in All or Most Cases	Illegal in All or Most Cases
Overall Average	57%	40%
Sex		
Male	55%	42%
Female	59%	38%
Race–Ethnicity		
White	58%	40%
Black	62%	34%
Latino	50%	49%
Age		
18–29	65%	33%
30–49	59%	40%
50–64	53%	43%
65+	53%	44%
Education		
High School or Less	49%	48%
Some College	57%	40%
College Grad or More	69%	29%
Politics		
Republican	34%	65%
Democrat	75%	22%
Independent	60%	38%

Source: By the author. Based on "Public Opinion on Abortion." PEW Research Center, July 7, 2017.

3. *Sociologists can apply the sociological imagination.* Sociologists can place social problems in their broad social context. For example, people's ideas about abortion are related to their views of individual freedom and privacy, sexuality and sex roles, and when life begins. They are also related to their views of parenting, wife–husband relationships, morality, and even their ideas about God and an afterlife.
4. *Sociologists can identify possible social policies.* To address a social problem, sociologists can suggest potential courses of action for public and private agencies, educational programs, public awareness campaigns, and legal changes.
5. *Sociologists can evaluate likely consequences of social policies.* Sociologists can suggest which consequences are likely to result if some particular social policy is followed (Becker 1966). With abortion, for example, sociologists can estimate how a social policy might affect the birthrate, population growth, crime rate, and expenditures for welfare and education.

Sociology and Values That sociologists can do objective research does not mean that sociology has all the answers. Far from it. Although sociologists can identify consequences that are likely to result from social policy, we sociologists have no expertise for determining which social policy *should* be followed. Social policy is based on values, on the outcomes that people want. *Because sociology cannot dictate that one set of values is superior to another, it provides no basis for making value decisions.* We'll come back to this in a moment, but first let's consider using common sense to solve social problems.

Sociology and Common Sense

1.6 Explain why common sense is not adequate to understand social problems.

Do we really need sociological research? We use **common sense**, the ideas common to our society (or to some group within our society), to get through daily life, so why don't we just use common sense to solve social problems?

The short answer is that common sense is not adequate, as some of our ideas are built on faulty assumptions. For example, a commonsense idea is that abortion is a last resort. For some women, it is, of course, but this is not always the case. Soviet Russia provides a remarkable example. In the Soviet Union, abortion was a *major means* of birth control, and the *average* Russian woman used to have six abortions in her lifetime (Yablonsky 1981; Eberstadt 1988). The abortion rate has plummeted since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but abortion became part of the culture, and even today for every 1,000 live births Russian women have 480 abortions (Ferris-Rotman 2017).

You know, of course, from personal experience how common sense falls short. Haven't we all made assumptions about something, only to discover to our dismay or embarrassment that we were in error? We continue to learn from our failures and our successes, refining our common sense, but we know how easy it is to be mistaken in our assumptions.

Since it is easy for commonsense ideas to be wrong, we need solid research. To see how sociologists produce objective findings, let's turn to how they do their research.

Methods for Studying Social Problems

1.7 Understand the four basic research designs and research methods that sociologists use to study social problems.

When sociologists study social problems, they choose from several **research methods** (ways of doing research). Which method they select depends on three factors. The first is the question they want to investigate. Suppose, for example, that you want to find out how people form their ideas about abortion. To answer this question, you would use a different method of research than if you want to compare the abortion rates of high school dropouts and college-educated women. A second factor is the matter of practicality. You might want to do face-to-face interviews with people across the country, but you can't because you have neither enough money nor enough time. A third factor is ethics. Some methods that might yield good data are unethical. They might cause emotional harm, violate people's privacy, or be illegal.

Let's look at the methods that sociologists use to study social problems. We shall first consider how sociologists design their studies, then describe how they gather their data.

Four Basic Research Designs

Most research falls into one of four **research designs**: case studies, surveys, experiments, and field studies. Let's look at each.

Case Studies The **case study** is used to gather in-depth information on a specific situation. As the name implies, the researcher focuses on one case—an individual, an event, or even an organization such as an abortion clinic or a crisis pregnancy center. Let's suppose that you want in-depth information about how women experience abortion. You might want to learn how the women wrestle with the decision of whether to give birth or to have an abortion. Or you might want to know how women adjust after an abortion. A case study could provide this type of depth of understanding.

Surveys While case studies provide rich detail, you cannot generalize from them. They can provide remarkable insight, but if you focus on just one woman, how can you know

whether her experiences are similar to those of other women? To overcome this limitation, sociologists use **surveys**. In a survey, you focus on a **sample** of the group you want to study. (Sociologists use the term **population** to refer to the target group.) Samples are intended to represent the entire group that you are studying. Done correctly, surveys allow you to **generalize** what you find—that is, you are able to apply your findings to people who belong to the group but who are not in your sample.

The best sample is a **random sample**. This is a sample in which everyone in your population has an equal chance of being included in your research. When researchers do national surveys, whether on attitudes toward abortion or anything else, they need to get information from only about 2,000 people. Yet random samples are so powerful that these surveys can accurately represent the opinions of 330 million Americans.

Experiments Another research method is the **experiment**. If you were to use this method, you would divide people who have certain characteristics (such as Latinas between the ages of 18 and 21 who have had an abortion) into two groups. You would expose half of them to some experience (such as a video of a woman giving birth). These people are called the **experimental group**. You would do this to see how their reactions differ from those of the other half, the **control group**, those who do not view the video. How the experimental group responds is thought to be generalizable to people who share their characteristics (in this case, Latinas who have had an abortion).

Experiments are rare in the study of social problems, partly because ethics do not allow us to create problems for people. (Having a woman who has recently had an abortion watch a video of a birth is likely to cause stress.) However, you can use experiments in more limited ways. For example, you could measure attitudes toward abortion before and after listening to a lecture on abortion.

Field Studies In **field studies** (or **participant observation**), researchers go into a setting that they want to learn more about. (This is called “going into the field.”) For example, sociologists did participant observation in a hospital in Salvador, Brazil. They found that some medical personnel expressed negative attitudes toward women who were having abortions. As one young woman was being admitted to the hospital, a doctor said to her, “Who wants to see a dead fetus?” They also found that some of the women referred to their aborted fetus as “my child.” The researchers conclude that the women used this term because during their pregnancy they anticipated a relationship with a future child (McCallum et al. 2016).

No other research method produces such rich detail on people’s experiences.

Four Methods for Gathering Information

After selecting a research design, sociologists decide how to gather their information. They choose from four basic techniques: interviews, questionnaires, documents, and observations. Let’s look at each.

Interviews If you use an **interview**, you ask people questions on the topics that you want to explore. You can choose from two types of interviews. If you use a **structured interview**, you ask everyone the same questions (for example, “What is your relationship to the man who made you pregnant?”). If you use an **unstructured interview**, you let people talk in depth about their experiences; however, you must make certain that everyone covers certain topics (such as contraceptive history, family relations, and the reasons for the abortion).

Questionnaires If you use the second technique, **questionnaires**, you ask people to answer a list of written questions. These can be in paper/pencil form or they can be questions on a computer program. Your questions can be either *open-ended* (people answer in their own words) or *closed-ended* (people choose from a list of prepared answers). An open-ended question might be “What is your relationship to the man who made you pregnant?” The woman would put the relationship in her own words. A closed-ended form of this question would ask the woman to check an item on a list, such as husband, life partner, boyfriend, casual acquaintance, other. It is easier to compare answers to closed-ended questions, but open-ended questions tap a richer world, eliciting comments, attitudes, and even topics that you might not anticipate.

If sociologists were to analyze what you see in this photo that I took at the Bulguksa Temple in Kyung Joo City, South Korea, they would want to know what the Buddha and the other four figures represent to the worshippers, why the people prostrate themselves in this form, and, especially, how their religious beliefs influence their lives.



Henslin, James M.

Analysis of Documents Written sources or records, called **documents**, can also provide valuable data about social problems. You might examine official records like census data or hospital records. Or you might look at more informal records, such as journals, blogs, e-mail, and Internet discussion groups. These documents can reveal people's attitudes, opinions, and actions. They also can provide insight into how people cope with troubles.

Observation The fourth technique, **observation**, is just what the term implies: To use it, you observe what is occurring in some setting. You watch and listen to what is taking place and record or take field notes on people's actions or what they say. You might use an audio or video recorder, but if recording will interfere with what people are doing or saying, you take notes instead, either while something occurs or afterward. If you use *overt observation*, you will identify yourself as a researcher, but if you use *covert observation*, the people in the setting will not be aware that you are studying them.

Combining Methods As you do research, you are not limited to a single method. A common combination of methods for sociologists is participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of documents.

Striving for Accuracy and Objectivity

As sociologists strive for accuracy and objectivity, they are aware that *questions can shape answers*. Look at Table 1.5, in which we compare biased and neutral questions. The bias of the questions on the left should be obvious to you. But what is biased about number two on the antiabortion side?

Did you spot the bias in number two on the antiabortion side? To make the bias more obvious, think about the terms *father* and *baby*. These terms contain assumptions that bias the question in an antiabortion direction.

Like everyone else, those of us who are sociologists get our views of life from the groups with which we associate and the ideas to which we are exposed. This gives us opinions about what is desirable and undesirable in life, from politics to morality. These views provide ways to interpret or understand life. When they creep into our research, they are called *biases*. They can contaminate our research even without our being aware of it. Fortunately, we have a safeguard, the publication of our findings. In our articles and

Table 1.5 Bias and Objectivity in Research Questions

Biased Questions	Neutral Questions
The Antiabortion Bias	
1. What is your opinion about killing babies by abortion?	1. What is your opinion about abortion?
2. What is your opinion about women not having to inform the father of the baby before they have an abortion?	2. If a husband or boyfriend gets a woman pregnant, do you think he should be informed before the woman has an abortion?
The Proabortion Bias	
3. What is your opinion about forcing a woman to have a baby when she wants an abortion?	3. What is your opinion about abortion?
4. Why do you think that any man who gets a woman pregnant should have a say in the woman's choice of what to do with her own body?	4. If a husband or boyfriend gets a woman pregnant, do you think he should be informed before the woman has an abortion?
5. By the author.	

books, we include details on the methods we use. Other sociologists comb over our publications in detail, eager to point out any flaws they can find, including biases.

To help you better understand how sociologists do research, I asked several sociologists to share their experiences with you. The result is a feature that runs through this text called *Spotlight on Social Research*. Here is an overview of this feature:

Spotlight on Social Research

An Overview of This Feature

Sociologists do a lot of research on social problems. In fact, this is one of their favorite areas of study. As we review social problems in this text, you will be introduced to both classic and current research.

To acquaint you with researchers in social problems, 10 chapters have a boxed feature titled *Spotlight on Social Research*. Each box features a researcher who has studied a particular social problem. These boxes are unique, for the researchers themselves have written them.

The research that you will read about in *Spotlight on Social Research* is incredibly varied. With these researchers, you will visit a youth gang in Chicago, a bar in Chicago's inner city where gangsters hang out, and neo-Nazis in Detroit. You'll even be present at a Klan rally. In a study of workers at two magazines, you will learn how views of sexual harassment differ from one work setting to another. You will also learn how one sociologist became so interested in military matters that he went to Iraq. One researcher recounts how his picking beans in the fields of Washington led to a lifetime of doing research on crime. Another researcher shares how her own abuse at the hands of her husband while she was a student motivated her to do research on intimate partner violence.

As these researchers reflect on their studies, they pull back the curtains to let you look behind the scenes to see how research is done. To help provide a broader context for appreciating their research, I open each box by sharing a little about the researcher's background and how the researcher became interested in a particular social problem.



*"That's the worst set of opinions
I've heard in my entire life."*

To attain their goal of objectivity and accuracy in their research, sociologists must put away their personal opinions or biases.

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www.cartoonbank.com

I think that you'll enjoy *Spotlight on Social Research*. The "inside" information that these researchers share gives a unique flavor to this text. From these reports, you will learn things about research that are not available anywhere else. I am grateful to these researchers for taking time out of their research and teaching to share their experiences with me. It was a pleasure corresponding with them and gaining insight into their work.

Should Sociologists Take Sides?

1.8 Summarize the disagreement in sociology regarding whether or not sociologists should choose sides.

Whether or not sociologists should take sides in social problems can ignite fierce debate. Let's see why.

The Issues Involved in Taking Sides

Within simple matters often lurk complex issues. This is how it is with taking sides on social problems. Let's begin with the problem of determining morality.

Sociology and Determining Morality As I mentioned earlier, sociologists can do objective research but sociology does not provide a basis for making value judgments. Our four research methods allow us to gather objective information on social problems, but they do not reveal what attitude or social policy is "correct." Abortion, for example, is interwoven with thorny philosophical and religious issues concerning the "great questions" of life, death, morality, freedom, responsibility, and ultimate existence. Sociologists can study people's ideas about such topics, but sociology has no basis to judge whether one person's ideas are right and someone else's ideas are wrong, much less determine the ultimate meaning that may underlie their ideas.

To take a position on a social problem is to take sides—and because sociology does not equip us to make judgments about values and morality, sociology cannot tell us which side to take. Even so, the question of taking sides on social problems is debated hotly among sociologists, for, like other thoughtful people, sociologists have their own subjective concerns about social problems. Let's look at this debate.

Taking the Side of the Oppressed Many sociologists are convinced that they have a moral obligation to take a stand on social issues. "If sociology is not useful for helping to reform society," they ask, "of what value is it?" They stress that although sociology does not provide a basis for making moral choices, it does provide sociologists the ability to relate the surface manifestations of a social problem (such as poverty) to deeper social causes (such as the control of a country's resources by the wealthy and powerful). They say that sociologists have the obligation to do their research objectively—but that they should side with those who are being hurt and exploited. Some go further than this and say that sociologists have a moral obligation to make the oppressed aware of their condition and to organize them to do battle against those who oppress them.

This view that we should take the side of the oppressed—a popular view running through sociology—does not give us a direction for taking sides in the abortion dilemma. Those who take the proabortion view would argue that they are siding with women who are hurt and exploited. But those who take the antiabortion view would argue that they are siding with the hurt and exploited unborn. We end up full circle to where we started. Again, sociology cannot provide the basis for choosing values.

Uncovering Values To better bring these views into focus, let's assume that some sociologists have studied unmarried pregnant teenagers. After analyzing the problems

that these young women face and the consequences for their children, they conclude that unmarried pregnant teenagers should have abortions. Arguments can be made for and against this position, of course, but the question is: Should sociologists promote such a point of view?

To make this issue clearer, let's consider an even more extreme case. Suppose that sociologists analyze the soaring costs of Social Security and Medicare. They become convinced that these programs are bankrupting the nation and that the solution is to euthanize the physically and mentally handicapped. Let's also assume that one of their conclusions is that all people, after celebrating their 80th birthday, should be "put to sleep" by means of painless drugs. Arguments can be made for and against this position, of course, but the question is: Should sociologists promote such a point of view?

I doubt that any sociologist would ever support any of these proposals, but I think you get the point. *Whenever someone takes any position on a social problem, values of some sort underlie that person's views.* We sociologists are no exception to this principle. We develop our values just like everyone else does. Like others, our positions are located in historically-rooted values and changing ideas of ideal reality. And like others, we, too, feel that our values, though relative and changing, somehow represent bedrock, ultimate reality.

Taking Sides: Divisions and Agreement Besides taking sides as individuals, sociological associations such as the Society for the Study of Social Problems and the American Sociological Association sometimes take sides. Because sociologists do not all think alike, this creates divisions among the association's members. When these associations pass resolutions favoring or opposing some social action program or for or against some position of the president, the result is heated debates, usually not about the particular issue but whether or not our professional groups should take a public stand on the matter.

As mentioned, the most popular view among sociologists is that we should work toward changing society in order to help the less powerful. But this is not the only view. In contrast, some are convinced that sociology's proper role is only to investigate and to report research findings objectively. They say that if sociologists want to take sides on any issue, they should do so as private citizens, not as sociologists.

This ongoing debate keeps sociologists sensitive to the boundaries between objectivity and partisanship. Although there is little room for middle ground, most sociologists attempt to resolve this dilemma by separating research findings from their own values and opinions. What they observe and measure, they attempt to report dispassionately and to analyze as accurately as possible.

Despite their disagreements about taking sides on social problems, sociologists agree that they are in a unique position to study social problems and that they should produce thorough and objective studies. Sociologists do possess the tools to do such research, and their studies can be valuable for both the public and policy makers.

A Personal Note I sincerely hope that this text helps you to acquire a sociological perspective that will allow you to work toward creative solutions for the pressing social problems we face. We sociologists can provide facts on objective conditions, sensitize you to the broader context that nourishes social problems, and suggest the likely consequences of particular actions. Your decisions about what should be done, however, will have to be made according to *your* values.



Henslin, James M.

A problem sociologists grapple with when they analyze social problems is objectivity (dispassionate analysis) versus partisanship (taking sides). When it comes to poverty, as in this photo I took in India, taking sides wins hands down.

Summary and Review

1. Sociologists use what is called the *sociological imagination* (or perspective) to view the social problems that affect people's lives. This means that they look at how *social locations* shape people's behavior and attitudes.
2. A *social problem* is some aspect of society that large numbers of people are concerned about and would like changed. It consists of *objective conditions* (things that are measurable) and *subjective concerns* (the ideas, feelings, and attitudes that people have about those conditions). Social problems are relative—one group's solution may be another group's problem.
3. Social problems go through a natural history of four stages that often overlap: defining the problem, crafting an official response, reacting to the official response, and pursuing alternative strategies.
4. The sociological understanding of a social problem differs from a commonsense understanding because the sociological perspective (or imagination) is not based on emotions or personal values. Instead, sociologists examine how social problems affect people, view the causes of social problems as located in society rather than in individuals, and use objective methods to gather information about social problems.
5. Sociologists are able to make five contributions to the study of social problems: They can help determine the extent of a social problem, clarify people's attitudes toward social problems, apply the sociological imagination to social problems, identify potential social policies for dealing with social problems, and evaluate likely consequences of those policies.
6. To study social problems, sociologists use four major research designs: *surveys*, *case studies*, *experiments*, and *field studies*. Sociologists gather information in four basic ways: *interviews*, *questionnaires*, *analysis of documents*, and *observation*. These methods are often used in combination.
7. Because social problems can be viewed from so many vantage points, sociologists disagree on whether they should choose sides as professionals. They do agree, however, that sociological research must provide objective, accurate, and verifiable data.

Thinking Critically about Chapter 1

1. What are the differences between personal problems and social problems? Apply this distinction to abortion; to robbery.
2. If you were a sociologist and you wanted to study abortion, which research design would you use? Why?
3. Do you agree with the author's statement that science, including sociology, cannot answer questions of morality? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that sociologists have a responsibility to take sides on social problems? Why or why not?

Key Terms

case study, 16
 common sense, 16
 control group, 17
 documents, 18
 experiment, 17
 experimental group, 17
 field studies (or participant observation), 17
 generalize, 17
 interview, 17
 objective conditions, 5
 observation, 18
 personal troubles, 2
 population, 17
 power, 8
 questionnaires, 17

random sample, 17
 research designs, 16
 research methods, 16
 sample, 17
 social location, 3
 social problems, 5
 sociological imagination, 2
 sociological perspective, 3
 sociology, p. 14
 structured interview, 17
 subjective concerns, 5
 surveys, 17
 unstructured interview, 17
 value, 7

Chapter 2

Interpreting Social Problems: Aging



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Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 2.1** Explain why we need theory—how theory is related to “facts.”
- 2.2** Explain functionalism and apply it to social problems.
- 2.3** Explain conflict theory and apply it to social problems.
- 2.4** Explain feminist theory and apply it to social problems.
- 2.5** Explain symbolic interactionism and apply it to social problems.
- 2.6** Discuss the possible generational struggle regarding the elderly.

In 1928, Charles Hart, an anthropologist working on his Ph.D., did fieldwork among the Tiwi, a pre-literate people living on an island off the northern coast of Australia. Every Tiwi belongs to a clan, and to help Hart fit in they assigned him to the bird (Jabijabui) clan. They even assigned Hart an adoptive mother, a woman Hart described as “toothless and almost blind.” Hart also said that this woman was “physically revolting and mentally senile.”

... the men would dig a hole in the ground ... put the old woman in the hole, and fill it with dirt until only the woman's head was showing

Toward the end of Hart's time with the Tiwi, several of the senior men of the Jabijabui clan reminded him that it was Tiwi custom to “cover up” old women who became too feeble to look after themselves. They told Hart that they had decided it was time to follow this custom for the old woman who now called Hart son and whom he now called mother. They said to prevent feuds among the clans, all the sons and brothers of an old woman had to agree to cover her up. Hart said that the woman he called “mother” was now so blind that she fell over logs, even into fires. The men said that the woman's senior clansmen agreed that she would be better out of the way. They wanted to know if Hart agreed.

Hart already knew about the Tiwi custom of “covering up,” that the men would dig a hole in the ground in some remote place, put the old woman in the hole, and fill it with dirt until only the woman's head was showing. Everyone would then leave the place. In a couple of days, when they went back to the hole, to their surprise they would discover that the old woman was dead. In Tiwi's eyes, no one had killed her. The woman had died a natural death. She simply had been too weak to lift her hands from the dirt and climb out of the hole.

Hart asked if he, as the woman's “son,” would have to be present at the “covering up.”

The men said that he did not have to attend the “covering up,” and Hart agreed that it should be done. A week or two later, the report went around camp that his “mother” was dead. Hart put on the customary mourning accouterments and joined the other men in wailing the death of his “mother.”

—Adapted from Charles William Merton Hart, Arnold R. Pilling, *The Tiwi of North Australia*, Holt McDougal, 1979, used with permission.

I don't know about you, but I was shocked when I read Hart say that he did not hesitate to agree that the old woman should be “covered up.” His only concern was whether he would have to watch the woman die. In our society, too, we have people who would like to find ways to “cover up” the elderly who seem to have outlived their social usefulness. “Why spend all that money for medical care on people who have only a few years—or just a few months—more to live?” goes their reasoning. “Wouldn't we be better off ushering them off the stage of life—with dignity, of course?”

This kind of thinking sends chills down the spine of most of us. But let's suppose that programs of euthanasia were put into effect. Who would decide which old people were “socially valuable,” and which were not? Would the frail elderly turn out to be just the first targets? Might others follow, those whom some officials decide are “useless”—or at least of “less value”—and for the good of the general society need to be “covered up”?

Suggesting that something like this is even possible might sound ridiculous. But, then, we must recall that the Nazis under *der Führer* developed such programs. Few human groups choose “covering up” as their solution, but every society must deal with the problem of people who grow old and frail. If you read closely, you may have noted that the Tiwi “covered up” only old women. This is an extreme example of the discrimination against females that is common throughout the world. We will return to this topic in Chapter 9. In this present chapter, we want to consider how theories help us to understand social life. As we do this, we will explore the social problem of the elderly.

Sociological Theories and Social Problems

2.1 Explain why we need theory—how theory is related to “facts.”

As sociologists do research on social problems, they uncover a lot of “facts.” If you have just a jumble of “facts,” however, how can you understand anything? To make sense of those “facts,” you have to put them in some order, so you can see how they are related to one another. To do this, sociologists use theories. A **theory** explains how two or more concepts (or “facts”), such as age and suicide, are related. A *theory*, then, gives us a framework for organizing “facts.” As it does so, it provides a way of interpreting those “facts” of social life.

In this chapter, we look at three main theories that sociologists use—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. Before we begin, you may want to look at an overview of these theories, which are summarized in Table 2.1. Because each theory focuses on some particular “slice” of a social problem, each provides a different perspective on the problem. As you study these theories, keep in mind that each theory is like a spotlight shining into a dark room: It illuminates only a particular part of that room. Taken together, these theories throw more light on a social problem than any one theory alone.

Table 2.1 A Summary of Sociological Theories

	Functionalism	Conflict Theory	Symbolic Interactionism
What is society?	A social system composed of parts that work together to benefit the whole	Groups competing with one another within the same social system	People’s patterns of behavior; always changing
What are the key terms?	Structure Function System Equilibrium Goals	Competition Conflict Special interests Power Exploitation	Symbols Interaction Communication Meanings Definitions
What is a social problem?	The failure of some part to fulfill its function, which interferes with the smooth functioning of the system	The inevitable outcome of interest groups competing for limited resources	Whatever a group decides is a social problem is a social problem for that group
How does something become a social problem?	Some part of the system fails, usually because of rapid social change	Authority and power are used by the powerful to exploit weaker groups	One set of definitions becomes accepted; competing views are rejected

Source: By the author.

Functionalism and Social Problems

2.2 Explain functionalism and apply it to social problems.

A major theory that sociologists use to interpret social problems is **functionalism** (or *functional analysis*). Functionalists compare society to a self-adjusting machine. Each part of the machine has a **function**. When a part is working properly, it fulfills that function, and the machine hums along. Some functionalists use the analogy of the human body: A human has many organs, and when an organ is working properly, it contributes to the well-being of the person. Like the parts of a machine or the organs of a human body,

society's parts also have functions. When a part is working properly, it contributes to the well-being (stability or equilibrium) of the other parts.

To see why functionalists stress that the parts of society contribute to the well-being of one another, consider health care and Social Security. Of the vast sums spent on health care for the elderly, some goes into medical research. The discoveries of medical researchers help not only the elderly but also children and adults of all ages. In the same way, Social Security brings benefits not only to the 53 million retired and disabled workers who get monthly checks, but also to the 65,000 people who work for this federal agency (*Statistical Abstract* 2018:Tables 521, 566). Their families also benefit. So do businesses across the nation, as the billions of dollars paid by Social Security work their way through the economy.

As you know, the parts of society don't always work properly. Functionalists call these failures **dysfunctions**. Dysfunctions can be minor, and soon resolved. But if dysfunctions linger, they can create problems for other parts of society. *And this is what a social problem is from the functionalist perspective—the failure of some part of society, which then interferes with society's smooth functioning.* Many dysfunctions show up when we examine the agencies that serve the elderly. Among these dysfunctions is “red tape,” a term that refers to the strict regulations that make it difficult for an agency to accomplish its purposes. For example, an agency's rules can delay the benefits that people need or prevent elderly people with medical problems from receiving health care.

The Development of Functionalism

Let's turn to three people significant in the development of functionalism: Comte, Durkheim, and Merton.

Auguste Comte: Organs Working Together Functionalism has its roots in the origins of sociology. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) (called the founder of sociology because he coined the term) regarded society as similar to an animal: Just as an animal has tissues and organs that are interrelated and function together, so does society. For a society to function smoothly, its parts must be in balance.

Emile Durkheim: Normal and Abnormal States Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) built on this idea that a society is composed of parts that perform functions. When society's parts perform the functions they are supposed to, Durkheim said, that society is in a “normal” state. When society's parts fail to perform their functions, that society is in an “abnormal” or “pathological” state. To understand society, Durkheim stressed that we must look not only at function—how each part contributes to society—but also at **structure**—how the parts of a society are related to one another.

Robert Merton: Functions and Dysfunctions In the 20th century, sociologist Robert Merton (1910–2003) dropped the idea that society is like an animal but refined functionalism's concepts. He defined functions as the beneficial consequences of people's actions. Functions can be either manifest or latent. A **manifest function** is an action *intended* to help some part of the system. For example, Social Security is intended to make life better for the elderly. Improving the quality of life of the elderly, then, is a *manifest function* of Social Security. As Merton emphasized, our actions can also have **latent functions**, consequences that help some part of the social system but were not intended for that purpose. For example, the salaries paid to the 65,000 federal employees of the Social Security Administration help to stabilize our economy. Because this beneficial consequence of Social Security was not intended, however, it is a *latent function*.

Merton (1968) stressed that human actions also have dysfunctions. These are consequences that disrupt a system's stability, making it more difficult to survive. If a part fails to meet its functions, it contributes to society's maladjustment and is part of a social problem.

Because the consequences of people's actions that disrupt a system's equilibrium usually are unintended, Merton called them **latent dysfunctions**. For example, the Social Security Administration has thousands of rules, written in incredible detail, designed to anticipate every potential situation. If the 65,000 employees of this agency were to follow each procedure exactly, the resulting red tape would interfere with their ability to serve the elderly. Because these rules are not intended to have this effect, they are latent dysfunctions.

In Sum Functionalists sensitize us to think in terms of systems. Instead of seeing something in isolation, we need to see how it is related to other parts of the same system. As we do so, we look for both functions and dysfunctions. Let's apply these terms of functionalism to the social problem of aging.

Applying Functionalism to Social Problems

From the functionalist perspective, *society* is a social system composed of interconnected parts that function together. Each of those parts, if it is working well, contributes to the equilibrium of society. *Equilibrium* simply means that society's parts are balanced, that they are adjusted to one another. A *social problem*, then, is a condition in which some part of a society is not working well.

To explore functions and dysfunctions of our growing numbers of elderly, let's look at nursing homes.

Functions of Nursing Homes With all the negative news and views about nursing homes, it might surprise you that we are going to look at their *functions*. Let's consider how these homes have helped society adjust to social change.

Care of the elderly used to fall primarily on women's shoulders. Because almost all women worked at home and there were few non-home settings for the elderly, the daughters, sisters, and aunts cared for the elderly at home. Then came two changes that upset this arrangement among these "parts" of society: Life expectancy increased, and more women began to work outside the home. Just as the numbers of frail elderly who needed care grew, there were fewer women available to care for them. To replace these women who would have been caretakers of family members, nursing homes were developed. Each year, 2.8 percent of Americans age 65 and over live in nursing homes (*Statistical Abstract* 2018:Tables 17, 178). Over the years, these annual totals add up, and eventually about 40 percent of all people who reach age 65 or over enter nursing homes. The elderly in nursing homes, though, are not typical of older people: Most are ill or disabled, unable to take care of themselves, and have no family. About half are age 85 and older. As you can see, nursing homes are a way that society adjusted to social change.



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Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock

No stereotype does justice to the variety of the elderly. The two lifestyles represented here are likely a reflection of lifestyles followed in earlier stages of the life course. These choices also have a major impact on health, as we discuss in Chapter 10.



A common fear is that old age will bring dementia, dependence, even the lack of control over body functions.

Dysfunctions of Nursing Homes As you know, nursing homes also have dysfunctions. Few nursing homes are pleasant places. Some people refer to them as “houses of death” or “human junkyards.” Every time I have visited a nursing home, I have found it to be a depressing experience. Some stink of urine, and it is sad to see old lonely people clustered together, most of them waiting to die. After being admitted to a nursing home, most elderly people decline physically and mentally. One reason is the dehumanized way they are treated—segregated from the outside world, denied privacy, placed under rigid controls, and treated like children.

Neglect and abuse are common dysfunctions of nursing homes, but most incidents are not reported (NCEA 2018). Most neglect is minor, such as giving medications late. On a more serious level is ignoring residents who request medical attention or who need assistance in going to the bathroom. Then there is atrocious neglect:

A nursing home patient was sent to the hospital for the treatment of a bedsore. The hospital staff treated the condition and gave the nursing home instructions on how to keep the wound clean and dressed. Several days later, family members noticed an odor and seepage from the wound and asked that the patient be returned to the hospital. The hospital staff looked at the bandage and saw that it had not been changed as they had instructed. When the bandage was removed, insects crawled and flew out of the wound (Harris and Benson 2006:87).

Less common is abuse, such as shouting at patients, pinching or hitting them, or sexually abusing them—or this case:

The daughter of an 86-year old brain-damaged woman installed a hidden camera in her mother’s room. This is what the woman’s caretaker told the woman before she went to sleep: “Die, die you bitch. You’ve got to die now” (Pedersen et al. 2018).

Another dysfunction of nursing homes is using demeaning ways to control patients. Nursing home personnel used to tie unruly patients to chairs or to beds, where they would stay restrained all day. After investigations revealed this abuse, there was a public outcry, and nursing homes turned to “chemical straitjackets” instead, drugs such as Prozac, Risperdal, Seroquel, and Thorazine (Human Rights Watch 2018). These drugs keep patients quiet, but they can reduce people to empty shells of their former selves. Their personality disappears, and they become zombies sitting and staring into space.

Psychotropic drugs also kill, but slowly. Residents of nursing homes who are given these drugs die sooner than those who do not receive them (Human Rights Watch 2018). If the estimate that chemical restraints kill about 15,000 elderly nursing home patients a year (Hendren 2010) is anywhere near accurate, do you think that using “chemical restraints” might be a modern form of the “covering up” that the Tiwi used to practice?

Overcoming the Dysfunctions With the public painfully aware of neglect and abuse in nursing homes, the decision to place an elderly family member in a nursing home can be agonizing. Even though an aged parent has become too sick to be cared for at home, when the adult children place a parent in a nursing home, they can feel that they are betraying love and duty. However, nursing homes don’t have to be abusive places. With adequate finances, nursing homes can have well-paid, well-trained staff and be more pleasant places to live. They can be redesigned, with a kitchen and bedrooms that open onto an inviting, well furnished, shared living room.

Around the world, a major concern is what to do about the growing numbers of elderly, especially those who are frail, dependent, and sick. In the following *Global Glimpse*, we look at the severe problem that Japan is facing.