JOHN J. MACIONIS

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

EIGHTH EDITION

Social Problems

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Most of the readers of this book are among the world's privileged people—those who have enough to eat, a comfortable place to sleep, and who have the special opportunity to study the human condition. I offer this book in the hope that it will stimulate thinking about those who are in need, the state of our planet, and spark action toward making our world a better place.

Jan J. Macionis

Social Problems

EIGHTH EDITION

John J. Macionis
Kenyon College

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Brief Contents

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What's New in *Social Problems*, Eighth Edition

New chapter on social media. The new edition contains the first social media chapter to be found in a social problems title.

Total updating of all data and research. There are more than one thousand statistics in *Social Problems*. In the Eighth Edition, each one is new and represents the latest available data. More than five hundred new research citations support descriptions and analysis in this revision.

Major revision to the chapter on sexuality. The Seventh Edition's "Sexuality" chapter is now a new chapter called "Sexuality and Inequality," which has been moved to Part II and deals with social inequality. The chapter now has a focus not only on the diversity of sexual identity in our society but also how sexuality is linked to social stratification.

New topics plus the latest examples and illustrations. The new edition provides students with the latest on sexual harassment, including the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements; the extent of gun violence, including school shootings; the rise and significance of the alt-right in U.S. politics; the continuing trend toward greater economic inequality; the increasing number of women in political office; recent changes to laws and public attitudes about marijuana use; the expanding opioid crisis; the expansion of the gig economy; the state of same-sex marriage around the world; how the Trump administration has reacted to global warming; and the latest trends in global conflict, including war and terrorism. This revision includes discussion of the 2016 presidential election and its consequences, including immigration policy, the 2017 changes to the tax law, and the 2018 midterm elections.

New "Understanding the Other" interactive learning exercises. These five interactive exercises, written by John Macionis, are unique to this social problems title. The five exercises, based on recent research, present real-life, everyday situations in which race, class, gender, and sexual identity have profound—and often unrecognized—effects on social outcomes. As students see the world through the eyes of others, they come to understand the power of society to confer disadvantage as well as privilege on categories of people.

Revel™

This title is available as part of the Revel program. Revel is the new and powerful digital learning experience.

Compared to a bound book, Revel offers a number of clear advantages.

Interactivity. Bound books encourage passive reading. Revel transforms graphs and maps into interactive learning exercises that spark curiosity and encourage active engagement.

Accessibility. Bound books come in a single format. Revel allows readers to adjust font size according to their own preferences, alternative text for images and screen reader compatibility are available for students with visual impairments, and full audio presentation is available to those who prefer sound to visual access.

Available on all devices. Revel is available on your desktop or laptop and can be used on your tablet or smartphone—both iOS and Android devices—through the free Revel app. The Revel app also allows for offline access so you can read even if you don't always have a data connection.

Integration. Pearson provides Blackboard Learn™, Canvas™, Brightspace by D2L, and Moodle integration, giving institutions, instructors, and students easy access to Revel. Our Revel integration delivers streamlined access to everything your students need for the course in these learning management system (LMS) environments.

Single Sign-on. With single sign-on, students are ready on their first day. From your LMS course, students have easy access to an interactive blend of author's narrative, media, and assessment.

Grade Sync. Flexible, on-demand grade synchronization capabilities allow you to control exactly which Revel grades should be transferred to the LMS gradebook.

Greater currency. Because electronic delivery allows instant updating, the content of Revel is not static but will be updated by the author over the course of an edition.

Additional content. Revel provides content not available in a bound book, including special graphics, primary readings, engaging videos, thought-provoking journaling exercises, engaging surveys, and interactive assessment with results reported directly to faculty.

Lower cost. Revel is available to students at less than half the cost of a new bound book. Learn more about Revel at http://www.pearsonhigher-education/com/revel/.

Boxes

SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN FOCUS

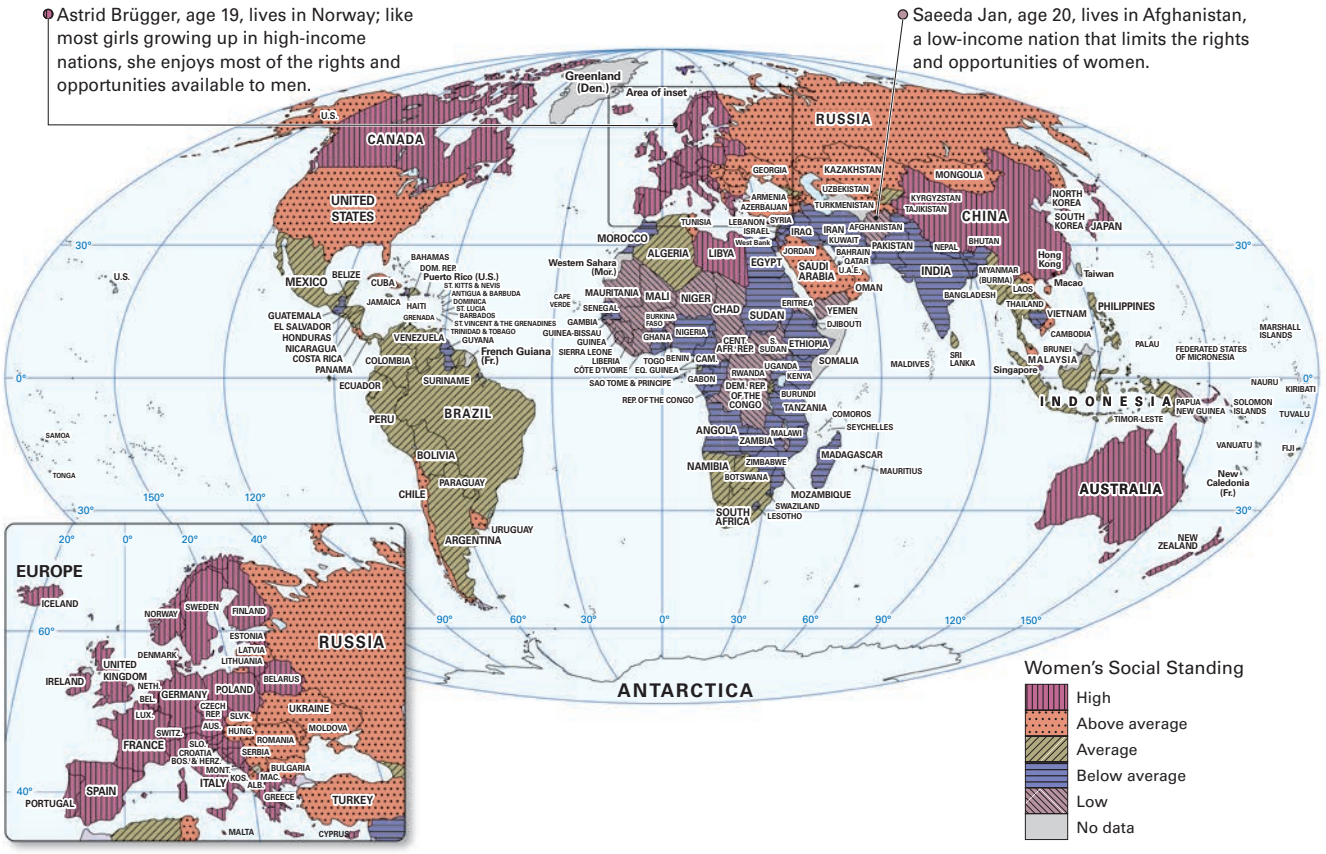
SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS, & GENDER

SOCIAL POLICY

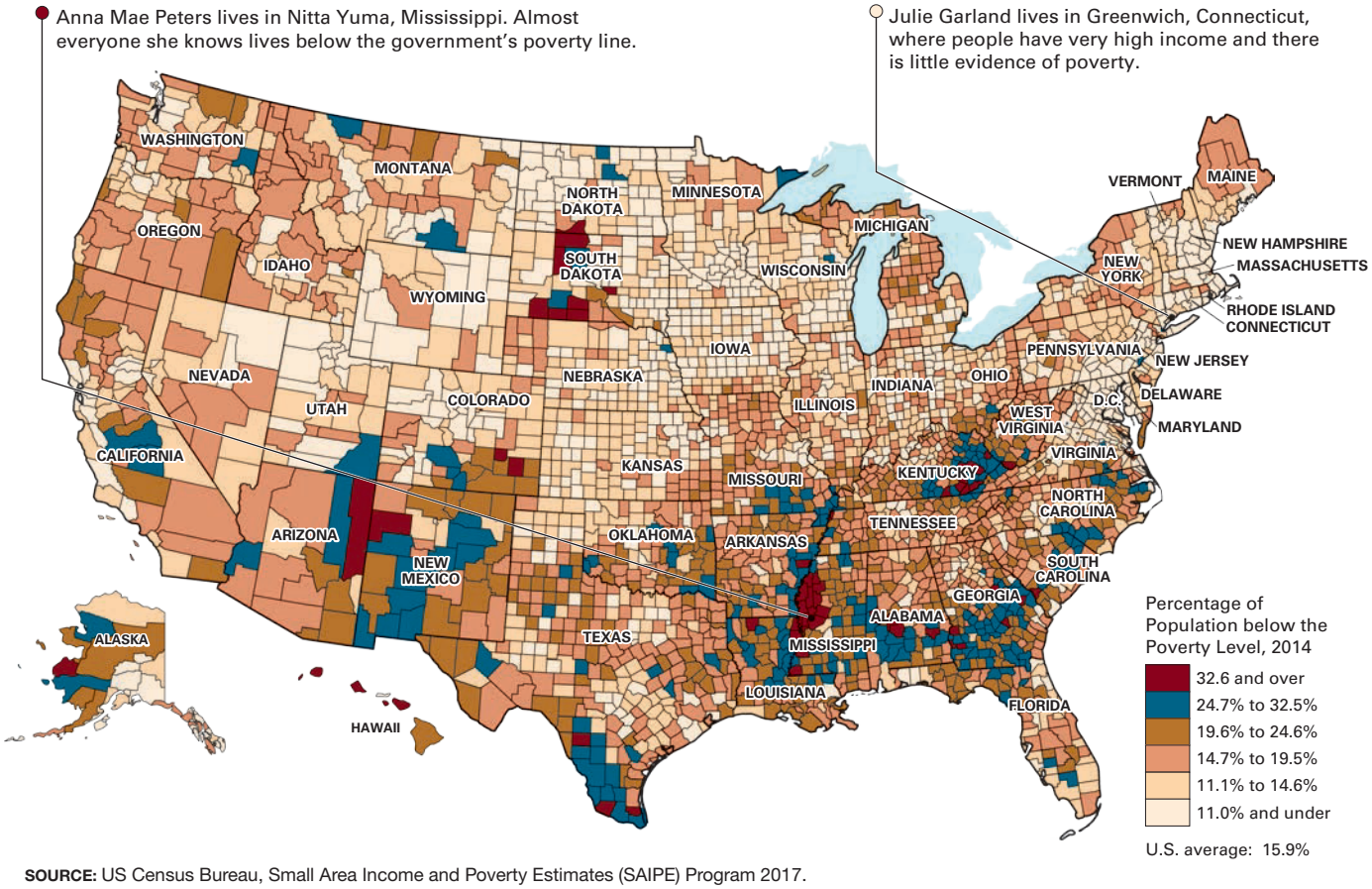
PERSONAL STORIES

Maps



SOURCE: Data from United Nations Development Programme (2015).

GLOBAL MAPS: Window on the World



SOURCE: US Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program 2017.

NATIONAL MAPS: Seeing Ourselves

Preface

Our nation's Pledge of Allegiance ends with the words "… with liberty and justice for all." This statement may reflect our collective hope, but does it describe our reality? Certainly, some categories of the population (the rich, men, white people, heterosexual people) have greater freedom than others (the poor; women; people of color; homosexual, bisexual, and transgender people). Then, too, a large share of this country's population has serious questions about the extent of social justice, especially in the Trump era. We are living in a time of political division and widespread frustration: Two-thirds of all U.S. adults say that the country is "on the wrong track." Globally, armed conflict and terrorism threaten the planet's peace, and there is increasing concern about the state of the natural environment and the future consequences of global warming. Clearly, this is a time when we need to understand more about social problems.

Facts, Theory, and Politics

Sociology offers a path to understanding the problems that we face in today's world. Sociology is also a path to change. Our discipline extends an invitation to action—to become involved in the political debates and movements that are reshaping society. As the leading title for this course, *Social Problems, Eighth Edition*, offers a broad investigation of social problems, both domestic and global. This title provides all the *facts*, highlighting historical trends and explaining today's social controversies. We build this understanding using *sociological theory*, which ties facts together to create meaning and deepen insight.

Just as important, this title stands alone by providing readers with *political analysis*. As a source of understanding and a call to action, *politics matters*. Where a person or a society stands on the political spectrum shapes what issues are defined as social problems. Just as important, political position also shapes what policies are defined as solutions. Becoming a good citizen depends on learning about various issues and also gaining fluency in politics so that one can decide which positions are worth supporting and which are worth resisting.

Social Problems, Eighth Edition, not only urges people to become involved, but *it also explains what politics is all about.* From the first chapter to the last, this title explains the attitudes and values that define various positions on the political spectrum. *Social Problems* applies these political points of view to dozens of issues—from increasing economic inequality to terrorism—so that students understand today's debates and are able to develop and defend political positions for themselves.

A guiding principle of this text is that *politics involves competing points of view. Social Problems* presents diverse political viewpoints for four reasons. First, all points of view are part of the political debate that goes on across the United States. Second, no one can hold personal political beliefs with any conviction without understanding the arguments of those who disagree. In other words, to be, say, a good liberal, one needs to understand not just progressive politics but conservative, far-right, and radical-left positions as well. Third, while anyone is likely to favor one political position over others, most of us can find, in all the political positions, at least some element of truth. In the political arena, as in the classroom, reasonable people can and do disagree. Understanding all positions is a major step toward reducing our nation's angry political divide and, in its place, promoting civil and respectful discourse. Fourth, and finally, by being inclusive, *Social Problems* invites all students to share their ideas, which encourages more lively class discussion.

The Social-Constructionist Approach

The most important reason to put the politics in when teaching a social problems course is to understand how politics guides the process of defining and responding to social problems. This title differs from all others in that it does not adopt one (implicit or explicit) political point of view by presenting a series of "problems" and identifying a sequence of "solutions" as if everyone agreed about what these are. Rather, all chapters highlight the importance of political attitudes in the selection of some issues and not others as problems, as well as in the favoring of certain polices as solutions. With this fact in mind, we can understand why people disagree about what the problems and their solutions are. Indeed, one person's problem may well be another's solution. From this insight, true conversation can begin.

Another benefit of using a social-constructionist approach is recognizing how and why our society came to recognize a problem at a certain point in our history, often as a result of claims made by social movements. For example, the behaviors we now call child abuse, environmental racism, and sexual harassment may always have been with us, but our society did not always define these as problems. On the contrary, problems came into being only after courageous individuals sparked successful social movements that brought about change both in our hearts and, more importantly, in our laws.

Your Fully Involved Author

John Macionis is personally involved in every element of *Social Problems*. In addition to keeping the manuscript up to date with the latest research, data, and relevant examples and illustrations, he selects all the photos and other images, writes all the captions, develops all the testing material, prepares the instructor's manual, and creates all the interactive content in the Revel electronic version. John corresponds regularly with colleagues and students, which makes *Social Problems* an always-evolving project. For the latest in the Macionis texts, visit his personal website: **www.TheSociologyPage.com** or **www.macionis.com.** Among other things, you will find there a series of new PowerPoint presentations, based on current research and free for downloading. A full suite of instructor resources is available from Pearson at **www.pearsonhighereducation.com.**

What's New in the Eighth Edition

The new edition of ***Social Problems*** is different and improved in the following ways:

Chapter 1: Studying Social Problems Find the latest data on the share of the public claiming that this country is on the wrong track. There is new and expanded analysis of the state of U.S. politics in the wake of the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 midterms. Included are the latest survey data identifying what the public thinks are the most serious social problems and the distribution of U.S. adults on the political spectrum. Discussion is supported by inclusion of recent social movements, including #MeToo and #TimesUp. A new Understanding the Other interactive exercise, "First Day of College: The Invisible Baggage of Class," explores how social class shapes the experience of being on campus. This revised chapter is supported by twenty-two new research citations.

Chapter 2: Economic Inequality The revised chapter has the latest on the distribution of both income and wealth. New data provide a profile of people in the richest 1 percent. Economic data by class, race, and ethnicity have all been updated. The most recent statistics document increasing economic inequality between 1980 and 2016. The discussion of poverty in the United States provides updated analysis by age, race, ethnicity, gender, and region. The changes in the 2017 tax law are discussed. This revised chapter is supported by forty-one new research citations.

Chapter 3: Racial and Ethnic Inequality In the age of Trump, political analysis has been expanded to explain how the alt-right views race, ethnicity, and immigration. New discussion explores immigration policy—including the border wall and the fate of the Dreamers—since the 2016 presidential election. New data provide the latest on the social standing of various racial and ethnic categories of the U.S. population. A new Understanding the Other interactive exercise, "Traffic Stops by Police: The Difference Race Makes," provides a data-driven analysis of racial bias on the streets. Twenty-one new research citations inform the revised chapter.

Chapter 4: Gender Inequality New data track the increasing number of women in Congress between 1918 and 2018. Updates include analysis of women's roles in recent films, contrast the power of women in relation to men in nations around the world, report the share of women in the U.S. labor force, indicate the share of degrees earned by U.S. women, identify the most sex-segregated occupations, track the pay gap between women and men, and indicate the share of women in the U.S. military. There is expanded discussion of gender, housework, and child rearing. The coverage of sexual harassment has been updated and expanded to include the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. New discussion traces the rising power of feminism in the United States since the 2016 presidential election. The revised chapter is informed by thirty-two new research citations.

Chapter 5: Sexuality and Inequality This chapter has been moved to a new position and recast to focus on how sexuality is linked to social stratification. The chapter-opening story highlights the national attention now directed at sexual harassment. Coverage of the transgender movement has been greatly expanded. The discussion of teenage pregnancy has been updated and expanded to include teenage parenthood. Attention is given to Trump administration efforts to limit access to abortion. Updates include the latest on violence directed against LGBTQ people, the extent of homosexual and bisexual identity, the extent of same-sex marriage worldwide, the extent of pornography use in the United States, patterns of arrest and the extent of public support for prostitution, the rate of births to teenage women in nations around the world, the extent of abortion in the United States, public attitudes about abortion under various circumstances, the extent of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and new national and global data on HIV and AIDS. There is a new Understanding the Other interactive exercise called "Jobs and Income: The Hidden Injuries of Transgender Workers." There are thirty-four new research citations in this revised chapter.

Chapter 6: Aging and Inequality There is updated discussion of euthanasia laws across the United States and in other nations. Attention is given to the effects of Trump administration policies on older people. Find the latest statistical data on the number of seniors in the United States, the increasing average age of retirement, the extent

of elder abuse, living patterns among older people, the increasing number of complaints of age discrimination, and income and poverty data contrasting older and younger people. New discussions include the increasing pay gap between older women and men, why older stars such as Meryl Streep and Samuel L. Jackson are the exceptions rather than the rule in the entertainment business, and a nod to Mick Jagger, who has turned seventy-five. There are thirty-four new research citations in this revised chapter.

Chapter 7: Crime, Violence, and Criminal Justice There is updated and expanded coverage of mass shootings in the United States. Recent global data show that two-thirds of all mass shooting fatalities occur in the United States. There is also expanded discussion of the national debate over guns and deadly violence. Coverage of hate crimes is also expanded. The chapter reflects changes in marijuana laws right up to 2018. The revised chapter has the latest crime statistics for all major property and person crimes, new profiles of who is arrested for serious crimes, and arrest data for street crime that are analyzed by age, gender, race and ethnicity, and social class. All the crime statistics show trends over the last half century and provide the latest data for 2016. A National Map provides the most recent laws, state by state, regulating gun ownership. The latest data inform the discussions of mass incarceration and the death penalty in the United States. Current examples and illustrations include the 2017 automobile murder of an anti-white-supremacy protestor in Charlottesville, the 2018 mass shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Santa Fe High School, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the ongoing gang violence crisis in Chicago, and expanding violence linked to the opioid epidemic throughout the United States. Where appropriate, new Trump administration policies and their consequences are noted. A new Understanding the Other interactive exercise called "On the Street: Do I Look Dangerous to You?" links race to perceptions of criminality. Forty-eight new research citations inform the revised chapter.

Chapter 8: Alcohol and Other Drugs There is updated and expanded discussion of the opioid crisis in the United States. New topics include the shifting federal drug policy under the Trump administration. There are updates on a record high in public support for legal marijuana, the latest in state laws permitting marijuana use, changes in European laws regarding marijuana, binge drinking by college students, the share of U.S. adults who define drug use as a social problem, the share of the adult population using various categories of legal and illegal drugs, and the extent of cigarette smoking around the world. Fifty-five new research citations inform this revised chapter.

Chapter 9: Physical and Mental Health The revised chapter has updated and expanded coverage of AIDS around the world; the discussion reflects the increasing share of minorities among people infected with HIV. The profiles of health care systems in the United States and various other nations have all been updated to reflect the latest policies and trends. The chapter highlights changes to the nation's health care system under the Trump administration. There are new data on longevity in the United States including analysis by race, class, and gender. The chapter reports the share of the U.S. population defined as obese, the share experiencing a mental illness, the link between poverty and illness in the United States and around the world, and trends in infant mortality in the United States and around the world. Find the latest statistics and research on the cost of providing health care in the United States, salaries paid to nurses and physicians in the United States, and patterns of mental health on campus. Thirty-six new research citations inform the revised chapter.

Chapter 10: Social Media This entirely new chapter responds to perhaps the most important development in the last generation—the rise of social media and the rapid expansion of internet-based communication. The chapter briefly traces the rise of mass media and explains its importance for modern societies. Attention then turns to social media, pointing out ways in which it differs from earlier mass media. There is extensive discussion of social networking sites and other apps.

Problems linked to the media begin with ways in which various media shape the content that they transmit. An issue with special importance in the wake of the 2016 presidential election is media bias and claims of fake news. Discussion highlights what we know about bias in the media and also instructs readers in pursuit of greater media literacy. Analysis of differential access to the internet and social media explains the digital divide both in the United States and around the world.

Individuals use social media to construct a social identity and build self-esteem. Research suggests that use of social media reduces people's capacity for empathy, encourages conformity, and may reduce attention span. Research links use of social media to the experience of cyber-bullying and also increasing rates of clinical depression. There is mounting evidence to support the conclusion that social media may become addictive. Social media also shapes our relationships, including patterns of dating and parenting. Social media is also linked to the problem of online predators.

Social media brings change to popular culture and encourages young people to develop an oversexualized social identity. Social media also bring both positive and negative changes to the workplace, politics, and other institutions.

The new chapter highlights the power of social media to advance social movements, including the #MeToo and #TimesUp responses to sexual harassment. The content of this new chapter reflects several dozen recent research citations.

Chapter 11: Economy and Politics The chapter contains a new discussion of the rising power of the far right in U.S. politics. There is updated and expanded discussion of Trump administration policies and increasing political polarization in the United States. There is new and expanded discussion of campaign financing and how money drives U.S. politics. The revised chapter analyzes the role of women voters in the 2016 presidential election. There are updates on the level of trust the U.S. public has in government and other national institutions, the extent of political freedom in nations around the world, the share of the economy represented by government for the United States and other nations, and the size of economic conglomerates in the United States. Also covered is voting turnout in the 2016 elections by age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Twenty-three new research citations support this revised chapter.

Chapter 12: Work and the Workplace A new chapter-opening story describes gender imbalance in the workforce of high-tech companies in the United States. The revised chapter has a new discussion of the gig economy and also describes changes to conditions in the workplace under the Trump administration. There are updates on the unemployment rate, including data by age, gender, and race; the median income for U.S. workers by race, ethnicity, and gender; the distribution of U.S. workers in three sectors of the economy; the intersection of race and ethnicity with the type of jobs people hold; relative wages for workers around the world; the number of workers killed or injured in the workplace; the level of workplace violence; and the current state of labor unions in the United States. There is a new Understanding the Other interactive exercise called "Finding a Job: The Hidden Importance of Race." This revised chapter is supported by seventeen new research citations.

Chapter 13: Family Life A new chapter-opening story illustrates change over time in our cultural definition of the family. Discussion of gay and lesbian families in the United States and around the world has been expanded and updated. The revised chapter provides the latest data on trends in marital status, cohabitation, age at first marriage, single parenting, and divorce. The most recent statistics inform analysis of the links between income, poverty, and type of family. International data contrast divorce rates in the United States to rates in other nations. Maps showing divorce across the United States and the legal status of same-sex marriage around the world have been updated. This revised chapter is supported by twenty-two new research citations.

Chapter 14: Education The revised chapter has new discussion of the 2018 teachers' movement for higher salaries and greater public investment in education. There is expanded and updated discussion of school violence and coverage of the student movement to end mass murder in schools. There is new discussion of education policy under the Trump administration. The revised chapter has updates on the educational attainment of the U.S. population and the share of women and men in U.S. higher education. Updated coverage includes educational performance according to race, class, and gender; rates of illiteracy in the United States and around the world; the global ranking of the United States in measures of academic performance; and the rates of dropping out of school for various categories of the U.S. population. The chapter notes with sadness and respect the death of racial segregation activist Linda Brown. This revised chapter is supported by twenty-six new research citations.

Chapter 15: Urban Life The revised chapter has updates on the extent of racial segregation in U.S. cities, the extent of bankruptcy of U.S. cities, the rate of urban sprawl, the poverty rates for various sectors of urban and rural places, the extent of homelessness in U.S. society, the population shift from snowbelt to sunbelt cities, and the increasing size of cities in developing nations. This revised chapter is supported by seventeen new research citations.

Chapter 16: Population and Global Inequality There is updated and expanded discussion of how women's social standing is fueling global population increase. There is expanded coverage of the importance of gender in patterns of global poverty and also the extent of global poverty among children. The revised chapter provides the latest data for all demographic indicators, including fertility, mortality, and population increase. Find the latest statistics for world population and its rate of increase. There are also the most current data for global inequality with comparisons to national inequality data in the United States. Discussions of global slavery and global sweatshops have been expanded and updated. This revised chapter is supported by twenty-nine new research citations.

Chapter 17: Technology and the Environment The revised chapter has updated and expanded discussion of the increasing global shortage of fresh water. There is also new and expanded discussion of climate change, including the Trump administration withdrawal from the Paris climate accords. The revised chapter has updates on the upward trend in global carbon emissions, the declining rate of population increase, the environmental consequences of rising global affluence, and the increasing production of solid waste. This revised chapter has the most recent data available and is supported by twenty-six new research citations.

Chapter 18: War and Terrorism This revised chapter has updates on the "doomsday clock" indicating the risk of global destruction, the number of active military conflicts in the world, the loss of life in all U.S. wars, the size of the U.S. military budget, and the number of recent acts of terrorism. Changes in military policy under the Trump administration are also highlighted. The revised chapter is supported by twenty-five new research citations.

Revel for *Social Problems*

Providing educational technology for the way today's students read, think, and learn, Revel is an interactive learning environment that offers a fully digital experience. It uses frequent updates of articles and data to illustrate the current state of society. Students can interact with multiple types of media and assessments integrated directly within the author's narrative:

- Chapter-opening **Trending Now** features provide articles written by the author that put breaking news and current events into the context of sociology. Examples include the increasing suicide rate in the United States, the record level of racial and ethnic diversity in the Congress that opened in 2019, the record level on women in positions of political leadership in 2019, Trump administration efforts to define sex in binary terms, recent mass shootings and the debate over gun control, the controversy over vaping, concerns about addiction to social media, the increasing number of states that have increased the minimum wage, the controversy over separating parents and children on the border, activism among the nation's public school teachers, and the record loss of life from wild fires in California.
- **Understanding the Other** interactive learning exercises in five chapters offer data-driven snapshots of day-to-day situations from the perspective of marginalized individuals, providing the opportunity for students to see the world from a new perspective.
- **Interactive maps, figures, and tables** feature Social Explorer technology, which allows for real-time data updates and rollover information to support the data and show movement over time.
- **Chapter Evaluate features** include a reflection question to encourage students to critically assess the insights gained from theoretical analysis.
- **Assessments** tied to primary chapter sections, as well as full chapter exams, allow instructors and students to track progress and get immediate feedback. All assessments are written by the author, John Macionis.
- **Integrated Writing Opportunities:** To help students reason and write more clearly, each chapter offers three varieties of writing prompts:
  - **Journal assignments** at the end of each major section ask students to apply what they learn to their own lives.
  - **Where Do You Stand?** writing opportunities ending each Defining Solutions feature encourage students to state their own positions on controversial issues and choose policies that support their solutions to social problems.
  - **Shared Writing: Envisioning a Better Society** prompts, found at the end of each chapter, encourage students to use what they have learned to imagine how to improve their social world. These exercises can form the basis of lively class discussion.
  - **Essay prompts** are from Pearson's Writing Space, which allow instructors to 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 writing. Writing Space provides everything students need to complete and track their writing assignments, to access assignment guides and checklists, to write or upload completed assignments, and to receive grades and feedback—all in one convenient place. For educators, Writing Space makes assigning, receiving, and evaluating writing assignments easy. It's simple to create new assignments and upload relevant materials, to see student progress, and to receive alerts when students submit work. Writing Space uses customized grading rubrics so students can receive 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.

The ***Documentary Sociology/Pearson Originals*** highlight stories that bring sociological concepts and today's political controversies to life. These outstanding videos connect students with the problems, politics, and controversies of today's world.

Supplements

Make more time for your students by using instructor resources that offer effective learning assessments and increase 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 the quality of instruction with each semester.

Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of Macionis's *Social Problems*. 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.

Instructor's Manual Create a comprehensive road map for teaching classroom, online, or hybrid courses. John Macionis has prepared this Instructor's Manual and Test Bank for every chapter in this title. Each chapter in the Instructor's Manual includes the following resources: Chapter Update; Author's Note; Chapter Outline; Learning Objectives; Detailed Teaching Objectives; John's Chapter Close-Up; John's Personal Video Selection; Research for a Cutting-Edge Classroom; Teaching Suggestions, Exercises, and Projects; Revel Features; Essay Questions; and Film and Video List. Designed to save preparation time and to make your lectures more effective, this extensive resource gathers together useful activities and strategies for teaching the Social Problems course. Available within Revel and on the IRC.

Test Bank Also available is a Test Bank of more than 900 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, Black-Board, and WebCT versions are available on the IRC, and Respondus versions are available on request from **www.respondus.com**.

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**.

PowerPoint Presentations The Lecture PowerPoint slides follow the chapter outline and feature images from the textbook integrated with the text. Additionally, all of the PowerPoints are uniquely designed to present concepts in a clear and succinct way. They are available to adopters for download from the Pearson Instructors Resource Center at **www.pearsonhighered.com/irc**.

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 digital formats at the Instructor's Resource Center (www.pearsonhighered.com/irc) or in the Instructor's Resources folder within the Revel product.

I offer this new edition of *Social Problems* in the hope that this new digital age will elevate teaching and learning to a new level of excellence.

As always, please feel free to contact me by email:
Macionis@kenyon.edu
With my best wishes to my colleagues,

John J. Macionis

About the Author

JOHN J. MACIONIS [pronounced ma-SHOW-nis] has been in the classroom teaching sociology for more than forty years. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, John earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell University and a doctorate in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania.

His publications are wide-ranging, focusing on community life in the United States, interpersonal intimacy in families, effective teaching, humor, new information technology, and the importance of global education.

In addition to authoring this best-seller, Macionis has also written *Society: The Basics*, the most popular introductory title in the field, now in its fifteenth edition. The full-length Macionis introductory title is *Sociology*, which is now in its seventeenth edition. He collaborates on international editions of these titles: *Society: The Basics: Canadian Edition, Sociology: Canadian Edition*, and *Sociology: A Global Introduction*. All the Macionis titles are available for high school students and in various foreign-language editions.

All the texts are now offered in low-cost electronic editions in the Revel program. These exciting learning materials encourage students to read and provide an interactive learning experience on a variety of electronic devices. Unlike other authors, John takes personal responsibility for writing all electronic content, just as he authors all the assessment and supplemental materials. John proudly resists the trend toward outsourcing such material to non-sociologists.

In addition, Macionis edited the best-selling anthology *Seeing Ourselves: Classic, Contemporary, and Cross-Cultural Readings in Sociology*, also available in a Canadian edition. Macionis and Vincent Parrillo have written the leading urban studies text, *Cities and Urban Life*, currently in a sixth edition.

Follow John on his Facebook author page, John J. Macionis, [author page, John J. Macionis, and find the latest information on all the books. You can also access downloadable teaching material at his website: www.macionis.com or www.TheSociologyPage.com. A full suite of instructor resources is found at the Pearson site: www.pearsonhighered.com.

In 2002, the American Sociological Association presented Macionis with the Award for Distinguished Contributions to Teaching, citing his innovative use of global material as well as the introduction of new teaching technology in his textbooks.

John Macionis recently retired from full-time teaching at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where he served as Professor and Distinguished Scholar of Sociology. During his long career at Kenyon, he chaired the Sociology Department, directed the college's multidisciplinary program in humane studies, presided over the campus senate, was president of the college's faculty, and taught sociology to thousands of students. Kenyon recognized his decades of service by awarding him an honorary doctorate of humane letters in 2013.

Professor Macionis has been active in academic programs in other countries, having traveled to some fifty nations. He writes, "I am an ambitious traveler, eager to learn and, through the texts, to share much of what I discover with students, many of whom know little about the rest of the world. For me, traveling and writing are all dimensions of teaching. First and foremost, I am a teacher—a passion for teaching animates everything I do."

At Kenyon, Macionis taught a number of courses, but his favorite classes were always Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems. He continues to enjoy contact with students across the United States and around the world.

John works every day on his Pearson titles. In his free time, he enjoys tennis, swimming, hiking, and playing oldies rock-and-roll. Macionis is an environmental activist in the Lake George region of New York's Adirondack Mountains, working with a number of organizations, including the Lake George Land Conservancy, where he served for more than a decade as president of the board of trustees.

Chapter 1

Sociology: Studying Social Problems

Learning Objectives

1.1 Explain the benefits of learning about sociology and using the sociological imagination.

1.2 Define the concept "social problem" and explain how the people in a society come to define some issues—and not others—as social problems.

1.3 Apply sociological theory to the study of social problems.

1.4 Discuss the methods sociologists use to study social problems.

1.5 Identify factors that shape how societies devise policy to respond to social problems.

1.6 Analyze how political attitudes shape the process of constructing social problems and defining solutions.

Constructing the Problem

William Thomas Cain/Stringer/Getty Images.

What turns an issue into a social problem?

Social problems come into being as people define an issue as harmful and in need of change.

Alex Wong/Getty Images.

Aren't we always dealing with the same problems?

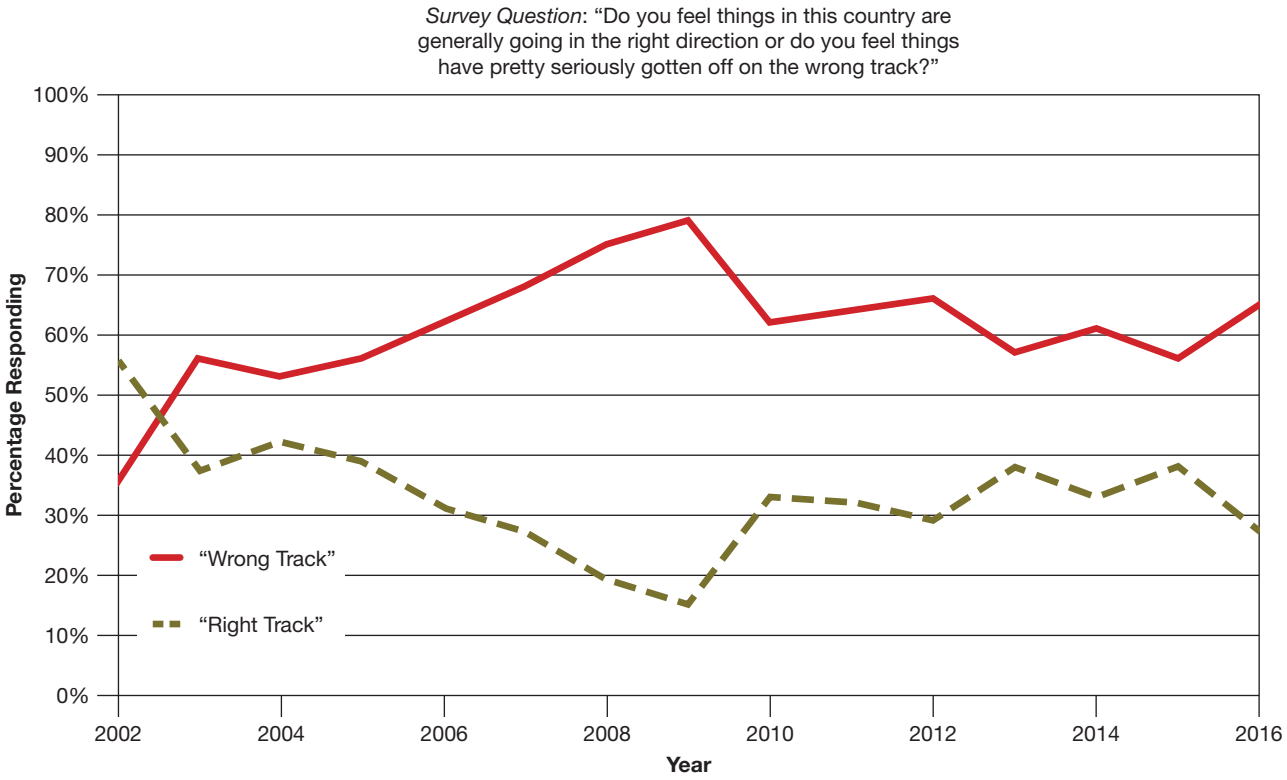
Most of today's problems differ from those that concerned the public several generations ago.

Conor Caffrey/Science Source.

Isn't a social problem any condition that is harmful?

Many conditions harmful to thousands of people are never defined as social problems.

Tracking the Trends



SOURCE: CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, January 12, 2016.

Researchers try to gauge the public's confidence in the country by asking general questions such as this one:

"Do you think the country is on the right track or the wrong track?"

In early 2016, 65 percent of U.S. adults said they thought that the country was "on the wrong track," more than twice the share who thought the country was "going in the right direction." Back in 2002, just 35 percent of U.S. adults said the country was on the wrong track. In recent years, dissatisfaction with government emerged as the most commonly cited social problem in the United States. Polls taken at the end of 2017 show two-thirds of U.S. adults disapprove of President Trump's performance in office—further evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with the country's direction. Do you think the country can continue without the confidence of a majority of the people?

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study of social problems by defining the sociological imagination, explaining sociology's theoretical approaches, and describing the ways sociologists carry out research. You will learn how people's political attitudes define the issues they are likely to view as social problems and what policies they are likely to favor as solutions. You will gain the ability to describe the political spectrum and to analyze social issues from various positions on the political spectrum.

Marcos Jorman was already late as he rushed out the door of his apartment. He ran down the stairs, briefcase in hand, and crashed through the old wooden door of the apartment building. He looked north up Chestnut Street. What luck! The bus was right there, just half a block away! Catching his breath, Marcos climbed aboard as the bus pulled out into the heavy traffic. He saw Jan, a neighbor and co-worker, standing in the rear of the bus.

"I just got a text from Sandra," Jan blurted out, looking a little desperate. "She says everyone is getting laid off. *We're all out.* The company is shutting down the whole division and moving operations out of the country." Her head dropped along with her spirit. "What am I going to do? How am I going to manage with my kids?"

Marcos checked his own phone. He, too, had messages—several from co-workers who had already arrived at work and confirmed the bad news. "Oh, man, it's true," he said softly. The two stood silently for the rest of the ride.

The day turned out to be one of the toughest in Marcos's entire life. He knew the start-up company was struggling with rising costs and heavy competition. Only two months earlier, new management had come in to "reorganize" and to cut costs. The decision to close local operations was the result.

Franckreporter/E+/Getty Images

As he entered his workstation, he was handed a short letter spelling out the dismissal. He joined dozens of others at a brief meeting with a human relations officer and then went back to pack up his things. He was home again by early afternoon.

Marcos sat in his apartment with a cup of tea looking out the window at nothing in particular. He felt weak, almost ill. He kept telling himself that we live in a world full of risks. He knew the company was in trouble. But, somehow, he could not shake the idea that the job loss was his own fault, his own personal failure.

This story could be told millions of times because millions of people—including those who work in construction, sales, communications, management, and teaching—lose their jobs every year.

Seeing Patterns: The Sociological Imagination

1.1 Explain the benefits of learning about sociology and using the sociological imagination.

Living in a society that teaches us to feel personally responsible for whatever happens to us—good or bad—we easily understand Marcos's reaction to being laid off. We imagine Marcos second-guessing himself: Should he have majored in something else? If only he had taken that other job in Atlanta! If only he had listened to his father and stayed in school. We all tend to personalize our lives and blame ourselves for our troubles.

However, when we apply the **sociological imagination**, *a point of view that highlights how society affects the experiences we have and the choices we make*, the picture changes. Using the sociological imagination, we see that the operation of U.S. society—including an economy that makes unemployment a normal part of doing business—causes the loss of millions of jobs every year. These losses are far greater in times of economic recession. For this reason, losing a job can hardly be said to be simply a matter of bad personal choices.

SOCIAL POLICY

C. Wright Mills: Turning Personal Troubles into Social Issues

All of us struggle with our own problems, which might include unemployment, falling into debt, falling out of love, drug or alcohol abuse, poor health, or suffering from violence. We experience these problems; we *feel* them, sometimes on a gut-wrenching level. Our problems are personal. But C. Wright Mills (1959) claimed that the roots of such "personal" problems lie in society itself, often involving the ways our economic and political systems work. After all, the normal operation of our society favors some categories of people over others: the rich over the poor, white people over people of color, middle-aged people over the very young and the very old. When people see their problems as personal, all they can do is try to deal with their troubles as one *individual*. Isolating one life in this way keeps people from seeing the bigger picture of how society operates. In the end, as Mills explained, people feel that "their lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles" (1959:3). Because we live in an individualistic culture, we are quick to conclude that the troubles we experience are simply our own fault.

A more accurate and more effective approach is to understand that it is society that shapes our lives. The sociological imagination transforms personal troubles into social issues by showing us that these issues affect not only us but also countless people *like* us. This knowledge gives us power because, joining with others, we can improve our lives—and break free of our traps—as we set out to change society.

What Do You Think?

1. Provide three examples of personal problems that Mills would define as social issues.
2. To what extent do you think people in the United States believe that problems such as unemployment result from bad personal choices or even bad luck? Explain.
3. Have you ever taken part in a movement seeking change? What was the movement trying to achieve? What were your reasons for joining?

Sociology is *the systematic study of human societies*. **Society** refers to *people who live within some territory and share many patterns of behavior*. As sociologists study society, they pay attention to **culture**, *a way of life including widespread values (about what is good and bad), beliefs (about what is true), and behavior (what people do every day)*.

Cultural patterns in the United States are diverse, but one widely shared value is the importance of individualism, the idea that, for better or worse, people are responsible for their own lives. In the case of Marcos Jorman, it is easy to say, "Well, he lost his job because he decided to sign on with a start-up company in the first place. He really brought this on himself." In other words, our common sense often defines personal problems—even when the problems affect millions of people—as the result of *personal choice*. Without denying that individuals do make choices, sociologists point to ways in which society shapes all our lives. Thinking sociologically, we see that widespread unemployment may be a personal problem (especially to people who lose their jobs), but it is also a *social issue*.

Sociology's key insight is that *many of the personal troubles people face are really social issues with their roots in the operation of the larger society*. As the U.S. sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1963) explained, using the sociological imagination helps us "kick it up a level" and see how society shapes our personal lives. The Social Policy box takes a closer look at how sociology can help you do this for yourself.

By helping us to see the world in a new way, the sociological imagination gives us power to bring about change. But a sociological viewpoint can also be a bit disturbing. A course in social problems asks us to face the fact that many people in our communities lose their jobs, become victims of crime, and go to bed hungry through no fault of their own. When the economy turns bad, as it did when a recession began in 2008, tens of millions of people suddenly find that they are unemployed and many of them may still be out of work a decade later. In this richest of nations, even during "good times," some 45 million people (especially women and children) are poor. The study of social problems helps us see these truths more clearly. It also encourages us to play a part in shaping the future of our nation and the world.

Social Problems: The Basics

1.2 Define the concept "social problem" and explain how the people in a society come to define some issues—and not others—as social problems.

A **social problem** is *a condition that undermines the well-being of some or all members of a society and is usually a matter of public controversy*. In this definition, the term "condition" refers to any situation that at least some people define as troublesome, such as not having a job, having huge college loans, living in fear of crime, being overweight or living in poor health, or worrying about the effects of toxic chemicals in our drinking water.

A condition that "undermines the well-being" hurts people, either by causing them immediate harm or, perhaps, by draining their spirit or limiting their choices. For example, poverty not only deprives people of nutritious food and safe housing, but it also takes away their dignity, leaving them passive and powerless.

Because any issue affects various segments of our population differently, a particular social problem is rarely harmful to *everyone*. During the recent recession, some executives earned huge salaries and bonuses, just as some corporations (such as Walmart, which sells at very low prices) actually did pretty well. Even war that brings injury and death to young soldiers brings wealth to the companies that make and sell weapons and confers greater power on the military leaders who head our country's armed forces. As a result, the full consequences of any particular social problem are rarely simple or easy to understand.

Social problems spark public controversy. Sometimes a social problem (such as the mass shooting in Las Vegas in 2017) rocks the whole world. In other cases (such as the spread of the Zika virus in 2016), a small number of government leaders and public health officials take action, perhaps by stockpiling vaccine and restricting travel to areas where infections have been reported (Tavernise, 2016).

Social Problems over Time

What are our country's most serious social problems? The answer depends on when you ask the question. As shown in Table 1–1, the public's view of problems changes over time. Back in 1935, a survey of U.S. adults identified the ten biggest problems facing the country, which we can compare to a similar survey completed in 2017 (Gallup, 2017). In the mid-1930s, the Great Depression was the major concern because as much as 25 percent of U.S. adults were out of work. Not surprisingly, unemployment topped the list of problems that year. After years of gridlock in Washington, D.C., and the election of Donald Trump as president, dissatisfaction with government and political leadership topped the list in 2017. Of course, concern about the economy was still with us in 2017, along with fears about terrorism, immigration, and deep political division across the nation.

Table 1–1 Serious Social Problems, 1935 and 2017

1935	2017
1. Unemployment and a poor economy	1. Dissatisfaction with government/poor leadership
2. Inefficient government	2. Terrorism
3. Danger of war	3. Health care/insurance
4. High taxes	4. Economy in general
5. Government overinvolvement	5. Unemployment/jobs
6. Labor conflict	6. Race relations/racism
7. Poor farm conditions	7. Lack of national unity
8. Inadequate pensions for the elderly	8. Illegal immigration
9. High concentration of wealth	9. Moral/ethical/family decline
10. Alcohol consumption	10. International problems

SOURCE: Gallup (2017).

Comparing the two lists in the table, we find three issues on both: the economy, unemployment, and dissatisfaction with government. But the other issues are different, showing that the public's view of social problems changes over time. Terrorism, for example, was not a widespread concern in 1935, although it has become a major issue today. Sometimes, public opinion shifts dramatically even over short periods. In the months after the allegations of sexual assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein in 2017, women as well as men across the country mobilized against sexual harassment leading to additional allegations against hundreds of important people and millions of women breaking their silence as they joined the #MeToo movement (Chira, 2017; Patel & Miller, 2017).

The Social-Constructionist Approach

The fact that over time, people define different issues as social problems points to the importance of the **social-constructionist approach**, *the assertion that social problems arise as people define conditions as undesirable and in need of change*. This approach states that social problems have a subjective foundation, reflecting people's judgments about their world. For example, the public has yet to include obesity on the list of serious social problems, even though health officials say that most adults in the United States are at risk of poor health because they are overweight. This is true despite the objective fact that illness brought on by obesity claims the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in our country each year, which is many times the number of people who die as a result of terrorist attacks or the number of soldiers who were killed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Figure 1–1 explains the subjective and objective foundations of social problems. Box A includes issues—such as homicide—that are objectively very harmful (more than 16,000 people are murdered each year in the United States) and cause widespread concern (polls show that a majority of U.S. adults worry about gun violence and want the government to reduce crime) (Pew Research Center, 2016). Box B includes issues—such as the use of automobiles—that, objectively speaking, cause even greater harm (more than 32,000 people in the United States die each year in auto accidents), and yet hardly anyone sees these issues as social problems. Of course, one reason people overlook the high death toll on our highways is that we can't imagine our way of life without automobiles. Box C represents issues—such as school shootings—that, objectively speaking, cause relatively limited harm (only a few dozen people have

died from such incidents, which is actually fewer than the number of people who die each year from bee stings), but these issues are widely viewed as horrifying and serious problems all the same (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2017; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Finally, Box D includes the use of cell phones, football, and a host of other activities that are not thought to be harmful and do not show up on survey listings of "problems."

Over time, issues may move from one box to another. In the years after the invention of cell phones in the 1980s, for example, few people worried about their use even by those operating motor vehicles. With little evidence that this practice posed a threat, cell phones belonged in Box D. More recently, however, studies have reported that the use of cell phones by people driving automobiles plays some part in more than 1.6 million accidents a year, claiming thousands of lives. As the number of deaths linked to cell phone use increases, this issue will move toward Box B. By 2018, as a result of increasing public concern, fifteen states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia) plus the District of Columbia banned talking on handheld phones while driving; thirty-eight states have outlawed cell phone use by new drivers, and forty-seven states have prohibited texting by anyone behind the wheel. Before long public opinion could define cell phone use in cars as a serious problem, moving the issue from Box B to Box A (Governors Highway Safety Association, 2017; National Safety Council, 2017).

Any issue that is not considered a problem now may be viewed quite differently at some point in the future. For example, there are few things as American as football, a game that has gained popularity over recent decades and is now the most popular sport in the country. In recent years, however, an increasing number of players and ex-players have spoken out about possible concussion-related brain injury called chronic traumatic encephalophy (CTE). The National Football League has acknowledged that a problem exists and that efforts are being made to more carefully monitor the well-being of players. Exactly how widespread CTE is among players remains an open question. The 2015 film *Concussion* starring Will Smith raised concern about CTE among the general public (Siegel, 2015; Kindelan, 2016). Should this concern over potential injuries increase, football might well move from Box D to Box C, Box B, or even Box A, depending on how many people are found to be harmed.

Another change in public opinion involves government efforts to track people's movement, telephone calls, and internet activity. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, most people in the United States did not know much about efforts by the National Security Administration and other government agencies to identify suspicious behavior on the part of potential terrorists. When asked about government tracking of individuals, most people offered the opinion that this was good and necessary. There was little public awareness of how government can use computer technology to threaten personal privacy (Scherer, 2013). As a result, the government's use of computer technology fell in Box D. In recent years, revelations about the extent of government monitoring of people's movement and communication have convinced an increasing share of the public that this issue poses a real danger to the personal freedom of everyone. For this reason, this issue appears to be moving to Box B. Perhaps, at some point in the future, *most* people will consider government monitoring of the public to be a serious social problem, placing the issue in Box A.

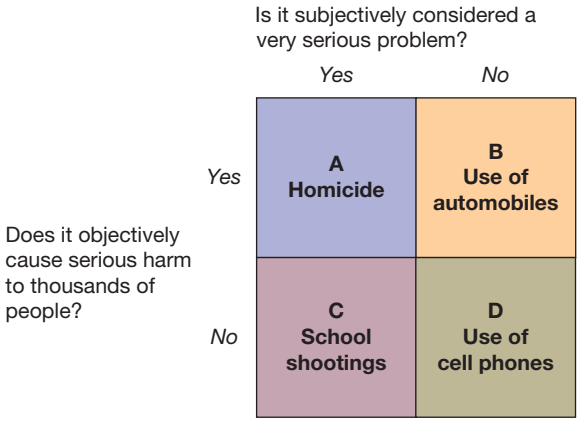


Figure 1–1 The Objective and Subjective Assessment of Social Issues

This figure shows that some issues (such as homicide) are both objectively harmful and widely seen as problems. But many issues that are objectively harmful (the use of automobiles results in more than 32,000 deaths each year) are not perceived as serious social problems. Likewise, some issues that are viewed as serious social problems (school shootings, for example) may be tragic but they actually harm relatively few people. Many other issues (such as using cell phones or playing football) are not viewed by most people as harmful, although this may change at some point in the future.

Recognizing that the subjective and objective importance of social issues may differ opens the door for a deeper understanding of social change. Consider this curious pattern: A century ago, it was objectively true that the social standing of women was far below that of men. In 1900, nine out of ten adult men worked for income, and nine out of ten adult women remained in the home doing housework and raising children. Women didn't even have the right to vote.

Although some people condemned what they saw as blatant inequality, most people did not define this situation as a problem. Why not? Most people believed that because women and men have some obvious biological differences, the two sexes must have different abilities. Thinking this way, it seemed natural for men to go out to earn a living while women—who were thought back then to be the "weaker sex"—stayed behind to manage the home.

Objectively, gender inequality was huge; subjectively, however, it was rarely defined as a social problem.

Today, women and men are far closer to being socially equal than they were in 1900. Yet awareness of a "gender problem" in the United States has actually become greater. Why? Our cultural standards have changed, to the point that people now see the two sexes as mostly the same, and so we *expect* women and men to be socially equal. As a result, we view even small instances of gender inequality as a problem.

Would anyone doubt that sexual violence was a bigger problem in 1900 than it is today? The norms of the time—and, in many cases, the laws as well—made husbands' use of physical discipline against wives either "acceptable" or a "private matter" to be resolved within a household. Today, despite a decline in sexual assault and the fact that such behavior is now widely condemned and everywhere against the law, public concern is greater than ever. Just consider how many millions of women and men have signed on in support of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements.

When we investigate social issues, it is important to consider both objective facts and subjective perceptions. Both factors play a part in the social construction of social problems.

What powerful people say about issues can have big consequences for public opinion. In 2016, for the first time, immigration showed up on the public's list of the most serious social problems. To some extent, this concern reflects the fact that thousands of people cross the southern U.S. border illegally each year. But much of the concern reflects fear that immigrants from the Middle East might engage in terror. After his election in 2016, President Donald Trump fanned these fears and called for "building a wall" and enacted a "travel ban" barring people from a number of mostly Muslim countries from entering the United States until the government could ensure that no would-be jihadists were admitted (Suleiman, 2018).

Does this subjective fear square with the objective facts? The truth is that, since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, some 390 people have been charged with crimes relating to jihadist terrorism, but nine in ten of these people have been U.S. citizens or people who have permanent legal residency (green cards). An isolated case of a recent immigrant engaging in deadly jihadist terrorism is Tashfeen Malik (a legal U.S. resident) who, along with her husband Syed Rizwan Farook (a natural-born U.S. citizen), killed fourteen people in a 2015 terror attack in San Bernardino, California.

Almost all terrorism that takes place in the United States is "home grown" and is not the work of immigrants. In addition, the number of people killed by right-wing extremists (who strike out against the power of the U.S. government) is also high. But while fears of jihadist terrorism have figured into national political debate (especially on the part of Republicans), far-right terrorism is not widely viewed as a social problem.

A much greater threat to the public than any terrorism is gun violence. For years, more than 30,000 deaths due to gun violence (including murder, suicide, and accidents) have occurred annually, which is about 100 deaths *every day*. And for years, few people defined gun violence as a social problem. In the 2017 listing of the most serious social problems in the United States, gun violence is not to be found.

The point is that much public concern is directed against immigrants, the vast majority of whom pose very little danger to anyone; far less public concern is directed against far-right extremists who pose far greater danger. Even more significant, gun violence involving tens of thousands of deaths each year has long been ignored and has only recently gained widespread public attention. Put another way, someone in the United States is 5,000 times more likely to be killed by gun violence than by a jihadist terrorist. Subjective fear does not necessarily reflect objective facts (Kristof, 2015; Bergen, 2016; Blinder & Victor, 2018).

Claims Making

For gun violence to be defined as a serious social problem, more of the political leadership in the United States—starting with the president—will have to stand up to special interests and recognize the harm involved.

Claims making refers to *efforts by officials, individuals, and organizations to convince others that a particular issue or situation should be defined as a social problem*. This process begins by rejecting the *status quo* (Latin words meaning "the situation as it is") and calling for change. Put another way, claims making creates controversy by defining the existing situation as unacceptable. The process continues as people explain exactly *what* changes are needed and *why* they are needed.

Claims making is illustrated in the history of another issue that has been with us for almost forty years. Back in 1981, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first received reports of a strange disease that was killing people. The victims were mostly homosexual men. The disease came to be known as "acquired immune deficiency syndrome" (AIDS). For several years, even as the numbers of cases in the United States climbed into the thousands, AIDS received limited media coverage and there was little public outcry. By 1985, however, the public as a whole had become concerned about the danger of AIDS, and this disease was defined as a serious social problem.

What brought about this change? For any condition to be defined as a social problem, people—usually a small number at first—make claims that the situation is unacceptable and that change is needed. In the case of AIDS, medical officials first sounded the alarm, and the gay communities in large cities (notably San Francisco and New York) mobilized to spread information about the dangers posed by this deadly disease.

Claims making is the process of defining certain issues as social problems. In 2017, sexual harassment rose to the level of a national problem as a result of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements that carry forward the message that women would no longer remain silent about the experience of sexual abuse.

Sundry Photography/ Shutterstock.

Of course, public officials and powerful individuals often engage in the "loudest" claims making. We can see this process today with increasing attention given to the opioid epidemic of government officials. But ordinary people can make claims more powerful by joining their voices. In 2016, people in the city of Flint, Michigan, began to come together and speak out about the dirty-looking and foul-tasting tap water that was coming into their homes from the city water supply. Scientists at a university laboratory were engaged and confirmed the presence of dangerously high levels of lead in the city's water (Smith, 2016).

Social media have greatly increased the potential impact of claims making. Along with television, radio, and newspapers, our computers and smart phones quickly spread information to tens of millions of people who can join together in groups actively seeking change. Stories in the mass media about the dangers of tap water in Flint, Michigan, as well as the use of social media by the public, not only elevated this situation into a major problem that led to criminal charges against public officials but also alerted people in other cities to the risk of water contamination. In the last year, social media have been responsible for fueling the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements in opposition to sexual harassment and assault.

In general, the greater the media coverage of a topic and the more media stories argue for change, the more likely the issue in question is to develop into a social problem. Media outlets devote far more attention to tornados than they do to a disease like asthma. Perhaps this is why the public perceives tornados as more serious despite the fact that such storms kill several dozen people a year while the death toll from asthma runs well into the thousands (Pinker, 2018).

In an age when social media connect people as never before, success in claims making can occur quickly. In 2013, shortly after a Florida jury acquitted George Zimmerman in the shooting death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, an activist in California posted a statement that "black lives matter." Another activist transformed these words into the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, and this claim suddenly spread across the country, sparking a social movement. By 2018, in response to the deaths of African Americans at the hands of police, the phrase "black lives matter" was tweeted some 50 million times.

In other cases, the process of claims making may result in change only after many years. As noted earlier, although experts estimate that talking on handheld cell phones while driving causes hundreds of deaths every year, only fifteen states have passed laws banning this practice (Governors Highway Safety Association, 2017). The people of Flint, Michigan, spoke out for several years before public officials began to respond. Individual women have complained about sexual harassment and assault for decades before, helped by the power of social media, they succeeded in defining this issue as a serious social problem in 2017.

As the process of claims making gains public attention, it is likely to prompt counterclaims from opponents. In other words, most controversial issues involve claims making from at least two different positions. Take the abortion controversy, for example. One side of the debate claims that abortion is the wrongful killing of unborn babies. The other side claims that abortion is a woman's right, a reproductive choice that should be made only by the woman herself. Politics—how power plays out in a society—is a process built around claims and counterclaims about what should and should not be defined as social problems.

How do we know when claims making brings about change? The people of Flint will know they have been heard when scientists confirm that their water is safe. In

many other cases, success in claims making is marked by the passing of a law. Enacting a law is a clear statement that some behavior is now defined as wrong, and the power of government will be used to enforce it. In recent decades, the passage of laws against stalking and sexual harassment have clearly defined these behaviors as problems and directed the criminal justice system to act against offenders (Welch, Dawson, & Nierobisz, 2002).

One important dimension of claims making is the deliberate use of language. Consider the case of the Affordable Care Act, enacted in 2010. Under this law, health insurance companies could no longer refuse insurance to someone who was already sick. Opponents of the law characterized this policy as "socializing" risk, meaning that the law forces other people to subsidize the cost of the sick individual's insurance. The word "socializing" (which sounds a lot like "socialism") suggests that this policy is outside this country's tradition of people taking personal responsibility for their own health and insurance. On the other hand, supporters of the health care law praised an end to what they called "discrimination against those with preexisting conditions." The use of the word "discrimination" implies that such refusal is unjust and a violation of people's basic rights. In the same way, young people brought to the country without documentation are described as "Dreamers" by those who support their right to stay and as "illegals" by those who oppose their presence.

The same careful use of language applies to debates about how to solve problems. In general, advocates choose language that makes their policy seem reasonable and necessary; by contrast, opponents describe the same policy in language that makes it seem unreasonable and perhaps even dangerous. In 2013, for example, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel tried to address his city's budget crisis by closing some public schools and moving their students to other, nearby schools. Supporters cheered what they saw as a responsible and necessary step toward a balanced budget. Opponents, alarmed at the thought of children having to walk through unfamiliar neighborhoods that might have gang activity, condemned the mayor's policy as "killing our children" (Rogers, 2013). In short, people on both sides of any issue use language to spin claims in one way or another.

Problems and Social Movements

The process of claims making almost always involves the deliberate efforts of many people working together. A **social movement** is *an organized effort at claims making that tries to shape the way people think about an issue in order to encourage or discourage social change*. Over the past several decades, social movements have played a key part in the construction of numerous social problems, including the AIDS epidemic, family violence, the debate over a national health insurance program, and sexual harassment.

Stages in Social Movements Typically, social movements progress through four distinct stages, shown in Figure 1–2, in the effort to define a condition as a social problem (Blumer, 1969; Mauss, 1975; Tilly, 1978):

1. **Emergence.** The emergence of a movement occurs when people (initially just a few) come together sharing their concern about the status quo and begin to make claims about the need for change. In 2011, for example, a group of activists proposed a gathering of people in New York City's Zuccotti Park, and this effort launched the Occupy Wall Street movement. The protestors drew attention to increasing economic inequality, corporate greed, and the great influence that large businesses (especially those on Wall Street) have on the U.S. system of government.
2. **Coalescence.** The coalescence of a movement occurs as a new organization begins holding rallies and demonstrations, making public its beliefs, and engaging in political lobbying. After the initial "encampment" in the Wall Street area of New York, similar protests spread to dozens of other cities across the country and in other nations. The mass media began to discuss the claims made by the Occupy movement.
3. **Formalization.** Social movements become formalized as they become established players on the political scene. Although social movements usually begin with only volunteers, at this stage the organization is likely to include a trained and salaried staff. The Occupy movement has attracted many volunteers and has developed a strong presence on Facebook and other social

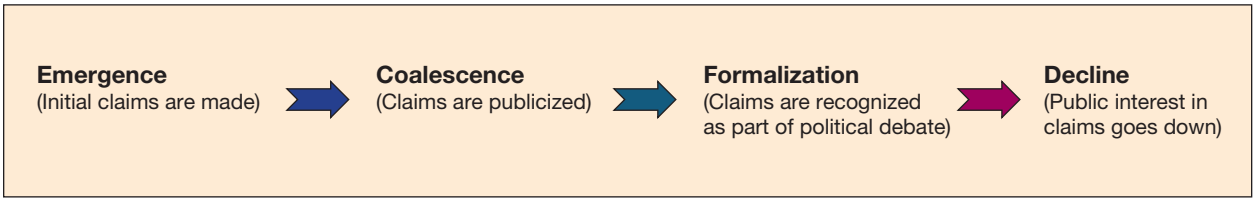


Figure 1–2 Four Stages in the Life Course of a Social Movement

Social movements typically pass through these four stages over time. How quickly this process unfolds varies from movement to movement.

media. By 2014, however, Occupy was not as prominent as it had been years before, and it now seems clear that it never did develop the level of formalization needed to remain a part of the political scene. But the message of the movement has certainly been adopted by the Democratic Party, and the issue of economic inequality was widely discussed during the 2016 presidential election, especially by candidate Bernie Sanders.

4. **Decline.** Becoming established is no guarantee of continuing success. Social movements may decline because they run out of money, because their claims fail to catch on with the public, or because opposing movements are more convincing. Sometimes, the powers that be simply have the clout to crush a social movement that threatens the status quo. The legacy of the Occupy movement will depend on whether the trend toward income inequality continues as well as on the share of our population that is willing to become invested in change, as indicated by the extent to which the Democratic Party embraces the goal of reducing economic inequality.

At the same time, a movement can decline simply because it is successful. If enough people demand greater economic equality, and changes to our economic and political systems are made, movements such as Occupy Wall Street may no longer be necessary. Even when organizations succeed in reaching an initial goal, however, they may adopt new goals so that they continue to operate. The feminist movement began with the goal of getting women the right to vote and moved on to improving the standing of women in the workplace and in the home. More recently, MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) shifted its attention from combating drunken driving to the goal of opposing another movement that seeks to lower the drinking age from twenty-one to eighteen.

Social Problems: Eight Assertions

To conclude this section of the chapter, the following eight assertions describe how sociologists approach social problems. These statements sum up much of what has already been presented in this chapter, and they form the foundation for everything that follows.

1. **Social problems result from the ways in which society operates.** Society shapes the lives of each and every one of us. Because U.S. culture stresses individualism, we tend to think that people are responsible for their own lives. As C. Wright Mills (1959) pointed out, however, a sociological perspective shows us that social problems are caused less by personal failings than by the operation of society itself. For example, the increasing income inequality in the United States results not from the fact that some people are working harder than others but from our economic system, corporate salary policies, and government tax policies that distribute income more and more unequally. In the same way, the loss of industrial production in the United States means that millions of people are finding only low-paying jobs or no jobs at all. In other words, problems such as income inequality and unemployment have their roots in the way our economic and political systems operate. For this reason, correcting social problems requires change to society itself.
2. **Social problems are not caused by bad people.** This is the flip side of the first assertion. Especially when some individual harms a lot of innocent people—as when Bernard Madoff swindled investors out of $65 billion or when Stephen Paddock shot and killed fifty-eight people attending a Las Vegas concert—we think of the problem in terms of bad actions by evil people. The law holds us as individuals accountable for our actions.

   But, in general, pointing to "bad people" does little to explain social problems. It is true that some people commit serious crimes that hurt others. But whether the crime rate is high or low depends not on individuals but on how society itself is organized. As Chapter 7 ("Crime, Violence, and the Criminal Justice System") explains, how many police we hire, how many prisons we build, whether the economy is strong or not, and whether all categories of people have access to good jobs or not will go a long way toward explaining whether the crime rate is low or high. In the same way, the policies toward firearms that we adopt have a lot to do with the amount of deadly violence we endure.
3. **Problems are socially constructed as people define a condition as harmful and in need of change.** Whatever the objective facts of any situation, people must come to see the condition as a serious social problem. Claims making is the process of defining a condition as a social problem.
4. **People see problems differently.** Some issues, such as the high unemployment rate during the recent recession, are widely regarded as serious problems. But most issues are matters of controversy. For example, the Obama administration created the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which supporters see as a needed step toward the goal of providing everyone with health insurance. Opponents of this law, including leadership in the Trump administration, claim that government is inefficient, so giving government greater control over health care is likely to make care less affordable and reduce people's range of choices about their care. As this example suggests, one person's "solution" may be another person's "problem."
5. **Definitions of problems change over time.** The public's views on what constitutes a serious problem change as time goes on. A century ago, the United States was a much poorer nation where no one was

surprised to find many rural people living in shacks and many city people living on the streets. But as living standards rose, members of our society began to think of safe housing as a basic right, and so bad housing and homelessness emerged as social problems. Going in the other direction, some "problems" of the past have largely gone away because people no longer think of them as problems. For example, sixty years ago, interracial marriage was looked down upon and was actually illegal in many places; such marriages, however, are now widely accepted and are legal everywhere in the country.

6. **Problems involve subjective values as well as objective facts.** Today, about one-third of people who have ever been married have also divorced. But does this mean that there is a "divorce problem"? Facts are important, but so are subjective perceptions about any issue. People who value traditional families are likely to view a high divorce rate as a serious problem. But others who think family life can limit individual opportunities, especially those of women, are likely to disagree.
7. **Many—but not all—social problems can be solved.** One good reason to study social problems is to improve society. Sociologists believe that many social problems can be effectively addressed, if not eliminated entirely. Back in 1960, for example, 35 percent of elderly men and women in the United States lived below the poverty line. Since then, rising Social Security benefits and better employer pensions have reduced the poverty rate to about 9.3 percent of all seniors, which is less than one-third of what it used to be.

   But sociologists do not expect that every social problem will be solved. As already noted, situations that are problems for some people are advantageous to others, and sometimes those who benefit are powerful enough to slow the pace of change or to prevent change entirely.

   The driving force behind the ACA was the fact that the United States was and remains the only industrial nation without a tax-funded system that helps pay for everyone's medical care. When Congress enacted this new system, 33 million people still lacked health insurance, largely due to strong political opposition to universal health care (especially a system that is entirely government funded) and lobbying by organizations representing physicians and insurance companies. During its first year, the Trump administration made several failed attempts to repeal the ACA.

   Even problems that everyone wants to solve sometimes defy solution. For instance, almost everybody hopes researchers find a cure for AIDS. But, despite advances that make "living with AIDS" a reality, the research breakthrough that finally cures this disease may lie years in the future.
8. **Various social problems are related.** Because social problems are rooted in the operation of society, many social problems are related to one another. This means that addressing one problem—say, reducing the number of children growing up in poverty—may in turn help solve other problems, such as the high rate of high school dropouts, drug abuse, and crime.

   It is also true that solving one problem may create a new problem that we did not expect. For example, the invention of the automobile in the late 1800s helped people move about more quickly and easily, but as decades went by, automobiles were polluting the air and causing tens of thousands of traffic deaths every year (32,166 in 2015).

The Advertising Archives/Alamy Stock Photo.

DFree/Shutterstock

Compared with women fifty years ago, women today are much more equal to men in terms of rights and opportunities. Actress Emma Stone, for example, makes as much money for a film as her male costars. Yet today's women are more likely to see gender inequality as a problem. Can you explain this apparent contradiction?

SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The Global Village: Problems around the World

To see just how desperate the lives of many of the world's 7.6 billion people really are, imagine the entire planet reduced to the size of a "global village" of 1,000 people. The global village contains 599 Asians (including 187 citizens of the People's Republic of China), 160 Africans, 101 Europeans, 86 Latin Americans, 5 residents of Australia and the South Pacific, and 49 North Americans, 44 of them from the United States.

The village is a very rich place with a vast array of goods and services. Yet anything beyond the basics is too expensive for almost everyone. This is because of economic inequality: The richest 1 percent of all villagers—the ten richest people—earn 15 percent of all income, and the richest 100 villagers (10 percent) earn about half of all the income. By contrast, the worst-off 200 villagers (20 percent) earn just 2 percent of all income. These people are hungry every day and even lack safe drinking water. Because of their deprivation, the poorest villagers have little energy to work and fall victim to life-threatening diseases (Ortiz & Cummins, 2011; Milanovic, 2016).

Villagers boast of their fine schools, yet only 67 people (6.7 percent) have a college degree, and 137 of the village's adult population (13.7 percent or one in seven) cannot read or write.

Many troubling issues such as health, illiteracy, and poverty are much worse elsewhere in the world than in a rich nation such as the United States. In fact, 15 percent of the world's people live on less than $2 a day—a standard of living far below what we in the United States consider "poor." This harsh reality of suffering—detailed in Chapter 16 ("Population and Global Inequality")— is one good reason to take a global perspective in our study of social problems (Milanovic, 2016; Population Reference Bureau, 2017; UNESCO, 2017; World Bank, 2017).

What Do You Think?

1. Do any of the facts presented in this box surprise you? Which ones? Why?
2. As a person living in a rich nation, do you think you have a responsibility to help solve problems in poor nations? Why or why not?
3. Can you see ways that you, personally, benefit from the economic inequality of our world? Can you point to ways that you are harmed by inequality? Explain.

Together, these eight assertions form a sociological understanding of social problems. We now turn to another important idea: Addressing many social problems requires the use of a global perspective.

Social Problems: A Global Perspective

Many beginning students of sociology find it hard to imagine just how serious problems such as poverty and hunger are in the poorest regions of the world. To help you understand the seriousness of global problems, the Social Problems in Global Perspective box describes patterns of inequality in a world represented by a village of 1,000 people.

Adopting a global perspective also shows us that some social problems cross national boundaries. For example, Chapter 16 ("Population and Global Inequality") explains that Earth's increasing human population threatens the well-being of everyone on the planet. Chapter 17 ("Technology and the Environment") offers another example, showing how people living in rich countries are consuming the planet's resources very quickly and, as they use up these resources, they are polluting the planet's air and water.

Finally, a global perspective shows that many dimensions of life—and many of life's challenges—may be quite different elsewhere. Global Map 1–1 shows us that in rich countries such as the United States, the typical woman has one or two children. But in a poorer country such as Guatemala, three children is the norm. In the poorest nations, the number goes even higher: In Ethiopia, four children is common; in Nigeria, it's five; and in Somalia, it's more than six.

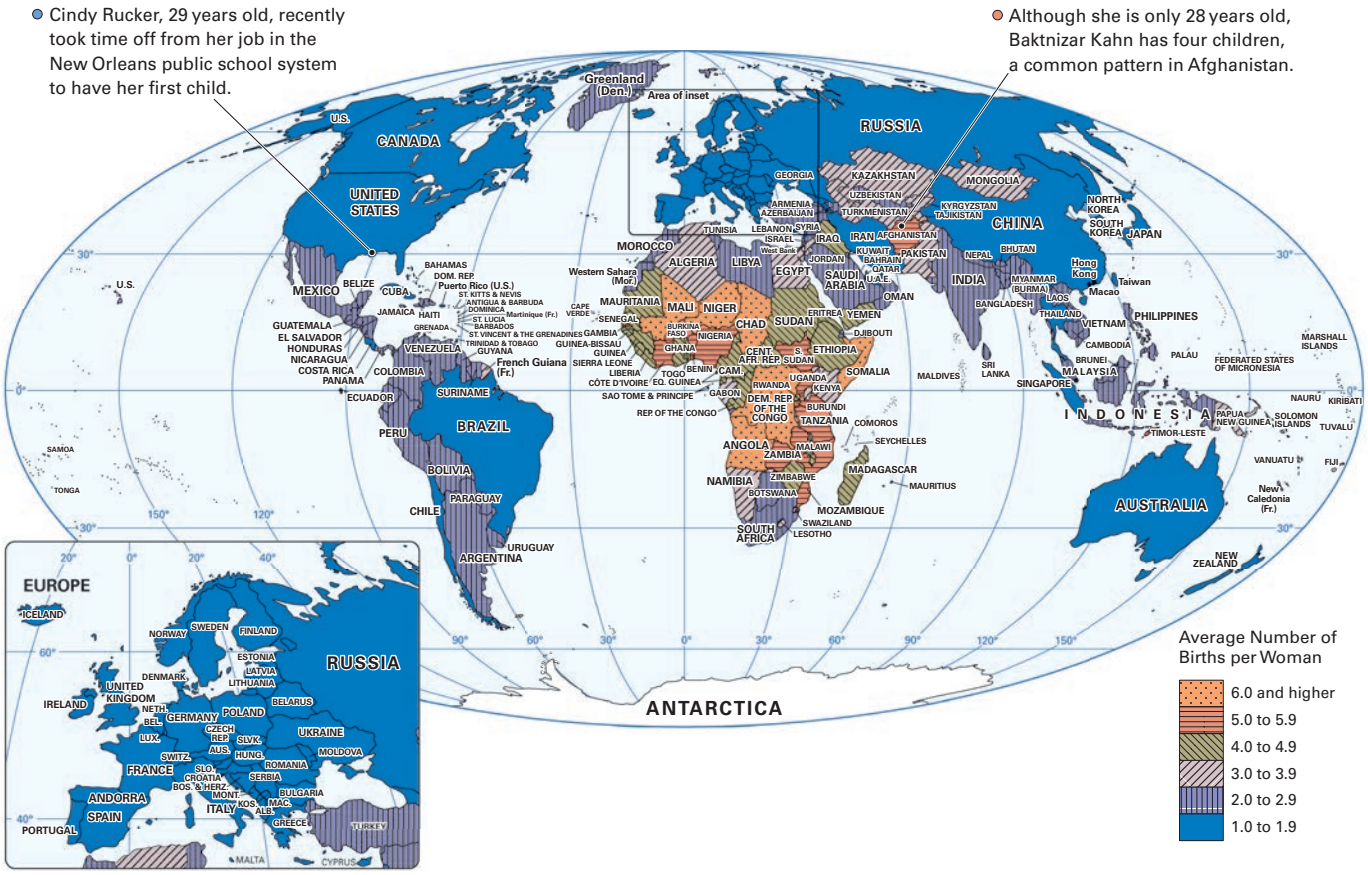
Analyzing Social Problems: Sociological Theory

1.3 Apply sociological theory to the study of social problems.

Sociologists weave various facts into meaning using **theory**, *a statement of how and why specific facts are related*. Building a theory, in turn, depends on a **theoretical approach**, *a basic image of society that guides theory and research*. Using a particular theoretical approach leads sociologists to ask certain questions. The following sections present the discipline's most widely used theoretical models: the structural-functional, social-conflict, feminist, and symbolic-interaction approaches.

The Structural-Functional Approach

The **structural-functional approach** is *a theoretical framework that sees society as a system of many interrelated parts*. Sociologists describe the main parts of this system as **social institutions**,



Window on the World

Global Map 1–1 Women's Childbearing in Global Perspective

How people live and the challenges they face differ dramatically around the world. If you are a woman living in a high-income nation, the chances are that you will have one or two children during your lifetime. But had you been born in one of the low-income nations of Africa, four, five, or even six children would be the rule. Can you point to several reasons for this global disparity?

SOURCE: Population Reference Bureau (2017).

major spheres of social life, or societal subsystems, organized to meet a basic human need. For example, the structural-functional approach might explore how the family is a system to ensure the care and raising of children, how schools provide young people with the skills they need for adult life, how the economy produces and distributes material goods, how the political system sets national goals and priorities, and how religion gives our lives purpose and meaning.

Early Functional Theory: Problems as Social Pathology

A century ago, the structural-functional approach studied society as if it were a living organism. This view led to *social pathology theory*, a model that treats social problems as a disruption in society's normal operation, in the same way that a disease upsets the operation of the human body. Crime, truancy, and premarital sex were all seen as pathologies (from a Greek word meaning "disease") that threatened the health of society.

What caused society to break down? Because early functionalists viewed society as good and healthy, many were quick to assume that pathologies must be caused by bad or weak people. The English sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) made the claim that the problem of poverty was the result of some people lacking the ability and personal discipline to work. Spencer based his thinking on the ideas of the biologist Charles Darwin, who published a groundbreaking theory of evolution in 1859. Spencer's "social Darwinism" viewed the rich as society's most successful members and the poor as those who could not keep up. To Spencer, the harsh competition of the marketplace was good for society because it guaranteed, as he put it, the "survival of the fittest." For this reason, Spencer opposed social welfare programs as harmful to society because they transfer wealth from the people he considered the most able to the ones he regarded as the weakest.

There is no surprise in the fact that Spencer's ideas were very popular among the rich industrialist owners of his day. But sociologists gradually turned against Spencer because there is no scientific evidence that the rich and powerful are any more worthy than others or that a competitive

economy benefits everyone. Social Darwinism has little support among sociologists today. But understanding this approach is important if only because lots of people, including some of our political leaders, still think this way.

The Chicago School: Problems as Disorganization A second type of structural-functional theory—often called the "Chicago School" because it originated at the University of Chicago, home of the first sociology department in the United States—linked problems not to deficient people but to social "disorganization" (Park & Burgess, 1970, orig. 1921). *Social disorganization theory* holds that problems arise when society breaks down due to social change that occurs too rapidly.

A century ago, evidence of disorganization was easy to find as industrial cities grew rapidly with the arrival of millions of immigrants. Many saw traditional family patterns and long-held attitudes breaking down. Schools were filled to overflowing, there was not enough housing for everyone, and crime seemed to be rising out of control.

In response to such problems, many Chicago sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s became active reformers. They supported local settlement houses, set up programs to teach English to immigrants, and in a few cases even ran for public office (Faris, 1967).

More Recent Functionalism: Problems as Dysfunctions By about 1950, the structural-functional approach had changed its emphasis from activism to scientific analysis. Sociologists then began to study the positive functions (or "eufunctions") of patterns like sports; they identified both functions that are intended and widely recognized (the "manifest functions") as well as others that are unintended and less well known (called "latent functions"). A manifest function of sports is improving physical fitness; a latent function of sports is strengthening the cultural values of individual effort and personal achievement. Sociologists noted that social patterns also have negative functions (called "dysfunctions"). For example, one important dysfunction of sports on many campuses is leaving college athletes with little time for their studies. From this point of view, social problems can be thought of as the dysfunctions of various social patterns.

These sociologists also pointed out that just as "good" things such as sports can have some bad consequences, "bad" things such as sexual assault can sometimes do some good for society as a whole. For example, the many incidents of sexual harassment and assault have greatly harmed many women, but in 2017 they also sparked a national debate on various forms of sexual violence that promises to produce some lasting changes for the better.

EVALUATE

Although the structural-functional approach has been influential for more than a century, its importance has declined in recent decades. For one thing, many of today's sociologists have a renewed interest in activism and shy away from a "hands-off" approach that they think defends the status quo. For another, by viewing society as a smoothly functioning system, the structural-functional approach pays little attention to social divisions based on race, class, and gender. Since the 1960s, more attention has been paid to a second theoretical framework: the social-conflict approach.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING In a sentence, how does the structural-functional approach view society? How has this approach explained social problems in terms of social pathology, social disorganization, and social dysfunction?

The Social-Conflict Approach

The **social-conflict approach** is *a theoretical framework that sees society as divided by inequality and conflict*. In general, conflict theories claim that social problems arise from the division of our society into "haves" and "have-nots."

Marxist Theory: Problems and Class Conflict Marxist theory, sometimes called "class conflict theory," is an explanation of social problems guided by Karl Marx's theory of class struggle. Marx (1818–1883), a German-born thinker and social activist, was amazed by how much the new industrial factories could produce. Yet Marx criticized society for concentrating most of this wealth in the hands

Dean Conger/Corbis Historical/Getty Images.

The structural-functional approach points to the contribution young people working in factories in Indonesia make to their families' income. The social-conflict approach provides a different insight: Many of the products popular in the United States are made by young people in sweatshops that pay pennies an hour to workers.

of a few. How, he wondered, could a society so rich contain so many people who were so poor?

Marx devoted his life to analyzing *capitalism*, an economic system in which businesses are privately owned by people called "capitalists" who operate them for profit. To Marx, social problems are the inevitable result of the normal operation of a capitalist economy. The industrial technology of modern societies produces enough to meet everyone's needs; modern society therefore has the *productive* capacity to end human suffering. Yet, Marx observed, allowing this technology to operate under a capitalist economy means that this bounty will be *distributed* to only a few. Capitalism, explained Marx, is a system that does not serve the people but only seeks profit for the small share of people who own factories and other productive property. Therefore, he concluded, it is a system that does not operate to meet human needs. As a result, the normal operation of the capitalist system creates social problems such as poverty.

Marx was critical of modern society, but he was also optimistic about the future. He predicted that, as a system that failed to meet the needs of most people, capitalism would bring about its own destruction. In the short term, Marx concluded, the rich would become richer and richer, while the poor would have less and less. Industrial workers, whom he called "proletarians," performed hard labor in factories for low wages while facing the ever-present threat of being replaced by machines. In the long term, Marx was certain that workers, holding little hope for the future, would join together, rise up, and end this oppressive system.

As Chapter 2 ("Economic Inequality") explains, however, such a revolution has not yet happened, at least not in industrial-capitalist nations. But followers of Marx still support a radical restructuring of society—especially the economy—as the best means to address most social problems.

Multiculturalism: Problems of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Sociologists study conflict based not only on class but also on color and culture. Societies attach importance to skin color and cultural background, which leads to ranking people in a hierarchy based on race and ethnicity. *Multicultural theory* explains how social problems arise from racial and ethnic inequality.

The great social diversity of the United States and the rest of the Western Hemisphere is the result of centuries of immigration. Every person who lives anywhere in the Americas, from the northern reaches of Canada to the southern tip of Chile, either migrated here from someplace else or has an ancestor who did. Here in the United States, some categories of people (especially white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or WASPs) have enjoyed higher social standing than others (especially people of color).

In 1865, the United States ended centuries of slavery, an important step in the process of giving people more equal standing before the law. Yet as Chapter 3 ("Racial and Ethnic Inequality") points out, white people continue to enjoy privileges based on race, and racial and ethnic minorities remain disadvantaged and at higher risk of poverty, poor health, street violence, and numerous other social problems. In addition, racial and ethnic prejudice is great enough on the part of some people that they see the very presence of minorities in their communities as a social problem.

EVALUATE

Offering a striking contrast to the structural-functional view of society as a well-integrated system, various social-conflict approaches now dominate the study of social problems. But taking a social-conflict approach also has limitations.

Critics fault this approach for overstating the extent of social divisions. They point out that, because of the general pattern of upward social mobility over the past century, few members of our society today show interest in the type of revolution advocated by Marx. Although there is still much to be done, progress has been real: Over the past century, living standards have risen and African Americans and other minorities have far more opportunities than they did in the past.

A second criticism is that social-conflict analysis rejects scientific objectivity in favor of political activism, which calls into question the truth of some of its claims. Marxists and multiculturalists concede that their work is political, but as they see it, so is any theoretical approach, including structural-functionalism. They add that functionalism escapes the criticism of being biased only because it supports the status quo.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING In a sentence, how does the social-conflict approach view society? Explain what Marxist theory and multicultural theory identify as the causes of social problems.

The Feminist Approach

The feminist approach, also called the "gender-conflict" approach, is another type of social-conflict approach in sociology. Because of its increasing importance to sociologists, this approach is appropriately treated on its own terms.

Feminism is *a political movement that seeks the social equality of women and men*. Feminists claim that women suffer more from poverty and many other social problems because society places men in positions of power over women. *Gender-conflict theory* explains social problems in terms of men's dominance over women.

Chapter 4 ("Gender Inequality") points out that although the social standing of women and men has become more equal during the past century, women working full time still earn just 80.5 percent as much as men do (Semega et al., 2017). In recent decades, an increasing share of the poor is made up of women (especially single women) and their children. Just as important, working women remain concentrated in a number of low-paying jobs, and from childhood to old age, women are subject to everyday disadvantages—from subtle prejudice to outright violence—at the hands of men.

EVALUATE

Like Marxism and multiculturalism, feminism seeks to change the status quo just as it challenges the structural-functional view of society as a well-integrated system. In recent decades, feminism has become a widely supported point of view in sociology, and it is commonly used in the analysis of social problems. But, like Marxism and multiculturalism, this variant of the social-conflict approach also has limitations.

In the same way that critics fault Marxism for overstating "class warfare," critics claim that feminism overstates the degree of inequality that separates the sexes. Over the course of the past century, the opportunities for women—in politics, in the workplace, and in other arenas such as sports—have increased dramatically. Without denying that gender inequality is still a reality, critics claim that women (like all minorities) enjoy far greater opportunities than they did in the past.

The charge of political bias is also made against feminism by its critics. The fact that feminism explicitly seeks social change means that this approach is clearly a form of social activism. As in the case of Marxism and multiculturalism, defenders of feminism respond that they are committed to the pursuit of social justice. They also point out that any analysis is political in that it either calls for social change or it does not.

A final criticism, which applies to both the structural-functional and all the social-conflict approaches, is that these macro-level approaches make use of broad generalities that seem removed from how individuals actually experience their world. This concern has led to the development of a third theoretical model: the symbolic-interaction approach.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING In a sentence, how does feminist theory see the world? Explain how feminist theory understands social problems.

The Symbolic-Interaction Approach

The goal of describing society more in terms of how people experience the world underlies the **symbolic-interaction approach**, *a theoretical framework that sees society as the product of individuals interacting with one another*. We can apply this approach to social problems by asking two questions: How do people become involved in problematic behavior? And more generally, how do people come to define issues as social problems in the first place?

Learning Theory: Problems and the Social Environment Why do young people in one neighborhood get into more trouble than those who live in another neighborhood? *Learning theory* claims that people learn troublesome attitudes and behaviors from others around them. The point here is that no one sets out to become a burglar, a Wall Street swindler, a drug abuser, or an industrial polluter; rather, people gradually engage in such behavior as they learn skills and attitudes from others.

A learning approach guided Nanette Davis (1980, 2000) in her study of thirty women performing sex work. Interviewing these women, Davis discovered that no one simply decides to sell sex. A woman might turn to such a life for any number of reasons, perhaps as a way to cope with loneliness or as a means of economic survival. Whatever the reason, Davis found, the women she studied gradually "drifted" toward prostitution, usually taking years to learn the skills, norms, and attitudes that characterize the professional sex worker. In short, people learn such roles one step at a time, eventually reaching the point where the role becomes their livelihood as well as part of their social identity.

Labeling Theory: Problems and Social Definitions The symbolic-interaction approach also explores how people socially construct reality. *Labeling theory* states that the reality of any particular situation depends on how people define it. For example, the spirited consumption of alcohol that young people view as normal partying may be labeled by college officials as dangerous binge drinking.

The distinction between a "social drinker" and a "problem drinker" often depends on which audience is watching (do parents view drinking the same way that friends do?), who the actor is (do we view women who drink the same as we view men who do?), where the action takes place (is drinking in a park the same as drinking at a bar?), and when the action occurs (is drinking on Sunday morning different from doing the same thing on Saturday night?). Obviously, many factors come into play as people socially define a given situation.

Shawn Thew/EPA/REX/Shutterstock.

Reality is often less a matter of what people do than of how they define their own behavior. Studies show that many college students consume large amounts of alcohol on a regular basis. To these students, drinking heavily may just be "partying." College officials, however, may define such behavior as "binge drinking" or "alcohol abuse," which can result in serious penalties.

APPLYING THEORY

Sociology's Major Theoretical Approaches

	Structural-Functional Approach	Social-Conflict and Feminist Approaches	Symbolic-Interaction Approach
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Macro-level	Micro-level
What is the basic image of society?	Society is a system of interrelated parts, all of which contribute to its operation.	The social-conflict approach sees society as a system of social inequality in which some categories of people benefit at the expense of others. The feminist approach highlights inequality between men and women.	Through social interaction, we construct the variable and changing reality we experience.
How do we understand problems?	Society is basically good; problems are the result of deficient people, too rapid change, or dysfunctional consequences.	Problems result from inequality in terms of class (Marxism), gender (gender-conflict theory and feminism), and race (multiculturalism).	People learn attitudes and skills for all patterns of behavior; this approach explores how people may or may not define situations as problems.

EVALUATE

The symbolic-interaction approach adds a micro-level or "real-world" view of social problems. But by highlighting how individuals differ in their perceptions, this approach overlooks the extent to which social structure, including class and race, shapes people's lives. In other words, pointing out that prostitution involves both learning and labeling is worthwhile, but we don't want to forget the broader issue that men dominate society and cast women into sexual roles in the first place.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How does the symbolic-interaction approach view society? How do learning theory and labeling theory help us to understand social problems?

This completes the introduction to sociology's major theoretical approaches, summarized in the Applying Theory table. But sociologists not only use theory to analyze social problems, they also engage in research to gather relevant facts. We turn next to the ways in which sociologists conduct research.

Finding the Facts: Sociological Research

1.4 Discuss the methods sociologists use to study social problems.

Many sociologists devote their lives to investigating the nature and causes of social problems in the hope of making the world a better place. Barbara Ehrenreich (2001), for example, spent months working alongside low-wage workers in Florida, Maine, and Minnesota, documenting the many challenges faced by this country's "working poor." The willingness to work hard, she found, is sometimes not enough to escape poverty, as millions of people throughout the United States know all too well.

The sociologist Lois Benjamin (1991) investigated the problem of racial prejudice. Is prejudice directed only at poor people, or are successful people also victimized in this way? After interviewing 100 of the most successful African American men and women in the United States, Benjamin concluded that success provides no escape from racial prejudice. Even African Americans at the top of their fields encounter racial hostility in their daily lives.

William Julius Wilson (1996) conducted interviews and examined available data in a major study of poor people living in Chicago. He found that people who have lived in poverty for many years contend with a host of social problems, including joblessness, unstable families, and, perhaps worst of all, a loss of hope. Wilson found that the major reason for this poverty is the disappearance of good jobs from Chicago's inner city.

These brief accounts are just a few examples of the research being done by thousands of sociologists across the country. The following sections provide a brief description of the research methods used by Ehrenreich, Benjamin, Wilson, and many others to study social problems—and to make the world a better place.

Research Methods

Sociologists use four major research methods in their investigation of social problems: surveys, field research, experimental research, and secondary analysis.

Survey Research: Asking Questions The most widely used research procedure is the **survey**, *a research method in which subjects respond to items on a questionnaire or in an interview*. A *questionnaire* is a series of items a researcher presents to subjects for their response. Researchers may deliver questionnaires in person, send them through the mail, or use e-mail.

Of course, the success of a project depends on your ability to locate the people you want to survey. If you are studying, say, homeless people, identifying and tracking down subjects may be difficult because many have no

stable addresses. Alternatively, it would not be hard for researchers studying the medical system from the patient's point of view to find sick people in hospitals, but gaining access to them and getting them to complete a questionnaire may be challenging.

The *interview* is a more personal survey technique in which a researcher meets face-to-face with respondents to discuss some issue. This interactive format allows an investigator to probe people's opinions with follow-up questions. Interviews take a lot of time, of course, which usually limits the number of people one can survey in this way. A good way to think about surveys is this: Questionnaires offer the chance for greater *breadth* of opinion, and interviews can provide greater *depth* of understanding.

Whether you use a questionnaire or an interview format, the key to a successful survey is selecting a sample of people that represents the larger population of interest. For example, researchers try to reach conclusions about all the police officers in a city by studying only a small number of them. To make a sample representative of the larger population, researchers typically use various techniques to select subjects randomly.

Sometimes, researchers pursue a *case study*, in which they focus on a single case: a person (say, a divorced mother), an organization (a college or a gambling casino), or an event (a rock concert or a hurricane). The advantage of this approach is that focusing on a single case allows greater detail and depth of understanding. However, because this strategy involves a single case, researchers are not able to generalize their results.

Field Research: Joining In Have you ever walked through an unfamiliar neighborhood and observed the people who lived there? If so, you have some experience with **field research** (also called **participant observation**), *a research method for observing people while joining them in their everyday activities*. Field research might mean investigating a particular community to understand the problems and hopes of its people. Elijah Anderson (1999) did this when he studied families in some of Philadelphia's poor African American neighborhoods. Anderson discovered that although most people in these neighborhoods had "decent" values, some had come to accept what Anderson calls the "code of the streets." Such people were likely to have weak family ties, to use drugs, and, especially if they were males, to engage in episodes of violence in an effort to defend themselves and to gain the respect of others.

Field studies involve a number of challenges. For example, the researcher benefits from observing people in their natural surroundings, but as Anderson's work suggests, fieldwork can be dangerous, especially to a researcher working alone. In addition, although this method makes sense for researchers with little money, it requires a lot of time, often a year or more. Finally, field researchers have to balance the demands of being a *participant*, who is personally involved in the setting, with those of an *observer*, who adopts a more detached role in order to assess a setting or situation more objectively.

Experimental Research: Looking for Causes Why are this country's prisons so violent? Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues investigated this question using an **experiment**, *a research method for investigating cause-and-effect relationships under tightly controlled conditions*. Unlike field research, which takes place almost anywhere, most experiments are carried out in a specially designed laboratory. There, researchers change one variable while keeping the others the same. Comparing results allows them to identify specific causes of patterns of behavior.

To investigate the causes of jailhouse violence, Zimbardo built an artificial prison in a basement at Stanford University. He recruited male students as volunteers and then assigned the most physically and mentally healthy subjects to the roles of inmates and guards. After the "prison" had been in operation for just a few days, Zimbardo was alarmed to see that on both sides of the bars, people performing their assigned roles were becoming hostile and violent. In fact, the aggression was so great that Zimbardo had to end the research for fear that someone would get seriously hurt.

Zimbardo's research highlights the responsibility researchers have for the safety and well-being of their subjects. His study also points to a fascinating conclusion: The prison system itself—not any personal problems on the part of inmates or guards—can trigger prison violence (Zimbardo, 1972; Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

Secondary Analysis: Using Available Data Sometimes all that is needed to study social problems is a trip to the local library. Easier still is going online, where a vast amount of sociological information can be found. **Secondary analysis** is *a research method that makes use of data originally collected by others*. In simple terms, why go to the trouble and expense of collecting information for yourself if suitable data already exist?

Just because data are easy to find does not mean that the data are accurate. Much information that is readily available on the internet, for example, is misleading, and some of it is just plain wrong. Always look carefully to learn as much as you can about the source: Is it a reputable organization? Does the organization have a political bias? Asking these types of questions and using more than one source will improve the quality of the data you find.

The federal government is a good source of data about almost all aspects of U.S. society. The Census Bureau continuously updates a statistical picture of the U.S. population—counting people, tracking immigration, assessing patterns

of health, and reporting levels of employment, income, education, and much more. Other government agencies also collect specific information; for example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation publishes detailed statistics on crime in the United States.

Secondary analysis is often quick and easy, but this approach has its own problems. For one thing, a researcher who has not collected the data personally may be unaware of any bias or errors. Fortunately, however, the quality of most government data is high, and enough material is available to satisfy almost any researcher.

Truth, Science, and Politics

Once sociologists have data in hand, they must decide what to do with them. Sociologists turn to science in order to gather their data, but science cannot solve problems for us. Science can help us learn, say, *how many* U.S. families are poor, and it may even yield some insights as to *why* they are poor. But science cannot tell us *what we should do* about poverty.

When we confront a social problem, we may use science to gather facts, which represent one kind of truth. But deciding how to respond to the problem always involves another kind of truth: our political values. How should sociologists tackle important and controversial issues such as poverty, family violence, and abortion? Should we simply try to discover the "facts"—reporting what is happening and perhaps why—and leave the political decisions about what the problems and solutions are to others? Or should we take a stand and actively try to change society for the better?

Sociologists have long debated how to square science and politics. No one wrestled more with this question than the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), who urged his colleagues to focus on the facts in an effort to make research *value-free*. Weber knew that personal values lead people to choose one topic over another. But, Weber insisted, once a topic is selected and research is under way, social scientists should keep a professional objectivity in their work. This means that as much as possible, researchers should hold their personal politics in check to avoid distorting the results. In practice, for example, a researcher who personally supports the death penalty must be willing to accept any and all results—even those that show that capital punishment has little or no effect on the murder rate. For Weber, the sociologist's main goal should be discovering truth rather than engaging in politics and promoting change.

In recent decades, however, an increasing number of sociologists have taken an opposing view. Many believe that sociologists have a responsibility not just to learn about the world but also to help improve the lives of people who suffer from poverty and prejudice. This pursuit of social justice might seem like taking sides—and it is. In defense of this value commitment, many sociologists (especially those using the social-conflict approach) argue that objective research is impossible because whatever theory we use or whatever we may say (or not say) about the world, we end up taking some position (even if we do so by remaining silent). If this is true, then all knowledge is political, and trying to be neutral is itself a political position that ends up favoring the status quo. In the end, critics of Weber's view say, all sociologists must take one side or another on any issue they study. This activist orientation was the hallmark of Karl Marx, who summed up his view of this controversy in words placed on his tombstone: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

Truth and Statistics

Finally, a brief word about *statistics*, the numerical results that researchers often include when they report their findings. Statistics are easy ways to characterize a large number of subjects, as when a professor announces that members of a class had an average grade of 90 on a midterm examination.

Many of us have been brought up to think of statistics as "facts." How often have we been told that "numbers don't lie"? But numbers are not always so truthful, for two reasons.

First, like all research findings, numbers must be interpreted. A class exam average may be 90, but does that mean the students studied hard or that the exam was fairly easy? Similarly, one person can point out that the official U.S. unemployment rate fell to about 3.7 percent in 2018 and interpret this as good news because the rate has come down in the past few years, while another claims the same number is bad news because it accepts the fact that millions of people are out of work. In addition, the official unemployment rate understates unemployment because it does not include people who have given up looking for work. Second, organizations, politicians, and even sociologists often present statistics that support some preferred conclusion. How are we to know whether the statistics we read are presented in a misleading way? There is no easy answer, but here are three tips to make you a more critical reader:

1. **Check how researchers define their terms.** How people define terms affects the results. Even the most careful counts of the poor will vary widely, depending on how each researcher defines poverty.
2. **Remember that research is never perfect.** Even if we agree on how to define the poor, actually counting millions of poor women, men, and children is a very difficult task. This is especially true of those who are

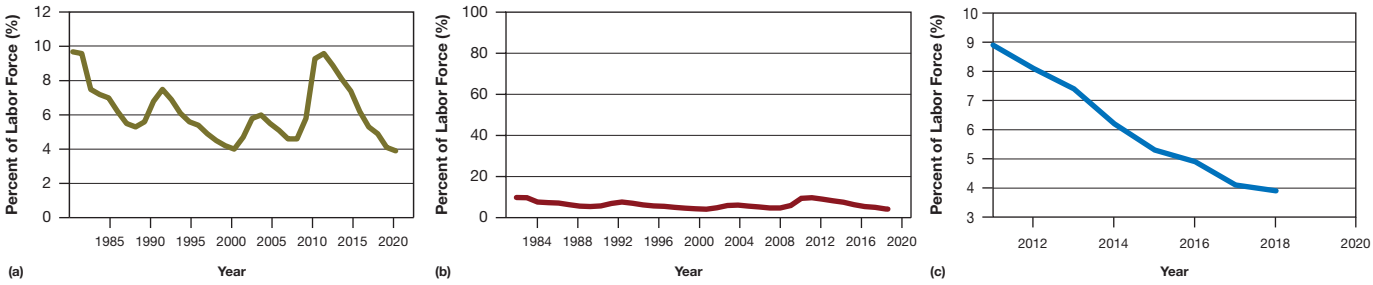


Figure 1–3 Do Statistics Lie?

Analysts, including sociologists, can "spin" their data to encourage readers to reach various conclusions. These three graphs are based on the same factual data. Yet the way we construct each graph suggests a different reality. The scale used in graph (a) gives the impression that the employment rate displays a lot of volatility, rising and falling over time. Graph (b) changes the scale to flatten the line, thus giving the impression that the unemployment rate has changed little. Graph (c) presents data only for the years 2011 through 2018, giving the impression that the unemployment rate is sharply falling.

SOURCE: Data from U.S. Department of Labor (2018).

homeless and therefore difficult to contact. In most cases, researchers end up undercounting the poor and especially the homeless.

3. **Researchers may spin their statistics.** What does a "steep decrease" in the homicide rate really mean? "Low unemployment" means low in relation to what? There are countless ways to select and present statistics, and researchers often present their findings in a way that advances the argument they wish to make.

Use special care when reading tables and graphs. Figure 1–3 illustrates the problem with three graphs showing changes in the U.S. unemployment rate. All three figures are drawn using data from the U.S. government. Graph (a) might be titled "Unemployment Goes Up and Down!" because it presents data across a time frame that shows both a decreasing and an increasing rate of unemployment. Graph (b) uses the same time frame but changes the scale to flatten the line, supporting a title such as "Unemployment Holds Steady!" Graph (c) uses a limited time frame over just five years to display the decline in unemployment from 2009 to 2016. Here we can announce "Unemployment Coming Down!"

Ideally, sociologists strive for accuracy, clarity, and fairness in their work and use statistical data with the intent to convey information rather than to mislead readers. But, keeping in mind that researchers have to make choices about how to present their numbers, you should always think critically about statistical information and how it is presented, whether it appears in textbooks or anywhere else. Never assume that statistics are the absolute truth.

Responding to Social Problems: Social Policy

1.5 Identify factors that shape how societies devise policy to respond to social problems.

How does a society respond to social problems? This question brings us to the topic of **social policy**, *formal strategies that affect how society operates*. Organizations, including governments and colleges, create social policy to get their work done and to address social problems. Sociologists play an important role in developing social policy. Over the years, sociologists have helped direct our nation's policy in dealing with racially segregated schools, poverty, pornography, health care, gun regulations, homelessness, racial discrimination, problems of family life, sexual harassment, and many other issues.

Policy Evaluation

How do we know whether a policy works? To evaluate any policy, we must answer the following, often difficult, questions:

1. **How do we measure "success"?** There is more than one way to measure the success of any policy or program. Take, for example, a rehabilitation program for young people who abuse drugs. Does "success" mean that those completing the program stay "clean" for a year? Five years? Show a greater rate of completing high school? Or finding a job? There are many ways to measure the success or failure of any policy or program, so researchers must look at more than one

before deciding whether a particular program is a failure or a success.

2. **What are the costs of the policy or program?** We live in a world of limited budgets and competing priorities, so policy evaluation means weighing results against costs. It may be possible to improve schools by increasing funding, for example, but a local community may not support raising property taxes.

   The costs of any program involve not just money but ethical concerns as well. For example, installing surveillance cameras on public streets may reduce crime or at least drive criminal activity elsewhere. Yet many citizens object to having their movements—including which stores they visit and with whom they strike up a conversation—recorded in computer files by public officials. In short, street surveillance may be successful in reducing crime but may involve an unacceptable cost by taking away people's privacy.

3. **Who should get the help?** In assessing a social policy, another key question is whom the policy should target for assistance. To combat poverty, should agencies work with adults who need jobs? Provide a good breakfast to poor children in school? Provide prenatal care to pregnant women? All of these things may be helpful, but limited budgets require agencies to make choices about whom to target.

   One guideline for making such decisions is Benjamin Franklin's old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Generally, the earlier the intervention, the more successful a policy is and the lower the costs. For example, helping boys before they get into trouble costs less—and accomplishes more—than putting them in jail later on.

   Sherry Deane of the National Black Child Development Institute says that too many programs kick in too late: "We spend so much more money after the problem has occurred—after a baby is born at low birth weight, after a child begins to fail in school, after a child is in trouble with the law—instead of making an early investment in the child with prenatal care, preventive health care, early education" (Goldman, 1991:5).

Policy and Culture

Social policy is also shaped by cultural values. That is, societies respond to a social problem in a particular way not necessarily because that approach is cheapest or works best but because a particular response, according to the society's culture, seems to be "the right thing to do."

There are more than 40 million poor people in the United States, many living with inadequate nutrition, unsafe housing, and little or no medical care. Poverty persists in this country not because no one knows how to eliminate it; a policy to guarantee a minimum income would end the problem very quickly. But because our way of life stresses self-reliance, there is not much support for what would be widely criticized as "handout" policies. Guided by a culture that defines people as responsible for their social standing, we tend to see the poor as "undeserving" of assistance. Such cultural values were at work in 1996 when Congress and the White House acted with widespread public support to change public assistance programs so that fewer people were dependent on government support.

Policy and Politics

The kinds of policies people favor depend on their political point of view. People with a politically conservative outlook usually turn to the past for guidelines about how to live in the present and how to shape the future. Conservative people try to limit the scope of societal change. They tend to view the existing society as good, leading them to conclude that problems arise mostly because of the actions and choices of bad individuals. This is why conservatives favor policies that treat problems as shortcomings of particular individuals rather than as shortcomings of society. If the problem is unemployment, for example, conservatives might suggest helping jobless people get more schooling or learn new skills in order to make them more attractive to employers. By supporting policies that place more responsibility on individuals to take care of themselves, conservatives accept society as basically good the way it is. In short, they support the status quo.

By contrast, people with more liberal views see problems in the organization of society itself and favor greater social change. They are more likely to understand unemployment, for example, as caused by a society's economy. Therefore, to combat unemployment, liberals seek societal reforms, such as strengthening antidiscrimination laws, expanding the power of labor unions, or calling for government to create enough jobs to provide work for the people who need it.

People with radical-left views seek policies that go beyond the reforms suggested by liberals. From their point of view, social problems exist because the entire system is flawed in some basic way. For example, Marxists claim that replacing the market-based, capitalist economy with a government-controlled economy is the only real answer to problems such as high unemployment and increasing economic inequality. Because radical policies are, by definition, outside the political mainstream, they spark both committed support and widespread opposition.

We conclude this chapter—and each of the remaining chapters—with a discussion of how political attitudes lead people to define certain situations as problems in the first place and to define certain kinds of policies and programs as solutions to those problems.

POLITICS

Constructing Problems and Defining Solutions

1.6 Analyze how political attitudes shape the process of constructing social problems and defining solutions.

The social-constructionist approach described earlier is useful for exploring how political views guide people as they define social problems and devise solutions. Let us begin with a look at the political spectrum.

The Political Spectrum

We become part of the political process as we form attitudes about various issues. Social scientists measure people's opinions using a model called the **political spectrum**, *a continuum representing a range of political attitudes from "left" to "right."* As shown in Table 1–2, attitudes on the political spectrum range from the far left at one extreme through "middle of the road" views at the center to the far right at the other extreme.

The data in Table 1–2 show that 27.7 percent of people consider themselves liberal or left of center to some degree (adding the numbers at points 1, 2, and 3 together); 36.0 percent say they are moderates (falling in the middle at point 4); and 32.4 percent say that they are conservative or right of center to some degree (adding the numbers at points 5, 6, and 7 together). The remaining 3.9 percent of respondents did not know or simply did not answer the question. Grouping people another way, we see that a majority of people place themselves near the middle of the political spectrum (points 3, 4, or 5), and just a small percentage describe themselves as holding what might be called a radical view, either at the far left (at point 1 on the continuum) or the far right (point 7 on the continuum).

Over time, political attitudes may shift to the left (as they did during the 1960s) or to the right (as they did in the 1980s). Recent years reveal short-term political trends: In 2008, the election of Democratic candidate Barack Obama marked a shift to the left, and the Republican gains in the 2010 elections marked a shift to the right. In 2012, President Obama was reelected in another shift leftward, and Republican gains in Congress marked another rightward shift in 2014. In 2016, in a closely contested election, Donald Trump won the presidency and shifted national politics further to the right.

But at any time, there is always wide variation in this nation's political thinking. Some of this variation is regional: The people of Massachusetts and Minnesota almost always elect liberal candidates, just as those living in Mississippi and Texas usually elect conservatives. Similarly, some ethnic categories, such as African Americans, Jews and, to a lesser extent, Hispanics, historically have favored liberal positions; others, such as Asian Americans, tend to be relatively more conservative.

Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals

What do labels such as "conservative," "liberal," and "radical" really mean? Here is a brief statement to get us going. The deeper meaning of these three concepts will become clear as you read through the chapters that follow, applying each point of view to various issues.

Conservatives look to the past for guidance about how to live. They believe that the past is a store of wisdom developed by countless generations who have already confronted many of the same questions and issues that we face today. A good society, from the conservative point of view, is respectful of traditions and tries to conserve what earlier generations have learned. Conservatives have a special interest in the family and religion—the social institutions that transmit our moral traditions. Conservatives also typically seek to limit the size and scope of government. They tend to see "big government" as a problem because it threatens individual freedom and undermines people's responsibility to take care of themselves. Typically, conservative people tend to support the Republican Party and the Libertarian Party more than the Democratic Party.

Liberals have a different view of the world. In simple terms, liberals (from a Latin word for "free") think people should be free from the past to decide, on their own, questions about how to live. A good society, from a liberal point

Table 1–2 The Political Spectrum: A National Survey, 2016

Survey Question: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal—point 1—to extremely conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely liberal	Liberal	Slightly liberal	Middle of the road	Slightly conservative	Conservative	Extremely conservative
4.7%	12.2%	10.8%	36.0%	13.3%	14.9%	4.2%

[*Don't know/no answer* 3.9%]

SOURCE: The data in this figure are from *General Social Surveys, 1972–2016* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2017).

of view, is one in which people are able to make choices for themselves. This requires that society be both tolerant and respectful of individual rights. It also requires that categories of people be more or less equal in terms of basic rights and opportunities. Therefore, liberals have a special interest in the economy and politics because these are the social institutions that distribute wealth and power. Liberals typically seek to expand the size and scope of government. They see government power as a solution because it is an effective way to reduce inequality and to make other progressive changes that benefit everyone. In general, liberal people support the Democratic Party more than the Republican Party.

Although liberals and conservatives differ in some important ways, both accept the existing political system, at least in most respects. In contrast, people with more extreme views seek more basic change in society. Such are the attitudes of radicals (from Latin meaning "of the root") because they hold that the system must be changed right down to its roots. Radicals point to some basic flaw in society that is responsible for any number of social problems. For people on the far right, the historical expansion of "big government" is the basic flaw, leading to the claim that government is involved in far too many dimensions of our daily lives. In a few cases, people who hold far right views try to escape the reach of government to remote places where they live as "survivalists." Radicals also include people on the far left. For Marxists, the basic flaw in society is the capitalist economic system that creates social classes; as they see it, a socially just society could exist only after the abolition of capitalism. Similarly, for radical feminists, the basic flaw is the concept of gender that gives rise to patriarchy, the power of men over women. They claim that a socially just society could exist only with the abolition of gender differences. Typically, people with radical views do not support either the more mainstream Democratic Party or Republican Party. Some may vote for the mainstream candidate closest to their political position; others may support "fringe" candidates; still others may choose not to vote at all.

Can we sum up these different views of the world in a single sentence? It might go something like this: Conservatives talk about the importance of traditions and, in most respects, keeping society the way it has been; liberals talk about the need to reform society to make it more equal; radicals talk about organizing society in some completely new way.

Social Issues

People hold political positions on two types of issues: social issues and economic issues. **Social issues** are *political debates involving moral judgments about how people should live*. Some of today's leading social issues include abortion, marijuana, the death penalty, immigration, transgender rights, gender inequality, and sexual harassment.

Leaning Left People who lean to the left on social issues are called "social liberals." In general, social liberals think that people should be free to shape their lifestyles for themselves. In practice, then, social liberals are broadly tolerant of various alternative lifestyles. They also favor expanding opportunities for women, oppose all forms of sexual assault, support the pro-choice side of the abortion controversy, look favorably on racial and ethnic diversity and welcome immigrants coming to the United States, support legal marriage for gay and lesbian people, and favor expanding rights for transgender people. On the other hand, social liberals oppose the death penalty partly because, in the past, states have been more likely to execute African Americans than whites and the poor rather than the rich, even considering people convicted of the same crimes.

Leaning Right People who lean to the right on social issues are called "social conservatives." Social conservatives are respectful of traditional values and want to conserve them. Conservatives criticize what they see as too much tolerance in today's society, which amounts to moral decline. Social conservatives favor the pro-life side of the abortion controversy. In addition, they are concerned about controlling this country's borders, both to uphold the law and also to protect our cultural traditions. Social conservatives also support the traditional family in which women and men have different roles and responsibilities. Social conservatives also endorse the death penalty as a necessary moral response to especially brutal criminal acts.

Economic Issues

The second type of issues involves economics. **Economic issues** are *political debates about how a society should produce and distribute material resources*. These debates typically focus on the degree to which the economy should be under the control of government or a market system. (Chapter 11, "Economy and Politics," explores these issues in depth.)

Leaning Left In general, *economic liberals* (who lean to the left on economic issues) favor government regulation of the economy in order to reduce inequality. A free-market system, liberals claim, too often works to the advantage of a select few and leaves everyone else behind. For this reason, economic liberals support strong government that is able to regulate the economy through policies such as raising the minimum wage, setting high taxes especially on the rich, and using tax revenues to pay for health care, free education, and other social service programs that help average families and, especially, the poor.

Xinhua/Alamy Stock Photo.

Michael Nigro/Pacific Press/LightRocket /Getty Images.

Lower-income people tend to be very concerned about economic issues, for the simple reason that they lack economic security. Recently, thousands of people marched in Los Angeles to demand a $15/hour minimum wage. Higher-income people, by contrast, take economic security for granted. They are likely to be more concerned about social issues, such as ending discrimination against LGBT people. The people in the photo at the right are speaking up for transgender rights.

Leaning Right By contrast, *economic conservatives* (who lean to the right on economic issues) call for a smaller role for government in the economy. From their point of view, the market—not government officials—can set wage levels more fairly and efficiently. In addition, conservatives claim that motivated individuals and the businesses they create (rather than government agencies) are the key to growing the economy, generating greater wealth that benefits everyone. Government regulation of economic activity limits economic growth and raises the cost of doing business and also reduces personal choice and freedom. Economic conservatives support lower tax rates in the belief that people should be able to keep more of their own earnings and use this money as they choose to spend or to invest and expand the economy. In doing so, people take responsibility for their own well-being.

Who Thinks What?

What types of people are likely to fall on each side of the political spectrum? Social standing is a good predictor, but it turns out that most people are actually liberal on one kind of issue and conservative on another.

People of high social position, those with lots of schooling and above-average wealth, tend to be liberal on social issues. But they are more conservative on economic issues. That is, most highly educated people are tolerant of lifestyle diversity (the liberal view), but many privileged people also seek to protect their wealth (the conservative position).

People with less education and wealth show a different pattern. Typically their values are more traditional so that they tend to see moral issues as clear-cut choices that are right or wrong, which is the socially conservative view. At the same time, with less economic security, they are likely to support government-enacted economic programs that may benefit them, which makes them economically liberal (Kohut, 2012).

Keep in mind that most of us—whatever our social standing—tend to hold some combination of liberal and conservative attitudes. This inconsistency helps explain why so many people call themselves "moderates," "centrists," or "middle-of-the-roaders."

A Word about Gender Finally, what about any differences between women and men? Political analysts have documented a modest gender gap in voting patterns that paints women as slightly more liberal than men. Surveys of voting behavior show that women are somewhat more likely to vote for Democratic candidates, and men are more likely to favor Republicans. In the 2008 presidential election, for example, 56 percent of women but only 49 percent of men voted for the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama. This pattern was repeated in 2012 with 55 percent of women compared with 45 percent of men voting for President Obama. In the 2016 presidential election, 54 percent of women and 41 percent of men supported the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton. Donald Trump won the election with support of 53 percent of men and 42 percent of women voters. In general, men express greater concern about having a powerful military to ensure national security (generally viewed as a conservative or Republican issue), and women express greater concern about keeping an adequate social safety net to help those in need (a liberal or Democratic issue) (Pew Research Center, 2012; Tyson & Maniam, 2016).

A Word about Political Parties and the 2016 Presidential Election In general, people who lean left support the Democratic Party and people who lean right support the Republican Party. The presidential elections of 2004, 2008,

2012, and 2016 yielded two victories for Democrats (Obama in 2008 and 2012) and two victories for Republicans (Bush in 2004 and Trump in 2016). This pattern suggests that, over the years, power tends to shift back and forth from one major party to the other.

In 2016, the election of Donald Trump was not good news to Democrats. But Trump is also not a conventional Republican; news reports indicated, for example, that no one in the Bush family voted for him. Trump had the support of many pro-business Republicans and many religious or Evangelical Republicans. But his victory was based on a high turnout among people who, in the past, were less likely to vote at all. These voters included rural people, working-class urban people, and people without college degrees. They are concentrated in regions of the country that have experienced economic downturns—especially in states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—all of which were carried by Trump. What all these various Trump voters had in common is that they felt left behind by both major parties. In addition, they see the United States as being in decline, losing our economic power, military might, and cultural heritage. In short, Trump victory depended on support from people who wanted to "make America great again." The major reason most analysts (and probably even Trump himself) were surprised at the outcome of this election is that these "disaffected voters" turned out in far greater numbers than anyone expected.

A year in to Trump's term, polls showed party affiliation to be a strong predictor of people's support for the president. Not surprisingly, support was highest among people who claimed to be Republican (about 80 percent) and lowest among those who said they are Democrats (7 percent). With President Trump's approval rating hovering around 40 percent, the nation remains bitterly divided—especially in the wake of Brett Kavanaugh taking a seat on the Supreme Court, there may be a significant political shift in the 2018 midterm elections (Burlij & Agiesta, 2017; Dugan, 2017; Gallup, 2018).

Going On from Here

This chapter has presented important information that you will need in order to understand the rest of the book. Each chapter that follows focuses on important issues that are debated by politicians and the public across the country. To make better sense of these issues, each chapter will present research findings and will also apply sociology's major theoretical approaches—the structural-functional, social-conflict, feminist, and symbolic-interaction approaches—to the issues.

Keep in mind this key fact: *Social problems are socially constructed*. Political attitudes guide what we define as a problem and what policies we are likely to support as solutions. Recognizing and respecting the diversity of political attitudes in the United States, this text does not assume that everyone will agree about what the problems are or what the best solutions might be. On the contrary, we all should expect and welcome disagreement. *The goal is to engage in conversation*. The word "conversation" is closely linked to the word "convert," meaning "to change." When we engage in good-faith conversation, we take responsibility for stating our own opinions, listening to others, and asking and answering questions. Most of all, as we exchange ideas with others, we should have a willingness to change our positions as a result of learning more.

Throughout this text, you will read diverse analysis explaining how the libertarian, conservative, liberal, and left-radical political attitudes lead people to define social problems and to decide what we ought to do about them. Try to understand each of the various points of view. You will soon see for yourself that to come to a point where you can claim any one point of view as your own requires familiarity with *all* points of view. In addition, understanding various points of view helps to explain why our society has such long-standing and intense debates over social issues. Finally, gaining a diverse understanding of politics also helps us understand that one person's solution often turns out to be another's problem.

What should you expect by the time you have finished this text? You will have learned a great deal about many of the social issues that command the attention of government officials and the public, both in the United States and around the world. You will gain familiarity with sociology's theoretical approaches so that you can apply them to new issues in the future. Finally, with a firm grasp of the various political positions and arguments, you will find it easy to analyze new issues as you confront them. With this ability, you become an active participant in the political process.

A social problems course is an invitation to get involved in political debates and political action. Each chapter of this text provides a feature called "Constructing Social Problems: A Defining Moment" that shows how easy—and how important—it is to become involved in the political life of our nation. Throughout the text photo essays provide a look at people and organizations making a difference in the country and in the world. You will find many examples of "ordinary" people like you or me who decided to take some action in a way that made a difference. Let us be inspired by them and live in a way that inspires others!

CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A Defining Moment

A Call to Action: The Message of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) was born in Atlanta at a time when black people and white people were kept apart by a strict system of racial segregation. Taught in racially segregated classrooms, King graduated from high school at the age of fifteen. Then, like his father and grandfather, he earned a bachelor's degree from Morehouse College, a traditionally black institution.

Also like his father and grandfather, King set out to become a preacher. He enrolled at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where his mostly white classmates elected him president of the senior class. He received his theology degree in 1951. King continued his studies at Boston University, which awarded him a doctorate in 1955.

In 1954, King was appointed pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Quickly, he became a community leader, heading up not only his church but also the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The city of Montgomery—like the rest of the South—was still racially segregated, and people of color were restricted to their own businesses and neighborhoods and required to sit in separate sections at the rear of city buses. King condemned racial segregation as morally wrong and decided to take action to challenge the status quo. In December 1955, he led a nonviolent social movement that came to be known as the Montgomery bus boycott. Thousands of people pledged that they would no longer ride the buses until the city allowed all people equal access to seats on public transportation. The boycott continued for more than a year, ending only after the U.S. Supreme Court declared that the racial segregation of public transportation was unconstitutional.

King had won a great victory, but there was still powerful resistance to racial equality, which made his life difficult and dangerous. King faced hostility not only from members of the public but also from police. He was arrested dozens of times, his home was attacked, and some opposed to his cause made threats against King's life. But King held firm in his beliefs. In 1957, he was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, emerging as the leader of the national civil rights movement. His activism continued for another decade, culminating in a civil rights march in Washington, D.C., that included more than 250,000 people who gathered to hear him deliver his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

King was a great national and international change-maker, and he stands among a handful of people in the United States honored with a national holiday each year (celebrated on the third Monday in January, near King's birthday). But King was the first to say that his life should not be taken to mean that only great people can accomplish great things; he saw his own life as evidence the power to make a difference is within the reach of everyone. King held the view that anyone can be great because anyone can serve others. He did not think that great people had to be rich or well educated. Rather, he reminded us that to serve others, all anyone needs is a heart full of grace and the desire to help.

King's message is an invitation to each and every one of us to learn more about our society and to recognize that, as human beings, our lives are bound up with the lives of everyone else whether they live around the corner or around the world. Following King's example, look for a way in which you can make a positive difference in the life of at least one other person. Get involved!

Bettmann/Getty Images.

Martin Luther King Jr. is one of only four people in the history of our country whose birthday has become a national holiday (George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Christopher Columbus are the others). When we celebrate King's life, we recognize that our society has grappled with the issue of racial inequality for centuries and that this problem has yet to be solved.

Defining Solutions

CHAPTER 1 Sociology: Studying Social Problems

Whose problem is it?

This chapter has explained that different political attitudes lead people to disagree about what the problems are. And even when we do agree about the problems, we are likely to define different courses of action as solutions. Over the past several years, almost everyone has recognized increasing economic inequality that leaves millions of families without economic security. Look at the accompanying photos to see two different approaches to fixing the problem.

Kevin Lamarque/Thomson Reuters (Markets) LLC.

The more we favor the left side of the political spectrum, the more we look to government to manage the economy and ensure that families are secure. From a left point of view, best represented in the 2016 presidential campaign by Bernie Sanders, a job is a right to be guaranteed by government, which should set a minimum wage of at least $15 an hour rather than allow pay to reflect market forces of supply and demand.

The more we favor the right side of the political spectrum, the more we expect people to set their own goals and to solve economic problems for themselves. Conservatives claim that a job is a personal responsibility, and they suggest that, to find a good job, people have to ensure that they have the necessary personal skills and ambition as well as sufficient training for the type of job they are seeking.

Gilles Mingasson/Getty Images.

Hint: A key difference between the two sides of the political spectrum is how economic life should be organized. Seen from the political right, the economy should be based on a market system in which people freely act according to their individual interests. Therefore, primary responsibility for finding and holding a job lies with the individual. Conservatives tend to support the free market, and they distrust "big government" as a threat to personal freedom and limiting to economic expansion. From the political left, by contrast, the government should represent the public interest, regulating the economy through policies such as setting minimum wage levels and mandating working conditions. When operating on its own, liberals claim, "big business" creates economic inequality by concentrating wealth in the hands of a few. As for personal responsibility, liberals believe that because many problems are rooted in society, individuals cannot solve such problems for themselves. In the 2016 presidential campaign, the Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton (a moderate liberal) and especially Bernie Sanders (farther to the left) both claimed that people's success or failure is not so much about who is smarter or works harder but how wealth and power are distributed in the United States. Republicans candidates, including Donald Trump, took a more conservative position, claiming that a productive and free society rests on a market system that allows people to pursue their dreams. Democrats called for higher taxation to reduce economic inequality and fund new government benefits; Republicans, however, won the election and went on to reduce taxes on individuals and, especially, on corporations with the goal of encouraging investment and economic growth.

Getting Involved: Applications and Exercises

1. Explain how the following slogans from bumper stickers are examples of claims making: (a) "Build the Wall"; (b) "Guns Don't Kill People; People Kill People"; (c) "It's a Child, Not a Choice"; (d) "When You Elect Clowns, Expect a Circus"; and (e) "I'm a Republican: I work so you don't have to."
2. What kinds of questions might you ask about, say, poverty, using the structural-functional, symbolic-interaction, feminist, and Marxist social-conflict approaches?
3. Identify several national politicians—try to include your own members of Congress—who fall on the conservative and liberal sides of the political spectrum. What are their views on social issues such as sexual violence and transgender rights and on economic issues such as U.S. corporations moving abroad and raising taxes to reduce income inequality?
4. Explain how people's political attitudes affect the kinds of issues they are likely to define as social problems. For example, do conservatives or liberals see the "breakdown of the traditional family" as a social problem? Why? Are conservatives or liberals more concerned about economic inequality? Explain.

Making the Grade

CHAPTER 1 Sociology: Studying Social Problems

Seeing Patterns: The Sociological Imagination

1.1 Explain the benefits of learning about sociology and using the sociological imagination.

Sociology is the systematic study of human societies.

- Sociologist C. Wright Mills coined the expression "the sociological imagination" to encourage people to view their own personal problems as connected to the workings of society.

sociological imagination (p. 4) a point of view that highlights how society affects the experiences we have and the choices we make

sociology (p. 5) the systematic study of human societies

society (p. 5) people who live within some territory and share many patterns of behavior

culture (p. 5) a way of life including widespread values (about what is good and bad), beliefs (about what is true), and behavior (what people do every day)

Social Problems: The Basics

1.2 Define the concept "social problem" and explain how the people in a society come to define some issues—and not others—as social problems.

A **social problem** is a condition that undermines the well-being of some or all members of a society and is usually controversial.

- A social-constructionist approach holds that a social problem is created as society defines some condition as undesirable and in need of change.
- The specific conditions defined as social problems change over time.
- At any particular time, the objective facts and the subjective perception of any social issue may or may not be the same.
- A global perspective is important because many social problems cross national boundaries. Also, many problems, such as poverty, are more serious elsewhere in the world than in the United States.

Claims making refers to efforts by officials, individuals, and organizations to convince others that a particular issue or situation should be defined as a social problem. Claims made by one group of people typically prompt counterclaims by other groups.

Social movements typically go through four stages: emergence, coalescence, formalization, and decline.

social problem (p. 5) a condition that undermines the well-being of some or all members of a society and is usually a matter of public controversy

social-constructionist approach (p. 6) the assertion that social problems arise as people define conditions as undesirable and in need of change

claims making (p. 8) efforts by officials, individuals, and organizations to convince others that a particular issue or situation should be defined as a social problem

social movement (p. 10) an organized effort at claims making that tries to shape the way people think about an issue in order to encourage or discourage social change

Analyzing Social Problems: Sociological Theory

1.3 Apply sociological theory to the study of social problems.

Sociologists use **theoretical approaches** to guide their research and theory building. The major theoretical approaches—structural-functional, social-conflict, feminist, and symbolic-interaction—all provide insights into various social problems.

Macro-Level

The **structural-functional approach** sees society as a complex system of many different parts.

- Early *social pathology theory* viewed problems as disruptions in society's normal operation.
- Later, *social disorganization theory* linked social problems to rapid change.
- More recently, functionalism views social problems in terms of the dysfunctions of various social patterns.

The **social-conflict approach** highlights social inequality, including inequality based on class and on race and ethnicity.

- *Class conflict theory*, based on the ideas of Karl Marx, links social problems to the operation of a capitalist economic system.
- *Multicultural theory* spotlights problems arising from inequality between people in various racial and ethnic categories.

The **feminist approach** highlights social inequality based on gender. *Feminist theory* links social problems to men's domination of women.

Micro-Level

The **symbolic-interaction** approach helps us understand how people experience social problems in their routine, everyday interactions.