



Introduction to
SOCIAL PROBLEMS

EIGHTH EDITION

THOMAS J. SULLIVAN

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Thomas J. Sullivan

Northern Michigan University



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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

For Nancy

PREFACE

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the study of social problems continues to be one of the most demanding, exciting, and fast-paced fields in sociology and the social sciences. Some remarkable advances have been made: The crime rate has fallen dramatically since 1990; the high school dropout rate among minorities is falling, dramatically in some cases; and women now go into combat as pilots and circle the globe as astronauts aboard space shuttles. And these are just a few examples of the significant advances that have occurred since the first edition of this book was published. At the same time, we should not rejoice for too long, because serious problems persist: The crime rate is still far too high, alarming new evidence suggests that global warming may be a much more severe problem than had previously been thought, the prevalence of poor people of color among the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans brings home the extent to which class and race still shape opportunities and outcomes in the United States, and the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, in 2001 remind us of the horrific acts of violence that still occur frequently in the world. So, although some rejoicing is warranted, much important and difficult work still remains.

The work of dealing with such social problems is, of course, a collective effort in which virtually all citizens join at some time and at some level. Many professionals—sociologists, educators, social workers, counselors, and police officers, to name a few—devote their careers to solving social problems. Many other people, with no special training, volunteer their efforts in community centers and other organizations in an effort to alleviate the pain and damage from crime, woman battering, or homophobia. This eighth edition of *Introduction to Social Problems* supports these efforts by providing students who are training for helping professions and any other interested activists with the most current assessment of social problems and their solutions. This book explores the nature and extent of the problems, documents the advances and setbacks, and analyzes what solutions work and don't work.

Sociology and the other social sciences make some special contributions to this battle against social problems. They use scientific research to assess the nature and extent of social problems and the effectiveness of solutions to them. Social science research focuses on questions such as: Why and how do particular social problems emerge? Does a given solution work? Who benefits? What are the negative consequences of a given solution? Is there a way that we can achieve the same gain for less expense? In fact, over the past few decades, the study of social problems has become one of the most exciting and innovative wings of the social sciences because it involves the application of social science research and knowledge to the solutions of some of the most difficult, agonizing, and controversial problems confronting the United States and the world today.

Organization

Many serious social problems confront the United States and the world, too many to cover in a single book. From among these social issues I have chosen to discuss problems that are particularly serious, affect many people, and expose students to a broad array of concerns in varied sectors of life in the United States. By studying these problems, students gain the tools and the insight that enable them to analyze other problems and solutions not explicitly covered in this book.

Chapter 1 introduces students to the sociological analysis of social problems, including a discussion of the theoretical perspectives that are used throughout the book and of the importance of the scientific approach and applied research in the analysis of social problems and their solutions. Chapters 2–4 cover social problems that relate directly to some of the major social institutions in society: government, the economy, the family, and health-care systems. Chapters 5–8 focus on problems that are linked by the common theme of social inequality: poverty; racial and ethnic discrimination; and inequality based on gender, age, or sexual orientation. Chapters 9–11 analyze problems surrounding behavior that some people consider unconventional or deviant: crime and delinquency; alcohol and drug abuse; and prostitution, pornography, and the sex trade. Chapters 12–14 focus on problems involving changes or disruptions in the physical and social world: urban problems and population growth; environmental pollution; violence, war, and terrorism. Finally, Chapter 15 addresses some rapidly changing areas—education, science, and technology—that concern many people in the twenty-first century.

Features in the Eighth Edition

This book goes beyond simply cataloging a set number of social problems. It also provides the student with a framework for analyzing any such problems. This framework is incorporated into a number of special elements of the book.

1. *Theoretical Perspectives.* I have organized the analysis of social problems and their solutions around the three core theoretical perspectives in sociology: functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism. These perspectives offer tremendous insight into the sources of problems, the effectiveness of solutions, and the ramifications—both obvious and hidden—of adopting particular solutions. These perspectives are used in every chapter of the book to provide the student with a set of tools to analyze any social problem, including problems not directly discussed in this book.
2. *Applied Research inserts.* A theme in this book is that the application of social science research is central to solving problems and evaluating how well solutions work. Therefore, I have included in every chapter an insert titled *Applied Research*, which illustrates how and why this is the case. In this way, I emphasize the point that the choice of solutions to problems, although shaped by personal values and the public policy debate, should be constrained by the assessment of those solutions through systematic and scientific observation. In other words, the choice of solutions to problems should involve an interplay between human values and social research.
3. *Myths and Facts.* To emphasize further the role of research in understanding social problems, I point out some ways in which people's common-sense beliefs about social problems are proved incorrect by research data. This encourages the student to be sensitive to the distinction between myths and facts: beliefs that have no scientific foundation versus knowledge that has been substantiated by observational testing.

4. *Laissez-Faire versus Interventionist Debate.* The debate over social policy and social problems is centered in part on the role of the government in such issues. This long-standing debate is incorporated into the text in the form of two opposing positions. The laissez-faire stance posits that the government is, in most cases, either inefficient at finding or unable to find such solutions and should stand aside and let private enterprise and impersonal economic forces produce solutions. The interventionist position gives the government prime, although not sole, responsibility for finding and initiating solutions to problems. This debate is addressed periodically in the text where it is relevant.
5. *Policy Issues inserts.* Another important theme of this book is that finding solutions to social problems is a political process in which groups differ with one another over which solutions are preferred. One's choice of solutions is influenced in part by one's cultural and subcultural values. Therefore, every chapter includes an insert titled *Policy Issues*, in which contemporary debates on social policy related to that problem are discussed. Both the pros and the cons of policies are debated and in many cases linked to the laissez-faire/interventionist debate.
6. *International Perspectives.* This feature provides students with a global picture of particular social problems and their solutions. One reason this is important is the growing interdependence among the world's peoples and nations. Another reason is that we can gain insight into problems and their solutions when we observe them in societies and cultures that are different from our own. In addition, some social problems are inherently global in nature rather than national or regional.
7. *Social Construction and the Mass Media.* Explicit emphasis is given to the social constructionist perspective on social problems, in many cases by discussing the role of the mass media in constructing problems and their solutions. A section in Chapter 1 discusses the social construction of social problems from the three theoretical perspectives; then, sections on constructionism and the mass media are included in Chapters 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, and 14.
8. *Linkages.* To encourage the student to see the interconnections among social problems, a brief insert at the end of each chapter points out how a problem discussed in that chapter is linked to problems discussed in other chapters. This encourages the student to recognize that the worsening of one problem can mean that other seemingly unconnected conditions may also deteriorate and that alleviating one problem can result in improvements in others.
9. *Study and Review.* At the end of each chapter, a Study and Review section is included to give students an opportunity to test how well they have grasped the material presented in the chapter. Each section contains a chapter summary, list of key terms, multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, fill-in questions, matching questions, and essay questions. Correct answers are also provided (see pp. 458–460). These various testing formats offer an assessment of the different kinds of information found in each chapter and will assist students in organizing their study. Students will thereby have a good measure of how much they have learned and a comprehensive review of the content in the chapter, as well as help in preparing for exams.
10. *Researching Social Problems on the Internet.* Each chapter includes a section, following the Summary, titled *Researching Social Problems on the Internet*. It suggests some ways students can further their knowledge of the topics of that chapter by searching the Internet. It gives some specific Web sites to explore but also suggests some exercises that direct a search for new materials.

Updates and Changes

Although the book's basic organization remains the same in the eighth edition, it has been thoroughly revised and updated to reflect contemporary developments in sociology, as well as new social, political, and economic developments relating to particular social problems. Special attention has been given to ensuring that the data presented on the various social problems are the most current available. The "For Further Reading" sections at the end of each chapter have also been thoroughly updated with challenging books for the student who wishes to pursue a topic in greater depth.

A detailed list of the revisions in each chapter (including the page number where the changes are found in the text) can be found in the *Instructor's Manual* that accompanies this book. The following list highlights the major changes:

- New discussion has been added to Chapter 2 on the role of corporate opposition in the decline of unions (corporate use of litigation and intimidation against unions) and the focus of the global labor movement on the concept of labor rights for all people (to move governments and international trade organizations to recognize as human rights the right to a fair wage, to join a union, and to bargain collectively).
- Although the Applied Research insert in Chapter 2 is mostly the same, new material has been added to expand on the discussion of how media corporations shape public debate over social problems.
- A new discussion is added to the Future Prospects section of Chapter 2 on the trend toward the privatization of government action on social problems (i.e., the tendency to have private contractors do government work); this further expands the attention given in this text to the phenomenon of the privatization of social problems.
- New research is presented in Chapter 3 on the effectiveness (or, rather, lack of effectiveness) of policies promoting abstinence only in sex education programs.
- Where available, data have been added to tables and figures on Asians and Pacific Islanders and, in some cases, Native Americans (Table 6.1 and Figures 5.5, 6.1, 6.3, 7.1, and 8.5).
- In Chapter 6, recent court rulings relating to the school integration and the use of race in assigning students to schools are discussed, including the most recent Supreme Court rulings on this; the social policy implications of these court rulings are discussed in text and in the Social Policy insert.
- Given developments since 9/11, a new section has been included in Chapter 6 on the Arab American experience as an ethnic group and a minority group in the United States, highlighting their experiences with prejudice and discrimination.
- The Applied Research insert in Chapter 8 has been rewritten to include the most recent research and scale development work on scales measuring child well-being in the United States; this current research makes possible a more detailed and complex assessment of the condition of children and youth in the United States.
- The Policy Issues insert in Chapter 11 now includes a discussion of the implications of the most recent Supreme Court rulings relating to censorship on the Internet, especially having to do with restricting the distribution of pornography and using filtering software to control pornography.

- Chapter 13 now gives expanded discussion to research on the problem of global warming and climate change; the section on air pollution has been retitled “Air Pollution, Global Warming, and Climate Change” and now gives expanded discussion to research on and the implications of the broader problem; the section on renewable energy resources is now titled “New Approaches to Energy” and devotes more attention to what can be done to alleviate global warming, including discussion of carbon footprint, carbon tax, carbon trading, and other new ideas related to this issue.
- Figure 13.3 from the seventh edition has been deleted (and other figures renumbered where necessary) in order to make room for a new Figure 13.6, which provides the student with data on the changes over time on the amount and percentage of municipal solid waste that is recycled; this new figure provides students with more important data on the working of environmental programs.
- The discussion of terrorism in Chapter 14 has been updated to take into account developments since the beginning of the Iraq War; Figure 14.2 has been significantly revised to show the growth in terrorist activities in recent years, and the text now mentions terrorist acts in Iraq, Afghanistan, London, and Madrid; in addition, the section titled “Nuclear Annihilation” has been renamed “Nuclear Devastation” and now gives more attention to the danger of terrorists gaining access to nuclear materials and causing devastation rather than annihilation.
- In Chapter 15, new research is presented on the effectiveness of charter schools and vouchers in educating children; sufficient research is now accumulating on these topics that we can begin to draw some solid conclusions.

These and the other additions and revisions called for by world developments in the past few years will make the eighth edition of *Introduction to Social Problems* an even better vehicle for use with students in the study of social problems.

Ancillary Materials

A number of materials have been prepared to assist the instructor and the student in using this textbook. Many of them can be downloaded from the Instructor’s Resource Center (www.pearsonhighered.com/educator). More information about these and other materials can be obtained from your Pearson sales representative or from the Pearson Higher Ed Web site.

Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank. I have prepared a combined Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank to accompany this book. The instructor’s manual section contains, for each chapter, a number of materials to assist the instructor in teaching the course: an outline of the chapter, a list of the learning objectives for the chapter, a list of changes in the new edition, a series of suggestions for teaching and discussion, and a list of films that can accompany the chapter. The test bank section contains 10 essay questions, 70 multiple-choice questions, and 15 true/false questions for each chapter.

TestGen EQ: Computerized Test Bank. The test bank is available with the TestGen software for Windows or Macintosh. TestGen can prepare exams that contain questions from the test bank and revisions of those questions or new questions added by the instructor.

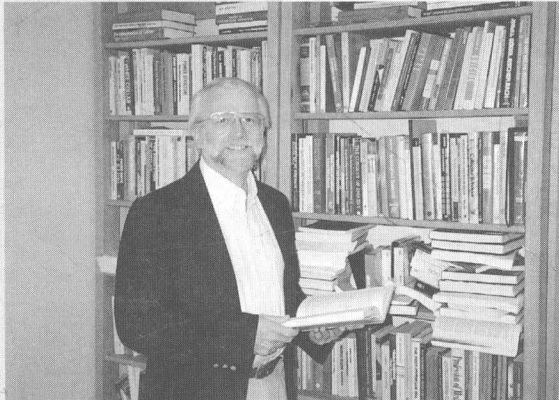
PowerPoint Presentation. PowerPoint presentations are available by download or on CD-ROM that provide lecture outlines for the course.

Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed to the completion of this new edition. Jeff Lasser and Karen Hanson served ably as the editors of the last few editions, suggesting timely and sound revisions to make the book even more valuable to students. I would like to thank the following reviewers for their helpful suggestions for this edition: Carole A. Campbell, California State University, Long Beach; William Egelman, Iona College; Anna Hall, Delgado Community College; Liisa Itkonen, Boise State University; and Monique Moleon-Mathews, Indian River Community College. I also received some excellent advice and assistance over the various editions of this book from a number of other colleagues: Gai Berlage, Iona College; Carole A. Campbell, California State University, Long Beach; Susan E. Claxton, Floyd College; Karyn Daniels, Long Beach City College; Mark Evan Edwards, Oregon State University; Chris Girard, Florida International University; George R. Gross, Northern Michigan University; John Hillebrand, Northwestern State Louisiana; Gary Hodge, Collin County Community College; Brad E. Huffaker, Labette Community College; Christine Johnson, Quinsigamond Community College; Kirk A. Johnson, Washburn University; Steven G. Jones, University of Charleston; Daniel C. Morris, Ball State University; G. Alexander Ross, Indian River Community College; Josh Schlenker, University of Maine, Augusta; Bonita Sessing-Matcha, Hudson Valley Community College; Joel Charles Snell, Kirkwood College; Timothy A. Ulrich, Seattle Pacific University; and Anthony W. Zumpetta, West Chester University.

Of all the people who have had an impact on this work, the students in my various classes have probably been the most significant. They have questioned and challenged me; agreed and disagreed with me; and generally forced me to be more careful, analytical, and critical in my teaching and writing than I might otherwise have been. Their collective imprint on this book is greater than they probably imagine.

Thomas J. Sullivan



About the Author

THOMAS J. SULLIVAN is Professor of Sociology at Northern Michigan University, specializing in social psychology, research methods, applied sociology, and medical sociology. He earned his undergraduate degree in sociology from San Francisco State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Sociology: Concepts and Applications in a Diverse World*, 7th ed. (Allyn and Bacon, 2007), *Methods of Social Research* (Wadsworth, 2001), and *Applied Sociology: Research and Critical Thinking* (Allyn & Bacon, 1992); he is the co-author of *Applied Social Research: Tool for the Human Services*, 7th ed. (Cengage, 2008). He has published articles in *Social Science and Medicine* and *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*. His applied research has focused on evaluation research of social service delivery in elementary schools and of teen pregnancy prevention and intervention services. He has served in various elected and appointed positions for the American Sociological Association, the Society for Applied Sociology, and the Midwest Sociological Society.

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APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

What Is a Social Problem?

Personal Troubles, Public Issues, and Social Problems

The Social Context of Social Problems

The Sociological Imagination

Theoretical Perspectives on Social Problems

The Functionalist Perspective

The Conflict Perspective

The Interactionist Perspective

Using the Theoretical Perspectives

Constructing Social Problems: The Mass Media and Other Influences

Research on Social Problems

The Scientific Method

Conducting Research

APPLIED RESEARCH: *Untangling Myths and Facts About Social Problems*

Values, Interest Groups, and Objectivity

Assessing Data: Problems and Pitfalls

Sampling Problems

Assessing Causality

Measuring Social Problems

Assessing Claims

Future Prospects: Solving Social Problems

What Can We Do About Social Problems?

The Interplay of Social Policy and Research

Who Provides Solutions?

POLICY ISSUES: *Domestic Violence: How to Intervene?*

Should We Solve the Problem?

International Perspectives: Social Problems in Other Societies

LINKAGES

Study and Review

Researching Social Problems on the Internet

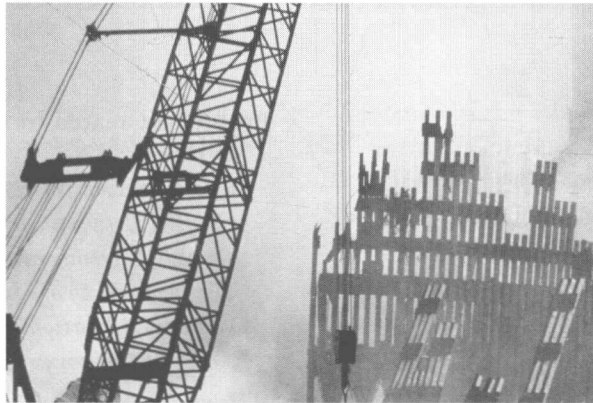
CONTENTS

Preface xxiii

About the Author xxix

CHAPTER ONE

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS



What Is a Social Problem? 2

Personal Troubles, Public Issues, and Social Problems 2

The Social Context of Social Problems 3

The Sociological Imagination 5

Theoretical Perspectives on Social Problems 6

The Functionalist Perspective 6

The Conflict Perspective 7

The Interactionist Perspective 9

Using the Theoretical Perspectives 10

Constructing Social Problems: The Mass Media and Other Influences 10

Research on Social Problems 11

The Scientific Method 11

Conducting Research 11

APPLIED RESEARCH *Untangling Myths and Facts About Social Problems 12*

Values, Interest Groups, and Objectivity 14

Assessing Data: Problems and Pitfalls 14

Future Prospects: Solving Social Problems 16

What Can We Do About Social Problems? 16

The Interplay of Social Policy and Research 16

Who Provides Solutions? 17

POLICY ISSUES *Domestic Violence: How to Intervene? 18*

Should We Solve the Problem? 19

International Perspectives: Social Problems in Other Societies 20

LINKAGES 20

Study and Review 21

Researching Social Problems on the Internet 22

CHAPTER TWO

GROWTH OF CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT POWER



Types of Economic Systems 28

MYTHS AND FACTS: *About Business and Government* 28

Capitalism 29

Socialism 29

Mixed Economies 30

The Concentration of Economic and Political Power 30

The Corporate Economy 30

Unionization 32

Big Government 33

Perspectives on the Concentration of Power 35

The Functionalist Perspective 35

The Conflict Perspective 35

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES *Global Economic Concentration* 36

Is There a Power Elite in the United States? 37

The World Economic System 39

APPLIED RESEARCH *Corporate Concentration and Globalization of the Media* 40

Problems Created by the Concentration of Power 42

Effects on Competition 42

Conflict Between Societal and Corporate Goals 42

Threats to Democratic Institutions 43

The Dwindling of Unions 44

Worker Dislocation and Unemployment 44

Abuse of Government Authority 45

Future Prospects 47

Reducing Government and Deficits 47

Government Reorganization 47

Collective Action by Citizens 48

The Globalization of Labor Rights 49

Economic Reorganization 49

POLICY ISSUES *What Role Should the Government Play in the Global Economy?* 51

LINKAGES 52

Study and Review 52

Researching Social Problems on the Internet 53

CHAPTER THREE

FAMILY-RELATED PROBLEMS



The Family in Society 58

MYTHS AND FACTS *About the Family* 58

The Functionalist Perspective 59

The Conflict Perspective 61

The Interactionist Perspective 61

APPLIED RESEARCH *Day Care: Problem or Solution?* 62

Attitudes Toward Marriage and the Family 63

Divorce 65

The Divorce Rate 65

Who Gets Divorced? 67

The Effects of Divorce 67

Emerging Family Lifestyles 69

Dual-Earner Families 69

Singlehood 70

Cohabitation 71

Single Parenthood 71

A Global Perspective 72

Violence in the Family 73

Intimate Partner Violence 73

POLICY ISSUES *Should Gay and Lesbian Families Be Legitimized?* 74

Child Abuse 76

Abuse of the Elderly 76

Constructing Family Problems: Media Images 77

Future Prospects 78

The Future of Divorce 78

Reducing Family Violence 78

Children and the Family 79

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES *Families and Children in Other Societies* 81

LINKAGES 81

Study and Review 82

Researching Social Problems on the Internet 83