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Understanding Social Problems

Second Edition



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Linda A. Mooney
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East Carolina University



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Violence in the home, school, and street; impoverished living conditions among millions of people throughout the world; increasing levels of environmental pollution and depletion of the earth's natural resources; persistent conflict between and within nations; ongoing oppression of minorities; and the widening gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" paint a disturbing picture of our modern world. In *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E.F. Schumacher questions whether a "turning around will be accomplished by enough people quickly enough to save the modern world"? (quoted in Safransky 1990, p.115). Schumacher notes that "this question is often asked, but whatever the answer given to it will mislead. The answer 'yes' would lead to complacency; the answer 'no' to despair. It is desirable to leave these perplexities behind us and get down to work."

In *Understanding Social Problems*, we "get down to work" by examining how the social structure and culture of society contribute to social problems and their consequences. Understanding the social forces that contribute to social problems is necessary for designing strategies for action—programs, policies and other interventions intended to ameliorate the social problem.

ACADEMIC FEATURES OF THE NEW EDITION

In response to feedback from teachers, reviewers, and students who have read the first edition of *Understanding Social Problems* (1997), we have retained several features and added several others:

Strong Integrative Theoretical Foundation. The three major sociological approaches, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory, are introduced in the first chapter and discussed and applied, where appropriate, to various social problems throughout the text. Other theories of social problems, as well as feminist approaches, are also presented where appropriate.

Emphasis on the Structure and Culture of Society. As noted above, the text emphasizes how the social structure and culture of society contribute to and maintain social problems, as well as provide the basis for alternative solutions.

Review of Basic Sociological Terms. An overview of basic sociological terms and concepts is presented in the first chapter. This overview is essential for students who have not taken an introductory course and is helpful, as a review, for those who have. Additionally, Appendix A details "Methods of Data Analysis."

Unique Organization. The order of the 16 chapters reflects a progression from a micro to a macro level of analysis, focusing first on problems of health care,

drug use, and crime and then broadening to the wider concerns of science and technology, population growth and environmental problems, and conflict around the world.

Two chapters merit special mention: “Sexual Orientation” (Chapter 9) and “Science and Technology” (Chapter 14). Whereas traditional texts discuss sexual orientation under the rubric of “deviance,” this topic is examined in the section on problems of human diversity along with the related issues of age, gender, and racial and ethnic inequality. The chapter on science and technology includes such topics as biotechnology, the computer revolution, and the information highway. This chapter emphasizes the transformation of society through scientific and technological innovations, the societal costs of such innovations, and issues of social responsibility. This chapter is particularly relevant to college students, many of whom have never known a world without computers.

Expanded Coverage of Global Issues. In this second edition, we place a greater emphasis on examining social problems from a global perspective. Each chapter contains a heading entitled “The Global Context,” and the number and scope of references to international issues has been expanded.

Unique Chapter Format. Each chapter follows a similar format: the social problem is defined, the theoretical explanations are discussed, the consequences of the social problem are explored, and the alternative solutions and policies are examined. A concluding section assesses the current state of knowledge for each social problem.

Standard and Cutting Edge Topics. In addition to problems that are typically addressed in social problems courses and texts, new and emerging topics are examined. Topics new to the second edition include the threat of nuclear terrorism, DNA testing in criminal investigations, telemedicine, divorce law reform (such as the Covenant Marriage law in Louisiana), cloning, the Census Bureau’s new multiracial classification, bisexuality and biphobia, effects of welfare reform, and environmental justice.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES OF THE NEW EDITION

Student-friendly Presentation. To enhance the book’s appeal to students, the second edition includes expanded information relevant to the college population. In Chapter 1, for example, we present data on the beliefs of college students about various social problems. Chapter 2 has a new section on “Health Concerns of College Students” and in Chapter 3 we have added a section on binge drinking and other alcohol-related problems on campus. Further, Chapter 5 contains poems written by college students about the divorce of their parents and in Chapter 12, “Problems in Education,” students may complete a “Student Alienation Scale.”

Self & Society. Each chapter includes a social survey designed to help students assess their own attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or behavior regarding some aspect of a social problem. Students may also compare their responses with those from a larger sample. Examples include a Criminal Activities Survey, a Family Functioning Scale, and an AIDS Knowledge Scale.

National and International Data. National statistics and research data are presented throughout the text and offset as “National Data.” Similar inserts called “International Data” present data from nations around the world.

Consideration Sections. Sections labeled “Consideration” provide unique examples, insights, implications, explanations, and applications of material presented in the text. These sections are designed to illuminate a previous point in a thought-provoking way.

The Human Side. To personalize the information being discussed, each chapter includes a feature entitled “The Human Side.” These features describe personal experiences of individuals who have been affected by the social problem under discussion. Examples include an interview with a former racist Skinhead, a witness’ description of an execution, personal stories about “managed care,” and a Gulf War veteran’s parents’ description of their son’s death.

Focus on Social Problems Research. Also new to the second edition, offset boxes called “Focus on Social Problems Research” present examples of significant research. These boxes demonstrate for students the sociological enterprise from theory and data collection, to results and conclusions. Examples of research topics covered include variables which affect college students’ openness to diversity (Chapter 8), survival strategies of low income single mothers (Chapter 10), and the socially constructed world of computer hackers (Chapter 14).

Focus on Technology. Also new to the second edition are offset boxes called “Focus on Technology.” These boxes present information on how technology may contribute to social problems and their solutions. For example, in Chapter 4, Crime and Violence, the Focus on Technology feature highlights the use of DNA testing in criminal investigations. In Chapter 12, Problems in Education, distance learning and the “new education” are examined.

Is It True? Each chapter begins with five true-false items to stimulate student interest and thinking.

Critical Thinking. Each chapter ends with a brief section called “Critical Thinking” that raises several questions related to the chapter topic. These questions invite the student to use critical thinking skills in applying the information discussed in the chapters.

InfoTrac College Edition. New to the second edition is the inclusion of InfoTrac College Edition—an online reference service that allows students to search for articles by subject, title, and author in over 700 journals. Suggested articles are listed at the end of each chapter along with questions to be answered by students from the assigned readings.

Worldwide Web Home Page. As an additional pedagogical tool, *Understanding Social Problems* has its own home page on the Worldwide Web. Students and faculty can access relevant research studies, statistics, and theoretical links as suggested at the end of each chapter in an “Internet” section. For example, in Chapter 13, Cities in Crisis, faculty and students are referred to

Internet links on smart growth, the new urbanism, sustainable communities, and road rage.

In addition to chapter by chapter links, several additional features have been incorporated in the text's home page. For faculty, the *Understanding Social Problems* home page now contains an online instructor's manual and test bank, both password protected. For students, the home page now includes chapter outlines as well as the InfoTrac College Edition articles and questions listed at the end of each text chapter. Links to information about employment opportunities and sociology as a career are also listed. Students and faculty can send questions, comments, or suggestions directly to the authors and contact Wadsworth Publishing Company concerning book adoption.

NEW TO THIS EDITION—A CHAPTER BY CHAPTER LOOK

In addition to the academic and pedagogical features noted above, *Understanding Social Problems'* content areas have been significantly revised. Over thirty new citations have been added to every chapter. Further, in addition to expanded coverage of important topics from the first edition, we have added new areas of research and theorizing and have expanded issues concerning race, gender, and social class. A partial list of new or expanded topics follows:

Chapter 1: Thinking About Social Problems. Collaborative research as an emerging methodology, student activism on college campuses, and "sociological mindfulness."

Chapter 2: Illness and the Health Care System. A new approach to measuring the health status of a population—disability-adjusted life year (DALY), health concerns of college students, managed care, and telemedicine.

Chapter 3: Alcohol and Other Drugs. Survey data on college student drinking and "binging" behavior, teenagers' use of inhalants, the medical use of marijuana debate, and tobacco suits and settlements.

Chapter 4: Crime and Violence. The 1998 International Crime Control Act, pornography on the Internet, children who kill, and innovative criminal justice initiatives (e.g., community policing).

Chapter 5: Family Problems. Results of the First National Survey of Parents' Political Priorities, college students' experiences with parental divorce; premarital education proposals and policies, and divorce law reform.

Chapter 6: The Young and the Old. Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), children and poverty, child prostitution, physician-assisted suicide, and social security reform.

Chapter 7: Gender Inequality. Fathers' pre-natal rights; the "new feminist;" men, women and computer technologies; and the men's movement.

Chapter 8: Race and Ethnic Relations. The social construction of race, census guidelines for establishing mixed-race identity, and the religious racial reconciliation movement.

Chapter 9: Sexual Orientation. Biphobia, gay and lesbian youth, socio-legal issues relating to sexual orientation including same-sex marriage, ENDA, and sodomy laws.

Chapter 10: The Haves and the Have-Nots. The Human Poverty Index (HPI), the extent and consequences of economic inequality, welfare reform, the working poor, living wage laws, the role of charity and non-profit organizations in poverty alleviation.

Chapter 11: Work and Unemployment. Child labor and child labor laws, societal attitudes toward corporate America, labor unions and the development of the Labor Party, job burnout, corporate multinationalism, contingent workers, cumulative trauma disorders and ergonomics in the workplace.

Chapter 12: Problems in Education. Distance learning, the charter school movement, National Education Standards, the quality of teaching and teachers in the U.S., and the “dumbing down” of American education.

Chapter 13: Cities in Crisis. Urban sprawl, the urban “three-headed monster” (HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, and crime), road rage, the new urbanism, smart growth, regionalism, neighborhood transit, and mixed-use neighborhoods.

Chapter 14: Science and Technology. Postmodernism; the demographics of Worldwide Web users; the debate over partial birth abortions and cloning; deskilling versus upskilling; e-commerce; and science, ethics and the law.

Chapter 15: Population and Environmental Problems. Falling population levels in Europe, threatened biodiversity, environmental justice issues, environmentally induced illnesses, and “greenwashing.”

Chapter 16: Conflict around the World. Nuclear terrorism, Gulf War Syndrome, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Operation Desert Fox, bombings of American embassies, and the increased threat of nuclear war.

SUPPLEMENTS

Understanding Social Problems comes with a full complement of supplements designed with both faculty and students in mind. Supplements include:

Web Site

Virtual Society web site: The Wadsworth Sociology Resource Center **<http://sociology.wadsworth.com>** at the Wadsworth Sociology Resource Center, you can find surfing lessons (tips to find information on the web), a career center, links to great sociology web sites, and many other selections.

Supplements for the Instructor

Instructor's Manual with Test Bank

0-534-56513-1

Offers the instructor chapter specific lecture outlines, learning objectives, key terms, classroom activities, student projects, and Internet assignments. There are multiple-choice and true-false questions for each chapter, all with page references. Also includes short answer questions and essay questions for each chapter. Available upon adoption.

Transparency Acetates for Understanding Social Problems

0-534-56516-6

More than 50 book specific acetates to help facilitate the instructor's presentations, available free upon adoption.

CNN Social Problems Video

0-534-54119-4

Consists of footage from stories originally broadcast on CNN within the last several years. Each segment is introduced to place the segment into a proper sociological framework.

Thomson World Class Learning Testing Tools

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This fully integrated suite of test creation, delivery, and classroom management tools includes Thomson World Class Test, Test Online, and World Class Management software. Thomson World Class Testing Tools allows professors to deliver tests via print, floppy, hard drive, LAN, or Internet. With these tools, professors can create cross-platform exam files from publisher files or existing WESTest 3.2 test banks, edit questions, create questions, and provide their own feedback to objective test questions—enabling the system to work as a tutorial or an examination. In addition, professors can create tests that include multiple-choice, true/false, or matching questions. Professors can also track the progress of an entire class or an individual student. Testing and tutorial results can be integrated into the class management tool which offers scoring, gradebook, and reporting capabilities. Call-in testing is also available.

Supplements for the Student

Study Guide

0-534-56512-3

Includes learning objectives, detailed chapter outlines, fill-in-the-blank test items using key terms from the chapter, and 20 multiple choice and true-false practice test questions with an answer key.

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