



Readings On Social Problems

Probing the Extent, Causes, and Remedies of America's Social Problems

William Feigelman

READINGS ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS

*Probing the Extent, Causes,
and Remedies of America's
Social Problems*

Edited by

William Feigelman

Nassau Community College

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.

Fort Worth
Philadelphia
London

Chicago
Montreal
Sydney

San Francisco
Toronto
Tokyo

Publisher	Ted Buchholz
Acquisitions Editor	Christopher P. Klein
Senior Project Editor	Charlie Dierker
Manager of Production	Tad Gaither
Manager of Art & Design	Guy Jacobs
Text Design	Tom Dawson
Cover	Faith Nichols and Gregg Weitzel

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Readings on social problems : probing the extent, causes,
and remedies of America's problems / edited by
William Feigelman.

p. cm.

Includes index.

1. United States—Social conditions—1980-
2. Social problems. I. Feigelman, William.

HN59.2.R43 1990

361.1'0973—dc20

89-30467

CIP

AC

ISBN: 0-03-028913-0

Copyright © 1990 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to: Copyrights and Permissions Department, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., Orlando, FL 32887

Address Editorial Correspondence To:

301 Commerce Street, Suite 3700,
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Address Orders To:

6277 Sea Harbor Drive,
Orlando, FL 32887
1-800-782-4479, or
1-800-433-0001 (in Florida)

Printed in the United States of America

0 1 2 3 0 3 9 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
The Dryden Press
Saunders College Publishing

READINGS
ON
SOCIAL
PROBLEMS

For Jesse and Ana

This work is conceived primarily to complement one of the many textbooks used in the very popular undergraduate course Social Problems. Some students, encountering this book *and* their text for the first time, may feel overwhelmed by a seemingly enormous amount of reading. Some might wonder why isn't the textbook enough? Why do we need to read these additional selections? Can't the important aspects of the readings be summarized by the text?

Instructors acquainted with the benefits of anthologies will of course not need to be persuaded about their value. But those unfamiliar with these teaching tools may need some explanation of their advantages. Too often, students exposed only to a textbook end up obtaining an erroneous and unrealistic conception of their subject of study. As one attempts to acquire knowledge in almost any discipline, one learns that it ordinarily does not come out of one central headquarters; erudition usually emerges from many sources of inspiration and from a careful review by students themselves of all the available materials. Many students who have no more to guide them than their text become lulled into thinking that wisdom is embodied in the authoritative pronouncements of their textbook author. They may become overinclined to apply rote memory—memorizing the five factors that cause the “Y” problem—rather than to invoke their critical-thinking capabilities.

An anthology serves important functions for beginning students in any discipline. In sociology, it enables them to observe directly what sociologists actually do. It affords for the student firsthand experience in confronting the sociological literature and in evaluating the actual products of sociologists. Students are also encouraged from such exposure to learn that problems are not always conceptualized in the same way by all scientific practitioners and are thereby encouraged to sift all

the available evidence, to come to their own scientific conclusions.

Anthologies also permit students to acquire an in-depth understanding of some selected issues. Instead of the encyclopedic overview of a text, an anthology provides some detailed focus. Accordingly, with text and reader together, students are encouraged to derive a more balanced and complete viewpoint.

In this collection, I have tried to offer selections paralleling the topics usually investigated in Social Problems courses: problems of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, racism, family disorganization problems, and the like. These selections are derived from recent social science contributions. Many have come from highly acclaimed and prize-winning studies. Some of the selections have appeared in such professional social science journals as *Social Problems*, *Psychiatry*, and *Social Forces*; others have come from books and monographs; and still others originally appeared in popular magazines like the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Public Interest*, and *Reader's Digest*. They span the broad range of social-problems thinking that has been developed not only from sociologists and other behavioral scientists but also by journalists, politicians, and educated laypeople. Those aiming for the most complete understanding of the nature of social problems must inevitably assume a broad-based and open-ended attitude; indeed, it would be arrogant and foolhardy to assume that such knowledge would be confined only to social science practitioners.

Yet, sociologists like myself are inclined to put a sociological framework at the centerpiece of efforts to interpret social problems. The organization of selections presented here is meant to conform to a sociological approach to studying social problems. And what does that consist of? First, we must identify the definition and incidence of social problems: what

the problem is and how pervasive it is in the community. We might call this the **epidemiology** of a social problem. (Does the problem represent an epidemic, or how much of an epidemic is it?) Second, we are concerned with the **etiology** of social problems. What causes the problem; what are its social bases or group correlates; and how does the problem interpenetrate with other social problems? Last, but by no means least, we are concerned with the problem's **remediation**. Through what kinds of actions or social policies can we reduce or eliminate this problem? Today's sociological social-problems analysts are concerned with each of these three important dimensions of social problems. They are committed to using the scientific method of systematically collecting and comparing empirical data to address each of these major aspects to social problems. In assembling these readings I have attempted to represent each of these three major attributes of interpreting social problems throughout.

Those studying sociology for the first time are often advised about the three dominant theoretical perspectives shared by most sociologists: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. These viewpoints are very relevant in the sociology of social problems. Most social-problems analysts would be inclined to emphasize one or another of these three fundamental overviews in attempting to understand and deal with the various social problems plaguing us in urban-industrial societies.

FUNCTIONALISM: SOCIAL PROBLEMS OFTEN RESULT FROM SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

The theory of functionalism holds that society consists of a system of interrelated parts. Under optimal conditions, the institutions of society are integrated with one another, satisfying individual needs and binding the members of society together. As an example, let us consider the development of work values, imparted by parents and reinforced by extended kin. The individual learns various things about work: work is inherently gratifying; a task well done is a source of self-pride; work is the primary vehicle for attain-

ing financial and adult autonomy; promptness, ambition, and assuming responsibility are desirable personal traits. As these values are imparted within the context of the family, they are also supported by the institutions of the church and the schools. This, in turn, eventually inspires young people to seek employment, which not only relieves family members of the burden of their continuing dependency but also fulfills the needs of the industrial economy. Such would represent a state of institutional integration, the antithesis of social disorganization.

Functionalists see social problems as emerging from social disorganization. Social disorganization arises when the institutions of society are malintegrated with one another. Returning again to our example, social disorganization might arise when the industrial community is unable to generate a sufficient number of jobs for all those desiring work. Among those unable to find work, some of the possible social-problem by-products could be poverty, an overpowering sense of guilt that is temporarily allayed by drug abuse, or resentment to conventional social institutions expressed in criminal or violent actions, among other possible problems.

In any complex society, institutions exert compound consequences upon each other. These multifold relationships may be functional in some respects and disorganizing in others. For example, the industrial system may generate sufficient employment opportunities but it may also pollute the environment. As it may require its employees to relocate often or to subordinate their family lives for the company, it may contribute to marital instability.

Often, social disorganization results from rapid and uneven rates of social change. Change may take place in one institutional realm but adaptive responses may lag behind in other areas. Thus social disorganization becomes the inevitable result. Developments in medical science, greatly extending life expectancy through inoculations and insect control, have produced alarming rises in world population. Many third-world countries absorbed new technological measures but have not modified their religious prohibitions against modern birth-control techniques and traditional values venerating large families.

CONFLICT THEORY: SOCIAL PROBLEMS RESULT FROM GROUP AND VALUE CONFLICT

In sharp relief to the scheme above is another theoretical perspective: conflict theory. Conflict theory presupposes that social problems result from the hegemony of the socially dominant forces of society. The powerful and economically dominant strive to promote values that are consistent with their needs and interests, which necessarily involves subordination for the rest of society. The dominating elite foists its commitments to corporate capitalism upon a citizenry whose interests would probably be better served by more socialistic economic practices; thus social problems become the inevitable result. In the conflict perspective social problems exist because the interests of the most powerful members of society often prevail at the expense of the many.

For example, the problem of poverty in society could be dramatically reduced if wealthier members were willing to give up some of their many tax loopholes and tax themselves at the same rates paid by lower-income wage earners. But elite members use their dominance in the political process to blunt more far-reaching tax-reform proposals. The rich are also highly critical of proposals to expand welfare state practices, arguing that such aid will only weaken incentives to work and produce other demoralizing consequences among their recipients. The rich also gain by the presence of poverty: it means that people will be willing to work for low wages, pay high amounts for borrowing privileges, perform unpleasant tasks, buy inferior and secondhand merchandise, and do other things that help sustain the power and wealth of the rich. Many conflict theorists claim that substantial change or the amelioration of social problems can only be accomplished if power is seized from the ruling class.

Akin to the notion of conflict theory is the value-conflict approach. While most conflict theorists see fundamental structural change as essential for combating social problems, many value-conflict theorists do not necessarily link drastic restructuring of society to the remedia-

tion of particular social problems. Many posit that value conflicts can also be resolved by compromise, bargaining, and accommodation among the various contending interests.

This analytical scheme provides additional insight into the causation and persistence of social problems. Its principal assumption is that society is composed of a variety of groups who pursue diverging and competing interests and values. As groups attempt to promote their concerns, conflict inevitably results—and with it social problems. Conflicts vary in intensity from mild differences of opinion to violent opposition. Although certain conflicts may engender changes that avoid stagnation and enhance adaptation, others may tear a society apart, resulting in massive destruction of human material resources. A great many contemporary social problems are either caused, exacerbated, or sustained by value conflicts.

For example, problems associated with the unequal availability of health care largely reflect the successful efforts of the health care industry—physicians, drug and medical equipment manufacturers, health insurance companies, hospital management, and the like—to maintain the existing fee-for-service, profit-oriented system against more socialized medical systems favored by their detractors—the poor, consumer advocate interests, leftists, among others. Despite the proven dangers associated with cigarette smoking, the tobacco industry has strenuously opposed most all anti-tobacco legislation, launching extensive efforts in its own behalf to obtain favored treatment and governmental supports. Thus the poor health of many Americans attributable to smoking owes its existence in part to the successful value and interest advocacy of tobacco industrialists.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM: SOCIAL PROBLEMS OFTEN RESULT FROM ASSIGNING MEANING TO ACTION AND LABELING BEHAVIOR AS DEVIANT

Another dominant sociological viewpoint is the theory of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionists maintain that as people interact socially they assign meaning to their actions. As

W. I. Thomas once said, "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." In this perspective, it is the assignment of meanings or social labeling that creates social problems. This viewpoint holds that many social problems result from labeling behavior as deviant. Here it is emphasized that the members of society make and enforce social rules and apply them to different groups and individuals. As the behavior of particular people departs from normative expectations, labels are assigned to them; they may be designated criminal, mentally ill, homosexual, old, alcoholic, and the like. As such labels are applied to particular persons, so-called deviants are also likely to be subject to exclusionary and inferior treatment. As a consequence, labeling may serve to elicit further disapproved behavior. Thus the occasional drinker may be encouraged to drink more heavily if those within his social circle expect him to do so. Moreover, if close associates link drinking with irresponsibility, "drinkers" may be inclined to doubt their abilities to take initiatives and they may act unreliably. Such associated additional deviant patterns are termed secondary deviance.

When labeling takes place on an institutional level as well as informally, its effects are likely to be even more personally damaging. Thus persons who may be denied employment because of their drinking problems may be inclined to drink more heavily to allay their anxiety and guilt for failing to comply with work values. Or in other cases of deviance, the same would be true for officially convicted criminals or for persons subjected to mandatory retirement, despite their desires to continue with their careers. Labeling at the institutional level drastically circumscribes the conventional opportunities available to the deviant.

People who are similarly stigmatized may be inclined to gravitate toward each other and form groups—deviant subcultures. Such memberships may have multifold consequences: they may insulate deviants from the critical and condemnatory responses of conventional society and they may contribute to further deviance. For example, former criminals who

evoke much suspicion and encounter considerable employment discrimination may find their only acceptance within the criminal subculture, which may enlist them to do more crime. Thus deviant labels, when applied to people, tend to generate self-confirming and self-perpetuating response patterns.

Reading through many of the selections offered in this text, students will note that many of the analyses converge with these three dominant theoretical interpretations. It may even comprise a worthy academic enterprise to identify some of the theoretical underpinnings of the selections offered here. Yet it would be a gross oversimplification to assume that all or most of the analyses can be neatly pigeonholed into one or another of these predominating theoretical schemes.

In arranging the collection, I made certain arbitrary decisions about the ordering of all these selections. The interpenetrating nature of many social problems is often so deep that some instructors may feel more comfortable assigning an essay under another problem topic than the one under which it was placed here.

My main objective in making these selections was to offer students a sense of the rich and varied array of sociological work on social problems. If this collection succeeds in conveying a sense of the value of the sociological approach to illuminate the causes of and remedies to our social problems, it will have more than fulfilled its ambitions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, I would like to thank the following reviewers for their kind and constructive comments about this project: Gregg Carter, Bryant College; Lois M. Easterday, Onondago Community College; James Floyd, Macon College; Marietta Morrissey, Texas Tech University; Kathryn Mueller, Baylor University; Charles Norman, Indiana State University; Margaret Ortigo, Louisiana State University at Alexandria; Ed Ponczek, William Rainey Harper College; and William A. Roberts, Clinton Community College.

READINGS
ON
SOCIAL
PROBLEMS

Introduction_____	vii
-------------------	-----

PART ONE

Overview on Social Problems

1 THE SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Jerome G. Manis: <i>Assessing the Seriousness of Social Problems</i> _____	3
Joel Best: <i>Missing Children, Misleading Statistics</i> _____	11

PART TWO

The American Scene

2 PROBLEMS OF PHYSICAL HEALTH

Geraldine Dallek: <i>Hospital Care for Profit</i> _____	19
Peter Conrad: <i>The Social Meaning of AIDS</i> _____	27

3 PROBLEMS OF MENTAL HEALTH

James S. House, Karl R. Landis, and Debra Umberson: <i>Social Relationships and Health</i> _____	36
Stuart A. Kirk and Mark E. Therrien: <i>Community Mental Health Myths and the Fate of Former Hospitalized Patients</i> _____	45

4 THE CRIME PROBLEM

William Kornblum and Vernon Boggs: <i>New Alternatives for Fighting Crime</i> _____	55
Eugene H. Methvin: <i>The Proven Key to Crime Control</i> _____	62
James D. Wright: <i>Second Thoughts About Gun Control</i> _____	65
James Traub: <i>Into the Mouths of Babies</i> _____	75

5 ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

Gerald E. Markle and Ronald J. Troyer: <i>Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: Cigarette Smoking as Deviant Behavior</i> _____	82
Herbert Fingarette: <i>Alcoholism: The Mythical Disease</i> _____	95
Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler: <i>Shifts and Oscillations in Deviant Careers: The Case of Upper-Level Drug Dealers and Smugglers</i> _____	107

6 PROBLEMS OF THE ECONOMY

James D. Wright: <i>The Worthy and Unworthy Homeless</i> _____	121
William J. Wilson with Robert Aponte and Kathryn Neckerman: <i>Joblessness versus Welfare Effects: A Further Reexamination</i> _____	129
Robert Blauner: <i>Work Satisfaction and Industrial Trends in Modern Society</i> _____	139
Michael Lipsky: <i>The Welfare State As Workplace</i> _____	157

7 PROBLEMS OF FAMILY LIFE

Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg: <i>Coming Apart: Radical Departures Since 1960</i> _____	164
Lenore J. Weitzman: <i>The Economic Consequences of Divorce</i> _____	179

8 SEX DEVIANCE

David F. Luckenbill: <i>Entering Male Prostitution</i> _____	202
Susan H. Gray: <i>Exposure to Pornography and Aggression Toward Women: The Case of the Angry Male</i> _____	213

9 PROBLEMS OF THE CITIES

John D. Kasarda: *Caught in the Web of Change*_____ 223

J. Allen Whitt and Glenn Yago: *Corporate Strategies and the Decline of Transit in U.S. Cities*_____ 232

10 PROBLEMS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Jonathan Kozol: *A Third of the Nation Cannot Read These Words*_____ 249

Robert Rosenthal and Lenore F. Jacobson: *Teacher Expectations for the Disadvantaged*_____ 255

11 AGEISM

Arnold Arluke and Jack Levin: *"Second Childhood": Old Age in Popular Culture*_____ 261

Arlie Russell Hochschild: *Communal Life-Styles for the Old*_____ 266

12 SEXISM

Kathryn Strother Ratcliff and Janet Bogdan: *Unemployed Women: When "Social Support" Is Not Supportive*_____ 276

Judith Lewis Herman and Lisa Hirschman: *Incestuous Fathers and Their Families*_____ 284

13 RACISM

William Julius Wilson: *Inner-City Dislocations*_____ 301

Douglas S. Massey, Gretchen A. Condran, and Nancy A. Denton: *The Effect of Residential Segregation on Black Social and Economic Well-Being*_____ 310

PART THREE

The World at Large

14 OVERPOPULATION

Jodi L. Jacobson: *Family Planning and World Health*_____ 329

Elise F. Jones, Jacqueline Darroch Forrest, Noreen Goldman, Stanley K. Henshaw, Richard Lincoln, Jeannie I. Rosoff, Charles F. Westoff, and Deirdre Wulf: *Teenage Pregnancy in Developed Countries: Determinants and Policy Implications*_____ 338

15 THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Joseph Collins and Frances Moore Lappé: *Still Hungry after All These Years*_____ 353

Anastasia Toufexis: *The Dirty Seas*_____ 360

16 PROBLEMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Malcolm W. Browne: *Will the Stealth Bomber Work?*_____ 368

Carl Sagan: *Nuclear War and Climatic Catastrophe: Some Policy Implications*_____ 374

Name Index_____ 389

Subject Index_____ 395

CHAPTER

1

*The
Sociology of
Social Problems*

A ssessing the Seriousness of Social Problems

JEROME G. MANIS
Western Michigan University

The definition of a concept inevitably influences the nature of the related hypotheses or theory. A well-conceived concept is heuristic and realistic—that is, it generates hypotheses that improve our understanding of phenomena. Such a concept will direct researchers toward significant data. As Max Planck (1962:841) has contended, however, there are many “phantom problems—in my opinion, far more than one would ordinarily suspect—even in the realm of science.” It is the recognition of anomalies in “normal science” that results in the collapse of accepted paradigms (Kuhn, 1962).

... To most sociologists, social problems are defined by popular beliefs and interest groups.

Exponents of leading sociological perspectives—symbolic interactionism and functionalism—have essentially similar conceptions of social problems. To Blumer (1971:298, 301–302), “social problems are fundamentally products of collective definition. . . . A social problem does not exist for a society unless it is recognized by that society to exist.” Merton (1971:799) is somewhat more inclusive: “The first and basic ingredient of a social problem consists of a substantial discrepancy between widely shared standards and actual conditions of social life.” Although he distinguishes between manifest or recognized and latent or unrecognized discrepancies, his definition centers upon “widely shared standards,” i.e., society’s norms and values. . . .

One of the shortcomings of the public definition of social problems is the inclusion of possibly spurious or “phantom” conditions. . . .

Indeed, the “subjective” definition must include witchhunting, long hair, and possession of marihuana as social problems as long as the public is in opposition to them. So defined, the concern of the sociology of social problems is with social issues or controversies rather than the objective conditions detrimental to human or societal well-being.

A related deficiency of the “public opinion” approach to social problems is its inability to assess the seriousness of social problems. Some advocates of this viewpoint are aware of the limitation.

... it is the values held by people occupying different social positions that provide the rough basis for the relative importance assigned to social problems . . . this sometimes leads to badly distorted impressions of various problems, even when these are judged in the light of reigning values (Merton, 1971:801).

Nor are public definitions sound guides to the magnitude of social problems. . . . Influential publics, moreover, have little if any basis on which to *compare* the relative seriousness—extent and effects—of problems This definition of social problems explores certain absurdities. Public recognition is in nearly all respects a bad basis for collective judgment In spite of these difficulties, the definition stands: A social problem is a condition that has been defined by significant groups as a deviation from some social standard, or breakdown of social organization (Dentler, 1971: 14–15).

Despite these admissions of “distortions” and “absurdities,” sociologists have continued

I would like to thank James J. Bosco, Paul A. Dorsey, Charles B. Keely, Bernard N. Meltzer, and Stanley S. Robin for their helpful criticisms and suggestions.

to use popular values as the only criteria of social problems. Considerations of the severity or magnitude of social problems are restricted to the numbers of concerned citizens or to the intensity of their feelings (Tallman and McGee, 1971:42). . . .

THE IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

For present purposes, social problems are defined as "those social conditions, identified by scientific inquiry and values as detrimental to the well-being of human societies" (Manis, 1974). Four perspectives or viewpoints appear useful in determining and specifying such conditions. These are: (1) public conceptions; (2) the views of appropriate professionals; (3) sociological knowledge; (4) the norms and values of science. The order in which the categories are presented is based upon their increasing importance as criteria for identifying social problems. Consistent application of these criteria can help to reduce or eliminate the anomalies arising from current definitions of social problems.

Public conceptions. A basic source of information concerning social problems is the opinions and attitudes of the members of a group or society. This information is necessary for understanding social behavior. As Blumer (1971:301) points out, "the process of collective definition determines the career and fate of social problems, from the initial point of their appearance to whatever may be the terminal point in their course." Though most textbooks accept "collective definition" as the essence of social problems, they do not disclose any evidence for the choice of their topics.

The content of the sociological literature—crime, divorce, alcoholism, etc.—*appears* to be congruent with the views of the populace. However, the justification for their inclusion or for the assessment of their assumed seriousness is not revealed to the reader. The absence of such data is a major deficiency in our knowledge. . . .

Public conceptions of deviance, and of social problems generally, are necessary but insufficient knowledge. Certainly, we need to know

what a society abhors and why it does so. We also need to know the consequences of these conceptions. Accepting social values as criteria of "harmful people" or "undesirable conditions" lends an aura of scientific respectability to beliefs which may be based on ignorance or prejudice. Accepting these values as the ultimate criteria of social problems is a specious justification for claims of value-neutrality.

Professional expertise. At times, public opinion differs substantially from the views of experts. A current example is the widespread antagonism to users of marihuana. The public position seems to be based upon many erroneous beliefs: that it is addictive; that it is debilitating; that it invariably leads to other addictions; that users are sexually depraved. The differing views of physicians, psychiatrists, and sociologists apparently have not greatly altered its popular image.

According to current definitions, marihuana is a social problem since it is contrary to social values. Presumably it is a serious problem if many people are strongly opposed to its usage. The views of trained experts are considered relevant because of their disagreement with the public, not for their technical knowledge. Sociologists may agree with the professional definition—but the public definition is the usual standard for identifying social problems.

There are, of course, many experts; and they are not always in agreement. But in agreement or not, their professional training and intimate contact with conditions viewed by the public as undesirable can provide needed correctives. Sociologists do question the medical perspective of psychiatry. Should they not also raise questions about the category of "crazy people"? The latter conception helps to explain the responses of society to those so identified and the effects of these labels. It is less helpful in the search for social causation and consequences.

Sociologists draw upon the data of other experts and disciplines in their analyses of mental disorder, drop-outs, divorce, and riots. This expertise receives special weight in the analyses but not in the definition of social problems. To be consistent with current definitions, the seriousness of social problems should be based not on the weight of technical data but the extent of popular concern.

To propose that the expert's interpretation be included in defining and assessing social problems is not a claim for their absolute correctness. It is only a means for incorporating more technical knowledge into our inquiries. Such knowledge can help to recognize trivial or spurious social problems as well as to identify serious ones.

Sociological knowledge. Although social problems are defined in terms of public conceptions, values, and controversies, sociologists do not ignore the causes and the consequences of the "undesirable conditions." Indeed, Blumer (1971:300) has contended that sociologists have concentrated on the latter and have "conspicuously failed . . . to study the process by which a society comes to recognize its social problems." What sociologists actually do is different from what they say about social problems.

The discrepancy stems, I believe, from the unwillingness of researchers to accept the implications of the accepted definition. If the public views busing, atheism, subversives, women's liberation, and radical professors as major social problems, will the textbook writers allocate substantial sections to these topics? If not, why not? A reasonable conjecture is that their knowledge and values are the implicit criteria.

To understand social behavior, we must explore public beliefs and values. Collective behavior is guided by social perceptions. To adopt these perceptions of social realities, however, is to equate common sense with analytic sociology (Schutz, 1963; Manis, 1972). Understanding of everyday knowledge is needed by sociology; understanding does not require its endorsement. . . .

The values of science. A major justification for the accepted definitions of social problems is the presumed value-neutrality of science. A scientific sociology must avoid any appearance of bias derived from personal values. The aim is laudable. The accepted solution—adopting popular values as the standards for identifying social problems—is a substitution of values, not their elimination. The outcome is an illusory value-neutrality.

Values are an integral aspect of the sociological enterprise. . . .

That science is a social institution with distinctive norms and values can hardly be

questioned. Among the accepted values are: the search for knowledge, the empirical testing of belief, the provisional standing of accepted viewpoints, the freedom of critics to dissent and propose new interpretations, and the dissemination of knowledge (Merton, 1967; Kaplan, 1964). The socialization of would-be scientists includes the inculcation of these values.

Scientists seldom discuss, since they take for granted, certain underlying values. In totalitarian states, protection of life, safety, subsistence, and freedom of inquiry for the scientist may be uncertain. The institution of science depends upon societal tolerance and support. Obviously, science cannot exist without society and functioning scientists. Is it less obvious to contend that science must value an open, supportive society?

A current value-controversy among scientists concerns the social responsibility of science. To take an extreme illustration, does the nuclear scientist have the obligation to test a fission hypothesis which will set off a continuous, endless, chain reaction (Z-bomb)? Traditionally, scientists have contended that science can only describe "what is, not should be." Contemporary science is *not* limited to this role of passive observation. The rapid tempo of discovery and, particularly, the creation of new phenomena—synthetic atoms, plastics, nylon, etc.—reflect the intentional innovations which have helped to transform the world around us. These creations have blurred the lines between basic and applied science as well as between science and technology.

The thesis here is that the knowledge and the values of science can provide sociology with needed guidelines for appraising social phenomena. Certainly, scientists neither possess all of the needed knowledge nor agree upon scientific values. Nevertheless, existing knowledge and values are more uniform, more rational, and more fruitful criteria than the divergent beliefs and values of any given society. . . .

To say that science is guided by values is not to deny its efforts at objectivity. All knowledge is subjective, a product of mental activity. Scientific knowledge, however, is guided by norms of conceptual clarification, descriptive accuracy, and theoretical understanding. In current definitions of social problems, "subjective"

knowledge refers to personal and group beliefs whatever their source may be. Studying these beliefs is needed to help account for individual and collective behavior; it is insufficient for explaining the nature, the causes, and the consequences of specific social problems.

Proposing the use of scientific criteria to assess the existence or the severity of social problems need not imply absolutism. Specifying their criteria does not require the crowning of scientists. The concepts, hypotheses, theories, and values of science are open to continuing criticism, revision, or rejection on the basis of rational judgments and knowledge. No implication that science be empowered to coerce society to accept its conclusions is intended. All that is suggested here is to permit the knowledge and values of science to identify and to assess conditions deemed harmful to science and to society.

To summarize, scientific knowledge and values are proposed as criteria for identifying socially harmful conditions. These criteria can help to distinguish spurious from genuine social problems. We also need to consider ways of differentiating minor or trivial social problems from major or serious ones. By seriousness is meant the primacy, the magnitude, and the severity of social problems.

THE PRIMACY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

An examination of the interrelationships among social problems provides one way of assessing their importance. To illustrate, let us consider the hypothesis that poverty is associated with higher rates of malnutrition, mortality, desertion, delinquency, drop-outs, addiction, and mental disorder. Although sociologists are cautious about attributing causality in statistical relationships, the temporal priority of poverty to many of the other variables suggests its consideration as an independent variable. Viewing poverty as an antecedent to many other social problems is a basis for appraising its importance of primacy.

Social problems which produce or exacerbate other social problems are more serious or critical to society than those which have less

effects. On such grounds, Perrucci and Pilisuk (1971:xix) refer to "central" or "underlying" social problems as distinguished from the "peripheral" ones produced by the former. Despite the brevity of their discussion, it is evident that they consider cause-effect relationships as their basic criterion.

For my purposes, the term "primary social problems" will be used to refer to these influential conditions. The search for independent or causal social problems may imply an endless, circuitous task, since society is a complex system. This difficulty, however, applies to any investigation of causality. Still, there are established ways for reducing the possibility of error and the level of difficulty. Temporal priority, statistical association, and control of related variables are commonly accepted standards for causal analysis.

By influence, we refer not only to the degree of relationship between two variables but also to the relationships between a variable and a number of others. A social problem that directly or indirectly causes or increases many other social problems can be considered more influential than its consequences. Designating the former as a primary social problem differentiates it from secondary or tertiary ones. Although finer gradations may appear desirable, limiting the categories facilitates their clarification.

A more specific definition can be proposed at this point. *Primary social problems are influential social conditions which have multiple detrimental consequences for society.* For example, we may predict that a conventional war will result in higher death rates, waste of human and other resources, increases in family disorganization, disruption of careers, and neglected solutions to other undesirable conditions. Racism seems conducive to separatism, conflict, individual alienation, etc. On the basis of their multiplicative influences, war and racism can be viewed as primary social problems; their socially harmful effects may be defined as secondary or tertiary problems. . . .

In the absence of detailed, accurate, and precise knowledge, the proposed distinctions between specific primary and secondary or tertiary social problems remain as hypotheses rather than established conclusions. Even so, they are preferable to such criteria as numbers