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JAMES M. HENSLIN

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

A DOWN-TO-EARTH APPROACH

Pearson

Social Problems

A Down-to-Earth Approach

TWELFTH EDITION

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Boxed Features

The boxed inserts are one of my favorite features of the text. I especially enjoyed writing them because many focus on provocative ideas. These boxed features, which take students to the cutting edge of social problems, can be a source of stimulating class discussions.

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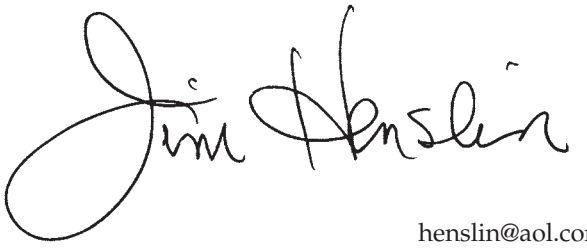
Guide to Social Maps

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

These Social Maps are unique to this text. I have produced them for you from original data. At a glance, you can see how your state compares with your region and the other states—or you can see how the United States compares with other countries. If you have suggestions for other Social Maps that you would like to see in the next edition, please let me know.



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Preface

The Exciting Potential of Social Problems

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

The goal of this book is to make the study of social problems down-to-earth, that is, to present the analysis of social problems clearly and to show how social problems relate to the student's own life. Instructors and students alike have responded positively to this text. Instructors have commented on how the clear presentation of the sociological perspective helps their teaching, and students have written to say that this text stimulates their thinking and learning. A primary reason for this positive response is that I have personalized social problems, an approach that continues in this pleasant milestone of the 12th edition.

You can expect that this text will enliven your classroom, that it will be a source of provocative discussions about major issues facing our society. The potential is that from the ideas presented in the fascinating topics of this text, your students will learn a perspective from which they can view social life and their place in it.

Let's review some of the major features of this text.

Spotlight on Social Research

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

The authors who share their research experiences with us in this feature are

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 9: Donna Eder: Sitting in on adolescent conversations

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

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

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

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

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

Scope and Coverage of the 12th Edition

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

In this text, your students will explore the vital social issues that face our nation and the world, events and conditions that influence their present and their future. Not

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

The Sociological Task: The Goal of Objectivity

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

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

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

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

Incorporating Theory into Your Teaching

Students often find the word *theory* to be frightening. Many expect to land squarely in the midst of vague, abstract ideas, where they wander blindly in a foggy marsh. But theories don't have to be like this. Students can find theories clear and easy to understand—even enjoyable—*if* they are presented clearly and creatively. I have been pleased with how students and instructors alike have reacted favorably to the ways in which sociological theories are presented in this text. One of the main reasons for this favorable reaction is that I embed the theories in clarifying contexts. For example, when I first introduce the theories in Chapter 2—symbolic interactionism theory, functional theory, conflict theory, and feminist theory—I make them concrete. The topical focus of this chapter is aging, so I apply each theory to problems that the elderly confront. This makes the theories much easier to understand.

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

Chapter Organization and Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Terms When a term first appears in the text, it is set in bold and is defined in context. The key terms are also listed at the end of each chapter.

Thinking Critically About the Chapter At the end of each chapter are several questions designed to help students evaluate what they have read. Many of these questions lend themselves to stimulating class discussions.

New in This Edition

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

Chapter 1 Antiabortionists posting videos on YouTube that show abortion providers in graphic situations • Controversy over abortion being covered by the Affordable Care Act

Chapter 3 Male prostitutes in the year 1000 B.C. • "Rentboys" on the Internet • Some men pay men for "the boyfriend experience" • Under *The Amy and Vicky Child Pornography Victim Restitution Improvement Act*, victims of child pornography have the right to restitution for their sexual exploitation

Chapter 4 Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Cool, Fun, and No Danger • Thinking Critically about Social Problems: How Can You Tell If You Have a Drinking Problem? • About *half* (48 percent) of all Americans over the age of 12, about *130 million people*, have smoked marijuana at some point in their lives • New medications to treat alcoholism and change abusers' brain circuitry

Chapter 5 Figure 5.1 Fear of walking alone at night near your home • Earlier comparative data (1960–1967) added to Figure 5.2, The Rate of Violence • Historical examples added to serial killers

Chapter 6 Table 6.6 Recidivism by Age, Sex, and Race–Ethnicity • Figure 6.3 States that have had executions but have now abolished the death penalty added as a category • GM ignition switch problem that killed 124 people • Mafia involved in computer crimes, including identity theft

Chapter 7 Figure 7.5 Income and Wealth (Net Worth) of Families by Race–Ethnicity • Research by Kochbar and Fry on the racial–ethnic gap in wealth • Research by Saez and Zucman on the concentration of wealth: 16,000 families own 11 percent of the nation's entire wealth • Research by Karl Alexander and team that, focusing on social mobility, follows 790 children from age 6 to age 29 • Eliminating poverty by giving all poor people enough money to raise them above the poverty line

Chapter 8 Figure 8.3 Predatory lending (data by Kochbar and Gonzalez-Barrera) • To save the lives of illegal migrants, members of No More Death and the Samaritans leave water, food, socks, and blankets in remote locations of Arizona's Sonoran desert • Building a wall between the United States and Mexico was a 2016 presidential election issue • The *Fisher v. University of Texas* decision • In 2016, Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada became the first Latina senator.

Chapter 9 New chapter opening vignette • Table 9.1 The 10 Countries with the Least Literacy • Table 9.4 Hate Crimes Based on Sexual Orientation • Figure 9.1 The Mother's Attitude Toward Girls Who Are Circumcised • Figure 9.7 Changing Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gays • Attack on Pulse, an Orlando, Florida, gay nightclub, leaves 50 dead • The *Obergefell v. Hodges* 2015 ruling, which allows same-sex couples to wed in all 50 states • The gender math difference, so strongly in favor of males, is not universal • Children's books featuring transgender children have begun to be published • Transgender people allowed to serve openly in the U.S. military • Bi-communities

Chapter 10 Black lung disease has increased, likely because of new coal cutting machines

Chapter 11 New data by Suzanne Bianchi for Figure 11.9 In two-paycheck marriages, how do husbands and wives divide up family responsibilities? • The grandchildren of couples who divorced don't get along as well with their spouses as those whose grandparents did not divorce • Survivors who expected the death of a spouse adjust better than those whose spouse died unexpectedly

Chapter 12 Thinking Critically about Social Problems: Mass Migration: Latinos, Muslims, Conflict, and Confusion • The MS-13 smuggles a gang member from Mexico for a specific killing and then sneaks him back across the border, safe from U.S. investigators • Following a "campus carry" law, licensed gun owners in Texas, both

teachers and students, can bring concealed guns into the classroom • Meat grown in steel tanks will soon be for sale • Current projections are that Europe's population will never double • While the world's population jumped from 1990 to today, the number of people in poverty was cut in half

Chapter 13 Technology and Social Problems: Peering into the Future: Consequences of Driverless Cars • Germany plans to have half of its electricity generated by renewable resources by 2030 • One of the nuclear waste storage containers that needed to last at least 10,000 years began to leak in 15 years • Using low house prices, the city of Niagara Falls, New York, lured families back into Love Canal—and serious health problems followed • A microbe has been discovered that eats plastic • Each year, the aged, rusty pipelines in Russia leak two *Deepwater Horizons* of oil • The American Association for the Advancement of Science concluded that GMOs are just as safe as conventional food • 17 European countries have banned the cultivation of genetically modified crops • A drug derived from the berry of the Blushwood tree in Australia dries up cancerous tumors • California lost track of 3,000 truckloads of hazardous wastes • In 2016, 175 nations signed an agreement in Paris to further limit carbon dioxide • We can turn carbon dioxide into a liquid fuel, which will reduce global warming and provide abundant energy

Chapter 14 New chapter opening vignette • Six missiles with warheads *10* times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima were accidentally loaded on a plane and left unguarded • Iran suspended its nuclear program • 19 nations have terminated their nuclear programs • 90 percent of the world's vast stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed • The New Cold War

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Suggestions for Using This Text

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

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

Invitation for You to Respond

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

Acknowledgments

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

I am also grateful to the many instructors who have offered valuable comments during the development of

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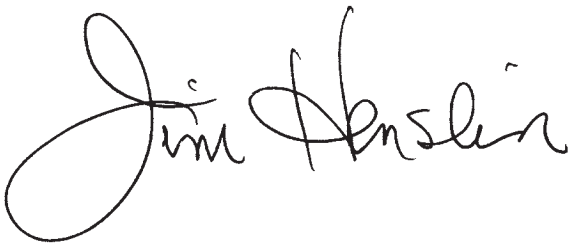
Authors of Supplements

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

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



James M. Henslin,
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About the Author

I was born in a rented room in a little town on the bitterly cold Canadian border in Minnesota. My mother hadn't completed high school, and my father hadn't even made it beyond the seventh grade. Our next home, a converted garage, didn't have indoor plumbing. One of my colder memories goes back to age 10 or 11, when I froze my nose while delivering newspapers in my little northern village. I was elated at age 16 when my parents packed up the car and moved to sunny California, where I graduated from high school and junior college. During the summer following high school graduation, while working as a laborer on construction projects, I took a correspondence course in Greek from the University of California at Berkeley. Indiana was where I graduated from college. I was awarded scholarships at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where I earned my master's and doctorate in sociology. After winning a competitive postdoctoral fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health, I spent a year studying how people adjust to the suicide of a family member.

My primary interests in sociology are the sociology of everyday life, deviance, and international relations. One of my main goals in sociology is to make sociological concepts and research findings down to earth. Among my books are *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (Allyn and Bacon), in its 13th edition, and *Essentials of Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (Allyn and Bacon), in its 11th edition. There is also *Mastering Sociology* (Allyn and Bacon), in its first edition. I have published widely in sociology journals, including *Social Problems* and *American Journal of Sociology*. The topics range from the esoteric ethnomethodological locationalities to the everyday nitty-gritty of cab drivers shooting midnight craps in St. Louis alleys.

While a graduate student, I taught at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. After completing my doctorate, I joined the faculty at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, where I am Professor Emeritus of Sociology. With its fascinating variety and its focus on the major issues facing the nation, Social Problems has always been a joy to teach. What a pleasure to introduce students to the sociological context of issues that have such far-reaching effects on both their current lives and their future experiences!

Photo by Anita Henslin

The author at work—sometimes getting a little too close to "the action."

I enjoy research and reading (obviously), but also fishing, kayaking, and a little weight lifting. My two favorite activities are writing and traveling. I especially enjoy visiting other cultures, even living in them. This brings me face to face with behaviors and ways of thinking that challenge my perspectives, begging me to explore why they and I view the world so differently. These cultural excursions take me beyond the standard research and make sociological principles come alive. They provide a more global context for interpreting social problems, which I am able to share with you in this text.

I am grateful to be able to live in such exciting social, technological, and geopolitical times—and to have access to portable broadband Internet while I pursue my sociological imagination.

A Note from the Publisher on Supplements

Instructor's Manual

For each chapter in the text, the Instructor's Manual provides chapter summaries and outlines, learning objectives, classroom activities, discussion topics, recommended films, websites, and additional references. The Instructor's Manual is available to adopters for download at Pearson's Instructor's Resource Center, www.pearsonhighered.com.

Test Bank

The Test Bank contains more than 1000 questions, including multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay formats. All questions are labeled and scaled according to Bloom's Taxonomy. The Test Bank is available to adopters to download at Pearson's Instructor's Resource Center, www.pearsonhighered.com.

MyTest

This software allows instructors to create their own personalized exams, to edit any or all of the existing test questions, and to add new questions. Other special features of this program include random generation of test questions, creation of alternative versions of the same test, the ability to scramble question sequence, and test preview before printing. For easy access, this software is available at www.pearsonhighered.com.

Powerpoint™ Presentation

The online PowerPoint presentations for *Social Problems: A Down-to-Earth Approach,* 12th edition, offer a robust suite of supplementary lecture materials. Professors have the option of choosing from Lecture and Line Art slides. Additionally, all of the PowerPoints are uniquely designed to present concepts in a clear and succinct way. They are available to adopters for download at Pearson's Instructor Resource Center, www.pearsonhighered.com.

Seeing The Social Context Readings To Accompany *Social Problems*

(ISBN: 0-205-56875-0)
edited by James M. Henslin

This brief reader contains 15 readings, chosen and introduced by Jim Henslin.

Chapter 1

How Sociologists View Social Problems: The Abortion Dilemma

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

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

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

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

1.4 Identify the four stages through which social problems evolve.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sociological Imagination

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

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

What Is the Sociological Imagination?

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

Another way of saying this is that we want to understand how our **personal troubles** (the problems we experience) are connected to the broader conditions of our society. As with Lisa and her grandmother, for example, attitudes toward abortion don't "come out of nowhere." These attitudes are related to conditions in society: in this case, technology (birth control and surgical techniques), gender relations (women's rights), and the law (abortion being legal or illegal). Change these, and ideas about abortion will change. *As we apply the sociological imagination in this text, you will discover how forces greater than yourself set the stage for the personal troubles that you experience.*

Applying the Sociological Imagination to Personal Troubles

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

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

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

In our opening vignette, neither Lisa nor her grandmother saw this finely woven net that had been cast over them, turning their lives upside down, making them confront one another like opponents instead of the close friends they are. Like Lisa and her grandmother, social change also hits us on a personal level: We feel its impact in our own intimate and everyday lives. As with Lisa and her grandmother, the winds of social change affect what we think and feel and what we do—and how we relate to one another.

The sociological imagination (also called the **sociological perspective**) helps us to see how larger social forces influence our personal lives. We tend to see events in our lives from a close-up perspective—the immediate things that are impinging on us. In contrast, the sociological imagination invites us to place our focus on the social context, to see how it shapes our ideas and actions, even our attitudes and emotions.

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

Social Location

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

The term **social location** refers to where you are located in society. It includes, of course, physical places, such as your neighborhood and city. But social location also refers to personal characteristics, such as your education, health, age, sex, race–ethnicity, and marital status. As sociologist Peter Berger (1963:40) said,

> *To be located in society means to be at the intersection of specific social forces. Commonly one ignores these forces…one also knows that there is not an awful lot that one can do about this.*

The Significance of Social Location

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

You might think that I am exaggerating to make a sociological point, but I'm not. Look at Table 1.1, and you will see the differences in abortion by age, race–ethnicity, marital

status, and length of pregnancy. Look at age: Women in their early 20s are the most likely to have abortions. You can see how much lower the rate of abortion is before the early 20s and how sharply it drops after this age. Now look at the influence of race–ethnicity. As you can see, African American women are by far the most likely to have abortions. Their rate is more than four times that of white women. Another striking difference—one that cuts across both age and race–ethnicity—is marital status: Unmarried women are more than four times more likely than married women to have abortions. You can also see that four of five abortions take place before the 11th week of pregnancy, and that close to half of the women who have an abortion have had one before.

Table 1.1 Who Has Abortions?

Abortions	Number of Abortions	Percentage of All Abortions	Abortion Rate per 1,000 Women[1]
Total Abortions	**1,103,000**	**100%**	**18**
Age			
Under 15	5,000	0.5%	3
15–19	157,000	14%	15
20–24	362,000	33%	34
25–29	272,000	25%	26
30–34	172,000	16%	17
35–39	97,000	9%	10
40 and over	37,000	3%	3
Race–Ethnicity			
African Americans	427,000	39%	44
Whites	366,000	33%	10
Latinos	239,000	22%	20
Others[2]	85,000	8%	17
Marital Status			
Married	164,000	15%	6
Unmarried	939,000	85%	27
Length of Gestation			
Less than 9 weeks	696,000	63%	NA[3]
9 to 10 weeks	182,000	17%	NA
11 to 12 weeks	102,000	9%	NA
13 or more weeks	129,000	11%	NA
Number of Prior Abortions			
None	585,000	53%	NA
1	288,000	26%	NA
2 or more	229,000	21%	NA

[1]Based on the number of women in the category.

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

[3]Not Available or Not Applicable.

Source: By the author. Based on ***Statistical Abstract of the United States*** 2016:Table 110.

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

Predictions from Social Location: The Group, Not the Individual

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

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

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

The social context also shapes our views of what is or is not a social problem and of what should be done about it. Let's look more closely at how this shaping takes place.

What Is a Social Problem?

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

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

The Characteristics of Social Problems

As we look at the characteristics of social problems, we will see that for a social problem to exist two characteristics *must* be present. We will also see that social problems evolve and are relative.

Social Problems: Objective Conditions and Subjective Concerns Social problems have two essential components. The first is **objective conditions**, conditions of society that can be measured or experienced. With abortion, objective conditions include whether abortions are legal, who obtains them, and under what circumstances. The second essential component is **subjective concerns**, the concerns that a significant number of people (or a number of significant people) have about the objective conditions. For abortion, subjective concerns go in two directions: Some people are concerned that some women give birth to unwanted children, while others are concerned that some women terminate their pregnancies. To see how subjective concerns about abortion differ in another part of the world, see *A Global Glimpse: Only Females Eligible: Sex-Selection Abortion in India—and the United States.*

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

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

A Global Glimpse

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

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

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

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

This cultural context sets the stage for female infanticide, the killing of newborn girl babies, a practice that has been common in India for thousands of years. With today's technology, much female infanticide has been replaced by sex-selection abortion. Instead of waiting to see whether their newborn baby is a boy or girl, the prospective parents use prenatal tests to determine if they will abort the fetus. Some clinics even used to put up billboards that proclaimed "Invest Rs.500 now, save Rs.50,000 later." This means that by paying Rs.500 (500 Indian rupees) to abort a female, a family can save a future dowry of 50,000 rupees.

With profits in mind, medical personnel have developed techniques to convince reluctant women to abort their female fetuses. In one clinic, nurses reach under the counter where they keep the preserved fetuses of twin girls. When a woman sees these bottled fetuses, the horror of double vigilance and two dowries is often sufficient to convince her to have an abortion.

Another horror made national headlines: A *male* fetus had been aborted unintentionally. This news sparked protests, and the Indian legislature passed a law forbidding doctors to tell would-be parents the sex of their fetuses. Physicians who violate the law can be sent to prison and banned from their profession.

Seldom enforced, however, this law is ignored. An eminent physician has even stated publicly: "The need for a male child is an economic need in our society, and our feminists who are raising such hue and cry about female feticide should realize that it is better to get rid of an unwanted child than to make it suffer all its life."

This banner is part of a national campaign to stop sex-selection abortion in India, where women often feel pressure to have an abortion when tests show they are going to give birth to a girl.

How extensive is the assault on females in India? Here is one measure: Between sex-selection abortion and female infanticide, *India has 10 to 15 million fewer girls and women than it would have if these practices didn't exist*.

These same practices are also common in China. There, the gender ratio is so lopsided that for Chinese in their 20s, there are six bachelors for every five potential brides.

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

Based on Kusum 1993; Roberts 2009; Wheeler 2009; Jha 2011; Nelson 2014.

For Your Consideration

→ Granted the cultural situation that Indians face, do you think that Indians in poverty should practice sex-selection abortion? Why or why not?

→ Do you think that the U.S. Congress should pass a law against sex-selection abortion for Americans?

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

As concerns grew that women could not have legal abortions, some people began to work to change the law. Their success turned the problem on its head: The *Roe v. Wade* decision, which made abortion legal, upset large numbers of people. Convinced that abortion is murder, these people began their own campaigns to change the law, in this case to repeal *Roe v. Wade*. Activists who favor legal abortion opposed each step these people took. We'll look more closely at this process in a moment, but at this point

I simply want you to see that social problems evolve, *that they take shape as groups react to one another*.

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

Issues in Social Problems

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

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

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

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

How people define the unborn is the essence of their position on abortion. That which is pictured here is about eleven weeks' gestation. To describe it, those on one side of the abortion controversy use terms such as fetus and "product of conception," while those on the other side call it a baby.

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

And changes in our subjective concerns do not have to occur. We can also hold firmly onto our ideas and attitudes, perhaps when confronted with different views digging in all the deeper to hold onto what we consider to be the absolute truth of reality.

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

Let's look at the two main opposing views.

The Fetus is *Not* a Human Being

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

What Do You Think?

The Fetus *is* a Human Being

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

What Do You Think?

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

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

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

Source: By the author. Modified from *Roe* 1989.

Competing Views As you know, our pluralistic society is filled with competing, contrasting, and conflicting groups. This variety certainly makes life interesting, as it means that we are exposed to competing, contrasting, and conflicting views of life. But in our dynamic world where some groups fiercely promote their particular ideas and values, whose definition of a social problem wins? The answer centers on **power**, the ability to get your way despite resistance. After abortion became legal, most observers assumed that because the opponents of abortion had lost, they would quietly fade away. What a naïve assumption this turned out to be. Feelings were so strong that groups that had been hostile to one another for centuries, such as Roman Catholics and Baptists, began to work together to try to stop abortion. Shocked at what they considered the killing of babies, they took to the streets and to the courts, fighting battle after battle over this issue.

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

The Natural History of Social Problems: Four Stages

1.4 Identify the four stages through which social problems evolve.

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

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

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

Table 1.3 The Four Stages of Social Problems

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

Note: Our current society is marked by continuous unrest and agitation about numerous matters. Very few of these issues turn into social problems. Most remain diffuse matters of discontent.

Around some social issues, however, social movements develop. The trigger that sometimes launches a social movement is a dramatic event that captures the imagination, desires, or discontent of large numbers of people, often accompanied by organizing of some sort that transforms those emotions into a dynamic force for change. The variety is fascinating. Following a precipitating incident, decades of simmering discontent can erupt in sudden and violent acts of rage, which burn out, with no social movement. Or a simmering discontent that goes back decades can lead to slow, deliberate acts that constitute a slow, deliberate social movement, as with abortion in the United States.

Source: By the author.

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

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

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

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

Organizing around the Issue Another leader emerged: Joan Hayes, a former Washington lobbyist. She went even further, arguing that the major issue was the right of pregnant women to choose whether or not to have a baby. Hayes used the media effectively. Concentrating on influential people, she organized leaders in medicine, business, labor, politics, religion, education, and the media. Focusing on women's choice, she aroused public support for her position.