

Sociology 103

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF YOUTH**

Mr. Imber  
Office Hours: M: 9-9:45  
Th: 9-9:45  
and by appointment

Spring 2007  
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PROBLEM (OED) literally, a thing thrown or put forward; hence, a question propounded for solution.

- 1) A difficult or puzzling question proposed for solution, a riddle, an enigmatic statement, obs.
- 2) A question proposed for academic discussion or scholastic disputation.
- 3) A doubtful or difficult question, a matter of inquiry, discussion thought; a question that exercises the mind: 1795: Burke, Th. Scarcity Wks. VII 416: "It is one of the finest problems in legislation ... 'What the state ought to take upon itself to direct ... and what it ought to leave, with as little interference as possible, to individual discretion.'"
- 4) Geometry - a proposition in which something is required to be done: opposed to theorem.
- 5) Physics and Math - a question or inquiry which starting from some given conditions investigates some fact, result, or law.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

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| Joel Best                           | <i>How Claims Spread: Cross-National Diffusion of Social Problems</i>  |
| Joel Best and<br>Donileen R. Loseke | <i>Social Problems: Constructionist Readings</i>   |
| John C. Burnham                     | <i>Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History</i> |
| James Davison Hunter                | <i>Culture Wars</i>  |
| Cynthia Kuhn, et al.                | <i>Buzzed: The Straight Facts about the Most Used and Abused Drugs from Alcohol to Ecstasy</i>                     |
| Nisbet, Lee                         | <i>The Gun Control Debate: You Decide</i>  |

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### General Expectations:

All students are expected to attend class. I do not calculate an exact percentage of the grade based on attendance and participation, but I will take attendance occasionally and keep note of participation and use that record when making close decisions about a final grade. Class participation in the form of raising questions and furthering discussion is a vital part of an interesting class. **Your enrollment in this course means that I may call upon you at any time in class.**

### Newspaper Subscriptions:

It is impossible to think sociologically unless one is thinking about concrete historical or contemporary issues that affect large numbers of human beings, most often in their daily lives. A course in social problems can help students to confront those issues more critically and with greater self-confidence, if they acquire the habit of reading a newspaper daily. For the purposes of this course, students are asked to read one of three papers: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, or *The Boston Globe*. You may subscribe to the paper versions of these media, or review the web-based versions on a daily basis.

**Examinations:** All examinations are take-home and open-book.

A. Midterm Exam (short essay questions on readings):

**Distributed March 12, DUE March 15 (by 5PM)**

B. Final Exam (Distributed the Last Day of Class)

**Papers:** All assignments are due on the date indicated and must be typewritten. Papers handed in late **will automatically** be penalized, a third of a grade per day.

- 1) 5 page paper on social problems of dependence and their proposed solutions  
**NO PAPER MORE THAN OR LESS THAN 5 PAGES WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

**DUE: February 22.**

- 2) 5 to 8 page paper on social problems of independence and their proposed solutions

**DUE: April 19.**

## COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

January 29: Introduction to the course. Explanation of assignments.

February 1: What is a social problem?

Robert A. Stallings, "The Problem with the Earthquake Problem," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 21-28.

Michael Crichton, "Aliens Cause Global Warming" (e-reserve)

George Will, "Global Warming? Hot Air" (e-reserve)

### I. Problems of Dependence: Trust Close to Home

February 5: Joel Best, "Rhetoric in Claims-Making: Constructing the Missing Children Problem" *Social Problems*, Vol. 34, No 2 (April 1987), pp. 101-121. (on e-reserve)

Phillip W. Davis, "The Changing Meanings of Spanking," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 6-12.

February 8: John M. Johnson, "Horror Stories and the Construction of Child Abuse," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 267-271.

Dorothy Pawluch, "Medicalizing Childhood," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 219-225.

February 12: Tarja Pösö, "Child Protection without Children – or Finnish Children without Problems?" in Best, *How Claims Spread*, pp. 283-304.

February 15: Leslie Margolin, "Teaching Gifted Children," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 226-252.

Charles Murray, "Intelligence in the Classroom," in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2007, p. A21.

Charles Murray, "What's Wrong with Vocational School?" in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2007, p. A19.

Charles Murray, "Aztecs vs. Greeks: Those with superior intelligence need to learn to be wise," in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2007.

## II. Problems of Dependence: Trust at a Distance

February 22: Vincent F. Sacco and Karim Ismaili, "Social Problems Claims and the Undefended Border: The Case of Canada and the United States," in Best, *How Claims Spread*, pp. 19-37.

### **FIRST PAPER DUE**

February 26: Ellie Lee, "Reinventing Abortion as a Social Problem: 'Postabortion Syndrome' in the United States and Britain," in *How Claims Spread*, pp. 39-67.

March 1: Gray Cavender, "Reality Television Constructs Crime," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 29-36.

Theodore Sasson, "Crime Frames and Their Sponsors," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 88-92.

March 5: Joel Best, "Audiences Evaluate Statistics," in *How Claims Spread*, pp. 43-50.

Philip Jenkins, "How Europe Discovered Its Sex-Offender Crisis," in *How Claims Spread*, pp. 147-167.

March 8: Donileen R. Loseke, "The 'Homeless Mentally Ill' and Involuntary Hospitalization," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 146-153.

March 12: Joel Best, "The Rhetorical Appeal of Random Violence," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 113-119.

### **MIDTERM EXAMINATION DISTRIBUTED**

## III. Problems of Independence: The New Risk Culture

March 15: Why are some problems, problems of independence?

### **MIDTERM DUE (5PM)**

March 26: John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits*, chapters 1, 2, and 3: Drinking

Kuhn, et al., "Alcohol," in *Buzzed*, pp. 31-58.

- March 29: Craig Reinerman, "The Social Construction of an Alcohol Problem: The Case of Mothers against Drunk Drivers and Social Control in the 1980s," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1. (Jan., 1988), pp. 91- 120. (on e-reserve)
- Joel Best and Frank Furedi, "The Evolution of Road Rage in Britain and the United States," in *How Claims Spread*, pp. 107-127.
- April 2: Burnham, chapter 4: Smoking
- Kuhn, et al., "Nicotine," in *Buzzed*, pp. 162-174.
- Jun Ayukawa, "Smoking Problems in Japan," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 81-87. See also, the longer version, "The United States and Smoking Problems in Japan," in *How Claims Spread*, pp. 215-242,
- April 5: Jacquelyn Litt and Maureen McNeil, "'Crack Babies' and the Politics of Mothering," in Loseke and Best, *Social Problems: Constructionist Readings*, pp. 254-260.
- Kuhn, et al., "Stimulants," in *Buzzed*, pp. 210-230.
- April 9: Burnham, chapter 6: Gambling
- John Rosecrance, "Compulsive Gambling and the Medicalization of Deviance," in *Social Problems*, Vol. 32, No. 3. (Feb., 1985), pp. 275-284. (on e-reserve)
- Randy Stinchfield, "Demographic, Psychosocial, and Behavioral Factors Associated with Youth Gambling and Problem Gambling," in Jeffrey L. Derevensky and Rina Gupta, eds., *Gambling Problems in Youth: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers), pp. 27-39. (on e-reserve).
- April 12: Lee Nisbet, *The Gun Control Debate*:
- Read the opening Introduction and the introductions to Parts 1-5 of the book: pp. 13-21; 23-28; 95-107; 175-181; 303-314; 541-542.

April 17: The Gun Control Debate, concluded

#### IV. The Convergence of Social, Political, Economic and Moral Problems

April 19: Burnham, chapters 9 and 10.

#### **SECOND PAPER DUE**

April 23: James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars*

April 26: Hunter, *Culture Wars*, continued

April 30: Hunter, *Culture Wars*, concluded

May 3: NO CLASS

May 7: Review for Final Exam, Take-Home Exam Distributed in Class

### **DATES TO REMEMBER: SOCIAL PROBLEMS 2007**

**February 22: First Paper Due**

**March 12: Midterm Exam (DUE March 15)**

**April 19: Second Paper Due**