Ch.1 Sociological approach

1. What are social problems

- We consider social problems to be (1) societally induced conditions that cause psychic and material suffering for any segment of the population and (2) acts and conditions that violate the norms and values found in society. The distribution of power in society is the key to understanding these social problems.

- Early definition
  - Assumed that social problems resulted from bad people because they assumed that the basic norms of society are usually held
  - Deviants
    - Result of conflict between the culturally prescribed goals of society and the obstacles obtaining them
    - The role of society in creating and sustaining deviance through labeling people viewed as abnormal
    - Ex) when you're sick you go to the doctor and get medicine and a note of verification, the norm is in order to be sick society has deemed a doctor must say you’re sick.

2. Social Problems definition differs by audience and time

- How we perceive things depends on our social environment
- Cautions
  - Definitions of social problems provided by those in power, ex) government, educational institutions, stats
  - Overlooking conditions that are detrimental to a relatively powerful segment of the society
  - Public opinion diverts attentions away from the social order
  - Ex) interracial marriage has only been legal for 48 years
  - There are always outliers in society, those not in the norm

3. Sociological research
• How do sociologists gather data about social problems
  • Survey research
  • Field research
  • Experimental research
  • Secondary data analysis, taking someone else’s data and analyzing it

• Does statistics lie?
  • You want to show people the stats that you want Ex) three graphs show our unemployment rate, you’re going to use that one that appears the lowest

• The sociological imagination involves several related components (Eitzen and Smith 2003:8).
  - The sociological imagination is stimulated by a willingness to view the social world from the perspective of others.
  - It involves moving away from thinking in terms of the individual and her or his problem and focusing rather on the social, economic, and historical circumstances that produce the problem. Put another way, the sociological imagination is the ability to see the societal patterns that influence individuals, families, groups, and organizations.

4. Norm Violations

• Using what were presumed to be universal criteria of normality, sociologists commonly assumed that social problems resulted from “bad” people—maladjusted people who were abnormal because of mental deficiency, mental disorder, lack of education, or incomplete socialization. These social pathologists, because they assumed that the basic norms of society are universally held, viewed social problems as behaviors or social arrangements that disturb the moral order.
  - For them, the moral order of U.S. society defined such behaviors as alcoholism, suicide, theft, and murder as social problems. But this approach did not take into account the complexity inherent in a diverse society.
• The distribution of power in society is key to understanding these social problems
• Individual deviants are a manifestation of society’s failure to meet their needs
• Society, not the individual must be reconstructed if social problems are to be solved

6. Sociological Theory

• A theory that is a systematic explanation for how and why something occurs in our social world
  - A sociological theory is a set of ideas that explains a range of human behavior and a variety of social and societal events.
  - The late Michael Harrington said this regarding the necessity of theory: “The data of society are, for all practical purposes, infinite. You need criteria that will provisionally permit you to bring some order into that chaos of data and to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant factors” (Harrington 1985:1).

• Scientific theories guide research
  - This ideal of value neutrality (to be absolutely free of bias in research) can be attacked from three positions.
    - The first is that scientists should not be morally indifferent to the implications of their research.
    - The second argument against the purely neutral position is that such a stance is impossible.
  - Ex) The social norms of a community influence the behavior of an individual

7. Theoretical Approaches in sociology

• The Theoretical Paradigm – a basic image of society that guides theory and research
  - Overarching group of theories applied in many different circumstances
16. **Age**

- Age
  - 35% of poor are children
- Race/Ethnicity
  - Most poor people are white
- Percentages
  - 27.2% of blacks
  - 25.6% of Hispanics
  - 11.7% of Asians
  - 9.7% of Non-Hispanics

17. **Poverty Demographics**

- Gender
  - 57% of poor are female
- Feminization of poverty
- Family
  - Single women with children
- Region
  - South, West
  - 19.7% of people in inner cities
  - 17.7% of people in rural areas

18. **Kinds of Poverty**

- Working Poor
  - $7.25/ hour of minimum wage
  - $15,080 full time, 52 weeks a year
  - Poverty Line for family of 3 is $18,284
- Non-Working Poor
  - Unemployment, illness, divorce
  - Job doesn’t pay for childcare
- Underclass
• Immigrants as a group lag behind native-born Americans on major SES indicators. However, some immigrant are better off than native-born Americans. Immigrants with high levels of education, skills, and training are more likely to participate in the labor force and have relatively better earnings compared to those with little educations.

  - Where people reside is an important metric to gauge how much social and economic amenities (Efficient schools and daycare faculties for example) are available to them.

  - Residential segregation (measures the level of physical separation between two groups) is more pronounced among black and Hispanic children relative to white children. Also, residential segregation among Black and Hispanic children is more pronounced than among their adult counterparts. This means Black and Hispanic children will have fewer opportunities to access social and economic amenities compared to white children. Also, Black and Hispanic households with children have access to fewer social and economic opportunities than their counterparts with no children.

59. Immigrant Children compared to American – born children

• More children of immigrants live in poverty compared to children born to native-born parents. However, there is a variation in levels of poverty among children of immigrant parents by country of origin

  - The population of white children has declined significantly while the population of non-white children is on the rise nationwide.

  - The growth of nonwhite child population is reflected in the demographic profile of American children

  - The proportion of Hispanic children has grown from just 12% in 1990 to 23% now. While the proportion of
The best of these include schoolteachers, police officers, firefighters, other municipal employees, and neighborhood doctors and lawyers. The worst include low-wage, insecure, temporary, part-time, dead-end work with few or no benefits in retail, clerical, custodial, food service, and private security work.

- Race and class, as well as the fear of crime, play into the corporate motivation to move to the fringes of urban areas.

77. **Disinvestment**

- Wells Fargo
  - Racist lending
  - African-American
  - Hispanic
- Pay 175 million
  - 125 million to customers
  - 50 million to communities
- When giving a loan to a minority they gave them riskier loans
- Systematic patterns of investment and disinvestment have hurt U.S. cities. Banks, savings and loans, and insurance companies have redlined cities and metropolitan areas—literally drawing red lines on the map and making loans and providing insurance on one side of the line and not on the other.
- Redlining refers to the practice of not providing loans or insurance in what are deemed undesirable areas. These areas are almost always made up of high concentrations of poor minorities and located in the central cities.
- The patterns of disinvestment and investment that have resulted from redlining in U.S. metropolitan areas have discriminated by both race and place.
  - Bank deposits made by inner-city residents in city banks are more likely to be used for home and business loans in the suburbs than in the cities, where the need for capital is so apparent. This sort of
growth. Such suburban sprawl (low-density, automobile-dependent development) absorbs more than 2 million acres of open space each year.

88. The effects of the suburban sprawl

- The first effect of suburbanization and sprawl are the environmental effects such as the disruption of wildlife habitats, the altering of rivers and streams, and pollution.

- A second consequence of suburbanization is, as the more affluent leave cities for the suburbs, they take their spending and their taxes with them, leaving businesses less profitable and city governments strapped for the funds to provide adequate services.

- Third, the economic costs of auto's suburbanization, de-concentration, and sprawl are extremely high.

- Finally, there are some health concerns. People who live in sprawling suburbs are much more likely to drive to school, to work, or to the store than are people living in densely populated cities and neighborhoods.

89. Automobile Dependency

- As auto dependency causes sprawls and decentralizes urban areas, a vicious cycle of more cars and highways sets in. More automobiles traveling greater distances to the suburbs increases traffic congestion. This, in turn, leads to the construction of more and bigger highways, which encourages even more cars, further decentralizing metropolitan areas.

- The decentralization that comes with auto transportation has destroyed the landscape and encouraged the spread of commercial strips, shopping malls, and multi-lane roads and streets. The shopping areas are spread out so that suburban
residents cannot walk to a store, as is possible in high-density cities. Instead they must use an automobile.

- Urban sprawl, with its reliance on the automobile, has also led to environmental pollution and a waste of natural resources.

90. **Social Isolation in the suburbs**

- Moving to the suburbs is a move away from diversity and toward homogenization (Eitzen 2004). The suburbs are disproportionately White and relatively affluent. Suburbanites leave immigrants, racial minorities, poor people, and the homeless for life near people like themselves.

- Suburbanites drive somewhere away from their immediate neighborhood to shop among strangers. Or they may not leave their home at all, working, shopping, banking, and paying bills by computer. For suburban teenagers and children, almost everything is away—friends, practice fields, music lessons, jobs, schools, and the malls, resulting in a disconnect from those nearby. Suburban neighborhoods in particular are devoid of meeting places. In effect, the suburbs often suffer from a lack of community—and connection.

91. **Transforming the suburbs**

- The collapse of the housing market brought about by the Great Recession and relatively high gasoline prices have resulted in more and more people reconsidering the wisdom of living so far from work in homes they can no longer afford.

- With housing values plummeting in the suburbs while neighborhoods close to downtown have held the value, there is a move back closer to the urban core. Homes close to urban centers or that have convenient access to mass transit are especially desirable (Penalver 2008). Builders/developers of new suburban areas are building whole communities.
• Gould (1986) provided a list of the number of toxic waste sites in the nation by zip code.
  - The West Dallas area (zip code 75212) was listed as having nine toxic waste sites, one of the largest number for any zip code area within Dallas County.

• Annexed by the city of Dallas in 1950, West Dallas is an area of 13 square miles that has a history of lead pollution, poverty, and racial segregation.

• By 1974, the West Dallas housing project was 90 percent black and Dallas had lost more than $31 million in federal housing renovation money because of the continued illegal assignment of tenants to housing projects by race and ethnicity.

• Federal officials have labeled lead the number one environmental health threat to the nation’s children, particularly to those under the age of 6
  - Lead toxicity is the one environmental hazard for which both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the EPA agree that the nation’s blacks have a high risk.
  - At all income levels, significantly more of the nation’s black than white children have unacceptably high blood lead levels (BLLs).

• The EPA conducted a series of nationwide studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One found high concentrations of lead in close proximity to lead smelters in both soil and dust samples, including two Dallas-based smelters, RSR and Dixie Metals.
• However, RSR had violated two calendar quarters of the
- EPA ambient air quality standard for lead. As a result, the state of Texas and the city of Dallas initiated a rigorous lawsuit against the lead smelter.
  - In the summer of 1983, the state and the city took RSR to court to force not only compliance with air standards, but cleanup of the surrounding area as well.
  - In October of an out-of-court settlement was reached which required RSR to install air pollution control equipment and to remove contaminated soil from West Dallas.
- In 1985 Debra Walker and six indigent black women residing in the West Dallas housing project filed suit against the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Dallas Housing Authority, contending that these two agencies forced thousands of poor black families to live in slums.
  - In 1987, a settlement was reached that called for the renovation of 832 apartments. The remainder were to be demolished, and replaced with certificates that would let poor families choose their own apartments. Hundreds of families chose to leave.
  - Over 2,500 housing units in the West Dallas housing projects lie in various stages of decay and ruin.

- This age group is at a very high potential risk to neurological damage due to elevated blood lead levels (CDC 1993).
  - About 42 percent (2,874) of the population includes children 17 years or younger.
  - Depending on the number of years these children have resided in this area, the chance that they have sustained neurological damage could also be very high.
  - All of the schools and boys & girls clubs are in the immediate area of the projects and are in the path of
the prevailing northern winds, making them susceptible to airborne contaminants.

- This area again underwent a limited lead cleanup in the mid-1980s, but recent tests have found that contamination persists at levels now known to be harmful.
  - On May 9, 1993, the U.S. EPA designated parts of the West Dallas area as a Superfund site. The cleanup process is likely to take four to six years
  - The agency noted that it would take approximately 18 months to determine the extent of contamination and decide how to conduct the cleanup.
  - This is regarded as one of the largest Superfund sites in the U.S. Usually, most Superfund sites are industrial facilities and have no residents.

- Alphonso Jackson, President and CEO of the DHA. He states: "Recent publicity has suggested that lead is a serious health hazard to residents of the Housing Authority's Lakewest developments. Those allegations are not supported by scientific evidence." He also reports that "soil areas in three areas of George Loving Place contained unacceptable levels by federal standards."
  - He counters by writing that the Housing Authority immediately relocated families from unsafe areas and scheduled the vacant apartments for demolition and removal.

- The West Dallas residents and scaled down the plan to include a total of 1,200 family units which would be air conditioned and upgraded.
  - This plan, which is estimated at a total of cost approximately $62 million, would allow for two-thirds of the units to be destroyed.