

**Spring 2017**  
**202: Social Problems**  
**Dr. Karrie Ann Snyder**  
**Harris Hall L07**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays - 3:30 - 4:50 pm**

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**Office hours - Dr. Snyder: Mondays from 12:30-2:30 (No appointment needed!)**

\*Office hours may change for Reading and Finals week. Please check Canvas!

**Teaching Assistants: Contact and office hours information will be on Canvas.**

In this course, we will investigate how social conditions come to be defined as social problems. This course will be divided into two sections. The first section will be an overview of how sociologists have approached the study of social problems including theoretical perspectives (symbolic interactionist, conflict, structural-functionalist and constructionist perspectives). In this section, we will also examine the roles of policymakers, social advocates, and the media in the process of defining social problems. In the second section of the course, we will use the perspectives and conceptual tools from the first part to analyze contemporary social problems including bullying, violence among young people, and the effects of the media on children and teenagers. As a class, we will also examine the debates surrounding several social problems (such as what to do about bullying) to understand how interested parties can define a similar situation as problematic, but for very different reasons and in doing so suggest very different solutions.

***Learning Objectives:***

- A) To examine the theoretical perspectives that sociologists use to understand how social problems develop.
- B) To look at how various interested parties (or “claimsmakers”), including the media, experts (such as doctors), and politicians, shape how the public thinks about and reacts to a social problem, including the rhetorical devices claimsmakers use in defining a social problem and its possible solutions.
- C) To examine the debate surrounding a social problem and compare/contrast the various sides in the debate to understand why and how groups develop opposing opinions regarding a given social problem and its solution.
- D) To be able to trace the evolution of a given social problem to understand the historical, economic, cultural and political reasons that an issue has come to be defined as a social problem.
- E) To critically assess how social problems are presented to the public by the media, including how the various sides of the debate surrounding a social problem and possible solutions are reported in both mainstream and academic media outlets.

## **Course Requirements and Grading:**

Your final grade for the quarter will be comprised of the following components. All assignments/graded components must be completed in order to receive a passing grade for the quarter.

### **15% - Class participation and attendance**

Students are required to complete the assigned readings before class and actively participate during lecture and small-group discussions/activities (Some participation activities will be turned in and/or participation recorded). Attendance is also required. Participation on the course's Yellowdig site (on Canvas starting Week 2, will be discussed during lecture) is required and will make up half of your participation grade. See the Announcement on Canvas concerning the Yellowdig participation policy for the course (will be posted by Week 2 of the quarter).

### **30% - In-class Midterm - Week 5, Wednesday, April 26**

### **30% - Take-Home Final - Due Finals Week, Monday, June 5 by 5:00pm to Canvas.**

### **25% - Research Project - Due Week 9, Thursday, May 25 by 7pm**

Throughout the quarter, students will work (either individually or in teams of two) on a project where they will choose a social problem not covered in class and will develop a web page on Canvas. The goal of the assignment is to explain why/how a particular social issue has become a social problem. Details will be given out during Week 2 of the quarter. This project may require preliminary assignments.

### **Course Materials - Books were ordered at Norris Book Center.**

Best, *Social Problems* – (Note: The **2nd** edition of Best was ordered at Norris Book Center. The 1st edition is also fine, but some of the examples used will be different but the main text for both editions is almost identical.)

Bazon, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy*

Readings with a \*\* are available through Course Reserves on Canvas or are publically available on the web at the web address following the title.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was missed. Please take note of two other students' email addresses. Teaching staff lecture notes are not available to students.

### **Academic Integrity**

Issues regarding academic integrity will be immediately referred to the Dean's Office. For further information regarding the academic integrity policy at Northwestern, please consult the *Student Handbook* and <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/uniprin.html>.

### **AccessibleNU**

Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to AccessibleNU (847-467-5530) and the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class.) All discussions will remain confidential.

### **Laptop Policy**

Laptops (along with other forms of technology including cell phones, iPads etc.) are not to be used during lecture. This includes no texting during class.

**\*\*This syllabus is as of March 27, 2017. If there are any modifications to the assignments, course policies, or criteria for evaluation, any updates will be posted on the course's Canvas site. Students are responsible for any changes and additions to the syllabus and course assignments and for any announcements made during class.**

## I. The Sociological Approach to Social Problems

### Week 1

#### **Monday – 3/27: Introduction to the Course**

#### **Wednesday – 3/29: What is a Social Problem?**

\*\*Mills, C.W. 2010. "The Promise" Pp. 1-7 in *Mapping the Social Landscape*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, S. J. Ferguson, ed. McGraw-Hill.

### **A. Objectivist vs. Subjectivist Perspectives**

### Week 2

#### **Monday – 4/3: The Objectivist Tradition**

\*\*Davis, Kingsley. 1937. "The Sociology of Prostitution." *American Sociological Review*, No. 2 (October), 746-55.  
\*\*Jenness, Valerie. 1990. "From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem." *Social Problems*, vol. 37, no. 3, 403-420.

#### **Wednesday – 4/5: The Subjectivist Tradition**

Best, *Social Problems*, "Social Construction", pages 3-16

\*\*Alarid, Leanne Fiftal and Ofelia Lisa, Vega. 2010. "Identity Construction, Self Perceptions, and Criminal Behavior of Incarcerated Women." *Deviant Behavior*, vol. 31, no. 8, 704-728.

### **B. The Constructionist Perspective**

### Week 3

#### **Monday – 4/10: Social Factors**

\*\*Ball, Richard A. and Lilly, J. Robert. 1982. "The Menace of Margarine: The Rise and Fall of a Social Problem." *Social Problems*, vol. 29, no. 5, 488-498.

#### **Wednesday – 4/12: Claims**

Best, *Social Problems*, Chapter 2 – "Claims"

\*\*Best, Joel. 1987. "Rhetoric in Claims-Making: Constructing the Missing Children Problem." *Social Problems*, vol. 34, no. 2, 101-121.

### Week 4

#### **Monday – 4/17: The History of Social Problems**

Best, *Social Problems*, "The Natural History of Social Problems," pages 17-27

\*\*Hilgartner, Stephen and Bosk, Charles L. 1988. "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, no. 1, 53-78.

#### **Wednesday – 4/19: Social Movements**

Best, *Social Problems*, Chapter 3 – "Activists as Claimsmakers"

\*\*Reinarman, Craig. 1988. "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, 91-120.

### Week 5: Policymaking

#### **Monday – 4/24**

Best, *Social Problems*, Chapter 7 – "Policymaking"

\*\*Richtel, "Reframing the Debate Over Using Phones Behind the Wheel," *New York Times*.

(Link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/us/reframing-the-debate-over-using-phones-while-driving.html?hp&gwh=DF89B52E7485C7328727C5C9567D75C2>)

#### **Wednesday – 4/26: In-class Midterm**

## II. Case Studies of Social Problems

### A. Making Kids Victims and Villains – Experts and the Media

#### Week 6

##### **Monday – 5/1**

Best, *Social Problems*, Chapter 4 – “Experts as Claimsmakers”

\*\*Pfohl, Stephen J. 1977. “The “Discovery” Of Child Abuse.” *Social Problems*, vol. 24, no. 3, 310-323.

##### **Wednesday – 5/3**

Best, *Social Problems*, Chapter 5 – “The Media and Claims”

\*\*Sternheimer, Karen. 2010. “‘It’s Not the Media’: The Truth About Pop Culture’s Influence On Children.” Pp. 459-471 in *Mapping the Social Landscape*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, S. J. Ferguson, ed. McGraw-Hill.

\*\*Parker-Pope, “The Myth of Rampant Teenage Promiscuity,” *New York Times*.

(Link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/27/health/27well.html>)

### B. Moral Panics and Drug Use

#### Week 7

##### **Monday – 5/8**

\*\*Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 2009, “The Theories of the Moral Panic,” Pp. 51-72 in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Wiley-Blackwell. (On Canvas, there is a brief introduction defining a moral panic. Be sure to read that prior to the assigned reading for 5/8.)

##### **Wednesday – 5/10**

\*\*Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 2009, “Drug Abuse Problems,” Pp. 197-217 in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Wiley-Blackwell.

### C. Bullying – A Rising Social Problem

#### Week 8

##### **Monday – 5/15**

In-class documentary: *Bully*

##### **Wednesday – 5/17**

Bazelon, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy* - Prologue, Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Also, read Chapter 4 **or** 5. (Reading both Chapters 4 and 5 is fine and encouraged, but you are only required to read one or the other).

#### Week 9

##### **Monday – 5/22**

Bazelon, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy* - Chapters 6, 8, 9 and Conclusion

##### **Wednesday – 5/24**

Readings to be announced (Readings will be available on Canvas)

Take-Home Final will be distributed during lecture and will be posted to Canvas after lecture.

**Research Projects due May 25, Thursday, 7pm to Canvas**  
**Take-Home Final due June 5, Monday, 5pm to Canvas**