Social Problems A Down to Earth Approach 12th edition Henslin Solutions Manual

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Chapter 2

Interpreting Social Problems: Aging

A. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we look at three main theories that sociologists use to study social problems and aging in the United States. Functionalists focus on the functions and dysfunctions of society, such as the high costs of health care and Social Security to future generations. Conflict theorists focus on society's parts that are competing with one another for limited resources, such as the younger versus the older employees. Symbolic interactionists focus on how the elderly are viewed or labeled in our society, the technological changes that caused this generational gap, and the issues affecting the elderly and their families today.

B. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, the student should be able to:

2.1 Explain functionalism and apply it to social problems.
2.3 Explain conflict theory and apply it to social problems.
2.4 Explain feminist theory and apply it to social problems.
2.5 Explain symbolic interactionism and apply it to social problems.
2.6 Discuss the possible generational struggle regarding the elderly.

C. CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. **Sociological Theories and Social Problems**
   a. Looks at the three main theories that sociologists use to focus on social problems and how each provides a different perspective on the problem.

II. **Functionalism and Social Problems**
   a. Introducing Functionalism
      i. Functionalists compare society to a self-adjusting machine, with each part of the machine having a function. If working properly, it contributes to the well-being of the machine (society), but if parts are not working properly, then it creates problems for society, or dysfunctions. Health care and Social Security are discussed as parts contributing to all of society, including the elderly. (See Discussion Questions 1) (See Short Assignments 2)
   b. The Development of Functionalism
      i. Auguste Comte: Organs working together—Comte regarded society as being similar to an animal, with interrelated parts that must be in balance to function smoothly. (See Discussion Questions 3)
      ii. Emile Durkheim: Normal and abnormal states—Durkheim built on the idea that parts that function properly lead to a society in a "normal state." If the parts fail to perform their functions, then society is in an "abnormal" state. He also stressed that the structure of parts of society

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are related to one another. (See Classroom Activities 2)

iii. Robert Merton: Functions and dysfunctions—Merton defined functions as the beneficial consequences of people's actions. Manifest functions are actions intended to help some part of the system, while other actions have consequences that were not intended, such as latent functions. He stressed that the unintended consequences of people's actions can disrupt the equilibrium, an event he called latent dysfunctions. (See Lecture Starters 3)

c. Applying Functionalism to Social Problems

i. Functions of nursing homes—As more women began to work outside the home and life expectancy increased, nursing homes were developed to replace these former caretakers. (See Classroom Activities 3)

ii. Dysfunctions of nursing homes—Analysts refer to nursing homes as "houses of death" or "human junkyards," and most elderly people decline physically and mentally after being admitted. Dysfunctions include neglect, chemical restraints, and abuse ranging from psychological to physical abuse of patients.

iii. Overcoming the Dysfunctions—Although dysfunction in nursing homes do exist, if adequate finances are made available staff can be well-trained and accommodations can be both well-maintained and comfortable.

d. Functionalism and Social Problems: A Summary

i. Functionalists assume society is like a well-oiled, self-adjusting machine. Therefore, when society undergoes change, social problem may arise when some parts do not adjust to those changes and are not functioning properly. (See Long Assignments 2)

III. **Conflict Theory and Social Problems**

a. Introducing Conflict Theory

i. When society's parts are competing with one another for limited resources, it views social problems as natural and inevitable outcomes of social struggle. This theory emphasizes domination by one group over another.

b. The Development of Conflict Theory

i. Karl Marx: Capitalism and conflict—Marx concluded that capitalism marked the beginning of a small group of people (owners) who gained control over the means of production for profit. They exploited employees by paying starvation wages, in miserable conditions, and controlled politicians, too. Marx believed that the workers would overthrow their oppressors and establish a classless society.

ii. Georg Simmel: Subordinates and superordinates—Simmel compared the relationships of superordinates and subordinates. The main concern of superordinates, who occupy higher positions than subordinates, is protecting their positions of privilege by forming relationships based on exchange. Also argued that conflict was beneficial to pull members of groups together to confront an external threat, such as in times of war.

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iii. Lewis Coser: Conflict in social networks—Coser analyzed why conflict often developed among people who had close relationships with one another. Mainly due to expectations about relative power, responsibilities, and rewards, as common in marital relationships.

c. Applying Conflict Theory to Social Problems
   i. Social conflict and Social Security—How industrialization transformed the elderly from a productive and respected group to a deprived and humiliated group. Examines how two-thirds of Americans over 65 could not support themselves when they were replaced by machines and younger workers. President Franklin Roosevelt and Congress passed Social Security and payments began in 1942 to the elderly.

d. Conflict Theory and Social Problems: A Summary
   i. Who experiences the problem? — From the conflict perspective, one social problem comes from the trouble experienced by people who are exploited by the powerful. The second is the trouble experienced by the powerful when the exploited resist or rebel.
   ii. Conflict and social problems—At the root of each social problem lies competition over the distribution of power and privilege and groups who will compete for them.

IV. **Introducing Feminist Theory**

a. Examines male–female relationships from the perspective of the powerful oppressing the powerless, and the reactions to that oppression. Places an emphasis on patriarchy, in which men dominate women by maintaining and creating boundaries and obstacles to prevent them from gaining or exercising power. (See Short Assignments 1)

b. The Development of Feminist Theory
   i. In the 1970s, this term emphasized the oppression of women and the need for fundamental change. By the 1980s, feminist theorists split into several branches with their own applications.
      a. Radical feminism—Main focus is to dismantle society in order to get rid of patriarchy. This type attracts much negative publicity and many people assume this is what feminism is.
      b. Liberal feminism—Central argument is that all people are created equal and deserve access to equal rights. Main goals are to change institutions that socialize men and women with oppressive ideologies.
      c. Socialist feminism—Stresses that there is a link between capitalism and the oppression of women. Women's work in the home is unpaid labor, therefore not respected.
      d. Cultural feminism—Argues that we need to appreciate biological differences between men and women. If women ruled the world, oppression and capitalism would not exist and it would be a better place.
      e. Ecofeminism—Stresses that patriarchy is oppressive not only for women but also for the environment. They point out that men want to dominate not only women but also nature. Therefore women need to free themselves from their dominance and protect the

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natural environment.

c. Applying Feminist Theory to Social Problems: Focusing on Gender

i. Focuses on the sexual division of labor, when men and women are sorted into different types of work. Caring for the elderly places the burden on daughters, whose unpaid work is not as valued as her husband's paid wages. As the increasing numbers of frail elderly need to be cared for, it's not clear that daughters will have the money or time to do so.

V. **Symbolic Interactionism and Social Problems**

a. The Significance of Symbols in Social Life

i. The essence of this theory is that we see the world through symbols, to which we attach meaning and use to communicate with one another. Symbols can also be ways that we classify people according to our culture.

b. When Symbols Change, Perceptions Change

i. In earlier periods of the United States, "old" summoned positive images associated with wisdom and ability, mainly because most people were actively involved in work and they died young. As work became "deskilled," reaching old age suggested uselessness rather than usefulness. Symbols change and so does what we consider to be social problems. Therefore with more people reaching old age, social action will be necessary to solve their problems. (See Classroom Activities 1) (See Long Assignments 1) (See Lecture Starters 1)

c. Personal Problems and Social Problems

i. The central aspect of symbolic interactionism and social problems is that because symbols change, the matters considered to be social problems also change.

d. The Development of Symbolic Interactionism

i. Although we use symbols to think about other people or objects, they are also used to symbolize our own self. Therefore, symbols are central to our lives and relationships.

1. Mead and taking the role of the other—Mead concluded that our self-concept evolves during childhood through the use of symbols. We gradually learn to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and to anticipate how that person feels, thinks, and will act. (See Discussion Questions 2)

2. Cooley and the looking-glass self—People come to view themselves as they think others perceive them. Our self has three elements:

a. How we imagine we appear to others.

b. How we think others feel about what they perceive.

c. How we feel about this reflected image.

3. Berger and Luckmann and the social construction of reality—The simple idea is that things happen to a person, and when they do, you have to figure out what it means.

a. Applying the social construction of reality: When does old age begin? —Old age is rooted more in social experiences than in biology. Therefore, the 65th birthday has become a standard marker of old age in America. (See Lecture Starters 2)

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b. Applying the social construction of reality: What does suicide mean? —Not all cultures have the same symbols, so the social construction of reality changes from culture to culture. Suicide by a Japanese military officer is a symbol of honor and duty, but in America, symbols include the responsibility of friends and family in preventing suicide. Both these examples are cultural attempts to use symbols to make sense out of life.

e. Applying Symbolic Interactionism to Social Problems
   i. The social construction of social problems—The status of the elderly depends on how they are viewed or labeled. The fact that there are old people in our society does not mean there is a social problem. Although their status has dropped sharply since the Industrial Revolution, few of the elderly are poor and their status is improving.

f. Symbolic Interactionism and Social Problems: A Summary
   i. Symbolic interactionists stress that people place the label of social problems on some objective condition of society. It's important to understand how those conditions are turned into social problems and what the problem means to the people involved in it.

VI. **The Future of the Problem: The Pendulum Swings**

a. Changing Objective Conditions and Subjective Concerns—Economic growth and the expansion of state and federal programs have reduced the poverty rate of the aged, which is now lower than the overall poverty rate of the United States. However, the costs of Medicare and Medicaid have soared to $725 billion, 925 times larger than the amount paid in 1950.

b. The Emerging Struggle—The rapid increase of the elderly means that the costs of Social Security and health care will increase faster than the current rate. To protect their gains, older Americans have organized powerful lobby groups such as the AARP and the Gray Panthers. The number of people collecting Social Security benefits is growing faster than the number of people working. A day of reckoning between generations can't be far off. (See Discussion Questions 4)

D. LECTURE SUGGESTIONS

i. **Lecture Starters:**

1. To get students prepared to understand issues relating to aging, ask them to describe some common stereotypes related to the elderly. Ask if they are aware of any social problems that might impact the elderly. Then ask students to decide which theoretical approaches might be useful to study those specific problems. (L.O.2.4) (See Chapter Outline IV.b.i)
2. An instructor can gather photos of celebrities (George Clooney versus Meryl Streep) in mainstream media and show it to students on a PowerPoint slide presentation. It will visually connect the issue of ageism in the media. Provide examples of aging in Hollywood, how it affects men and women differently, and the types of roles they may be offered to play. (L.O.2.4) (See Chapter Outline IV.d. iii.a)
3. Another example is to use a short sitcom video from the "Everybody Loves Raymond" TV show, which is available for free online. Ask students to describe all the stereotypes shown in that video and the long-term impact it may have on

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television viewers in how they view the roles of the elderly in society. Have students discuss what functions the elderly could play today in society, such as in schools, hospitals, communities, and workplaces. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.b.iii)

ii. **Classroom Activities:**

1. For the average college student, the definition of an "old" person lies within the range of others' definitions of "middle-aged." The middle-aged include nontraditional students who have entered colleges and universities in increasing numbers. For this project, students could talk with any nontraditional students that may be in the class or other nontraditional students in order to understand their experiences of higher education, the factors that influenced their decisions to return to school, descriptions of their typical days, and how they fit classes and study into their personal schedules. They can also address how they feel about interactions with students in different age categories. By "taking the role of the other" (symbolic interactionism), students can analyze how their perceptions or labels influence their behavior toward nontraditional students. Have students share their results with their classmates. (L.O.2.4) (See Chapter Outline IV.b.i)

2. Invite one retired professional from any field to talk with your students about his or her career, retirement, and the aging process. The speaker can also discuss with students stereotypes and misconceptions about aging and older adults. The speaker can share the positives and negatives of aging, as well as lessons he or she has learned throughout life. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.b.ii)

3. Have students in groups make a list of issues related to nursing homes from various lenses, such as employees, patients, and family members. What might be the challenges that are faced by employees and patients who work or live in the homes? What qualifications would an employee need to work in nursing homes, and what types of jobs are available? Are there any issues of access to nursing homes for women and/or the poor? Who in the family decides when an aging parent needs to go to a nursing home? Do people decide against it, and what are the long-term challenges of having an elderly parent in their home? Students should have a pretty good start at analyzing issues and problems around the use of nursing homes in the United States. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.c.i)

iii. **Discussion Questions:**

1. It is valuable for students to think about how the theoretical perspectives can be applied to socially problematic issues. Have students examine the issue of Social Security in the United States and explain how the three theoretical perspectives can be applied to understand the issue. Students can discuss which perspective they agree with most and reasons for their views. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.a.i)

2. In the section on symbolic interactionism, examples are given of the negative connotations found in American society for the word *old*. Ask students to make a list of adjectives that describe the word "old." Discuss the symbolic interactionist assumption of the ways in which these definitions communicate our views of the world. Further discussion can include students' perceptions of the age at which they consider someone old, their physical descriptions of old people, and the activities they think old people are capable of accomplishing, such as working, practicing physical fitness, dating, or sexual

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activity. The discussion can help your students understand the gap between commonly held perceptions and the reality of people categorized as "old," as well as approach issues facing the elderly, such as HIV infections for people over 50. (L.O.2.4) (See Chapter Outline IV.d.i.1)

3. Ask your students to think about how our society views and treats older people compared to other societies and countries. Have a discussion about students' reactions to the story of the Tiwi tribe at the beginning of the chapter. Also, have them discuss the rapidly aging population in Japan and the implications it has for that country. Compare and contrast the United States and Japan and how each country handles inequalities or needs for the elderly population. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.b.i)

4. The text's discussion of conflict theory helps students to understand how social problems are experienced by the exploited when the powerful push them around. While the elderly in America have gained power through organized efforts like the Gray Panthers, they are still likely to be regarded in negative ways. Discuss if the perception of the elderly will change in this country as the baby boom population grows and gains power. If so, have students address the conflicts this will produce in the next 10 to 20 years between older adults and young people. (L.O.2.2) (See Chapter Outline V.b)

E. SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

Short Assignments:

1. Students can perform content analysis research by observing a specific television channel for about two hours. Keep track of the number of men and women shown in commercials, shows, news, and so on. Track those same men and women, estimate their ages, the roles or characters they play in a specific show or as newscasters. In focusing on the news, did a specific newscaster cover "hard news" while others covered the lighter or "softer stories"? Did gender and age play a role in bringing legitimacy or seeing them as "experts" in covering those news stories? Student can summarize the number of older characters/newscasters/actors shown in a positive light and in a negative light. Students should also pay attention to symbols (clothing), position (lead actor versus supporting role), social class or race–ethnicity. (L.O.2.3) (See Chapter Outline III.e.i)

2. Students can identify one or two social problems that the elderly in the United States are facing today. Have them research specifics about the particular issue and why this is a social problem. Ask them to examine these issues from all three of the theoretical perspectives and to discuss which perspective they most agree with and why. Additionally, they should research and identify possible social solutions to the issues they have addressed. They should address how viable these solutions are and the barriers within society that may pose challenges for these possible solutions. It may be helpful to have them look within their own communities. (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.a.i)

Long Assignments:

1. In a project related to a family oral history, students could examine family photographs for as many generations as possible. Encourage them to make notations about visual images, such as style of clothing, hairstyles, and personal demeanor of those in the photographs; the latter permitting the student to access symbolic information about the people involved. Then, they can gain information about the birth and death dates of these people, including

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the cause of death if possible, and in so doing, draw some conclusions about longevity and medical/health care of a particular era. By contextualizing the aging process in this graphic fashion, students can better understand how long life, and in particular, long life after retirement, is recent phenomena in our society. Students could create a PowerPoint presentation and present their findings to the class. (L.O.2.4) (See Chapter Outline IV.b.i)

2. Have your students conduct an oral interview with an adult over the age of 60. A grandparent would be the ideal choice due to the already established close relationship. If a student does not have a grandparent, a person in a retirement home or perhaps a professor emeritus could be interviewed. This project can be conducted as an independent interview, or the entire class could agree on an interview format for everyone to follow. In either case, it is important that students follow the same general format in their interviews. The following interview guide could be provided: (L.O.2.1) (See Chapter Outline II.d.i)

a. The background of the interviewees, including their date and place of birth, parents' occupations, number of siblings, where they grew up, and their childhood memories.
b. The interviewee's educational experiences, including schools they attended, favorite subjects, social activities, and memorable experiences and teachers.
c. Descriptions of the person's teen years and early adulthood, including friendships and dating experiences.
d. The interviewee's employment history and experiences.
e. The influence of historical events on the person's life. Various strategies could be used for wrapping up the interview, such as asking the person to think of the most joyful and saddest times of his/her life as well as life lessons he/she has learned.
f. Students should write a summary of the interview, describe the insights gained into the elderly person's life, and outline what he/she learned about the person's experiences during significant historical events.

F. ANNOTATED SUGGESTED FILMS/TV SHOWS

Elder Abuse: America's Growing Crime, 16 min. (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1999). It has been estimated that 1.5 million elderly Americans suffer neglect, mistreatment, and even financial exploitation at the hands of their own families. In this program, ABC News correspondents probe the issues surrounding elder abuse.

Holding Back the Years? The Race to Slow the Aging Process, 54 min. (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2006). This program airs conflicting viewpoints of biologists, nutritionists, and geriatric experts as it presents efforts being made to dramatically slow the process of aging. Factors impacting the rate of aging and bodily changes associated with aging are analyzed, and insights into the telomere hypothesis, the oxidative stress hypothesis, and hormone depletion associated with aging are provided. Research into telomere elongation is discussed, and two controversial therapies—calorie restriction and hormone replacement—are debated. A visit to a documented longevity village in Japan, home to 112-year-old Yoko Minagawa, is included as well.

Tuesdays with Morrie, 89 min. (DVD, 1999). This film is based on Mitch Albom's nonfiction best seller. This is the story of the reconnection of Morrie, a former sociology professor who is

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dying and has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, and his former student, Mitch Albom. Morrie gets the opportunity to mentor Mitch about the meaning of life.

Adapting to Change (PBS, 2009). Change must be faced one way or the other—but how realistic is it to expect seniors to simply go with the flow? This program studies the ways in which aging and adaptation can be synonymous, or at least related, rather than being mutually exclusive. Using music as a cultural lens, the panelists discuss differences between nostalgia, which can be corrosive if it distorts one's view of the past, and rich memories that ground a person emotionally. Guests describe various ways in which they have maintained awareness of and involvement in the wider culture, or, in some cases, in which they have stopped keeping track of social changes.

The Bucket List, 96 min. (DVD). In this film, two terminally ill men escape a cancer ward and head off on a road trip to do all the things they wanted to do before they died, according to their bucket lists. In the process, both of them heal each other, become unlikely friends, and ultimately find joy in life.

G. ANNOTATED SUGGESTED BOOK/JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. *Thematic Analysis of Literature for Adult Children of Aging Parents*, by C. Kuba, *The Gerontologist* (Oct. 5, 2002, p.244). The scholarly literature revealed themes concerning the myth that Americans abandon their elderly, and themes about policy change. The popular literature dealt with positive benefits for some groups and with preventative tasks that eased the caregiving burden. The focus group discussion included caregiving by men, isolation, and lack of help from their siblings or health care professionals, and questions about obtaining information.

2. *The Study of Global Aging: A Smart Move*, by Alison Hood, *Generations* (Spring 2013, Vol. 37, Issue 1, p.4–5). This article is concerned with the impact of global aging and the challenges it presents to developed and developing countries. It also profiles the issue's guest editors, Frank J. Whittington and Suzanne R. Kunkel.

3. *What Can Other Countries Teach Us About Retirement?*, by Tay K. McNamara and John B. Williamson, *Generations* (Spring 2013, Vol. 37, Issue 1, p.33–38). This article focuses on differences in cultural expectations related to work and retirement in many countries across the globe and discusses differences in retirement ages seen in many countries. It also presents a discussion of the impact efforts to persuade older workers to remain in the workforce longer may have on developing and developed countries. The authors offer opinions on lessons the United States can learn about retirement from other countries.

4. *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development*, by George E. Vaillant (Jan. 1, 2003). This groundbreaking sociological analysis is based on three research projects that followed over 800 people from their adolescence through old age. Vaillant, a psychiatrist and professor at the Harvard Medical School, brings a nuanced point of view and an acceptance of the project's limitations. He suggests that successful physical and emotional aging is most dependent on a lack of tobacco and alcohol abuse by subjects, an adaptive coping style, maintaining healthy weight with some exercise, a sustained loving (in most cases, marital) relationship, and years of education. This is good news since factors that cannot be altered, such as ancestral longevity, parental characteristics, and childhood

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temperament, were among those ruled out as predictors.

5. *All in the Family: A Practical Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living*, by Sharon Graham Niederhaus and John L. Graham (March 8, 2013). As the nation reels from the impact of the Great Recession, many families are finding new ways to live together, including creating multigenerational households to save money and consolidate resources. Indeed, as the authors point out, the concept of nuclear family living is an aberration in our history that stemmed from post–World War II prosperity, mobility, and the associated baby boom. However, the threatened failure of American Social Security and health care systems is forcing us all to rethink how we live and care for one another. This book covers the financial and emotional benefits of living together, proximity and privacy, designing and remodeling your home to accommodate adult children or elderly parents, overcoming cultural stigmas about interdependent living, financial and legal planning, and making cohabitation agreements.

H. ANNOTATED SUGGESTED WEB SITES

http://www.marketwatch.com/story/retirement-in-america-is-endangered-2012-01-26
Retirement issues and addressing how to fix Social Security.

http://www.marketwatch.com/story/retire-here-not-there-georgia-2013-04-08?link=MW_retirement_popular
Retire here, not there: Information about the best places to retire in the United States and why.

http://www.bcm.edu/hcoa/?PMID=13596
This site looks at the connection between psychological and social aging.

http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/exercise-physical-activity-your-everyday-guide-national-institute-aging-1
The National Institute of Aging offers a free guide to exercise and activities.

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