

Sociology 550 Spring 2012 Sociology of Social Problems

Jen Dunn, Faner 3396--Office Hours: W 9-11 and 2-4:30, Th. 11-12:30 and by appt., 453-7614, jldunn@siu.edu

Course Description:

This seminar will explore issues in social constructionist social problems theory. Rather than focusing on the *conditions* we ordinarily think of as social problems, we will examine how various actors come to *define* conditions as problematic, the claims-making and other strategies that take place in these definitional processes, and some outcomes of these processes for specific cases. How is it that a social phenomenon comes to be seen as a social issue? How do people decide what is or is not a social problem, and how do they organize to get others to agree? What is at stake in these processes? We will begin with an introduction to constructionist theory and some debates regarding its utility. We will then examine stages and components of social problems construction. The goals of this course are to enable students to critically assess relevant theory, methods, and analyses in general terms, evaluate how well empirical exemplars make use of the approach, and draw upon it for their own research agendas.

Texts:

- Loseke, Donileen R. 2003. *Thinking about Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives (Second Edition)*. New York: Adeline De Gruyter.
- Gusfield, Joseph R. 1996. *Contested Meanings: The Construction of Alcohol Problems*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Berns, Nancy. 2011. *Closure: The Rush to End Grief and What it Costs Us*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Potter, Gary and Victor Kappeler. 2006. *Constructing Crime: Perspective on Making News and Social Problems (2nd ed.)*. Long Grove IL: Waveland Press Inc.
- Jenness, Valerie and Ryken Grattet. 2004. *Making Hate a Crime: From Social Movement to Law Enforcement*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Berger, Ronald J. 2002. *Fathoming the Holocaust: A Social Problems Approach*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter

- Readings available through JSTOR and other full-text sources and on ER (electronic course reserve) in Morris Library. If not otherwise noted, look in JSTOR.

Seminar Requirements And Grading For Sociology 550

1. Regular attendance and active participation in discussion.
2. Completion of all readings on schedule.
3. Serving as discussion leader(s) as assigned. NOTE: students will turn in a **brief** précis (1-2 paragraphs MAXIMUM) for each of the readings or book chapters they will be presenting (and send everyone an electronic copy). I will provide guidelines.
4. Oral presentation of seminar paper. These will be organized as sessions, exactly like those one finds at our annual professional meetings (each presenter will have 15-20 minutes; I will provide guidelines).
5. Seminar paper (due by 3:00 April 29. I will provide guidelines).

SEMINAR PAPER

The paper (of **potential** journal quality and length--20-25 pages) may be one of two types: {1} an analysis of empirical material (if you are currently engaged in research which is yielding data suitable for constructionist analysis (in this case, claims about a social problem) or {2} an historical analysis of the emergence of a social problem, based on a literature review BEYOND what we read in the seminar.

NOTE: you must meet with me prior to the third class meeting (February 2nd) to discuss your proposed topic. At this time, you will be required to provide me with a one-page (maximum) prospectus outlining your topic.

Week 1 (January 19): INTRODUCTION AND TECHNICAL MATTERS

Week 2 (January 26): THE CONSTRUCTIONIST STANCE

Loseke, Donileen R. 2003. *Thinking about Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives* (Second Edition) (all except pp. 183-202, the Appendix). New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Week 3 (February 2): CLASSICAL STATEMENTS

Fuller, R. and R. Myers. (1941). "Some Aspects of a Theory of Social Problems." *American Sociological Review* 6:24-32.

Blumer, H. (1971). "Social Problems as Collective Behavior." *Social Problems* 18:298-306.

Kitsuse, J. and M. Spector. (1973). "Toward a Sociology of Social Problems." *Social Problems* 20:407-49.

Pfohl, S. (1977). "The 'Discovery' of Child Abuse." *Social Problems* 24:310-23.

Best, J. (1995). "Historical Development and Defining Issues of Constructionist Inquiry." Pp. 41-63 in J. Holstein and J. Gubrium (eds.), *Handbook of Constructionist Research*. New York: The Guilford Press. (ER)

Recommended:

Berger, P. and T. Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

Spector, Malcolm and John I. Kitsuse. 2001 (1977). *Constructing Social Problems*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

Best, J. 1989, 1995. *Images of Issues*, 1st and 2nd editions. (see below)

Week 4 (February 9): CONSTRUCTIONISM'S CRITICS AND CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Loseke, D. (2003). Appendix: Social Constructionist Theories and Issues. Pp. 183-202 in D. Loseke, *Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives*. (2nd edition). New York: Aldine.

Woolgar, S. and D. Pawluch. (1985). "Ontological Gerrymandering." *Social Problems* 32:214-27.

Ibarra, P. and J. Kitsuse. (2003). "Claims-making Discourse and Vernacular Resources." Pp. 17-50 in J. Holstein and G. Miller (eds), *Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems*. New York: Aldine. (ER)

Best, J. (2003). "But Seriously Folks: The Limitations of the Strict Constructionist Interpretation of Social Problems." Pp. 109-127 in G. Miller and J. Holstein (eds.), *Constructionist Controversies: Issues in Social Problems Theory*. New York: Aldine.(ER)

Heiner, Robert. 2005. *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism*. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press. Chapter 1, pp. 1-19.

Recommended:

Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems (see above).

Constructionist Controversies: Issues in Social Problems Theory (see above).

Week 5 (February 16): CLAIMS AS RHETORIC

- Best, J. (1987). "Rhetoric in Claims-Making: Constructing the Missing Children Problem." Social Problems 34:101-121.
- Williams, R. (1995). "Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources." Social Problems 42:124-44.
- Best, J. (1999). "Random Violence". Pp. 1-27 in J. Best, Random Violence: How We Talk About New Crimes and New Victims. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (ER)
- Loseke, D. (2009). "EXAMINING EMOTION AS DISCOURSE: Emotion Codes and Presidential Speeches Justifying War." The Sociological Quarterly 50: 497–524.
- Dunn, J. (2004). "The Politics of Empathy: Social Movements and Victim Repertoires." Sociological Focus 37(3):235-250.
- Del Rosso, J. "The Textual Mediation of Denial: Congress, Abu Ghraib, and the Construction of an Isolated Incident." Social Problems Vol. 58, No. 2 (May 2011), pp. 165-188.

Week 6: (February 23): MEDICAL AND SCIENTIFIC RHETORIC

- Gusfield, Joseph R. 1996. *Contested Meanings: The Construction of Alcohol Problems*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Conrad, P. (1992). "Medicalization and Social Control." Annual Review of Sociology 18:209-32.
- Schneider, J. 1978. "Deviant Drinking as Disease: Alcoholism as a Social Accomplishment." Social Problems 25 (4): 361-372.

Week 7: (March 1): EMOTIONS AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS CONSTRUCTION

- Berns, Nancy. (2011). *Closure: The Rush to End Grief and What it Costs Us*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

ANY ONE OF THE BELOW:

- Johnson, J. (1989). "Horror Stories and the Construction of Child Abuse." Pp. 5-20 in J. Best (ed.), Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (ER)
- Jasper, J. and J. Poulsen. (1995). "Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests." Social Problems 42:493-512.
- Goodwin, Jeff, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta. 2001. "Why Emotions Matter." Pp. 1-24 in Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements, edited by Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (ER)
- Loseke, D. (2000). "Ethos, Pathos, and Social Change: Reflections on Formula Narratives." Pp. 41-54 in J. Holstein and G. Miller (eds.), Perspectives on Social Problems (Vol. 12). Stamford, CT: JAI Press. (ER)

Week 8: (March 8): CLAIMSMAKERS/CLAIMS AND MASS MEDIA I

- Best, J. (1990). Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern About Child-Victims (Chapters 5-6). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (ER)
- Gamson, W., D. Croteau, W. Hoynes, and T. Sasson. (1992). "Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality." Annual Review of Sociology 373:93.
- Beckett, K. (1996). "Culture and the Politics of Signification: The Case of Child Sexual Abuse." Social Problems 43:57-76.
- Nancy Berns. 1999. "My Problem and How I Solved It": Domestic Violence in Women's Magazines." The Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 85-108.
- Dunn, J. (forthcoming). "'Choosing Life': Abortion, Adoption, and the Problem of Regret." Pp. 278-311 in Joel Best and Scott R. Harris, (eds.), *New Images, New Issues: Construction Social Problems in a New Century*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishing.

Week 9: (March 22): CLAIMS AND MASS MEDIA II

Potter, Gary and Victor Kappeler. 2006. *Constructing Crime: Perspective on Making News and Social Problems* (2nd ed.). Long Grove IL: Waveland Press Inc.

Week 10: (March 29): CLAIMS IN THE PUBLIC POLICY ARENA

Jeness, Valerie and Ryken Grattet. 2004. *Making Hate a Crime: From Social Movement to Law Enforcement*. New York: Sage Publications.

Week 11: (April 5): SOCIAL PROBLEMS WORK

Sudnow, D. 1965. "Normal Crimes: Sociological Features of the Penal Code in a Public Defender Office." *Social Problems* 12(3):

Holstein, J. and G. Miller. 1990. "Rethinking Victimization: An Interactional Approach to Victimology." *Symbolic Interaction* 13(1):103-22.

Holstein, J. and G. Miller. (1997). "Introduction: Social Problems as Work." Pp. ix-xxi in G. Miller and J. Holstein (eds), *Social Problems in Everyday Life: Studies of Social Problems Work*. Greenwich CT: JAI Press. (ER)

Emerson, R. (1997). "Constructing Serious Violence and its Victims: Processing a Domestic Violence Restraining Order." Pp. 191-215 in G. Miller and J. Holstein (eds), *Social Problems in Everyday Life: Studies of Social Problems Work*. Greenwich CT: JAI Press. (ER)

Dunn, J. (2000). "Innocence Lost: Accomplishing Victimization in Intimate Stalking Cases." *Symbolic Interaction* 24:285-313. (Caliber)

Loseke, D. (2001). Lived Realities and Formula Stories of 'Battered Women.' Pp. 107-126 in J. Gubrium and J. Holstein (eds), *Institutional Selves: Troubled Identities in a Postmodern World*. New York: Oxford University Press. (ER)

Week 12: (April 12): SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT I

Downs, A. (1972). "Up and Down with Ecology: The 'Issue Attention Cycle'." *Public Interest* 28:38-50.

Hilgartner, S. and C. Bosk. (1988). "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *American Journal of Sociology* 94:53-78.

Dunn, J. (2010). *Judging Victims: Why We Stigmatize Survivors and How They Reclaim Respect*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications. Selected chapters. (ER)

Week 13: (April 19): SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT II

Berger, Ronald J. 2002. *Fathoming the Holocaust: A Social Problems Approach*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter

Week 14: (April 26) SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Davis, P. (1994). "The Changing Meanings of Spanking." Pp. 133-154 in J. Best (ed), *Troubling Children: Studies of Children and Social Problems*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (ER)

Lowney, Kathleen S. and Joel Best. 1995. "Stalking Strangers and Lovers: Changing Media Typifications of a New Crime Problem." Pp. 33-57 in *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems*, edited by Joel Best. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. (ER)

ARTICLES SELECTED BY STUDENTS THAT ILLUSTRATE RELEVANT CONCEPTS

Week 15: (May 3) ORAL PRESENTATIONS and DUE DATE for SEMINAR PAPER

Emergency Procedures. Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and health environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, available on BERT's website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Safety's website www.dps.siu.edu (disaster drop down), and in Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.