

# P R E F A C E

“I am so frustrated I could scream,” remarked a student in a social problems course. It was her first exposure to many of the problems discussed in this book. *Social Problems and the Quality of Life* is based on the assumption that many people do not feel strongly about social problems because they know too little about them. When this student began to learn about the perplexing problems that afflict our society, she began to have intense feelings toward them for the first time in her life.

Part of her frustration lay in the fact that she felt so helpless with respect to social problems. Seeing the multiple and complex factors that combine to cause and perpetuate social problems, she felt that the problems could only become progressively worse. It is interesting to note, therefore, that some problems are less serious now than they were when the previous editions of this book were written. Among other things, poverty among the aged has declined, some crime rates have dropped, divorce rates seem to be leveling off, the Cold War has ended, as has the accompanying arms race between the super powers, and air- and water-pollution levels have decreased significantly.

Other problems, however, remain just as serious; some have become even worse. For example: Health problems such as AIDs afflict greater numbers of people; racial minorities have lost some of the gains made in previous years; poverty is greater among some groups; increasing numbers of single parents mean increasing problems for children of various kinds; equitable opportunities remain elusive for homosexuals; and the threats posed by toxic wastes are more serious than previously realized. These advances and setbacks are all discussed in the text.

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## Changes in the Eighth Edition

A social problem is a product of social definition—that is, something *becomes* a problem, and becomes a more or less serious problem as it is so defined by the members of a society. People’s definitions of problems and the problems themselves continually change. Each new edition of a social problems text, therefore, must strive to capture the current status of ever-changing phenomena.

To achieve that goal, we have significantly updated the material in this edition, using both empirical studies and government data. It is increasingly difficult to update some data, because government record-keeping and reporting have diminished. Nevertheless, there are sufficient new data and new studies each year with which to revise a text. This edition has hundreds of new references, as well as the most recent data available from government and other sources.

There are changing concerns among the public as well as changing emphases among researchers. To reflect current interests and concerns more adequately, we have made significant revisions in the organization and content of this edition. Among the major revisions, we have

Added a new chapter on government and politics as a social problem.

Expanded material on environmental problems into a full chapter.

Deleted the separate chapter on “The Aged”; there is now a combined chapter entitled “Population, Aging, and Urban Problems” that expands material on population problems and includes a new section on urban problems.

Consolidated the chapters on sexual variance and homosexuality/homophobia.

Provided new material on such current issues as private prisons, homelessness, workfare, the impact of the “beauty myth” on women, mass media stereotypes, the effects of the global economy, educational vouchers, family violence, and the quality of health care in HMOs.

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## Organization

This book is organized around the theme of the quality of life. People everywhere strive to maximize the quality of their lives and must deal with the social problems that impede their pursuit of that goal. As we point out in Chapter 1, a social problem is, by definition, a condition or pattern of behavior that is incompatible with people’s desired quality of life.

In order to deal with the social problems that affect our quality of life, we must address a set of questions.

What is a social problem?

How can we gain a sociological understanding of social problems?

What kinds of thinking should we engage in and what kinds should we avoid in our attempt to understand social problems?

What is the meaning of particular social problems for the quality of life?

What causes the social problems, and what can be done to resolve them or to lessen their severity?

Part 1, “Foundations,” lays the foundation by showing how such questions can be approached. In Chapter 1 we distinguish between personal and social problems, discuss various theoretical approaches, and make explicit the theoretical approach used in this text.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to critical thinking skills that are useful in examining some common, but misleading, ways of thinking about social problems. It is important to see how fallacious thinking clouds our understanding. Chapter 2 also describes the various ways in which we can obtain valid knowledge about social problems through research.

The remainder of the book deals with the social problems that most acutely influence our lives. The particular problems we discuss are those most visible or most likely to be a part of our knowledge or experience. There is no relationship between the order in which they are treated and either their seriousness or the intensity of concern that they generate. The headings under which the problems are grouped are useful categories rather than priority labels. Part 2 examines “Problems of Behavioral Variance”; Part 3, “Problems of Inequality”; Part 4, “Problems of Social Institutions”; and Part 5, “Global Social Problems.”

Each problem is discussed in relation to the various social features that cause and help to perpetuate it. Each problem is also examined in terms of its impact on the quality of the lives of those affected indirectly as well as directly.

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## Interrelationship of Problems

We should observe that the various problems, while treated separately, are often interrelated. For example, health problems intersect with the problems of aging, the environment, poverty, drugs and alcohol, and race. Poverty intersects with the problems of race, crime, population, health, drug addiction, and aging. As we discuss the effects of various problems on the quality of life, keep in mind that some people are burdened with several social problems simultaneously.

While, by necessity, this book is organized around problems rather than the people who suffer from them, we must not lose sight of the individuals whose quality of life is reduced by multiple problems. They need more than understanding; they need help. In dealing with each problem, therefore, we give some attention to possible ways to resolve them.

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## Special Features

### Chapter Elements

A number of pedagogical elements serve to enhance the usefulness of this book and facilitate the student's mastery of the materials.

Each chapter begins with Learning Objectives and Focus Questions. The **Learning Objectives** help students identify the chapter's most important concepts, while the **Focus Questions** pique student's curiosity by raising important issues or by asking questions that they may not have thought about before. The narrative of each chapter opens with an **Introduction** to the material and ends with a **Summary** that provides a quick review. Important terms and phrases within the chapter are italicized; or, if they may be unfamiliar to students, set in boldface type. The latter are listed in a **Key Terms** section at the end of each chapter, and they also are defined in a **Glossary** at the end of the book.

Dealing with social problems is as important as knowing what causes them. Each chapter, therefore, contains a section called **What Is to Be Done?** in which there are suggestions for various ways by which to ameliorate each problem. We have found that most students are much like the one quoted at the beginning of this preface. They don't simply want to know about the problems: They also want to know what can be done to address them. They wonder, "Can you do anything more than wring your hands or bemoan the sorry state of affairs in the nation and the world?" The answer is a firm, "Yes." We do not claim that the suggestions given in the "What Is to Be Done?" sections will eliminate the problems. However, they will demonstrate that problems have solutions and that the solutions are always, to some extent, in our own hands.

**Study Questions** at the end of each chapter are designed to enable students to see how well they have followed the road map outlined at the beginning of the chapter. Also at the end of each chapter is a **For Further Reading** list that will be helpful to students who want to dig more deeply into a topic. Some of the suggested resources are drawn from the references that are cited throughout each chapter and listed alphabetically at the back of the book.

## Thematic Boxes

There are three categories of boxed material: Involvement boxes, Voice boxes, and Global Comparisons boxes.

**Involvement** boxes suggest projects that offer students firsthand involvement in the problems discussed in the chapter. They afford students the opportunity to take the initiative in their own learning. Some Involvement boxes suggest how students can conduct their own research into a problem. Others suggest how students can participate in some attempt at resolving a problem. The activities can be individual or group projects. If they are pursued as individual projects, the results can be combined by the instructor or by some of the students and presented to the class. We believe that these “Involvement” activities offer invaluable learning experiences, because they activate one of the most effective methods of education—self-education.

**Voices** boxes help personalize the various problems. They make each problem not just a set of facts, but a social reality that disrupts, troubles, and diminishes the quality of people’s lives in concrete, understandable ways.

**Global Comparisons** boxes allow students to understand how social problems affect other nations. For example, many Americans are concerned about the increasing numbers of single-parent families. Are such families increasing in other nations? Is something happening throughout the world that helps explain the phenomenon, or is this situation unique to the United States? Or take the problem of crime. Many Americans feel that we need to “get tough” and make more use of imprisonment to get criminals off the streets. Is this the best way to deal with the crime problem? As the Global Comparisons box in Chapter 5 points out, the German and Israeli approaches suggest that there are alternatives to imprisonment that might be both more effective and less expensive. In sum, Global Comparisons boxes add a dimension to our understanding of a problem by showing how it works out elsewhere in the world.

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## Supplementary Materials

As a full-service publisher of quality educational products, McGraw-Hill does much more than just sell textbooks. The company creates and publishes an extensive array of print, video, and digital supplements for students and instructors. This eighth edition of *Social Problems and the Quality of Life* is accompanied by a number of supplementary items.

### For the Student

#### ***Making the Grade CD-ROM***

A CD-ROM packaged free with the text, which includes chapter quizzes, an Internet guide, a study skills primer, and other resources to help students get the most out of each chapter.

#### ***Student’s Online Learning Center***

This is a web-based, interactive study guide featuring URLs relevant to each topic, chapter quizzes, overviews, learning objectives, key-term flashcards, and more for each chapter. Please visit at [www.mhhe.com/Lauer8](http://www.mhhe.com/Lauer8).

### ***PowerWeb***

Packaged free with the text, PowerWeb is a password-protected website developed by Dushkin/McGraw-Hill giving students:

Web links and articles.

Study tools—quizzing, review forms, time management tools, web research.

Interactive exercises.

Weekly updates with assessment.

Informative and timely world news.

Material on how to conduct web research.

Daily news feed of topic-specific news.

Access to the Northern Lights research engine.

## For the Instructor

### ***Instructor's Manual and Test Bank***

This combined instructor's manual and test bank is designed to help the instructor plan classroom and lecture presentations and design exams. For each chapter, the Instructor's Manual contains a chapter outline, learning objectives, key terms, section summaries, lecture/discussion topics, class activities, essay questions, and an annotated film/video guide. The Test Bank provides multiple-choice, true/false, and fill-in-the-blank questions for each chapter.

### ***Computerized Test Bank***

The Computerized Test Bank contains all of the test questions from the Instructor's Manual/Test Bank to assist professors in generating tests. It is available in both Windows (PC) and Macintosh formats.

### ***PowerPoint Slides***

A collection of tables and figures from the text allows instructors to add visual content to their classes and their websites.

### ***Instructor's Online Learning Center***

Password-protected, it contains a variety of resources, activities, and classroom tips. The Instructor's Manual/Test Bank, Powerpoint slides, and more can be accessed electronically on this site, [www.mhhe.com/lauer8](http://www.mhhe.com/lauer8).

### ***PageOut***

The Course Website Development Center is designed for the professor just beginning to explore web options, or for the professor needing to save time and simplify this process. In less than an hour, even a novice computer user can create a course website with a template provided by McGraw-Hill (no programming knowledge required). PageOut lets you offer your students instant access to your syllabus, lecture notes, and original material.

Students can even check grades on-line. And you can pull any of the McGraw-Hill content from the Lauer and Lauer OnLine Learning Center (OLC) into your website. PageOut also provides a discussion board where you and your students can exchange questions and post announcements, as well as an area for student to build personal web pages. To find out more about PageOut, ask your McGraw-Hill representative for details, or fill out the form at [www.mhhe.com/pageout](http://www.mhhe.com/pageout).

### ***PowerWeb***

See the description under “For the Student.” For further information, visit the PowerWeb site at <http://mhhe/NewMedia/dushkin/index.html#powerweb>.

### ***Videos***

A variety of videos from the films for the Humanities and Sciences series, as well as other sources, are available to adopters of this text.

### ***SocCity***

This is a veritable melting pot of sociobiology cybersources, information, and Internet activities for students and instructors alike. Just click on any of the four buttons on the left side of your screen at [www.mhhe.com/soscience/sociology](http://www.mhhe.com/soscience/sociology) and get started.

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