SOCIAL PATHOLOGY: SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND THE RISE OF PSYCHOTECHNOLOGY

Dale R Howard, Emporia State College, Kansas

PROBLEMS THEORY IMPASSE
Social problems theory is at an impasse due to its dependency: 1) on fixed and limited ways of viewing social problems; 2) on methods deemed near-perfect; 3) on the models and theories of giants in the field; 4) on public opinion setting the direction of research.

FIXED VIEWS
Delinquency research has concentrated mainly on the hard-science approach (Galliher, McCartney 1973), and mainstream sociologists tend to concentrate on the social pathology perspective. The maladjusted individual is responsible for his/her own shortcomings. In this there is a failure to consider total social structures or to move beyond a low level of abstraction, with a fragmentary and scattered focus on various milieux (Mills 1969 527). Existing arrangements of power, property and stratification are upheld by not being considered a part of the problem.

The "causes" of the problem are still seen as a failure of the individual to conform to normative standards of society. The "why" of these failures is answered by Mills' paste-pot eclectic psychology or by catch-alls of socialization failure, cultural deprivation, or negative self-concept.

Here we have an order perspective (Horton 1966) which means that social structure is made up of given and generally unquestioned means and ends, which underlay a vast number of theories and research projects in sociology in the United States (Merton 1938). Although liberal sociologists recognize that means are differentially distributed along class and racial lines, there is little questioning of the ends themselves. The ends remain given, if not realizable for all. Analysis of social problems in this functionalist perspective remains confined within the given, in a structure which the "good man" strives to sustain (Gouldner 1970 427). With this mode of analysis is that the means become ends. Social scientists only research superficial questions, and social problems thus become adjustment problems.

There lacks a critical spirit which would not only analyze historical forces which have produced the structure within which the "good" man operates, but would critically analyze both the ends, and the impact which these ends have on environment, well-being, and interpersonal relations.

Instead of implying that the individual who does not accept the normative means to society's ends is pathological, five critical questions should be vigorously analyzed. 1) Is human emancipation, well-being, and security enhanced in this society? 2) Is human growth, awareness and potential enhanced? 3) Does this society produce men and women with a sense of purpose, meaning, and happiness? 4) Is work non-alienating? 5) Are families, living arrangements, and communities viable and supportive of meaningful social existence?

This approach implies a radically different epistemological assumption than the given of the order theorists. As present social problems theory and research stands, we are exposed to an endless series of descriptive, classificatory, common sense approaches to social problems, with a continuing commitment to the positivist method (Frankfurt Institute 1972 11)

DEPENDENCY ON 'PERFECT' METHODS
Part of the crisis in mainstream social science is too-close adherence to a few conventional methods to the exclusion of all others. In social problems research, this crisis is particularly acute in a state of theory which neither explains nor generates scientific answers to problematic phenomena.

By impasse I mean that stage in a movement away from a dependency state to one of independence, where new models, paradigms, and theories may be generated with a critical spirit of inquiry. The uncertainty and fear of cutting free from dependence on tradition suggests the Gestalt therapy of catastrophic expectation (Perls 1969 34). It is difficult to break through the impasse stage, and easy to cling to the dependency stage, with implicit security of acceptance, employment, and research support. But it may be even more dangerous to depend on existing mainstream models. Those who question the state of
social problems research have moved away from the dilemma of Kuhn's (1970 35) normal social science which shows little appetite for major conceptual or phenomenal novelties. Research on mainstream social science problems depends on the natural science model (Roszak 1969, 1973; Matson 1966; Bakan 1972). Major social science questions revolved on attaining social laws and interpreting the social world. Questions of the foundations and changes of this social world were dismissed as metaphysical; the critical spirit atrophied. Unobservable essences, inner states of being, and absolute truth are dismissed as "unscientific" (Frankfurt Institute 1972 3).

Comte’s positive philosophy stressed that the new science of sociology must avoid intervention in actual political movements, which must remain only objects of observation for it. As such it was appealing to those in power. Such a science could report, classify, dissect and observe forever with the ideological and financial largess of established regimes. Denial of the critical spirit would rationalize, and legitimize existing political, economic and social arrangements.

Thus, the dominant method sociological research is unscientific, even using the criteria of mainstream sociology of what is and what is not scientific. This dependence on existing established method makes for trivialization of social research, distrust of philosophy, rejection of a historical approach, neglect of social structure, and refusal to examine the underlying assumptions and social forces which lurk behind this so-called objective approach. Findings are not contaminated by other more critical approaches. Established methods often prescribe the subject matter, instead of being adapted to it. This produces “knowledge of domination, not knowledge of cultivation.” (Frankfurt Institute 1972 125)

MODELS ON 'GIANTS' OF THEORY

Texts dealing with juvenile delinquency and social problems are monotonously similar in setting forth the same theories and the same causes and the same solutions, with no variety of approach. The recognized giants of juvenile delinquency theory are Short, Shaw, Cloward and Ohlin, Nye, and Cohen, where hard data positivists are overrepresented, and others, such as conflict theorists are underrepresented (Galliher, McCartney 1973 81). These theorists tend to reduce causation to individual characteristics or those of narrow, specific milieus. These rather shortsighted solutions revolve around adjustment definitions, stressing control above all (Horton 1966 702). Alternative interpretations to delinquency and the rising crime rate rarely appear.

Crime rates among the oppressed may be only one movement in the process of liberation: a movement from horizontal to vertical aggression, as when blacks riot and rebel in North Africa and magistrates are confounded by astonishing crime waves (Fanon 1963 52).

DEPENDENCY ON PUBLIC OPINION

Reliance on public opinion greatly facilitates definition of social problems simply as social pathology. Social problems research has been based on expressions of small town and rural bias (Mills 1943). The focus of social problems research is largely determined by bureaucratic social science as a service to prevailing authorities, and in service of administrative liberalism of the welfare state (Mills 1959 129). Both value-free and democratic definitions of social problems take on a public opinion interpretation which is dubious for supposedly “neutral” social science, with a congeries of scattered categories difficult to relate to theory, or method or social significance. It focuses sociology on trivial, superficial or spurious topics (Manis 1974 305).

This is the critical point, especially when we consider the elaborate funding policies and all the strings attached. It seems clear that social scientists would echo society’s opinion makers in what they investigate, how they investigate, and solutions to the problem based on such investigation. The public is a democratic-sounding euphemism to manipulate content and direction of research.

CONCLUSION

A sociologists have failed to deliver their promises of solving problems of the 1960’s when serving the liberal establishment, and many social scientists became less confident as urban renewal, and the poverty issues addressed by the Office of Economic Opportunity collapsed. Instead of generating a new paradigm for mainstream sociology in response to these failures, the great “American resignation” prevailed, with a principal theme that many social problems are unsolvable because they are rooted in immutable
individual characteristics. Such resignation is
evidence of failure to transcend the estab-
lished mode of studying social problems. If social
pathology is to be blamed on the victim, we
can see how completely the giants have
internalized the four dependencies which we
have reviewed. The reaction is almost
perverse: "We can't be wrong. The problem
is with sick people." The response is to deal
with these social problems by techniques col-
lectively labeled psychotechnology, which
includes neurosurgery, drug therapy, and
behavior modification.

Many writers have noted the resurgence
of psychosurgical techniques, and the parallel of
this resurgence with rising crime rates,
violence, alienation, and radical social
movements (Restak 1973; Miller 1972; Breggin
1972). The movement to reinstate these
techniques, including implanting electrodes in
the brain, drugs to deaden or destroy brain
tissue, and laser beam treatments, began
when several scientists advocated brain
surgery for gheto rioters (Breggin 1972). And
a complete program of screening was advok-
dated to detect violence-prone people. Prime
candidates for psychosurgery include: 1) old
people; 2) women; 3) blacks; 4) those in simp-
ler occupational categories (Breggin 1972
3381). Other pacification programs are under
way in prisons, schools (control hyperactive
children), mental hospitals, homes for aged,
and drug and alcohol treatment programs.

The success rate of these programs is low,
and often, more problems are created, such
as intellectual deterioration or convulsive
seizures. However, for psychosurgeons, this
is interpreted as success.

If psychosurgery is an extreme example, it
illustrates the resurgence of the social
pathology assumptions. The medical model
is now moving from theory to application, and
deviants literally can be rooted out. Little con-
cern has been given to stratification, class,
property, and power arrangements. The rise
of psychosurgery is a two-pronged attack on
social problems: 1) social scientists can pro-
vide the theory framework for the social
pathology model, providing concepts which
veil existing patterns of oppression and
domination, and supporting the illusion that
existing social arrangements are immutable.
2) Technicians trained in the medical model,
and armed with trained incapacity to see alter-
natives, can state without reservation that
rioters, delinquents, and criminals are brain-
damaged and pathological. Such an arsenal
of psychotechnology, with drugs, electric
shock, surgery, and behavior modification
aimed at the "deviant" would have been a
dream come true for the the eugenistic.

The social pathology approach to social
problems has not been dead, but only sleeping
through the liberal period of the 1960's. With
the failure of proposed solutions to social
problems, an individual approach is reappearing,
forcibly to "adjust" the "unadjusted:'
Sociologists, depending on limited ways of
viewing social problems, and allowing a few
"giants" and "public opinion" to set the direc-
tion and focus of research, have contributed
to this trend.

REFERENCES

Bakan D 1972 Psychology can now kick the science
habit. Psychology Today 5 26-31
Breggin P 1972 Psychosurgery for the control of
violence. Congressional Record March 3380-3386
Fanon F 1963 The Wretched of Earth. NY. Grove
Frankfurt Institute of Social Research 1972 Aspects
of Sociology. Boston. Beacon
Gallilher J, J McCartney 1973 Influence of funding
agencies on juvenile delinquency research. Social
Problems 21 77-89
Gouldner A 1970 The Coming Crisis in Western
Horton J 1966 Order and conflict theories in
sociology. Amer J Social 68 701-713
Kuhn T 1970 The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.
Chicago U Press
Manis J 1974 Concept of social problems: vox populi
,sociological analysis. Social Problems 21 305-315
Doubledry Anchor
Merton R 1938 Social structure and anomie. Amer
Sociol Rev 3 672-682
Miller R 1972 Psychosurgery: childhood's end.
Clear Creek June 16-23
Mills C 1969 The professional ideology of social
pathologists. 525-552 I Horowitz ed Power, Politics,
Perls F 1969 Gestalt Therapy Verbatim. NY Bantam
Reich W Sex-Pol Essays, 1929-1934. NY Vintage
Restak R 1973 The promise and peril of
psychosurgery. Saturday Rev/ World Sep 54-58
Roszak T 1969 The Making of a Counter Culture.
New York. Doubleday Anchor
Rubington E, M Weinberg 1971 The Study of Social