The Sociology of Youth Behavior: Improving Health & Well-Being with Learning

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Sociology as positive science

- Sociology (& social science generally) has yet to develop a positive sense of itself as a contributor to social and individual progress.

- My perspective: because individual health is determined by social health, social reform is essential for improving individual health.

- This perspective presumes that:
  1. Life is preferable to death
  2. Health is preferable to sickness
Why is this perspective not accepted

- Our dominant paradigm suggests that individuals control their own fate by choosing health & longevity via health behaviors (smoking, weight control, exercise & so on)
- However, the evidence suggests this individualistic approach is more that just limited, it is specious
- Two types of evidence to support this proposition:
  - 1) leading causes of death among youth
  - 2) the relationship between social position & mortality risk
### Five leading causes of death according to age among persons 5-24 years of age: 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>5-9</th>
<th>10-14</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>20-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unintentional Injury</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>1,553</td>
<td>6,646</td>
<td>7,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malignant Neoplasms</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,398</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Congenital Anomalies</td>
<td></td>
<td>272</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>2,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Heart Disease</td>
<td>189</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deaths: Injuries, 2001

Highlights

• 157,078 deaths due to injuries—all ages
  (13,806 of these were 5-19 years of age)

• Unintentional injuries were the leading cause of death for children and adolescents 5-19 years of age

The five leading mechanisms of injury deaths for those 5-19:
  Motor vehicle traffic (48%)
  Firearm (21%)
  Suffocation (7%)
  Drowning (5%)
  Poisoning (5%)
Mortality from Vehicular Accidents, United States

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2004
Possible benefits of car based system

- Source of economic wealth (car sales, car insurance, car repair, etc.)
- Source of employment
- Facilitates low density urban system
Criticisms of car based system

- Cost in human life: in 2002, 42,815 Americans killed by cars, versus 728 killed on bicycles
- Health cost: car based urban system is associated with obesity & chronic disease (CU Professor Nancy Wells)
- Environmental cost: fossil fuel pollution is poisoning the oceans & air
- Expensive system: consumers spend high percent of income on cars, road taxes, etc; see Barry Jones (1995) *Sleepers Wake!*
- Growing population of 288 million Americans too dense for privately owned car system
- Automobile production employment is being automated and moved over seas
Location of motor vehicle production, 2003

China: 4.4
Japan: 10.3
U.S.: 12.3
Korea: 3.2

Source: International Labour Office, 2005
Percent change in motor vehicle production location, 1997-2003

Source: International Labour Office, 2005
Learning tool: video showing how corporations replaced urban trolleys with motor vehicles


- This video describes how “what seems natural” was planned & marketed by corporate America; there was no public debate about most desirable system.
Marx/Engels’ ruling class/ruling ideas

- Because the ruling class owns the means of material production, it also owns the means of mental production.
- Macro-micro link is crucial: most people adopt ideas or ideology of ruling class.
- Therefore, the American “love affair with the car” is understood as “ruling idea” in the sense of desiring and purchasing high profit goods such as motor vehicles.

Source: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm#b3
Local examples of car fatalities, 2005-06

- “Teen Killed in Route 79 Crash” September 22, 2005 DRYDEN - New York State troopers continued
- March 1, 2006; DRYDEN - A Groton woman has died, and a Groton man faces manslaughter charges Tuesday following an alleged drunken driving accident on North Road.
- March 1, 2006 ELMIRA — Elmira police say a man struck and killed by a car Monday night was 79-year-old James E. Collins of Rochester, the father of space shuttle Commander Eileen Collins.
Geoffrey Rose (1992) The strategy of preventive medicine

- Health interventions designed to ameliorate individuals are ineffective
- Mortality/morbidity incidence generally follows a bell curve
- The most effective interventions are designed to change the mean of the distribution, not the tail
- E.g., Japanese youth suicide prevention that takes a societal, not an individual, approach
- E.g., interventions that attenuate the overall level of insecurity by guaranteeing basic access to food, housing, education, & healthcare
- Ruling ideology in medicine: individual choice, not social reform, is the avenue for improving health
Learning proposals

- For the leading cause of death, show video “Taken for a Ride” and study evolution of transportation

- For the 2nd & 3rd causes homicide & suicide, I recommend two approaches
  1. A statistical approach that analyzes survey data collected by the Centers for Disease Control
  2. A text based approach using Luis Rodriguez’s book *Always Running*
Statistical approach to learning about health

- Youth Behavior Risk Survey that is conducted biannually by Centers for Disease Control
- Variables that stress individual behaviors as cause of disease
- Example: youth suicide attempts
What are social forces shaping Rodriguez’s “vida loca”? 

- Family background (father’s fall from middle class; mother’s indigenous status) 
- Immigration and language 
- Social status/class disadvantage 
- Los Angeles: police force, community power structure
How did Rodriguez survive “vida loca”?

- Accumulation of individual experience: confrontation with Chava, p. 243-6.
- Accumulation of social knowledge through collaboration and study with peers.