

Day 15: Social Construction

Daniel J. Mallinson

School of Public Affairs
Penn State Harrisburg
mallinson@psu.edu

PUBPL 304

Today's Objectives

- ① Mid-semester Feedback
- ② Identify how issues move from the systemic agenda to the decision agenda
- ③ Understand how social construction is so powerful in policymaking

Mid-semester Feedback

Keep

- Presentations clear
- Organization
- Group activities

Change

- Real life application
- Contemporary examples
- Less rushed
- Videos
- Rap more (lol)
- Capitol trip - let's ask!
- Clarity on assignment prompts (Canvas)

The Power of Social Construction

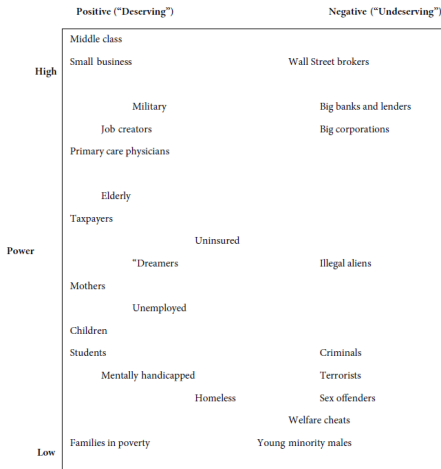
How do we as a society view these groups?

- Children
- Business owners
- Convicted criminals
- Immigrants

How do those views affect politics/policy?

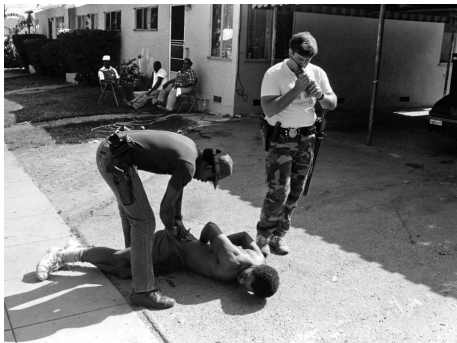
Social Construction of Target Groups

FIGURE 4.2 Social Construction and Power Typology



Distribution of benefits and burdens

Policy Design Differences



Crack (1980s)

Responding to the Heroin Epidemic



PREVENT People From Starting Heroin

Reduce prescription opioid painkiller abuse. Improve opioid painkiller prescribing practices and identify high-risk individuals early.



REDUCE Heroin Addiction

Ensure access to Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). Treat people addicted to heroin or prescription opioid painkillers with MAT which combines the use of medications (methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone) with counseling and behavioral therapies.



REVERSE Heroin Overdose

Expand the use of naloxone. Use naloxone, a life-saving drug that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose when administered in time.

SOURCE: CDC Waikige, July 2015

Opioids (Now)

Social Construction of Problems

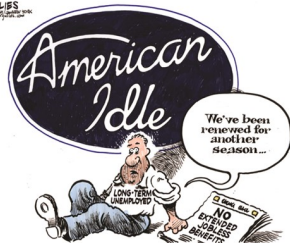
- Problems (solvable) vs. conditions (not)
- Symbols
 - Key point for analysts: “a hallmark of successful policy advocacy is the ability to tell a good story”
- Synecdoches
- Causal stories
 - Stories of change (better or worse); stories of power (helplessness and control) - Next slides

Change

- Rising and Decline
- beginning, middle, end, heroes, villains, victims, change



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Power

- Helplessness and Control
- Common element in all is the assertion of choice
- Beginning, middle, end, heroes, villains, victims, change



Figure: “Mexican-American Border at Nogales” by U.S. Army, public domain

Tell Me a Story

Break into two groups to write a policy story.

The Problems with Numbers

- Deciding what to count is a policy/political decision
- Unit of analysis (level of aggregation)
- Numbers are not objective, they have assumptions and are open to interpretation
- Debate over best measure (e.g., poverty/income) (Example)
- Outliers (potential synecdoches)
- Advocates pick and choose favorable numbers

Key point: “rhetoric prevails over the evidence or logic of an issue or problems”

Homework Assignment

See Canvas!