New Victims and the Victim Industry

One important cultural resource is the ideology of victimization. Between 1960 and 1975 a variety of trends—equal rights movements, focus on victims by the right (crime victims) and left (the underclass), new therapies, etc.—contributed to the rise of a new ideology of victimization. This ideology is based on seven claims:

1. Victimization is widespread
2. Victimization is consequential
3. Victimization is relatively straightforward and unambiguous
4. Victimization often goes unrecognized
5. Individuals must be taught to recognize others’ and their own victimization.
6. Claims of victimization must be respected
7. The term “victim” has undesirable connotations

“Taken together, [these claims] form a virtually incontrovertible ideology that encourages identifying and labeling victims... It is, in short, a set of beliefs that makes it easy to label victims, and very difficult to dispute these labels.” (p. 127)

Some arrangements that support campaigns of the victim industry

1. Absence of external restraints
2. Extraordinary powers coupled with an absence of internal restraints
3. Structured interests
Connections among Claims

Best suggests several connections between social problems that deserve additional research.

“New” social problems borrow cultural resources used to describe earlier ones.

Naming and classifying social problems are just the first steps in defining a problem’s scope. Later scope processes include domain expansion, domain elaboration and diffusion.

- Domain expansion includes piggybacking new problems onto old names (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder being applied to new problems or parental smoking viewed as a form of child abuse.)
- Domain elaboration involves identifying new aspects of a problem (e.g., sexual abuse disrupting education or leading to drug use).
- Diffusion involves problems moving geographically from one region or nation to another.

Claims about social problems establish orientations—what sort of problem is it?

- Some set of advocates may assume ownership of a problem and become its authorities.
- Advocates may engage in rationale expansion, changing the orientation of the problem to attract more support.
- Advocates may also engage in ideological extension, assuming ownership of new problems and orienting them consistently with their existing ideology. However, advocates may also downplay their ideologies.
- Different movements may share master frames, broad orientations shared by several movements (e.g., equal rights.)
- There are few claims about systems of social problems. One exception is the problems of the inner cities.

Americans tend to ignore the history of social problems, including cycles of concern (e.g., the periodic fear of gangs) and recurring issues (e.g., repeated drug scares involving different drugs). However, advocates sometimes point out ironic consequences of previous social policies.