Interpreting Social Problems
Questions

(1) What is a theory?

(2) What is a fact?

(3) What is a paradigm?
### Sociological Paradigms

#### A Summary of Sociological Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Society?</th>
<th>Symbolic Interactions/Im</th>
<th>Functionalism</th>
<th>Conflict Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s patterns of behavior, always in flux</td>
<td>Groups within the same social system whose parts work together to benefit the whole</td>
<td>Groups within the same social system competing with one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the Key Terms?</th>
<th>Symbols Interaction</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>System Equilibrium Goals</th>
<th>Competition Conflict</th>
<th>Special Interests Power Exploitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Meanings Definitions</td>
<td>Structure Function System</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| What Is a Social Problem?     | Whatever a group decides is a social problem for that group | The failure of some part to fulfill its function, which interferes with the smooth functioning of the system | The natural and inevitable outcome as interest groups compete for scarce or limited resources |

| How Does Something Become a Social Problem? | One set of definitions becomes accepted, competing views are rejected | Some part of the system fails, usually because of rapid social change | Authority and power are used by the powerful to exploit the weaker groups |

Source: Henslin, p. 27
Paradigms and Interpretation

Paradigms are lenses through which sociologists see social interaction.

Sociologists interpret social interaction through the “tint” that a paradigm imposes on their way of thinking, much in the same way that people come to view particular types of actions as social problems.
Discussion

How do sociologists interpret social problems?

Consider immigration.

How would each of the following perspectives interpret immigration as a social problem?

(1) Symbolic Interaction
(2) Functionalist
(3) Conflict Theory
Discussion

Now consider ageism – that both the young and the old are marginalized groups, outside the mainstream of society.

How would each of the following perspectives interpret ageism as a social problem?

(1) Symbolic Interaction
(2) Functionalist
(3) Conflict Theory