

Diana Stuart
Environmental Sociology

Chapter 3:

Examining Drivers (Root Causes) of Environmental Impacts

1

The purpose of this chapter is to identify root causes of the environmental impacts we are experiencing.

Why should we care what the root causes are?

It's analogous to health. We don't want to only fix the immediate health problem. We want to know what caused it so we can avoid it occurring again.

So, what are some of the root causes? (there's at least 8)

2

(Overview of Root Causes)

- Population growth
- Individual consumption
- Economic growth/capitalism
- Technological innovation
- Social structures such as how our political system works
- Urban planning and development (location of roads, housing, availability of public transportation)
- Ignorance—unaware of behavioral effects
- American values and practices

3

(Overview of Root Causes)

- What American values and practices affect global warming? And how?

--materialism/capitalism

--individualism/if we can find a loop hole that provides us w/more \$ we take it even if it means polluting

--lifestyle practices (waste water, overuse of oil based products, trashing environment)

--number of work hours/week

4

When considering global drivers/causes: (at the level of nations)

Scientists have proposed IPAT to explain the level of environmental impact by a society:

Env. Impact = Population * Affluence * Technology

(Env. Impact is sometimes thought of as the ecological footprint)

What does this formula say?
 Which of the three do you believe is most important?

5

Many scientists believe affluence is most important, measured as: the Gross Domestic Product per capita

GDP=total value of goods and services produced / population size

GDP is highly associated with carbon emissions and biodiversity loss (richer countries emit more carbon)

Why might affluence be considered most influential? Why not population or technology? Why does GDP have such an effect?

6

Research has found that:

- As GDP goes up (i.e., economic growth per person)
 - material use goes up
 - species endangerment goes up
 - deforestation goes up
 - wealthiest 10% produce 36% of carbon emissions

Could there ever be a case where increased GDP does not contribute to global warming?

In no, what does this mean?
If yes, what does this mean?

7

If no:

Affluent nations will need to reduce their economic growth which could mean fewer jobs, lower pay checks since companies are selling less. Some environmental sociologist adhere to this view.

If yes...

8

If yes:

Affluent nations will need to identify how they can grow without contributing further to the ecological footprint. Some Env. Sociologist adhere to this view.

9

As GDP goes down (during recessions)

--carbon emissions go down
as less is produced and consumed

How did the pandemic support these findings?

10

Env. Impact = Population * Affluence * Technology

What about technology?
How important is it to global warming?

Does increased technology always mean more pollution?

If yes, what does this mean for strategies for reducing pollution?

If no, what does this mean for strategies?

11

When considering individual drivers of pollution (at the individual level):

What would you guess are some of the most influential (largest) individual drivers/causes of global warming—list three (what do individuals do to contribute to GW)?

Transportation
Housing
Consumption of goods

12

What percentage of all carbon emissions in the U.S. are contributed by motor vehicles?

Nearly one-fifth (20%) of all US carbon dioxide emissions come from motor vehicles (reported by Union of Concerned Scientists).

One gallon of gas produces roughly 24 pounds of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gases.

Wealthier individuals emit more carbon per person (e.g., travel more, own boats, large cars, own things).

13

Why do people want to consume a lot of goods, even when this may be harmful?

"Values-Beliefs-Norms Theory" explains how specific values result in specific beliefs and these, in turn, result in norms that people follow (e.g., gift-giving at Christmas).

"Norm Activation Theory" explains that people focus on consequences of various behaviors and this activates their norms and behaviors.

How are these theories different?
Which theory do feel is most accurate?

14

Los Angeles before and after pandemic "stay at home" order.



The Sociology of Consumption focuses on social class and "conspicuous consumption."

How might this influence behavior and norms?

The Sociology of Consumption also studies/focuses on the social system of advertising and marketing, each of which "pushes" more personal consumption, also referred to as "false commodities."

Why would it be called this?

16

Personal preferences don't drive production, instead, production drives personal preferences and this results in false commodities.

Examples?

17

Karl Marx argued that the "structure of society" contributes to environmental degradation as well as social injustice.

Can you guess what his primary argument was?

He focused on capitalism and production (what we've been talking about).

For example, applying capitalism to agriculture resulted in soil degradation. Capitalism to fishing has disrupted marine food chains and ecosystems (referred to as "oceanic rift").

18

How about the
 "treadmill of production" (some call
 it the treadmill of destruction)?
 What might this be referring too?

The goal of ever-increasing profit
 drives production (like a treadmill)
 and causes environmental
 degradation.

What does the following mean:

19

Is anyone familiar with metabolic rift
 theory? (what does metabolic refer to?
 What comes to mind?)

Metabolic refers to the total of all
chemical changes that take place
 (typically referring to changes in cells).

When applied to environmental pollution,
 it's the chemical changes that are
 occurring resulting in a lack of balance
 (i.e., there is a rift) between Co₂ being
 released into the atmosphere and then
 captured by plants, etc.

20

Should social and economic well-
 being be prioritized ahead of
 economic development/profit and
 market logic or vice versa?

What would be an example of
 economic development being
 prioritized ahead?

- Allowing for pollution by industry
 in the first half of 20th century
- gentrification

21

At the end of the chapter Stuart
 discusses the role of ideology. To
 some degree, this seems to be
 something we have been discussing
 all along.

So, what do we mean by "ideology?"

"An individual's world view or general
 beliefs about what exists, what is
 good and bad, and what is possible."

What would be an example of
 ideology and its affect on behavior?

22

Example: differing political
 ideologies

Another example: "domination
 ideology" --the view that the
 world was created for humans to
 dominate and to do as they see
 fit.

Is this ideology a feature behind
 the constant push for economic
 growth?

23

Among environmental advocates
 domination ideology has been referred
 to as a "contradiction concealing"
 ideology.

The ideology allows those in power to
 continue their ignoring of
 environmental problems which is
 contradictory to having a healthy
 environment.

The ideology of overconsumption
 masks the dangers that are caused to
 the environment.

24

John Hannigan
Environmental Sociology

Chapter 5:

Media and environmental
 communication

25

Why do we care about the media
 when studying Environmental
 Sociology?

- Without the media's attention environmental issues would not come to the attention of the general public
- The media "socially constructs" the issues
- The media educates the public

What are some types of media that do these things?

26

- documentaries
- Motion pictures
- News outlets (TV, newspapers)
- Internet
- Social media

27

Prior to the 1970s, media topics were simply a reporting of apparent facts having a "certifiable existence"

Since that time, less focus has been on the "objective characteristics" and more on "news making" (the manufacturing of news)—a negotiation between journalists and their sources.

Any idea what factors influence the manufacturing of news stories?

28

1. Constraints on the amount of time available for the show to "air" or the amount of space on a page. Typically there is relatively little time/space per "report."

How might this constraint affect what is reported and how it is reported?

29

- Short action clips that fit into reporting formats
- Ignore a story's underlying causes and conditions or ignore the story due to its complexity
- "decontextualizing or removing an event from the context in which it occurs"
- Putting a "spin" on a story so only a particular "angle" of the news story is presented

30

Do journalist develop their own angle for a story or rely on others? Why?

- Journalist often lack knowledge of the complex issues so must rely on sources
- Powerful figures and organizations (e.g., high ranking federal officials, company representatives) can provide them with easy to use info on the issue
- These figures can also make the lives of journalists difficult (e.g., holding back info)

31

(factors influencing the manufacturing of news stories)

2. Journalists present "frames" that don't cover the whole story but answer "What is it that is going on here?"
3. Over time "storylines" can be added to the "frame"

Can you think of an example where a particular event is framed a particular way either positively or negatively?

32

- Fracking vs non-fracking
- Alternative energy vs nuclear energy
- Framing nuclear power as the answer to the climate crisis or as the future destruction of all

As frames are developed, would you guess journalists prefer to develop their own frames or rely on those provided by others?

33

While "claims-makers" attempt to promote their frames of the story and make it easy for journalists, journalists prefer to develop their own.

Why might this be?

34

- Journalist, in general, have a desire to be objective
- The constraints of reporting requires they be efficient while claims-makers want an elaborate story told
- Journalists want stories that are suitable and fit into the "dominant mainstream frames" to gain viewer support

35

What production constraints are there on journalists that affect the stories they produce (beyond the constraints of choosing the story)?

1. Limited sources
2. Short-term logistical and technological constraints created by a lack of time
 1. Makes it difficult to cover the bigger environmental issues
3. Long-term and occupational constraints embedded in the news process (e.g., getting future access to sources).

36

There are three types of environmental events that get covered (p.110). Any ideas?

37

[The influence of Artificial Intelligence on the media](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiUPD-z9DTg>

(3) How We End Consumerism (why degrowth must happen) (11:45)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omcUaD8pxaY>

(2.) Why renewables can't save the planet | Michael Shellenberger
(show first 11:45 mins)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-yALPEpV4w>

(1.) The Problem with Consumerism (10:21)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0ckvo2Z5BU>

The dirty secret of capitalism -- and a new way forward | Nick Hanauer (show first 9 min and then remaining 8 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th3KE_H27bs

39

Our Planet: Our Business (biodiversity)(show 17-20mins of 36)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdWQJq2OKJs>

Our Planet | Frozen Worlds | 53 mins, FULL EPISODE | Netflix
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTQ3Ko9ZKg8>

Climate Change - We are the PROBLEM & the SOLUTION
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D_Np-3dVBQ

Causes and Effects of Climate Change | National Geographic
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4H1N_yXBtA

Explained | World's Water Crisis
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C65iqOSCZOY>

40