

Introduction to Sociology

Michigan Tech University: Social Science 2700

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Course Description:

In the movie *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers Neo a blue pill and a red pill. If he takes the blue pill, he will go on believing what he has been programmed to believe about reality. If he takes the red pill, he will learn the truth—that what he has always believed to be reality is a façade or a dream world made to keep people under control. This class offers students a similar choice. You'll be presented with new ways of thinking about the world that will call into question some of the fundamental understandings about the world you may hold dear (including things like religion, capitalism, and marriage). You'll be challenged to think about what is “real” and what is socially constructed. You may choose to “take the blue pill” and only superficially engage with this material. Or, you might choose to “take the red pill” and think hard, truly questioning the world around you and in which you are an active part. I will encourage you to do the latter, but ultimately it is your choice.

Sociology is the scientific study of society (the social world). Just as an ichthyologist studies fish and a physicist studies motion and behavior of objects and energy, a sociologist relies on scientific methods of discovery to build knowledge about the way society works. This means we are studying ourselves. And that is complicated. The social world is always evolving, making it difficult to pin down lasting truths. Knowledge is constantly evolving and theories are put forth, tested against data, and revised, and then things change. Oftentimes, there are no clear answers. The sociologist approaches the social world with a critical, questioning eye. Are things really as they seem? Why and how do things work as they do? What is *really* behind it? We question reality, rather than taking for granted that the world is as we have always presumed it to be (or as we have been socialized to understand it). This questioning is referred to as the “sociological imagination”, and it is what I'll encourage you to develop in this course.

About now, you might be wondering “what the heck is this crazy lady talking about?” or “is this just some escape into the mind that will never prove useful?” While the issues we address will get you thinking and challenging preconceived notions about reality, they are also very practical and important to your careers and even more important to your lives. In fact, this may be one of the most practical courses you'll take in your college career. You live in society. You are constantly shaped and affected by it. You must learn how to work within it to increase your chances of success in life (in your work, family, relationships, and community). And because you are not just a viewer of the world, but an actor within it, you also shape society and have the ability to change it.

Goals:

The overarching goal is for you to learn to think sociologically about the world. This means not taking things for granted as “just the way things are” or “only natural”, but instead thinking about how and why things are the way they are and how they might be different.

At the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1- Think critically about social phenomena (including your own culture and personal history), using the sociological imagination
- 2- Analyze social issues and effectively communicate relevant information to the public
- 3- Appreciate perspectives of people from diverse communities and cultures

This course supports Michigan Tech University Learning Goals #3 (Human Culture and Global Literacy) and #8 (Values and Civic Engagement).

Required Texts:

- 1- Peter Callero. 2013. *The Myth of Individualism*. Second Edition. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- 2- Sudhir Venkatesh. 2008. *Gang Leader for a Day*. Penguin Press.
- 3- Dalton Conley. 2013. *You May Ask Yourself*. Core Third Edition. Note: We will only be reading a couple of chapters from this. But more of it will be useful for you to reference. The ebook edition for 180 days use is available for only \$18.75 online, and this should be fine for our purposes unless you want a physical copy. For this reason, I’ve not ordered this book from bookstore. You can get it at:
<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?ID=4294975256>
- 4- Readings posted on Canvas

Assignments and Grading:

Activity Postings: 30%
Sociological Autobiography: 20%
Social Issue Blog: 20%
Quizzes: 20%
Participation: 10%

All assignments will be graded according to the critical thinking rubric found in this syllabus. An additional rubric will be provided on Canvas for the Sociological Autobiography and for the Social Issue Blog.

A late assignment loses 10% of the highest possible grade for each day it is late. For example, if the assignment would have received a 95% if it were turned in on time, if it is turned in a day late it will receive an 85%. This penalty will be waived if students notify me **prior** to the deadline of potentially late assignments... and the reason must be unavoidable.

Final Grades will be distributed as follows:

A:	95% or more	C:	75-80
AB:	90-95	CD:	70-75
B:	84-90	D:	60-70
BC:	80-84	F:	Less than 60%

Responsibilities:

To be successful in this course, you will need to:

- Stay open-minded and think carefully and critically
- Do the reading and be prepared! (see notes below on preparation and participation)
- Participate! Your contributions are valued and required.
- Effectively communicate your ideas to others. Writing, arguing, and verbal presentations will be important ways for you to share your ideas.
- Regularly use the course website on Canvas. This is where you find out what the required readings are, turn in assignments, view grades, and access extra resources.
- Your textbook comes with access to a web-based student resources center, called StudySpace. This gives you extra resources, practice quizzes you can take to study, flashcards, internet exercises, etc. Quiz questions will sometimes come directly from the questions listed here. Check it out.

Out of consideration for your classmates, cell phones, Blackberries, iPods, PDAs, or other **electronic devices are not to be used in the classroom**, and must be shut off. Information exchanges on these devices during class are also prohibited and violate the Academic Integrity Code of Michigan Tech.

Class Preparation and Participation

I expect all students to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and issues raised in class. To prepare, I strongly encourage all students to come to class each day with a written summary of the reading(s) that includes the main points in the readings, key things that you learned/surprises, questions this reading raised for you, and ways this reading ties into the topic of the day or other material we've covered in class. I may call on you directly to share your thoughts, and I expect you to be ready to contribute. Preparing these summaries will also help you with quizzes and you may even reference these notes while taking a quiz.

We will be reading an ethnographic book called *Gang Leader for a Day*. Students will be assigned a Reading Group of about 5 students for discussing this book. Think of it like a book club. Book clubs will meet to discuss the book in class. Each student will have a turn at "leading" this small group discussion. Leaders should be prepared to summarize the reading for the day, pose interesting questions, reference specific passages and solicit discussion from the broader group, and generally keep discussion among the group going.

Assignment Descriptions:

Activity Postings: Activities ask you to participate in something (do something active) and then write a short summary of the activity, including what you learned and how you used your sociological imagination. They are referred to as “postings” because you are asked to write about the activities in your own personal blog. These are meant to be an informal venue for you to explore and communicate your ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to topics from class and readings with particular emphasis on real world circumstances and issues in your own life. In addition to writing your own personal blog, please recognize that these will be public so that others will be reading what you write. You may use an alias, but you need to let me know that at beginning of semester.

There are a total of 6 Activity Postings (worth 5 points each). Specific topics are posted on Canvas. They will be graded on how well you integrate material from readings and class, critical thinking, and creativity. See critical thinking grading rubric below. It is your responsibility to check Canvas for assignments.

Sociological Autobiography:

This is a professionally written 5-7 page paper typed and double-spaced. Due before midnight March 27. Please submit via Canvas. You may also submit this paper early for feedback and a chance to revise. For feedback submit by 8:00am March 19.

We are who we are because of our experiences in the social world. For this paper, think back on your own life experiences. Write about one or more aspects of your life and interpret from a sociological perspective. To do this, try to distance yourself and approach your life as a detached observer might. Your job is to examine the role of external social forces in shaping your life. Be specific, using concrete examples and social events/occurrences. You should discuss personal events, but focus on how these events illustrate sociological concepts and tie into bigger social issues. Use concepts from class to explain how your life is shaped by society. In other words, narrate your life story using sociological language. Your goal is to make connections between private experiences and public issues. A grading rubric and more specific direction are provided on Canvas.

Social Issue Blog: This is a more detailed and carefully researched blog post that should be added to your Activity Posting blog. This entry is different than the others. You define the topic. It should be a specific social issue of interest to you. It may be something we discuss in class, but it doesn't have to be. Some ideas could be: gender inequality in the workplace, relationship between religion and capitalism, incarceration for nonviolent offenses, the gay rights movement, legalization of marijuana, environmental justice, aging of America, value of a college degree, a specific sub-culture and their norms and values, education and social mobility, social capital and health, fair trade, teenage pregnancy, climate change, or any number of other ideas. Usually, the more specific your topic, the easier it will be to do a good job analyzing it. You may choose to examine this issue in a general sense or using a specific country, state, or case.

Your job is to explain: Why this is an important issue for the public; What is going on with this issue, drawing on data including charts, maps, tables, etc. where appropriate and available; how

this issue came to be/the social forces that keep this issue going (drawing on your sociological imagination and the major findings from peer reviewed sociological analyses of this issue); and to present ideas for potential solutions. The blog should be professionally written. The audience is the general public. Choose an issue that is of broad civic interest, analyze this issue carefully using the sociological imagination and including concepts and approaches we've learning about in class, and communicate a clear message about this issue to the public via the blog. You do not have to "choose a side" or make an argument necessarily, but you should carefully describe the issue considering multiple perspectives, draw on data, and reference sociological research. Provide links to good, trusted sources where readers can turn for more information and cite any such sources that you use in the blog using endnotes. You should cite a minimum of five different sources.

The blog should be 1,200 to 2,000 words (including all titles, references, etc.) plus any charts, tables, or maps. Do NOT write as if you are a student writing for the instructor! Write as if you are a well-informed, educated individual who has learned to use his/her sociological imagination and you know something that you feel is critically important to share with the public. This is your message to that public. Due by midnight April 24.

Quizzes: There will be no final exam in this course, but there will be at least four quizzes (often unscheduled) that in total will make up 20% of the final grade. These will usually be take home, but might occasionally be in-class. They may involve multiple choice, short answer, or essay responses. They are meant to make sure that you do the reading, pay attention in class, and generally keep up. No make-ups.

Participation: I expect students to attend class regularly, to carefully read assigned material before class, and to engage actively in class discussion. Participation points will be based on attendance, how prepared and effective you are at contributing to class discussion, and preparation for and involvement in Book Club discussions. I will take attendance each day. One absence is a "freebie", after that, additional absences will negatively impact your grade. I will ask each of you to help to evaluate participation in Book Clubs for the members of your group.

You may earn bonus participation points in two ways. 1- send me and the TA (Dan Schneider) an email introducing yourself (name, major, hometown, something interesting about you, and anything else you want us to know) before 11:00am on Jan 16. This will show us you've read the syllabus and help us to get to get to know you. It can be one email with both of us as recipients. 2- email me music (a song) via attachment or web link that is very relevant to the topic we'll be discussing that day before 9:00am on the day we are scheduled to address that topic. I will play some of this before or during class and publicly recognize your effort.

University Policies:

Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance the University's policies.

Student work products (exams, essays, projects, etc.) may be used for purposes of university, program, or course assessment. All work used for assessment purposes will not include any individual student identification.

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310.

Academic Integrity:

http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html

Affirmative Action:

<http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aao/>

Disability Services:

http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability

Equal Opportunity Statement: <http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/boc/policy/ch3/ch3p7.htm>

General Rubric for Grading:

You are expected to think, read, speak, and write in this class using critical thinking skills. But what exactly is critical thinking? And how will I determine if you're using it? Critical thinking means that you carefully consider ideas against evidence (from readings, class lectures, data, academic journal articles, government documents, other trusted sources) and against examples from your own life experiences. Critical thinkers justify their opinions and arguments. This means that they clearly explain how their opinions are shaped by evidence and agree or disagree with others by explaining why and, again, providing evidence to support their opinions. Essentially, you justify yourself by defending your thinking with examples and evidence. In order to really think critically, you should consider multiple different perspectives against evidence in search of the elusive truth.

In grading your assignments, I'll generally follow this broad rubric.

Best (A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate deep understanding of concepts and issues presented in readings and class.• Justify opinions with evidence and highly appropriate examples from readings, class lectures/materials, other trusted (peer reviewed or government type) sources, and relevant life experiences. Explain thinking followed by "because" and clear justification.• Agree and disagree with others and authors and tell why• Keep the conversation going by asking open-ended questions of others• Exhibit creativity and unique contributions, rather than simply repeating what others have stated• Use accurate grammar and clear writing/speaking style and organization
Good (B-ish)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate adequate understanding of concepts and issues presented in readings and class.• Justify opinions with evidence and examples from readings, class lectures/materials, other trusted (peer reviewed or government type) sources, and/or life experiences.• Agree and disagree with others and authors and tell why• Make unique contributions, rather than simply repeating others• Use accurate grammar and clear writing/speaking style and organization
Fair (C-ish)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May refer to concepts and issues presented in readings and class, but without much meaning or understanding.• Answers questions or tells opinion, without justifying• Agree and disagree with others and authors, but cannot tell why• Makes little unique contribution• Uses some incorrect grammar and lacks clear writing/speaking style and organization
Poor (D/F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incomplete• Does not integrate material from readings/class• Does not contribute to the conversation• Agree and disagree with others and authors, but cannot tell why• Makes no unique contribution• Uses poor grammar and lacks clear writing/speaking style and organization

Schedule, Readings, & Assignments

The Study of Sociology

Week 1: The Sociological Imagination

- Jan 14: Read syllabus and review course website.
- Jan 16: Callero, *The Promise of Sociology* (selection from Introduction)
Dalton Conley, Chapt. 1, *The Sociological Imagination*

Week 2: Doing Sociology

- Jan 21: *Understanding Katrina*, links posted on Canvas from
www.understandingkatrina.ssrc.org
Activity Post 1 Due
- Jan 23: Dalton Conley, Chapt 2, *Methods*
Venketesh, Chapt. 1, *How does it Feel to be Black and Poor?*

Week 3: Demographics and Data

- Jan 28: Adler and Adler. 2003. *The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field*.
Contexts 2(2): 41-47.
- Jan 31: Howard Schuman. 2002. *Sense and Nonsense about Surveys*. Contexts 1(2): 40-50.
Activity Post 2 Due

Socialization, Self, and Culture

Week 4: Culture & Structure

- Feb 4: Callero, Chapter 1, *Individualism*
Optional: Augustin Fuentes, Chapt 2 in *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You*
- Feb 6: Venketesh, Chapter 2, *First Days on Federal Street*

Week 5: Self, Identity and Social Construction

- Feb 11: Callero, Chapter 2, *Becoming a Person*
- Feb 13: Amy Best, *Youth Identity Formation*
Activity Post 3 Due

Week 6: Socialization, Groups and Social Control

- Feb 18: Callero, Chapt 3, *Conformity and Disobedience*
Victor Rios. 2012. *Stealing a bag of potato chips*. Contexts 11:48.
- Feb 20: Venketesh, Chapter 3, *Someone to Watch over Me*

Institutions & Structure

Week 7: Family

- Feb 25: Hull, Meier and Ortyl, 2010. *The Changing Landscape of Love and Marriage*.
Contexts 9:32.
Activity Post 4 Due
- Feb 27: Venketesh, Chapt 5, *Ms. Bailey's Neighborhood*

Week 8: Economy, Work & Community

- March 4: Gerson and Jacobs. 2004. *The Work-Home Crunch*. Contexts 3: 29.
- March 6: Venketesh, Chapt. 6, *The Hustler and the Hustled*

***** SPRING BREAK*****

Inequality

Week 9: Class & Power

- March 18: Callero, Chapter 4, *Family Matters: The Power of Social Class*
McNamee and Miller. 2012. *The Silver Spoon: Inheritance and the Staggered Start*. Reading 14 in *The Meaning of Difference*, 6th Edition.
- March 20: Mark Rank. 2011. *Rethinking American Poverty*. Contexts 10: 16.
The Economist. 2012. *More or Less Equal*. Reading 13 in *The Meaning of Difference*, 6th Edition. Bosenblum and Travis (eds.).

Week 10: Gender and Sexuality

- March 25: Michael Kimmel. 2012. *The Gendered Society*. Reading 9 in *The Meaning of Difference*, 6th Edition. Bosenblum and Travis (eds.).
Micheal Schwalbe. 2012. *The Hazards of Manhood*. In Yes! Magazine, Oct. 30.
- March 27: Maria Charles. 2011. *What Gender is Science?* Context 10: 22.
Sociological Autobiography Due

Week 11: Race

April 1: Augustin Fuentes, Chapt. 4, *The Myth of Race*
Activity Post 5 Due

April 3: Lipsitz, 1995. *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. American Quarterly 47(3). OR
Massey. 2009. *Racial Formation in Theory and Practice: The Case of Mexicans in the United States*. Race and Social Problems 1: 12-26.

Week 12: Education, Crime, and Life Chances

April 8: Claude Steele, *Thin Ice: 'Stereotype Threat' and Black College Students*
Topic for Social Issue Blog Due.

April 10: Pager, Devah. 2003. "The mark of a criminal record" *American Journal of Sociology*.
Venketesh, Chapt. 7, *Black and Blue*
Activity Post 6 Due

Social Change & Civic Engagement

Week 13: Social Change

April 15: Jason Konefal. 2013. *Forces of Social Change*. In *Ten Lessons in Introduction to Sociology*. Gould and Lewis (eds.). Pp. 219-249.

April 17: David Meyer. 2003. *How Social Movements Matter*. Contexts 2:30.

Week 14: Policy, Practice, and the Sociological Imagination

April 22: Venketesh, Chapt. 8, *The Stay Together Gang*

April 24: Callero, Conclusion

April 24 Social Issue Blog Assignment Due by midnight