

Sociology 111: Social Problems
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
Mondays and Wednesdays 2:10-4:00pm

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And by appointment

Location: 47-012D



Course Description

Social problems, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, are social and structural formations of identity and inequality that affect all of our lives. They are often taken as true, unavoidable, commonsensical and rarely confronted and challenged. In this course we will define and examine the importance and influence of various forms of inequality both in social interactions and in social institutions, as part of large social structures and as part of our everyday communications. We will begin the course examining how race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, as well as the interlocking nature of these identities and the institutions that maintain them, shape society and individual experiences. This course will also utilize the experiences of people living in the U.S. and Latin America as comparative case studies of various social problems. Finally, we will devote the last week to discussing the concept of social justice and strategies for social change.

Required Texts

1. Tracey Ore. 2010. *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality, Fifth Edition*. 2009. New York: McGraw-Hill.
(Note: Fourth edition acceptable)
2. Readings listed as “Polylearn” can be found on the course Polylearn.
Instructions for accessing the site are as follows:
First, log on to Polylearn with your username and password.
Search for our course by name and number. Please contact polylearn support if you have trouble logging on. You will not be able to log on unless you are formally registered for the course.

Course Goals

The goals for this course are for every student to:

1. Understand the importance of specific social problems as distinct aspects of social life and as interlocking forms of oppression.
2. Understand the ways that social problems are socially constructed categories that have different content across societies and can be/have been transformed or maintained over time.
3. Understand that although social problems are socially constructed, they are enduring formations that continue to structure and influence the life chances, experiences, interactions, and identities of individual social actors.
4. Discover ways in which you as a “future leader of the world” can combat inequality.

Course Requirements	Portion of Final Grade:
In-Class Participation and Quick Writes	20
In-Class Discussion Leader	10
Movie Reaction Paper	10
Participant Observation	10
Midterm	25
Final Exam	25
<i>OR</i> One Research Paper Attempting to Solve A Social Problem in Our World	[50]

Course Goals

I have designed this class with three specific goals in mind. First and most broadly, I want you to be able to recognize and study social problems using a sociological lens. Second, I want you to obtain the necessary theoretical tools to explain important aspects of race, class, gender, and sexuality that have occurred historically and today, as well as in the U.S. and internationally. Finally, I hope by the end that you feel that you can be an engaged global citizen who can create positive social change.

Class Procedure

This class will be pedagogically “mixed method.” Recognizing the various ways in which people learn, my goal is to meet you, the student, halfway in this learning process. Below are my commitments to and expectations of you as a student.

First, my main teaching style is lecture mixed with class discussion and activities. Lecture will be concise, relevant, and is central to the way this class is designed. Therefore, you are expected to be at every class (unless you have an emergency) having read the designated material. A large percentage of your grade is based on participation and the reading. Second, both the movie reaction paper and the participant observation will allow you to put the tools you learn in our class into action. Finally, the exams/or paper will give you the opportunity to show how brilliant you are. I expect that you not only understand concepts but also to be able to apply them to real life situations. My commitment is to judge your knowledge and effort as well as give you insightful feedback on your work.

Requirements

Attendance, Participation, and Reading

As noted above, attendance is a necessary part of this class. Therefore, I will use quick-writes, quizzes, and group work to check your attendance periodically.

Everyone will be expected to participate equally and often. I have three goals in having students participate: to learn from one another, to be able to articulate clearly to others sociological theory via their experience, and to build confidence in speaking their opinion publicly. Effort is more important than right answers.

Readings—do them. I have chosen to go for depth rather than breadth so time should not be an issue. I recommend doing the reading and making notes in the margin, then going back later that day or the next day and reviewing the reading. This will help you “set” the information in your memory. These notes may also be useful as a reference for later classes or work. Also, **please bring the appropriate readings to class** as they will be referenced in lecture and group discussion.

Writing--Writing well is a necessary skill that will have long-term benefits in your personal and professional life. As a course that has multiple writing components, this class offers you an opportunity to become a better writer. Since much of your grade will be based on various writing assignments, you should take your writing seriously and ask for help either from myself or the writing center when in need.

I also expect you to follow the standard writing procedures on all of your assignments. This means that you will: use normal margins (1 inch top and bottom, 1.25 on the sides), twelve point Times New Roman font,

double space, title all of your work, and put a name, date, and course number on everything you hand in. All work should be type-written. Sloppiness will be judged accordingly.

Quick Writes

Quick writes are in-class writing exercises that will be used for various purposes. Sometimes they will be used as checks to make sure you are doing the reading and that you are prepared to discuss the reading in class. I will also use them as a simple exercise to get your mind warmed up for a discussion. They must be legible if you are to receive credit.

In-Class Discussion Leader

Each student will pick a class during the quarter where they will present the readings to the class. The presentation should be a ten-fifteen minute presentation. It should: highlight important concepts as they relate to the leader's life, include multimedia, include a class activity, and include discussion questions. IT SHOULD NOT REVIEW THE READING. The brief discussion can be based on a few questions that relate to the reading but may be controversial or otherwise interesting. A rubric is provided on the polylearn site. This activity is worth 10 points.

Movie Reaction Paper

Near the end of the semester I will ask you to turn in a movie reaction paper. This paper is an opportunity for you to critically engage a popular medium on a deeper level. In three full double-spaced pages I want you briefly (less than one page) summarize the plot, how you saw an inequality played out (reinforced, rebuked, unquestioned, etc.), and back up your claims with examples. Then describe how this affected the plot. This paper may be turned in at any time during the quarter but before the due date. A rubric is provided on the polylearn site. It is worth 10 points.

Participant Observation

You are required to spend one hour doing participant observation in a situation where race, class, or gender are being exemplified. Some examples include: spending time in a student group's office or going to one of their activities, going to gendered activities, volunteering at a homeless shelter, etc. However, I encourage you to push yourself and conduct participant observation with a group or in an area that makes you feel socially uncomfortable. Then please write a two full double-spaced page reaction paper to this experience relating what you saw and felt to class concepts. A rubric is provided on the polylearn site. It is worth 10 points.

Mid-term and Final Exam

Both the mid-term and final exam will consist of true-false, multiple choice, and short-answer questions. The true-false and multiple choice questions will gauge your knowledge of key sociological terms, concepts, and theories while the short-answer questions will have you connect these ideas to real life situations.

Social Change Paper (Instead of a midterm and final)

This project is an opportunity for student growth in four areas. First, the student will learn concrete ways to make positive change in the world, which also fulfills the department's mission of engaged scholarship. Second, the student will have a greater understanding of the interlocking forces that augment or reduce inequality. Third, the student will have the opportunity to utilize and broaden her critical reading and research skills. Finally, this project will empower the student to think creatively in analyzing the development of inequality and strategic ways of addressing those inequalities.

The student will turn in an 8-10 page paper (not including appendix, bibliography or title page) explaining a social problem, the root and proximate causes of the problem, current strategies being used to address the problem, and at least two creative and new ways of addressing the problem. The student will also create a ten minute presentation (plus five minutes for questions) that will be presented to the rest of the class. Further instructions will be provided the second week of class.

Other Issues

Cheating: I abhor efforts by students to turn in work that is not their own or to cheat the system in other ways. In my classes I take an extra effort to make sure that this does not happen. If I find a student has cheated, I will make sure the student is punished to the fullest extent by the Scholastic Conduct Committee. If you think that you may do this, I recommend taking another class.

Late and Make up policy: Tardiness is not accepted in other work environments and will not be accepted in this class. **Late homework and papers will not be accepted unless there is documented illness/other emergency.** If you cannot make it to class, please drop off your homework or paper in my box in the Sociology office on the 9th floor of the Social Science building **BEFORE** class with an attached note explaining why you cannot turn it in to class. If it is an emergency, please see me individually. **Homework sent by email will not be accepted.**

Incompletes: No incompletes will be given unless you have a prior written agreement with me and will only be given out in rare situations with extenuating circumstances present.

Classroom Behavior: This is an upper level class. Therefore, I will treat you like adults. I expect you to participate often, engage the material both critically and constructively, and to have the highest respect for others, even if you disagree with what they say. We will have intellectual discussions, not petty arguments. It is my duty as an instructor to ensure that each student feels safe and respected when speaking in the classroom. Disruptive and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. If problems arise we will not spend class time solving them. You will be asked to leave and we will work on a solution after class. Remember, both learning and teaching requires humility. Open yourself up to being changed.

Cellphones and Texting: I believe that talking on the phone or texting during class is disrespectful of the professor and of other students. If I see you texting during class, I will stop lecture or discussion and ask you to leave to the room to finish your texting. Please do not do it.

Email: The simplicity of writing emails, I believe, has encouraged students to email their professor at every whim. I received dozens of emails last quarter in which the answer could have been found in the syllabus, from a classmate, during class, or during office hours. Please only email me if it is critically urgent.

Disabilities: It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. I encourage you to contact me to discuss any individual needs for accommodations. The sooner you do the better.

Media/Speakers: I believe that technology and guest speakers are valuable tools to increase student learning. Therefore, various multimedia pieces will be used including movies, “You Tube” clips, speeches, and documentaries. These effects give life to the readings by showing real people and institutions being affected by race, class and gender.

Disclaimer: While I believe that it is important to treat the syllabus as a contract between us, I also reserve the right to make minor changes in the course as I see necessary. That said, I will do my best to maintain the syllabus as-is and if changes need to be made, I will alert the class in a timely and appropriate manner.

WHEN YOU ARE NOT SURE ABOUT SOMETHING OR HAVE A QUESTION:

1. First re-read the syllabus
2. Then check Polylearn
3. Then check with a classmate
4. Then wait until class or office hours
5. Or if it is an emergency—then email me.

Class Schedule

Date: Theme	Monday	Wednesday	All Assignments due on Wed.
(1) Jan. 2 Intro. Soc. thinking	No Class	Pedagogy and class introductions P: Mills “The Sociological Imagination” P: Benjamin “Foreword”	
(2) Jan. 9 Interlocking Systems of Oppression	Definitions SCR: Ore’s “Constructing Differences;” P: Barbara Frye’s The Politics of Reality “Oppression” p. 1-16	Sharing a common language P: Harro’s “The Cycle of Socialization;” P: Young’s “Five Faces of Oppression.”	
(3) Jan. 16 Sex & Gender	Social construction of Gender SCR: Lorber’s “The Soc. Con. of Gender;” SCR: Williams’ “The Glass Escalator;”	Constructing Gender in childhood SCR: Bornstein “Naming all the parts” P: Messner “Barbie Girls Versus Sea Monsters: Children Constructing Gender.”	
(4) Jan. 23 Social Class & Classism	Definitions P: Shapiro “Race, Wealth, and Equality” SCR: Mantsios’ “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible” SCR: Burnham “Welfare Reform, Family Hardship, and Women of Color”	Reality SCR: Ehrenreich’s “Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By In America;” P: Hooks’ “White Poverty: The Politics of Invisibility” SCR: Downey “I am your Welfare Reform”	Participant Observation
(5) Jan. 30 Poverty in the U.S., Poverty in the World	American Dream/ Poverty P: Block’s “The Compassion Gap in American Poverty Policy” P: Rank’s “As American As Apple Pie: Poverty and Welfare”	Globalization P: Eitzen and Zinn (eds). Free Markets and Poverty, Gap Clothes, 21 st century slaves, Race, Class, and Globalization P: Benjamin Ch. 10 “We Don’t Want to Beg” from <i>Don’t Be Afraid, Gringo..</i>	Evaluations
(6) Feb. 6 Race and Ethnicity	Racial Formation and identity construction SCR: Omi and Winant’s “Racial Formations” P: DuBois “Spiritual Striving”	Is Race still an issue? (20 pages of reading) SCR: Cose’s “A Dozen Demons” P: Rosen and Marcos “A Tourist Guide to Chiapas.”	Midterm Exam
(7) Feb. 13 Becoming White & White Privilege	Whiteness SCR: Wildman “Making Systems of Privilege Visible” SCR: Lipsitz “Investment in Whiteness” SCR: Brodtkin “How Did Jews Become White Folks?”	White Privilege in the U.S. and Guatemala SCR: Waters’ “Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?;” P: Macintosh “Invisible Knapsack” P: Menchú “A Maid in the Capital”	<i>M: Hartmann “Blinded by the White”</i>
(8) Feb. 20 Sexuality, Heterosexism, and Masculinity	Theory of Sexuality SCR: Katz’ “The Invention of Heterosexuality” P: Taylor, “Drag Queens.” P: Strate, “Beer Commercials”	Effects of Heterosexism and Masculinity SCR: Rust’s “Sexual Identity & Bi Identities;” SCR: Kimmel’s “Masculinity as Homophobia;” SCR: Pharr’s “Homophobia as a Weapon of Sexism;”	Movie Reaction Paper
(9) Feb. 27 Inequality and Education	4-7 Educational inequality and the student SCR: Dog & Erdoes’ “Civilize Them With a Stick” SCR: Sadker’s “Missing in Interaction”	4-9 Educational Inequality and society SCR: Cookson & Persell’s “Preparing for Power;” SCR: Miceli’s “Schools and the Social Control of Sexuality”	
(10) Mar. 5 Inequality, Social Justice, and Social Change	Individual Change SCR: Ore “Introduction to Resistance and Social Change” SCR: Collins “Toward a New Vision;” P: Hooks’ “What Happens When White People Change”	Broad Social Change P: Harro “The Cycle of Liberation” P: Thompson’s “Can White Heterosexual Men Understand Oppression?;”	
(11) Mar. 12 Finals	Final Friday March 16 th , 1-4pm		Final Exam