

Professor Kathryn J. Lively

Classroom: Carson 60

Class Meets 10A

X-Hour: W 3:00-4:05

Office Hours: M, W, 9:15 a.m. or by appointment

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Sociologist C. Wright Mills described “the sociological imagination,” as that quality of mind with the ability to grasp the interplay of biography and history, of self and social structure, of private troubles and public issues. This capstone seminar will help each of us to see how the sociological imagination manifests itself in some of the most highly acclaimed (and cutting-edge) sociological works over the last eight years and to apply it to individual lives (including our own), against the backdrop of historical and current world events. This capstone course will also assist us in developing critical understandings of sociological work, as well our own culpability in the creation and the reification of social problems.

So while there is no substantive focus, per se, our goal is quite literally the cultivation of “the sociological imagination.”

In fourteen years, I have always structured this class the same way – though I have always had a desire to assign biographies instead of relying solely only on sociological texts.

This year, I gave into those desires.

We will be reading two autobiographies, one book that was awarded the C. Wright Mills Award for the Sociological Imagination, and one whose author was a runner up for what is now a 1983 classic in the field and whose new book, “Strangers in Their Own Land,” speaks specifically to the current political, social, and ideological moment in which we find ourselves as a nation.

The common theme through all of these books, other than the sociological imagination, is inequity in its various forms – with a particular focus on race and class, as well as the intersection of the two.

Satisfies the Culminating Experience for the Sociology Major.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation – Expected

This will be an intensive working seminar, which means that everyone is expected to attend regularly and come to engage, actively and critically, in a discussion of the assigned readings. In the words of Professor King, “critical engagement necessitates bringing to bear all the theoretical, methodological, and analytical prowess in sociology that you have acquired.” You are *required* to class with comments, questions, critiques of the assigned readings (not just summaries), as well as relevant (or complementary) examples from other research and current events.

Although class attendance and participation will not earn you any points, missing class and non-participation will lower your overall grade. If you suffer from debilitating shyness, you should come see me before the second week of class.

Daily Critical Questions (13 sets, 10 points each = 130 points)

You must turn in **2 to 3** critical questions for every reading assigned in class, beginning with Berger (first day of classes).

Your questions must indicate that you understand the reading, and that you are engaging the argument.

Questions that actually critique the reading and have the potential to *generate discussion* will be viewed more positively than those that do not. Questions that tie back to previous questions or outside events will also be viewed favorably.

These are not busy work; I will be using these questions to build the class discussion. In fact, I am likely to call in individual students to ask their own questions and facilitate a few moments of discussion in class.

In previous years I have had students actually run all of the class discussions. Because of the nature of these books, I have changed this policy. However, if I am not receiving the questions on time or people are not participating, I will change the policy back, mid term.

You will need to submit these questions no later than 9:00 p.m. the day before (that is, Monday 9:00 p.m. for a Tuesday class and Wednesday 9:00 p.m. for a Thursday class), so schedule accordingly. This will give me time to identify the unifying themes or points raised by the class in order to bring them into class discussion.

The critical questions should illustrate that you have read the entire section for the day. If it appears that you have not done the reading and are submitting questions that only cover a portion of the material, you will not receive credit for them.

You may not submit questions on days that you are not in attendance.

“So, what do you guys think about...?” is not an appropriate question. Ever. So don’t ask it.

Questions will be graded in a check plus (9.5/10), check (8.5/10), check minus (7.5/10 or lower) fashion. A check plus means that you have effectively illustrated your understanding of the material and have been critical in your interpretation of it (that is, you've been able to move beyond it in some meaningful way). A check paper means that it's obvious that you've read it, but not much more. A check minus means that you have not effectively illustrated that 1) you've read or 2) thought about it above and beyond trying to complete the work on time.

If you have questions about why you're receiving a check versus a check plus, please make arrangements to see me to discuss. If you know why you received a check, as opposed to a check plus, there's no need to come see me.

Again, questions should illustrate your understanding of the assigned reading for the day – in its entirety. It will be very clear if you've only read the first two pages! In other words, do not center your thoughts on a single footnote! Make it about the big picture. If big pictures aren't your thing, feel free to turn in a question per chapter.

Maintenance of an Intellectual Journal (9 entries, variable values = 460 points [see Canvas for details])

You are also tasked with keeping an Intellectual Journal. Once you've read Mills' appendix on Intellectual Craftmanship, this will become clearer to you. While this may seem like a lot of work, I've really just broken it down and scheduled what you would have already been doing on your own time if I had just handed you the final paper assignment without any scaffolding.

This journal is designed to keep you on task for your final project and to encourage the sociological imagination.

In the years that I have required students to do this, their papers, as a whole, were appreciably better.

Even if you hate the process, you will be pleased with the outcome.

Week Two: Pick two or three aspects of your individual biography that you plan to focus on. So for instance, if I was writing this paper, I might focus on getting married at age 40, selling my house at a tremendous loss in 2010, or my move from lower working class (my father's name is JD – which will have greater significance once we read all of the books on poor whites) to being a full professor at an Ivy League Institution, or how my life turned out dramatically different than other poor white kids who grew up in my neighborhood that was 98% African American. However, I could also write about how I went from someone who never smoked pot as a teenager, yet ended up acting as a water woman in a Peyote Ceremony under the offices of the Native American Church.

Week Three: Begin constructing your autobiography (ala Berger); also a brief write up of your What Matters to Me and Why Presentation

What Matters to Me and Why. Taking a page from the Tucker Foundation, prepare to 5-7 minute presentation on what matters to you and why. This is an opportunity to think about values, something that we don't often discuss in sociology classes, but which are nonetheless very important to individual and social life.

Week Four: Begin to construct a cultural, historical timeline of your biography; also your letter to your five year old self. (See below.)

Short Letter to Your Five Year Old Self. Write a 3-5 page letter to your five year old self. Explain what it means to be a "person like you," in today's society. Be prepared to share this with someone who is not like you (in some socially significant way) in order to get feedback. We will share these – in class – on Thursday, so be prepared. Rewrite taking this person's perspective into account.

Week Five: Begin identifying outside sources (begin with materials from your other classes and work your way out) that will help you think about your own experiences in a more sociological way; also 2 page response to the documentary *Thirteenth*.

Week Six: Begin identifying (and collecting data) that will help put your experience in context; also a biographical sketch (see below)

Biographical Sketch

Write a brief sketch of someone whose lives they believe reflect either a grasp of the sociological imagination or whose lives can be better understood via the sociological imagination and why; these sketches *must* include some discussion of the broader social and historical context in which that person (or persons) was situated and the degree to which his or her "personal troubles" were or, perhaps could be, linked to "public issues."

In other words, you must present the interplay of this person's individual biography and their historical/social context.

Although this may seem like a diversion, it is usually at this point in the term when the final assignment really comes into focus. In the past, we have done presentations, but due to scheduling conflicts, we don't have time to do these in class. For this you should be thankful, because I use a very stylized presentation method that typically required *hours* of practice in order to pull off.

Past assignments have featured such diverse subjects as J.K. Rowling, Bob Marley, Paul Newman, Elizabeth Glaser, Oprah Winfrey, Lance Armstrong, Barak Obama, George W. Bush, etc. One of the best ones, in recent memory, was of Mike Tyson, so use your imagination.

No more than 5 pages. Short and sweet is the key.

Week Seven: Begin a rough outline of your autobiography; that is, how are you planning on organizing it? What structure is it likely to take?

Week Eight: Begin drafting your autobiography.

Week Nine: 2-page response to Orange Sunshine

Week Ten: Full Rough Draft of your Autobiography (or as full as you can possibly make it).

Final Project – A Sociologically Informed Autobiography (200 points)

As all good sociology majors know, less than half of the American public ever attends college and less than a quarter actually finish; these numbers, of course, vary by sex, gender, race, ethnicity, region of the country, etc. Interestingly, it also varies by religion, with Christians being the least likely of any other religious group to complete college within the U.S.

As you are about to leave Dartmouth and embark on the next phase of your lives, it may be useful for you to contemplate your own biography within the framework of the sociological imagination.

In order to do this you must 1) sketch out your own biographical history (including, but not limited to your position in various social structures; 2) identify the characteristics of your proximal conditions that led you to where you are today and shaped who you will be tomorrow; and 3) any personal choices or sacrifices that you have made that may have led you off the “expected” path. In addition to thinking about structures in terms of socio-economic status, father’s occupational position, race, ethnicity, or gender, you must also consider how “culture,” “place,” “time” and “history” also affected your life chances. You may also want to consider the role of technology.

As we proceed through the course, I will be introducing you to various types of structures that you may want/need to consider. I will also expect you to consult the sociological literature on educational attainment, class mobility, the reproduction of status, and the relationship between structure and agency, gender, race, etc. –or any other that is relevant to the focus of your paper.

While an adequate answer will situate you locally, an exemplary one will also take into consideration the broader (global) implications of what it means to be a citizen (or resident) of one of the most economically developed and economically stratified nations in the world – particularly at this moment as we head into a new era of American politics.

While this may seem like a daunting task, it is merely one that requires imagination and the ability to bring your sociological eye to bear on your own life. Everything in our lives can be understood more fully using a sociological lens. Past students have written papers that have included the following:

1. A young woman's experience in a magnet school system that changed her educational and, thus, class trajectory.
2. A girl's decision to put dreadlocks in their hair, following a traumatic experience.
3. A young women's experience growing up white in a non-white culture and her participation in a historically non-white, male dominated male sport.
4. A young athlete's realization of her sexuality and her decision to remain in the closet.
5. A young man's perspective on his parent's divorce.
6. The death rituals of a family who live with death instead of hide from it—caring for the dying and attending to the death at home rather than sending loved ones to nursing homes or hospitals.
7. One white woman's experience as a competitive surfer in Hawaii.
8. One man's journey from living in a cardboard box in Haiti to graduating with a double major at an Ivy League College.

Deadlines for the paper are embedded in the syllabus (as part of your intellectual file). You must turn in these preliminary assignments; they are designed to keep you on track. I will give you feedback along the way.

Final Presentation – Using Pecha Kucha – a Japanese presentation style that requires you to present 20 slides, 20 seconds each (set to automatic advance), you will present some aspect of your final project here.

Keep this in mind when deciding what you want to write about!

Policies:

I am not your mother, nor are you my children. Thus, I will not monitor you or nag you about doing your assignments. If you don't do them, you don't do them. I understand that you have other commitments and priorities. Part of being in college is learning how to manage competing priorities. However, there are consequences.

In return for this, you will not ask for extensions, offer excuses, or plea bargain for grades, points, etc.

I do not change grades, because grades are relative in courses like this and if I were to change yours, I would essentially have to change everyone else's in order to be fair, which would essentially invalidate the change that you're requesting.

And, finally, if you don't come to class, turn in an assignment, etc, that's your business. I will not take it personally. I will not get mad. And I will not "not like" you.

We're all adults. Deal?

Attendance

- It is to your advantage to get to class because: 1) active participation is important to your grade (and it is necessary to be in class to participate), and 2) information gleaned from mini-lectures and discussions will be designed to help you in subsequent papers and writing assignments.
- Having said that, however, I understand that some absences are unavoidable.
- You may miss 2 classes without penalty; however, missing more than 2 class periods, **regardless of the reason**, will result in a lowering of your final grade by 5%. Furthermore, each additional day's absence will result in additional 5% deduction. In other words, if you miss 4 days of class, you will face a 10% reduction in your final grade. You will also lose points for the daily questions (which will not be accepted on days when you miss class), so pick your absences carefully.

Papers

- Use citations when you are quoting or borrowing from the work of others. Any literature you cite or quote should be properly and consistently referenced. See the quote below from the Academic Honor Principle.
- I will not accept late papers, period. All papers should be turned in (as PDFs) to Canvas on the date they are due, at the time when they are due).
- Though I should not have to specify this at this point in the game, **writing matters!** I know that everyone is pressed for time, but you must read your work (off the printed page) before you turn it in! You'd be surprised how many mistakes you miss when just glancing across the screen. If it appears to me that you have not read your paper before turning it in or the writing is sufficiently bad, it will be returned to you, ungraded.
- For help with your writing, visit the Composition Center. Call 6-3525, visit 108 Sanborn to make a free appointment, or get additional information about the Center and college writing at: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose>. (I can also meet with you individually.)

Cheating and Plagiarism

- In the words of Professor Lewis, "do not cheat, do not plagiarize; follow the honor code and your own internal moral compass. Do not be afraid to talk to me if you have any questions about this issue."

"A number of actions are specifically prohibited by the Academic Honor Principle. These focus on plagiarism and on academic dishonesty in the taking of examinations, the

writing of papers, the use of the same work in more than one course, and unauthorized collaboration.” ...

“Any form of plagiarism violates the Academic Honor Principle. Plagiarism is defined as the submission or presentation of work, in any form, that is not a student’s own, without acknowledgment of the source. With specific regard to papers, a simple rule dictates when it is necessary to acknowledge sources. If a student obtains information or ideas from an outside source, that source must be acknowledged. Another rule to follow is that any direct quotations must be placed in quotation marks, and the source immediately cited. Students are responsible for the information concerning plagiarism found in *Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgment*, available in the Dean’s Offices and at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources>.”

**** Students with learning, physical or psychiatric disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, and by the end of the second week of classes. Also, contact the Academic Skills Center, 6-2014, asc@dartmouth.edu, 301 Collis Center to register for support services.****

Required Texts

Khan, Shamus Privilege: the making of an adolescent elite at st. paul’s school Princeton Univ Press 978-0691156231 2012 \$15

Mills, C. Wright Sociological Imagination Oxford Univ Press 978-0195133738 2000; 40th anniv edition \$11

Coates, Ta-Hanesi Between the World and Me The Text Publishing Co. 978-1925240702 2015 \$8.

Hochschild, Arlie Strangers in Their Own Land New Press 978-1620972250 2016 \$17.

Vance, JD Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis Harper Paperbacks 978-0062300553 2017 \$10.

OPTIONAL:

Kendzior, Sarah kindle View From Flyover Country: Essays by Sarah Kendzior Amazon Digital Services B00WPW5EDY \$8.

Required texts are available at Wheelock Books and the Dartmouth Bookstore and are on reserve at the library. If additional readings are to be assigned, they will be available on Blackboard.

Tentative Reading and Discussion Schedule.

Week One – Introduction to Sociology

January 5 – Re-Introduction to Sociology

Reading: Berger, Chapters 1 & 2

Week Two – The Sociological Imagination

January 10 – Mills – Preface, Chapter 1 & Appendix

January 12 – Mills – Chapters 6-10 (Response Paper; no classes).

Week Three – The Sociological Imagination (In Practice)

January 16 – MLK Keynote Address 7:00 p.m. (highly recommended)

January 17 – Berger, Chapter 3; What Matters to Me and Why (10 minute presentations)

January 19 – What Matters to Me and Why (10 minute presentations)

- Presenters will be drawn randomly from a hat; everyone needs to be prepared to go on the 17th.

Week Four – Being Black

January 24th – Coates, Chapter 1&2

January 26th – Coates, Chapter 3; share the first draft of your letter to yourself in class.

WEEK 5 – Historical Underpinnings of Race

January 31st – Documentary: Thirteenth

February 2 – Guest Lecturer – Kathy Edin

WEEK 6 – Being Poor & White

February 7 – Vance, Introduction, Chapters 1-7

February 9 – Vance, Chapters 8-13 & Conclusion

Week SEVEN – Understanding the Tea Party

February 14 – Hochschild, First Half

February 16 – Hochschild, Second Half

Week Eight – Being/Becoming an Elite

February 21 – Kahn, Introduction & Chapters 1-2

February 23 – Kahn, Chapters 3 – Conclusion

Week 9 – Miscellaneous, yet worthwhile

February 28 – Kendizor – TBA

March 2 – Documentary: Orange Sunshine

Week 10 – Final Presentations

March 7 – Final Project Update (Pecha Kucha format)

March 8 – Final Project Update (Pecha Kucha format)

You are expected to present your main ideas to the class, providing as much information as you feel comfortable sharing. The point is not to fully disclose, but to get feedback from your classmates that might help you in contextualizing your experiences. Keep this part of the assignment in mind when selecting your topic!!!!

Presenters' names will be pulled randomly out of a hat. Everyone must be prepared to present when name is called.

Statements Regarding the Sociological Imagination

David Newman, *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* (1995)

"Herein lies the fundamental theme of sociology: that everyday social life--our thoughts, actions, feelings, decisions, interactions, and so on--is the product of a complex interplay between societal forces and personal characteristics. In order to explain why people are the way they are, we must understand the social, historical, cultural, and organizational environments they inhabit. Neither individuals nor society can be understood without understanding both."

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)

"It is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society."

Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (1963)

"The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all of our lives. ... It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this--things are not what they seem. People who like to avoid shocking discoveries ... should stay away from sociology."

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)

"[Humans] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."