I. Course Description

Malcolm Gladwell in his best-selling book "The Outliers" writes that youth hockey players born in January, February, and March have a better chance of becoming professional hockey players than those born in the later months. Is he implying that effort or talent makes no difference? The legendary 19th century French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, found that people in Protestant countries were more likely to commit suicide than those in Catholic countries. But is not suicide an individual act of will?

No one lives entirely alone (even when alone, one is not really alone). Rather we live out our lives among others--families, groups, friends, work colleagues, and in national, ethnic, and religious groups. Although the aim, as the title of the course suggests, is to look at human behavior from various perspectives, a central feature of the semester is to examine the effects of historical and social environments. We call this approach the sociological perspective, or as Mills calls it, "the sociological imagination." Forces external to our minds and bodies--those around us, as well as culture, social position and roles, institutional arrangements, and the happenstance of our birth, play an important part in our behavior, thoughts, and the course of our lives. These external forces constitute the core of sociological study. In short, sociology looks at the context of behavior.

But this context, which we call the social environment, is not easy to study. The elements of the social environment are abstract, invisible--can't touch, taste, smell, or hug them. But knowing the context of our lives, we can gain a better sense of our behavior, thoughts, successes, and disappointments. Taking these contextual factors into account can also provide clues on how to (using a biblical saying) "fix the world" around us.

On the grave yard bust of a very famous sociologist, it is engraved: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways—the point however is to change it.” (an extra point on your grade if you can identify this person)
II. Objectives

1. To become acquainted with theories and findings about human behavior, particularly those dealing with the social environment.

2. To see things through a sociological perspective without diminishing free will.

3. To use this knowledge in better understanding one’s life and the immediate and not so immediate surroundings.

4. To examine the world with a skeptical eye.

III. Texts


IV. Course Requirements

1. Three Exams

The course is divided into thirds. Exams will be given after each third. With the exception of a few questions from the previous exams, the exams will be noncumulative. The tests will comprise multiple-choice questions, real life or hypothetical examples of concepts, and short essay questions. I will distribute review sheets several sessions prior to each exam. Make-up exams are given only for legitimate reasons and with advance notice.

2. Two Papers

a. The sociological perspective. You are asked to provide (in C. W. Mills’ words) a real or hypothetical “private trouble” or simply a personal experience or action. And then explain how you would understand this personal experience as a “public issue,” i.e., in terms of the broader historical or social context. Lastly, recognizing the behavior as a public issue, what could be done to influence the problem or event?
b. Application paper. Watch a movie, read a book (no texts or self-help books), or watch a play, and identify a number of concepts or ideas covered in the course. Then describe how these concepts are illustrated or applied in the source you use.

Note: The nature of these assignments is tentative. I'll inform you in advance of changes if any. I will provide a guideline sheet for the papers, indicating in more detail what I expect. Due dates (see schedule below) are firm—no kidding.

Although the course is not “writing-intensive,” I expect decent writing. Good writing is not easy for any of us, but writing skills may be one of the most valuable skills you can acquire as you progress through college and afterwards in the work place. Spell correctly, but watch out for those demonic spell checks on your computer. If you refer to a “social roll” instead of a “social role,” you must provide the cream cheese. Bad spelling is like putting an initial stigma on your paper. Please use the Writing Center (8th floor Gruening) if you have any misgivings (or even if you don’t) about your writing. In addition, I will be happy to provide feedback on drafts.

3. Attendance

As another well-known contemporary “philosopher” has said, “the key to success is showing up” (another extra point if you get this one). I will take attendance randomly. Note below that I allot two points for attendance toward the final grade. But a more important reason for attending, however, is that exams will cover not only readings, but anything that goes on in class—lectures, films, in-class exercises, surveys, and such. Studies, as well as my casual observations, indicate a positive association between showing up and good grades. If for a good reason you are unable to get to class, send me an e-mail message.

I encourage you to read the assigned material before class. Thus we can have interesting and informed discussions, which can also lead to livelier class sessions. It's more fun than hearing me talk the entire time. Moreover, I enjoy hearing your ideas and concerns about the material presented. Always keep in mind that theories, particularly those in the social sciences, are only theories, not divine explanations. Consider them with a critical eye.
V. Course Schedule

7/8-7/10 The sociological perspective. Origin and development of sociology and the early (classical) theorists. The theoretical perspectives—divergent ways in which societies are perceived.

Hughes, Ch 1, pp. 3-24; McIntyre, Chs 1,2.

7/11 Doing research: investigating human behavior and the social environment. Ethics of research. Film: A social psychological experiment.

Hughes, Ch 1, pp. 24-35; McIntyre, Chs 4,6.

7/15-7/18 Components of culture, cultural unity, cultural diversity, subcultures, counter cultures, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism.

Social structure: the patterned, enduring arrangements of people and groups in society. Statuses, roles, and groups. Film: Stanford Prison Experiment

Hughes, Ch 2; McIntyre, Chs 8,9,12,16.

7/17 PERSPECTIVES PAPER DUE

7/22 FIRST EXAM

7/23-7/25 Socialization: the manner of becoming civilized. Theories of socialization and symbolic interactionism. Primary and secondary socialization, agents of socialization, socialization across the life course, and the absence of socialization. Film: Genie

Hughes, Ch 3; McIntyre, Chs 20,22,24.

7/29-7/30 Social groups: primary and secondary, formal organizations, and bureaucracy. Film: Groupthink

Hughes, Ch 4; McIntyre, Ch 12.
7/31  “All the world’s a stage” (who said this?)
The dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman.
Hughes, pp. 82,83; McIntyre, Ch 14.

8/1  SECOND EXAM

8/5-8/6  Theories of deviance: sin, perversion, crime, disabilities, or simply being different.
Video clip: Pseudo-patients.
Hughes, Ch 5; McIntyre, Chs 21,27,30,31;

8/7  Obedience.
Video: Milgrim’s experiment.
McIntyre, Chs 7,16.

8/8-8/12  Social stratification, the American class system, social mobility, and two opposing theories of inequality.
Hughes, Ch 6; McIntyre, Chs 32,33.

8/12  APPLICATIONS PAPER DUE

8/13-8/14  Racial, ethnic, and gender stratification.
Prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes, and patterns of intergroup relations.
Hughes, Chs 7,8; McIntyre, Chs 35,36.16

8/15  THIRD EXAM

Note: This is a tentative schedule. I will inform you of changes if any. You are responsible, nonetheless, for keeping informed.

VI. Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>54% (18% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First paper</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second paper</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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VII. Grading Scale
90 and above = A
80-89 = B
70-79 = C
59-69 = D
Below 59 = F

VIII. The Small Print

I expect students to arrive on time, stay until the end of class, and no skipping out at the break unless you tell me in advance. Please maintain class etiquette—cell phones and other electronic devises turned off—concern for the instructor and others.