

Instructor: Prof. Agnes Ku (谷淑美)/ soagnes@ust.hk

Office hrs: Mon/Wed (2-3pm) or by appointment (Rm: 3369, lift #13-15)

Teaching Assistants:

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## UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

*“Ours is a time of uneasiness and indifference ... Instead of troubles – defined in terms of values and threats – there is often the misery of vague uneasiness; instead of explicit issues, there is often merely the beat feeling that all is somehow not right. Neither the values threatened nor whatever threatens them has been stated; in short, they have not been carried to the point of decision. Much less have they been formulated as problems of social science.” (C. Wright Mills 1959, The Sociological Imagination)*

*“(T)he discovery of sociology can change your life. It can help you to understand better the social forces you confront, the forces that constrain and free. This understanding has a liberating potential: By examining these forces you can stand somewhat apart from at least some aspect of society, and thereby exert more creative control over your own life.” (James Henslin, adapting from Peter Berger 1963, Invitation to Sociology)*

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### I. COURSE AIMS

1. To introduce the basic sociological concepts and perspectives;
2. To address some critical social issues and problems from sociological perspectives;
3. To enable students to relate sociology to their life experiences and the social context.

### II. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the course, students should be able:

- (1) To demonstrate basic knowledge of the key sociological concepts and perspectives;
- (2) To explain and analyze a wide range of social issues including deviance, gender inequality, family changes, class inequality, education, power, politics and so on; &
- (3) To apply some basic sociological concepts.

### III. MODES OF LEARNING/ASSESSMENT

Mid-term exam	35%
Final exam	40%
Essay	25%
Class exercises/ discussion	(10 bonus points max.)

※ Exams take the form of MC and/ or short questions. Mid-term exam will cover the topics from the start to Family & Gender; final exam will cover the rest of the topics.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The questions will cover the lectures/ required readings (80-90%) and the video clips shown in class

※ An essay, *on an individual basis*, of 600-900 words is due on 1 December (Friday), 11:59pm (submission via Canvass). The task is to write a sociological essay about yourself, your family or a social phenomenon (suggestions regarding the essay topics will be provided along the way). For the sake of fairness to all, late submissions will receive a penalty and submissions late for more than 3 days will not be accepted.\*

*(\*Please submit a Word or PDF file named in the following format – “student’s name\_student ID\_course code”, such as “Chan Tai Tai\_12345678\_SOSC1850”. The name, student ID, and course code should also be typed in the document.)*

※ The class exercises give you an opportunity to apply the concepts and theories you have learned in class and stimulate you to think further about some critical social issues. You may receive bonus points on top of your total course score. (There will be no make-up arrangement for these exercises in case of absence for class.)

※ Class etiquette: (i) *punctuality*; (ii) *no mobile phone, notebook or tablet PC*.

We all share the responsibility to ensure that the classes will run well with the least disturbance to anyone. Please come to class on time. You are also advised against using any electronic devices in class, for this will distract both yourselves and the instructor more than you might be aware of. Everyone will be better off if we all learn to respect the occasion.

#### IV. CONTENTS AND CLASS SCHEDULE

Wk	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
1	[04/09] Introduction	[06/09] Culture and Socialization
2	[11/09] Deviance	[13/09] Deviance
3	[18/09] Deviance	[20/09] Deviance/ Sociological Theories
4	[25/09] Family	[27/09] Family
5	[02/10] {holiday}	[04/10] Gender
6	[09/10] Gender	[11/10] Family/ Gender
7	[16/10] Social Inequalities	[18/10] <b>MID-TERM EXAM</b>
8	[23/10] Economy & Class Inequalities	[25/10] Economy & Class Inequalities
9	[30/10] Economy & Class Inequalities	[01/11] Economy & Class Inequalities
10	[06/11] Economy & Class Inequalities	[08/11] Education
11	[13/11] Education	[15/11] Education
12	[20/11] Power & Politics	[22/11] Power & Politics
13	[27/11] Power & Politics	[29/11] Power & Politics

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(10-20%). Lecture notes (word format), as well as supplementary ppt notes, will be available from Canvass. Students who are unable to take the mid-term will not be given a make-up exam but will be given a take-home essay exam as an alternative, *provided that you seek approval from the instructor PRIOR TO the exam on justifiable grounds (e.g. accidents and critical illness)*. If you do not show up in the exam and also fail to seek approval from the instructor prior to the exam (except in the case of accidents), you will receive no marks for the exam. The final exam will take place during the university’s exam period --- no make-up arrangement will be made except with prior approval in the case of accidents and critical illness.

## V. READINGS (available on Canvass)

### 1. Introduction: The “Sociological Imagination”

#### *Required*

- J.C. Alexander and K. Thompson 2008. *A Contemporary Introduction to Sociology – Culture and Society in Transition*, London: Paradigm, pp. 7-13

#### Culture & Socialization

#### *Required*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. vi-xi
- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by Henslin, “On Becoming Male: Reflections of a Sociologist on Childhood and Early Socialization)

### 2. Deviance

#### *Required*

- Haralambos and Holborn. 2004. *Sociology*, pp. 330-351, 353-355

#### *Supplementary*

- Howard Becker.1953. “Becoming a Marihuana.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 59 (3), pp.235-242.

### 3. Sociological Theory

#### *Required*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, p. xiv-xxi, pp. 934-950, 961-964

### 4. Family

#### *Required*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, 466-470, 478-488, 494-500

### 5. Gender

#### *Required*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp 98-115, 126-137
- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by Thorne and Luria, “Sexuality and Gender in Children’s Daily Worlds”)

### 6. Social and Class Inequalities

#### *Required*

- Bilton et al. 2002, *Introductory Sociology*, chapters 4 & 5 (pp.70-94, 98-127)

#### *Supplementary:*

- Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by H. J. Gans, “The Uses of Poverty: The Poor Pay All”)

### 7. Education

#### *Required:*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. xxvi-6, 692-694, 698-706, 731-756

### 8. Power and Politics

#### *Required:*

- Haralambos and Holborn 2004, pp. 538-559

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Recommended Books for the Course (on reserve)

- Haralambos, M., and M. Holborn. 2004. *Sociology - Themes and Perspectives*. London: Collins. (Note: The 2013 edition contains very minor changes.)
- Bilton, T., K. Bonnett, P. Jones, D. Skinner, M. Stanworth and A. Webster. 2002. *Introductory Sociology*. London: Macmillan.
- Henslin, J. 2007. *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*. New York: Free Press.
- John, J. Macionis. 2012. *Sociology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, Allan G. 1997. *The Forest and the Trees - Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise*. Temple University Press.
- Worsley, P. 1991. *The New Modern Sociology Readings*. London: Penguin, chs. 1,3,4,6,27,29,58,59,64,65,66,74.
- 莫家豪 (1998) :《社會學與社會分析》。香港：香港人文科學出版社。章 1-2。
- 李明堃, 黃紹倫主編 (1992) :《社會學新論》。香港：商務印書館。章 6,9,11,12。

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**Introductory Lecture**

**I. Nature vs Nurture (Culture)?****II. “Sociological Imagination” (C.Wright Mills 1959)**

-An awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society

- private troubles ↔ public issues (e.g. poverty; unemployment; “unsuccessful” students)

-*Do not take things for granted!* (i.e. Don’t ever believe that what you see at present is the natural or the only way of behaving or organizing social relationships. There always are alternatives.)

-Sociology encourages you to develop a *debunking* attitude toward social phenomenon (i.e. a critical attitude that exposures falseness and pretensions).

**Sociological Focuses:**

- the recurring patterns in people’s attitudes and action
- how such patterns are formed culturally, socially, economically and politically
- how such patterns vary across time, societies, & social groups (e.g. classes)
- how such patterns generate social inequalities (e.g. gender inequality) & social conflicts