

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

TAs: Creamy Wong (wyyukha@ust.hk); Vivien Pong (vivienpong@ust.hk)

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)

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

Quiz I	15%
Quiz II	15%
Final exam	45%
Essay	25%

✧ The quizzes and final exam are in MC format, which include contents drawing on the lectures, assigned readings (see Section V) and class videos. **Quiz I** covers the topics of: Introduction, Culture & Socialization, Deviance, and Sociological Theory. **Quiz II** covers the two topics of Family and Gender (including one assigned reading). The **Final Exam** will cover the remaining topics (including one assigned reading): Economy and Class Inequalities, Education, as well as Power & Politics.

※ You are also required to submit a writing assignment of 600-800 words toward the end of the semester. The task is to write a sociological response paper on one of the given articles or class videos (more details on p.4).

IV. CONTENTS AND SCHEDULE

Wk	Tuesday	Thursday
1		[01/02] Introduction
2	[06/02] Culture and Socialization	[08/02] Deviance
3	[13/02] {holiday}	[15/02] Deviance
4	[20/02] Deviance	[22/02] Deviance
5	[27/02] Deviance	[29/02] Deviance; Sociological Theory
6	[05/03] Family	[07/03] Family; Gender
7	[12/03] Gender	[14/03] Gender (+ QUIZ I)
8	[19/03] Family & Gender (video show)	[21/03] Economy & Class Inequalities
9	[26/03] Economy & Class Inequalities	[28/03] {mid-term break}
9	[02/04] {mid-term break}	[04/04] {mid-term break}
10	[09/04] Economy & Class Inequalities	[11/04] Economy & Class Inequalities
11	[16/04] Economy & Class Inequalities (+ QUIZ II)	[18/04] Economy & Class Inequalities
12	[23/04] Education	[25/04] Education
13	[30/04] Education; Power & Politics	[02/05] Power & Politics
14	[07/05] Power & Politics	[09/05] Power & Politics

V. ASSIGNED READINGS (required, to be included in quizzes & exams)

The following readings highlight certain sociological ideas and illustrate them with examples pertinent to contemporary society. Try to grasp the key sociological ideas, issues and arguments discussed in the readings.

- **[To be included in Quiz II]** Henslin, J. 2007. "On Becoming Male: Reflections of a Sociologist on Childhood and Early Socialization." *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*. New York: Free Press.
- **[To be included in the Final Exam]** J. L. Waters. 2006. "Geographies of Cultural Capital: Education, International Migration and Family Strategies between Hong Kong and Canada." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31 (2), pp.179-192. (extracts)

VI. RECOMMENDED READINGS (optional)

The following recommended readings are meant to help you better understand the lecture contents and provide references for your essay writing. They will not be included in the quizzes or exams.

1. Introduction: The “Sociological Imagination”
 - J.C. Alexander and K. Thompson 2008. *A Contemporary Introduction to Sociology – Culture and Society in Transition*, London: Paradigm, pp. 7-13.Culture & Socialization
 - Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. vi-xi
 - Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology* (chapter by Henslin, “On Becoming Male”) (Also for Reading Quiz I)
2. Deviance
 - Haralambos and Holborn. 2004. *Sociology*, pp. 330-351, 353-355Supplementary
 - Howard Becker.1953. “Becoming a Marihuana.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 59 (3), pp.235-242.
3. Sociological Theory
 - Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, p. xiv-xxi, pp. 934-950, 961-964
4. Family
 - Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, 466-470, 478-488, 494-500
5. Gender
 - 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
 - Bilton et al. 2002, *Introductory Sociology*, chapters 4 & 5 (pp.70-94, 98-127)
7. Education
 - Haralambos and Holborn 2004. *Sociology*, pp. xxvi-6, 692-694, 698-706, 731-756
8. Power and Politics
 - Haralambos and Holborn 2004, pp. 538-559

Recommended Books for the Course

- Haralambos, M., and M. Holborn. 2004. *Sociology - Themes and Perspectives*. London: Collins. (Note: The latest 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.
- Johnson, Allan G. 1997. *The Forest and the Trees - Sociology as Life, Practice, and Promise*. Temple University Press.

Writing Assignment (25%)

Write a sociological response paper on one of the following topics *in relation to the assigned article or class video* (#1-#6). The response paper should include two parts:

- (A) Explain the social phenomenon addressed in the article/ video with reference to certain sociological concepts or theories you have learned from the course.
[You must NOT copy directly from the article.]
- (B) Relate the discussion to your personal experience or your observation about the society.

Please note that there will be TWO different deadlines: the deadline for topics #1-4 is **May 2 (Thursday), 11:59pm**; the deadline for topics #5-6 is **May 23 (Thursday), 11:59pm**.

(*File format: Word or PDF named as follows – “student name_student ID”, such as “Chan Tai Tai_12345678.” Such information should also be typed in the document.)

Topics:

1. Subculture
[VIDEO] *Lolita Subculture*
2. Deviance
[VIDEO] *Youth Gang*
3. Gender Socialization
[ARTICLE] Henslin, J. 2007. “On Becoming Male: Reflections of a Sociologist on Childhood and Early Socialization.” *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*. New York: Free Press.
4. Class Inequalities
[VIDEO] *Poverty Line*
5. Education
[ARTICLE] J. L. Waters. 2006. “Geographies of Cultural Capital: Education, International Migration and Family Strategies between Hong Kong and Canada.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31 (2), pp.179-192. (extracts)
6. Power & Politics (Housing Issues)
[VIDEO] *Home for Whom*

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