



中央民族大学  
MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

**Academic Inquiries:** Minzu University of China  
**E-mail:** bjiss@muc.edu.cn  
**Phone:** 86-010-68932708

**Minzu University of China**  
**SOC201 Introduction to Sociology**  
**Summer 2020**

**Basic Information**

**Class hours:** Monday through Thursday, 2 hours each day

**Discussion:** Friday, 1 hour (60 minutes)

**Review Section:** Saturday, 1 hour (60 minutes)

**Office Hour:** 2 hours (According to professors' teaching plan)

**Field trip:** According to professors' teaching plan

**Credit:** 4

**Total contact hours:** 60 (50 minutes each)

**Instructor:** James Bany

**Course Readings**

I'll ask you to read many essays; they will be available on the website.

**Course Description**

Sociology is the study of human societies.

Some sociologists ask very broad questions, like Karl Marx, who wanted to describe how one kind of society (like feudalism) evolved into another kind of society (like capitalism), or how an entire society developed its ideologies. Other sociologists ask much narrower questions, like: why do some people choose to get tattoos? In other words, sociology has a very broad range. We will look at both sorts of topics, the wide ones and the narrow ones.

The class will have three parts: general theory, particular case studies, and methodologies. The general theory and particular case study part will have a lot of overlap. For instance, one of the great theorists in sociology is Emile Durkheim. We'll study his theories through a famous case study of his, on the social causes of suicide.

There are two particular topics we will focus on in the section on case studies. One I will call the Social Construction of the Individual, and the other I will call Sociology and Globalization.

We are in an ideal position to study sociology together. We all know, from our own personal experiences, that there are many cultural differences between the US and China. Perhaps some of us have lived in other countries as well. The goal of sociology is to methodically study these sorts of differences, to ask about the reasons for the differences, and soon.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1:**

*Day 1:* Introduction: What is Sociology?

We'll discuss the case of Daniel Kish, known as "batman," who has no eyes but rides a bicycle and climbs trees and lives a normal life, because he has learned something known as "echolocation." Echolocation is how bats get



along in the world. Kish, though he has no eyes, says that he is not blind. In fact, he claims that blindness is a “social construction.” This sort of thing is basic to Sociology, the view that, what most people take to be “reality” is in fact socially constructed.

*Day 2:* Continue with the question: What is Sociology?

Reading 1: Sociological Imagination, C. Wright Mills, 1959

- a) Pre-sociological thinking: Western conception of rationality and the individual. The rise of the social sciences.
- b) What is sociological thinking? Possibly the best description comes from C. Wright Mills.
- c) Discussion of breaching experiments

*Day 3:* Foundations: Marx/Engels and Historical Materialism Reading 2: Marx and Engels: Notes on historical materialism

We'll discuss several features of Marx/Engels theory: determinism, materialism, false consciousness, and so on.

*Day 4:* Foundations: Continue Marx, and his legacy. Weber's Criticism of Marx Reading 3: Ritzer, Introduction to McDonaldization

Marx, Weber and Durkheim are often considered the Big Three in the foundations of sociology. We're not going to read Weber, but we will read a recent essay by a follower of Weber named George Ritzer. Eventually we will spend some time discussing the sociology of globalization; Ritzer will give us an introduction to that topic too.

*Day 5:* Discussion

*Day 6:* Review

## **Week 2 :**

*Day 1:* Foundations: Durkheim

Reading 4: excerpts from Suicide, Durkheim, 1897

Along with Marx/Engels and Weber, Durkheim's work is often considered the third great foundation of sociology.

*Day 2:* Reading 5: “Social rituals and Sacred Objects” (excerpted from Elementary Forms of Religious Life), Durkheim, 1912.

Marx thinks that religion is part of the “false consciousness” of society, and we ought to get rid of it. It's not that Durkheim disagrees with the false consciousness part, but Durkheim gives religion a very different social role than Marx does.

*Day 3:* Begin the topic of social construction of the individual: the child

Reading 6: “Socialization: The Creation of Meaning and Identity” (from Symbols, Selves and Social Reality, ch. 4.)

This reading concerns the early socialization of the child, but it comes from a textbook that is written from the point of view of one of the influential schools in sociology known as symbolic interactionism. So we're going to use it to accomplish a few goals:



- a) First, we'll ask the question: what is "symbolic interactionism"?
- b) Next, we'll discuss the social construction of the child

*Day 4:* Social construction of the individual: gender

Continue with reading 6: "Socialization: The Creation of Meaning and Identity." Also, reading 7: "College Freshman Rapidly Cycles through Identities," from *The Onion*

- a) We'll begin by continuing the discussion of previous day's reading, but we'll focus on gender
- b) Next, we'll discuss the *Onion* article. The article is satire, but it is making fun of something that is very

often a feature of American college life.

*Day 5:* Discussion

### **Week 3:**

*Day 1:* Social construction of the individual: deviance

Reading 8: "The Politics of Social Reality: Constructing and Negotiating Deviance." "Deviant" behavior is behavior that violates social norms. Since sociologists tend to think that social norms are human inventions and are culturally relative, they tend to think of deviant behavior as culturally relative, or socially constructed.

*Day 2:* Social construction of the individual: communication Reading 9: "On Face-Work," Goffman, 1967

Goffman is one of the most influential sociologists of the last 50 years. He's similar to but not the same as the symbolic interactionists. So today we'll do a few things:

- a) We'll discuss Goffman's views about how we communicate together
- b) We'll discuss Goffman's approach to sociology, comparing and contrasting it with symbolic interactionism

*Day 3:* Midterm Exam

*Day 4:* Social construction of the individual: communication Reading 10: "Sound of Silence," Hall and Hall, 1971

This essay has similarities with Goffman's, but it focuses on the nonverbal elements of communication.

*Day 5:* Discussion

### **Week 4:**

*Day 1:* Social construction of the individual: Situationism

Reading 11: "If Hitler asked you to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You?" (This essay was written in 1970 by Philip Meyer, but it's about the work of a very influential social psychologist, Stanley Milgram.)

Milgram and Zimbardo are social scientists who originally were trying to understand how the German people could possibly have followed Hitler in World War Two. So they wanted to study how obedience works. In order to study obedience, they came up with two of the most famous, and most controversial, experiments in the history of the social sciences. Today we'll begin discussing the experiments, and the interpretation of the experiments made by Milgram and Zimbardo, known as "situationism." Eventually, when we get around to discussing



methodology in the social sciences, we will look at some of criticisms of the work of Milgram/Zimbardo.

*Day 2: Situationism. Reading 12: "You Can't be a Sweet Cucumber in a Vinegar Barrel," Zimbardo, 2005. (This article is actually taken from an interview with Zimbardo, where he is reflecting on his work. You are welcome to listen to the interview instead of reading it. It can be found here:*

*<http://edge.org/conversation/you-can-39t-be-a-sweet-cucumber-in-a-vinegar-barrel> ).*

*Day 3: Sociology and Globalization: Baseball.*

*Reading 13: "Samurai Baseball," Hayford, 2007.*

*Over 100 years ago, the game of baseball was introduced to Japan (and to Taiwan.) Today it is a national pastime in both Japan and the US. But, though the rules in both countries are the same, some people have called it a "different game," because the cultural meanings around the game are so different.*

*Day 4: Globalization: Resistance to McDonaldization*

*Reading 14 and 15: "Jihad vs Mcworld" Barber, 1992. Then read, "Here's What Will Truly Change Higher Education: Online Degrees That Are Seen as Official," Carey, 2015*

a) We'll begin by discussing Benjamin Barber's essay on globalization. He thinks that currently there are forces that are leading toward global uniformity and homogeneity (which he calls Mcworld), and forces resisting that (which he calls Jihad.)

b) Then we'll discuss a recent article in the New York Times arguing in favor of MOOCs (massively open online education.) This is a current trend that might or might not be leading towards what Barber calls "Mcworld."

*Day 5: Discussion*

### **Week 5 :**

*Day 1: Methodology in the Social Sciences*

*Reading 16 and 17: Huff, "How to Lie with Statistics." Also, begin Stanovich, "How to Think Straight about Psychology"*

1) We'll start discussing Methodology with Huff's article, which teaches us about several types of fallacious thinking common in the social sciences.

2) Though Stanovich's article uses the word "psychology," it applies equally well to sociology. Stanovich describes how we should apply scientific method in the social sciences, and also how misleading the uncritical ideas of "folk psychology" can be.

*Day 2: Methodology in the Social Sciences*

*Reading 18: Read excerpts from Erich Fromm on the Milgrim and Zimbardo experiments ("On Psychological Experiments.") Also, reading 19: Skeptoid on Zimbardo.*

1) We'll begin by finishing Stanovich.

2) Stanovich defends an approach to the social sciences that applies the scientific method to people, just like the scientific method is applied in sciences like physics. But there are some social scientists who think this approach is misguided. These include, for example, the symbolic interactionists, and the psychologist Erich



中央民族大学  
MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

Fromm. In this essay, Fromm is specifically criticizing both Milgram and Zimbardo.

Skeptoid is a website run by Brian Dunning who is “dedicated to furthering knowledge by blasting away the widespread pseudosciences that infect popular culture.” Here he’s criticizing Zimbardo’s prison experiment. You can either listen to the podcast

(<http://skeptoid.com/episodes/4102>) or read the transcript of the broadcast.

*Day 3: Methodology in the Social Sciences*

Reading 20: “The Promise and Pitfalls of going into the Field,” by Adler and Adler, 2003. We’ll discuss what ethnography is, what its advantages are, and what its limitations are.

*Day 4: We’ll review for the exam.*

*Day 5: Final Exam*

**Grading:** The grade will be based on two exams, two quizzes, and on attendance. Attendance will be worth 10% of your final grade. Each exam will be worth 40% of your final grade, and each quiz will be worth 5%. The quizzes and the exams will be discussed in class ahead of time.

### **Grading Standard**

A+ 97-100; A 94-96; A- 90-93;

B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83;

C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73;

D+ 67-69; D 64-66; D- 60-63; F < 60

### **Classroom Policies**

**Electronic Devices in the Classroom:** There have been MANY MANY studies that show: (1) students who use electronic devices (like smartphones, or laptops) in the classroom have lower grades than students who do not.

Not only do smartphones distract you, they also distract people around you, and they distract me, the teacher. They distract from a serious learning environment. IF YOU INTEND TO BE A SERIOUS STUDENT, DO NOT BRING YOUR SMARTPHONE OR YOUR LAPTOP TO CLASS. IF YOU DO NOT INTEND TO BE A SERIOUS STUDENT, YOU SHOULD NOT BE ATTENDING THE CLASS.

For further information, see the following:

<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html>

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-9408-52>

<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-talk/class-multitasking-how-laptops-hurt-learning>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/04/28/why-students-using-laptops-learn-less-in-class-even-when-they-really-are-taking-notes/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mental-wealth/201402/gray-matters-too-much-screen-time-damages-the-brain>



中央民族大學  
MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

<https://www.winona.edu/psychology/media/friedlaptopfinal.pdf>

### **Cheating**

CHEATING WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. If you cheat, I will catch you. If I catch you cheating, you will fail the class. If you plan to cheat, there is no point in taking the class. Do not waste my time, do not waste your time, do not waste your money.