

SO 143

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professor Gregory Elliott
Maxcy Hall, Rm. 202
Ext. 3-1907

Semester I, 2009-2010
Tu.-Th. 9:00-10:20
Gregory_Elliott@Brown.edu

This is a course which investigates the relationship between one's place in the social structure and one's own, individual personal growth. We will seek to gain some understanding of the impact of society on the individual. Recognizing that the development of the self is an ongoing dynamic process that does not stop with the onset of adulthood, we will be investigating the social aspects of individual growth and change throughout the life cycle.

The basic premise of this course is that people must learn how to be members of society. In that vein, one of society's major functions is to facilitate the assimilation of its constituents. Successful assimilation serves two goals: it encourages the maintenance and growth of the social system, and it gives each person a sense of his or her location within the social structure. In consequence, it is to the advantage of both society and the individual that the latter comes to adopt an understanding of the social system and one's place in it that is shared by all its members; this understanding not only includes a sense of personal identity, but also an appreciation of the roles one will take as a participating member of society. Part of our analysis will focus on this socialization process.

Beneath this grand design, however is a gnawing awareness that is disquieting: something is basically wrong. As people experience the life course, they realize (even if they do not admit to others) that they have neither a strong sense of personal identity nor a feeling of involvement in their social roles. Although society seems to be progressing in its development, it appears to do so only at the expense of the well-being of many of its members. The remainder of our analysis will examine the proposition that there is something inherent in the structure of our society that causes pain and alienation in people's everyday lives.

We will begin by examining some of the theories of personal growth developed by sociologists, including those pertaining to early socialization in childhood. Next, we will examine the development of the individual from infancy through adulthood, concentrating on the impact of family, school, occupation, and social class on personal growth and social opportunities for advancement. Finally, we will study the social antecedents to alienation.

This course will utilize material from required readings and lectures. Required readings are presented on the accompanying syllabus. Lecture material will encompass some of the required readings as well as information not contained in any of them. I will make an effort to discuss in detail those articles in the required readings that are particularly difficult, provocative, or insightful.

I want to encourage each of you to participate in classroom discussions. Although this class will be in lecture format, I find that students learn more when they actively participate in open discussions of the material being presented. Accordingly, I hope that you will feel free to interrupt the lecture with any questions, comments, or criticisms you have about the material. Of course, your participation will be more beneficial and informed if you have read the assigned material, but you should also feel free to bring in related material from other classes.

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
SYLLABUS

Professor Gregory Elliott
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Tu.-Th. 9:00-10:20
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NOTE: Articles marked with an (*) in the reading list are available on OCRA.

WEEKS 1-2: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

John P. Hewitt. 1999. *Self and Society*, Chapters 1-4. (for students who have not taken SOC 0020)

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*, entire book.

*Robert K. Merton. 1957. "The role set: Problems in sociological theory." *British Journal of Sociology*, 8, 106-120.

*William J. Goode. 1960. "A theory of role strain." *American Sociological Review*, 25, 485-496.

WEEKS 2-3: SOCIALIZATION

Gerald Handel, Spencer E. Cahill, and Frederick Elkin. 2007. *Children and Society The Sociology of Children and Childhood Socialization*, entire book.

WEEKS 4-5 : GENDER AND THE SELF

Judith Lorber. 1995. *Paradoxes of Gender*, entire book.

*Susan Faludi. 1999. *Stiffed*, Ch. 1: "The son, the moon, and the stars: The promise of postwar manhood," 3-47.

*J. Richard Udry. 2000. "Biological limits of gender construction." *American Sociological Review*, 65, 443-457.

*Maxine Bacca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael Messner. 2006. "Sex and Gender Through the Prism of Difference." Pp. xx in M. L. Andersen and P. H. Collins (eds.), *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (sixth edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

WEEK 6: FAMILY AND THE SELF

William Damon. 1995. *Greater Expectations*, entire book.

- *Paul R. Amato and Juliana M. Sobolewski. 2001. "The effects of divorce and marital discord on adult children's psychological well-being." *American Sociological Review*, 66, 900-921.

WEEK 7: RACE AND THE SELF

Michael Omi and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States*, Chs. 1-4.

- *Margaret Beale Spencer and Carol Markstrom-Adams. 1990. "Identity processes among racial and ethnic minority children in America." *Child Development*, 61, 290-310.
- *Elizabeth Martinez. 2006. "Seeing more than Black and White: Latinos, racism, and the cultural divides." Pp. 108-114 in M. L. Andersen and P. H. Collins (eds.), *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (sixth edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- *Lincoln Quillian and Rozlyn Redd. 2009. "The friendship networks of multiracial adolescents." *Social Science Research*, 38, 279-295.

WEEKS 8-9: SOCIAL CLASS AND THE SELF

- *R. D. Hess and Virginia C. Shipman. 1965. "Early experience and the socialization of cognitive modes in children," *Child Development*, 36, 869-886.
- Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, entire book.
- *Paula M. Lantz, James S. House, Richard P. Mero, and David R. Williams. 2005. "Stress, life events, and socioeconomic disparities in health: Results from the Americans' Changing Lives study." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 46, 274-288.
 - *Juliana M. Sobolewski and Paul R. Amato. 2005. "Economic hardship in the family of origin and child's psychological well-being in adulthood." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 67, 141-156.

WEEK 10: EDUCATION AND THE SELF

Ron Suskind. 1998. *A Hope in the Unseen*, entire book.

- *Roslyn Arlin Mickelson and Stephen Samuel Smith. 1998. "Can education eliminate race, class, and gender inequality?" Pp. 376-388 in M. L. Andersen and P. H. Collins (eds.), *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (sixth edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- *Burton Clark. 1956. "The 'cooling out' function in higher education," *American Journal of Sociology*, 65, 569-576.
- *Kimberly Torres. 2009. "'Culture shock': Black students account for their distinctiveness at an elite college." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32, 883-905.

WEEK 11: OCCUPATION AND THE SELF

*Gideon Sjoberg, Richard A. Brymer, and Buford Farris. 1966. "Bureaucracy and the lower class," *Sociology and Social Research*, 50, 325-337.

Richard Sennett. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, entire book.

WEEKS 12-13: ALIENATION

*Robert K. Merton. 1938. "Social structure and anomie," *American Sociological Review*, 3, 672-682.

*Melvin Seeman. 1959. "On the meaning of alienation," *American Sociological Review*, 24, 783-791.

*Kai Erikson. 1986. "On work and alienation," *American Sociological Review*, 51, 1-8.

Richard Stivers. 2004. *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society*, entire book.

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Semester II, 2001-2002
Tu.-Th. 2:30-3:50
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REQUIRED BOOKS

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Doubleday Anchor.

William Damon. 1995. *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools*. Free Press.

Gerald Handel, Spencer E. Cahill, and Frederick Elkin. 2007. *Children and Society The Sociology of Children and Childhood Socialization*. Roxbury.

Judith Lorber. 1994. *Paradoxes of Gender*. Yale University Press.

Richard Sennett. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. Norton.

Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. Norton.

Richard Stivers. 2004. *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Ron Suskind. 1998. *A Hope in the Unseen*. Broadway.

Studs Terkel. 1974. *Working*. New Press.

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Semester I, 2001-2002
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Grades for this course will be based on a series of short papers and a term paper (60% and 40% of the full grade respectively). Each short paper will focus on one topic covered in the syllabus; in 12 pages, you will synthesize the readings and lectures into a coherent understanding of the issues involved. The topics for the short papers are:

1. Sociological Theories of Growth and Development;
2. Gender and the Self;
3. Family and the Self;
4. Race and the Self;
5. Social Class and the Self.
6. School and the Self;
7. Occupation and the Self.

Students will do three (3) short papers. All students will do a paper on topic 1. The second paper will be taken from one of topics 2, 3, or 4. The third paper will cover one of topics 5, 6, or 7.

The term paper will focus on the topic of alienation. One major premise underlying this course is that many people in our society develop an inadequate sense of self and an incomplete understanding of their locus within the social structure that surrounds them. Further, the premise argues that a large part of this feeling of alienation is systemic; their pain comes not from their own deficiency, but rather from their experience of the social structure itself.

In the term paper, students will conduct an in-depth analysis of some aspect of the alienating effects of involvement with social systems in our society. Types of term papers include: a systematic and comprehensive review of empirical research relevant to the topic; a proposal for an original research project focusing on an important issue; a comparison and contrast of the various theories and perspectives applied to the topic. Other possibilities exist. By the end of the class lecture period, I will expect a detailed proposal from you for a term paper topic. I encourage you to discuss ideas for the term paper with me before submitting your proposal.