Course Description

What is the individual? What is the individual’s relationship to social organization and social relations? How is the individual constituted or made through social relations? What possibilities and choices are available for the individual within social systems that are unequal and hierarchical? These are the questions that this course explores. People who study these subjects are generally known as social scientists; in the course we will explore what it means to be social and why the study of it is conducted through the practices and terminology of science.

Much of the way that we conceive of the relationship between the individual and society comes from Western notions of the self: as autonomous, isolated, able to make decisions for oneself and responsible for one’s own actions. We will be examining how the self constructs itself out of cultural and social materials, and how society is constructed through the interactions of multiple individual selves. We will end the course by examining American individualism and its particular idiosyncrasies.

Expectations

By the end of this course, you will be expected to be able to:

• understand Western notions of the autonomous self and alternative notions of the self embedded in social relations;
• see how people are constantly engaged in interpreting experience and how interpretation varies according to the frame (real or play);
• understand how one’s position (gendered, racial, age, class) within unequal societies allows for different kinds of expression of selfhood;
• carry out analysis in order to examine how this happens in everyday life.

Text: Reading Packet available from the Sociology/Anthropology Department.

Website: http://www.trinity.edu/%7Emkearl/. This website is your friend. Explore it and think about the information in the context of our class topic and the discussions.
Grading

Your class grade will be determined by three elements: 1) Class participation and attendance (100 points); 2) Answering the included questions on each of the weekly reading and commentary on that reading done in form of class participation (100 points) (11 paper opportunities; drop lowest grade); 3) short film review paper (100 points).

Class participation and attendance: Attendance is necessary for this course. I expect you to take notes on what is presented in the class and on the discussions that take place. I hope to see evidence of this in your response papers to the readings as well as in the other written assignments. If you attend every class and complete your assignments on time, you will ace the course. Perfect attendance will gain you 100 points. You will receive 90 points for up to 2 absences. Four absences will gain you no more than 80 points. More than four absences and your fate is entirely in my hands. To be excused, an absence must be explained in writing, with the reason clearly laid out. Medical reasons must have doctor’s explanation.

Short, writing assignments. Each week you will have a set of reading to complete. In your packet you’ll find questions, that can be answered briefly, in narrative form, on each of the reading. You’re responsible for answer these questions and then being prepared to discuss each reading in class. Each set of weekly answers will be graded and each will be worth 10 points. There are 11 sets of readings. Therefore, you will be able to drop (or ignore) 2 of the weekly set of questions. In other words, you will be graded on 10 assignments, for a possible total of 100 points. Late writing assignments, or assignments that are not typed, will not be accepted under any circumstances.

Film Review Essay: Near the end of the semester, you will see a film. You will analyze and review this film using the perspectives that you have picked up from the readings and the class discussions. The review will be around 5-6 pages and will use citations from the readings when appropriate. Format will be discussed in class. (Due April 16.)

There are 300 points possible for the course. To calculate your final grade, divide your total number of points by 300 and find the percentage on this scale:

Grading Scale:

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Schedule of Themes and Discussion Topics

Jan. 8  Introduction to Course: What is Sociology? What does it Mean to be Human?

Jan. 15  Martin Luther King Holiday=No class

Jan. 22  How Sociologists Look at the Individual
  • 1) The Promise: C. Wright Mills
  • 2) Human Societies: Chapter 1 and 2 (Lenski, et. al.)
  • 3) How is Society Possible (Charon)
  • 4) Body Ritual Among the Nacirema (Miner)
  • Witt: Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Use the Website to orient your thinking this and every week.
http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/

Jan. 29  The Creation of the Individual
  • 5) Individualism (Kivisto)
  • 6) Socialization and Self (Landis)
  • 7) What Does It Mean to be Human? (Charon)
  • Witt: Chapter 7

Feb. 5  The Biology of it all: Does Nature Lead to Nurture?
  • 8) Are Humans Free? (Charon)
  • 9) The Mind (Wilson)
  • 10) Genome: Chromosome 7-Instinct (Ridley)
  • 11) Genome: Chromosome 11-Personality (Ridley)

Feb. 12  It’s Nature AND Nurture
  • 12) A Natural Experiment of History (Diamond)
  • 13) The Origins of the Sacred Cow (Harris)
  • Witt: Chapter 9

Feb. 19  Creating the “Other” or Vice Versa
  • 14) Why can’t Everyone be Like Us? (Charon)
  • 15) Japan: A Conforming Culture (Schneider/Silverman)
  • Witt: Chapters 6 and Chapter 10

Feb. 26  Gender Indentities and the Individual
  • 16) Becoming “Boys,” “Men,””Guys,” and “Dudes” (Franklin)
  • 17) Beauty and the Beast of Advertising (Kilbourne)
  • 18) The Influence of Gender Socialization in Eating Disorders (Taub and McLorg)
  • 19) From Toads to Queens: Introduction (Schifter)
  • Witt: Chapter 13
March 5 Racial and Ethnic Identities and the Individual
• 20) A Question of Color (Winn)
• 21) The Black Male in Public (Anderson)
• Witt: Chapter 14

March 12 Modernity and the Individual
• 22) The Consequences of Modernity: Chapter 1 (Giddens)
• 23) Modernity-Chapter 5 (Kivisto)
• 24) Modernity and forms of Personhood in Melanesia (Lambek/Strathern)

March 19 Spring Break (Mar. 19-24)

March 26 American Individualism
• 25) Popular Individualism (Gans)
• 26) Why are People Unequal in Society (Charon)
• 27) Nickle and Dimed: Intro, Serving Florida, Evaluation (Ehrenreigh)
• 28) Why do we believe what we do? (Charon)
• Witt: Chapter 12

April 2 Film

April 9 The Individual and Global Forces
• 29) Why We Hate (Monteith/Winters)
• 30) Jihad vs. McWorld: Introduction (Barber)
• 31) Jihad vs. McWorld: The Old Economy and the Birth of a New McWorld (Barber)
• 32) Jihad vs. McWorld: Securing Global Democracy in the World of McWorld (Barber)
• Witt: Chapter 11

April 16 This Land Is Our Land
• 33) The Hispanic Challenge (Huntington)
• 34) Does the Individual Really Make a Difference? (Charon)
• 35) The Social Sciences (Wilson)
• Witt: Chapters 8 and 15

Film Review Due

April 23 Finals Week Begins