Spring 2015 instructors:
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Class: MWTh 11:00-11:50am
in Gerstenzang 124

Office hours (in Pearlman 211):
Monday 2-3pm
Thursday 12-1pm, & by appointment

This course focuses broadly on processes of order and change, with an emphasis on how individual choice both shapes and is shaped by institutional and societal dynamics. While Sociology is a wide-ranging field, we will not be concerned with introducing all of its distinct substantive areas, but instead with understanding particular key generalizable processes. Our central motivation will be to uncover how systems of power operate to produce sustained inequalities, as well as how individuals and groups confront, and sometimes alter, such institutionalized systems. To this end, we begin by examining how complex social systems emerge from simple patterns of interaction. Armed with this background, we then examine a variety of issues and institutions, touching on race, class, gender, community organizations, schools, informal social spaces, and social movements. We reserve the right to retain some fluidity across our weekly time slots, but many weeks will combine large lectures and discussion on Mondays and Wednesdays with smaller section meetings or “lab” activities on Thursdays. Readings often will serve to supplement and apply what we do during class rather than cover the same ground. A central goal of the semester is not only to have you understand specific concepts and processes from readings and class discussions, but also to introduce new perspectives that enable you to develop fresh insights from the books, films, music, and interactions that surround you everyday.

Office Hours
David has scheduled office hours on Mondays from 2:00 to 3:00 and Thursdays from 12:00 to 1:00. If these times are not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements – email is generally a good way to contact any of us, and our email addresses are listed at the top of this page. We encourage each of you to come to office hours to discuss problems with the class or any other issues that interest or concern you. Each of us will generally be available for quick questions immediately after class, and you can also leave messages in any of our mailboxes on the second floor of Pearlman Hall. Additionally, if you need to contact David at other times, his phone numbers are listed above.
**Readings**
The materials in this course will likely be more varied than what you have encountered in most other Brandeis classes. The logic here is that a wide range of essays, stories, films, songs and other audio recordings, newspaper and magazine articles, and web pages – including those that you might usually read, view, or listen to on your own – can serve as a jumping-off point for developing general sociological insights. Many of these sources will be available online; those posted on our course Latte page are referred to as ‘L’ readings below. Additionally, the following books are required for this course:

- *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, by Erving Goffman
- *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School*, by Shamus Rahman Khan
- *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, by Alice Goffman
- *Doormen*, by Peter Bearman

**Assignments and Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 response papers (10% each)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term take-home project/essays</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final essays</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**Response papers**
Over the course of the semester, you will submit three brief (no more than 3 page) thought papers that respond to a book-length reading and its connections to class discussions. Everyone will complete a response to the Erving Goffman book, due on January 28. After that, you can select any two books to serve as the basis for, respectively, your second and third papers. Those papers will be due by the start of class on the Thursday of the week in which we begin talking about the book in question. Assuming that we stay on track with the tentative schedule in the course outline below (and note that, if we fall behind, we will provide plenty of advance notice of due-date changes associated with these response papers), response paper due dates would fall on the weeks of February 9 (Gladwell), March 9 (Khan), March 23 (A. Goffman), and April 13 (Bearman). We will distribute a detailed set of guidelines for these thought assignments in class, but basically each response should briefly summarize key concepts from readings and class, and then focus on: 1) how effectively you feel these concepts explain particular real-world phenomena, and 2) any ideas you have about extending these concepts to better explain aspects of social life.

**Mid-term and Final Essays**
Twice during the semester (in mid-March, and during the final class session in April), we will distribute essay questions designed to tie together broad sets of ideas from readings and class
discussion. Approximately one week after you receive each set of questions, you will need to hand in written responses not exceeding a total of ten double-spaced pages.

Participation
Much of the benefit of this class will come through class discussion. It is therefore very important for each of you to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss issues you found interesting or want clarified. We understand that in-class participation is sometimes difficult in a large class, and we therefore view the 'participation' component of your grade very broadly -- meaning that participation can include contributing during class, as well as asking questions and/or suggesting ideas, possible topics of discussion, connections between class topics and current events, etc. outside of class (i.e. before or after class, in office hours, or over email). Once a week, you will meet in smaller discussion sections or work in groups on “lab” problems, which do provide a fuller opportunity to contribute your thoughts, questions, and critiques. Participation is especially important here – your instructor will take attendance, and you are expected to be present for each session (please make arrangements ahead of time with both David and your section instructor if you cannot make a section meeting). We additionally reserve the right to offer opportunities for extra participation credit related to events or activities relevant to this class.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Academic Services office (x63470; brodgers@brandeis.edu).

Course Outline

Weeks 1-2 (12-22 January; no class 1/19):
- Introductory business
- Building a macrostructure: Social exchange & social roles
  - reading: Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Weeks 3-4 (26 January - 5 February; class on 2/5 meets in Sherman Hall, Hassenfeld Conf. Ctr.):
- Performance, identity, and the presentation of self
  - reading: Goffman, con’t
  Tom Wolfe, “The Mermaid Blushed” (L)
- Roles and power: the emergence of status distinctions
  - film: *Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Study*

First response paper due 1/28
Week 5 (9-12 February):
   ● Networks, social structure, and the “rules of epidemics”

Week 6 (16-19 February): No class (“midterm recess”)

Weeks 7-8 (23 February-5 March):
   ● Understanding macro-outcomes: Networks, thresholds, and diffusion
     -reading: Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, Chs. 4-5
     Nicholas A. Christakis & James H. Fowler, *Connected* (L)

Weeks 9-10 (9-19 March):
   ● Inequality from above: privilege and status
     -reading: Shamus Rahman Khan, *Privilege*

Midterm take-home essays due 3/19

Weeks 11-12 (23 March - 2 April):
   ● Inequality from below
     -reading: Alice Goffman, *On the Run*
   ● Civil rights events

Week 13 (6-9 April): No class (“spring recess”)

Weeks 14-15 (13-23 April):
   ● Observing social life analytically
     -reading: Peter Bearman: *Doormen*

Week 16 (27 April):
   ● Course wrap-up

Final essays due (tba)