Introduction to Sociology, Science of Modern Life
Greggor Mattson
SOCI 112 Syllabus * Spring 2009
King 341, MWF 11am

Course Description
Learn the methods and theories that sociologists use to understand our mass society that emerged out of 19th-century industrial and political revolutions. This young science’s insights will help us understand contemporary controversies around inequality, social change, gender, race and power. This course will familiarize you with the relationship between sociology and other disciplines, techniques for reading original research articles, basic sociological writing skills, and mostly importantly, the social origin of individual thought and action.

This course is Writing Intensive and a prerequisite for topical sociology classes.

Writing Tutors: Ethan Foote (ethan.foote@oberlin.edu)
Abbey Chung (abbey.chung@oberlin.edu)
OFFICE HOURS TBA

Contact info
greggor.mattson@oberlin.edu
Mailbox on my door, King 305c
Office hours: Mon 2:00-3:00pm; Wed 9am-10:45am; by appointment

Required books

Goals
1) read and write like a (social) scientist
2) learn how sociologists think and work
3) analyze specific research pieces—book-length and articles
4) locate sociology in relation to other sciences and humanities

Assessment
Dedication to the readings
Office hours 10% (2.5% per visit, at least 4 required)
Low stakes writing 30% (in-class writes, homework paragraphs, pop quizzes)
3 assignments 45% (15% each)
Final Exam 15%
Respect for each other

Assignments: 5 pages max.
Assignments are evidence of your comprehension of the course materials, your ability to
synthesize them with our discussions, and your contribution to the intellectual discussion. Do not mistake the length of these assignments for their importance. Each is worth 15% of your grade and deserves attention over several days, not a last-minute dash on the night before they are due. Use the writing center tutors, colleagues and friends to develop your ideas, hone your writing, and edit your final draft.

Assignment #1: Observations in public DUE MARCH 2
Using Grazian as a model, make observations of a group of Oberlin students to make a sociological argument about the interactions you witness. How do social roles influence the “personal” decisions made by your colleagues?

Assignment #2: Peer interview DUE APRIL 3
Use Lareau to analyze class position and trajectory. Interview someone who is NOT a friend about their upbringing and high school extracurricular experiences. Use Lareau to interpret your interviewee’s experiences.

Assignment #3: Hypothesis testing DUE MAY 1
Reproduce one of the trends in Fischer and Hout using the General Social Survey. Specify your hypothesis, the recoding necessary to create your crosstabulation, and its results. What do your results suggest about the sociological trajectory of American society?

Participation (in 3 easy steps)
Participation begins with attendance but doesn’t stop there. Lectures are only a small part of this course. We will spend most of our time discussing the readings and linking them to the main concepts and themes of the course. Read the materials before class and bring them with you so we have a common vocabulary to discuss your personal reactions and experiences. My job is to guide discussions and make sure everyone’s questions get answered—though not necessarily by me. Come prepared to ask and answer questions. Here are some to start you off:

• what are the main concepts this author is using?
• what is the point of this article—what is the author trying to explain?
• how convincing is the argument?
• how does it relate to the others we have covered?

Bring reading notes to class with passages that you like, that capture a main idea, or puzzle you.

Reading Tips
It’s better to skim through each of the texts than to get hung up on a difficult page. Try skimming the whole selection in 5 minutes. Notice section headings, bold words, or highlighted quotations just to get a sense of the story the author is telling. When you sit down to read the whole thing, you’ll already know where the argument is going.

Attendance
Your on-time attendance is essential to your ability to participate. Besides, fun stuff happens at the start of class. If you miss, it is your responsibility to get notes from a colleague and come to office hours to discuss what you missed. Our time together is short—missing even one class may
indirectly affect your grade if you miss assignment advice.

The first two absences are freebees; unexcused absences beyond two will affect your participation grade. Make up in-class work or quizzes during office hours at a penalty of one letter grade. If you will be missing class events for approved College events, please provide documentation at least two weeks before your absence so we can keep you up to speed.

**Honor Code:** [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html)

Remember to sign each assignment—it is your reminder to know the boundaries of cheating (not doing your own work) plagiarism (taking credit for someone else’s work) and fabrication (making up sources, quotations or observations). All quotations should be attributed properly. Refer to the honor code and/or talk to me if you have concerns or are feeling so pressed that cheating seems attractive.

**Disability Accommodations**

If you are a student with a disability, make sure you’ve registered with the Office of Disability Services (Peters G-27/28 x55588) to develop a plan to meet your academic needs. Bring their recommendations to me at least two weeks before any due date or exam.

**Grading rubric**

Assignments will be graded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis sentence</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>On time</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
<td>10</td>
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**Sources & Citations (APA format)**

You need not make a works cited for course readings but you must cite them properly in the text in APA format. *Wikipedia is not an academic source, but may lead you to primary sources.*

Paraphrasing primary sources (preferred):

- Media in the 1950s catered to the rising middle class, giving a misleading impression of America’s families (Coontz 1990, p. 31).

Direct quotations (use sparingly) must be introduced:

- Stephanie Coontz cites the enduring power of the media for creating a new American tradition during the baby boom: “The happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s were… a result of the media’s denial of diversity” (1990, p. 31).

**Final Exam**

I will distribute the final essay questions on the last day of class for you to study. I will choose three of them for you to answer during the exam period. They will be broad questions that will require you to draw on the breadth of the course and reflect on what you know about sociology.
UNIT ONE: RECREATION: BUILDING THE SELF BY GOING OUT
This unit has three goals. We will analyze Grazian’s *On the Make* as an example of a sociological research monography; we will learn concepts useful to interpreting his empirical research topic, urban nightlife; but most importantly we will see how his data support one of the foundations of sociology: the social origins of the self.

Feb 4: The social life of chemicals: marijuana and raging hormones

*These readings reveal two examples of the ways that meanings define the reality of social life. In the first, users must learn to enjoy smoking marijuana for pleasure—the drug itself is not sufficient without the social context in which it makes sense. Chemicals have pharmacological effects, but we interpret these sensations using cultural meanings. In the second reading, racial attitudes (and not necessarily racist ones) shape the rates of interracial marriage. Note: Professor Qian is visiting next week.*

Feb 6: Expressive and utilitarian individualism in American culture

*What do the authors mean that there is a paradox about individualism in American culture? In what ways is the college experience an institutionalized process of “finding selves” for the middle class? What evidence do they authors give that individuals are made by society and not the other way ’round?*

Feb 9: Reading a research monograph
Grazian, *On the Make*.

*Skim the intro, then turn to the back and read the methods and appendices pp. 235-249. The methods section answers our questions about how the author knows what he knows, why we should trust their conclusions, and the strengths and limitations of their project. Note the notes: do they look useful to refer to when reading the chapters?*

HOMEWORK: Bring a list of unfamiliar terms for discussion.

Feb 11: Reading an Introduction
Grazian, Chapter 1.
The intro is where the author tells us what their project is about and gives us the criteria to judge its success or failure. Closely read the introduction with an eye to answering these questions:

HOMEWORK: Make a list of the concepts important to the author. Identify the research question. Answer the following question in paragraph form: What is the author studying? Why is it an interesting sociological question?

*** FEB 12 GUEST SPEAKER Zhenchao Qian, KING 337, 4:30pm

Feb 13: Staging Urban Nightlife
Grazian, Chapter 2.

Sociology applies theoretical concepts (abstract concepts and ideas) to understand empirical (observable, concrete) phenomena. What did the author observe in this chapter? Into what conceptual category does he classify his observations? What insights does this interpretation provide? Which of the concepts he introduced in chapter 1 does he apply here?

EXTRA: Watch Top Chef

Feb 16: Spin Control in the Culture Industry
Grazian, Chapter 3.

What is the difference between media and advertising? What does this chapter tell us about what makes a successful nightspot? What concepts from Chapter 1 does it illustrate? What is the culture industry, and why is it a useful sociological concept?

Feb 18: In the Company of Men
Grazian, Chapter 5

Why do guys still chase women even if they know that they will almost surely fail?

Feb 20: Hustling the Hustlers
Grazian, Chapter 6

Why do women go out if they don’t want to be chased by men? What does each gender get out of their unsuccessful interactions in public?

Feb 23: The Experience of Urban Nightlife
Grazians, Chapters 7 and Conclusion

Given the cynical take Grazian presents about the nightlife world—producers, consumers, players and haters—what do people get out of their experiences? Why do they go back, again and again, and enjoy it so much?

Feb 25: You’re Not the Boss of You: Class, classy, classless

Now you’re ready for a journal article from one of the top two sociology journals. First skim through the article—it’s not meant to be read like a novel. Pay special attention to the abstract and the conclusion. What is Bryson’s argument, and why is it sociologically interesting?

HOMEWORK: Turn in your thesis sentence for Assignment #1

*** FILM NIGHT *** Feb 26 7pm Devil’s Playground (2002) DVD-1022

Compare and contrast individualism among your peers and among the Amish. In what ways do Amish youth express their individuality during rumspringa? What is similar or different about their expressions? What can we say about the social origins of individualism in American culture based on our peek into Amish life?

Feb 27: Going out, growing up, getting class
Peterson R.A. “Roll over Beethoven, there’s a new way to be cool.” Contexts 1 (July 1, 2002): 34-39.

We’ll finish our discussions of Bryson, Grazian and the film before moving on to the next unit.

UNIT TWO: CULTURE AND INEQUALITY
Materialist approaches to inequality look at money and property. Cultural accounts look at the influence of culture on daily practices. Lareau’s book provides an account of the benefits that parents bestow on their children through their childrearing practices, one that is sophisticated methodologically and theoretically.

*** ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE MARCH 2 ***

Mar 2  Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth
Lareau, Chapter 1, appendix A, notes, acknowledgements

Repeat the exercises from Feb. 9th that we used with Grazian.

HOMEWORK: Bring a list of unfamiliar terms for discussion.

Mar 4  Social Structure and Daily Life: Bourdieu and social theory
Lareau, Chapter 2 + appendix B

Appendix B provides a mini theory lesson, illustrating how social theory underpins both the methods by which sociologists do their research, the way they interpret their data, and how they tie their conclusions into broader sociological questions. How does Lareau accomplish these tasks in Chapter 2?
Mar 6 The Organization of Daily Life (how to read for content)
Lareau, Chapters 3-5

Three chapters? On a Friday? What strategies are you going to use to get the content out of these chapters without spending any more time than you would normally spend on a Friday’s worth of reading (assuming that time >0)?

Mar 9 Language Use: Middle Class
Lareau, Chapter 6 (30pp)
Weiss, Robert S. “In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews.” Contexts 3, no. 4 (2004): 44-51.

In addition to reading the content of the Lareau chapter, read the Weiss article with an eye to Assignment #2.

Mar 11 Language Use: Working Class
Lareau, Chapter 7 (30pp)

Mar 13 Families and Institutions: Concerted Cultivation
Lareau, Chapter 8-9 (33)

Mar 16 Educational Institutions and Middle Class Culture
Lareau, Chapter 10-11 (198-232)

Mar 18 The Power and Limits of Social Class
Lareau, Chapter 12: conclusion

HOMEWORK: Turn in your interview schedule for assignment #2

*** FILM NIGHT *** Michael Apted’s 42 Up (1992)

Mar 20: Class and Culture

*** SPRING BREAK ***

UNIT FOUR: SOCIOLOGY AND MODERNITY: THE STRUCTURE OF HISTORY
Sociology views history as discontinuous, with society essentially transformed by the wrenching changes of the late 19th century. This unit looks at the way those changes played out in American lives by looking at population trends.

Mar 30: Sociology and modernity
Mattson handout

Apr 1 Sociology and history: the changing meaning of childhood

Economics holds that markets set values, but values actually fix markets: the rules for what can and cannot be exchanged. How is this sociological insight illustrated by Zelizer?

* * * ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE APR 3 * * *

Apr 3  Is America Fragmenting?

What is different about the historical sociology deployed by Fischer and Mattson and the kind of history you got in high school? What is their argument, and why is it surprising to most folks? Is their evidence persuasive? Why or why not?

Apr 6  Century of Difference
Fischer and Hout, Preface, Introduction, Appendices and Notes

Use your well-honed skills to dissect the introduction and back matter of this statistical and historical sociological monograph. What is their research project? Their data source? Their thesis?

HOMEWORK: Bring a list of unfamiliar terms to lecture

Apr 8  How American Expanded Education and Why It Mattered
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 2

What are the major trends in US Educational history? Why is this interesting sociologically? What is the relationship between this data and the argument in Lareau’s book?

Apr 10: Where Americans Came From
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 3

In the next few course meetings we will pay close attention to the language of hypothesis testing that Fischer and Hout use—it serves as a model for your third assignment

Apr 13: How Americans Lived
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 4

Apr 15: How Americans Worked
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 5

Apr 17: What Americans Had
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 6
Apr 20: Where Americans Lived
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 7

Apr 22: How Americans Prayed
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 8

Apr 24: The Direction of Americans’ Differences
(possible guest speaker, Professor Rebecca Adams)
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 10

HOMEWORK: Turn in your table for assignment #3 with your research hypothesis written out.

UNIT 4: YOU ARE NOT THE BOSS OF YOU: The social origin of individuality
The power of sociological insight lies in its study of the ways that each individual is formed from wider contexts: the meanings provided by culture, the trajectories of social class positions, and the social roles from institutions.

Apr 27: The social life of chemicals: raging hormones?

Raging hormones? Americans regularly ascribe behavioral traits to their hormones, the Dutch do not. Are Americans more hormonal than Europeans, or is something else going on here? The meaning of sex and hormones is culture-specific, and culture is as powerful as any hormone.

Apr 29

*** ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE MAY 1 ***

May 1

May 4

May 6

May 8 review

*** May 14 Final Exam from 7:00pm-9:00pm ***