

SOCIOLOGY

Professor: Sal Restivo (Sage 5304)

Email: restis@rpi.edu

salrestivo.org

Phone: 8504

Office Hours: Daily and weekly office hours will be announced in advance; otherwise, by appointment (Sage 5204).

Teaching Fellow: Christine Eromonec (eromoc@rpi.edu)

NOTE: This course carries social science credit only.

Course objectives: This is an introduction to the field of sociology. My approach is to treat sociology as a culture for which I am the informant. My role, then, is to introduce you to this culture – to its language, its view of the world, its technologies for generating knowledge claims, and its place in the pantheon of sciences. Your role, as a visitor to this culture, is to learn the basic features of this culture as they are presented in this course. It's important to keep in mind that this course is about my culture – the culture of sociology; it is not about your culture. However, since sociology takes as its subject matter society and culture (all societies and cultures), it generates perspectives on, theories about, and facts about you (individually and collectively), your society, and your culture. This fact is inevitably the source of tensions between the sociological worldview and your worldview. A related source of tension is the fact that your ability to navigate your social world requires that you have a theory about how that world works. We are all, in that sense, social theorists. The tension, then, is between everyday folk social theories and professional scientifically grounded social theories. I will have more to say about this in class.

No one has yet realized the wealth of sympathy, the kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure.

[Emma Goldman](#)



1869-1940

Course Text (Required)

Marty Zusman, David Knox, Tracie Gardner, **The Social Context View of Sociology**, Carolina Academic Press, Durham NC, 2009.

On electronic reserve: works by Randall Collins (from *Sociological Insight*), Sal Restivo (from *The Sociological Worldview*), introductory materials by Bradshaw & Healey (*Sociology for a New Century*), Henslin (*Essentials of Sociology*), Collins and Makowsky (*The Discovery of Society*), excerpts from Sanderson's *Macrosociology*. We will read material from Collins and Restivo. You are encouraged to explore the other readings on your own.

CORE TOPICS IN SOCIOLOGICAL REASONING

Causarum Cognitio

Knowledge of Causes



The School of Athens [Raphael](#), [1509–1510 Fresco](#), [Vatican City](#), [Apostolic Palace](#)

There are five areas of sociology that I like to focus on in teaching this course: the sociology of the self; social life as the causal foundation of human behavior; interrogating the social institutions of (1) marriage, family, and sexuality (erotics and intimacy), (2) the sociology of religion; and (3) the sociology (political economy) of the world. My specialty is the sociology of science and the perspective and findings of that field will permeate this course.

I. THE SELF (INDIVIDUAL, PERSON) IS A SOCIAL THING

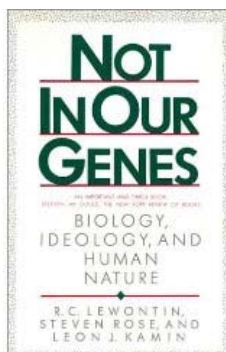
George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)

Mead's work has led to the final demise, at least within sociology, of what Simmel once called the "fallacy of separateness," which considers actors without reference to the interactions in which they are variously engaged. For Mead, no monads without windows ever exist in the social world; there is never an I without a Thou, to use Martin Buber's terminology. An ego is inconceivable without an alter, and the self is best visualized as a vivid nodal point in a field of social interaction. This perspective on human action has by now become an essential characteristic of all thinking that wishes to be called sociological. Although Mead was by no means alone in having prepared it, he surely was one of its major sources.

http://www.bolender.com/Sociological%20Theory/Mead,%20George%20Herbert/mead,_george_herbert.htm

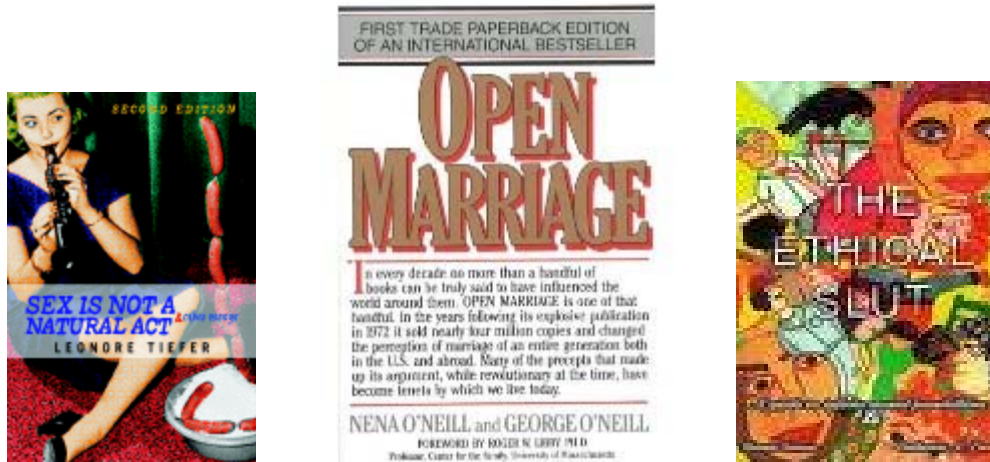
II. GENES, BRAIN, AND SOCIAL LIFE

The social brain hypothesis proposes that large neocortex size in Hominoids evolved to cope with the increasing demands of complex group living and greater numbers of interindividual relationships. The question is: did brains get larger and lead to culture? Did culture evolve and lead to larger brains? Or, did brains and culture co-evolve?



Interrogating Social Institutions _Marriage, Family, and Sexuality. For some time medical investigators have recognized the concept of the intersexual body. But the standard medical literature uses the term *intersex* as a catch-all for three major subgroups with some mixture of male and female characteristics: the so-called true hermaphrodites, whom I call herms, who possess one testis and one ovary (the sperm- and egg-producing vessels, or gonads); the male pseudohermaphrodites (the "merms"), who have testes and some aspects of the female genitalia but no ovaries; and the female pseudohermaphrodites (the "ferms"), who have ovaries and some

aspects of the male genitalia but lack testes. Each of those categories is in itself complex; the percentage of male and female characteristics, for instance, can vary enormously among members of the same subgroup. Moreover, the inner lives of the people in each subgroup— their special needs and their problems, attractions and repulsions— have gone unexplored by science. But on the basis of what is known about them I suggest that the three intersexes, herm, merm and ferm, deserve to be considered additional sexes each in its own right. Indeed, I would argue further that sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories.
Anne-Fausto Sterling



IV. The Social Construction of the Gods and Religion

"The general conclusion of the book which the reader has before him is that religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain, or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they should be social affairs and the product of collective thought. At least -- for in the actual condition of our knowledge of these matters, one should be careful to avoid all radical and exclusive statements -- it is allowable to suppose that they are rich in social elements." From Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912).

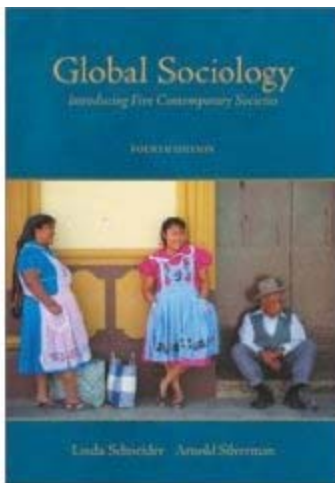
According to Marx, the foundation of all criticism is the criticism of religion. Why? Because religion sanctions the separation of man from himself, the cleavage between the sacred and the profane, between the supernatural and nature. (H. Lefebvre 1968).

Marx (like Camus) "refuses to take atheism seriously. It misses the point." (H.L. Parsons 1964). The whole concept of atheism is one derived from the religious sphere itself. Atheism itself comes from a religious stance and is a religious term. Louis Dupre characterizes atheism as no more than an ideology itself, "...an idle and ill-directed theoretical attitude that only drains much needed energy away from the battle for a true humanization." Dupre

continues by pointing out that Merleau-Ponty "refused to be called an atheist, because atheism is still an inverted act of faith" (Dupre 1982). Marx did not start with the denial of God, but with the affirmation of man, the sole source of meaning.

V. Political Economy and a Sociology of the World

*Questioning a candidate's patriotism is not new in American elections, but what strikes me as unusual is the vehemence with which Obama's global appeal and consciousness is derided by those who sneer at an African-American brought up in Hawai'i, Kansas, and Indonesia. His names, race, and multicultural background certainly play a role in these aggressive attempts to relegate Obama to the margins of the national imaginary. But there is more. For many Americans, the Illinois senator is the problematic personification of a dynamic generally known by the buzzword "globalization." One of the consequences of the dramatic compression of the world since the 1990s has been the destabilization of the national. The mental and geographical maps that help us navigate our political universe no longer correspond neatly to the familiar order built over the last century on the foundation of the sovereign and self-contained nation-state. Faced with genuinely global problems like climate change, transnational terrorism, energy and food crises, and growing inequality, young and bright politicians like Obama who have seen beyond the cornfields of the American Midwest grasp that the national has become inextricably linked to the global. Thus, they have begun to translate into concrete political agendas what I call the "global imaginary"—a sense of a thickening world community, bound together by economic and cultural processes that are daily shrinking our planet. Manfred Steger, author of [*The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*](#) 2008.*





Let the games begin.....

Indiana Jones: Wear your jewels to bed Princess?
Willie: Yeah... and nothing else. Shock you?
Indiana Jones: Nothing shocks me. I'm a scientist.

Schedule of Readings and Quizzes

9/1 Read Chapter 1 • The Social Context Perspective 3 for 9/4

9/4 Chapter 2 • Culture 25 for 9/8 **QUIZ**

9/8 Chapter 3 • Socialization 49 for 9/11 **Q**

9/11

9/15 **Q**

9/18

9/22 **Q**

9/25 Chapter 4 • Social Order and Deviance 71 for 9/29

9/29 **Q**

10/2 Chapter 5 • Population and Human Ecology 99 for 10/6

10/6 Chapter 6 • Collective Behavior and Social Movements 127 for 10/9 **Q**

10/9

10/16 Q

10/20 Chapter 7 • Groups 153 for 10/23 Q

10/23 Chapter 8 • Social Class, Race, and Ethnicity 177 for 10/27

10/27 Chapter 9 • Gender and Age 203 for 10/30 Q

10/30 Chapter 10 • Families and Communities 225 for 11/3

11/3 **MIDTERM**

11/6

11/10 Chapter 11 • Education for 11/13 Q

11/13 Chapter 11 • Religion 249 for 11/17 &
Read R. Collins and S. Restivo on God and religion (on electronic reserve).

11/17 Q

11/20

11/24Q

12/1 Chapter 12 • Politics and Economics 275 for 12/4 Q

12/4

12/8 Chapter 13 • Networks and Societies 295 for 12/11 **FINAL**

12/11

Last Words and the Fallacy of the Last Word.

“Be just, do good.” John Adams & Thomas Jefferson (religion boiled down to 4 words).

SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE STATEMENT:

We will generally follow the schedule outlined in this syllabus, but adjustments to the schedule may be necessary, based on what actually happens in class. Be sure to check with a classmate after an absence to see if assignments have changed. Remaining in the course after reading this syllabus will signal that you accept the possibility of changes and responsibility for being aware of them. You can expect in general to spend at least part of each period discussing the reading for that day if there is a reading assignment due. There are five topics I like to focus on over the

course of the semester, and in this order: the self as a social structure; the social – what it means to say we humans are social; sex, gender, intimate relationships, and marriage and family; religion as a social construct; and the political economy of the world. So you can think of the semester divided into the chapter readings on one level and divided into five modules (the topics I just listed) on another level. We may do less justice to some chapters than others in class depending on time available, how they link up with the modules, and whether videos interrupt the chapter sequence.

GRADING POLICY

Grades will be determined as follows. There will be a short answer quiz each week – usually on Tuesday, but note that the first quiz will come on the first Friday of the term. Quiz days are marked with a **Q**. Normally, there will be 10 questions on a quiz. Each question will be worth 1 or 2 points, and there will occasionally be extra credit questions. The questions will be based on the readings and can draw on anything that occurs in class. In the simplest case, the scheme works as follows: 13 quizzes worth 10 points each (for a total of 130 points); midterm (50 points); final (120 points). Your point totals are cumulative, so: 250-300 = A; 200-249 = B; 150-199 = C; 100-149 = D; 0-99 = F.

Class attendance. If you anticipate missing more than three classes (excused or unexcused absences), please see me. For each missed class after your third (for whatever reason), 51 points will be deducted from your final score.