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Beyond the Core: The Hot Topic(al) Alternative to the Survey-Based Introduction to Sociology Course

Michael Schwartz and

Stony Brook University Med Ctr, Stony Brook, NY 11794-0001, USA

R. Tyson Smith

Stony Brook University Med Ctr, Stony Brook, NY 11794-0001, USA

Michael Schwartz: mschwartz@ms.cc.sunysb.edu; R. Tyson Smith: tyson321@gmail.com

Abstract

In the following paper we argue that the conventional “Introduction to Sociology” survey course should be restructured because such courses try to survey an unsurveyable body of knowledge and they do not teach the application of sociological research. The conventional intro course should be replaced with an intro course that surveys the types of social dynamics that sociologists typically research and the methods they use to do so. We propose a semester-long intro course with four case study learning-units that are chosen for their coverage of the underlying sociological dynamics, methods, and core concepts. We contend that case study learning-units which concentrate on topical issues and core sociological concepts are better suited for an introduction course.

Keywords

Teaching; Pedagogy; Introduction to Sociology; Gender; Inequality

Conventional “Introduction to Sociology” Courses

In virtually every sociology department in the US, the most frequently taken sociology course is the Intro Course (‘Undergraduate Sociology’ 1975). This places a heavy burden on this one course, a burden made heavier by the fact that, unlike many other disciplines, sociology is only occasionally taught in high school. Thus for many students, “Introduction to Sociology” is the first and only sociology course they will ever take.

This burden may explain the frustration and disdain for the introductory course and for the textbooks that typically accompany it. Among the relentless complaints are Lenski’s call for a “major overhaul” (1983:112), Chertok’s complaint that “sociologists don’t do very well at the lower division introductory survey of the discipline” (1991: 112), Stauffer’s declaration that the discipline is “too methodologically sophisticated and too theoretically complex to be conveyed adequately” (1985:128), and Stephan and Massey’s conclusion that the course “attracts a large number of students interested in metaphysical debates on issues—not empirical research” (Stephan and Massey 1982: 430).

The common complaint, however, is about the textbooks. Wolf focused on the “dull encyclopedic presentation of concepts.” (1996: 408; see also Lenski 1983). Kinnell and Hecht pointed to the context-less lists of “theories and concepts that students are required to memorize” (1996: 238). Stauffer decried their failure to develop a sustained argument (1985: 130). And, more recently, Hamilton traced a trend toward culling student attention by highlighting sociological personalities, an emphasis that “completely overwhelmed any scientific concerns” (2003: 295).

These criticisms suggest that there has been very little progress since James Davis declared in 1983 that “[t]he average intro course is superficial, unscientific, unduly eclectic, moralistic, thin in substance, boringly focused on antiquated topics, and I am really glad I don’t have to teach it.” (1983: 186). (Except, of course, that a huge number of us still “have to teach it.”)

The Problem of Large Lectures

Many instructors who are blessed with small enrollments suited to discussion formats abandon or augment the survey course methodology, ameliorating at least some of the problems that Intro critics so relentlessly document. But in large courses, there is far less room to maneuver.

For us, the key challenge was encouraging student interaction with the course material. Such interaction is a staple in smaller courses (less than 50 students), taking many forms, including discussion in class, oral presentations, small group work, and in-class writing projects read aloud to the entire class or to a small group. Such methods are hard to execute once the class exceeds 50 students; and with classes (like ours) that have an enrollment of over 200, the sheer number of students and the intimidating physical environment of a large lecture hall make student-to-student, as well as student-to-instructor, interaction a major challenge.¹

A second problem inherent to the large-course format was highlighted by a recent discussion on our department’s listserve about our inability to supply most courses with sufficient graduate teaching assistants.² An email from the department administrator did not mince words about the cause or the solution to the problem: “With the budget situation the way it is, they are pushing us all to do more. I know, it stinks. Just cut down on any writing requirements and do more multiple choice tests to make it easier for yourself” (Sociology Dept. Listserve 9/03/04).

While we can all agree that this is an unsatisfactory remedy, our department and many others have condoned, if not recommended, this approach because it lessens the already large burden of the overwhelmed and outnumbered instructor. Unfortunately, this solution simply sharpens the contrast between large lectures and discussion driven small classes, where various forms of written assignments can be used to immerse the student in the course material.

While our course design does not overcome the necessity for easily graded assignments (we reluctantly limit ourselves to one real written assignment per semester), we nevertheless have tried to create a more student-centered curriculum than the typical lecture course. To

¹When this is combined with insufficient budget to allow for discussion sections, the course almost inevitably devolves into the dull lectures that fuel universal discontent.

²Typically in our department, a course does not qualify for a graduate TA unless 120 students are enrolled. (Unfortunately, many state universities face similar resource constraints.) This eliminates the possibility of organizing discussion sections (unless undergraduate TAs are available), and also restricts the types of graded assignments.

accomplish this, we developed teaching devices that would engage the students and invite participation in a large lecture hall, a process that led us to seek out subjects for our learning units that would be particularly engaging, and for in-class exercises that would command participation.

Dispensing with the Core of the Field

From our own experience and from the aforementioned complaints about introductory courses, we knew that engaging our students would be impossibly difficult if we required them to slog their way through a dull textbook. But this knowledge created an unfortunate dilemma for us, since we also realized that textbooks—despite their many faults—are virtually the only way to cover the core concepts and key debates in one semester. In struggling with this problem, we polled our own department members on what they considered the crucial core (concepts and perspectives), that is, the material that would prepare students for advanced courses in sociology requiring *Introduction to Sociology* as a prerequisite.

We were astonished to discover that there was no consensus on any core, even in our relatively homogenous department beyond a small number of key ideas, like inequality, race, and gender.³ The disagreement was so profound that the instructors in our program did not expect the Intro class to provide any foundational knowledge that they could depend on in more advanced classes.

But this depressing result became a hopeful one when we realized that there was therefore no necessity for our intro course to “cover the field,” a conclusion reinforced by a recent *Teaching Sociology* issue devoted to a discussion about the “core” of sociology.⁴ Most instructors in our upper division courses review all key concepts, perspectives, or scholars that are central to the subject. Stated bluntly, the survey format we use in our department, designed to cover the core in sociology, has failed to provide any meaningful foundation knowledge that can be relied upon by other teachers.

We therefore took this unfortunate situation as permission to develop an alternate model that does not attempt to cover the sociological core.

Design of Our Model

Our course focuses on the ways in which sociology develops and disseminates scientific insight about salient contemporary issues. We attempt to teach *more about sociology* while using *fewer of the standard, codified sociological concepts* that saturate most introductory courses. We find that this “less-is-more” approach is a liberating experience: once freed from the necessity of covering a wide cross-section of sociological terms and theories, we can convey what is important about the sociological enterprise.

Our course is built around two-to-three week learning units that are devoted to specific topics that have the following qualities:

³The disagreement even extended to instructors who taught the same course, so that two instructors who teach the Sociology of Religion looked at things so differently that no Introductory course could prepare students for both of them. And even when two instructors agreed on the centrality of a particular concept, their approaches were usually quite different—different enough so that it would be hard to cover them in a single course.

⁴Teaching Sociology (vol. 32(1). 2004) See particularly Keith and Ender's study on the lack on commonality in concepts and terms used in Intro Sociology textbooks. (Keith and Ender 2004)

- *They are engaging for the students*, because they either connect to highly salient personal experiences or they are prominent public issues about which students have something to say.
- *The research results generate “aha” experiences for the students*. That is, they discover that sociology can teach them something about the subject that is both fascinating and counterintuitive. An example of this is the fact that mass panic very rarely occurs during disasters (Clarke 2002).
- *The sociological insights they learn are applicable to more general issues*. An example is translating their insights about panics and disasters into a broader appreciation of the centrality of organizations to society. This effort is our concession to the “core,” but its more practical purpose is to try to translate students’ fascination with a specific subject into a broader understanding that society as a whole is made up of processes that they can and should comprehend.
- *The topic lends itself to illuminating one or more methodologies*. For example, Margaret Meade’s findings about gender roles offer an opportunity to talk about the usefulness of both ethnography and comparative methods; studying SAT testing demonstrates the power of multivariate quantitative analysis.

Because these multifaceted goals require much more than one class session, we teach only four or five learning units each semester, chosen with sufficiently different content, arguments and methodologies to give a sense of the scope of sociology. We also try to exploit the extreme ethnic diversity and geographic parochialism of our students, drawn almost exclusively from the New York City metropolitan area. For example, with as many as 30 different nationalities⁵ in our class, we can address global inequality with some confidence that students will offer firsthand accounts of stratification throughout the world. We also exploit their pride about New York being the birthplace of hip hop culture—once a competitive break dancer brought his crew to demonstrate key moves and their social origins. Stated bluntly, we attempt to harness the experiential understanding of students because it encourages them to invest in the course material.⁶

The sociology is introduced as a way of providing non-intuitive insights into events and phenomena in which they are already engaged. As Stauffer argued, in a slightly different context:

“If students often know little about important dimensions of their own society, they nonetheless possess an enormous body of impressions, experiential understanding, and even factual information about America which they don’t have with regard to other societies. And given the obvious limits to what can be accomplished in (one) course, the comparative task is greatly simplified if a certain base of knowledge can be assumed about at least one of the societies under consideration” (Stauffer 1985: 134).⁷

⁵The instructor of the Honors entry-level chemistry class demonstrated the remarkable diversity at our university by asking his ($N=80$) students to list their nationalities. Fully 45% were born outside the US from 18 different countries: Belarus(2), Bangladesh (3), Canada(1), China(3), India (6), Jamaica (2), Japan (1), Korea (3), Malaysia (1), Pakistan (2), Poland (2), Russia (3), Saudi Arabia (1), Switzerland (1), Syria (1), Taiwan (1), Trinidad (1), Ukraine (2). Another 30% were born in the US but their parents were in 21 countries, including 14 not already mentioned: Austria (1), China (2), Curacao (1), Dominican Republic (1), Greece (1), Guyana (1), Honduras (1), India (3), Iran (2), Ireland (1), Israel (1), Italy (1), Jamaica (1), Korea (1), Pakistan (3), Philippines (3), Poland (1), Puerto Rico (1), Vietnam (2), Russia (1), Barbados (1). Only 25% were born in the US and their parents were born in the US.

⁶As Smelser argued years ago in an essay on social sciences and general education, when instructors choose particular themes they should be considered in light of several considerations like students backgrounds and capabilities and the geographical setting of the institution (1973). Of course connecting with the lived experience of your students requires making some assumptions about their experiences, and we found that at least sometimes our assumptions are wrong. We thought that material inequality would be a part of their daily experience, but discovered that the class segregation of high schools and colleges made it almost invisible.

⁷See also Neil Smelser’s insightful essay on the same subject (1973).

This dedication to topics that work outward from the lived experience of our students does create a parochial bias, and one of the challenges in our course is to make the connections between what they are excited about and the content they need to confront. In addressing racial inequality in America, we had difficulty finding connecting home ownership, which they knew about, with the transmission of inequality, which was invisible to them. In discussing fashion, it was difficult for them to appreciate that the globalization of fashion was part of a cultural homogenization process, since their focus was on clothing as self expression. But, these challenges represent *creative tension*, rather than insurmountable obstacles. And we have found that initial fascination—even when it tends to obscure the underlying social structure—nevertheless helps to overcome the students' resistance to abstraction. For example, we discuss the international appeal of hip-hop after we have learned hip-hop's New York City origins and how the artistic expression is rooted in localized social protest. The students are then receptive to the insight that hip-hop appeals internationally to groups who respond to its rebellious image and content.

In teaching the class ten times thus far, we have used seven different learning units in a variety of combinations. The seven units are:⁸

- The Role of SAT Tests in College Admissions
- The Causes and Consequences of Wealth Inequality Between Blacks and Whites in American Society
- The Social Construction of Contemporary Masculinity.
- The Social Meaning of the Rise and Spread of Hip-Hop Culture
- How Clothing Fashions Develop and Spread
- Inequality Within and Between Countries
- Disasters and Panics

Below we review in detail two of these units, to give a sense of how we put them together and what we try to accomplish. We then briefly review some elements of three other units we have developed, to illustrate some of the challenges and rewards in using diverse subjects to teach an understanding of the sociological enterprise.

The Structure of the Learning Units

All of the learning-units are designed to be of equal significance and length, but we find, particularly after the first time through a learning unit, that some units require more time while others can be trimmed down. But even this experience is modulated by the larger imperative to remain flexible with class time, since each iteration of a particular unit is different: reflecting the specific reactions of a particular collection of students, current events that impinge on the subject, the accidents of how discussions develop, or the presence of a few students with important insights that lead the class in a new and useful direction. We therefore plan the sessions with this diversity in mind, including leaving two or three blank dates at the end of the semester with no planned curriculum, to leave room for extra sessions in the individual units.⁹

We now turn to a discussion of two learning units: *The Social Construction of Contemporary Western Masculinity*; and *The Social Meaning of the Rise and Spread of Hip-Hop Culture*.

⁸We include the syllabus for Spring 2005 in the Appendix.

⁹In the rare instance where we find ourselves with an empty session, we have sought—with middling success—to introduce synthetic material that bridges the various units.

The Social Construction of Contemporary Western Masculinity

In this learning-unit, we examine the male gender role from a social constructionist perspective. We start with an early chapter from David and Brannon (1976) that explains the four prescribed tenets of manhood; “don’t be a sissy,” “be a big wheel,” “be a sturdy oak,” and “give ‘em hell!” By asking them about celebrities who are “real men,” we can tease out all four of the Brannon and David role elements, and make the important point that “real men” do not necessarily fulfill all four—that is, there is considerable flexibility in how men “prove” their “masculinity”; there is room for individuality and creativity.¹⁰ As a consequence, we feel we are giving them good grounding in role theory and in the ways in which roles operate as a key element of social structure, constraining and channeling behavior, while rewarding both conformity and individuality.

We then turn to the “nature” versus “nurture” question. We read Margaret Mead’s classic research from New Guinea, Anne Fausto-Sterling’s research on intersexed humans, and Robert Sapolsky’s short article on the effects of testosterone. It is in this session (which often extends to two sessions) that we are guaranteed at least one “aha” experience, in which we expose our students to counter-intuitive sociological results. Most students are shocked at the existence of societies in which men are not the aggressive sex. They are even more shocked when they discover the existence of intersexuality, and look around uncomfortably when we tell them that likely between five and ten students sitting in the class are biologically intersexed (the discomfort is so intense that we have often had to discuss both the prevalence and the morality of operations that “fix” the physical condition). And we have also found that students are incredulous at the biological fact that testosterone does not generate aggression, but rather enhances the intensity of an aggressive act.

It has taken us several iterations for us to convert the surprise and engagement of the students into a critique of the “biology is destiny” argument: that biology—including hormones, physical size, and other obvious male-female differences—is a tool that society uses in constructing gender roles; and that male aggressiveness is not a biological given, but rather something that society has constructed, with varying degrees of commitment and success. Without the “aha” we have little chance of delivering these ideas, but even with it, they can be difficult for the students to absorb.

The remaining sessions do not drift far from this basic issue. They seek to deepen the constructionist viewpoint by exploring the social aspects of the male role: both the ways that the male role is modeled, encouraged, and reinforced by various institutions, and the ways in which its prescriptions impact on the way we live our lives. In the next session, the documentary film, *Tough Guise*, focuses on male images in the media, demonstrating not only the circumscribed range of acceptable male behavior, but also the increasing emphasis on aggression and physicality in the past two decades.

The following two sessions deal with the ways in which men and women are constrained and injured—physically and emotionally—by the activities that men undertake to fulfill and enforce their masculinity. Of particular importance in this section is the Sabo (2000) article on men’s health and the class discussion it generates. At first we expected this to be a “boring” session, but it has turned out to be the opposite. One exercise that we use is to offer a list of diseases and conditions that are more fatal for men than for women, and another list of those that are not. We ask the students to hypothesize why some are and some are not, and they inevitably begin to spin out theories—most of them true. The key to it all is that those diseases that require early detection and/or regular visits to doctors produce the largest

¹⁰A good sign is when students extend the Brannon and David tenets to also include heterosexuality. We read these instances as successful applications of gender theory in which students come to realize the invisibility of many social privileges.

differentials, as the male ethic of stoicism and invulnerability leads men to endure pain and “suck it up.”

Once this becomes part of the discourse in class, we noticed that male defensiveness about studying sexism tends to dissipate, since the men in the class are now in a position to argue that they are perhaps the primary subjects of the male gender expectations. When we teach a session on domestic violence followed by an article on men’s health we have found that the men became much less defensive because the discussion felt to them like the course was saying that everyone was short-changed—men as well as women—by gender roles.¹¹ The charge that all men were potential abusers had less sting when they were also potentially hurting themselves.

This interaction between the “men’s health” and “gender violence” elements is an example of a larger pattern in this unit and in all of the units we have chosen for the course: the emotional involvement and practical expertise of the students in gender roles interacts with the material in important ways that can help or hinder the pedagogical process.

An even more important example of this sort of interaction took us two semesters to fully understand—both men and women in the class were very defensive of the male role, which they often expressed indirectly by questioning virtually any comments or readings that could be construed as saying that contemporary masculinity needed to be modulated or altered. When we focused on this tension, we found their arguments were coherent and convincing. The “sturdy oak” ideology is an important and serviceable one that encourages people to grow up and take care of themselves, instead of remaining dependent on others; The “give ‘em hell” ethic is good advice in many circumstances, and has even been echoed in the “assertiveness training” that feminists used to prescribe for women. We subsequently changed our presentations to incorporate the dialectics in the role—the ways in which the same role elements can be rewarding and serviceable in some contexts, brutal, even lethal, in others.¹²

We also extracted from this dissent a teaching lesson: when students are organic experts in the subjects you are teaching, you are compelled to offer a much more nuanced (and accurate) analysis than is necessary for subjects which are distant from their own experience. We suspect that instructors in courses on gender and race and religion have discovered this same pattern.¹³

In describing these teaching issues we have signaled the ways in which we connect the learning unit to the larger sociological enterprise. It is worthwhile elaborating on discussion some of this to give a sense of the ease with which these larger issues can be addressed. For example, this unit allows us to illustrate and to formally discuss many elements of role theory, including such key ideas as sanctions, norms, status, etc. But beyond this, we find that we can also illuminate *gender socialization*, *deviance*, *sexuality*, *feminist theory*, and *social influences on health*. These ideas can be addressed as part of understanding western masculinity or formally introduced as generalizations from the material we are covering.

¹¹Ironically, we have had to deal with men arguing that men were the “greater” victims of the male gender role, pointing to the fact that their health was threatened, that most male violence is directed at men, and that risk-taking behavior usually hurt the risk-taker most of all.

¹²We are cognizant of gender scholars’ critiques of “sex role theory.” The critiques emphasize that sex role theory fails to incorporate the importance of power. Oftentimes students come to this understanding by themselves; if not, we incorporate this critique.

¹³In practice we found that we needed to articulate a dialectical approach to the role prescriptions, in which each of the elements of the male role has a good and bad aspect. In order to understand the negative consequences, therefore, we needed to offer a much more complex portrait of the institutional underpinnings of the role. In our course this has led to a much more careful discussion of the movie “Tough Guise,” since it offers a real sense of how the media have modeled the destructive aspects of the male role.

We also find that this unit lends itself to addressing methodological lessons, if we work outward from the reading material. Each time we have taught the course, the “aha” experience around the Margaret Mead (1963) reading has led to a discussion of the usefulness of comparative and ethnographic methods. The comparative logic, in particular, has been especially useful, since we can point out the importance of looking across societies to assess the causes of those patterns that seem deeply engrained in a community or country.¹⁴

Similarly, the Anderson and Umberson article allows us to teach the value of qualitative interviews, a technique about which most students are cynical, reflecting our society’s faith in numerical evidence. But the revealing quotes in this article demonstrate that such discursive evidence allows us to see the deep connections between the prescriptions of the male role and the enactment of gender violence, precisely because the perpetrators themselves invoke the male role in justifying their actions.

We find that the challenge in this unit is for the students to grasp the foundational idea that the male role—and all roles—are learned and then enacted creatively within socially set boundaries—and are not hard wired by human biology. Upon seeing this, they are energized to search for and understand how behavior is an expression of these prescriptions, of individuals’ attempts to meet or modify these prescriptions, and of various institutions’ (sometimes contradictory) attempts to mold and enforce these prescriptions. This eagerness then becomes the extension cord through which we can introduce them to all manner of conceptual and methodological knowledge.

The Social Meaning of the Rise and Spread of Hip-Hop Culture

This learning-unit is a sociological investigation of the controversies generated by hip-hop music and culture. We study the transition from hip-hop’s New York City origins to today’s multi-national, multi-billion dollar industry, particular focusing on the controversy over hip-hop’s violence and how this discourse has framed the public’s perception of this artistic expression.

The unit starts with hip-hop’s roots in New York City. We view the documentary *Style Wars* to present early hip-hop music, dance, and graffiti (*Style Wars* 2003). The articles by Stapleton (1998) and Salaam (1995) help explain how the artistic expression is grounded in a localized social protest of urban living conditions. We then concentrate on the association of the musical form with violence, starting with the controversy surrounding the 1991 Ice-T song, “Cop Killer.” After listening to “Cop Killer,” we read articles that were part of the censorship controversy (Rogers and Jones 1995); Hershey-Webb (1995); Leo (1995); Ehrenreich (1992) as well as an article written by Ice-T (1995) explaining why he withdrew the record from stores.

We then look at two sociological studies that address the sources of the antagonism to the music, Amy Binder’s (1993) “Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music,” and Carrie Fried’s (1999) “Who’s Afraid of Rap.” Our final readings discuss the sources of hip hop’s world-wide diffusion.

Our discussions always touch on hip-hop’s interaction with the formal institutions of our society. The movement for banning “Cop Killer” developed 2 years after the original song was released, initiated by a police officer who overheard his son listening to it. A call for a

¹⁴Tyson has shared stories of living overseas and experiencing differing arrangements of gender. For example, many cultures allow for men to hold hands with one another—a practice that is highly taboo within the U.S.

national boycott of the Time Warner records was then organized by a variety of formal and informal institutions. Students learn that institutions are usually at the center of social action.

When we compare “Cop Killer” to other songs with similarly violent, anti-police lyrics that attracted no attention—including rap lyrics that came out at the same time or earlier—and explore the logic of the Binder and Fried articles (see below), students see that social context—most particularly the Rodney King Trial that took place just before the censorship campaign began—was a critical ingredient in the controversy.

We have found that what’s crucial to this unit’s success, beyond proving that this sort of “outlaw” music is a legitimate subject of sociological study, is getting our students to see two important patterns: the rebelliousness of hip hop culture is the key to its popularity; and the source of public anxiety lies, not in the content of the songs and the lyrics, but in the deeply rooted racist beliefs of its opponents which characterize the music’s audience as violently inclined. The former point is driven home by the material on its spread to other countries, because the comparative method allows them to see that its popularity resides in sectors that identify with the “underclass” image of the music. But the really dramatic insights often arise when we ask why over 70% of all rap music is sold to middle-class kids from mostly suburban neighborhoods like those surrounding our university. For many, this requires simple introspection, and it is easy for them to see the resonance of rap’s rebelliousness with white teen culture.

Our second question is more abstract for our students, but the answer has the virtue of exposing them to the utility of quantitative analysis and to the usefulness of sampling rigor and experimental design. We capture their attention by showing them that myriad songs describe and endorse violence without any effort to censor them (a good example, is Clapton’s *I Shot the Sheriff*).¹⁵ We then deliver the results of the Binder article: critics of heavy metal were anxious to insulate white youth from the music’s effects, while the critics of rap were trying to shield themselves from the violence of black youth. This appears to be such a blatantly racist posture that the students were fascinated to see if the two sociological studies could really prove this point. To satisfy their curiosity, they need to learn how to read and extract generalizations from tabular results.

Among the sociological concepts that are integral to this learning-unit are *race*, *class*, *culture*, and *discourse analysis*. As with our male gender section, the entire unit is infused with the consideration of the role of *institutions* in social life, and a whole host of other ideas can be addressed. We have found in this and other units that we must work opportunistically, to dwell on key ideas that speak to the focus of class discussion, or which can unpack the questions that students want answered. These concerns can vary each semester. In one semester, for example, students became immersed in the diffusion of hip hop culture to the suburbs—largely because a student in the class from suburban New York had brought his (mostly Asian) breakdance crew in for a demonstration—so we dwelled on the nature of *youth culture*. In another semester, the discussion of “Cop Killer” led to an emphasis on police brutality and then to a larger discussion of institutional racism.

One methodological lesson available in this unit is the logic and usefulness of controlled experiments. The Fried article presents research subjects with the lyrics of an old Kingston Trio song, in which the protagonist kills a law enforcement officer. By random assignment, the respondents were told the lyrics were from either a rap song, a country song, or a heavy metal song. They were asked whether the song should be barred from the radio. Predictably, the proportion supporting censorship was magnitudes higher if the song was labeled as a

¹⁵Written by Bob Marley but made widely known by Eric Clapton.

“rap” lyric. Students are impressed with the cleverness of this research, because they can see how it helps to explain the effort to ban “Cop Killer.” It thus emphasizes the practical usefulness of social science research.

An alternative methodological emphasis is *content analysis*. Binder’s research analyzes editorials and commentary from magazines and newspapers regarding heavy metal and rap music. She finds that while both genres are criticized for their violent, aggressive and misogynist lyrics, the critics of heavy metal are mostly concerned that it will corrupt otherwise “good kids,” leading them to devil worship and lack of respect for authority. The concerns with rap music, on the other hand, involve the possibility of the music inducing riots (“wilding”), and public protest. Because the article presents representative quotations and walks through its research logic, we expose students to this method in the most persuasive way. When we focus on this research, furthermore, it provides an opportunity to explore *epistemology* because Binder’s research (and the learning-unit in general) explains the social construction of the dominant portrait of hip-hop, developed in the early 1990s, but clearly evident in the students’ everyday life.

Some Notes on Other Learning Units

Different units present different challenges, though we have found that virtually any subject that we consider can provide the sort of pedagogical skeleton we seek. We briefly review each of the other units we have presented, looking at some of the key elements and discussing particular problems that have made these units worthwhile and/or particularly challenging.

The Causes and Consequences of Wealth Inequality Between Blacks and Whites in American Society—This is the most unambiguously sociological learning unit, resting exclusively on two winners of the American Sociological Association’s Distinguished Scholarship Award, Oliver and Shapiro’s, *Black Wealth, White Wealth* (1995), and Massey and Denton’s *American Apartheid* (1994). The substantive centerpiece of this unit is demonstrating that the Federal Housing Authority loan programs that promoted class homeownership deliberately excluded African Americans through federally initiated redlining; and that the houses purchased under these programs have created vast amounts of equity wealth. This wealth was then harnessed to provide a broad set of important opportunities for the now middle class whites whose parents and grand-parents were allowed access to the Post World War II homeownership boom. Our task is to unpack these social processes and to demonstrate that much of the racial inequality we witness today derives from the exclusion of African-Americans from the post-World War II house purchase boom which became the foundation of establishing middle class life in America.

In a sense, our problems here were complementary to those we encountered in the SAT unit: multivariate analysis (a critical element in the Oliver and Shapiro argument) and the search for an arresting counter-intuitive result. Our solutions were, however, very different. We eventually drifted away from trying to explain the very complicated Oliver and Shapiro calculations and trimmed the reading to include those chapters that dealt mainly with qualitative evidence.

Our search for a counterfactual led us back to something that the students had heard many times: that the ideal of equal opportunity was being undermined by historical racism. But instead of vague references to the “legacy of slavery,” which can operate like “white noise” for most students (regardless of their racial identity), this legacy of housing equity is much more concrete to them, and its origins really catch their attention. This source of racial inequality was consciously constructed by the indubitably liberal regime of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and, instead of developing in the undeniably racist South, the legacy began in the

very Northern cities most associated with racial tolerance. Moreover, instead of being transmitted across generations through prejudiced attitudes, the inequality is perpetuated by accumulated wealth (or the lack thereof), which is then preserved by excellent primary schools, home tutoring, college tuition, start-up funds for entrepreneurial endeavors, and a host of other advantages, including homeownership at a young enough age to guarantee a new accumulation of capital to transfer to the next generation.

Because students are well aware of differential housing statuses, and because they are in the midst of framing their own future, this exposition leads them to consider the tools they are currently using (and/or will ultimately access) to insure their own prosperity. While we seek to avoid personalizing the discussion, these considerations are never far from the students' consciousness, and it gives the discussions a sharpness that would not be present without this immediacy.

Inequality Within and Between Countries—The challenge in this unit is to engage students in issues as abstract as Third World poverty. Our strategy is begin with a consideration of the visible inequality in America and connect this to an understanding of how the concentration of wealth in the Global North often produces extreme poverty in the Global South.

We start with three data points within the U.S.: the very rich (represented by the movie, *Born Rich* (2003), middle class America (represented by the students' own experience), and the working poor in America (represented by Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickled and Dimed*, 2001). The themes we stress are that differences are not simply in the quantitative amount of discretionary spending; but that the life style contrasts are manifested in every aspect of people's existence, including the content of their idle thoughts. To concretize this contrast, we ask students to create a budget for themselves as a low-income worker on Long Island or NYC (see below).

We then look at the processes that created increased inequality in the United States between 1980 and 2000, to give students a sense that these differences are neither immutable nor automatically reduced by the invisible hand of "progress." This logic becomes the bridge to the consideration of global inequality and poverty: we demonstrate that globalization—a phenomenon that feels "familiar" to them because of its rhetorical pervasiveness in 21st century America—has been the engine of growing inequality for the Global South, and therefore has increased the misery of those on the poor end of the dichotomy.

We have found that the most arresting counterintuitive insight in this unit is the idea that "progress can cause misery"—that is, that arrival of modern industry and commerce in the Global South can produce increased unemployment, population displacement, new slums, and declining standards of living. The imagery of this contradiction, combined with discussion of declining standards of living for the working poor in America, provides an entry point for understanding the contradictory dynamics of economic development—in which the same processes that produce visible wealth can also produce misery at home and abroad.

Disasters and Panics—This is the most easily managed of the units we have so far developed, largely because most of our students—virtually all of whom grew up in the New York City area—have experienced 9–11 in some primary fashion. We trade on their experiences to discuss two dramatic results of organizational sociology: that mass panic is very rarely present during disasters; and that egalitarian, loosely coordinated and even ad hoc organizations are usually more effective for managing crises and disasters than large,

hierarchical organizations. These sociological findings are so counterintuitive that mentioning them as propositions is usually enough to generate interest and controversy.

We illustrate the first issue—mass panic—by using clips from disaster movies (*Independence Day* has a beautiful example of fictional mass panic, but virtually any disaster movie will do). We follow that with (what at first appears to students to be) the astonishing arguments made by Clarke (2002) and Tierney (2003) that there are few documented cases (most notably 9–11 in lower Manhattan) when mass panic has occurred in real life. We have discovered, however, that once we introduce this idea, they quickly become enamored with it, based mostly on their experience (personally or through the media) with the 9–11 disaster (where there was famously no mass panic), but also based on other (mostly personal) emergencies that a surprising number of students have endured.

But even more fascinating has been the ways in which the students have absorbed the idea of “normal accidents”: that the “normal” operation of complicated hierarchical organizations can, under unusual circumstances, become the precipitant of a disaster. This idea is challenging enough to energize the students to read some pretty tough case studies, such as Sagan’s (1993) treatment of the Thule disaster, which almost led to a nuclear war. It also allows us to challenge them with Ahmed’s meticulous documentation of the failure of the air traffic control system to identify and intercept the 9–11 bombers as they aimed their planes at the WTC and the Pentagon. This discussion, the most riveting of the semester, resolved nothing—but the students nevertheless absorbed the idea that large, apparently invincible, organizations can make huge mistakes that are implicated in huge disasters.

Initially we thought that organization theory would be out of reach of our introductory course. However, the drama of disasters provided such a strong motivation that the students did more than sit still for long explanations of organizational logic—they absorbed complex ideas because they were motivated to understand real world events in which they had a passionate interest—like the causes and aftermath of the 9–11 disaster. It may be that as new generations of students who did not experience 9–11 in the first person reach our classrooms, this unit may be less successful. Or not.

Special Pedagogical Techniques

One never-ending challenge in large classes is engaging 200 students when only a small proportion can actually participate in any discussion, and when most of the hour will inevitably be filled with presentation of written or visual material from behind the front podium. This circumstance creates a constant need to engage and re-engage students in the subjects of our learning units, and in the reading that is designed to illuminate them. Among the many devices we have experimented with to help sustain engagement, at least four have met with enough success to merit mention here.

Surveys

In-class surveys are a form of student-centered learning that have many potential advantages, including a measure of our students’ collective experience (e.g., the proportion who lost friends or relatives in 9–11), an illustration of the value of empirical research (e.g., evaluating the degree to which SAT scores predict our own students’ college grades),¹⁶ and giving students a personal stake in the results of the analysis (e.g., evaluating the speculations or suppositions that students make during class discussions). Some of the surveys we administer are designed before class (like the SAT survey) and use pedagogically interesting methodologies that are instructive in and of themselves. Others (like the proportion who lost friends or relatives) are conducted impromptu after the question comes up in discussion, are tallied during the class period, and answer an

immediate substantive issue. In all cases, however, they expose students to the utility and logic of empirical evidence, while giving an immediacy to the results that captures their attention.

Another example is less elaborate, but had even greater impact due to a serendipitous development within the class. To illustrate homophobia, at the beginning of the unit on masculinity and the male sex role, we planned and executed a survey with two quick “raise your hand” questions. The first question asked students if they were left-handed. With a little over 200 students in the room, about 20 of them raised their hands and held them up while everyone observed the 10% proportion. We then asked, “How many people in the room are gay, lesbian or bisexual?” Only two students raised their hands.

We expected this result to provide a good starting point for our lecture, and we began by informing them that there were (almost certainly) just as many gay students as left handed students, pointing toward homophobia as the source of their reluctance to reveal themselves. At that point a clever, attentive student suggested that if we were right, then a “secret ballot” would produce the predicted 10% result. We conducted the secret ballot, and tallied the votes immediately, netting 23 gay, lesbian or bi-sexual students. The resulting discussion was animated and informed, and most students were interested in either describing or understanding what sorts of sanctions gay students faced that would make them reluctant to reveal themselves in a “liberal” class at our university.

While not all surveys have worked so well, they have rarely failed to produce the sort of involvement and attentiveness that is so often lacking in large lecture classes. Because the students’ collective experience is incorporated into the class, they feel more allegiance to the material. We believe that they are therefore more likely to absorb, understand, and appreciate the key content of the course.

But beyond this, because the results of our surveys are never fully predictable—they force us to present empirical research as a contingent, indeterminate process. While it is risky to create the possibility of the findings not matching the expected result, we find that a cautionary discussion before the first of these surveys—about the contingent results of research and multivariate complexities that might confound our predictions—enriches students’ understanding and enhances the credibility of the results when they are finally revealed. Of course, when the findings do not correspond perfectly to the point we are trying to make, we are given a challenging teaching task—to fit the results into larger patterns that illuminate how sociologists respond to empirical evidence. A “failed” survey that does not match one’s theory is still a valuable, “teachable moment”.¹⁷

¹⁶In our SAT survey, we give a formal survey which records students’ SAT scores, their high school GPA, and their first semester college GPA, in order to produce a simple trivariate regression that mimics the calculation done at the University of California. To these basic variables, we added additional questions that sought to help them understand the measurement. One question, for example, read “Suppose two students who both had A- averages in high school were admitted to our university, one with a 1000 on the SATs and one with a 1200 on the SATs. If the student with the 1000 SATs got a 2.5 average in his/her first semester at this school, what GPA would the 1200 student most likely get? (2.0, 2.25, 2.5, 2.75, 3.0)”. This question introduced them to the logic of controlling for a third variable, and our discussions around their opinions laid a foundation for our exposition of the multivariate analysis. We reported the results of this question (their predictions) before reporting the results of the actual calculation, and explained the plausibility of their consensus that the higher SAT score would predict a higher first semester GPA. When we then reported that the 1200 score did not produce a higher GPA, we achieved the “aha” experience that makes this result counter-intuitive. It also added to the students’ understanding of the identical, but much more comprehensive, results found in the University of California study.

¹⁷For our gender unit, one semester we designed and conducted a survey of what traits students found attractive, as it relates to gender (what does a man/woman look for in a woman/man?). We made the survey anonymous (listing only their sex) and asked students to list traits that they deemed attractive in both a man and a woman. We expected to demonstrate that men and women had very different standards, but the results did not reflect this pattern at all. The adjective lists that emerged were very similar.

Social Experiments

Many of the propositions we handle in our learning units constitute predictions about human behavior or assertions about why people do what they do in social situations. We have found that students will think carefully about social dynamics if they can see their concrete manifestations. This has led us to experiment with exercises that concretize the points of discussion. Two examples will illustrate their use.

One very successful assignment was developing a budget for living on the wages of a low-income job. This assignment, inspired by James Loewen's article in *Teaching Sociology* (1979), was developed in response to many students' lack of connection with Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) low-income adventures. Instead of the usual midterm essay, we offered the students the choice of locating (through networks or want-ads) a low-income job in the area, and then developing a budget that would allow them to "make ends meet" on that income. They needed to figure out housing (using realtors, newspapers, or the web), transportation and food costs, and make a list of all incidentals and their prices. When they could not afford everything, cost cutting methods (including sharing studio apartments, using public transportation on Long Island, etc.) were required. Once their budget was complete, they were asked to describe what elements of their current life would be eliminated or drastically altered in their "low income" life (most commonly healthcare, any social life with a price tag, and all gifts, even for family).

We were surprised not only at the students' resourcefulness with their budgets (such as knowledge of inexpensive food, access to cheap housing, resourceful use of public transportation, etc.), but also with their dedication to the project. Because the budgeting was such a challenge, it energized them as problem solvers, while engaging them in the issues of income inequality in a way that no amount of course material and/or class discussion could have done.

The problem with this assignment was that it was extremely labor intensive for both students and instructors. On the student side, it had to be made a substantial part of the grade—out of proportion with the unit's contribution to the course as a whole. On the instructors' side, evaluating the projects required as much as a half hour per student, and therefore cannot be made a regular part of the course without eliminating our required essay. We are casting about for ways to incorporate this and other such exercises (see Loewen 1979 for other useful ideas) without overburdening students, instructors, and teaching assistants.

It is often difficult to develop exercises that can illuminate key ideas and processes. We have tried ideas that do not work as well as those we have presented, and these failures chew up valuable class time. But, as our examples demonstrate, success has great rewards and failure has lesser rewards. We therefore continue to use successful exercises and search for others, either pre-planned or spontaneous. Like our surveys, these demonstrations have a potential impact that cannot be achieved by ordinary course material.

Blackboard Discussion Threads

Our institution introduced Blackboard software as an adjunct to all classes. Most colleges and universities now have similar systems that allow faculty to communicate electronically with all students in their class, and that allow students to discuss course material with each other. We have found that the discussion feature of Blackboard can be a valuable device for maintaining engagement among our students, and for allowing us to tailor our in-class presentations to target key issues.

The basic device we use is what Blackboard calls "discussion threads," in which all students and faculty can contribute (ad serium) to a discussion on a topic set by the instructor. For

each learning unit, we initiate at least one discussion, inviting students to comment on any aspect of the course material and/or posing key questions that were not adequately addressed during class. We find that most students—because of Instant Messenger and other interactive software they regularly use—are comfortable with this format; and that a sizeable minority are more-or-less compulsive about expressing their opinion about almost any subject (apparently a larger proportion than those who are willing to speak up in a large classroom setting). Since most comments are reactive to class sessions and/or reading, all these comments reveal the state of consciousness of the students who contribute them as well those who respond to them; and they therefore provide us with valuable information about what issues to address to help students to comprehend key concepts and processes.

The most important challenge in our use of Blackboard has been in getting all students to participate, at least at the level of reading the entries of others. We discovered that, while perhaps half of the students kept up with the discussion, as many as half did not, and a substantial minority were never logging on to the site at all. We found that we could spike participation by mentioning important contributions in class (for example, a student posted a video of the Rodney King beating in response to this reference in the song “Cop Killer”), but such advertising opportunities were episodic. A more enduring method is to make participation a part of the grade—requiring, for example, that each student make four substantive contributions during the semester. This option can assure that everyone is monitoring the discussion, but it can also mean that reading all the entries becomes very time-consuming. In a class of 200, four entries per person means 800 required (substantive) entries, augmented by all the voluntary entries of the active participants, thus equaling hundreds of pages of additional reading and tabulation for the instructor.

Quizzes

One problem in all large courses is getting students to read the assigned material before the session in which it is discussed. In our course, this is a particularly trying problem because the connectedness of our learning units means that most of the class discussions rely on students absorbing the readings as well as the previous discussions in the unit. Since a majority of our University students tend to read for exams—at least in sociology courses—they often have not read the material on time.

To combat this element in our university culture, we create short (five question) quizzes on the readings, using the multiple-choice format. The quizzes are unannounced, and are not inevitable, but we promise the students that there will be at least 10 throughout the 26 class sessions. Because they are short and multiple choice, we complete them in less than 10 min and therefore they do not dominate the period, even if we review the test questions.

The key to these tests—and to the students’ willingness to endure them—is that they are designed simply to measure whether the students have read the material. The idea is to devise questions that are truly easy to get correct if the student knows the gist of the text, but are very difficult if they do not know what is in the reading. We advertise the quizzes as an easy way to put a floor under their grades, since if they average over three correct per test, they are guaranteed at least a B for 25% of the class.

The tricky part of this is to devise quizzes that work—where the answers are really hard if one has not read the material and really easy if one has. While we had a lot of trouble at first, we became very good at it. For example, the following question on Malcolm Gladwell’s *Tipping Point* worked very well:

1. Gladwell uses which one of these sneaker companies as an example of a “Tipping Point”

- a. Nike
- b. Adidas
- c. Airwalk
- d. Vans

Those who had read the text knew the answer was Airwalk because the entire chapter was built around this story. Those who did not, would have to guess. On the other hand, this question was a failure:

2. Which Economic Principle does Gladwell use when he refers to the Hush Puppy shoes epidemic?
 - a. The history always repeats itself principle
 - b. Supply and Demand principle
 - c. The short run principle
 - d. 80/20 principle

While the logic of the 80/20 principle was a major part of the chapter, the label was mentioned in only one small part of the text. Hence the student could have read the chapter and understood it, but might still not remember the label.

During the 6 years that we have taught the course, we have gotten better at creating effective questions, and an increasingly larger proportion of the students have been reading the material before arriving at class. This has inflated the average grade in the course, since more and more students are claiming the “cushion” on their grade that pre-reading gives them. We believe, however, that this is a fair exchange.

Limitations

Time Demands on the Instructor

The key limitation of this type of intro course is the added preparation required by the instructors, particularly in building of the course reader and developing sufficient expertise in four-to-five unit areas.

Compiling the course reader can be a significant challenge because of the time and energy required to review material in each area and searching for a mix of items that are both accessible and credible. It is not always easy to locate quality social science research on every topic we consider. Moreover, many of the most appealing empirical studies use sophisticated research methods and/or cumbersome language that make them inappropriate for first year students.

Thus, for every perfect fit like Amy Binder’s (1993) *ASR* article on censoring hip-hop and heavy metal music, there are several more abstruse pieces that cannot be used. And, while student engagement will lead them to plow through some truly difficult texts, like Scott Sagan’s (1993) highly technical treatment of the Thule disaster, many that seem useable may not be, as we found with two quantitative assignments.¹⁸

These sorts of misfits can be avoided in three ways. One way is the application of a huge amount of searching through the relevant literature. Another is that less accessible research

¹⁸Examples are chapter 5 of Oliver and Shapiro’s *Black Wealth, White Wealth* (1995), and the apparently inaccessible but otherwise brilliant Crouse and Trusheim (1988) essay on SAT tests and college grades.

can be remedied by taking added time to explain very difficult material. The third is a trial-and-error approach that eliminates attractive material that simply does not work. All of these solutions require a time investment well above that needed to design and implement a textbook-based intro course.

The significant time investment can also be ameliorated by adopting a two-instructor model (as we did).

Lack of Coherence

Because we have chosen our learning-units on the basis of student interest and on the basis of providing a sense of the range of sociological subject matter, they can have little visible connection to each other. This same disconnect is likely in a survey-based intro course that relies on a textbook. In part, we have been content to allow this disconnect, treating the units as discrete areas of study, offering them as a celebration of sociology's diversity. But we admit that because of this complacency, we have not fully capitalized on the many opportunities to link the numerous themes. Frequently, it has been the students themselves who offered these connections, for example among the units on fashion, hip-hop, masculinity, and wealth inequality. One nice connection was made by a student who pointed out that many of today's mainstream fashion trends are derivatives of hip-hop culture, a point that led the class to discuss the resonance between white and black teen cultures, and the popularity of hip hop in the suburbs. Similarly, the indelible association of gangsta rap with hyper-masculinity has led to illuminating discussions of how music responds to and reinforces gender roles. Our students have made these connections and have suggested that we integrate them into the class. The application of more systematic effort on our part could create the sort of cross fertilization that would make explicit the larger themes that underlie the various units we teach.

Despite these limitations, we believe that changing the course design is worth the investment of time and energy. We have seen significant improvements in our course evaluations, especially when comparing to courses with an equally large enrollment.

Conclusion

In the *Invitation to Sociology*, Peter Berger asserted that "people who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and the maxims of what Alfred Schuetz has called the 'world-taken-for-granted,' should stay away from sociology" (Berger 1963: 7). We believe that textbook driven courses tend to portray sociology as a validation of, instead of a challenge to, the Sunday School view of society. The approach we propose can offer the students the precise counter-intuitive shock that Berger relishes.

Our approach seeks to engage the students, and therefore challenges them to become activists in a changing and changeable social system. While abandoning the intro survey-based course as we know it is asking more of the instructor, it is a change that will benefit our students by illuminating social phenomenon and demonstrating the greatness of our discipline. We concur with bell hooks' assertion that "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (1994: 12). We believe that the boiler plate textbook intro class cannot fulfill this radical role, because it steers students away from being active in their own education.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills' asserted that it "is not information that they need—in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it... What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality

of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves” (Mills 1959: 14). Textbook driven courses have the transmission of information as their only goal. We have to do better than that.

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Appendix

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, STONY BROOK

Department of Sociology

Introduction to Sociology

Soc. 105-01-Fall 2006

Time: TuTh 12:50-2:10

Place: Old Chem 116

Instructors:

Michael Schwartz

Offices: Wagner College 47B

SBS 412S

Phone: 516 356 4078

Office Hours: Tu. 11:30–12:30; Th 2:30–4:00 (SBS 412S) and by appointment

Email: Michael.Schwartz@stonybrook.edu

R. Tyson Smith

Office: SBS S-424

Phone: none

Office hours: Tu. 12:30–2:00 or by appointment

Email: rsmith@ic.sunysb.edu

Deirdre Caputo-Levine¹⁹

Office: SBS S-424

Office hours::Tu 2:20–4:20.

Email: climberta@optonline.net

Purpose of the Course

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to how sociology illuminates the social world. Our emphasis is on addressing highly salient issues that are current in our society, and discussing the ways in which sociology develops and disseminates scientific insight into them.

To accomplish this, we look closely at four key features of modern life. In each of these sections we will connect these larger social issues to the work of sociologists whose research has either helped to illuminate these phenomena and/or pointed out ways for society to better manage them. We will pay particular attention to the methods that help to resolve controversies, using evidence and analysis.

The specific issues we address in this course are the following:

- *The male gender role*: the image (and behavior) of men that our society reinforces—including the stereotypes of the quiet, self reliant, and physical man who protects his wife and family—and the ways in which this may harm social relationships;
- *Global Inequality*: the inequality in income and wealth in America and in the world, an imbalance that results in business executives making 1,000 times as much as the average American, and which means that large numbers of 3rd world working citizens are dying of diseases that can be cured with medicines that are readily available in advanced countries;
- *The Rise of Rap Music*: the rise of hip hop culture, first in the U.S. and then the world, a phenomenon that reflects both the power and vibrancy of Black culture

¹⁹Need to confirm or change

and its resonance with white youth in the United States and young people in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

- *Disasters and Panics*: the ways in which the organizations we create to manage disasters may contribute to causing and deepening them including the controversial government response hurricane Katrina. We will also consider how organizational dynamics might have prevented the interception of the 9–11 attackers, and how organizational dynamics contributed to the spectacularly successful response to the disaster.

Readings

All the readings are contained in a reader created especially for this course entitled:

-Readings for Sociology 105, Section 1, Introduction to Sociology

(the reader will be in two separate packets that are sold together)

This reader is **only available at Stony Books**, for reasons that we will explain in class.

STONY BOOKS IS LOCATED across from the railroad station on Rt. 25a. It is 1 block west of the 7–11, but east of Green Cactus Grill. The phone # is 689-9010.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on:

1. *Midterm Paper*. (30% of grade) This will be a 1,000–1,200-word *take-home* assignment. You will be given a choice of two subjects, all relating to the material covered in the first two sections of the course. You will be expected to write a coherent essay that demonstrates both your knowledge of the material covered and original thinking about the subject. The paper assignment will be handed out **Tuesday October 17** at the end of class and **it will be due at the beginning of class on Tuesday October 31**.
2. *Final Exam*. (25% of grade) This will be an exam covering the entire semester, but emphasizing the sessions after the midterm. Please plan your end-of-semester schedule around being present for this exam. **We cannot schedule early exams or make-up exams**. The final exam will be **Thursday December 21, from 11:00–1:30**.
3. *Quizzes*. (30% of grade) There will be at least ten unannounced short quizzes (approximately one per week). They are designed to test whether you have read the assigned material for that session, and they will usually contain 5 multiple choice questions. They should take no more than 10 min to complete.
4. *Attendance*. (15% of grade) We expect you to attend each class, and we will take attendance at least once a week at some point during class. You are responsible for signing in when roll is taken. When quizzes are given, participation in quizzes will be taken as attendance at the session.
5. *Extra Credit*. At the beginning of the semester we will ask students to sign up to take notes on one lecture during the semester. These notes will be posted on Blackboard (with or without your name- your choice) for use by class members. Those who successfully submit notes will receive extra credit on their overall course grade (enough to make a difference if you are slightly below the next higher grade.) *We will not accept other forms of extra credit*.

We will discuss all these items at the beginning of the semester and as each requirement approaches.

Blackboard

Most of the official materials for this course, including this syllabus (possibly modified as the semester progresses) will be found in the class site on Blackboard. Changes in the schedule, copies of assignments, and lecture notes will be found there also. Please check it regularly, just in case we need to contact you or change something.

How to Use Blackboard: All currently registered Stony Brook students have a Blackboard user account. If you registered before the first day of classes, and you are enrolled in a course that uses Blackboard, you will see the course when you log in to Blackboard.

Visit <http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu> to access this class. You will need to know your username and password. Your username is the same as your sparky username ("sparky" is the nickname for student email accounts at Stony Brook); your password is your Stony Brook ID number (SOLAR number). If you do not know your sparky username, visit the SINC site in the Main Library (Room S1460), the Student Union (Room 080), the Computing Center (Room 138) or the HSC Library (3rd floor) for assistance.

(If you register for this class during the add/drop period, you will not have access to Blackboard for this class until the day after the add/drop period ends. If, after add/drop closes, you still do not have access to your Blackboard class, contact go to the Main Library SINC site or the Student Union SINC site during regular business hours and speak with a staff member.)

Disabilities

Americans with Disabilities Act: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students requiring emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information, go to the following web site.

<http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/fire/disabilities/asp>

If you have any condition, such as a physical or mental disability, which will make it difficult for you to carry out the work as it is outlined here, or which will require extra time on examinations, please notify us in the first two weeks of the course so that we may make appropriate arrangements. (We are particularly concerned about the quizzes, since some students may have difficulty completing the quizzes in the time allotted. If this affects you, please come to us for special arrangements.)

Email

We welcome email queries from students at any time. If you are concerned or confused about something, or want to talk to us at non-office hours, please contact us by email.

SCHEDULE

Date	Subject	Handouts, Reading Due and Assignments Due
Th. Sept. 7	Introduction to Class	
Part I—Male Gender Role		
Tu. Sept 12	The Male Gender Role in American Society	<i>The Forty Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role</i> , by Deborah S. David and Robert Brannon (New York, Random House, 1976), pp. 1–45.
Th. Sept 14	How We Know That the Male Role is Not Biological	<i>Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies</i> , by Margaret Mead (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), pp. 220–225. “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” by Anne Fausto-Sterling, from <i>Myths of Gender</i> (New York: Basic Books, 1997). “The Trouble with Testosterone: Will Boys Just be Boys?” but Robert M. Sapolsky; excerpted from <i>The Trouble with Testosterone</i> (New York: Scribner, 1997).
Tu. Sept. 19	The Media and the Male Image	No Reading Assignment Movie (view in class): Tough Guise (1999)
Th. Sept. 21	How the Male Role Damages Men	“The Study of Masculinities and Men’s Health: An Overview.” By Don Sabo. 2005. pp. 326–352. <i>Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities</i> . Eds. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Tu. Sept. 26	The Connection between Masculinity and Social Pathology	“Threats to Masculinity Pits Straight Men Against Gay,” by Richard H. Gramzow; <i>Reuters Health</i> , February 7, 2002 (based on paper presented to <i>The Society for Personality and Social Psychology Annual Meeting</i> (February, 2002)). “Gendering Violence: Masculinity and Power in Men’s Accounts of Domestic Violence,” by Kristin L. Anderson and Debra Umberson, <i>Gender and Society</i> vol. 15 (no. 3, June 2001), pp. 358–80.
Th. Sept. 28	The Bigger Picture	“Nation” by Joanne Nagel. <i>Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities</i> . Eds. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell. (Sage Publications 2005), pp. 397–413.
Part II—Global Inequality		
Tu. Oct. 3	What is Inequality and why is it important?	“The Architecture of Stratification: Social Class and Inequality,” by David Newman, in <i>Sociology, fifth edition</i> (Sage, 2004), pp. 327–370
Th. Oct. 5	Living Poor, Born Rich	“Serving in Florida” by Barbara Ehrenreich in <i>Nickeled and Dimed</i> (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2001), pp. 11–50. VIEW IN CLASS: <i>Born Rich</i>
Tu. Oct. 10	Living Poor, Born Rich	“Evaluation,” by Barbara Ehrenreich in <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> , pp. 193–226.
Th. Oct. 12	The meaning of Global Inequality	“Kofi Anna’s Astonishing Facts,” by Barbara Crossette, <i>New York Times</i> Sept 27, 1998. “The Lost Decade,” by Larry Elliott, <i>Guardian</i> July 9, < 2003. “A Rich Nation,” by Jeffery D. Sachs, <i>New York Times</i> July 9, 2003. “No Limit; Writing the bill for Global AIDS,” by Donald G. McNeil, <i>New York Times</i> July 2, 2000. “Drug Makers and the 3rd World: Study in Neglect,” Donald G. McNeil, <i>New York Times</i> May 21, 2000.
Tu. Oct 17	The Causes of Global Inequality	“Global Economy and the Third World,” by Martin Khor, in <i>The Case Against the Global Economy</i> (edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith (Sierra Club Books, 1996), pp. 47–59. ASSIGNMENT: MIDTERM PAPER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED
Part III—Hip Hop Culture		
Th. Oct. 19	Origins and History of Hip Hop Culture	“The Aesthetics of Rap” by Mtume ya Salaam, <i>African American Review</i> , vol. 29, issue 2. (Summer, 1995) p. 303–315. “From the Margins to the Mainstream: The Political Power of Hip-hop,” by Katina R. Stapleton, <i>Media, Culture, and Society</i> , vol. 20 (1998), pp. 219–234.

Date	Subject	Handouts, Reading Due and Assignments Due
Th. Sept. 7	Introduction to Class	“Top Record Sales in the 1990’s” in series titled, “Feuding for Profit: Rap’s War of Words”, <i>New York Times</i> , 11/3/02. p.1.
Tu. Oct. 24	Controversy on Ice-T’s “Cop Killer”	“Gunning for Gangstas; Activist C. Delores Tuckers Wants the Music Industry to Clean up Rap,” by Patrick Rogers and Rochelle Jones, <i>People</i> , June 26, 1995 (v. 43, n. 25), p. 105 “Stonewalling is Not an Option,” by John Leo, U.S. <i>News and World Report</i> , June 19, 1995 (vol. 118, n. 24), p. 19. “Number One, with a Bullet: Songs of Violence Are Part of America’s Folk Tradition,” by David Hershey-Webb, in <i>Rap on Rap: Straight Up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture</i> , edited by Adam Sexton (New York Dell Publishing, 1995), pp. 100–106. “The Controversy,” by Ice-T in <i>Rap on Rap</i> , pp. 177–88. “Or is it Creative Freedom?” by Barbara Ehrenreich, <i>Time Magazine</i> . July 20, 1992
Th. Oct. 26	Controversy on Ice-T’s “Cop Killer” continued	“‘Cop out?: The Media, ‘Cop Killer,’ and the Deracialization of Black Rage,” by Christopher Sieving, <i>Journal of Communication Inquiry</i> , vol. 22 (No. 4, October 1998), pp. 334 (20).
		ASSIGNMENT: MIDTERM PAPER DUE
Tu. Oct. 31	What are People Afraid Of?	“Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music,” by Amy Binder, <i>American Sociological Review</i> vol. 58(December 1993), pp. 753–767. “Who’s Afraid of Rap: Differential Reactions to Music Lyrics,” by Carrie B. Fried, <i>Journal of Applied Social Psychology</i> , vol. 29 (No. 4, 1999), pp. 705–721.
Th. Nov. 2	Who’s Afraid of Rap?	“‘Fear of a Black Planet’: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990’s”, by Trisha Rose, <i>Journal of Negro Education</i> , Vol. 60, no. 3. (1991). p. 276.
Tu. Nov. 7	Global Hip Hop	“Rappin’ on the Tyne: white hip hop culture in Northeast England-an ethnographic study”. By Andy Bennett. 1999. <i>The Sociological Review</i> . Vol. 47 (1). pp. 1–24. “Homogenization of Global Culture” by Richard Barnet and John Cavanaugh. 1996. in <i>The Case against the Global Economy</i> , edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith (Sierra Club Books, 1996), pp. 71–77.
PART IV—Panics and Disasters		
Th. Nov. 9	Do People Panic in Disasters?	Lee Clarke, “Panics, Myth and Reality,” <i>Contexts</i> 1(Fall, 2002).
Tu. Nov. 14	Is “Human Error” the Cause of Disasters?	Karl Weick, “The vulnerable system: an analysis of the Tenerife air disaster,” <i>Journal of Management</i> , 16 (1990): 571–593.
Th. Nov. 16	When Does Systematic Rule Breaking Make Sense?	Karlene H. Roberts, “Structural Failures and the Development of an Organizational Breakdown: The Tragedy of the USS Greenville,” in Lee Clarke(ed), <i>Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, Volume 11, Terrorism and Disaster: New Threats, New Ideas</i> . (NY: Elsevier Science Ltd., 2003).
Tu. Nov. 21	Return and Discuss Midterm papers	
Th. Nov. 23	Happy Thanksgiving	
Tu. Nov. 28	How Accident Prevention Systems Almost Blew Up the World	Scott Sagan, “Redundancy and reliability: the 1968 Thule bomber accident,” in <i>The Limits of Safety</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Ch. 4, pp. 156–203.
Th. Nov. 30	Was New Orleans an Organizational Disaster?	Michelle Chen, “Katrina Preparations, Response Saw Failure at ‘Every Level’” <i>New Standard News</i> , Sept 9, 2005, Sept 16, 2005 David D. Kirkpatrick and Scott Shane, “Ex-FEMA Chief Tells of Frustration and Chaos,” <i>New York Times</i> September 15, 2005 Jonathan S. Landay, Alison Young and Shannon McCaffrey, “Chertoff delayed federal response, memo shows,” <i>Knight Ridder Newspapers</i> Sep. 13, 2005 Lisa Rosetta, “Frustrated: Fire Crews to Hand Out Fliers for FEMA,” <i>The Salt Lake Tribune</i> , September 6, 2005. Jessica Azulay, “New Orleans activists fill aid gaps left by FEMA” <i>New Standard News</i> , October 24, 2005.

Date	Subject	Handouts, Reading Due and Assignments Due
Th. Sept. 7	Introduction to Class	Sally Kestin, Megan O'Matz and John Maines, "FEMA's waste continues as millions in extra payments given out for Katrina," <i>South Florida Sun-Sentinel</i> , October 20, 2005
Tu. Dec. 5	Was there mass panic during 9-11?	Kathleen Tierney, "Not Again! Recycling Disaster Myths in the Aftermath of 9-11," in Lee Clarke (ed), <i>Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, Volume 11, Terrorism and Disaster: New Threats, New Ideas</i> . (NY: Elsevier Science Ltd., 2003).
Th. Dec. 7	Why Weren't the Hijacked planes intercepted?	Nafeez Mossaddq Ahmed (2002), "The Collapse of Standard Operating Procedures on 9-11," <i>The War on Freedom: How and Why America was Attacked, September 11, 2001</i> , Chapter 5,
Tu. Dec. 12	Review or Make-up	
Th. Dec. 14	Review or Make-up	
Thursday Dec. 21 11:00AM- 1:30PM		FINAL EXAMINATION