

## *Transformational Sociology: What Else is Possible?*

Sociology 495, Section 001, Topics in Sociology

Spring Semester, 2012

*Preliminary (and Incomplete) Syllabus*

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Office Hours: WF 1:30-2:30 and  
3:00-4:00

Tuesdays 10:00-12:00 and  
1:00-3:00

**Course Objectives:** This is an applied sociology course, a course that focuses on how we can use Sociology for personal and social transformation, and it is an invitation to come and play in the Wonderful World of Sociology! The goal of this course is to demonstrate how sociological knowledge, our theories and research findings, can be used to transform expectations, selves, and worldviews, so people can adapt to social demands by constructing new roles, or even by becoming who they really are (or really want to be), and living the lives they really want to live.

In this course, we will use Sociology to address, and hopefully answer, the following questions:

- How do we become who we are?
- Where do our “selves” come from?
- How do our ideas of who we are impact our life experiences?
- How can we become who we truly are and want to be?
- How can we take charge of our life experiences?
- How can we joyfully live the life of our dreams in a world that works for us?

In addressing and answering these questions, primarily from the social psychological perspective, we will have the opportunity to apply Sociology to our lives and to transform, or at least learn how we can transform, our selves, our lives, and our experiences in the social world.

**Course Structure:** This course is divided into five units that will be covered during the semester:

- Unit 1: Socialization and the Self
- Unit 2: Social Structure, Identities, and Roles
- Unit 3: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy
- Unit 4: Transformation: Resocialization and Reinterpretation
- Unit 5: Emotions, Self-Evaluations, and Wholeness

**Required Reading:** In addition to articles and book excerpts that will be assigned, four fabulous books that are written for the general population are required reading for this course. The books are:

- *Knowing Your Value (2010)*, by Mika Brzezinski. Mika Brzezinski is the co-host of MSNBC's "Morning Joe" news program.
- *Counter Clockwise: Mindful Health and the Power of Possibility (2009)*, by Ellen J. Langer. Dr. Langer is a Social Psychologist at Harvard University.
- *The Power of Your Past: The Art of Recalling, Reclaiming, and Recasting (2011)*, by John P. Schuster. John Schuster serves on the faculty for the coaching programs at Columbia University and the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara.
- *A Thousand Names for Joy (2007)*, by Byron Katie. Byron Katie "woke up" to who she really is from a very long-lasting state of very deep depression and now teaches "The Work" around the world.

**Attendance and Participation:** This course is meeting in a seminar format, and it will be conducted as a seminar. That is, you will read the assigned readings before class, and we will discuss them during class. For better or worse, we have two Monday holidays this semester, which shortens our meeting times a lot! You will have reading assignments for the weeks we do not meet, however, and we will do our best to cover the all of the material when we do meet. The class meetings are essential, so attend them!

**Critical Reflections for Assigned Readings:** To prepare you to discuss some of the readings, you will write a critical reflection for them. A critical reflection contains four parts: 1) a basic summary of the reading, 2) your reaction to the reading, 3) an examination of your reaction, and 4) a list of questions that are raised by the reading and/or by your response to it.

*The Process of Writing a Critical Reflection:* After you write a basic summary of the assigned reading, you will describe your reactions to the reading. If you agreed with what was stated, say that, and explain why you agreed with the author(s). Likewise, explain why if you disagreed with what was stated. If you think the author(s) missed something important, include that. If you liked/disliked what you read, why did you like/dislike it? Were you frustrated by what was being argued or asserted? Include that. On a deeper level, what does your emotional reaction indicate about you or your beliefs? End your critical reflection by noting questions that the reading leaves you with or raises for you. These written exercises will enable you to really "get" the material, critique it, apply it to your own experiences, and give you questions to contribute to our class discussions. The reading assignment list will indicate the articles or book excerpts for which you will write critical reflections.

**Wonder-Filled Reflections:** My favorite adjective in the English language is "wonderful," and one of my favorite verbs is "to wonder." According to dictionary.reference.com, to wonder means "to think or speculate curiously" or "to be filled with admiration, amazement, or awe." In this course you will get to discover, re-discover, or just enjoy wonder-filled reflection through some written assignments. If you are one who has retained wondering and wonderment, you will get to indulge that!

It is great fun, and – who knows – it may even make you a creative genius as you combine that with some advanced understandings of the discipline of Sociology!!

- “Creative geniuses tend to "return to the conceptual world of childhood," he writes, and are able to "wed the most advanced understandings" of a field "with the kinds of problems, questions, issues and sensibilities that most characterize ... a **wonder-filled** child.” ([Newsweek: The Puzzle Of Genius](#))
- Source: <http://www.wordnik.com/words/wonder-filled>

(The Newsweek link at the end of the quote takes you to:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/1993/06/27/the-puzzle-of-genius.html>, and that article, discussing a book by Howard Gardner, the Harvard education theorist who is quoted above, is well-worth reading. Gardner’s book, *Creating Minds*, is probably worth reading, too.)

**Course Paper:** Your course paper will be based on your critical and wonder-filled reflections. You will get to reflect on your reflections and you will be expected to dare to dream the dream of who you really are and who you really can be:

You are a wonderful person  
And you have a wonderful place  
In a wonderful world  
Where you do wonderful things  
Wonderfully well!

I’ll get the rest of the syllabus done before the semester starts, but this gives you an idea of what you can expect. We will be reading, thinking, and wondering, and writing and talking, and having a grand time playing with Sociology in this course this semester!

**Student Learning Objectives:** The Sociology Department currently has four student learning objectives (SLOs), phrased as follows:

1. Students can communicate research findings orally and in writing.
2. Students can perform appropriate analyses of data and draw valid conclusions from their analyses.
3. Students can apply sociological theory and methods to analyze historic and contemporary events.
4. Students can define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee is in the process of revising the SLOs, but using what we have now, the SLOs are related to this course in this way. You will be

- communicating orally and in writing about many sociological topics
- analyzing sociological materials and drawing conclusions
- applying theory and methods to analyze yourself, others, and the social world
- examining how theory is used to build sociological knowledge and how it is often used to reinforce, rather than to challenge, the existing social reality