

Week 1 Course Content

Welcome to GNED 1407 - Introduction to Sociology! This week we are going to focus on setting the scene for our semester. We aren't going to dive into any substantial content just yet, as I simply want to familiarize you with our course details first. I consider week 1 to be the most important week to pay attention - many of your questions get answered before you even ask them!

Read through this page from top to bottom, making sure to pay attention to the headings and descriptions as they will point out relevant action items. Your weekly content pages will look similar throughout the semester, so you should get used to this layout pretty quickly; it is designed to be easy to use (if you have notes on what could be simplified or ever come across broken links, please let me know!).

Learning Outcomes & Key Terms

In this section, I list for you the weekly learning objectives, as well as the course learning outcomes (CLOs); these guide our learning, and can be found in detail on the Durham College Course Outline.

1. Identify the goals of General Education and the connection to course learning outcomes to relevant careers
2. Defining sociology and the major theoretical perspectives
3. Developing a sociological imagination
4. Apply sociological thinking to various contemporary social problems

Key Terms: Sociology, Sociological imagination, Social structures, Micro, Macro, Global structures

Weekly Content: Reading & Resources

In this section, you will find a link to the Weekly Reading (if applicable), and lesson content like PowerPoints and/or mini video-lectures.

Reading:

This week you don't have any course content reading, but please read the entirety of this page; lots of important stuff!

Lesson:

This week I have provided two separate files; one is the course introduction - this contains important information that will walk you through how this course will work. The other is a very brief introductory lesson defining "sociology." You may choose to view the Google Slides or PowerPoint. The PowerPoint also includes audio captions.

Don't forget there is additional information provided in the 'notes' section!

Today's lesson will discuss the topic of suicide from a sociological perspective.

Slide 4: Lauryn Hill - Everything is Everything

- I like to start each class with a song to get us thinking about the topic. There are no right or wrong answers, just food for thought.
- Consider: What is the message of the song? How do the lyrics or melody relate to your current ideas about the world, social groups, opportunity, fairness, etc.?

Amy: Lauryn Hill's line "Everything is everything / After winter, must come spring" relates to my idea about the world and social groups as having seasons. Natural cycles over which we have no real control. There are some things that are out of our hands, that can't be changed but also can't be our fault. It's the natural balance of the world, where we can't take any season for granted because it always comes to a close. Whether that's a season of love and light, or a season of dark depression. It speaks to being humbled by the fact that the world keeps worlding while we're playing our social games. Win or lose, or completely lost, nothing in life is guaranteed. "Change, it comes eventually."

Slide 5: What is sociology?

Sociology is a science guided by the basic understanding that our lives are affected, not only by our individual characteristics, but by our place in the social world. **What does that really mean?**

- People, groups, and social life can be scientifically studied. Therefore, sociology is a social science.
- Sociology focuses on social relationships, looking at how others influence our behaviour
 - How major social institutions like the government, religion, and the economy affect us; and how we ourselves affect other individuals, groups, and even organizations.

Slide 6: Sociological Imagination

- The "tool" essential for beginners to sociology is called "sociological imagination", first proposed by **C. Wright Mills**
- It means: The ability to understand how social forces ("Public Issues") influence the lives of individuals ("Personal Troubles")
- Reflect: Consider one recent economic or political change that had a direct impact on your individual life. Reflect independently, or share your thought on the Lesson Lounge discussion board.

*Amy: One recent economic change that has had a direct impact on my life as an individual is the rise of Artificial Intelligence. After a 7 year career as a Technical Writer for business-to-business software-as-a-service companies, I was laid off in part due to my role becoming less valuable. Tech in Canada right now is in a rough place. In my role, I was paid a modest \$67k CAD a year, but in the states, a similar role with similar level of experience is paid 100+k **USD**. Now my options are getting ever narrower, and there is a "gig economy" rising up in my field, where people with my skill set are lucky if they can land a salary. Recently the SAG went on strike to negotiate protections against AI exploitation for writers and actors in the entertainment industry. There are few if any unions in tech, and it feels taboo to talk about that. I guess I could always just accept a contract gig, training the AI that replaced me. And that's why I'm back in school.*

Speaker notes: Developing this perspective asks us to give up the idea that our behaviour is simply a matter of what we decide to do. Now, we must combine an understanding of our individual decisions with how they are impacted by the greater world in which we live.

Slide 7: Sociological Imagination - Connecting the...

- General --> Particular
- Strange --> Familiar
- Social --> Individual
- Public --> Private
- Macro --> Micro

Slide 8: Using the sociological imagination

Sociological perspective / imagination is basically the ability to see relationships or influences of greater society on individual lives. This requires individuals to step outside of their own views and biases to explore connections. Private troubles vs. Public issues. E.G: Is a person unemployed due to a personal trouble or is it due to societal issues?

Task: Independently or using the Lesson Lounge discussion board, make a list of the 5 most pressing social issues facing Canadians.

1. Discuss how each of them would affect an **individual's** life. (Micro)
2. Discuss how it would affect an entire **population**, like Canada (Macro)

Amy: My source for the top five social issues facing Canada today is the [Service Canada 2024 Disruptions report](#) and map. The social issues identified as being the most impactful and most likely to have an impact within 3-10 years are:.

1. People cannot tell what is true and what is not

- **Micro:** Sue doesn't know what news to trust, so she tunes out all of it. On election day, Sue doesn't vote, or votes based on someone else's opinions. Sue is not aware of how she may have been passively influenced by her casual social media use.
- **Macro:** [The Online News Act](#) was passed. "The intent of the regulations is to provide platforms the opportunity to reach fair commercial agreements with news businesses, including the possibility of a single agreement with a group of news businesses, and thereby contribute to the overall sustainability of the Canadian news marketplace." Therefore, the Canadian government is concerned about the sustainability of the Canadian news marketplace, and have passed legislation to support it. Regulations passed in support of Canadian news indicate that there are real disruptions in Canadians ability to access relevant news and media at a macro level.

2. Downward social mobility is the norm

- **Micro:** Bob is 35 years old and lives in his mom's basement. When his parents were his age, his dad supported the family on a single income. Bob works two jobs in the gig economy, but still can't afford a place of his own.
- **Macro:** Canada has numerous strategies in place for decreasing "the degree to which the fortune of children relies on that of their parents." (from the [Canadian Encyclopedia entry on Social Mobility](#)) Therefore, it's a real social issue on a macro level.

3. Artificial Intelligence runs wild

- **Micro:** Amy was laid off in large part because of AI's disruptions to the tech industry.
- **Macro:** The first line in [The Artificial Intelligence and Data Act \(AIDA\) – Companion document](#) (from Canada.ca): "Artificial intelligence (AI) systems are poised to have a significant impact on the lives of

Canadians and the operations of Canadian businesses."

4. Ageing population has no support

- **Micro:** *Sue's long term exposure to negative stereotypes about aging has led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. She now has low self-esteem, and is having trouble getting her doctor to take her health concerns seriously.'*
- **Macro:** *"Canada faces significant aging of its population in the coming decades that will have profound and wide-ranging impacts on society."... "Ageism is not only a barrier to labour force participation among older adults, it is also a major loss for employers in terms of productivity. Along the same lines, the negative outcomes of ageism on a person's health ultimately impact the entire health care system's sustainability. This explains the growing interest in methodologies that can be used to measure and quantify the economic impacts of ageism.", from [Reports: Seniors and aging society \(2024-08-28\)](#)(from Canada.ca).*

5. Values-based clashes in society

- **Micro:** *Bob feels that his values are not represented in Canadian society. Due to some confrontations online and on the drive home, he is feeling more and more like an outsider, and is losing trust in his community.*
- **Macro:** *From the [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#) (UWaterloo): "Values are critical. They provide guideposts for how Canada can move forward as a society, how we can orient ourselves during challenging times, how we can inspire our citizens and how we can be confident that the policies and programs we recommend and the path we choose will reflect the vision of our citizens." "... "Social Norms and Values - Attitudes towards others and community - Attitudes and values are important contributors to community vitality because ideas, assumptions, and beliefs motivate social engagement and action within communities and Canadian society more broadly. Commonly shared feelings of trust, belonging, and caring are markers of inclusive societies. Discrimination, on the other hand, challenges community relationships and creates barriers to the pursuit of wellbeing, especially for groups that are seen by others as different."*

Slide 9: A Classical Example - Emile Durkheim + Suicide

"If sociology can reveal the hidden social causes of such an apparently non-social and antisocial phenomenon, there must be something to it!"

- Suicide was long thought of as an individual, psychological event. Durkheim showed that social forces influence suicide rates: a groundbreaking sociological discovery.
- Suicide rates varied because of differences in the degree of social solidarity in various categories of the population. (Religion, gender, etc.)

Speaker notes

Social solidarity refers to:

1. The degree to which group members share beliefs and values
2. The intensity and frequency of their interaction

Emile Durkheim: pioneering French sociologist

- Found that social forces influence suicide rates, and found little evidence that psychological disorder was correlated to suicide rates.
- Found that social solidarity among particular groups was related to suicide rates.

He noticed:

- Religion: Jews more likely to suicide (persecution brought them closer) than Christians. Catholics less likely than Protestants (a more solitary worship)
- Marriage: Married people less likely to suicide than singles
- Gender: Women less likely to suicide than men (masculinity norms prevented as strong of social bonds)
- Age: Elderly much more likely to be socially isolated than younger people

Slide 10: From personal troubles to social structures

Social Institutions: Relatively stable patterns of social relationships that help society function properly

- Micro: intimate social relations formed face-to-face. Families, friendship circles, and work associations.
- Macro: Overarching patterns that lie outside of your circle of acquaintances. Classes, bureaucracies, and power systems like patriarchy.

One of the main goals of sociology is to identify and explain how an individual's personal troubles are connected to the social structure in which the individual lives.

Slide 11: Going Global

Global Structures: Patterns of social relations that lie outside and above the national level. International organizations, patterns of worldwide travel and communication, and the economic relations between countries.

We are ever more connected culturally, economically, and politically.

Where we live shapes our lives. Societies throughout the world are increasingly interconnected through technology and economics.

What happens in the rest of the world affects life here in Canada.

Many problems that we face in Canada are more serious elsewhere.

Thinking globally is a good way to learn more about ourselves.

Reflect

Consider 1 issue that recently occurred in another country and how Canadians reacted. Why did they react this way? Reflect independently, or share your thought on the Lesson Lounge discussion board.

Amy: Recently the President-Elect of the United States has suggested that Canada should be the 51st state. This has caused some Canadians to react with extreme indignation at the notion. It's interesting to note, because why wouldn't we, the weaker country next to a superpower like the states, be at risk of being conquered? What makes us so special that we wouldn't be at risk of being taken over for our resources,

when countries full of people just like us, like Ukraine, have to fight and die to resist that same fate? Why do we feel entitled to be given that respect, when we haven't had to risk or sacrifice anything like the Ukrainians have, like our lives, livelihoods, money, status quo, to stand up for it?.

Slide 12: In Conclusion

The Sociological Imagination gives us the ability to see the world as an outside might. We are about to embark on a 14 week exploration of your own sociological imagination; you'll be using it even when you don't realize it!

Slide 13: Sociological Theories

Sociology uses 4 major theoretical perspectives to analyze social issues. Each has a unique view of the same issue.

1. Functionalist Theory.

- Main focus: Values
- Level of analysis: Macro
- Core questions:
 - What keeps society functioning smoothly?
 - What is the standard, tradition, or status-quo?
 - What are the parts of society, and how do they relate?
 - What are the intended / unintended outcomes of an event?

2. Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

- Main focus: Meaning
- Level of analysis: Micro
- Core questions:
 - How do people interact?
 - How does interaction influence relationships?
 - Do people change their behaviour in certain settings? Why?

3. Conflict Theory.

- Main focus: Inequality
- Level of analysis: Macro
- Core questions:
 - How are wealth, power, opportunities, and resources distributed in society?
 - Is this fair and just?
 - Who benefits / who suffers?
 - How are marginalized groups (gender, race) impacted?

1. Feminist Theory.

- Main focus: Patriarchy
- Level of analysis: Both micro & macro
- Core questions:
 - We will group this under the umbrella of "Conflict theory"

- What are the effects of gender inequality in society?
- How does the intersection of race and gender operate?
- LGBTQ+ issues?

Slide 14: Sociological research

Sociologists study all kinds of social groups and social phenomena.

They use the scientific method to objectively collect information through various research methods.

This can involve quantitative (statistics) and/or qualitative information (i.e interviews)

This means that sociology is not just "common sense," or hypothesizing about what might improve society, but it is a legitimate academic field that helps inform areas like social policy, government / non-government organizations, and public interest.

Speaker notes The scientific method:

1. Decide on a topic
2. Review the literature
3. Develop a hypothesis
4. Select a research design and collect data
5. Analyze the results
6. Share and publish the data

Slide 15: Fake News

Click each article and consider:

- What are the similarities and differences?
- Which source is more credible?
- Describe why you think so
- Chat with me on Teams, connect with a peer, or post on the Lesson Lounge discussion board.

(The links are broken)

Slide 17: John Green Crash Course vid on Social Media

*Amy notes on the John Green video: * It turns out that whether or not you participate in Twitter is irrelevant to whether or not Twitter affects your life because what's shared online has offline consequences. * When we're this reliant on a media ecosystem full of pollution, we have to take responsibility for what we read, post, and share. * Algorithms that organize our feeds into filter bubbles. (I have a carefully curated social media. I don't engage with anything that I hate, so that I don't get fed that hate back to me just because I engaged in it. It feels like it results in a self-censoring behaviour, because if I deign to explore outside the bounds of the safe space I created for myself, my calm cozy scrolling experience will be disrupted by spikes of stress and discomfort that go against the point of what I'm using the app for. Which is not noble; it's to be entertained and distracted, connecting with people who share my hobbies, and getting some kind of social connection that I don't get IRL. People want to pressure people to be engaged politically or in these*

debates online, but my social filter bubble online is important to me because I have so many other vectors that put me at a higher risk of suicide due to social isolation. And if it's all misinformation campaigns anyways, I'd prefer not to look. Cowardly, but true. At a micro level that's one thing, but at a macro level that over-reliance on being a part of an online society makes it easier to influence large swathes of the population, and raises the stakes of social media disinformation campaigns in the "personal trouble" way.)" It makes one feel paranoid, distrusting, and ill-at-ease.

. Entire businesses have been run on engaging but false news stories. When the business makes money from clicks and advertisements, they use the engagement bait to their advantage.

9:00 Engagement over quality makes it harder for people to distinguish truth from fiction.

Confirmation bias.

Extreme recommendation engines.

- The way we use the app tends to keep us surrounded by the same content we engage with.
- Updates to algorithms can have an impact. I'm curious about the data, about the effectiveness / impact of youtube's update to prefer authoritative content. Or if there is any, data about the chronological feeds vs. "for you" mess.

Lateral Reading

- Check the source
- Look for authority and perspective
- Check the claim
- Check the evidence.

Challenge your source and your own assumptions. Be suspicious.

References for this course content:

- Brym, R., Roberts L.W., & Strohschein, L(2016). Chapter 1: A Sociological Compass. Sociology: Compass for a New Social World. Sixth Edition. Toronto: Nelson.