

Sociology 3151-730

Self in Modern Society

Spring 2011

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Welcome to what I hope will be an intriguing examination of the selves we live by. It would seem, at first glance, that the nature and character of the social self are rather obvious. We are whatever we are. We talk about ourselves, we talk to ourselves, and we are continually presenting ourselves before varied audiences. We sometimes beat ourselves up and / judge our self a success. Heck, we even Google ourselves. We tend to have a definite sense of being certain about what we are experiencing as we interact with the social world. And we develop a self-identity through those experiences. Pretty personal stuff, right?

Yet the character of the self has some peculiar, sociological properties (or processes). Most notably, its reflexive and abstract nature. The development of the self arises from and is continually shaped through social interaction with others and involves the process whereby actors (subjectively) reflect on themselves as objects. Thus, the self has the rare ability to be both subject and object simultaneously. It is this reflexive process, and the patterned regularities of social life shaping this – rather personal – process that is of great sociological interest. Through the self, the individual and society are dynamically conjoined. The ability to see this linkage of individual biography and social history, self and society, individual agency and social structure, necessitates a keen sociological imagination. This is the promise of sociology. This is our objective for the next sixteen weeks.

We will draw broadly from the wealth of classical and contemporary sociological insights into the modern world to describe and analyze this most central of sociological concerns, the social construction of self. We will familiarize ourselves with the symbolic interactionist approach and highlight the interactional processes through which we produce and reproduce our social worlds.

I have chosen two rich texts to guide our discussions this semester. These two texts are available at the UMC Bookstore and the Bookstore on The Hill.

Symbols, Selves and Social Reality (3rd edition) by Sandstrom, Martin and Fine
Inside Social Life: Readings in Social Psychology (6th ed.) eds. Cahill and Sandstrom

Exams and Grading: I expect lively and thoughtful participation by all members of this class. I expect you to read the appropriate material for each class meeting and come ready to talk, share, apply, refine, and/or challenge the topic at hand. I favor frequent and informed participation. I strongly encourage you to make every effort to become a “regular member” of this class. Please bring your book(s) to each class meeting. Your grade for this course will be based on the following criteria: class engagement / co-facilitation (10%)*, eight quizzes / writing assignments (10% each); and a small group project / presentation (10%). In determining final grades I do use the “+ , - ”system.” If you are going to miss an exam, it is vital that you notify me prior to that exam.

* Class Engagement (10%): Your regular attendance and active participation in class discussions and activities is an essential component of this class. You are expected to engage in civil discourse on issues and readings relevant to each session. Each student is expected to co-facilitate one of our class meetings. Beyond two absences, your grade for engagement will be reduced by one-half letter grade for each subsequent absence, except in the case of high-holiday observance, family emergency or medical emergency.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who qualify for academic accommodations must provide me notification from Disability Services and discuss specific needs with me, preferably during the first two weeks of class. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard Hall, room 322.)

Classroom Behavior Policy: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set re limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities.

Student Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and nonacademic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion).

Policy on Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships applies to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550

Religious Observances: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, please inform me as to any classes you expect to miss due to religious observance.