University of Edinburgh
School of Social & Political Science Sociology
2018 – 2019

Sociology 1b: The Sociological Imagination:
Private Troubles, Public Problems
SCIL08005
Semester 2, Year 1

Key Information

| Course Organisers | Dr. Nathan Coombs  
| Email: nathan.coombs@ed.ac.uk |
| Room no. 6.10  
| Chrystal MacMillan Building, 15A George Square |
| Guidance & Feedback Hours: Wednesdays 15:00-17:00 |

| Lecturers | Professor Jonathan Hearn  
| Email: j.hearn@ed.ac.uk |
| Dr. Mary Holmes  
| Email: mary.holmes@ed.ac.uk |
| Dr. Nathan Coombs  
| Email: nathan.coombs@ed.ac.uk |

| Location | Tuesday and Fridays 2:10-3:00pm  
| George Square Lecture Theatre |

| Senior Tutor | Tim Squirrel  
| Email: tsquirrel@exseed.ed.ac.uk |

| Course Secretary | Lauren Ayre  
| Email: Lauren.Ayre@ed.ac.uk |
| Undergraduate Teaching Office |

| Assessment Deadlines | Midterm Essay: 12 noon 27 February 2019  
| Final Essay: 12 noon 22 April 2019 |

Aims and Objectives

‘The sociological imagination is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relations between the two.’


This course complements knowledge gained in Sociology 1A “The Sociological Imagination: Individuals and Society” and provides a basis for further study in Sociology 2A/B and Honours. The theme of the course is the relationship between private troubles and public problems, i.e.
how the personal challenges many of us face in our lives are shaped and defined in ways that often appear to be beyond our direct control. The course will introduce you to the sociological perspective by examining four significant topics in the discipline of sociology: structure and agency, the sociology of the body, capitalism, and social change. By the end of the course, students will be able to identify some of the social changes, problems, and issues facing modern societies.
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Learning Outcomes

• Students will be introduced to the discipline and study of sociology using several different in-depth units, which apply sociology to contemporary social life and social problems.

• Students will gain a broad knowledge of key sociological concepts and the concept of 'society' and identify some of the social changes, problems, and issues facing modern societies.

• Students will understand the relationship between sociological argument and evidence and be able to develop their own arguments drawing on sociological evidence.

• Students will be able to analyse the behaviour of individuals, as well as analyse the relationship between “private troubles” and “public problems.”

• Students will be able to analyse contemporary issues sociologically. They will be able to apply a critical perspective to social problems and personal experiences discussed in the course.

Teaching Methods

Lectures

There are two 50-minute lectures every week:

• Tuesday 14.10-15.00 in George Square Lecture Theatre
• Friday 14.10-15.00 in George Square Lecture Theatre

Tutorials

Tutorials provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the readings and lectures by engaging in discussions with other students. The tutors will facilitate these discussions, assist with tutorial tasks, and provide guidance for the essay assignments.

Each tutorial consists of 12-15 students. Tutorials meet weekly, starting in the second week of the course. Your first tutorial will take place in week 2 starting Monday, January 21, 2019.

*Please note that pressure of work or problems of time management are not considered an acceptable reason for non-attendance at tutorials.*

A list of tutors and contact email addresses will be made available on Learn during the first week of teaching.

What will we be doing in tutorials?

Tutorials are a core part of the course, which is why you are expected to attend all of them. In addition to discussing the readings assigned each week, you will also participate in tasks designed to enhance and extend the material presented in lectures.
Assessment

Students will be assessed by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Word count limit (excluding bibliography)*</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Submission date (All coursework is due at 12 noon on the date of submission)</th>
<th>Return of feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-semester Essay</td>
<td>2000 words max</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>27 February 2019</td>
<td>20 March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>2000 words max</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22 April 2019</td>
<td>13 May 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
All coursework is submitted electronically through ELMA. Please read the School Policies and Coursework Submission Procedures, which you will find here: [http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/submission_guidance](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/submission_guidance)

Refer to the SSPS Common Essay Marking Descriptors to find out what each grade signifies in terms of your performance: [http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/marking_descriptors](http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/marking_descriptors)

Midterm Essay (50% of the overall mark)

Your midterm essay will give you an opportunity to sharpen your critical thinking skills. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the sociological concepts and theories explored in each unit by: explaining them in a concise manner and in their own words; selecting effective illustrations or examples to support and enhance these explanations; and beginning to evaluate the arguments in the readings discussed in the essay by advancing one or two elements of a critique. For example, you might identify particular strengths or weaknesses of an argument, or question the assumptions on which the argument rests.

The maximum word count is 2000 words (excluding bibliography). Please refer to Appendix 2 for further details on word count penalty. You will not be penalised for submitting work below the word limit. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

The essay is marked by your tutor. The course organisers and lecturers will second-read a sample of essays from each tutorial group to ensure equal marking standards across tutorial groups.
Coursework is submitted online using our electronic submission system, ELMA. You will not be required to submit a paper copy of your work. Marked coursework, grades and feedback will be returned to you via ELMA. You will not receive a paper copy of your marked coursework or feedback.

Please refer to the assessment and submission procedure information on our webpages, which you will find here: http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/submission_guidance

**Midterm Essay Topics:**

Students must answer **ONE** of the following questions:

1. To understand individual and collective forms of human agency must we also describe social structure?
2. Are historical processes, cultural practices or ideas more important in the social construction of bodies?

*Essay advice:* Both questions invite you to take a position and defend a scholarly argument. ‘Yes’ or ‘no’ answers are not enough. You are expected to examine to what extent a proposition holds true and to what extent different factors are important in social processes. You should use the lecture readings as a starting point then conduct your own research and discover your own sources using the library’s DiscoverEd service. Articles in sociology journals are a particularly useful resource as they allow you to engage a cross-section of viewpoints, concepts and empirical studies relatively quickly. Remember, this is a University-level essay: you need to state your argument in the introduction, define the relevant terms (dictionary definitions are not acceptable), and elaborate your argument in a way that takes the reader from the introduction to the conclusion in logical, well-signposted steps. The argument should be analytical, not a statement of personal opinion.

**Final essay (50% of the overall mark)**

The final essay allows students to explore in depth a topic from the second half of the course. Students will demonstrate their understanding of sociological theories and concepts by engaging closely with course material and organising a discussion of several different readings. Successful essays will display command of the relevant sociological theories and concepts and will be able to illustrate them with specific references to course readings and lecture notes. Critical evaluations will be more fully developed; the various elements of a critique, such as weighing strengths and weaknesses or showing how an assumption is flawed, will add up to produce conclusions.

Your final essay should be a maximum of 2000 words (excluding bibliography). Please refer to Appendix 2 for further details on word count penalty. You will not be penalised for submitting work below the word limit. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

**Final essay topics will be posted on Learn on Monday, March 25th, 2019.**
The questions will be focused on units in the second half of the course but also provide you with an opportunity to draw on concepts from the first half of the course. Achieving a good mark will require you to weave together these different concepts, understand their interconnections and tensions, as well as draw on original and relevant examples to illustrate your points.

**Overall Course Result**

There are two parts to the overall assessment: the mid-semester essay (50% of overall mark) and the final essay (50% of overall mark.) In order to achieve a Pass in Sociology 1B, students need to earn an overall mark of at least 40%.

Your final grade will be decided by your tutor, the course organiser, and the Board of Examiners. You will have many opportunities during tutorials to discuss criteria and processes of assessment. Students who fail Sociology 1B by receiving a final overall result of less than 40% must resit any piece of coursework that received a failing mark. You do not re-take coursework you already passed.

**Attendance**

Attendance and participation in the lectures and discussion are essential for developing an understanding of the topics.

**Communications and Feedback**

During the semester, all important information for the class will be announced on Learn. You should also remember to check your university email account on a regular basis as this is the only way staff will be able to contact you about course matters. It is quite natural to run into problems or be unsure of yourself – you cannot go wrong by contacting one of the course team as soon as possible.

For course registration, joining a tutorial group and anything related to assessment, contact the course secretary:

Lauren Ayre  
Undergraduate Teaching Office,  
Chrystal Macmillan Building  
Email: Lauren.Ayre@ed.ac.uk

For problems with tutorials, contact your course tutor. The list of tutors’ emails can be found on Learn. You can also contact the senior tutor:

Tim Squirrell  
Email: tsquire@exseed.ed.ac.uk

To join the course, to discuss problems, and for any other advice, contact the course organiser:

Dr Nathan Coombs  
6.10 Chrystal Macmillan Building  
Phone: 0131 6508259  
Email: nathan.coombs@ed.ac.uk

For further guidance and feedback: Each week during the teaching term lecturers hold ‘guidance and feedback’ hours in their office. Students are welcome to drop by if they wish to
discuss academic matters, such as the content of the lectures or readings. Guidance and feedback hours are listed on staff page: http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/staff.

More serious personal problems are best dealt with by your Personal Tutor or Student Support Officer, who will let us know, for example, if you have been ill or, for some other serious reason, unable to keep up with the work for part of the course.

There are various avenues for you to provide us with feedback about the course:

- **Tutorials:** By asking questions and raising concerns during tutorial, tutors can identify common problems and pass on comments to the course organisers.

- **Tutorial reps:** Every tutorial group elects a tutorial representative (‘rep’). Tutorial reps meet with the course organisers once a semester to reflect on students’ Sociology 1B experience of the course and express informed opinions about it. Class representatives are chosen from a pool of tutorial representatives from each tutorial group. This will be arranged during the first half of semester 2. Reps are a key part of the course – they feed student views back to the teaching team. We encourage you to become one. If you have any problems with the course, or if there is anything that the course team needs to know, you can raise it with your rep, or directly with the course organisers.

- **Course evaluations:** At the end of the course, we ask all students to fill in a questionnaire about the various lecture blocks and other aspects of the course. We do hope you will take note of what you like and dislike as the course progresses, and that you then take the time to share your experience with us. We do our best to include your constructive suggestions into the program for subsequent years.

**Readings and Resource List**

To get the best out of this and other courses, start reading early and keep reading throughout the course. Each unit has identified several readings to provide some background and get you started.

For each lecture there are a few essential readings which you should do to prepare for lectures and tutorials. These are listed under Read This. There are further readings that you can do to expand on the lecture, listed here under Read Later or Read Further. These readings will help you to clarify and deepen your understanding of the lectures and tutorials.

They are also critical for essay preparation. To make this as straightforward as possible, we have assembled a ‘Resource List’ with links to online resources and library holdings:

http://resourcelists.ed.ac.uk/lists/3F2F2C4F-BE2A-3C16-9617-E4CF01F76DF8.html

Log into Learn and look for the ‘Resource List’ icon. (If you don’t log into Learn first, the links won’t work!)
## Lecture Summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>January 18</td>
<td>Structure and Agency—defining terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>January 22</td>
<td>Organisations, Institutions and Networks—mediating terms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Structure, Agency and the Public/Private distinction</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>January 29</td>
<td>Structure, Agency and Identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>Sociologically Imagining Bodies</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>Socially Constructed Bodies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>February 8</td>
<td>History: How Bodies are Socially Constructed Changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>February 12</td>
<td>Culture: Different Cultures Construct Bodies Differently</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>February 15</td>
<td>Critically Comparing Bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>February 27</td>
<td>Technology, Class, Revolution</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Capitalism and Religion</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>From Conspicuous Consumption to the Aspirational Class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 9</td>
<td>Money: Alienating or Empowering?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>Prices: Values and Valuing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Social Change—the Big Picture</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Causes: Technology, Knowledge, Rationality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>Causes: Social Conflict and Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>The Growth of Power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Concluding lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Week &amp; Office Drop-in Session (re: exam prep)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**FESTIVAL OF CREATIVE LEARNING** (18 – 22 February)
LECTURE READINGS

UNIT 1: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

Prof. Jonathan Hearn

This unit examines a fundamental conceptual distinction in sociology, and in the social sciences and humanities more widely: structure and agency. After defining these terms, we look at three kinds of social forms—organisations, institutions and networks—that mediate the relationships between agents and structures. The primary focus here is on organisation. Then we consider another major way modern societies seek to mediate agency and structure: through the distinction between private and public domains of social life. We conclude the unit by asking how the tensions between structure and agency impact the formation of identities.

General reading
The problem of ‘structure and agency’ runs through this accessible introduction to theory. It’s not required, but you may find it helpful for exploring different theoretical approaches to the problem:


Week 1
Lecture 1 - Course Introduction

The first lecture introduces the course and asks what it means to exercise the sociological imagination. We plan to use the Top Hat system to survey your views on the contemporary world and reflect sociologically on the results. Register for a student Top Hat account by following the guidance here: https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/learning-technology/electronic-voting-system/students/adding

The join code for Soc1b is: 330145.

Read this:
- Mills, C. Wright (1959) ‘The Promise’ (ch 1), in The Sociological Imagination, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-24. [This chapter contains a classic sociological statement about the need to place personal biographies in historical and sociological context.]

Read further:
- Hanisch, Carol (2009) ‘The Personal is Political: The Women’s Liberation Movement classic with a new explanatory introduction’, at: http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html [The original source of this saying from the second wave feminist movement of 60s and 70s.]

Lecture 2: Structure and Agency - defining terms

Social structure and human agency are basic concepts in sociology, but what are they? We look at ‘social structure’ first, asking what are structures ‘made of’? (material, ideas, behaviours, conventions, rules, practices...?). To illustrate we look at a classic example: the typical structural differences between agrarian and industrial societies. We then look at ‘agency’. Do agents have to be individuals, or can aggregates of people be agents? Social
movements suggest a kind of agency, but what about social trends? How does agency create structure, and how do structures shape agency? We examine the relationship, drawing on the illustrative case of Brexit.

Read this:

Read further:
- Archer, Margaret (1982) 'Morphogenesis versus structuration: on combining structure and action', *British Journal of Sociology* 33(4):225-252. (Also republished in a 2010 supplement issue of *BJS*.)

On Brexit see:

Explore online…
- *Complexity Labs*: Social Structure: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StMXdmt9etE Good overview, which picks up many of the themes and ideas of Unit 1, but may equate agency too much with the individual, and social change with human intention. The *Complexity Lab* videos are generally helpful, although they come from a particular ‘complexity theory’ perspective which is not the perspective of this course. Videos titled ‘Social Institutions’ and ‘Social Network Analysis Overview’ are also relevant to this unit.

Week 2
Lecture 3: Organisations, Institutions and Networks - mediating terms

We examine these three basic concepts that run throughout sociological research. They have a lot to do with how agents and structures interact. Social life is almost always organised, but organisations come in many different forms: formal and informal, large and small, long and short-lived, bureaucratic and personalistic. Organisations are easily confused with ‘institutions’. We focus on a particular sense of this term as core conventions that help coordinate social life. Networks are organising for social life, but looser and flexible, and generally defined by how we are situated in them. We explore these three basic tools of social analysis, with emphasis on the concept of organisation, using examples to show their differences, and variations.
Read this:


In addition, try searching basic definitions of ‘organisations (social)’, ‘institutions (social)’, and ‘networks (social)’ online and in the library. Recommended: The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, G. Marshall (ed.), and The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Sociology, M. Mann (ed.)—both should be in the Library HUB.

Read further:


Explore online…

- Formal Organizations: Crash Course Sociology #17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDuBh7VbGgU Lively summary with good basic coverage, from an American perspective. Also gets into Weber’s concept of bureaucracy, and Ritzer’s ‘McDonaldization’ thesis (discussed in lecture 17, Unit 4). The Crash Course Sociology videos are generally good, but of course will not exactly match how we present topics in this course.

Lecture 4: Structure, Agency and the Public/Private distinction

Distinguishing between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is fundamental to modern social life, especially in democratic societies with constitutional states. The distinction is basic to how they operate and deal with social conflict and competing interests. But what do we mean by it? In what sense does it ‘exist’? We flesh out this idea by considering its history, and other concepts that concern the relationship between public and private, namely ‘civil society’ and the ‘public sphere’. Looking at gender relations turns out to be very revealing in regard to this distinction.

Read this:


Read further:


On the gender dimension see:


Explore online…

- 19th Century Women: Private and Public Spheres (RC Frey): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQUaUY4hJeQ, Looks at the distinction in the context of 19th century American women, relating this to Habermas’s idea of the ‘public sphere’.
- Habermas & the Public Sphere (U of Sydney Sociology and Public Policy Dept.): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PzTyNe4tP4 Somewhat pedantic, but a clear overview of Habermas’s ‘Public Sphere’ concept.

**Week 3**  
**Lecture 5: Structure, Agency and Identity**

We conclude this unit by considering how structure and agency shape social identity. This is one place where these abstract ideas meet everyday experience. We ask what we mean by ‘identity’ and why this term has become so central to public debates. What is the relationship between individual personhood, and the large labels that people get categorised by? When are our identities chosen, and when are they imposed on us? How do organisations mediate and mobilise identities? What are the relationships between identity, agency, and power? Rogers Brubaker’s examination the differences between gender and race identities helps us explore these questions.

Read this:


Read further:

UNIT TWO: SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY

Dr. Mary Holmes

Where and when you are born and whether you are male or female can have major effects on how long you are likely to live, on what you eat and wear and how you go about your daily life. This unit introduces you to some of the major ideas within sociology through the lens of the body. We explore what it means to have a sociological imagination by examining how our bodies are shaped by our historical and cultural context. From the sex of skeletons to the meaning of tattoos, we examine bodies as social products and learn to think critically.

General reading

All these give you a good overview of the sociology of the body and some of the key ideas and thinkers we will cover in the lectures. You will get an idea of how Sociology has a different way of thinking about bodies to Biology.


Week 3
Lecture 6: Sociologically Imagining Bodies

Comparing different historical periods, different societies and different groups within societies is a crucial part of thinking sociologically. This lecture explains the sociological imagination as a way of looking at the world that takes account of history, comparison and critique. We also look at social processes and consider what it means to say that bodies are socially constructed.

Read this for lecture 6 and for next week’s tutorial:

- Williams, S. J. (2007) The social etiquette of sleep: some sociological reflections and observations. Sociology 41(2): 313-328. [This is an interesting article about how the sleeping body is shaped by changing social rules and practices. For instance, did you know that people commonly used to get up for a couple of hours during the night and do chores or other things?]

Read further:
Have a look through the journal Body & Society, which is available online.


**Week 4  
Lecture 7: Socially Constructed Bodies**

This lecture further explains the sociology of bodies by looking at influential ideas about how bodies are socially constructed. We examine how social rules and norms about bodies have changed throughout history, using a variety of examples. We also explore different cultural constructions of bodies by talking about what kind of bodies are found disgusting.

**Read this for lectures 7 and 8 and for next week’s tutorial:**
- Howson, A (2013) pp 85-108 of ‘The civilized body’ in *The Body in Society: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity. [Want to know when and why Europeans started using cutlery to eat their food instead of their hands? Why is this sociologically important? This chapter is a good place to start.]

**Read further:**

**Lecture 8: History: How Bodies are Socially Constructed Changes**

One element of the sociological imagination is to consider the different histories that have created the different social divisions and inequalities experienced today. One such division is between men and women, which is still often explained as arising from the differences between women and men's bodies. However, the ways in which those differences are understood has changed, as we will see when looking at the changing science of sex and at examples like how human skeletons became sexed.

**Read this for lectures 7 and 8 and for next week’s tutorial:**
- Howson, A (2013) pp 85-108 of ‘The civilized body’ in *The Body in Society: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity. [Want to know when and why Europeans started using cutlery to eat their food instead of their hands? Why is this sociologically important? This chapter is a good place to start.]

**Read further:**

Week 5
Lecture 9: Different Cultures Construct Bodies Differently

Comparison between different cultures is another key aspect of the sociological imagination and here we examine some of the different ideas about and rituals surrounding bodies in different cultures. With a focus on body modification, we see how cultural comparison highlights the socially constructed nature of bodies.

Read this for lectures 9 and 10 and next week’s tutorial:
• Yamada, M. (2009) ‘Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan’ International Journal of Cultural Studies 12(4): 319-338. [Tattoos might not mean the same thing in Japan as in the UK and the kinds of tattoos might differ. This article sets out some of the differences but also explores whether globalization processes are making tattooing more similar from one country to the next.]

Read further:

Watch this:
• In Borneo they have five genders: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9VmLJ3niVo

Lecture 10: Critically Comparing Bodies

Good sociology always strives to be critical. The point of cultivating the sociological imagination is not only to understand what makes society what it is, but also to consider how it could be different. It means considering the strengths and limitations of social practices and guiding ideas. Thus we see how we might think critically about the ways in which bodies are socially constructed.

Read this:
• Yamada, M. (2009) ‘Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan’ International Journal of Cultural Studies 12(4): 319-338. [Tattoos might not mean the same thing in Japan as in the UK and the kinds of tattoos might differ. This article sets out some of the differences but also explores whether
globalization processes are making tattooing more similar from one country to the next.

Read further:


Watch this:

- *La Sociologie est un sport de combat* [Film] Pierre Carles. dir. France. C.P. Productions A video about sociologist Pierre Bourdieu https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aukfnAfFZ7A
UNIT 3: CAPITALISM AND SOCIETY

Dr. Nathan Coombs

Unit Three: Capitalism and Society - Dr. Nathan Coombs

We all know that we live in a capitalist society. But what is capitalism, where did it come from, and will it always be with us? To answer these questions, this unit turns to the work of three classical sociologists: Karl Marx, Max Weber and Thorstein Veblen. We see that the different ways in which these thinkers conceptualize capitalism affects how they trace its historical origins and understand its role in society. The concluding lectures then address work by contemporary economic sociologists. We explore the sociology of money and prices, paying particular attention to Viviana Zelizer’s argument that culture shapes the economy.

General reading
-These readings are not required, but you may find them helpful.


Week 6
Lecture 11: Technology, Class, Revolution

Best known for inspiring twentieth century communism, this lecture asks if Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) idea of ‘historical materialism’ is still relevant. We see how Marx historicised the industrial division of labour and on the eve of the 1848 revolutions prophesied the demise of the bourgeoisie. We then turn to Marx’s theory of historical change, in which social revolution is unleashed by the ‘relations of production’ impeding the development of ‘productive forces’. The concluding section asks whether Marx’s analysis might tell us something about the implications of the technological changes in our economy.

Read this:

Watch these videos:
- Professionally-produced short video introducing Karl Marx’s political and economic thought: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICppFQ6Tabw
- Documentary ‘Marxism 101: How Capitalism is Killing Itself with Dr. Richard Wolff’ on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P97r9Ci5Kg

Read further:
most influential texts in the history of Marxism, in which Engels popularized the idea of ‘historical materialism’)

- Smith, Adam (1776/2000). The Wealth of Nations. New York: Modern Library. (Chapter 1) [The chapter where Smith introduces the pin factory and his idea that the division of labour arises from a natural human propensity to ‘truck, barter and exchange’]

Lecture 12: Capitalism and Religion

While drawing inspiration from aspects of Marx’s work, Max Weber (1864-1920) criticized its analysis for being mechanical and lacking an account of the subjective motivations of capitalists. This lecture introduces Weber’s idea that modern capitalism has religious origins and the great importance he attached to Protestantism in cultivating the strong work ethic and asceticism necessary for the industrial revolution. We then ask whether the rapid growth of East Asian economies in the late twentieth century confirms or disproves Weber’s hypothesis.

Read this:

Watch this video:
- Professionally-produced short video on YouTube explaining Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICppFQ6Tabw

Listen to this:
- BBC Radio 4 program in which a panel of scholars discuss Max Weber’s book The Protestant Ethic: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03yqj31

Read further:

(There are many more books and articles on Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic available by searching the library’s DiscoverEd service.)

Week 7
Lecture 13: From Conspicuous Consumption to the Aspirational Class

Thorstein’s Veblen book Theory of the Leisure Class is best known for its satirical portrayal of the excesses of the nouveau riche in the early twentieth century. However, its grander ambition is to account for why individuals use expensive consumer items to exhibit their economic power and social status. We examine Veblen’s evolutionary account of social structure and his claim that individuals at a lower level of the social hierarchy emulate the
tastes of those above them. The lecture concludes by addressing the work of Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, who proposes that the ‘aspirational class’ today use inconspicuous forms of consumption to signal social status.

Read this:
- Veblen, Thorstein (1899) *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Available online through library. (Introduction and Chapter 4)

Read further:

Lecture 14: Money: Alienating or Empowering?

Conventional wisdom holds that although money is an effective means of exchange it subordinates social relationships and psychological motivations to pecuniary interests. This lecture addresses recent scholarship which questions these assumptions. We see that ‘national territorial currency’ is a relatively recent historical phenomenon and engage Viviana Zelizer’s theory that social and cultural practices change our understanding of money over time. The lecture concludes by introducing alternative local currencies and electronic monies, reflecting on the meanings they hold for their advocates.

Read this:

Read further:
Week 8
Lecture 15: Prices: Values and Valuing

The question ‘where do prices come from?’ is a central concern of economic theory. However, sociologists have pointed to the limits the idealized market mechanisms postulated by economic theory for answering this question. The lecture begins by examining the cultural work involved in ‘sacralising’ certain objects and prohibiting their exchange on markets. It then turns to the role of culture and technology in determining the prices of unique ‘objects’. Examples include compensation for natural disasters and works of art.

Read this:

Read further:
UNIT 4: SOCIAL CHANGE

Prof. Jonathan Hearn

Understanding society in general requires some explanation of how and why societies change. We begin this unit by sketching the big picture of social change across human history, and some of the major questions it poses. Then we look at two kinds of main explanations of social change (there are others), namely: (1) the accumulations of knowledge, technology and rationality, and (2) the impact of social conflict and competition. We conclude by considering the growth of social power as basic to how and why societies change.

General Reading
These two books are not required, but provide overviews of theories of social change you may find helpful to refer to:


Week 8
Lecture 16: Social Change - the Big Picture

Why does society change, and why has social change accelerated in recent centuries? This is the flip side to the question: where does social order come from? Paradoxically, human efforts to get control of and impose order on the world is one of the basic drivers of social change. Through the writings of Gellner, Nolan and Lenski, and Chirot we scope three key questions of macrosociology: (1) Can human history be usefully analysed in terms of the emergence of major types of society? (2) What was the role of Europe in the emergence of modernity? (3) Do societies ‘evolve’?

Read this:

Read further:

Explore online…
- How We Got Here (Social Change): *Crash Course Sociology #12* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsRSL3duSko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsRSL3duSko) A lively overview of long-term social change, from hunters and gatherers, to postindustrial society. Draws on Lenski’s ideas of technological drivers of change.
- The History of Urbanization, 3700 BC - 2000 AD Charts the growth of cities across human history in just over three minutes, giving a sense of the explosion of urbanisation in the last century.
The History of the World: Every Year. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6Wu0Q7x5D0 Charts to spread of civilizations, empires and eventually nation states from the earliest times to the present in about 19 minutes.

Week 9
Lecture 17: Causes: Technology, Knowledge, Rationality

One of the most common modes of explaining major social change is as an effect of increasing knowledge and technological mastery over the world. Most fundamentally in terms of subsistence strategies, but of course this also has effects in many other areas, e.g. manufacture, transportation, communication, medicine, and coercion and violence. A particular version of this idea can be found in the work of Max Weber, who wrote (ambivalently) about ‘rationality’ and ‘rationalisation’ in human history. We look at this idea. What are the limitations of viewing human history as the steady progress of knowledge, technology, science, and reason?

Read this:

Read further:

Explore online…
- Formal Organizations: Crash Course Sociology #17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDuBh7VbGgU Lively summary with good basic coverage. Also gets into Weber’s concept of bureaucracy, and Ritzer’s ‘McDonaldization’ thesis. From an American perspective. (Also listed for Lecture 3.)

Lecture 18: Causes: Social Conflict and Competition

Another core dynamic of social change is social conflict, central to Karl Marx’s theory, and a whole tradition of ‘conflict sociology’. We distinguish between ‘conflict’ and ‘competition’, and observe how both can become institutionalised and integrated into how societies are ordered (see Coser). War, political revolution, and class struggle reveal one side of social conflict, but democracy, markets and free speech reveal another side. Is human history ultimately a record of restless social conflict?
Read this:

Read further:

Explore online…
- Karl Marx & Conflict Theory: *Crash Course Sociology* #6 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gR3igiwaeyc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gR3igiwaeyc) Again, high energy delivery, focusing on Marx, but getting into ‘conflict theory’ in general towards the end.

**Week 10**
**Lecture 19: The Growth of Power**

However we account for social change, as human societies have become larger, more complex, harnessed more energy from the environment, and increased their control over the natural world, they have had ever greater power at their disposal. This makes them more dangerous when they come into deep conflict with one another. And the increased power to do things, brings with it an increase in the power of some people over others, in forms of social organisation, hierarchy and stratification. The array of forms of modern societies can be understood as various strategies for mobilising and managing our vast and increasing levels of social power.

**Read this:**

**Read further:**

**Explore online….**
- Conversations with History: Michael Mann [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWnXX6cTVWg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWnXX6cTVWg)
A leading historical sociologist and theorist of power talks about his work.

- Complexity Labs: Social Systems Evolution: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf4mTT4jTH8 Social evolution outlined from a systems and complexity theory perspective. A bit abstract and complex, but a useful summary.

Lecture 20: Concluding lecture

Read this:

Tutorial Readings

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4
• Williams, S. J. (2007) The social etiquette of sleep: some sociological reflections and observations. Sociology 41(2): 313-328. [This is an interesting article about how the sleeping body is shaped by changing social rules and practices. For instance, did you know that people commonly used to get up for a couple of hours during the night and do chores or other things?]

Week 5
• Howson, A (2013) pp 85-108 of ‘The civilized body’ in The Body in Society: An Introduction. Cambridge: Polity. [Want to know when and why Europeans started using cutlery to eat their food instead of their hands? Why is this sociologically important? This chapter is a good place to start.]

Week 6
• Yamada, M. (2009) ‘Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan’ International Journal of Cultural Studies 12(4): 319-338. [Tattoos might not mean the same thing in Japan as in the UK and the kinds of tattoos might differ. This article sets out some of the differences but also explores whether globalization processes are making tattooing more similar from one country to the next.]

Week 7

Week 8

Week 9

Week 10
Appendix 1 – General Information

Students with Disabilities
The School welcomes disabled students with disabilities (including those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia) and is working to make all its courses as accessible as possible. If you have a disability special needs which means that you may require adjustments to be made to ensure access to lectures, tutorials or exams, or any other aspect of your studies, you can discuss these with your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor who will advise on the appropriate procedures.

You can also contact the Student Disability Service, based on the University of Edinburgh, Third Floor, Main Library, You can find their details as well as information on all of the support they can offer at: http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service

Learning Resources for Undergraduates
The Study Development Team at the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) provides resources and workshops aimed at helping all students to enhance their learning skills and develop effective study techniques. Resources and workshops cover a range of topics, such as managing your own learning, reading, note-making, essay and report writing, exam preparation and exam techniques.

The study development resources are housed on ‘LearnBetter’ (undergraduate), part of Learn, the University's virtual learning environment. Follow the link from the IAD Study Development web page to enrol: www.ed.ac.uk/iad/undergraduates

Workshops are interactive: they will give you the chance to take part in activities, have discussions, exchange strategies, share ideas and ask questions. They are 90 minutes long and held on Wednesday afternoons at 1.30pm or 3.30pm. The schedule is available from the IAD Undergraduate web page (see above).

Workshops are open to all undergraduates but you need to book in advance, using the MyEd booking system. Each workshop opens for booking two weeks before the date of the workshop itself. If you book and then cannot attend, please cancel in advance through MyEd so that another student can have your place. (To be fair to all students, anyone who persistently books on workshops and fails to attend may be barred from signing up for future events).

Study Development Advisors are also available for an individual consultation if you have specific questions about your own approach to studying, working more effectively, strategies for improving your learning and your academic work. Please note, however, that Study Development Advisors are not subject specialists so they cannot comment on the content of your work. They also do not check or proof read students' work.

Students can book a study skills consultation http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/taught/study/study-on-campus

Academic English support can also be accessed at http://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/students/current-students

Tutorial Allocation
You will be automatically assigned to a Tutorial group by the beginning of week 1. This allocation is done using Student Allocator, a tool which will randomly assign you to a suitable tutorial group based on your timetable. The benefits of this system are that students will be able to instantly view their tutorial group on their personal timetable and timetable clashes will be more easily avoided.
Please check your timetable regularly in week 1 to see which group you have been assigned. Guidance on how to view your personal timetable can be found at http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-administration/timetabling/students/timetabling-systems

Please note that there are limited spaces in tutorial groups and there will be little room for movement. If you are unable to attend the tutorial group you have been allocated for a valid reason, you can submit a change request by completing the online Tutorial Change Request form. You can access the form via the Timetabling webpages here.

**Discussing Sensitive Topics**

The discipline of Sociology addresses a number of topics that some might find sensitive or, in some cases, distressing. You should read this course handbook carefully and if there are any topics that you may feel distressed by you should seek advice from the course organiser and/or your Personal Tutor.

For more general issues you may consider seeking the advice of the Student Counselling Service, http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-counselling

**External Examiner**

The External Examiner for the Sociology 1B: The Sociological Imagination: Private Troubles, Public Problems is Dr Kate Reed, The University of Sheffield.
Appendix 2 - Course Work Submission and Penalties

Penalties that can be applied to your work and how to avoid them.
Below is a list of penalties that can be applied to your course work and these are listed below. Students must read the full description on each of these at: http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/coursework_penalties

Make sure you are aware of each of these penalties and know how to avoid them. Students are responsible for taking the time to read guidance and for ensuring their coursework submissions comply with guidance.

- **Lateness Penalty**
  If you miss the submission deadline for any piece of assessed work, 5 marks will be deducted for each calendar day that work is late, up to a maximum of seven calendar days (35 marks). Thereafter, a mark of zero will be recorded. There is no grace period for lateness and penalties begin to apply immediately following the deadline.

- **Word Count Penalty**
  Your course handbook will specify the word length of your assessments. All coursework submitted by students must state the word count on the front page. All courses in the School have a standard penalty for going over the word length; if you are taking courses from other Schools, check with them what their penalties are.

  If you go over the word length, you will receive a 5 mark penalty. These 5 marks will be deducted, regardless of how much you have exceeded the word count (whether it is by 1 word or by 500!). In exceptional circumstances, a Course Organizer may decide that, instead of a 5 marks penalty, any text beyond the word limit will be excluded from the assignment and be marked only on the text up to the word limit.

  In most cases, appendices and bibliography are not included in the word count whilst in-text references, tables, charts, graphs and footnotes are counted. Make sure you know what is and what is not included in the word count.

  You will not be penalised for submitting work below the word limit. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

ELMA: Submission and Return of Coursework

Coursework is submitted online using our electronic submission system, ELMA. You will not be required to submit a paper copy of your work.

Marked coursework, grades and feedback will be returned to you via ELMA. You will not receive a paper copy of your marked course work or feedback.

For details of how to submit your course work to ELMA, please see our webpages here.

Please note that all submissions to ELMA should be formatted as a Word document (doc or.docx.). If you are permitted or required to submit in a different format, this will be detailed in your course handbook.
Any submission that is not in word format will be converted by the Undergraduate Teaching Office into word where possible. By submitting in any format other than word, you are accepting this process and the possibility that errors may occur during conversion. The UTO will do everything possible to ensure the integrity of any document converted but to avoid issue, please submit in Word format as requested.

Extensions

If you have good reason for not meeting a coursework deadline, you may request an extension. Before you request an extension, make sure you have read all the guidance on our webpages and take note of the key points below. You will also be able to access the online extension request form through our webpages.

- Extensions are granted for 7 calendar days.
- If you miss the deadline for requesting an extension for a valid reason, you should submit your coursework as soon as you are able, and apply for Special Circumstances to disregard penalties for late submission. You should also contact your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor and make them aware of your situation.
- If you have a valid reason and require an extension of more than 7 calendar days, you should submit your coursework as soon as you are able, and apply for Special Circumstances to disregard penalties for late submission. You should also contact your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor and make them aware of your situation.
- If you have a Learning Profile from the Disability Service allowing you potential for flexibility over deadlines, you must still make an extension request for this to be taken into account.

Plagiarism Guidance for Students: Avoiding Plagiarism

Material you submit for assessment, such as your essays, must be your own work. You can, and should, draw upon published work, ideas from lectures and class discussions, and (if appropriate) even upon discussions with other students, but you must always make clear that you are doing so. Passing off anyone else’s work (including another student’s work or material from the Web or a published author) as your own is plagiarism and can be punished severely.

Copying part of one of your own assignments previously submitted for credit for the same or another course is self-plagiarism, which is also not allowed. This is an important consideration if you are retaking a course; an assignment submitted the previous year cannot be resubmitted the next, even for the same course.

When you upload your work to ELMA you will be asked to check a box to confirm the work is your own. All submissions will be run through ‘Turnitin’, our plagiarism detection software. TurnItIn compares every essay against a constantly-updated database, which highlights all plagiarised work. Students who are found to have included plagiarised (including self-plagiarised) material in their work will be reported to an Academic Misconduct Officer for further investigation, and grade penalties can be applied. In extreme cases, assignment grades can be reduced to zero.
For further details on plagiarism see our college website:
http://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/taught-students/student-conduct/academic-misconduct

Data Protection Guidance for Students
In most circumstances, students are responsible for ensuring that their work with information about living, identifiable individuals complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The document, Personal Data Processed by Students, provides an explanation of why this is the case. It can be found, with advice on data protection compliance and ethical best practice in the handling of information about living, identifiable individuals, on the Records Management section of the University website at:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/records-management-section/data-protection/guidance-policies/dpforstudents