KNOWLEDGE AT THE INTERSECTIONS, 920: 504

Professors Karen A. Cerulo and Paul Hirschfield
Department of Sociology

Class Time: Wednesday 1:10 to 3:50PM
Location: Davison Hall, Room 128

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OBJECTIVES
This course is designed to broaden our intellectual thinking by looking at exciting, emerging lines of thought that are developing at the intersection of one or more literatures. The areas we address might be interdisciplinary (e.g. psychology and sociology; sociology and history, etc.); the ideas might reside at the intersection of subfields within sociology (e.g. networks and institutions, criminology and stratification, technology and culture, etc.); or the ideas might be at the intersection of different research methods (e.g. a study that makes use of multi methods for a novel approach or result).

The course has two audiences. Students who have not yet completed their coursework may register for the seminar using the course number provided. (For this group, regular assignments will be required.) Intermediate and advanced students who have completed their coursework may wish to take the seminar for research credit and use the course as a structured way to both develop intellectual breadth and keep in touch with the program.

To help ensure the breadth of the literature we review, this workshop will be coordinated with the department colloquia series. Thus in weeks featuring outside speakers, course participants will read work by the speaker, attend colloquia and then meet to discuss the presentations. (Each student will be allowed one “pass” if she/he wishes to attend the scheduled colloquium lunch in a given week. We may even try to schedule one of the lunches in our class.) In weeks not tied to an outside speaker, regular class sessions will be held. The course will conclude with attendance at our department sponsored “Knowledge at the Intersections” mini-conference, currently scheduled for April 29, 2011. (Michael Burawoy is the featured speaker.)
READINGS
Both required and optional course readings, unless otherwise noted, will be available through the sakai course web-site (http://sakai.rutgers.edu) under “Resources.” Readings available through electronic reserve through Rutgers library are denoted below with „,(Res).”

REQUIREMENTS
This course presents a variety of requirements designed to tap the full array of your academic strengths and skills:

1) “Weekly Response Notes”: Beginning with week two of the semester and for all weeks excluding those featuring a Colloquia speaker, we ask all students, (whether taking the course for research credits, full credits, or auditing), prior to class, to record and submit to Sakai some brief (between one and two double-spaced pages) reflections on the reading for that week. You should write these commentaries in the style that is most efficient and comfortable for you. We are interested in the depth of coherent and rational thought that you are giving to the readings rather than in your adherence to formal writing conventions. Students should bring copies of these papers to class so they can reference their ideas during class discussions.

In these papers, please reflect upon the readings, individually and comparatively. Please focus on core arguments that span multiple readings. We especially encourage you to ask critical questions of the readings. You may also use these commentaries as a vehicle to test out, extend, and refine ideas for your final paper. Please also pose two discussion questions related to the week’s readings. The questions should be original and not the result of a group effort.

These assignments will be collected and graded on a weekly basis. This work will constitute 25% of your final grade. No late papers will be accepted.

2) Student-led Discussion: Toward the end of the semester (last two class meetings), groups of students (whether taking the course for research credit, full credit, or auditing) will be asked to assign a reading or group of readings that are intersectional in nature and lead class discussion. These sessions will be scheduled during the first week of classes. (The actual number of presentations will be determined by the size of the class.)

Students will be graded individually. These grades will count for 5% of the final grade.

3) Course Paper: Those students taking the course for full course credit must produce a 12-15 page seminar paper (typed and double spaced except for references which can be single spaced). In this paper, we would like you to develop and propose a research project that rests at the intersection of two or more knowledge bases. Specifically, we would like students to choose two literatures covered in the course and craft a research question that resides at the
intersection of these two literatures. (If you wish to choose one literature from the course and bring in a second literature closer to your own interests, we are willing to discuss that option.)

The paper should accomplish several specific tasks:

a) **Statement of the Problem:** What is the research question or puzzle that you would like to study? State it as you would for a qualifying paper or publishable article.

b) **Identify and summarize two literatures:** Using the syllabus, past research, and/or library resources such as Sociological Abstracts or the Social Science Citation Index, students should integrate at least 12 sources (six in each literature) in order to derive and develop their research question(s). Based on these resources, students should summarize the issues at the center of the discourse in each literature.

c) **Discuss the Importance of the Intersection:** Your paper should explain how the literatures you’ve chosen come together. In what ways do the union of these literatures forward your research agenda?

d) **Methodology:** If you were to pursue this project, briefly outline the method you would use.

The paper counts for **50% of your final grade**

4) **Attendance and Participation:** We view student input as vital to this course. Faithful attendance is a must, and students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to enter discussion.

Attendance and participation will constitute **20% of your final grade.** If you have a strong aversion to speaking in class, please discuss it with us. We will suggest alternate ways for you to earn your participation points.

- **NOTE:** This classroom should be considered a “safe place.” Students are encouraged to engage in discussion and debate *provided that* one’s views are not intended to provoke, insult, or damage another member of the class.
REVISED CLASS SCHEDULE 1/26/11

MTG. 1 (1/19): Introduction to the Class
  ✓ Overview of the Course
  ✓ Discussion of Class Requirements
  ✓ Scheduling of Student Presentations
  ✓ Doing a Literature Review

MTG. 2 (1/26): Cancelled due to snow

MTG. 3 (2/2): Surveillance and Society

Surveillance is a fundamental and instrumental social process within nearly all social institutions of modern society. Among other functions, it helps promote order and compliance at work, school, at home, and in the public sphere. Recent advances in technology (e.g. CCTV, camera phones, GPS, data mining) have created new, integrated modes and forms of surveillance. As a result, areas of social life and individual behavior that were once largely off-limits to surveillance are increasingly and readily accessible by the State, corporations, and the wider public.

Today, we’ll discuss three chapters from the recent book by leading surveillance scholar David Lyon. He provides an overview of “surveillance studies,” examines developments in surveillance across varied contexts, and reviews theories of the causes and consequences of expanded surveillance. The field of surveillance studies is richly multi-disciplinary, drawing mostly from the fields of social control, technology and society, and culture.

Readings for Today’s Class
Chapters 1 through 3 in David Lyon’s Surveillance Studies: An Overview (2007).

Further reading for future research


One of the most exciting inquiries of the day rests in literatures addressing the interplay between cultural sociology and cognitive neuroscience – e.g. the influence of cultural practices or structural patterns on neural operations; the interaction of neural and sociocultural components in processes such as cultural acquisition, attention, schema formation, memory; the intersection of cognition, emotions and action.

Today, we’ll discuss a recent review article that summarizes what’s been done in the field. We’ll also discuss some specific studies that execute this agenda. Finally, we’ll work together in class on a famous cognitive psychology experiment – “The Trolley Experiment” and discuss the things that sociology might offer to the interpretation of these results.

Readings for Today’s Class


Further reading for future research

The best review articles and collections that will orient you to this field can be found in:


The mass media is not only an instrument of power and manipulation, but it also provides the stage on which politics and political events unfold. Sociologists who analyze the role of the mass media in securing domination, mediating conflict, and mobilizing resistance must contend with some important historical developments in the post 9/11 world. First, major media organizations were complicit in the mass deception that helped the Bush Administration sell the Iraq War to the public and legislators. Second, traditional media organizations (old media) have yielded prominence and power to “mass self-communication” (new media such as blogs) whereby people and organizations can communicate to and mobilize masses of people. Today we will read three works that synthesize the literature on the sociologies of power, State propaganda, and the mass media to analyze these respective developments.

**Readings for Today’s class**


**Further reading for future research**


MTG. 6 (2/23): *Social Class: What Does It Mean (if anything) for Sociologists and for the General Public?*

The concept “social class” has had a ongoing and varied history within both American and European sociology. The term has always seemed relevant to the Europeans, but in past decades, social class has fallen out of favor with American sociologists … or has it? In the past few years, various scholars and thinkers are trying to resurrect social class and re-examine its meanings and utility. In today’s class, we will engage that debate. We will also take a look at a site that helps us understand the ways in which sectors of the general public view social class. *(Readings on next page)*
Readings for Today’s Class


Further reading for future research


MTG. 7 (3/2): Colloquium Day: Colin Jerolmack, NYU Sociology

Colin Jerolmack is an assistant professor of sociology and environmental studies at NYU. His is currently completing a book, to be published by the University of Chicago Press, that examines how relations with animals structure urban life. In today’s talk, he takes us to the intersection of micro-interactional and structural explanations … to the intersection of humans and animals in …

Peer Group Societies and Cultural Transmission: New York’s Rooftop Pigeon Flyers

This talk, based on four years of ethnographic fieldwork, examines a group of working-class men who breed and fly pigeons from their rooftops in New York City. I aim to provide a micro-level understanding of the social world of this racially heterogeneous group as well as a structural explanation for why interactions among these men have resulted in (con’t. next pg.)
cooperation rather than the ethnic conflict so typical of inter-racial contact in changing communities. Specifically, I examine how the flyers' lived experience of their neighborhoods is structured through their animal practices, and I highlight the unique historical circumstances that led to the cultural transmission of pigeon flying from ethnic whites to Puerto Ricans and blacks. I also touch on the men's gatherings at a pet shop, where they come to socialize with other flyers and to negotiate their social status in the group. I close by highlighting the social forces, such as gentrification, that are undermining the men's abilities to continue their hobby.

Readings for Today’s Class

Other works by Colin Jerolmack

MTG. 8 (3/9): Colloquium Day: Alondra Nelson, Columbia University:
Alondra Nelson is Associate Professor of Sociology and holds an appointment in the Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWaG). Her areas of specialization include race and ethnicity in the U.S., gender and kinship, socio-historical studies of medicine, science and technology; and social and cultural theory. In today’s talk, she takes us to the intersection of Genetics and the Social Sciences in …

The Social Life of DNA:
The recent 10th anniversary of the completion of the Human Genome Project was marked with cautious optimism because the medical applications promised by this accomplishment remain mostly unfulfilled. If the therapeutic potential of the genomic era is at present somewhat intangible, the social life of DNA is unmistakable. In this talk, I will argue that the import of genetic analysis reaches far beyond the medical arena. Genetic science’s techniques and logics are present in predictable and unforeseen sites, mediating identification, community formation, and citizenship. This circulation suggests the need for both domain specific and more general theories of genetics and society.

Readings for Today’s Class
No assigned readings

(Continued on next page.)
Other works by Alondra Nelson


Cut Loose – Spring Break!

MTG. 9 (3/23) Criminal Justice, Poverty, and Social Stratification

Poverty and social inequality have long been theorized as important to the explanation of crime and criminal justice. The monumental growth in incarceration and correctional supervision in recent decades has led to increased recognition among sociologists that the reverse is also true. A complete understanding of demographic patterns and trends in income, poverty, unemployment, requires consideration of the role of criminal justice. In this class we will explore this topic from two perspectives. The first two pieces examine the empirical links between incarceration and socio-economic outcomes and trends in social inequality. The third article approaches the topic through the lens of critical theory. Wacquant theorizes that the criminal justice system along with welfare serve to discipline and repress the “post-industrial working class” in service of a Darwinistic, neo-liberal vision of “free market” hegemony.

Readings for Today’s class


(continued on next page)
Further reading for future research


MTG. 10 (3/30) Colloquium Day, Judith Stacey, New York University

Judith Stacey is Professor of Sociology and Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University. Her research examines changes in family, sexuality and society. Her publications include Unhitched: Love, Sex and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China (New York University Press, 2011); In the Name of The Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Beacon Press, 1996); Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America (Basic Books 1990, University of California Press 1998) and, “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” co-authored with Timothy Biblarz, ASR (2001) and “How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?” (co-authored with Tim Biblarz, Journal of Marriage and Family 2010). One of the founding board members of Council on Contemporary Families, she has served as an expert witness in the Canadian same-sex marriage case and in lesbian adoption and gay family rights cases in the U.S. In today’s talk, professor Stacey takes us to the intersection of East and West to explore issues of marriage and family in … (see next page)

Unhitched: Love, Marriage and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China

Professor Stacey will present an overview of her new book by this title. Drawing from research on gay men’s intimacies and parenting in this country, on polygamy in South Africa, and non-marital maternal kinship among the Mosuo people of southwestern China, the book seeks to unhitch our culture’s taken for granted relationships between the indivisibility of love, marriage, and parenthood. It challenges calcified positions in the “family wars” over same-sex marriage, divorce, fatherlessness, marital fidelity, and the like with stories of real families and societies navigating inescapable personal and political trade-offs between desire and domesticity.

Readings for Today’s class

No assigned readings

Other Works by Judith Stacey


MTG. 11 (4/6): Who is a Social Actor?

This question has become relevant for Institutional Theorists, Network Theorists, and Science and Technology Scholars. Today, we’ll look at the relevant points of discussion. As a treat, we’ll also view a quick clip of a new “social robot” called Leonardo and discuss the idea of nonhumans as social actors.

Readings for Today’s class


Further Reading for Future Research

Cerulo 2009 offers a good review of this literature and an updates is coming up in Sociology Compass sometime next year. Below, I’ve listed some especially useful works on this subject.


**MTG. 12: (4/13) Student Presentations**

**MTG. 13 (4/20): Student Presentations**

**4/29 Miniconference (Attendance mandatory)**

*Assignment 3 due on 4/29. No late papers accepted!*