Soc. 575
Sociology of Identity: The Problems of "Identity Normals"
920-575:01 Spring'13

Professor Richard Williams   rwilliams@sociology.rutgers.edu
Th. 9:50-12:30   Sociology Seminar Room
Office: Davison 111   Office Hrs. Th: 1:00-2:00 and by
                                       appointment

Course Description/Objectives
Our undertaking is oriented towards experiencing the sociological pleasures of thinking creatively by attempting to develop a "new way" of classifying types of social actions ("problems" associated with being a "well-adjusted" member of an identity, a social system) while also attempting to build upon current sociological insights in order to explain those actions (becoming "well-adjusted" to an identity, a "normal", involves stressing the ideals upon which the identity has been constructed while downplaying the pragmatic behaviors upon which it was constructed and continues to exist. From this perspective all "identity normals" will have "problems" because becoming "normal" involves adjusting to contradictions that are inherent to social systems, identities. In addition to laying out a "new" way of thinking about actions and attempting to explain them, we will move beyond treating "the problems" by taking time to attend to a range of "problems" that are encompassed by the "problems of identity normals" classification schema.

Our seven weeks together we will be divided into three sections. We will begin with a group of social behaviors that are currently take-for-granted, i.e., accepted without need of explanation we will raise questions about those behaviors that make them unfamiliar. From there we will attempt to show that the seeds of explanations for the questions raised exist, although not exploited, within the sociological literature. Lastly we will look at data (from the social sciences as well as cultural media thought broadly) which I argue are cases are suitable for a sociological exploration of identity normal problems in the contemporary world.

Assessment
-Full engagement with the readings, as reflected in weekly seminar discussions

-A one-page response to the seminar material(s) for classes 2-7: your response to the material in and of itself, additionally your assessment of aspect(s) of the "identity normal problems" that the material(s) points towards. –to Sakai: drop box and discussion sections on Wednesday night

-Weekly report on the "problem" (see the immediately following) that you will be grappling with for your final paper.

A short (10-15 pages) research paper based upon the exploration of an "identity normal problem" of your choosing. Given the short period of the course you should make every

effort to arrive at a "problem" as quickly as possible. I will meet individually with each of you during or after our second seminar meeting. Given the long break between and our second meeting you should take the time to go through the syllabus and arrive at a possible "problem" or two before we return from spring break.

The paper could be structured around the three sections of the course; however, you are free to follow your format.
Paper due May 16th.

Course Outline

Section I: (**Week 1**)
Making a distinction between "good" vs. "evil" and "good" vs. "normal"

Introduction: getting oriented
Week I (March 14)
Being Normal is not the same as not engaging in harm.

Societies, Cultural systems and Identities, social systems in general, are all contexts for the enforcement of morality.

"Americans had mixed feelings about their 20th-century technological and financial heroes, too. Thomas A. Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company hired thugs to enforce his patent claims; independent filmmakers moved to Hollywood partly to avoid them. Steve Jobs paid little attention to conditions in his Chinese contractors' factories. After his death protests grew too large for Apple to ignore; but even then, not only was "bad Steve" praised, but many of the demonstrators in the early Occupy Wall Street movement still revered him ("Nasty like us," *NYTimes* May 2012)".

"But the disquieting reality is that *the conflict was between not good and evil, but good and normal*. The brute racism that today seems like mass social insanity was a "way of life" practiced by ordinary "good" people. But the disquieting reality is that the conflict was between not good and evil, but good and normal. The brute racism that today seems like mass social insanity was a "way of life" practiced by ordinary "good" people. According to the Southern community's consensus of "normal," those fighting for rights now considered mainstream were "extremists," and public servants could rationalize plans to murder men like Shuttlesworth, confident that they were on the right side of history ("Good and Evil in Birmingham," *NYTImes* Jan. 2013)."

(Freud)
"No one who shares a delusion recognizes it as such."

(Durkheim)
"Morality is determined by collective agreement"

By way of self-introduction: Words to your national anthem

(One source of evidence of "normal" behavior during the 20th and 21st centuries)
http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/massacre.html
(Could you come to believe that some are "more justified" than others, or some are "less justified" than others?)

Problems of identity normals are rooted in having to manage the fact that morality (good) and harm (as normal) coexist in social life.

The notion of "morally based" harm is useful for making a distinction between harm committed for personal interest (self-interested harm) and harm committed for the collective (altruistic harm).

(Distinct from evil vs. good "places")
http://www.prisonexp.org
"Welcome to the Stanford Prison Experiment web site, which features an extensive slide show and information about this classic psychology experiment, including parallels with the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. **What happens when you put good people in an evil place? Does humanity win over evil, or does evil triumph?** These are some of the questions we posed in this dramatic simulation of prison life conducted in the summer of 1971 at Stanford University."

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Section II*:* (**Weeks 2-3**)
Socialization as "normalizing"
The social construction of normalizing structures

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Week II (March 28)
Creating "identity normals"
**Durkheim, E. "Anomic Suicide"
$Mead, G. H. "The Self" section of *Mind, Self and Society*
*Oberschall, A. 2000. "Preventing Genocide," *Contemporary Sociology*, 29:1 (1-13)

In his, "Rules for the Distinction of the Normal form the Pathological," Durkheim raises the useful notion of defining "normal" as determined by the "frequency," or "commonality" of a behavior. While that definition of "normal" raises the issue of the coexistence of morality and harm as perceived by an outsider, it does not discuss it as a conflict as experienced by the insider.

 (Look at the ASA Section site for "Altruism, Morality and Social Solidarity")
http://www.csun.edu/~hbsoc126

Week III (April 4)
As contexts for "normalization" social systems, identities are made-up of parts yet narrated as social wholes. Such shifts from heterogeneity to homogeneity point to the strong possibility that the coexistence of contradiction (e.g. morality and harm) is a common feature of identities.
**Weber, M. 1977. "National Identity," from *Economy and Society*
*White, H. 1990. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation.*
&Rae, H. 2002. Chapters 1-2 and 5-6 of her *State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples.*
$Appiah, K. 2005. "The Demands of Identity," Chapter 3 in his *The Ethics of Identity*

Comparing the lyrics of national anthems in addition to claims of constitutions with the policies of state structures is a useful way of exploring the extent to which specific social

systems and by extension their members might need to manage the coexistence of morality and harm.

Section III
(Weeks 4-7)
"Problems of Identity Normals" manifested, degrees of awareness

Week IV (April 11)
Support for acting out harmful behaviors
&Murphy, C. 2012. *God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World*
      (We will cover the entire book by splitting the chapters among ourselves)

Week V (April 18)
Classifying social actors by degrees of awareness of the coexistence of morality/harm
Despite the fact that members of social systems are given support for engaging in morally based harm, member responses to the morality/harm *interface vary. I rely on films as a way to help us visualize that variability.*
Watch at least one of the following three films before class
[1] The Searchers
[2] Monsieur Verdoux
[3] Paths of Glory

Read:
*Metcalf, S. 2006-7. "*Revisiting The Searchers"
http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_dilettante/2006/07/the_worst_best_movie.html

Week VI (April 25)
Culture/media again:
Some variant of "Thou Shall Not Kill" is a common basis by which children are socialized into societies. As a result war novels and memoirs are useful for highlighting the process of socialization as integration into contradiction.

Read:
Remarque, E. M. [1929]. *All Quiet on the Western Front*
** "Conservation with Daniel Ellsberg"

Week VII (May 2)
Attending to micro level Identity Normal Problems as linked to the morality/harm conjunction
**Durkheim, "Social Facts"
**Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*
**Hustvedt, A. 2011. "Charcot," chapter 1 of her *Medical Muses: Hysteria in Nineteenth-*
      Century Paris
**Giddens, A. 1991. "The Self: Ontological Security and Existential Anxiety," Chapter 2
      and "Tribulations of the Self," Chapter 6 of his *Modernity and Self-Identity.*

Paper due May 16th.

Readings:
$ (In Book Store)
* (Access through JSTOR or directly from the journal through RU library)
** (In Resource tab of Sakai site)