I sometimes think of civilization or society as a kind of floor, a patchy, rickety floor in constant need of repair. Below the floor is the chasm. Some people know that chasm well—those who have scrabbled to exist in war zones, those who have tried to cope after hurricanes or earthquakes, those who have lost multiple family members simultaneously. For them, the daily comforts of society are of little use. The network of routine, the solace of art, hope for the future—none of it seems real. Only the chasm seems real.


The truth is that this "reality" is a very precarious one indeed.


**OVERVIEW**

This course examines how people experience, manage, and make sense of troubling events and circumstances, such as illness, death, divorce, and natural disaster. Delving into topics that are sometimes assumed to be the purview of psychology, our investigation will highlight the deeply social nature of personal suffering. We will explore a range of troubles on multiple scales (bodies, relationships, and communities) and compare, contrast, and make connections between different types of social disruption. We will also touch upon the relationship of trouble to social inequality and critically examine biomedical accounts that frame suffering as pathological. Beyond its substantive foci, this seminar is an advanced course in sociological social psychology that draws strongly from a social constructionist perspective. Discussions require students to think deeply about the sources of life’s meanings, the late-Modern Western human condition, and the relationship between social structures and intrapersonal experiences.

**GOALS**

By the end of this course, you will have
• A strong understanding of the social constructionist perspective, particularly as it applies to intrapersonal processes such as cognition and emotion
• Knowledge of the generic features of personal upheaval that tend occur across different types of trouble
• A critique of the dominant, biomedical approach to human suffering
• First-hand experience collecting and analyzing qualitative data
• A sense of what it is like to take a graduate course in sociology
* In addition to meeting these substantive goals, you will develop your skills in public speaking, library research, and scholarly writing

REQUIRED READING


Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities by Bradley Lewis (2012), Routledge.


In addition to the books listed here, I have placed a number of articles on electronic reserves. These are designated as ER in the course schedule.

Eres password: trouble

ASSIGNMENTS AND SCORING
20% In-class participation
20% Weekly discussion preparation
60% Case study of trouble and staged writing assignments
  5% Assignment 1: Topic description & plan
  10% Assignment 2: Interview or reflection & preliminary bibliography
  15% Assignment 3: Outline, preliminary writing, and in-class presentation
  30% Assignment 4: Final submission
**In-class participation.**
Designed to develop your intellectual independence and public speaking skills, seminar-style courses are student-centered and student-led. Although I will spend time framing and facilitating each class, you will shoulder most of the responsibility for discussion. 20% of your final course grade will reflect the frequency and quality of your in-class participation. I reserve high scores for students who:

- Think actively and honestly about what we read and discuss.
- Make informed comments, ask informed questions.
- Listen to and take seriously other students in the class.

**Preparing for discussion each week.**
Our seminar meetings will be interesting only to the extent that you come to class with a reasonable understanding of the readings and something productive to say about the day’s topic. This requires you to identify the readings’ key points, evaluate the authors’ claims, and pose questions that are personally or sociologically relevant. To help you develop these skills, I am requiring you to submit a weekly record of your discussion preparation. You submission should include the following three things:

1. A brief (250-word maximum) overview of the week’s readings, focusing only on the key points. On the days I’ve assigned more than one reading, think holistically and consider, what is the relationship between these readings? At what points do the authors’ arguments converge or diverge?
2. A one-paragraph response to the readings. What do you think of the authors’ arguments? What are their strengths and/or limitations?
3. At least two questions. These can be specific or broad and geared toward clarification or discussion. Whatever the case, they should reflect what you’d actually like to address during the day’s session.

Your weekly discussion preparation is **due at 8:00 AM each Thursday**. This is so that I can comment on your work and return it to you before we meet on Friday afternoon. Please upload these assignments to Moodle. I will score each submission as follows:

- ✓+ (2 points)
- ✓ (1.5 points)
- ✓- (1 point)
- 0

All of your written work in this class should adhere to the following specifications:

- 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- Double-spaced
- Numbered pages
- Default margins
There are ten of these assignments, but when calculating your grade, I'll only use your nine highest scores. This means that you can miss one weekly submission without it affecting your grade.

**Case Study of Trouble & Staged Writing Assignments.**
Your major project for this class is a 20-page term paper that allows you to research a particular case of trouble. Four staged writing assignments will help you to keep pace with your project throughout the semester. More details will follow.

**OFFICE HOURS**
Need guidance on your weekly assignments? Additional input on how to begin designing your term project? Want to talk about something that you saw in the news? Or are you just looking for a cup of tea? Find all of these things and more during my office hours! In all seriousness, mentoring you is one of my central priorities. Don’t think twice about dropping by.

**ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY**
Attendance is compulsory. More than a few absences will not only jeopardize your participation score but will also make it difficult to earn passing grades. I also encourage you to be mindful of all starting times, timelines and deadlines. Discussions begin promptly at eleven o’clock. **I do not accept late work.** If you experience an emergency that prevents you from meeting any of the course requirements on time, notify me immediately in order to make necessary arrangements.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
I will sanction and report to your Class Dean any and all cases of plagiarism, cheating, and collusion. According to Holy Cross’ policy on academic honesty, these are defined as follows:

“**Plagiarism** is the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrative material, or statements of someone else, without full and proper acknowledgment, and presenting them as one’s own.

“**Cheating** is the use of improper means or subterfuge to gain credit or advantage. Forms of cheating include the use, attempted use, or improper possession of unauthorized aids in any examination or other academic exercise submitted for evaluation; the fabrication or falsification of data; misrepresentation of academic or extracurricular credentials; and deceitful performance on placement examinations. It is also cheating to submit the same work for credit in more than one course, except as authorized in advance by the course instructors.

“**Collusion** is assisting or attempting to assist another student in an act of academic dishonesty.”
Please see the full policy for details (www.holycross.edu/catalog/academic-honesty-policy.pdf). If you have any questions or concerns regarding academic integrity, don’t hesitate to come see me.

**IMPORTANT DATES**
February 13   Assignment #1 Due
March 20   Assignment #2 Due
April 17   Assignment #3 Due
May 1   Assignment #4 Due

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>READINGS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 23</td>
<td>Welcome to the Sociology of Trouble</td>
<td>The Course Syllabus In Full</td>
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<td>January 30</td>
<td>Self, Society &amp; The (Late-Modern, Western?) Human Condition</td>
<td><em>The Social Construction of Reality</em></td>
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<td>February 6</td>
<td>“Trouble,” Sociologically Speaking</td>
<td>ER: “The Promise” by C. Wright Mills (pp. 1-6)</td>
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<td>ER: “Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities” by Harold Garfinkel (pp. 225-50)</td>
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<td>ER: “The Micro-Politics of Trouble” by Robert Emerson and Sheldon Messinger (pp. 121-134)</td>
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<td>ER: “The Dynamics of Family Trouble” by Ara Francis (pp. 371-401)</td>
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<td>February 13</td>
<td>Body Trouble</td>
<td>ER: “Chronic Illness as Biographical Disruption,” by Michael Bury (pp. 167-182)</td>
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<td><em>At the Will of the Body</em></td>
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<td>February 20</td>
<td>Relationship Trouble</td>
<td><em>Uncoupling</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>February 27</td>
<td><strong>Community Trouble</strong></td>
<td>*I will be at a conference in New York today, but you will carry on without me. Details to follow.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><em>Everything in its Path, Prologue, Introduction, Parts I &amp; III (pp. i-48 &amp; 135-259)</em></td>
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<td>March 6</td>
<td><strong>Spring Break</strong></td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>March 13</td>
<td><strong>Trouble, Stratification &amp; Inequality</strong></td>
<td>ER: Excerpts from <em>The Social Causes of Psychological Distress</em> by John Mirowski and Catherine E. Ross (pp. 75-129 &amp; 171-229)</td>
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<td>March 20</td>
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<td><strong>Sympathy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Misery and Company</strong></td>
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<td>March 27</td>
<td><strong>Depression, Culture &amp; History</strong></td>
<td><em>Depression: Integrating Science, Culture and Humanities</em></td>
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<td>April 3</td>
<td><strong>Easter Holiday</strong></td>
<td>No assigned reading</td>
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<td>April 10</td>
<td><strong>Narrating Continuity</strong></td>
<td><em>Disrupted Lives</em></td>
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<td>April 17</td>
<td><strong>In-Class Presentations</strong></td>
<td>No assigned reading, no weekly discussion prep</td>
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<td>April 24</td>
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<td><strong>Paper Workshop</strong></td>
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<td>CEFs</td>
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<td>No assigned reading, no weekly discussion prep</td>
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<td><strong>Receive Assignment #4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td><strong>A Sociology of Personal Trouble: Review &amp; Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Chapters 1 and 7 of <em>Family Trouble</em>, focusing in particular on pp. 5-10 and 223-234</td>
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