

**Conceptualizing Youth/Conceptualizing Gangs**  
**SOCI 268-01**  
**Professor Robert Garot**

MWF, 1:30-2:20

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**Perspectives and Overview of the Course**

The status and behaviors of youth have been increasingly criminalized over the past 20 years. The first half of this course will work towards putting such criminalization in perspective, by: 1) asking students to reflect on their own experiences as youth, 2) grappling with historical constructions of youth, and 3) examining youth and place. The second half will then begin to probe the ways in which youth have been criminalized, especially in terms of conceptualizing them as gang members.

It is essential that you *wrestle* with the readings for each week, and *mull over* how they apply to your own experience. I hope to open new perspectives to you, and what transforms “information” into a “perspective” that opens up new ways of thinking is wrestling with what you encounter. For each reading, I hope that you work to understand not just *what* the author is saying, but *why*. What received wisdom is she or he trying to challenge? With what ideas might they be competing? What is their evidence? I hope that you will enhance for yourself the value of what you read through the paired (and perhaps literally opposed) habits of mind of skepticism (“Ought I really believe that?”) and suspended disbelief (“What if it were true?”).

The idea is to foster an intense, searching class discussion. A great deal of learning happens in discussion, when one’s new ideas, guesses, hunches, ideological convictions, and moral persuasions rub unexpectedly up against others’. I will assist this process through my questioning in class, and want you to have challenged each reading so that you, in turn, can be challenged by others in class.

Please feel free to discuss topics further with me after class, or before class by appointment. Be sure to exchange phone numbers with two or three other students and form study groups.

**Requirements**

***Weekly Presentation***

For this course, you are required to become an expert on one week’s readings. You will be responsible for finding additional sociological and general literature from the library. *Be sure to take time to discuss your presentation with me beforehand.* You may use any of the props which are typically available in class to facilitate your presentation. Your presentation will be worth 10% of your course grade.

### **Papers**

Two papers are required for this course. The first is a short (4-5 page) autoethnography, based on a poignant experience in your life as a teen. The second is a 10-15 page term paper which may be based on either analyzing your autoethnography in terms of concepts from the course, or expanding your weekly presentation into a more substantial analysis. Papers not handed in on time will lose one course percentage point for each day they are late. *I do not accept papers sent electronically.*

### **Participation**

Your participation in this course will be encouraged through three means:

1. Submitting at least three discussion questions to the Course Discussion Board by *Monday* for each week of assigned readings, except the first.
2. Providing a one-page single-spaced written response to one of the discussion questions by *Friday* for each week, except the first. (For the first week, bringing a downloaded autoethnography to class and discussing it on Friday will count for both the questions and the response.)
3. A participation grade, based on your attendance and participation during discussion.

The point of the weekly questions and the one-page response is to keep us together as a group and encourage participation, so there is no point in handing them in late. These assignments and your attendance will be excused either if you *inform me beforehand* that you have a credible conflict, such as a snow emergency or you play on an athletic team, or if you provide a note from a recognized authority figure such as a doctor or dean after the class session. *Please do not email me to request material you missed while you were absent.* Instead, work together with your study group to keep abreast of the material.

### **Grading Policy**

You will not be graded on a competitive basis, so in theory everyone can do well in the class. However, in order to receive a top grade, students will be expected to achieve standards of excellence. If you are dissatisfied with any grade you receive, you must submit a written request for a review of the grade, including a defense, no later than one week after the work is handed back to the class. By requesting a review of the grade you receive, you invite the possibility that the new grade will be lower than the original grade, as well as the possibility that it will be higher. Points will be distributed as follows:

Weekly Questions: 13%

Weekly Response to a Question: 13%

Autoethnography: 20%

Final Paper: 34%

Paper Presentation: 10%

Participation: 10%

A+ 98-100	B+ 88-89	C+ 78-79	D+ 65-69
A 93-97	B 83-87	C 73-77	D 55-64
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 50-54

## **The Oberlin Code of Honor**

The Oberlin Code of Honor applies for this course and all its assignments and exams. Be sure to write, "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment," and sign it, or I have the option of withholding your grade.

## **Required Readings**

Most readings for this course are located on Blackboard under Course Documents, in the "Articles" folder. Some of the readings are in The Modern Gang Reader, at the bookstore. One reading, by Frederick Thrasher, for week 10, is on reserve in the library. Be sure to complete each week's readings prior to coming to class.

Miller, Jody, Cheryl L. Maxson and Malcolm W. Klein. 2001. The Modern Gang Reader. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.

## **Weekly Topics and Readings**

Please note that the following schedule, including project and exam dates, is tentative, and may change based on how quickly we cover the material.

## **Part I: Conceptualizing Youth**

### **Week 1: Autoethnography and Macro Perspectives**

February 7<sup>th</sup>

Find and read an autoethnography, by following the steps below:

Log on to Oberlin College Library. Under "Find Articles," click on "Databases listed by name." Scroll down and click on Sociological Abstracts. Unclick the "Check keywords in thesaurus" box. Under Keyword type in "autoethnography." Scroll down the search form and click "English" and "journal article." You should find 30 results. Peruse the titles. If you find one you like, click on it, and check the abstract. If you like it, click on "Find a copy." This should lead you through a series of windows, and soon you should be able to download the article as a PDF file. Print the article and read it following our first class, and be prepared to discuss it on Friday. If all else fails, email me, and I should be able to email the article to you.

Mortimer, Jeylan T. and Reed W. Larson. 2002. The Changing Adolescent Experience. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-17.

Also see:

Brown, B.B., R.W. Larson, T.S. Saraswathi, Eds. 2002. The World's Youth: Adolescence in Eight Regions of the Globe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Côté, J.E. 2000. Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity. New York: New York University Press.

Feldman, Shirley S. and Glen R. Elliot (Eds.). 1990. At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

### **Week 2: Historical Perspectives I**

February 14<sup>th</sup>

Ariès, Phillippe. 1962. Centuries of Childhood. New York: Vintage Books. "The Ages of Life," pp. 15-32.

Lesko, Nancy. 2001. Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence. New York: Routledge. Pp. 1-90.

Also see:

- Gillis, J.R. 1974. Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present. New York: Academic Press.
- Graff, Harvey J. 1995. Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kett, Joseph F. 1977. Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present. New York: Basic Books.
- Mitterauer, Michael. 1992. A History of Youth. Oxford: Blackwell.

### **Week 3: Historical Perspectives II: Case Studies**

February 21<sup>st</sup>

- Fass, Paula S. 1977. The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 327-364.
- Keniston, Kenneth. 1968. Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. Pp. 106-146.

### **Autoethnography due 2-25**

Also See:

- Thompson, R. 1984. "Adolescent Culture in Colonial Massachusetts." Journal of Family History. 8:127-144.
- Troen, S. 1985. "Technological Development and Adolescence: The Early Twentieth Century." Journal of Early Adolescence. 5:429-439.

### **Week 4: Youth Geographies**

February 28<sup>th</sup>

- Massey, Doreen. 1998. "The Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures." Pp. 121-129 in Katz, C. (Ed.) Cool Places. New York: Routledge. .
- Chatterton, Paul and Robert Hollands. 2003. Urban Nightscapes: Youth Cultures, Pleasure Spaces and Corporate Power. London: Routledge. Pp. 93-147.

Also see:

- Aitken, Stuart C. Geographies of Young People: The Morally Contested Spaces of Identity. London: Routledge.
- Childress, Herb. 2000. Landscapes of Betrayal, Landscapes of Joy: Curtisville in the Lives of its Teenagers. New York: State University of New York Press.

### **Week 5: Resistance in School**

March 7<sup>th</sup>

- McFarland, Daniel A. 2004. "Resistance as a Social Drama: A Study of Change-Oriented Encounters." American Journal of Sociology. 109(4):1249-1318.

Also see:

- Willis, Paul. 1977. Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. New York: Columbia University Press.
- MacLeod, Jay. 1995. Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood. Boulder: Westview Press.

## **Week 6: School Violence**

March 14<sup>th</sup>

- Anderson, David C. 1998. "Curriculum, Culture and Community: The Challenge of School Violence." Pp. 317-363 in Schools, Violence and Society, Ed. by Michael Tonry and Mark H. Moore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Matthews, Sarah H. 2003. "Counterfeit Classrooms: School Life of Inner-City Children." Sociological Studies of Children and Youth, 9:209-224.
- Staiger, Annegret. 2004. "Whiteness as Giftedness: Racial Formation at an Urban High School." 51(2):161-181.

## **Part II: Conceptualizing Gangs**

### **Week 7: Studying Gangs**

March 21<sup>st</sup>

The Modern Gang Reader: Chapters 2, 3, and 13

### **March 26<sup>th</sup>-April 3<sup>rd</sup>: Spring Break**

### **Week 9: Defining "Gangs"**

April 4<sup>th</sup>

- Bursik, Robert J. Jr. and Harold G. Grasmick. "Defining and Understanding Gangs." Pp. 2-14 in The Modern Gang Reader.
- Cohen, Albert K. 1990. "Foreward and Overview." Pp. 7-21 in C. Ronald Huff Ed. Gangs in America. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
- Horowitz, Ruth. 1990. "Sociological Perspectives on Gangs: Conflicting Definitions and Concepts." Pp. 37-54 in C. Ronald Huff Ed. Gangs in America. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage.
- Garot, Robert. "Varieties of Gang Involvements." Unpublished Manuscript.

### **Week 10: Naturalistic Studies of Gangs**

April 11<sup>th</sup>

Thrasher, Frederick. 1927. The Gang.

- Conquergood, Dwight. 1994. "Homeboys and Hoods: Gang Communication and Cultural Space." Pp. 23-55 in Lawrence Frey (Ed.) Group Communication in Context: Studies of Natural Groups. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "For the Nation! How Street Gangs Problematize Patriotism." Pp. 200-221 in Herbert W. Simons and Michael Billig (Eds.) After Postmodernism: Reconstructing Ideology Critique. London: Sage.

### **Week 11: The Gang Myth**

April 18<sup>th</sup>

- Katz, Jack and Curtis Jackson-Jacobs. 2004. "The Criminologists' Gang." Pp. 91-124 in Colin Sumner, ed. The Blackwell Companion to Criminology. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.
- Meehan, Albert J. 2000. "The Organizational Career of Gang Statistics." The Sociological Quarterly. 41(3):337-370.

## **Week 12: Gangs and the Community**

April 25<sup>th</sup>

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. 1997. "The Social Organization of Street Gang Activity in an Urban Ghetto." American Journal of Sociology. 1031:82-111.

Dwight Conquergood. 1997. "Street Literacy." Pp. 354-375 in James Flood, Shirley Brice Heath and Diane Lapp (Eds.) Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts. New York: Simon and Schuster MacMillan.

## **Week 13: Gangs and Schools**

May 2<sup>nd</sup>

Trump, Kenneth S. 1996. "Gangs and School Safety." Pp. 45-60 in Allan M. Hoffman Ed. Schools, Violence and Society. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

Brotherton, David C. 1996. "The Contradictions of Suppression: Notes from a Study of Approaches to Gangs in Three Public High Schools." The Urban Review. 28(2):95-117.

Garot, Robert. 2005. "School Staff's Grounded Constructions of Gangs." In Where You From: Grounded Constructions of Gangs in an Inner-City Alternative School. UCLA: Dissertation.

## **Week 14: Gangs and Dress**

May 9<sup>th</sup>

Holloman, Lillian O., Velma Lapoint, Sylvan I Alleyne, Ruth J. Palmer, and Kathy Sanders-Phillips. "Dress-Related Behavioral Problems and Violence in the Public School Setting: Prevention, Intervention, and Policy—A Holistic Approach." Journal of Negro Education. 65(3):267-281.

Garot, Robert and Jack Katz. 2003. "Provocative Looks: Gang Appearance and Dress Codes in and Inner-City Alternative School." Ethnography. 4(3):421-454.

## **General Writing Guidelines\***

### **Format and Presentation**

Do not skip lines between paragraphs (like I'm doing here). Use an easily legible font, 12-point size works in most types. Papers should be typewritten, double-spaced with approximately 1" margins. Number all pages. Papers should be stapled. This means no plastic binders, no folding the edges together and no paper clips. The following information should appear in the upper right-hand corner of the first page: name, student ID#, date, paper topic number, and title. A bibliography is a necessary part of a research paper (see Citation, below), and should be attached at the end.

### **General Organization**

You should make sure that you read the paper assignment instructions and follow them closely. The most important feature of your paper is that you have answered the question you have chosen. No matter how good your ideas are, if can't demonstrate your understanding of the question, and give an answer to it in your paper, then you will not do very well.

Academic papers have introductions, bodies, and conclusions. An introduction should be simple and explicit, and describe what you are going to do, and in what order. It should provide a complete "road map" for the rest of the paper. Tell your reader something about the study you are conducting, what you will focus on in the paper, what points you will be making, what you

will argue, and what you will conclude. It is perfectly acceptable to use the first person voice and say, "I will focus on ...", after all who is writing this paper, anyway?

The body of the paper must be well organized. You must use paragraphs to divide your thoughts. A paragraph is a set of sentences with one common idea. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence and make one main point. Your argument should flow logically from one paragraph to the next. Please use subheadings if they are appropriate or help the reader navigate through different sections of the paper. I should be able to make sense of your paper, in a general way, by reading the introduction, the first sentence of each paragraph, and the conclusion.

In your analysis, you will need to make explicit links between your "data" and the relevant course material. You will need to organize your paper around a description of the data you are analyzing and a review of the course material that helps to make your points. You should address all of the analytical issues I have proposed in the question. You may find that these do not exhaust the points you need to make, and answering your own additional questions may help further your analysis. Don't overlook a review of the course material (even though you know that I already know it). That way I can determine how fluent you are with the concepts, and how well you are able to apply them to your subject matter. There are various strategies for integrating the course material with an analysis of your data, but these are indispensable.

For your conclusion, restate the paper's highlights and take the opportunity to tie things up neatly. You may restate ideas from your opening paragraph. Repeat your thesis and briefly summarize the main evidence you have included. After reviewing your main points, you may speculate, include personal reactions, pose additional questions or suggest avenues for future research, and the like. If you have some doubts about whether your format will work effectively for the assignment, please feel free to consult with me first.

### **Citation**

This is sometimes tricky, but by this point in your academic career, it is essential that you do it correctly. It is expected that you will use material from the texts and lecture to analyze your subject. Thus, whether you use direct quotes or paraphrases, you must give credit to the authors of those words, when they are not your own.

If you cite a lecture, do it this way: (Lecture, 9/9/02). However, relying solely on lecture citations for material that is also in the readings reveals to me that your familiarity with the readings is inadequate. So you should be sure to prioritize. Where appropriate, always cite the original source and not my delivery of it in lecture.

Directly quoted course materials from the reader should be cited in one of the following ways.

"Self-absorption is consistent with the emphasis on self-satisfaction fostered by capitalism in general and advertising in particular" (Karp, 1996:176).

Or alternately:

David A. Karp (1996:176) suggests that, "self-absorption is consistent with the emphasis on self-satisfaction fostered by capitalism in general and advertising in particular."

Also, be sure to cite any ideas that you borrow, not just quoted text. For instance:

Many analysts have noted how self-absorption may be fostered by capitalism (Karp, 1996:176).

Any direct quotation that is longer than three lines needs to be set off from the body of the paper by indenting and single-spacing. Since your papers will be double-spaced and indented only to begin paragraphs, you will see the contrast. Be careful to differentiate between what the textbook authors are saying themselves, and the other authors that they may in turn quote. Cite accordingly. Do not string quotes together without putting them in context with your own prose. When you use a direct quote, place it in the context of a sentence that includes an explanation of what the quote means and why it is useful in service of the point you are making.

A full reference, including the author's name, book or article title, publishing information and page numbers will appear in a separate, alphabetically organized bibliography at the end of the paper, under the heading, "References." Refer the bibliographies of our articles as examples.

### **Style**

In general, write as simply as possible. Never use a big word, when a little one will do. Big words don't necessarily convey intellectual prowess – especially when they are awkwardly used. Your word choice should be appropriate to formal writing: no slang, and no contractions ("can't", "don't"), unless you are quoting others or it somehow better helps you to make your point. You must use words that actually exist, and words must be used correctly. Look up definitions and spellings if you are unsure. Spell check often misses words.

Avoid using the indefinite "you". You will notice that I am addressing these instructions to you; that is, I am using the second person. That is because I am giving these instructions to a definite person or set of persons. In your papers, unless you mean to address the reader directly, do not use "you" when you mean to use "one" or "we." Refer to yourself as "I" instead of the royal "we." It is perfectly acceptable to use the first person singular in papers – it is not too informal. Use "we" for the author and the reader together: "We have seen how breaching experiments disturb our taken-for-granted notions about reality." Never refer to "society" as an active agent (that's my pet peeve), as in, "Society requires that people follow norms."

Avoid "a lot" (and by the way it's not spelled "alot"), and "very". Hemingway and Morrison do not need them, and neither do you. Don't confuse "their/there/they're" or "it's/its", or "to/two/too", or "were/we're/where", etc. Also please differentiate between "suppose" and "supposed" – these are not interchangeable, and are almost always improperly applied. These are sets of words that give students trouble, so please be careful.

Try to avoid using "he", "his", or "mankind" to mean anyone or all in general. If for some reason you have a strong ideological commitment to using "he" as the generic, you may do so, but it is not accurate, and there are other options available.

Make sure that nouns and verbs agree in number. Avoid sentence fragments. Make sure that the sentences you write have subjects and predicates. Verbs are also necessary. Do not leave a clause hanging without these necessary components. Avoid run-on sentences. Make sure that if you link

things together in a sentence that you do so by using the proper connective words or punctuation marks. These kinds of mistakes can often be caught by reading your paper aloud. If it sounds wrong, it probably is.

Always follow the parsimony principle. That is, use as few words as possible to make your point.

## **Process**

One way to start is by saying your ideas out loud, and writing them down. Just get the words out of your head and onto the page where you will be able to work with them more easily. I strongly suggest that you write more than one draft of your paper. Most successful papers are begun well in advance of the night before the assignment is due. The best way to start is to just spew out a messy first draft, getting all of your ideas and facts down on paper (if you write long-hand) or your computer screen (if you prefer to word process). Then, a second draft will help you to organize the sections, focus your argument, and refine the content and style.

You must be at this point before you come to see me about your paper. Although we will be unable to read entire drafts, we may be able to discuss with you specific parts of your thesis or analysis, and/or help you with difficulties in transitions between ideas or sections of your argument. A final draft is useful for correcting spelling and grammatical errors, and for formatting the paper. You must proofread your own paper. It is not acceptable to turn in a paper with typographical errors, misspellings, nouns and verbs that do not agree, misused words, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, etc. You may want to rewrite the beginning or end of your paper in the last draft. Often in composing your paper, you will have changed your focus or ideas somewhat by the time you finish. You will want to make sure that these changes are reflected in a new version of your introduction or conclusion.

Finally, re-read your own paper and imagine that someone else wrote it. Does it make sense? Fix it, if it doesn't. You may also want to get someone else to read your paper and give you comments. It is often hard to be objective when you are so close in the writing process. If you have trouble with your writing, get help: see me during office hours, or seek assistance from the writing center on campus. For further suggestions on writing, I suggest:

Richlin-Klonsky, Judith and Ellen Strenski (Eds.). 1994. A Guide to Writing Sociology Papers. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Becker, Howard S. 1986. Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Also, please feel free to visit during office hours for personal assistance.

Good luck, and start writing now!

\* This document adapted with thanks from Dr. Kerry Ferris' Case Study Essay Guidelines.