

Society & the Individual

Paper Description

Fall 2014

Prof. Rebecca Tiger

For this assignment, I want you to interpret the world around you using concepts raised in class. In three pages, please analyze a concrete issue through the lens of the theorist we've read. Below I list three possible ways to do this, though there are others. Possible approaches to this assignment include:



Cultural Critique:

Analyze themes and ideas that came up in this class as they are expressed culturally through film, print or social media, music, the internet, etc. In what ways does contemporary culture reflect the ideas discussed by each theorist? Basically, this question asks you to engage the ideas in one or several of our key texts as they manifest in society.

Be sure to adequately explain the cultural "product" being examined (short plot summary, description of narrative arc, key characters, etc) so that the reader knows what you are talking about.

Current Events:

Analyze themes and ideas relevant to this class as they are reflected in the news of the day. Take a news event or series of related events and reflect on the different themes that we have discussed as they are present in that issue. For example, you may want to examine a particular theorist's ideas as they relate to: the militarization of the police or the



panic over heroin in Vermont or any issue that might interest you. One way to think about this is: What would Marx, Weber, or Durkheim say about this topic? How would they make sense of current events?



Closer to home:

Examine how key ideas from the theorists in class are relevant to understanding events surrounding you at Middlebury—sports, social life, extra-curricular activities, etc. For example, you could focus on the panics that have emerged around college students over

cheating, drug use, alcohol consumption, “hooking up”, etc. and make sense of them through the theorists we’re reading.

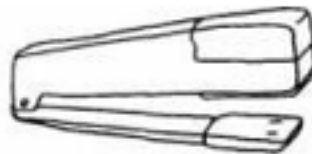
Helpful hints for successful sociological writing:

These papers are an opportunity for you to engage with the theoretical ideas we’ve been discussing in class. What do I mean by “engage”? Here’s my attempt to explain:

1. Add (and multiply)! Take ideas from the class, theories we’ve read (and please read them before you write about them – please!) and apply them in a way that adds to the theories and our discussions of them. **Do not just summarize the readings.**
2. Let me repeat: Don’t just summarize! Explain enough of the theory that will help you apply it to the specific example(s) you’re engaging with, but this is not a book report. Don’t simply tell me what Durkheim or Marx or Weber wrote – show me. But, please make sure you add enough of these authors’ ideas into your project that I know you read them and have thought about them.
3. Everyone has an opinion, but...! But don’t give them to me in this project. This is not about whether or not you think society “should” lock sex offenders up for life or children “should not” be medicated. Take your topic of interest and ANALYZE it ... don’t EDITORIALIZE. If there are current

debates on the topic, use the theorist you're working with to explain the nature of these debates.

4. Show and tell! Don't assume that because you've picked a great topic that its application to the course material will be self-evident. Your work is to make a case for the pairing of the topic and the particular theorist
5. Please use quotes! There isn't a requirement for how many to use but it will help strengthen your argument if you illustrate it with quotes from the readings.
6. Write drafts! Good papers are the result of writing and re-writing.
7. THREE PAGES! Double-spaced. 12 point font. I am a stickler for this page length. Related to point #6, often 5 page papers have 3 pages worth of relevant analysis. Check for word and idea repetition. Learning how to edit is a key step to becoming a good writer.
8. Come to my office hours! Talking ideas out is an excellent way to prepare yourself to write your paper. Please do not email me with questions about your topic. See me and we can discuss your ideas in person.
9. Writing Tutors—Middlebury College provides writing tutors for students. Use them. Having someone else read over drafts of your paper is probably the best editing exercise you can do. More info here:
<http://www.middlebury.edu/academics/resources/ctlr/writingcenter>
10. Assignments are due on the dates below, in class. STAPLED! Here's what a stapler looks like:



DUE DATES

September 30 – Durkheim

October 16 – Marx

November 4 – Weber

November 20 - Open