

Sociology 167: Virtual Communities/ Social Media

Fall 2021

INSTRUCTOR Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D. (Pronouns: she/her or they/them)
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Drop-in Office Hours: Thursday 11:00am-Noon

Sign-up Office Hours: Monday + Wednesday 2:30-3:30pm

Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/bakehorn/office-hours>

CLASS MEETING Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 1:00pm-1:59pm on Zoom
Join [here](#)

Course Description

This course explores the kinds of communities and social interactions that occur online or virtually. In particular we will examine how we **construct connections, meaning, self, and identity** in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Theories both utopian and dystopian about the virtual world will be discussed: for instance, does the Internet provide a space free from the **social inequalities** that plague the “real” world or does it exacerbate them?

We will begin the course with general sociological theories about the **social construction of reality, the self, and interactions**. We will use these as a basis for discussing and explaining online social relations, noting the ways in which these theories help illuminate the virtual world and the gaps that emerge.

We will use empirical research on virtual communities to understand what the online world facilitates and enables that may not be possible offline.

Technology is not, of course, neutral, so we will also take a critical eye to the **ways in which new communication technologies are created: within what contexts, by whom, and for what ends**. We will interrogate the intersection of society and social media. What are some of the dark sides of social media?

This topic is important not simply because social media and the internet more broadly are so omnipresent and integrated into our daily lives, but because many of you have plans to, or already pursuing, careers related to social media: in engineering, public relations, or perhaps as a micro-celebrity. **You need to know what you are participating in and what your participation supports.** How can you harness your participation for social good, for social justice?

Keep in mind this is a sociology course. Just to refresh your memory, sociology is the study of human social activity, organization, and interaction. Sociology is about the search for patterned behavior and social, rather than individual, explanations for this behavior. Sociologists look beyond the taken-for-granted notions of our social environment to examine the many layers of social meaning in the human experience. (If this doesn't sound familiar to you, or you are unclear about the *sociological perspective*, please refer to your introductory sociology text for a refresher.)

This class will be **challenging** on a number of levels:

- ❖ You will be expected to keep up with a number of readings for each class meeting.
- ❖ These readings will be challenging not only in terms of their length and number, but also in terms of the subject matter presented and the complex theories proposed.
- ❖ We will be speaking frankly about issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Some topics may be challenging in the sense that you may find the subject matter embarrassing or difficult to discuss. Frank discussions and presentation of material may include things that some find offensive or that differ greatly from your own experiences, preferences, and beliefs. It is important that we are non-judgmental.

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Keep in mind that your personal experiences may not match the general sociological insights discussed in the course. This does not negate the insights. Ask yourself why this might be the case. You may not agree with everything we read and discuss, but I expect you to have an open mind and demonstrate your knowledge of the sociological perspective. Disagreements and debates are expected and welcome in this class, however, I will not tolerate personal attacks.

Course Goals

- ❖ Use a sociological perspective to understand social media
- ❖ Interrogate how our sense of self is impacted by our increasingly digital world
- ❖ Understand the origins of social media and how that impacts our use of it
- ❖ Explore how technological innovations are creating and recreating identity categories
 - ❖ Study the impacts this has on our relationships with others, on social institutions, and on everyday life
- ❖ Examine how neoliberalism is built into social media and how this impacts activism
- ❖ Look at what privacy and surveillance mean in this context
- ❖ Introduce critical gender and race theories
- ❖ Adopt an intersectional understanding of social experiences

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- ❖ Explain the sociological perspective
- ❖ Connect sociological theories to the social world and your experiences
- ❖ Critically analyze media/“common sense” understandings of the Internet and social media
- ❖ Utilize a critical gender and race perspective
- ❖ Understand how our experiences online are shaped by sociocultural forces
- ❖ Explain how social media (re)creates social inequality
- ❖ Write succinct papers that effectively synthesize course materials and apply theory

Required Texts

Saraswati, L. Ayu. 2021. *Pain Generation: Social Media, Feminist Activism, and the Neoliberal Selfie*. New York: New York University Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses)

Marwick, Alice E. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses)

Additional Readings: Available digitally on bCourses and as a digital or hardcopy reader from Copy Central (they will ship it to you if you are not local).

Assignments

Norm Breaking Paper: You will be given a list of potential norming-breaking tasks related to the digital/online world. You must choose one, undertake it, and write a short, analytical paper.

Disconnect Paper: You will choose a single 24-hour period to go without social media, texting, Internet, apps, and any networked-connected device including phones, laptops, tablets, etc. You will write a paper about your experience reflecting on your feelings and on what it reveals about our relationship to connected devices. You will need to apply course materials to make sense of your experiences.

Essay Exams: Midterm and final exam. You will be responsible for course readings, lectures, and any media presented in the class. These exams will focus on your ability to apply theories and to synthesize and make connections between various readings.

All work must be original (you cannot recycle work from other courses).

Participation: These assignments are designed to keep you motivated and engaged with the course, to provide opportunities for you to check your comprehension, and to prepare for graded assignments. Assignments will be due on Mondays at 11:59pm (exceptions made for Monday holidays-due date is Tuesday). These assignments will be designed to give you a space to practice the skills you will later be graded on. **You must complete 10 of the 12 assignments in order to get full credit.** You will receive either full credit (10 points) or zero for each assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Norm-Breaking Paper (15%)

Disconnect Paper (15%)

Midterm (25%)

Final Exam (30%)

Participation Assignments (15%)

GRADE SCALE

Grade Range		Grade
100%	97%	A+
96%	93%	A
92%	90%	A-
89%	87%	B+
86%	83%	B
82%	80%	B-
79%	77%	C+
76%	73%	C
72%	70%	C-
69%	67%	D+
66%	63%	D
62%	60%	D-
59%	50%	F

Course Format and Policies

Readings: Readings should be completed prior to class. You must keep up with the readings to participate in class discussions and complete assignments.

Course Slides: I use course slides which often incorporate media. I will post course slides, but they will only contain the text. Keep in mind that these slides are meant to be a guide during lecture and are therefore not exhaustive or a substitute for attending/ watching lecture.

Zoom Etiquette and Tips: Please refer to [this guide](#).

Email: Clearly indicate to which class you are referring in your emails to me. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours, but this is not always possible; please be patient.

Names and Pronouns: You have the right to be referred to by the name you prefer and with the correct gender pronouns. Because the name listed in University records may not correspond to your preferred name, please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected.

You can refer to me as Prof. Bakehorn, Dr. Bakehorn, or Jill. My pronouns are she/they.

Grading Policies

No late assignments will be accepted without prior approval; however, **I am happy to provide extensions—just ask! Seriously, just ask.** Grades are not curved.

All assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for plagiarism. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned in papers as well as searching the internet.

Be sure to carefully consider assignment feedback; it is provided to help you improve on future assignments. For in-text feedback, **click on the link “View Feedback”** which may not be visible if you are not in full-screen mode.

To **request a re-grade** of an assignment: first, wait 24 hours after the assignment was returned and second, write up a statement detailing why you believe you deserve a higher grade. This statement should be about the substance of your work, not about effort. Be sure to make specific reference to your work, don't simply say that you responded to the questions asked. Demonstrate how you did so. **Request a re-grade within 7 days of the assignment being returned.** My assessment and grade of your work will be used, even if that means you get a lower score than originally given for that work.

Academic Dishonesty

The University defines academic misconduct as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community” (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct).

Academic dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism. Cheating is collaboration with other students on response papers and exams. Plagiarism includes turning in any work that is not your own as well as improper or missing citations of others' works. As a student of the University of California, you are bound by the Code of Academic Conduct. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will result in a referral to The Center for Student Conduct and a failing grade for that assignment.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite sources or because they feel desperate. If you get to this point in your writing, contact me ASAP rather than doing something you'll very likely regret. I am happy to help and remember, **you can ask for an extension.**

Office Hours

Please see Page 1 or [this link](#) for information about my office hours. These office hours are specifically for you. We can discuss readings, assignments, post-college plans, existential dread, how to access resources, letters of recommendation, any issues you are having—don't have to be related to this class, what is bringing you joy, whatever.

If you are having any difficulties with the material or assignments for the course or if you are having any personal problems that are affecting your ability to complete assignments on time, please take advantage of office hours—I am here to help!

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you in the future when you may need letters of recommendation. You do not need to be struggling or have course-specific questions to go to office hours.

All office hours will be via Zoom.

Student Support Services

Course Accessibility

This course is intended for all UC Berkeley students, including those with mental, emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illnesses, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that can negatively impact equal access to education. If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the [Disabled Students' Program](#). If you have a diagnosis, DSP can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through DSP, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors. **As a reminder, you do not need DSP accommodations to ask for an extension.**

Student Learning Center

"The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the [SLC](#) helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals."

Sexual Violence and Harassment Support Services

To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu>. **Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter.** You can speak to a [Confidential Care Advocate](#) at the Path to Care Center.

Economic, Food, and Housing Support

If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at [the Basic Needs Center](#). You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via [Calfresh](#) or our [Food Assistance Program](#). If you are in need of food immediately, please contact our UC Berkeley [Food Pantry](#). More information can be found [here](#).

Mental Health Resources

All students — regardless of background or identity — may experience a range of issues that can become barriers to learning like strained relationships, anxiety, depression, alcohol and other drug problems, difficulties with concentration, sleep, and eating, and/or lack of motivation. UC Berkeley offers many services like [Recalibrate](#) and [Corona Virus Mental Health Resources](#).

Course Outline

Complete readings on the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

Week One: Introductions

Wednesday, 8/25 **Welcome + Introductions**

Friday, 8/27 **Introducing the Sociology of Social Media**

Weeks Two-Three: The Sociology of Interaction + Reality

Monday, 8/30 **An Invitation to Sociology**

Berger, Peter L. 2011. "Sociology as an Individual Pastime." Pp 3-12 in *Readings for Sociology*. Seventh Ed, edited by Garth Massey. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Berger, Peter L. 1963. "Sociology as a Form of Consciousness." Pp 25-53 in *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Anchor Books.

Wednesday, 9/1 + **Rules for Interaction**

Friday, 9/3

Goffman, Erving. 1967. "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction." *Psychiatry* 18 (13):213-231.

Monday, 9/6 **Holiday: NO CLASS**

Wednesday, 9/8 + **The Social Construction of Reality**

Friday, 9/10

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. "Introduction: The Problem of the Sociology of Knowledge." Pp 1-18 in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1997. "The Social Lens." Pp 124-141 in *The Production of Reality: Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*, 2nd ed. Edited by Jodi O'Brien and Peter Kollach.

Weeks Four-Five: Theorizing Digital Communities

Monday, 9/13 Theories of the Digital World

Baym, Nancy K. 2015. "Chapter 2: Making New Media Make Sense." Pp 24-56 in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. 2nd Edition. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Wednesday, 9/15 Theories of the Digital World (Cont.)

Brooker, Charlie. 2016. "Nosedive." *Black Mirror* 3(1).

Friday, 9/17 Theories of Digital Society

Lupton, Deborah. 2015. "Theorising Digital Society." Pp 20-41 in *Digital Sociology*. New York: Routledge.

Monday, 9/20 Making Connections Through Technology

Standage, Tom. 2009. "Chapter 7: Codes, Hackers and Cheats." Pp 105-126 in *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*. New York: Bloomsbury.

—. "Chapter 8: Love Over the Wires." Pp 127-144 in *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Wednesday, 9/22 Virtual Communities as Communities

Baym, Nancy K. 2015. "Chapter 4: Communities and Networks." Pp 81-111 in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. 2nd Edition. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Friday, 9/24 Catch-up/Review **NORM-BREAKING PAPER DUE**

Weeks Six-Eight: Pain Generation: Social Media Community and Activism?

Monday, 9/27 + The Neoliberal Selfie Gaze
Wednesday, 9/29

L. Ayu Saraswati: Chapter 1: The Neoliberal Self(ie) in *Pain Generation: Social Media, Feminist Activism, and the Neoliberal Selfie*

Friday, 10/1 + Turning Pain Into Spectacle
Monday, 10/4

L. Ayu Saraswati: Chapter 2: 'Making Gold Out of It': rupi kaur's Poem, Pain, and Phantasmagoria in *Pain Generation*

Wednesday, 10/6 + The Sharing Economy of Emotions
Friday, 10/8

L. Ayu Saraswati: Chapter 3: Masking Pain, Unmasking Race: Sexual Harassment, Shaming, and the Sharing Economy of Emotions in *Pain Generation*

Monday, 10/11 + Collective Silence as Testimony
Wednesday, 10/13

L. Ayu Saraswati: Chapter 4: Silence as Testimony in Margaret Cho's #12daysofrage in *Pain Generation*

Friday, 10/15 Moving Beyond Neoliberal Activism?

L. Ayu Saraswati: Chapter 5: What Else Might Be Possible? Imagining Vigilant Eco-Love Practice in *Pain Generation*

Week Nine: Midterm

Monday, 10/18 Review/Catch Up

Wednesday, 10/20 Work on Midterm—NO CLASS

Friday, 10/22 TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE: NO CLASS

Weeks Ten-Twelve: Social Media Origins and Status

Monday, 10/25 + Understanding Web 2.0
Wednesday, 10/27

Alice E. Marwick: Introduction in *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 1: A Cultural History of Web 2.0 in *Status Update*

Friday, 10/29 Status and Social Media

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 2: Leaders and Followers: Status in the Tech Scene in *Status Update*

Monday, 11/1 Status and Social Media (Cont.)

Lorenz, Taylor and Laura Zornosa. 2021. "[Are Black Creators Really on 'Strike' From TikTok?](#)" *The New York Times*. June 25.

Mumford, Nana Efua. 2021. "[What Black Creators Think TikTok Needs to Do to 'Foster an Inclusive Environment.'](#)" *The Washington Post*. July 15.

Wednesday, 11/3 Celebrity and Social Media

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 3: The Fabulous Lives of Micro-Celebrities in *Status Update*

Friday, 11/5 Branding and Social Media

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 4: Self-Branding: The (Safe for Work) Self in *Status Update*

Freitas, Donna. 2017. "Chapter 3: My Name is My Brand and My Brand is Happiness!" Pp 63-80 in *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Monday, 11/8

Lifestreaming

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 5: Lifestreaming: We Live in Public in *Status Update*

Lorenz, Taylor. 2021. "[Young Creators Are Burning Out and Breaking Down.](#)" *The New York Times*. June 8.

Wednesday, 11/10

Conclusions

Alice E. Marwick: Chapter 6: Designed in California: Entrepreneurship and the Myths of Web 2.0 in *Status Update*

Alice E. Marwick: Conclusion in *Status Update*

Friday, 11/12

Catch-up/Review

Week Thirteen: What Are Our Digital Selves?

Monday, 11/15

Digital Selves

Lupton, Deborah. 2015. "Chapter 8: The Digitised Body / Self." Pp 164-187 in *Digital Sociology*. New York: Routledge.

Wednesday, 11/17

Engineered Inequality

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Engineered Inequity: Are Robots Racist?" Pp 33-52 in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Medford, MA: Polity Press. ProQuest Ebook Central, docID=5820427.

Friday, 11/19

Algorithmic Discrimination

DISCONNECT PAPER DUE

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Default Discrimination: Is the Glitch Systemic?" Pp 53-66 in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Medford, MA: Polity Press. ProQuest Ebook Central, docID=5820427.

Roose, Kevin. 2020. "[Social Media Giants Support Racial Justice. Their Products Undermine It.](#)" *The New York Times*. June 19.

Week Fourteen: Thanksgiving Break

Monday, 11/22 Mental Health Day: NO CLASS

Wednesday, 11/24 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Friday, 11/26 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS

Week Fifteen: Will Technology Bring About Justice?

Monday, 11/29 Can We Reimagine Justice Online?

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice." Pp 109-134 in *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Medford, MA: Polity Press. ProQuest Ebook Central, docID=5820427.

Wednesday, 12/1 + Challenging Misogynoir Online
Friday, 12/3

Bailey, Moya. 2021. "Introduction: What is Misogynoir?" Pp 1-33 in *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York: New York University Press.

—. "Transforming Misogynoir through Trans Advocacy." Pp 67-102 in *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York: New York University Press.

Week Sixteen: Reading, Review, and Recitation

Monday, December 6—Friday, December 10

Final Exam: Due Wednesday, 12/15 at 10pm