Sociology/Social Work Review

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THE GCU SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

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WELCOME TO THE SOCIOLOGY/ SOCIAL WORK REVIEW – VOL. 1

The Sociology/Social Work Review comes to you after a winding journey over three years. This first edition is a testament to the collaboration of the sociology and social work department of Grand Canyon University and the students who took the idea of a review and made it theirs.

The purpose of this review is to provide students a place to express, through writing or photo-essay, a student's life experience and the discipline of sociology and social work. Phoenix and the world become the social science lab to bring the student's social experience into focus through the use of sociology and social work tools of analysis, resulting in a student-led journal. This endeavor values students' experiential learning of sociology and social work with the expressive tool of writing.

The experiential learning of this process demonstrates the intersect of the knowledge of sociology and social work and the student's social experience. Our students' world became their "lab" to see and analyze the world around them. The first edition has our students' fingerprints and sociology and social work content all over it. This edition includes the use of The Sociological Imagination to examine life experience including the personal experience of divorce, moving between cultures and the growth of one's social-self that comes from entering one's twenties and beyond. Well done to our students who took up the idea of a student-run review – from the student editors and writers to the student professional writing group's editing team. You made this happen.

Finally, a nod to the faculty and support of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, who labored in support of our students to make this Sociology/Social Work Review a reality.

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A Daughter's Challenge Through Divorce

by Sunnie Shephard, Yuma, AZ
Class of 2023

Children assume their parents will be together forever, but that was not the case with my parents. Four years ago, I was at my childhood house in Yuma, Arizona. It felt like any other day until my mom delivered disappointing news. My sister and I were seated at the kitchen counter while my mom was cooking dinner, and my dad was standing by the sink. She announced they decided to get a divorce. I was sad and conflicted with my emotions. My sister's lack of a reaction led me to believe she either agreed with their decision or did not fully absorb the information.

When my parents told us, my sister and I were not shocked by this news. We always had a feeling that it was going to happen – our parents were never affectionate growing up. It almost seemed like they were just civil with each other for the sake of raising two daughters. I was 14 or 15 at the time, but I agreed with why they wanted a divorce. I was supportive throughout the entire process and was never in a legal position to choose one parent over the other.

However, I had a very hard time seeing my mother with another man months after the divorce was final. Even though it was a man that my mom had known for years, it still gave me anxiety to see someone else being affectionate with my mom since my parents never were. I recall fighting with my mother; she confronted why I always defended my dad when he was the reason for the divorce. Even now, I am unsure as to why I did that and still come to his defense. Since then, I no longer say it out loud because I worry that my mother and I will argue again. That was the only time we ever got into a big argument, and I do regret parts of it. Looking back, I know it was necessary to address the elephant in the room.

The sociological imagination asks us to distinguish between "personal troubles" and "social issues" within an historical context (Mills, 2000). For example, my reaction to my parents' divorce and my relationship with my sister and parents during and after the divorce would fall into the category of "personal troubles." A social issue is a public matter, something that transcends individual experience and reflects the values and structure of the society.

In the United States, between 37-50% of marriages will end in divorce (United States Census Bureau). Approximately one in two children will experience what my sister

and I experienced. Divorce rates are down from a decade ago, but there is still the question of how divorce affects children during the event and as they mature and consider starting families of their own (Howe, 2018; United States Census Bureau). Some researchers have found that both adults and children can learn resilience in the face of a life adversity, like divorce (Sandler et al, 2015). How do children and adults actively react to and construct the divorce experience, and is it possible to be happy and healthy no matter how the family is constructed (Howe, 2018)?

C. Wright Mills says a sociological imagination enables us, "to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions" (Mills, 2000). It is easy to forget how society influences social issues such as divorce. Although each person and family has a unique experience, divorce is not an uncommon experience in human history (Howe, 2018). It is experienced by couples with diverse backgrounds with varied social, economic, religious and educational status (Cohen, 2019). Applying the sociological imagination to divorce, certain societal factors that contribute to it are marrying too young, lack of shared values, conflict over money and family responsibilities, substance use, infertility, overall quality of the relationship, as well as other factors (Scott, 2013).

Many of my friends also have divorced parents. Family members on my mom's side are divorced and have since remarried, so being around divorce has always been normal for me. I know that my mom and dad struggled with legal matters from my dad's past, which strained finances. The disappointed expression on my mother's face told me she felt like she failed in her marriage and let her daughters down. They worked hard to be the best parents possible. They did not want my sister and I to stress about where we stood as a family throughout the legal and financial issues.

Many external factors led to their split, which made them feel that divorce was the only option. As my sociological imagination develops with age and education, I now see divorce as a means for some couples to move past what seems like unresolvable family strife and conflict. The sociological imagination provides the framework that everyone's personal life is affected differently, but societal and cultural factors related to gender roles, divorce laws, media influences and religious values also play a role in historical and contemporary divorce trends (Howe, 2018).

Using a sociological imagination to view my parents' marriage has helped me to see our family issues within a larger social and historical context. Like many other families in America, my family has gone through rough patches that resulted in

divorce. We have learned that divorce is not an isolated event, but a process that evolves over many years (Howe, 2018). Since the divorce, both of my parents have been happier and more stable in their own lives.

Research suggests that it can have varying effects on children, often related to personal characteristics and age of a child when the divorce occurs (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). This has been true in our family as well. My sister seems to have handled the divorce better than I did; however, it is possible she suppressed her emotions. I have learned to cope with changing family dynamics and structure and have a positive and respectful relationship with my parents. Although I understand their decision to divorce, I struggle with both of my parents moving on and finding other people that make them happy. From this experience I learned that marriage and commitment is not easy, and no one is ever fully prepared for it. However, each new transition in life brings opportunities for personal growth and the chance to move in a positive direction (Bleidorn et al., 2021; Howe, 2018).

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Generational Toxic Masculinity in the Latino Community

by Alejandro Merina Hernandez, Phoenix, AZ
Class of 2025

The Latino community views toxic masculinity or 'machismo,' in Spanish, as a household norm. I knew little about male-female relationships until I was 16 years old. A realization came to me while I reflected on what I observed at family events and from my experiences throughout my childhood. The Latino community tends to place higher expectations on women and girls than on men and boys. That thought did not just come from nowhere; its foundation is years of my experiences and observations piling up on top of me, waiting for me to open my eyes.

Growing up in a Mexican household was difficult, because my parents expected me to learn everything and perform consistently at a very young age. I was taught how to clean and cook, what should be said aloud – essentially how to be a proper lady. I always thought it was something I needed for myself in the future. One day my parents asked me, " How will you marry if you do not clean?" I was dumbstruck as a 10- or 12-year-old little girl when they told me there was a correlation between marriage and cleaning. How could my parents mention marriage to me and emphasize that it was the only option for my future? When I was 15 years old, my parents expected that I clean the house and cook meals. Every time I tried to do something different, they mentioned the male gaze and approval. Currently, I am 18 years old and constantly getting asked if I will get married in the future and have kids. I know people use this topic to make small talk, but it gets irritating hearing it repeatedly. One day, someone asked why I mostly wear baggy pants since it does not attract the male gaze – this got me thinking and internalizing. Why do I have to give effort to men? Why do all the women in my family tell me to stop what I am doing, because men would not be comfortable around me? I am tired of the stigma that a woman's only purpose is to get married, have kids, and minimize themselves for masculinity to rise.

From a sociological perspective, toxic masculinity stems from gender roles. To further clarify, toxic masculinity is "the constellation of socially regressive [masculine] traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Johnson, 2020). Gender roles are "the social

expectations regarding the proper behavior, attitudes, and activities of males and females" (Grand Canyon University, 2015). Although scholars have developed more contemporary conceptualizations of machismo that include both positive and negative characteristics (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008), negative perspectives of machismo still dominate popular culture. A traditional definition of machismo refers to "the cult of virility, the chief characteristics of which are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relations" (Stevens, 1973, p. 315).

In the Latino community, women have the role of being the caretaker in the family. Women are preferred in the kitchen and taking care of the kids, just like any novel set in the 1800s. At social gatherings, I always see women serving plates for the men. I have seen women do everything for men my whole life. When women are successful, no one cares. When men do the bare minimum, they get praised. Girls have high expectations and burdens, while boys are not required to learn as much. These roles have dictated the lives of Latino women generation after generation.

With all my experiences, I noticed that toxic masculinity in the Latino community, sadly, is part of the culture. Whenever someone tries to speak up, ignorant people think nothing is wrong with the status quo. Gender roles impact women more because they must cook and clean for men. In more traditional families, there is no way out for women. When will this cycle of misogyny and toxic masculinity stop in the Latin community?

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Changing Society One Person at a Time

by Lena-May Haught, Skull Valley, AZ
Class of 2022 (Dec.)

On Oct. 13, 2019, I visited the Faith Christian Center (FCC) campus on McDowell Road and 26th Place, which is one of the most colorful areas in all of Phoenix, Arizona. Before pulling into the parking lot, I noticed many indications of the community starting to decline—empty buildings, trash tumbling across roads, and beleaguered individuals strolling deserted streets. Unlike the grim-looking neighborhood, the FCC campus overflowed with life. The joy and community bubbled out of the church through the congregation of African American folk spilling out of the church doors into the ghost town surrounding neighborhood. FCC is a non-denominational Christian church with a predominantly African American congregation that strives to represent Jesus and change the way people view the church ("Changing The Way," n.d.). Their goal serves as a perfect example of C. Wright Mills' (1959) principle, "The Sociological Imagination," through FCC's efforts to impact the world by practicing the principles in the Bible, most notably, by teaching members to create community and leave a legacy of generosity.

During my time at an FCC service, I saw each of their goals were being upheld and practiced with love and care. I attended the 10 am Sunday service, where I watched multiple groups of people of all shapes and sizes interact through the music, teaching, and prayer; united by a shared passion for a faith that calls them to preach out in their community. The highlight of the service was Pastor Moore's sermon called, "If Your Money Could Talk." In a society that clearly had financial struggles, this title was ironic. However, I was surprised by how little money actually had to do with the application of his message. Instead, Pastor Moore only used money as a medium to discuss how the community of FCC believed they were called to impact the larger society. Specifically, his sermon focused on refusing to allow the expectations of our culture to define how members of the church live their lives. I found the message of empowerment and hope particularly powerful because it was put into the perspectives of people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds. Within the setting of one of the most joyful, grateful, and powerful groups I've experienced, this message of empowerment, through an identity in Christ, challenged every individual in the room to live their lives full of dynamic generosity, in hopes of reshaping society.

Some of you may wonder what this story has to do with sociology. The answer to that question lies in my favorite, and if you ask me, underrated sociological principle, "The Sociological Imagination," by C. Wright Mills. "Mills states that the sociological imagination is a way of thinking about society and social life" (Grand Canyon University Ed., 2015). Mills is recognized by many as one of the most astute sociologists of all time, partially because of his accurate address of the role of the individual in society. Looking past the common misconception that sociology only deals with groups of people, Mills asserted in his principle that, when viewed objectively, not only does society have an effect on the individual, but the individual also affects society (Mills, 1959). "Mills contends that if people can take a step back and objectively look at what is going on around them, they will gain insight and understanding" (Grand Canyon University Ed., 2015). Faith Christian Center stands as a perfect example of this concept throughout Pastor Moore's teaching, through pointing out the effects of society on the people, and how FCC members are affecting society. Despite the pressure from society to meet cultural expectations, these men and women are breaking stereotypes and leaving traditional and cultural expectations in the dust, which fits Pastor Moore's call to "allow God's Word to cast down tradition not the other way around" ("Changing The Way," n.d.). One way that individuals in the church are changing their community was, as said in Moore's sermon, people teaching financial literacy classes to help change a society reliant on debt. In the future, a marriage seminar, designed to bring life to suffering marriages, is going to be held. This is desperately needed in today's world where divorce rates are skyrocketing ("Changing The Way," n.d.). I mention this as it further illustrates the positive effects Faith Christian Center's individual members are having on their society, counteracting the effects of the society upon them, in order to live satisfied lives free from stereotypes, and finally, serve as a real-world example of C. Wright Mills' principle of the Sociological Imagination.

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Experiencing Cultural Changes

by Margret Jacott, Owatonna, MN
Class of 2025

Have you ever felt like you did not belong? It could be in a specific situation or a particular environment; for me, it was both. I grew up in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, however, that would come to change. My dad quit his job, and the only replacement he found was in Owatonna, Minnesota, an hour and a half away from my hometown. Moving was hard, especially in my junior year of high school. Through moving to a small, rural town, I was able to experience socialization and adaption within a new society. This experience allowed me to come out of my shell and develop a deeper sense of self.

It was my sophomore year at Champlin Park High School. I had known all of my best friends since elementary school. I just got my driver's license and applied for my first job. I was not ready to accept a huge change coming my way. Going to school with the same people that I had grown up with had caused me to remain in my little circle of friends. I let everyone else's perception of me dictate my actions and opinions. When I learned I was moving, I was angry. I was not prepared to make such a drastic change by leaving all my friends and everything I knew to move across the whole state. My parents let me wrap up sophomore year at Champlin, and as school ended, we moved to Owatonna.

The first thing I noticed was how far away it was from major stores and restaurant chains. I spent the whole summer babysitting my little brother. It was impossible to meet friends over the summer because everyone my age was out and about with their existing friend groups. As school started, I was worried that my peers might judge me and choose not to accept me into their friend groups. As a result, I kept to myself for the first couple of months. However, about three months into the school year, one friend that I made introduced me to her whole friend group. This group and I quickly became best friends. It was a challenging experience meeting so many new people and learning how to fit in. Looking back at the experience, I believe that it bettered me. I learned to adapt to the culture and society of southern Minnesota through socialization.

Socialization is "the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values" (Little

& McGivern, 2014, para. 6). Something else I experienced was acculturation. Acculturation is the process of learning and incorporating a new culture's values, beliefs, language, customs and mannerisms (Karatas, et.el 2020). I experienced the process of socialization and acculturation within my adjustment of living in Owatonna, such as learning specific norms and rules.

Throughout this process, I took note of key difference between Champlin and Owatonna. I found Champlin to be a more liberal area regarding political views since it is an urban region. In contrast, Owatonna is located in a rural area, holding a more conservative population. In connection to race, I had always found Champlin to support a more diverse population, while Owatonna holds a predominately white population. Experiencing such contrasts is also interesting since most of the population had grown up in this society. They were not able to notice or experience differences in culture. Taking note of the ways people interact within society and how it relates to sociology impacted my perspective of how the world works.

All in all, I am grateful I was able to experience transitioning and could come out of my shell and develop a deeper sense of self. I was able to learn how to adapt to many different cultures and societies and become prepared to enter the real world someday. Socialization is key for developing a deeper sense of who you are and how to adapt to any situation.

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Interracial Adoption

by Emme Quigley, Flagstaff, AZ

Class 2024

I was adopted from China when I was barely two years old. My new family was from Flagstaff, Arizona, in the United States. Although it was a different culture and area than I was used to, I quickly grew accustomed to my new environment. Most importantly – and I only realized this in hindsight – I formed meaningful relationships with those around me. My newly acquired family accepted me as a part of the Quigleys and did not treat me differently from their children.

Although I was a part of my family, some individuals did not accept me into their society. One time, my family and I were waiting to be shown to our table in an Italian restaurant. As my family and I sat down and began to eat, I saw another family looking at me. I kept eating, still not understanding why these other customers stared at me so intensely. I paused to see if I had something on my face or was acting strangely. They looked at me like they were trying to solve a puzzle. After a few minutes, I understood the predicament they were trying to solve – why was a Chinese girl with a White family? How did that happen? Why would anyone want such a thing to happen? My family was all White and genetically homogenous. My darker skin, distinct eyes, and different bone structure made me stand out.

Even though I felt a part of my family, my looks separated me from society. Internally, emotionally, and socially, I felt like I was just like my family. However, I was seen as different, foreign, and potentially intrusive to others.

As I grew up, everyone in my community slowly recognized me as part of my family. I am reminded of my differences all over again when I meet someone new. There have been multiple occasions when people see me with my family in public and tilt their heads, seemingly confused. They point, stare, and ask me, "Are you a part of that White family?" I nod and laugh, although I am incredibly uncomfortable. I always think, "Do people not understand that this diverse family system is possible?" I tried my best to understand why others were having difficulty comprehending that I was adopted; what aspects of my being were challenging to understand? I considered how symbolic interactionism – a sociological theory that attempts to understand the effects of communication and interaction between people as images – thus exchanging meaning through interacting, could help me understand the formed

subjective perceptions. Symbolic Interactionism posits that "individuals structure the external world by their perceptions and interpretations of what they conceive that world to be" (Benzies & Allen, p. 542). Being different from my adopted family, my race became a symbol that others attached meaning to.

I examined this exchange of meaning, produced by my race, occurring between myself and those trying to solve this ongoing puzzle. I came to see that the only noticeable races of families in Flagstaff were White, Native American, or Hispanic. Asians make up three percent of the Flagstaff population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Additionally, the number of interracial Asian adoptions is less than three percent (Administration for Children & Families, 2020). Given these low interracial Asian adoption rates, it is unlikely that families had previously seen adopted Asians in White families. Those within my society were seemingly unaccustomed to interacting with adopted children, making it difficult to accept them into their community.

I examined the symbolic meaning of those needing to rearrange their ideas on how families should look like and found my reality made them change their beliefs. This helped them understand my family's unique arrangement. My interactions with those in my community are akin to those of other interracial adoptees who reported being asked racialized questions and being categorized by others (Patel, 2007). Racial identity development is understandably affected by racial differences from the adoptive family and support or rejection of birth and adoptive heritages (Patel, 2007).

I learned from my social experiences that it is not easy to be a part of a situation that does not align with society's ideas. However, as I have seen it occur many times, individuals can rearrange their ideologies – using their past and novel experiences – to form a new symbolic meaning between those within their society and themselves.

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Spikeball Practice

by Joshua Travis, Bothell, WA
Class of 2023

The life of a college student is best understood by observation and experience. The door to this unique season of life is only open for a short time, inviting in emerging adults as they continue to develop and pursue their passions. Cliques and unique social dynamics are inevitable, especially in a group of 18- to 22-year-olds. Using my sociological imagination, I will relate the experience of my social interactions at the first Club Spikeball practice to similar social dynamics within my college campus. It was a typical, sunny day at Grand Canyon University, and the first club Spikeball practice was being held at Prescott Soccer Field. Spikeball, also known as roundnet, is an up-and-coming sport that combines the elements of volleyball, tennis, and ping pong into one. Four people, two teams of two, stand around a circular net that somewhat resembles a three-foot-wide trampoline. The premise of the game is bouncing a ball on the net from one team to the other. Each team can hit the ball three alternating times before returning the ball back to the net. The other team follows that same routine, and this goes back and forth until the ball hits the ground. What makes Spikeball different from other sports is there are no boundaries. Teams are allowed to circulate around the net and hit the ball in any direction, from anywhere, even over 10 feet away, if that were even possible. This school year, the club team has over 50 members, all of different ages and skill levels, coming from their own life experiences that have defined how they interact with others. With a group of college students this large, intriguing social dynamics started to form.

 That year, I was a returning player to the Spikeball team. Coming from 16 players last year to over 50 this year, the club has more than tripled in size. With this growth, I was excited to see the new experience and team dynamic. Upon arriving at the first practice, I found myself interacting with fellow returning players, only because of the level of familiarity and camaraderie I formed with them in previous years. I did, however, make an effort to meet new faces, who were mostly freshmen. Almost immediately, I noticed how different the upperclassmen interacted within their own network compared to their interactions with the newer players. The upperclassmen acted confident and haughty with each other and had close to no conversations with the players of lower age or skill level. My next observation was that social interactions

changed as hidden talent was revealed and when people were placed in teams based on skill level. After warming up, our team played a ladder tournament, where the better players ended up at what is called the top nets, and the less skilled players ended up in the bottom nets. This exercise changed the social dynamics for all the members of the club. Now, the upperclassmen were interacting with new, younger players on the condition that they had been placed in a higher skill level.

I am 19, a junior, and my skill level is within the top three of the team. This combination—young age, high education level, and above-average skill level—gave me a unique social identity that allowed me to observe these dynamics firsthand. I was able to interact comfortably with the older and more skilled players, with them reflecting a similar sentiment towards me. However, even though I had the opportunity to interact with these players, I felt I had an obligation to reach out and welcome the new players. I believe this sense of obligation came from the combined elements of my social identity, personality, and values.

The sociological imagination refers to the interplay between an individual's experience in relation to the larger society (Mills, 1959). Mills indicates that society shapes the person, and at the same time, the person shapes the society. Thus, we can see the interplay in my scenario, that being Spikeball. It can be seen that the individual players are affecting the social group and the team is influencing the players. Within the context of my sociological imagination, the same dynamics at this Spikeball practice can also be seen in the way students interact with each other around campus. For example, it is common knowledge that freshmen do not typically run in the same circles, or friend groups, as upperclassmen. However, the discovery of common characteristics, such as intellect, athletic ability, or social connections can alter those social norms. These social dynamics can be observed in the freshmen with the higher skill level, who have more interactions with the upperclassmen on the team. These students, both while playing Spikeball and around campus, can get pulled out of their typical activities because they have something that sets them apart. It is worth recognizing the sense of unity and the social bonds that can be found over a common interest or skill. As a part of my team, we can agree to come together over our love for Spikeball and our school pride, representing the GCU Lopes.

The most important takeaway I got from this experience is the importance of treating everyone with the same level of respect and kindness. Regardless of age, seniority, or

skill level, I do everything in my power to make people feel seen and included. This applies as a member of the Spikeball team and as a student roaming around campus. My sociological imagination allows me to see the impact my actions have on other people and the culture I live in and vice-versa. Fostering that sense of community is critical in creating healthy social dynamics among fellow students by modeling positive behavior for future generations.

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My Back Breaking Social Self

by Grace Wahl, Red Lodge, MT
Class of 2025

Let me let you in on a little secret; my entire life I have struggled with trying to fit in. It is not that I wanted to be average or that I did not want to be the best; I did not want to stand out. I despised the feeling of having all eyes on me, so I did everything I could to blend in with the crowd. I would work endlessly to keep up with the latest trends, use the popular language, arrive to events at just the perfect time—not too early, but never late. In attempting to do what society was telling me was average, I was destroying my spirit and was exhausted more than I wished to admit. It was not till I took a step back and looked at how I was living, that I finally saw that conforming to society's unspoken rules was no way to live. These rules were making me miserable, and yet I still tried my best to follow them to a T.

At the time, there was a battle between who I strived to be, and who society framed me to be. My social self and my desired personal identity were not aligned, and I had to do something before the damage on my character was irreparable. The social self refers to the self-presentation "that an individual may exhibit when in contact with other people." This may contrast a person's "real self" or personal identity (APA, 2020). In George H. Mead's "development of the self," he introduces the me as "that set of attitudes appropriated by the individual" (Deininger, 2000, p.3). The social self, developed through society's expectations, attitudes, and values, is a version of me, but not the me at heart. This was and still is closely knit with George H. Mead's "concept of the I," a person's unique identity and responses. Society's expectations, values, rules, and social norms help to keep social order, and develop the social self, while I, or the me at heart, is a completely different person. It was this incongruence between my I and me that was causing internal conflict. There is nothing society hates more than having an odd character challenging the social norms of fitting in. Although society needs this system to work, it is an enemy of individual expressions that are benefiting society by moving it forward. So, you can see that if no one were to deviate from the social norm, social progression would never take place.

Learning that my personal development was being guided by society's influence was eye opening. As much as I wanted to fit into a community, there was a part of me that aspired to be exceptional and change the world. Average has never changed the world,

and never will. If everyone were average, we would be stuck in the Stone Age. How could I combat this rooted force of society, that was trying to get me to conform? Only one word can characterize this subject: deconstruction. This theory and tool of analysis was introduced by the philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose theory was meant to question social structures in order to find the purpose behind them. The goal is not necessarily to "dismantle" what exists, but to question how it came to be and why. I applied this concept to how I was currently living. Deconstructing my life and seeing what fed my determination was a messy process that involved reflection beyond measure. My entire life, I was driven by what others would think of me, correcting myself so that I would fit into others' molds. Although, when I reflected on my favorite moments in life, the times I found pride and joy for who I was, I saw that I was not living by society's standards; I was living for myself and doing what was going to make me proud and lead a life worth living.

To again underline the significance of this issue, I describe another story of my errors and the process of my revelation. Conforming to what was socially acceptable at the time was exhausting. I would be ridden with anxiety, continually contemplating my next move. Even if that was as simple as ordering coffee, I would make sure my order was what everyone else was drinking, so maybe I would be considered normal and never cause a scene. It sometimes came to the point where I was doing stuff that was not what I wanted and did not like, but I pushed through. Hopefully from reading this little excerpt of this lifestyle, you can see that living this way is miserable. After reflecting my behaviors, I was finally able to see I was living for the pleasure of the people, and not for the approval of self. After this discovery, I began a life filled with joy for being myself, not for momentary happiness that comes when you get good news or approval from the internet; a lasting feeling of happiness.

So, to all of us people out there that are living as a perfectly fitting part in the perfectly constructed machine of society, I encourage you to take a step back; do some deconstruction of your own. Are you living how you want to? Are you proud of your actions day to day? Or are you acting a certain way so that you can fit in? Letting your social self conform to society keeps culture running smoothly, but does it keep us from moving forward? These are questions that I asked myself, and I ask you to do the same. I leave you with one last question, and I ask you to consider this: Are your actions helping you move forward?

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The New Kid on the Block

by Jana Moberly, Gurnee, IL

Class of 2023

It is four o'clock in the afternoon on Aug. 27, 2021. I am at my house in Gurnee, Illinois, just north of Chicago, packing last-minute things into my car, eagerly waiting for my mom to get home from work so we can begin our road trip to Arizona. Finally, it is just past five o'clock and my mom and I are 10 minutes into our 28-hour drive. A day and a half later we arrive in Phoenix, Arizona; I know, crazy fast right? Finally, after arriving, I am moving into my apartment on Grand Canyon University's campus. With the initial stress of moving in and first week of classes over, I am stressing over my first day of work at a new job. I have been the "new kid" before, everyone has, like the first day of high school, where everyone, myself included, is unfamiliar with the building. Then there are the times when you enter a new and unknown environment and cannot help but wonder if you might have entered a parallel universe. These feelings are the same that I felt when I walked into Palm Beach Tan, an indoor tanning facility in Scottsdale, Arizona, for the first time.

It is never easy being the new kid in an environment. We have all experienced anxious and stressful feelings about the first day, whether that be at school, work, or a new neighborhood, but it is the expectations and 'what ifs' that are often overpowering. Starting a new job entails not only getting to know your new coworkers and adjusting to your surroundings, but also learning and assimilating into what seems like a new culture. I was fortunate enough to work at a Palm Beach Tan in Illinois over the summer, so I was accustomed to the tanning salon lifestyle. Even with that previous experience, the first few weeks in this location challenged me in ways I did not anticipate or plan for. For as long as I can remember, everything in my life has always been given a score telling me how well I did along with quick feedback that helped me grow, but in this case, I did not receive this rapid response. This, I believe, was the most difficult aspect of starting this new job. I kept trying to remind myself that in a few weeks I would be looked at as just a regular employee, and everything would be normal.

Using my background in sociology, I moved past this challenge and within a few weeks, I was friends with my peers, and finally felt that I was part of the family. I was inspired to go beyond myself and consider the larger picture of this society. This concept can be described as the sociological imagination, which is the capacity to understand the background that determines your judgments as well as the behaviors

of others (McQuarie & McQuarte, 1989). My focus of the sociological imagination is to understand how society and present-day interactions shaped me or how, from my perspective, I shaped society and everyday interactions to work in my own lifestyle. By applying this concept, a link is created between my own experiences and society. My sociological imagination is important because it helped me to better recognize and evaluate various parts of society rather than just existing in it mindlessly. By addressing this, I was able to adapt to and consider the idea that almost every problem an individual faces is affected by society and a problem that is shared by others. I believe there is a sense of validity someone can find in this, just like me. Every challenge that an individual confronts is unlikely to be specific and unique to them. In this manner, adopting a sociological imagination allows you to examine yourself and your community from a distance; the idea to perceive oneself as a component of bigger systems, just like everyone else.

I hope after reading this, you have realized that everyone has to be the new kid at some point in their careers, and that is OK. It is usually a difficult position that needs some intentional and skillful maneuvering to navigate the first few days, if not months. When the first few days of my new job were tough, I would go home and look in the mirror and say to myself, "You did not work hard enough…you did not try hard enough," but then the realization comes that it is not just me; I am involved in a larger social world that I play a part in and it is reshaping the perception I have of myself. Learning the importance of connecting with others, the larger society, is the most important takeaway that I got from this experience, and I hope you found the same. Being the new kid at work taught me that every new relationship you form adds more support to you, as a person, and that could be support in any aspect of your life. I learned that asking questions, listening to other people's perspectives and stories, using my talents to assist others with their projects, and not being scared to open myself to a new work environment served as vital skills to have. While being treated like the new kid may appear to be just personal, there are many societal factors that play a role. Imagine them in a bond with one another: it is not that people do not have free will, it is that everyone is both an outcome of their society and an independent individual that is affecting society.

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