

SOCIOLOGY 097 DEATH AND DYING

Prof. John B. Williamson
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Fall 2007: Tu & Th 3:00 to 4:15
Class Room: Cushing 209

TA: David Harker (HARKERD@bc.edu)

Office Hours (JBW)
Monday: 4:30-5:30
Thursday: 4:30-5:30
or by appointment

If you want to meet with the TA for the course, please e-mail him to set up an appointment or make an appointment when you see him in class.

This course presents an overview of the major issues, themes, and controversies in the death and dying literature. Historical, cultural, ethical, and psychological aspects are considered, but the emphasis is on sociological dimensions and perspectives. As this is a core course, it has been designed to introduce you to sociology by emphasizing the sociological approach to these issues and by contrasting the sociological approach to that reflected in several other approaches including the historical approach, the psychological approach, the philosophical approach, and the like. One goal of this course is to introduce you to the history and methodology of the discipline of sociology. Toward that end you will be reading and I will give a number of lectures that put these issues in historical context. Where appropriate we will link discussion of these issues to classical studies in sociology. One such example, will be our discussion of Durkheim's very important work on suicide. The course will also expose students to a range of different methodological approaches used in sociological research including historical analysis, cross-cultural analysis, qualitative field studies, the analysis of aggregate data, and survey research.

There are a number of other goals we seek to achieve in a core course such as this. One is to integrate material from culturally diverse perspectives. Toward this end we will be discussing how death related beliefs and practices in the United States differ from those in other countries around the world. We will draw on anthropological resources for similar reasons. Where appropriate we will highlight gender and race differences.

The course will offer an opportunity to formulate, analyze, and deepen your own opinions on a number of issues. This will be particularly true with respect to our discussions of suicide, euthanasia, and medical ethics. The goal is to help you work out your own personal philosophy with respect to many death-related practices and ethical issues. My hope is to get you to rethink some of your taken for granted views on such issues. You may end up rethinking some of your views about American funerals when you find out how people in Borneo react when told about American practices. You may end up rethinking your views about how to deal with grief after an analysis of the consequences of some of the alternatives. You will be given the opportunity to work on your personal philosophy with respect to doctor assisted suicide and euthanasia for the terminally ill. You will be asked to work out your personal philosophy with respect to a number of ethical issues we as a society are confronted with such as whether or not to keep those who have been declared brain dead biologically alive so that parts can be transplanted over subsequent days, weeks, months, or years. You will also be asked to evaluate the evidence with respect to near death experiences and assess what impact, if any, this evidence has on your own thinking about afterlife.

In this course we deal with a number of what can be called perennial questions. The topic of death itself is one of these issues. In our analysis of death related issues and ethical questions we will touch on many death related perennial questions as: To what extent are our beliefs about

death social constructions and the product of our culture? Is there a best way to die or will what is an appropriate way to die vary a great deal from one person to another? To what extent are our lives driven by our need to deny the reality that each of us will one day die? Is it preferable to die at home or in a hospital or in a hospice? How extreme can the reaction to the death of a loved one be and still be considered within the realm of normal? How do children form their conceptions of death and how do those conceptions change over time? Is suicide ever justified? Is euthanasia ever justified? Is the death penalty ever justified? Do we survive death?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Mid-Term Exam** (40% of course grade) (**Thursday, March 13**) (essay & objective exam on Topics 1, 2, & 3)
2. **Final Exam** (40% of grade) (**Monday, May 12 @ 12:30**)
3. **In-class essays** (20% of grade). Periodically brief unannounced essays will be assigned in class. Sometimes they will be announced in advance. All will be written in class. There will be 14 such essays during the term. Your grade will be based on the best 10 of the essays that you do. Each will be graded 0 or 1. That means that each person will be able miss up to 4 of the essays without any loss of credit. However, it also means that it will be very difficult to get permission to make up essays missed beyond the first four. The reason for allowing you to drop 4 essays is to do away with the need for notes from doctors and the like. If, for example, you miss 5 essays you will need such notes from your coach or doctor for every essay missed, not just the 5th essay. Thus to be safe each time you do miss an essay if you think there is any chance that the number will get up over 4, you do need to keep very thorough documentation (including phone numbers for me to call). You would then turn all of the documentation in at the end of the semester and that that point I will decide whether the case is strong enough to allow at least some credit for any missed essays above the standard 4. If you are at all unclear about what I plan to do, please come to see me or the TA. If you end up with full credit (i.e. credit for 10 or more essays) you get an A for the in-class essay component of the course. However, the grade for this component of the course drops one grade level for each essay under 10. So if you have credit for 9 essays your grade will be A-, if 8 it will be B+, if 7 it will be B, etc.

WHAT IF YOU MISS AN EXAM?

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE NOT PRESENT FOR AN EXAM? If you remember there is an exam while the exam is still in progress, come directly to class and speak to me. Under most circumstances it will be possible to work something out with no loss of time to take the exam or loss of credit. If you are unable to do that, as soon as you are aware that you have missed the exam (or know that you are going to miss an exam), **immediately** contact me. There will generally be a penalty for missing an exam with the size of the penalty a function of the reason for missing the exam unless you are in the hospital, on an athletic team playing out of town, etc. I do not give permission to take an exam early or to take it late even when you have several exams on the same day or have purchased a non-refundable air ticket, etc. If the reason you miss the class is a medical emergency, bring a note from the appropriate medical person with a name and a phone number for me to call. If the reason is a funeral, please provide an explanation of the relationship (e.g. my grandmother), the name and phone number of one of your parents, and a copy of the obituary. Exceptions will be made for athletes who must be away for games so long as they have letters from their coaches, have come to see me in advance, and we have agreed to a time and date for the make-up before exam day.

REQUIRED TEXTS: (All three books will be in BC bookstore.)

1. *Death & Dying SC 097* (THE COURSE PACKET OF READINGS FOR SC097) by John Williamson
2. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (Bantam Books edition 1981) by Leo Tolstoy
3. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Doubleday, 1997) by Mitch Albom

In addition to the readings listed below it is likely that a few additional full-length articles and a few short articles will be distributed be-mail during the semester or put on reserve at O'Neill Library.

TOPIC 1: FINISH THIS READING BY JAN 29 (More specific dates will be given in class)

**INTRODUCTION: DIMENSIONS OF DEATH
HISTORICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
AIDS**

- * 1. "The Personification of Death" (Ch. 1)
by Robert Kastenbaum
- * 2. "The Pornography of Death"(Ch. 3)
by Geoffrey Gorer
- * 3. "Death in Popular Culture" (Ch. 4)
by Michael C. Kearl
- * 4. "The Terror of Death" (Ch. 5)
by Ernest Becker
- * 5. "Western Attitudes toward Death" (Ch. 6)
by Philippe Ariès
- * 6. "The Black Death as a Major Event in World History" (Ch. 7)
by Yves Renouard
- * 7. "Dependants: Orphans and the Elderly" (Ch. 50)
by Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside
- * 8. "Facing Life with a Lethal Gene"
by Amy Harmon (Ch. 51)

**TOPIC 2: FINISH THIS READING BY FEBRUARY 12
THE TERMINAL PHASE OF LIFE
DYING IN VARIOUS SETTINGS**

- 9. *Tuesdays with Morrie* (read the entire book)
by Mitch Albom
- ** 10. *On Death and Dying*, Chapters III and IV (On reserve at O'Neill as two separate articles)
by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
- * 11. "The Ritual Drama of Mutual Pretense" (Ch. 13)
by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss
- * 12. "Death, Uses of a Corpse, and Social Worth" (Ch. 14)
by David Sudnow
- ** 13. "Dying in a Total Institution: The Case of Death in Prison"
by Francis D. Glamser and Donald A. Cabana
- * 14. "Hospice Care for the 1990s: A Concept Coming of Age" (Ch 16)
by Marian Gentile and Maryanne Fello

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**TOPIC 3: FINISH THIS READING BY FEBRUARY 26
FUNERAL PRACTICES AND MORTUARY RITUALS**

- 15. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (entire story, skip the introduction by Blythe)
by Leo Tolstoy
- * 16. "The American Way of Death" (Ch. 17)
by Jessica Mitford
- ** 17. "Shroudland Revisited"
by Jessica Mitford
- * 18. "Public Behavior in the Funeral Home" (Ch. 18)
by Vanderlyn Pine
- * 19. "Death Be Not Strange" (Ch. 10)
by Peter Metcalf
- **20. "How Different Religions Pay Their Final Respects"
by William J. Whalen

*Readings marked with an asterisk can be found in the COURSE PACKET OF READINGS FOR SC097

**These items are on reserve O'Neill Library. In most cases if it is an article, it can be downloaded. If it is not listed for downloading, check with the reserve desk at O'Neill about how to do it.

TOPIC 4: FINISH THIS READING BY MARCH 18

**GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT
CHILDREN AND DEATH**

- * 21. “Symptomatology and the Management of Acute Grief” (Ch. 19)
by Erich Lindemann
- * 22. “A Grief Observed” (Ch. 20)
by C. S. Lewis
- * 23. “Disenfranchised Grief” (Ch. 22)
by Kenneth J. Doka
- * 24. “Worlds of Dying Children and Their Well Siblings” (Ch. 24)
by Myra Bluebond-Langner
- * 25. “The Death of a Child” (Ch. 26)
by Beverly Raphael

**TOPIC 5: FINISH THIS READING BY APRIL 17
MEDICAL ETHICS, EUTHANASIA, and SUICIDE**

- ** 26. “Doctor, I Want to Die. Will You Help Me?” (also read Commentary by Pellegrino)
by Timothy E. Quill
- * 27. “The Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Program” (Ch. 29)
by Robert Jay Lifton
- * 28. “Harvesting the Dead” (Ch. 30)
by Willard Gaylin
- ** 29. “Body Recycling”
by Kelly Joyce and John B. Williamson
- ** 30. “The Abortion Issue in the United States”
by Michael C. Kearl
- * 31. “Egoistic Suicide” (Ch. 31)
by Emile Durkheim
- **32. “The Truth about Jonestown”
by Keith Harray
- **33. “The First Official Human Bomb”
by Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase

**TOPIC 6: FINISH THIS READING BY APRIL 29
VIOLENT DEATH**

- ** 34. “Rwanda—The Legacy of Inequality”
by Neil Kressel
- ** 35. “Capital Punishment in the United States”
by Stephanie Picolo Manzi

**TOPIC 7: FINISH THIS READING BY MAY 1
BEYOND DEATH & TOPICS TO BE ANNOUNCED**

- * 36. “Near-Death Experiences: New Evidence for Survival?” (Ch. 41)
by Robert Kastenbaum
- * 37. “The Postself” (Ch. 43)
by Edwin S. Shneidman

*Readings marked with an asterisk can be found in the COURSE PACKET.

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OPTIONAL TERM PAPER GUIDELINES

The following are my suggestions about how to go about doing your optional term paper for this course. Length: 4,000 to 5,000 words. Use the word count facility in your word processing program to do the counting and count the references as well as the words in the body of the paper.

1. Pick a topic that will provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate your ability to do sociological analysis. This means using sociological concepts, asking sociological questions, using sociological sources, etc. For those with limited background in sociology I would urge you to take a look at one of the basic textbooks in introductory sociology that I have placed on reserve for this course such as: *Sociology* by Calhoun, Light, & Keller (HM 51. C282 1997), *Sociology* by Robertson (HM51.R68 1987) or *Sociology* by Macionis (HM 586.M33 2001). What are you looking for? Answer: sociological concepts, issues, and questions.
2. How do you pick a topic and what do you read about that topic? **Go to the journal DEATH STUDIES** and select one or two articles on a topic of interest to you published in 2005, 2006, or 2007. Make a copy of that article (or those two articles). Then select 8 or more citations from this article (or those articles) that you will use and cite in your paper. They must be sources that you can get from resources at BC. These are the sources that you will use for your paper. You may add an additional 1 or 2 sources obtained in other ways on your topic as well. This set of rules must be strictly followed.
3. **START YOUR PAPER EARLY IN THE SEMESTER! I say this because you may need several weeks to get some books or articles on interlibrary loan.**
4. Decide who you are going to meet with to discuss your paper, me or the TA for the course. See the same person each time you come in to discuss your paper so you do not end up with conflicting advice.
5. **We will not count or even grade a paper that is turned in without following the rules outlined in point #2 above or without the extensive consultation outlined here. If your paper is to be graded, it must meet the following conditions: (1) You will have to come in once to get your proposed topic approved. Bring to this first meeting the one or two articles from the journal titled DEATH STUDIES and a list of the other 8 sources from those articles that you plan to use for your paper. However, this first visit is not enough. (2) You will have to come in a second time after you have done all your reading for the paper to convince us that you have an adequate mastery of the books and articles your paper will be based on and you will be citing. Bring a copy of the article that you are using as the source for your references and give it to me or the TA you are consulting with. Feel free to bring the books, articles, or your notes on the reading you did to this second meeting (it will be open book). This is just a check to make sure you did do the reading your paper will be based on. We do not expect you to remember all the details in those readings. When you turn in the final paper specify who you met with for both of these two meetings. Put that person's name on the title page.**
6. Review the checklist that I have provided on the next page before you start and then again after you have prepared your first draft. You may want to ask a friend to use this checklist to give you some honest feedback on your paper. You will note many of the points in the checklist apply to both library research papers or to empirical papers, but some are primarily relevant to a library research paper.
7. There are many ways to write a sociological paper. It is possible to bring sociological concepts, theories, ideas, questions, and issues to the analysis of a set of articles that are not themselves sociological.
8. Use the ASA (American Sociological Association) citation style For help see the following website: www.buffalostate.edu/library/research/asa.pdf . You are also welcome to use the official APA citation style if you like (but you must say that is what you are doing). For this style see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.
9. **The potential credit for the term paper will be as follows: A paper grade of A (which will be very rare) will increase one exam grade below A by one grade level (e.g. B+ to A-) or increase one exam grade below B by two grade levels; an A- will increase one exam grade below A- by one grade level or increase any exam grade below B- by two grade levels; a B+ paper will increase one exam grade below B+ by one grade level or increase one exam grade below C+ by two grade levels; a paper grade of B will increase one exam below B by one grade level or an exam below C by two grade levels; a B- will increase one exam below B- by one grade level. If the grade on the term paper is below B- there will be no extra credit.**
10. Be sure to submit an electronic copy of your paper to both me and the TA. In addition submit a hard copy of your paper to the person you consulted with.
11. To be eligible to write the optional term paper for the course, you need to have your topic approved by **Thursday, April 17** at the latest and you are strongly urged to get it approved by mid October. The due date for the term paper will be **Thursday, May 1 at 3pm**. There will be a grade reduction of one grade level for each additional day the paper is turned in after that date. Late papers will be reduced by one grade level for each day late and permission to turn in a late paper must be approved in advance of the May 1 due date.

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12. If any of these instructions are in any way unclear to you, please talk to me or to a course TA before you start work on your term paper.

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CHECKLIST FOR SC097 TERM PAPERS

The following are some of the criteria that we will be using when we evaluate your term papers for SC097. Please ask about any of these criteria that you do not understand. You must familiarize yourself with and abide by the official BC rules with respect to academic integrity. Please spend some time checking out the information at the following website: <http://www.bc.edu/integrity> . Any paper written for this course must be written by you, be original to this course, be done only for this course, and not be a revised version of a paper (or thesis) done for a different course.

1. Is this an interesting paper?
2. Does the author demonstrate an ability to think about this issue sociologically?
3. Does the author demonstrate a capacity for analytical thinking? (Analytic thinking refers to your ability to go beyond mere synthesis of what others have to say on the topic. It refers to the ability to see the major issues, see flaws in an author's reasoning, to combine the ideas and evidence in such a way as to bring new insights.)
4. Is the paper well organized?
5. Does the paper have a strong introduction?
6. Does the paper have a strong conclusion?
7. Does the author correctly cite sources? Are each of the items mentioned in the references at the end of the paper also cited in the body of the paper? Is the standard citation and reference format of ASA (American Sociological Association) or APA (American Psychological Association) used consistently and accurately?
8. Does the author tend to use impressive sources? Where academic sources are called for are strong sources used (e.g. a professional monograph is more impressive than a basic textbook for undergraduates, a journal article is more impressive than a magazine article, etc.)?
9. Does the author make good use of sources? Are the sources used as a source of data or evidence to support arguments?
10. Are there few if any spelling errors in the paper?
11. Are there few if any grammar errors?
12. Is the writing clear?
13. Does the paper flow well? As the reader moves from paragraph to paragraph is there a logical progression?
14. Are paragraphs about one topic or does the author end up discussing several quite different topics in the same paragraph?
15. Be sure to submit both a hard copy and an electronic copy of your paper (as an e-mail attachment).