An Introduction to Microsociology:
Theories and Methods for the Study of Face-to-Face Interaction

Course Description
Even as we might imagine our world in terms of societies, nations, and cultures – large-scale entities that act as independent agents – the social world is, ultimately, based in the continuous interactions between and among individuals. This course is intended to focus on the sociological approach to the study of these face-to-face interactions that (re)produce our social world. We begin with an examination of the approaches to social action in classical sociological theory and then look at how microsociological approaches have developed within social interactionism, performance theory, the sociology of knowledge, and sociolinguistics. We conclude with a consideration of how we might connect these microsociological approaches with a broader, macro understanding of social life.

Course Objectives
The primary goal of the course is to gain familiarity with the various theories and methods within the subfield of microsociology. Through the readings and class discussion, students will be expected to engage with and interrogate these different approaches. We will examine how the approaches can be practically applied to actual face-to-face interactions and students will be required to analyze social interactions from their own observations.

Required Texts
Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*
Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*
Course Reader

Course Requirements
Participation & Attendance: 20%
6 Mini-Research Projects: 30%
Final Paper: 50%

Participation and Attendance
Participation and attendance will be an important part of this class. Students will be expected to complete the readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. In addition, we will use the experiences from the mini-research projects in our discussions of the various theories and methods and students will be required to contribute with their experiences in these discussions. The attendance policy for the course follows university policy.

Mini-Research Projects
The course is designed to introduce students not only to the ideas within microsociology, but also the various methods used to study social interactions. Through the mini-research projects, students will have an opportunity to experiment with these different methods and use these experiences to inform their understanding of the various approaches. Students will be required to identify and study a particular form of social interaction from the perspective of the different approaches we cover in the course. Students may choose to study the same social interaction from different approaches or use different types of interactions for each approach. Students should begin their study as they start the applicable readings and be prepared to introduce the study in class. Following the completion of the given approach, students must submit a short paper (minimum of 3 pages) that analyzes the interaction with the approach.

Final Paper
For the final paper, students will be expected to expand upon one or more of the mini-research projects from the course. Students may opt to work on the research paper in teams of two or individually. If two students work on the same project, they will each be required focus on a different approach for the same interaction or a different interaction for the same approach and then present a comparison of their findings.

Research Ethics & the Institutional Review Board
Part of this class will involve the observation social interactions, and, therefore, we will need to follow the ethical guidelines for social research. As researchers, we must not cause harm to the subjects of study, respect their right to privacy, and avoid research that involves a conflict of interest. It is important to understand the guidelines for research that requires review by an Institutional Review Board. For the purposes of this class, I encourage you to conduct research that is exempt from this review: (1) research that involves the observation of public behavior where individual identification is not recorded and there is neither risk of harm nor information gathered that contains sensitive aspects of others' behavior, or (2) the use of existing data that is publicly available. We will discuss these guidelines over the course of the semester; however, if you have questions regarding these guidelines or are interested in pursuing a project outside of the above parameters, please speak with me.

Late Work Policy
All work is due by 5:00 pm on the day indicated in the syllabus, unless otherwise amended by me. Only university-recognized excuses will allow for late work to be submitted without penalty. Otherwise, work handed in past the deadline will be penalized with an automatic 5% reduction in grade for each day late.

Course Schedule
(Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are in the Course Reader and on Reserve)

PART I: THE STUDY OF SOCIAL (INTER)ACTION
Week 1
Readings: *Max Weber, "Basic Sociological Terms" from *Economy and Sociology*, pp 3-62

Week 2
Readings: *Georg Simmel, "Fundamental Problems of Sociology" from *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* pp 3-57; "The Stranger" and "The Metropolis and Mental Life" from *On Individuality and Social Forms*, pp 143-149, 324-339

Week 3
Readings: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*
*Barry Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of the Gift," *American Journal of Sociology*, 73: 1-11

PART II: SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM
Week 4
Readings: *George Herbert Mead, "The Self" from *Mind, Self, and Society*, pp 135-226
Due: Assignment 1

Week 5
Readings: *Herbert Blumer, "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism" from *Symbolic Interactionism*, pp 1-60
*Sheldon Stryker and Peter Burke, "The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63: 284-297.

PART III: SOCIAL INTERACTION AS PERFORMANCE
Week 6
Readings: Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, pp 1-105
Due: Assignment 2

Week 7
Readings: Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, pp 106-end

PART IV: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY
Week 8
Readings: Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, pp 1-128
Due: Assignment 3

Week 9
Readings: Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, pp 129-end
*Eviatar Zerubavel, "Islands of Meaning" from *The Fine Line*, pp

PART V: LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL LIFE
Week 10
Readings: *Dell Hymes, "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life" from *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, pp 35-71

* Harold Garfinkel, "Remarks on Ethnomethodology" from *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, pp 310-324
*William Labov & Joshua Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience" from *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, pp 12-44

Due: Assignment 4

Week 11

Readings: *Robin Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place," *Language in Society* 2(1): 45-80
*Thomas Scheff, "Meaning, Context, and Interpretation" and "Microlinguistics: A Theory of Social Action" from *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion and Social Structure*, pp 35-51, 96-116

PART VI: RECONCILING SELF AND STRUCTURE

Week 12

Readings: *Anthony Giddens, "Elements of the Theory of Structuration" and "Structuration Theory, Empirical Research and Social Critique" from *Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration*, pp 1-40, 281-333

Due: Assignment 5 and the Final Paper topic

Week 13

Readings: *Pierre Bourdieu, "The Critique of Economy of Practices" from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp 97-225
*Karl Marton, "Habitus," *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts,* pp 43-66
*Patricia Thomson, "Field," *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, pp 67-84

Week 14

Readings: Jeffrey Alexander "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory*, 22(4): 527-573
Barry Smart, "On the Disorder of Things: Sociology, Postmodernity and the End of the Social," *Sociology*, 24(3): 397-416

PART VII: CONCLUSION

Week 15

Due: Assignment 6

Final paper due one week from the last class.