**My Sociological Imagination Journal**

 **By Arthur Gandy P00434737**

 **(SOC 110) (00B) Dr. Erica Hill-Yates**

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This Sociological Imagination Journal has been written as a requirement for Dr. Erica Hill-Yates online Intro to Sociology course at Delaware County Community College. The following pages have been written in response to the prompt:

*SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION JOURNAL (SIJ)-SUBMIT DURING WEEK SEVEN*

During some of the lectures I will pose a single question or more for you to reflect upon. You should answer these questions in short essay form. These reflection papers are not formal essays rather, they are an opportunity to share your thoughts on questions I pose to you based on the lectures, readings and the films and/or videos presented in the class.

These responses should be labeled SIJ-Reflection #\_\_\_. For instance, after the first lecture you will see a slide that will ask you to consider some questions; you should answer the questions and then label that paper SIJ-Reflection #1. During week seven you will submit **ALL** of your reflection papers together properly labeled as **ONE** file via Webstudy.

**SIJ-Reflection #1 - The Sociological Imagination**

How have I been shaped by society? The demographic of where I grew up was probably the main contributing factor of how I was shaped by society. I lived in a lower income household in a lower income neighborhood and attended a multicultural elementary school, where the majority of students were black and white children. The town was segregated, blacks lived on the south side of town and whites lived on the north. The town was literally divided by train tracks. Christianity was the dominant religion and therefore I was indoctrinated in those religious beliefs.

What social forces have impacted my life? I believe that the Internet and social media have made the world a smaller place, where people from different continents can communicate with the click of a mouse. I often wonder if social media brings people closer or pulls us farther apart, whereas I have noticed in while in public people interact more with their smartphones and less with people around them. I have even witnessed couples on dates, ignoring each other while paying attention to their phones. Social media is still relatively new, so I am unsure whether it is a good or bad thing. However, I do believe its not good for society when people prioritize a device over actual human interaction. I also believe that it is not good for society when people would prefer to video a street fight instead of helping the individual who is being victimized. Though in different ways, I believe that my parents’ and grandparent’s generations have also been impacted by the Internet and social media. My grandfather often complains about his grandchildren being anti-social and obsessed with their phones. A friend of mine who is in his late sixties asked me to help him with his resume and completing an online application. “Whatever happened to paper applications and handing your resume to an employer in person?” he asked. For some people changes can evoke excitement, where as changes can evoke fear in others.

I don’t believe that the invention of the Internet and social media wouldn’t be different if I grew up outside of the United States, unless I grew up in a country that doesn’t have access to the web. Perhaps I would use the Internet differently if I grew up in another country. Perhaps if education was not available, I would use the internet more for educational purposes and less for purposes of entertainment. Of coarse things would be different if I grew up in another time period as the Internet wouldn’t have existed yet. My grandfather is all the evidence I need for defending that perspective as he says that he has no use for a computer. I even remember when my father was working as a graphic designer in the nineteen nineties and his company decided they were going to shift from drawing on drafting boards to utilizing computers and software such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. My father was panicked over the change, though he learned and mastered the computer and software. Perhaps social forces are a matter of perspective. They’re impact maybe different to the individual based on how they’ve been shaped by society.

**SIJ-Reflection #2 - Questions about the Nacirema**

 The Nacirema people live in a culture of sickness, more so than a culture of health. The people are encouraged to believe that they are ugly. I was not surprised when I discovered whom the Nacimera people were, because I had noticed, in the title of the article, that “Nacimera” is “American” spelled backwards.

The article was written from the point of view of an individual who is not familiar with American culture. While reading this perspective I found myself reflecting on my opinion of the Shaman and other cultures that utilize holistic medicines, and how I don’t understand their practices. I thought of medicine men, almost like Native Americans, wearing make up, mixing herbs and chanting to the sound of a buffalo skin drum. Whether or not I am familiar with or understand the practices of other cultures, other cultures aren’t right or wrong. This article offered the perspective of someone from the outside looking in.

I think that some practices and rituals of other cultures may seem odd or foreign if we view them with an ethnocentric perspective, meaning that we use our own culture as the standard to which we judge other groups. Our own cultural norms only affect our understanding and perception of other cultures if we hold other cultures to the standard of our own, unless we recognize cultural differences without being judgmental or assigning value, ***Cultural Relativism***. I believe that all prosperous cultures share the same common themes of family values and community involvement.

**SIJ-Reflection #3 - Cultures**

The four cultures to which I belong are the cultures of skateboarding, hip-hop, graffiti (which is a subculture of hip hop) and what is called “The Hive.” Many people are familiar with skateboarding, hip-hop and graffiti, but The Hive isn’t as well known, so I will clarify. The best way to sum it up would be to compare The Hive to the Dead Head culture (Grateful Dead Fans). The Hive is basically the fan base of a band called 311, a band that fuses punk rock, hip-hop, reggae and dancehall styles. Members of The Hive frequent shows or even follow the band on tour. Members may have 311 tattoos and wear apparel.

The culture that I most clearly identify with would be the culture of skaters, as the other three cultures intersect with skateboarding. Obviously, skaters practice the act of skateboarding with each other. They gather at skate shops, skate parks or public areas that are known to be good spots to skate.

A deviant behavior in the world of skating is interrupting the session of another skater. Skaters should always try to steer clear of each other’s field of skate and respect each other’s space, not only because a session could be ruined, but also because someone could get hurt. Another deviant behavior is discouraging beginners. Sanctioning of the deviant behavior entails the belittlement of the aggressor. The skater practicing deviant behavior is made to look like a fool while the victim is propped up and brought under the wings of the non-deviant majority. Overall, discouraging anyone who skates is not encouraged or condoned by the community as a whole.

The beliefs and attitudes that motivate or underlie these behaviors are mainly tribal in nature. Though skaters may or may not share interests outside of skateboarding, these interest aren’t relevant as the main shared goal is that of encouragement and having a good time. Despite differences, skaters always look out for other skaters in regards to disputes with non-skaters.

Three cultural values of the skater culture are encouragement, risk-taking and respect. On the flipside, discouragement and disrespect are highly frowned upon.

The number one key identifier that let’s outsiders know that a person is a skater is the skateboard, though the skateboard may not always be on one’s person. Other key indicators may be skateboard brand apparel, patches, or stickers. Many outsiders may not always recognize these symbols or correlate them with skateboarding. These logos actually help skaters identify or recognize each other. With the world of skateboarding being much more mainstream in the present day than it was in its fetal years (late 1970’s – early 1980’s), many people who aren’t a part of the culture may be able to identify such symbols.

**SIJ-Reflection #4 - The Dalits**

The Dalits are the outcasts of Indian society, the untouchables. The Dalits are said to be untouchable because it is the collective belief of the caste system that they aren’t clean. In the Indian society it is believed that these oppressed people are unworthy of a quality life because they have lived unrighteous lives in past carnations. The Dalits are born outside of the caste system and can do little to nothing to better their situation.

The Dalits work the least desirable jobs such as cleaning the villagers’ linens, working the stone quarry, and spinning thread for the making of linens. Dalit children are forced into labor. The Dalits work for little to nothing, being paid rupees in advance, yet their wages are spent on survival and they rarely have enough money left over to make good on their debts. They become stuck in their positions of labor by becoming debt slaves to the employer. The Dalits are promised the gift of going to heaven for working the least desirable of jobs. They are dependent on others for survival and therefor must follow orders and commands.

Those in the caste look at the Dalits as lesser beings. The Dalits believe that their work is their destiny. The Priests are some of the highest in the caste. Why watching the video about the Dalits, I was amazed to see how the Priest spoke so horribly about the Dalits. Its astonishing to me how people follow a doctrine that oppresses their fellow men. What blows my mind even further is how the Dalits accept the belief system that enslaves them.

I found the treatment of these people utterly appalling. Just to imagine that there are people in this world who are enslaved over the debt of five dollars is unbelievable. It shows me just how much of a bubble I live in, here in America. I can’t imagine that there aren’t people in the caste system that want to fight for the rights of the Dalits. Perhaps the idea of social rejection is enough to convince those who would stand up for the Dalits to stand down.

I am curious as to the actual belief system of the Hindus. Do they truly believe that the treatment the Dalits endure is justified because of past carnations? If they believed this to be true, would they not worry about their own reincarnation? Would they not worry that they’d be reborn as an outcast as punishment for the way they treated the Dalits? My thoughts are a good example of how we internalize other people’s cultures and judge them based on our own. Maybe I am wrong to judge, in the eyes of sociology, but it is my firm belief that oppression is wrong. Perhaps, in the eyes of sociology, I am wrong for being against oppression. If that makes me wrong, then I don’t want to be right.

These thoughts have me pondering on how ideology has influenced me to turn a blind eye to or rationalize injustices. I tend to view myself as a social justice warrior, though my thoughts never go into action.

**SIJ-Reflection #5 – Race and Ethnicity**

I don’t think I ever realized what race or ethnicity was, I was taught. I attended kindergarten and first grade at a school populated by mostly black and white children. I was aware of the differences in our physical characteristics but it held no relevance to how I viewed my classmates. Some kids had lighter skin and some kids had darker skin. Some kids had straight hair and some kids had curly hair. My two best friends at that time were named Robert and Jevon. We shared interest in the same things; Transformers, He-Man, Thundercats, Michael Jackson’s Thriller album and drawling. We didn’t all have the same hair texture and skin tone. I can’t recall it ever being a topic of discussion.

It wasn’t until the summer after first grade that I learned of race/ethnicity. My parents and I went away for a week to visit family in central Pennsylvania. I remember meeting my cousins for the first time, two twin boys. I told them that they had a nice tan. My mother and their mother laughed and explained to me that their father was black and their mother was white. Up until that point I thought people were either tan or darker tan. Around the age of 8, Jimmy moved to my neighborhood. Jimmy and I became best friends. Jimmy’s family was Italian and I just thought that they were the coolest family ever. When I asked my mother what we were she always replied with the same thing, “We are Heinz 57 flavors. We are a mix of everything. I don’t know what we are.” My mother lost both of her parents at a young age and she was unsure of what countries her ancestors came from but she always spoke of the summer that she and her siblings lived with her Aunt and Uncle on an Amish farm and bathed outside in metal basins.

Discussing issues of race makes me feel excited. I love to debate the issue, mainly because I believe that there is only one race, the human race. I also love hearing other people’s perspectives and better understanding and experiencing other cultures.

I recently had a conversation with a friend about how being a minority in America makes him conscious of his skin tone. It really put things in perspective for me because I rarely consider the fact that I am white. I don’t feel like people are judging me because of my skin tone. My skin tone isn’t a focal point of my thoughts. Maybe that is because being white puts me in the majority group in America. I’m unsure if my skin tone has played a relevant part on how I’ve experienced life so far, as experience is perceptual to the individual. Perhaps I just explained white privilege?

Growing up in my household, most traditions were religious; Christmas, Easter, Lent, etc… We also celebrated the Fourth of July, New Year, Halloween and Thanksgiving. I think the tradition I cherish the most is decorating the Christmas Tree and celebrating birthdays.

As a kid I spent a lot of time at my buddy Jimmy’s house. Jimmy’s family didn’t have a living room; they had a parlor. They didn’t eat ice cream; they ate ice milk. Spaghetti sauce did not exist in Jimmy’s house; they made gravy. Spaghetti sauce is for “Medigans,” they said. I was taught how to make my own gravy and I still make it to this day. I also love making fresh homemade pasta. Every summer I grow San Marzano tomatoes in my garden. In Jimmy’s house the women called the kids “Mom,” and the men called the kids “Dad.” I call both my sons “Dad.” Jimmy’s mother calls my children “Mom-mom.” To this day Jimmy and I are still really close friends.

I’d have to say that when it comes to other ethnic groups, what really enriches my life is what enriches everyone’s lives… the tradition of sitting down with loved ones to eat. Sharing a meal with someone, the act of nourishing our bodies with others, is an intimate and meaningful thing that is often under appreciated. Music has also enriched my life. Who doesn’t love some good food and good music shared with good people? From Cajun creole and jazz/blues music to Texas BBQ ribs and southern country music… From rice and peas, jerk chicken, fried plantains, curry oxtail, beef patties and reggae music to eggplant parmesan, red wine, sharp provolone cheese and Frank Sinatra… From sweet potato pie, baked macaroni and cheese, chitterlings, collard greens and hip hop/r&b to fish tacos covered in cilantro, green salsa, and reggaeton drum beats… I love it all.

**SIJ-Reflection #6 - Gender**

Gender identity refers to the gender an individual self identifies with. Sex refers to the biology, such as reproductive organs, the body characteristics that determine male and female sexes. Sex refers to the body, where as gender refers to the mind. Gender is masculine, feminine or both. Gender expression refers to the way an individual expresses their self, whether masculine, feminine or both. Gender expression can be seen in the way an individual dresses, how they speak, or through their mannerisms. Gender expression is how people communicate their gender and gender roles with others.

One of the most popular cases to date of an individual in the media spotlight challenging the gender binary is Caitlin Jenner. Once known as the famous American Olympic track star, Bruce Jenner has recently announced to the world that he identifies as a she and is now living as Caitlin Jenner. Though this announcement caused quite the frenzy among the media and public opinion, Caitlin Jenner’s announcement to the world has helped to bridge the gap between the transgender minorities with the majority populous. With such a figure of fame shedding light on the transgender community, many topics have been up for debate such as creating transgender bathrooms for those who identify outside of the gender binary. Caitlin Jenner’s voice has created the conversation needed for the transgender community within America.

Personally, Caitlin Jenner’s story hasn’t taught me anything that I wasn’t aware of already. Being a hairstylist in an industry stereotyped as being for females or gay men, I’ve come to know and befriend many great people in the LBGT community. While working in an industry viewed as feminine in US society’s standards, I’ve seen my gender expression change, whether in an aggressive masculine manner in defense of not being gay, or in a more feminine manner while engaging with female and gay male coworkers.

My childhood socialization shaped my gender identity and expression in many ways. My father was a very masculine role model in regards to society’s standards of masculinity. He taught me how to use tools for crafting things out of wood. Together we engaged in the outdoors, camping and fishing. However, my Father was an artist. He worked in the field of graphic design. Music and the arts were very important in my parent’s household. My father wasn’t the most athletic person, and when I came to the age of wanting to participate on sports teams I had a belief that I was genetically incapable of being athletic. I gravitated towards the artsy crowd and assimilated with those kids.

My mother was super feminine. She was a hairstylist but stayed home and took care of the house and children until we reached the age of school. Her make up was always done nicely and her hair was always styled. She was very nurturing and compassionate.

As cool as everyone thinks Will Smith’s son is, I could never see myself wearing a dress or rocking a man purse. On the contrary, I also said that I’d never wear skinny jeans. If fashion is created by culture, and fashion is used as a means of gender expression, who is to determine what is feminine and what is masculine in regards to fashion? Also, at one point in time women didn’t wear pants. Was it a big ordeal when women started wearing pants? Was it viewed as masculine?

**SIJ-Reflection #7 - Education and Religion**

Religion and education have made significant impact on how I interpreted the world as a child. Both education and religion taught me how to act on the stage of life, the “do’s and do not’s” of the religious and secular world and how to be obedient and follow rule. Religion instilled my internal moral compass. Education fueled the flame of curiosity. Christianity taught me of the threat of damnation in the ever-burning flames of hell, separating the nonbelievers from God for all eternity. It also taught me that Christ died so that all who accept him into their hearts will be forgiven and rewarded with eternal life. The prize of eternal life with God wasn’t as much my prime motivator for following the word of God and the ways of the church, but yet the threat of burning for all eternity was. I found that I was more easily controlled by fear than reward. Perhaps this is a dysfunction of religion, controlling through fear… Or maybe it’s a function?

I remember being in the 5th grade. My Math teacher, Miss Neff had a set of rules for the class. We were not permitted to speak in class unless we were to raise our hands. Miss Neff stated that she did not believe in homework. She’d start the class with a brief lesson, writing on the chalkboard. After the lesson we’d receive our classwork. Unfinished classwork became homework. We were not permitted to ask questions during the lessons. All questions were to be held till the end of the lesson. I constantly fell behind on the lesson because of a lack of understanding. My questions waited till the end of the lesson and I had homework every night. I was one of the few students to ask for help, which made me feel like the stupid kid. I eventually stopped asking for help.

One day, out of frustration, I spoke out during the lesson and said that I didn’t understand. The teacher explained to me that I am not permitted to ask questions till after the lesson and that I must raise my hand if I were to talk. She then asked me to get out of my seat and sit on the floor. I’ll never forget what she said to me as it sticks in my mind like scar. As she walked past me, under her breath she said, “Sit on the floor. That’s where dirt belongs.”

This is an example of Teacher Expectation. From that point on I believed that I was incapable of doing math. I had a fixed mindset from that point forward. “I am stupid and incapable of doing math,” I thought.

Let’s flash forward, twenty-six years later. I registered for DCCC and was dreading the math courses. I was doomed to fail. Going to school part-time taking only two classes per semester, I decided to put math off and take English Comp 100 and Intro to Psychology. In English Composition, [Professor Mangini](http://www.sabatinomangini.com/) taught the class about the fixed mindset, which is the belief that intellect is fixed and an individual cannot become smarter. We also learned about neuroplasticity, the growth mindset and [Paulo Friere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Freire). The growth mindset states that an individual can become smarter through studying. Neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to create new neuro-pathways, is supporting evidence for the growth mindset. Going forward, I was skeptical of my ability to learn algebra, but I kept my new learned information in mind. I placed myself front and center in the classroom and asked questions like a maniac. Of the eight algebra exams that I have taken so far this semester, my lowest grade was a 93, the next grade up was a 98, and I earned over 100 points with extra credit every test since. Professor Mourning-Taylor has given me positive feedback and has gone out of her way to help me understand the material. She gives praise when it’s due and her actions and attitude are a positive example of Teacher Expectation.

While growing up, I believe that religion and education didn’t teach me much in detail of the world outside of the bubble that I live in. If anything, religion and education socialized me to fit in and interact within the perimeters of the society I was born into. They taught me to be an obedient subservient citizen. It is my opinion that religion and education can either be institutions of oppression or institutions of liberation. They can also be tools of stratification.

Sociology has opened my eyes to better understand societies and cultures outside of my own. It has opened my eyes to the social injustices in my own country. That, in its self, is something I cherish and respect the most. I’ve only earned a few credits so far in my college journey, but thus far I have been blessed with Professors that have the passion to liberate students through education.

As far as religion goes, I haven’t practiced or attended a church in a long time. A friend invited me to attend Mosque with him, but I declined. I walk deep into the woods, away from all man made construct, and I feel the presence of the creator. I realize that my relationship with God is personal. I grew up in a Christian household, and I’ve studied many of the world’s religions on my own. I respect the religious beliefs of others. I respect their concern with my eternal wellbeing. I appreciate their attempts of recruitment into their religious organizations. I feel as if the Lord wrote his words deep in my heart. I don’t need a religious book to verify or add credentials to my belief. The words he wrote were personal. They aren’t to be shared in the form of doctrine, or in the form of creating a new religion. The words he wrote in my heart are to be shared through the way in which I treat other human beings.

Overall, education and religion inspire us to either be liberated or oppressed. Stand up, sit down, recite this, recite that, push in your chair, kneel and pray, regurgitate what you’ve been taught. Is the liberator external or internal? Is the oppressor external or internal? I’ll have to ask my looking-glass self.

Whether education or religion, I believe that the fruits of the labor are the testimony of effectiveness. We can slam kids with state testing, but will it prove understanding or prove that they can pass tests? Not every human is 100% the same. We all learn at our own pace and in our own ways. I foresee a future of educational institutions that are less authoritarian and more liberating. It is the inevitable future for education; otherwise education will have no future.