

Introduction to Sociology 101 01  
Practice Essay Questions for Midterm Exam

On Oct 4, 2004, I will eliminate 10 of the questions from this list. The essay question that appears on your midterm exam will be among the remaining four.

1. What are the major historical events that have influenced the biographies of people in your generation? In your parents' generation? What does this tell you about the influence of society and history on biography? Reference the concepts of "troubles" and "issues" (C. Wright Mills, "The Sociological Imagination") in your answer.

2. Allan G. Johnson ("The Forest and the Trees") argues that there is a tendency in the United States for people to explain everything in individual terms. Using the example of divorce, why are individualistic explanations inadequate? What would sociological explanations emphasize instead?

3. What cultural practice among Americans might seem peculiar to someone from outside this society? What is the cultural meaning of that practice? Use Horace Miner ("Body Ritual among the Nacirema") in your answer. What are the global ripple effects of exporting this American cultural practice? You may engage in informed conjecture, but please also reference specific examples from one of the following articles also: "September 11, 2001: Mass Murder and Its Roots in the Symbolism of American Consumer Culture" (George Ritzer), "Barbie Doll Culture and the American Waistland" (Kamy Cunningham), or "Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism" (Walter LaFeber).

4. How do typical practices in advertising reproduce inequality in society? Think about race, class and gender in your answer. Use Jean Kilbourne's article "Buy This 24-Year-Old and Get All His Friends Absolutely Free" and the movie "Merchants of Cool" in your answer.

5. Using the dramaturgical perspective, explain the adult socialization process that occurs when individuals move away to college. Refer to the findings in David Karp et. al.'s article "Leaving Home for College: Expectations for Selective Reconstruction of Self."

6. Based on our discussion of Amy Schultz's article, "Navajo Women and the Politics of Identity," what historical information is important to understanding the construction of identity among another racial-ethnic group? Does it matter if that racial-ethnic group thinks of themselves as a "counter-cultural group?" If so, what effect might that group conception have on their identity construction process that would make it different from "sub-cultural" groups?

7. Discuss how socialization processes lead to differential treatment of men and women, and how these processes impact our own views of this differential treatment. Use examples from the Beal article on skateboarding in your answer.

8. Goffman agreed with William Shakespeare's character's view that "all the world's a stage." Describe Goffman's theory of the "presentation of self in everyday life." Specifically, focus on the idea of roles, of "props," of setting, and "collective representations."

9. From a Goffmanian perspective, explain what a convincing performance of the "code of the street" (Anderson, Elijah) would involve. Be sure to describe verbal and nonverbal behavior, folkways, and other cultural dimensions of this performance. Then review the specific ways Anderson links this street behavior to the social structural conditions of African Americans.

10. According to Boswell and Spade ("Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture: Why are Some Fraternities More Dangerous Places for Women?"), why are some fraternities more dangerous places for women than others?

11. Define and differentiate "strong tie" and "weak tie" networks. Evaluate the usefulness or efficacy of the two types in providing members with health care and emotional support, and useful occupational information and assistance. Refer to Bonnie Erickson's article "Social Networks: The Value of Variety" in your answer.

12. Apply Marx and Engels' theory on the causes of social stratification to the global distribution of poverty. Be sure to discuss the bourgeoisie, proletariat, and the role of ideology in your answer.

13. What is the difference between income and wealth, and why is this difference significant in understanding stratification by race? Please refer to Dalton Conley's article ("Wealth Matters") in your answer.

14. What does Hochschild ("The Nanny Chain") mean by the "globalization of love," and how is this phenomenon linked to the status of women in the United States? In other parts of the world?