SOCIOL 4W03

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**Winter 2023**

**Instructor:** Nick Martino

**Email:** [martinnv@mcmaster.ca](mailto:martinnv@mcmaster.ca)

**Lecture:** Mondays 2:30pm to 5:20pm   
**Room:** BSB B156

**Office:** TBA

**Office Hours:** By appointment **TA:** TBA  
**TA email:**  TBA

# Course Description

This course investigates social problems through a social constructionist and socio-historical framework. In particular, the course will focus on the claims-making activities of various social actors and groups involved in defining and constructing social problems. First, we examine Spector and Kitsuse’s (1977) theory of social problems along with other contributing theorists to understand the ways claims-making activities unfold and how to analyze them. Then, the remainder of the course will examine the empirical research on a variety of historical and contemporary social problems, including pop culture (e.g. music, Disney), gun control, the environment, drug use, medical diagnoses (medicalization), sexuality, racial prejudice, and settler colonialism.

# Course Learning Objectives

This course addresses several University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (<http://cll.mcmaster.ca/COU/pdf/Undergraduate%20Degree%20Level%20Expectations.pdf>). By the end of the course students should be able to:

* Evaluate and critically apply key concepts, theories and methods used to examine social problems.
* Develop critical thinking and analytical skills that are compatible across multiple disciplines and outside academia.
* Critically review, summarize, and present peer-reviewed academic sources.
* Understand the complexities and limitations of sociological theories and knowledge construction regarding deviance and social problems.
* Improve writing and oral communication skills.

# Required Materials and Texts

The journal articles and e-book chapters assigned for this course can be accessed through eReserves on Avenue to learn. Recommended (or required) readings can be accessed through McMaster’s library system (<https://library.mcmaster.ca>).

# Class Format

This is a discussion-based course, and therefore, attendance and participation are paramount. Failure to attend and participate will result in unearned marks.

# Course Evaluation – Overview

1. **Attendance and participation (20%)**

The quality of this course depends on students’ attendance, participation, and the meaningful discussions we have as a class. As such, students will earn grades for the quality of their contribution and demonstrating extensive knowledge on the readings or other course material.

1. **Paper proposal (10%) Due February 13, 2023**

Students are expected to submit a proposal (3-4 pages) outlining the topic and basis of the major paper. A minimum of 8 peer-reviewed articles will be required.

1. **Presentation (25%)**

Working in pairs of two, students are responsible for summarizing and presenting one article from the weekly readings and creating two questions to facilitate class discussions. Students should follow all COVID19 protocols and are encouraged to converse via Zoom, email, or telephone.

1. **Music Analysis (10%) Due March 13, 2023**

Students will choose a song or music video and submit a paper (3-4 pages) explaining how it has been deemed a social problem by claims-makers or how it contains lyrics or art that is used for claims-making and addresses a social problem.

1. **Major Paper (35%) Due April 10, 2023**

Using a constructionist approach to social problems, students will pick a topic that has been defined as a social problem and submit a 15-page analysis on the claims-making process involved.

***\*\*More details on the assignments will be provided on Avenue to Learn.\*\****

# Course Policies

## Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be in **word format**, doubled spaced, 1” margins on all sides, Arial 12-point font, and contain page numbers. Include your full name, student number, course information (e.g. course number, instructor or TA name) and date. Please use APA or ASA citation style.

Assignments should be submitted electronically to Avenue to Learn by the deadline. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure assignments are properly submitted. To access our Avenue to Learn page, please visit <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>.

## Late Assignments

For late assignments that are not approved, you must make arrangements directly with the instructor to submit the assignment. Assignments will be marked down 5 percentage points for each day it is late, including weekend days and holidays. Assignments that are 3 or more days late will not be accepted. Papers submitted 3+ days will be given a mark of 0 for the assignment.

## Review of Grades

Assignments will be marked carefully and fairly. However, on occasion students may disagree with the marks they receive. If this occurs, I would be happy to review the mark if the request is serious and the procedure outlined below is followed. **Please note that when a mark is reviewed, the new mark may be lower than the original**.

To request a review of a mark, write a 1-page statement describing in detail the nature of the perceived marking error. Submit this statement with the original marked assignment to me via email. You may submit requests for review no sooner than 48 hours and no later than two weeks after assignments are handed back to the class.

## Absences, Missed Work, Illness

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

## Email Policy

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or the TA via McMaster email (see pg1). We will reply to your email within 48 hours, excluding weekends/holidays. Emails with questions that can be answered by referring to this syllabus or Avenue to Learn may not be answered.

It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. **If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion**.

## Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

# Course Schedule and Required Readings

## Week 1 (Jan.9): Overview of Course

* Introduction
* Assigning readings for presentations

**Week 2 (Jan. 16): Introduction to Social Problems**

Readings:

* Loseke, Donileen R. 2017. *Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives, Second Edition*. London and New York: Routledge.
  + Ch1- “Examining Social Problems” pgs. 3-24
* Schneider, Joseph W. 1985. “Social Problems Theory: The Constructionist View.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 11: 209-29.
* Best, Joel. 2002. “Constructing the Sociology of Social Problems: Spector and Kitsuse Twenty-Five Years Later.” *Sociological Forum*, 17(4): 699- 706.

Recommended Readings:

* Spector, Malcolm and John I. Kitsuse. 2017. *Constructing Social Problems*. London and New York: Routledge. (**e-book**),
  + Chapters 5 and 7
* Loseke, Donileen R. 2017. *Thinking About Social Problems: An Introduction to Constructionist Perspectives, Second Edition*. London and New York: Routledge. (**e-book**)
  + Chapters 2 and 3

**Week 3 (Jan. 23): Pop Culture and Claims-Making**

**\*\*Presentations begin\*\***

Readings:

* Sternheimer, Karen. 2015. *Pop Culture Panics: How Moral Crusaders Construct Meanings of Deviance and Delinquency*. London and New York: Routledge.
  + Ch2- “Anti-Movie Crusades: Fears of Immigration, Urbanization, and Shifts in Childhood” pgs 23-48
* Best, Joel and Kathleen Lowney. 2009. “Disney as a Target for Social Problems Claims.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 50: 431–449.

**Week 4 (Jan. 30): Music as a Target and Tool for Claims-Making**

Readings:

* Gray, Herman. 1989. “Rate the Records: Symbolic Conflict, Popular Music and Social Problems” *Popular Music & Society* 13(3): 5-16.
* Mays, Kyle T. 2019. “Decolonial Hip Hop: Indigenous Hip Hop and the Disruption of Settler Colonialism.” *Cultural Studies* 33:3, 460–479.
* Lucy Bennett. 2014. “‘If We Stick Together We Can Do Anything’: Lady Gaga Fandom, Philanthropy and Activism Through Social Media.” *Celebrity Studies* 5(1–2): 138–152.

Recommended Readings:

* Sternheimer, Karen. 2015. *Pop Culture Panics: How Moral Crusaders Construct Meanings of Deviance and Delinquency*. London and New York: Routledge. (**e-book**)
  + Ch5- “Anti-Music Crusades: Fears of Racial Integration, Religious Participation, and Freedom of Expression” pgs 105-132
* McKay, Dwanna L., Kirsten Vinyeta and Kari Marie Norgaard. 2020. “Theorizing Race and Settler Colonialism within U.S. Sociology.” *Sociology Compass* 14(9): 1-17.

**Week 5 (Feb 6): Guns, Gun Control, and the Media**

Readings:

* Brown, Blake. 2009. “Pistol Fever: Regulating Revolvers in Late-Nineteenth-Century Canada.” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 20(1):107-138.
* Ogle, Jennifer Paff, Molly Eckman and Catherine Amoroso. 2003. “Appearance Cues and the Shootings at Columbine High: Construction of a Social Problem in the Print Media.” *Sociological Inquiry* 73(1): 1-27.
* Wondemagen, Meron. 2014. “Media Construction of a School Shooting as a Social Problem” *Journalism* 15(6): 696-712.

**Week 6 (Feb. 13): Claims-Making and the Environment**

**\*\*Paper Proposal Due\*\***

Readings:

* Fine, Gary Allan and Lazaros Christoforides. 1991. “Dirty Birds, Filthy Immigrants, and the English Sparrow War: Metaphorical Linkage in Constructing Social Problems” *Symbolic Interaction* 14(4): 375-393.
* Kunkel, Karl. R. 1995. "Down on the Farm: Rationale Expansion in the Construction of Factory Farming as a Social Problem." In *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems, 2nd edition*, edited by Joel Best. 239-60. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
* Munro, Lyle. 1997. “Framing Cruelty: The Construction of Duck Shooting as a Social Problem.” *Society and Animals* 5(2): 137-154.

***Week 7 (Feb 20-26): READING WEEK- NO CLASS***

**Week 8 (Feb. 27): Medicalization, Drug Use & Addiction**

Readings:

* Levine, Harry Gene. 1985. “The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America.” *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 2(1): 43-57.
* Reinarman, Craig. 1988. “The Social Construction of an Alcohol Problem: The Case of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers and Social Control in the 1980s.” *Theory and Society* 17: 91-120.
* Himmelstein, Jerome. 1983. “From Killer Weed to Drop Out Drug: The Changing Ideology of Marihuana.” *Contemporary Crises* 7: 13-38.

Recommended Reading:

* Conrad, Peter. 2005. “The Shifting Engines of Medicalization.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46(1): pp. 3-14.

**Week 9 (Mar. 6): Medicalization- Diagnosis & Illness Part 1**

Readings:

* Conrad, Peter and Deborah Potter. 2000. “From Hyperactive Children to ADHD Adults: Observations on the Expansion of Medical Categories.” *Social Problems* 47(4): 559-582.
* Figert, A. E. 1995. “Three Faces of PMS: The Professional Gendered, and Scientific Structuring of Psychiatric Disorder.” *Social Problems* 42(1): 56-73.
* Cotton, Christopher and John W. Ridings. 2011. “Getting Out/Getting In: The DSM, Political Activism, and the Social Construction of Mental Disorders.” *Social Work in Mental Health* 9: 181–205.

**Week 10 (Mar. 13): Medicalization- Diagnosis & Illness Part 2**

**\*\*Music Analysis Due\*\***

Readings:

* Rafter, Nicole H. 1992. “Claims-Making and Socio-Cultural Context in the First U.S. Eugenics Campaign.” *Social Problems* 39(1): 17-34.
* McCrea, Frances B. 1983. “The Politics of Menopause: The ‘Discovery’ of a Deficiency Disease.” *Social Problems* 31(1): 111-123.
* Neiterman, Elena. 2012. “Constructing and Deconstructing Teen Pregnancy as a Social Problem.” *Qualitative Sociology Review* 3(1): 25-47.

**Week 11 (Mar 20): Sexuality**

Readings:

* Speakman, Erika R. 2017. “Constructing an ‘HIV Killer’: HIV Non-Disclosure and the Techniques of Vilification.” *Deviant Behaviour* 38(4): 392–405.
* Heber, Anita. 2020. “Purity or Danger? The Establishment of Sex Trafficking as a Social Problem in Sweden.” *European Journal of Criminology* 17(4): 420–440.
* Jenesse, Valerie. 1990. “From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem.” *Social Problems* 37(3): 403-420.

**Week 12 (Mar. 27): Racial Prejudice and Racial Profiling**

Readings:

* Fraser, James and Edward Kick. 2000. “The Interpretive Repertoires of Whites on Race-Targeted Policies: Claims Making of Reverse Discrimination.” *Sociological Perspectives* 43(1): 13-28.
* Satzewich, Vic and William Shaffir. 2009. "Racism versus Professionalism: Claims and Counter-Claims about Racial Profiling," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 51(2): 199-226.
* Boykoff, Jules and Ben Carrington. 2020. “Sporting Dissent: Colin Kaepernick, NFL Activism, and Media Framing Contests.” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 55(7): 829-849.

**Week 13 (April 3): Settler Colonialism**

Readings:

* Denis, Jeffrey S. 2012. “Transforming Meanings and Group Positions: Tactics and Framing in Anishinaabe-White Relations in Northwestern Ontario, Canada.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(3): 453-470.
* Barker, Adam J. 2015. “‘A Direct Act of Resurgence, a Direct Act of Sovereignty’: Reflections on Idle No More, Indigenous Activism, and Canadian Settler Colonialism.” *Globalizations* 12(1): 43-65.

Recommended Readings:

* Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 387–409.
* Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1(1): 1-40.
* Kino-nda-niimi Collective. 2014. *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

**Week 14 (April 10): Last Class**

**\*\*Major Paper Due\*\***

* No readings, wrap up

# University Policies

## Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academiccredentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academiccredit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](about:blank)**.**

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

* Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
* Improper collaboration in group work.
* Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

## Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](about:blank) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or [sas@mcmaster.ca](about:blank) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [*Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities*](about:blank)policy.

## Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a [RISO](about:blank) accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](about:blank) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

## Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

## Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

This lecture schedule is based upon current university and public health guidelines and may be subject to changes during the term. Any changes to the schedule or course delivery will be communicated on the course announcements section on Avenue to Learn. Please check the announcements prior to attending class.

## Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

## Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

| **MARK** | **GRADE** |
| --- | --- |
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-89 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 67-69 | C+ |
| 63-66 | C |
| 60-62 | C- |
| 57-59 | D+ |
| 53-56 | D |
| 50-52 | D- |
| 0-49 | F |