

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
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Sociology 2112

Contacting the Instructor (Brian McMillan)

If you have any questions you would like to ask the instructor, please send to brian.mcmillan@lakeheadu.ca.

Course Description

This course of study examines the nature and consequences of new forms of social media and social networking. More specifically, the course offers a critical analysis of the impact that new types of digitized communications (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Skype, text messaging, blogging, email, mobile phones, the internet, and so on) are having on social interactions and personal relationships. To this end, the course introduces numerous analytical concepts and theories which are used to deepen our understanding of how social media are shaping our everyday lives and personal connections. Topics include a brief history of the internet, the digital divide, theories of technology such as Technological Determinism and Social Construction of Technology, the face-to-face vs. mediated-communications debate, the role of gender and culture in digitized media, social media and community development, social media and the development and maintenance of inter-personal relationships, and others. The course of study gives special attention to Twitter and Facebook.

Readings

The following books are required reading. They are important sources of information for written assignments and video comments. Please refer to the Course Schedule for reading times.

Required Books:

Baym, Nancy, 2015. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd Edition. Polity. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-7034-8 (pb)

Murthy, Dhiraj. 2018. *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*. Polity. ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5239-9 (pb)

Grading Scheme

Video Discussions.....	6%
Assignment #1.....	20%
Assignment #2.....	25%
Assignment #3.....	25%
Assignment #4.....	24%

Video Discussions

The course of study includes 3 videos which address various issues of relevance to the course. The videos are readily available online at no cost. You are urged to view the videos at the appropriate point in the course (see the Course Schedule for recommended viewing times). You may post comments about the videos --preferably ones which reflect key course concepts introduced and discussed in the readings-- in the Discussions area of our course site. You are encouraged to read and respond to the comments of others, always in a courteous fashion. Access to the Discussions area of our site is gained by simply clicking the Discussions link on the yellow navigation bar at the top of the site page. **Your participation in video discussions will be weighted at a maximum of 6% of your final course grade.** Evaluations will be based on the quality (relevance of comments to important course concepts, originality of comments, demonstrated understanding of video and course concepts) and frequency of comments. **Please note that closure will be invoked on video discussions 72 hours after the recommended viewing times specified in the Course Schedule.**

Assignment #1

This is an online course with no lectures. This means that the bulk of the important course content is contained in the course's reading material. Nancy Baym's book, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, is our main text and the chief source of the important analytical concepts, theories, arguments, etc. needed to understand the role of social media in contemporary society and our everyday lives. It is the analytical concepts, theories, arguments, etc. identified and discussed in Baym's book that you must learn if you are going to develop an understanding of how the likes of Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, text messaging, Skype, blogging, gaming (and all other examples of the new digitized forms of communication) are affecting our social interactions and relationships. Learning these important ideas not only requires a careful reading of the Baym book, but also frequent reflection on the meaning and significance of these ideas, and perhaps some thought towards how these ideas relate to your own personal life, or perhaps to other concepts encountered in previous academic experiences.

One way to facilitate a bit of reflection is through a bit of writing. I'm going to ask you to compile, on a chapter-by-chapter basis, a list of important terms, concepts, ideas, arguments, theories, etc. introduced and discussed throughout the Baym book. Although this is the kind of 'best practices' you should be doing anyway, **I will award a maximum of 20% towards your final course grade for the completion of this assignment.** You must submit this assignment in 2 installments (10% per installment). The first must cover Baym's chapters 1, 2, and 3. The second installment must cover Baym's chapters 4, 5, and 6. Please see the Course Schedule for submission deadlines. You must use the Dropbox tool to submit your installments. Your documents must be submitted in Word format... no other format, including PDF, will be accepted. Late submissions will be penalized 10% per day up to 48 hours past the deadline, after which late submissions will NOT be accepted.

Please see below for a *brief* example of what I have in mind in the case of Baym's chapter 1:

Important Terms/Concepts/Theories/Arguments/etc.

"New Forms of Personal Connection" (Baym, ch. 1)

- Face-to-face conversations are rapidly being replaced by new forms of disembodied digital interaction... new social media such as Twitter and social networking sites such as Facebook are reshaping the ways in which we develop and maintain personal connections

- Two positions have emerged with respect to the mediation of social interaction and the impact on personal connections; 1) new digital media will erode the quality of communication and, by extension, undermine the integrity of our existing personal relationships; 2) these new means of communication will generate expanding opportunities to establish greater numbers of meaningful relationships marked by greater diversity
- Basic purpose of the book is to examine the impact of new social media on inter-personal relationships
- New digital media renders time and space virtually irrelevant; this has serious implications for our traditional notions of ‘community’ which have historically been premised upon physical proximity; also has implications for the ‘pace of life’
- New social media give rise to the ‘challenge of absent presence’ wherein people, when using digitized media such as smart phones, may be physically present but emotionally and otherwise absent, giving rise to questions about the meaning of ‘self’
- Using social media blurs the line between ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms, generating concerns about surveillance and loss of privacy
- The anonymity afforded by social media generates concerns about the authenticity of identity and presentation of self, and personal security; “On the internet, no one knows you’re a dog”
- Social media, like all technologies, is a double-edge sword that cuts both ways; i.e., it increases our control over our environment, but at the same time imposes new controls and constraints upon us
- 7 key concepts as a useful analytical framework for comparing, contrasting, and evaluating social media and SNS’s: interactivity; temporal structure; social cues; storage; replicability; reach; and mobility
- Places digital media in its historical context, and describes the emergence and evolution of the internet, from ARPANET to the WWW, from text-based to multi-media, the development of Web 2.0 and user-generated content, the emergence of social networking sites, landlines to mobiles
- Access to new social media, and the internet more generally, is unequally distributed across the populations, both nationally and globally; access is correlated with socio-demographics such as social class, income, education, race/ethnicity, region, etc.

Assignment #2

Nancy Baym, in her first chapter entitled “New Forms of Personal Connection”, identifies and discusses 7 key concepts she uses throughout her book to examine the various forms of social media and social networking and their impacts on communication and personal relationships (see pp. 6-13 “Seven Key Concepts”). More specifically, throughout her book she uses these 7 concepts, or *analytical tools* (degree of interactivity, nature of the temporal structure, richness of social cues, etc.) to compare/contrast the various social media, and to evaluate their ability to approximate the affordances of face-to-face communication, which is widely held to be the gold standard of social interaction. In Dhiraj Murthy’s first chapter entitled “What is Twitter?”, the author, among other things, describes the structure and dynamics of Twitter. **Your task in this assignment is to use Baym’s 7 analytical concepts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Twitter as a means of fostering high quality personal connections and communications.** Your assignment must be based exclusively upon Baym’s and Murthy’s books (no other

secondary sources). Your assignment must be 5-6 pages in length not including your title page or References page. You must use double-spacing, 12 point Times New Roman font, and 1" margins. You must include a title page and a References page. The need to use a particular writing style (MLA, APA, ASA, etc.) does not apply to this assignment, but you must cite page numbers when and if you use direct quotations. **Assignment #2 is worth a maximum of 25% of your final course grade.** Please see the Course Schedule for submission deadline. You must use the Dropbox tool to submit your assignment. Your assignment must be submitted in Word format... no other format, including PDF, will be accepted. Late submissions will be penalized 10% per day up to 48 hours past the deadline, after which late submissions will NOT be accepted.

Assignment #3

In Baym's chapter entitled "Communities and Networks", the author wades into the debate regarding the impact of new digital media on community development. Has community been lost as a result of the widespread use of the likes of Twitter, Facebook, instant messaging, Skype, blogs, etc.? Or has community been enhanced for the better? Or has the traditional notion of "community" simply been transformed? Baym offers an analytical framework composed of 5 concepts: sense of space; shared practice; shared resources and support; shared identities; and interpersonal relationships. Murthy examines the same debate in his book with a specific focus on Twitter and the concept *homophily*. **Your task in Assignment #3 is to write a paper in which you take a position in this debate with a specific focus on Twitter; that is, do the new social media and social networking sites, in particular Twitter, enhance community development, undermine community development, or do they simply transform traditional meanings of 'community'?** You must incorporate into your paper the concept *homophily* (see Murthy), the analytical framework mentioned above and found in Baym's chapter 4, and you must apply these concepts to the subject matter of two (2) of the following Murthy chapters: ch. 4, ch. 5, ch. 6, or ch. 7. Your assignment must be based exclusively on Baym's and Murthy's books (no other secondary sources). Your assignment must be 5-6 pages in length not including your title page or References page, double-spaced using 12 point Times New Roman font, and must use 1" margins. You must include a title page and a References page. The need to use a particular writing style (MLA, APA, ASA, etc.) does not apply to this assignment, but you must cite page numbers when and if you use direct quotations. **Assignment #3 is worth a maximum of 25% of your final course grade.** Please see the Course Schedule for submission deadline. You must use the Dropbox tool to submit your assignment. Your assignment must be submitted in Word format... no other format, including PDF, will be accepted. Late submissions will be penalized 10% per day up to 48 hours past the deadline, after which late submissions will NOT be accepted.

Assignment #4

This assignment will focus on Facebook. It will entail the application of important concepts from Baym's chapters 5 and 6 to a supplementary online article of your choice. A list of supplementary online articles will be posted from which you will select one only. Your submission must be 4-5 pages in length not including your title page or References page, double-spaced using 12 point Times New Roman font, and must use 1" margins. You must include a title page and a References page. The need to use a particular writing style (MLA,

APA, ASA, etc.) does not apply to this assignment, but you must cite page numbers when and if you use direct quotations. **Assignment #4 will be weighted at 24% of your final course grade.** The deadline for this assignment T.B.A. You must use the Dropbox tool to submit your finished paper. Your paper must be submitted in Word format... no other format, including PDF, will be accepted. Late submissions will NOT, under any circumstances whatsoever, be accepted.

***PLEASE NOTE:** Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities and/or medical conditions to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and register as early as possible. For more information, please contact Student Accessibility Services <http://studentaccessibility.lakeheadu.ca>

- Thunder Bay - SAS -- SC0003, 343-8047 or sas@lakeheadu.ca
- Orillia - SAS - OA 1030, [705-330-4008 ext 2103](tel:705-330-4008)) or oraccess@lakeheadu.ca

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