

Seeing Sociology

Suggested Citation:

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Medley-Rath, Stephanie. 2013 "Seeing Sociology." Assignment published in *TRAILS: Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology*. Washington DC: American Sociological Association. (<http://trails.asanet.org>)

Abstract:

For this assignment, students will be required to take a photograph that illustrates a sociological concept and include a sociologically-rich and tweetable description of the photo.

Details:

Resource Types	Assignment
Authors	Stephanie Medley-Rath
Date Published	5/23/2013
Subject Area	Introduction to Sociology/Social Problems
Class Level	any
Class Size	Any
Language	English

Usage Notes:

Learning Goals and Assessments:

Goal	This assignment is designed to get students to pay closer attention to the world around them by them making connections between course material and the real world.
Assessment Goal	Assignment submission
Assessment Goal	This assignment encourages students to communicate both succinctly and effectively.
Assessment Goal	
Assessment	

Resource Files:

Medley-Rath_Seeing Sociology.docx

TECHNIQUE: Seeing Sociology

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COURSES: Introduction to Sociology (in-person or online)

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL:

- Goal 1: This assignment is designed to get students to pay closer attention to the world around them by them making connections between course material and the real world.
- Goal 2: This assignment encourages students to communicate both succinctly and effectively.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will identify an example of a sociological concept found in their daily life and record it visually.
- Students will illustrate how their photograph is informed by sociology through a caption.
- Students will formulate a caption that is tweetable, that is, short yet sociologically rich.

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As a result of this assignment, students will be able to

- Identify sociological concepts with real world examples.
- Defend their selection of photograph and caption as sociological.
- Create a word document that includes a jpg.
- Demonstrate the conventions of social media, in this case, Twitter.

REFERENCES:

Eisen (2012) assigns students a more involved photography project that serves as a student's final project. In that assignment, students take a photo for each subject area and detailed descriptions of the photo connecting it to sociological theory. My assignment is less involved in that I ask students to take three photos (one for each unit) and provide a succinct, yet sociological-rich caption for the photo.

Our assignments also differ in the requirements for the photo. I allow students to use photos that have already been taken (with permission), whereas Eisen (2012) requires students to only submit photos taken during the semester.

Eisen, Daniel B. 2012. "Developing a Critical Lens: Using Photography to Teach Sociology and Create Critical Thinkers." *Teaching Sociology* 40(4):349-359.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Instructor: At least one digital camera and SD card that you can lend out to students (I have yet to loan mine out).

Students: Access to a digital camera.

ESTIMATED TIME:

In-person courses:

- 15-20 minutes to initially assign
- 5 minutes (15 minutes total) to answer questions and remind students before each submission is due
- 5-15 minutes each time a submission comes due to discuss their pictures

PROCEDURE:

For the Instructor:

I assign this project during the second week of the semester as to not overwhelm students during the first week, though the assignment is noted in the syllabus and mentioned during the first class meeting. Students will need to be reminded of the due dates at least a week before each submission is due. Spend a few minutes at the start of each class in which a submission is due to ask students to describe their photos and captions. In an online course, students might be asked to share their submissions with one another and discuss, though I do not require this.

Ideally, it would be good to have students submit early enough that the instructor could share some of the photos during class. This does raise privacy issues for both the students and people in the photographs.

For the Students:

I have attached the assignment guide as an appendix to this submission.

INTERPRETATION:

Most students get it. Some are really creative in the photograph they use and their captioning. I am always surprised by at least some of the submissions because they make sociologically connections to photographs that I would have overlooked.

Students like doing a project that involves less writing and something creative. Thus far, there have been no student complaints regarding the assignment.

POSSIBLE PITFALLS:

Most students get the difference between word count and character count, but not all do. I tend to grade leniently on the first submission for this reason. I also do not count to make sure that students are 140 characters or less. I eyeball it and only count those captions that appear to be noticeably over 140 characters.

Students may be tempted to just type a concept into Google and copy a photo from the Internet. The assignment explains they are not to do this and I remind students that I can search for their image if I am suspicious (all submissions are turned in only so that I can easily search for the

image if needed). Most students do not do this. I have only had three students out of several hundred who have copied a photo from the internet.

Occasionally a photograph looks very staged or professional, yet the student has not explained that they have permission to use the photograph. I ask the student and I take their word for it.

Students might use photos that they did not recently take or take at all. I allow this because my intent is that they observe something and then connect it to sociology rather than having a sociological concept in mind and creating photograph to fit it. This means some photos may be years old. Students should always explain where their photograph came from.

Occasionally, a student may legitimately use the same concept with different photos or similar photos for different concepts. Make it clear to students that each photo and caption should be unique from their other submissions.

You will have to walk students through how to insert a photograph into a word document. Despite giving step by step instructions in the assignment and demonstrating this in class, you will have at least one student who just does not grasp how to do this or did not pay attention to your instructions.

You may have to provide additional tech support to the occasional student who takes a photo on her or his phone, yet does not know how to get the photo off their phone and onto a computer. The easiest solution is that they email the photo to themselves and then download the photo onto a computer.

ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES:

I do not do any additional assessment associated with this assignment beyond the assignment.

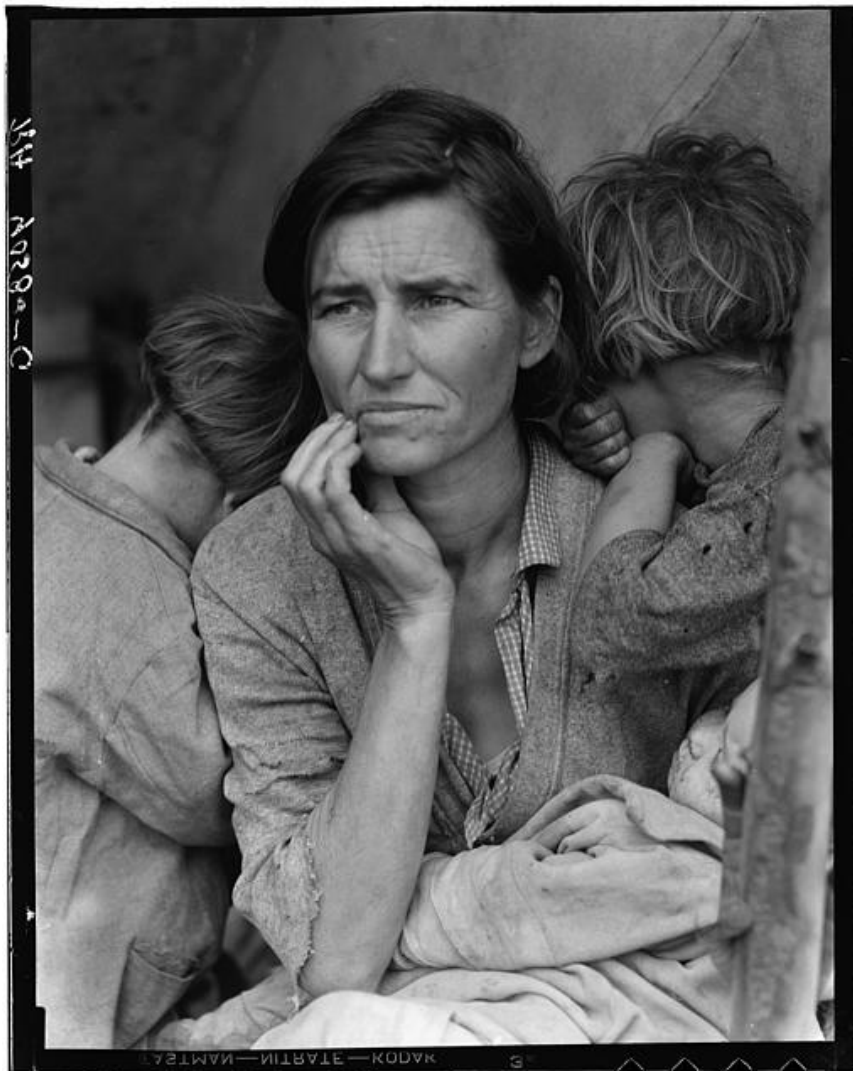
Appendix. Seeing Sociology Guide.

PURPOSE

For this assignment, you will be required to take a photograph that illustrates a sociological concept and include a sociologically-rich and tweetable description of the photo. This guide provides you all the details of the assignment, answers to frequently asked questions, and examples of the assignment.

Why photographs?

Sociology is all around us and photographs are an excellent way to communicate (sociological) information. For example, take a look at this photo:¹



¹ Lange, Dorothea. 1936. *Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California.* Library of Congress. Retrieved August 2, 2012 (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8b29516/>).

This photo of Florence Thompson, a migrant farm worker with her children during the Great Depression was taken by Dorothea Lange in 1936. The woman in the photo was 32-years-old and a mother of seven children. This photo communicates poverty, desperation, motherhood, family, how childhood has changed, aging, and so on. To this day, people are still moved emotionally by this photo.

Why tweets?

Twitter is a fast growing social network that allows users to share something with the world in 140 characters or less. The point is to share very tiny bits of information while communicating a great deal. The challenge is to communicate as much as you can in this limited amount of space. We live in a culture full of people with short attention spans feeding on sound-bites so we need to be able to communicate a lot of information in tiny bits (okay, that's a bit of an exaggeration, but you get the idea). (Read more about Twitter: <https://twitter.com/about>). The best way to write your tweetable captions is to write out everything you want to say about your image and then edit. Edit some more. And edit some more. You only have 140 characters to work with.

THE DETAILS:

Do I need a Twitter account?

No. If you already have a Twitter account, feel free to share your photos with your classmates via Twitter *in addition to turning your assignment as stipulated on page 6*. If you share your image on Twitter, include the hashtag #seesoc so the rest of us can find it. You can also tag me @learnsociology (<https://twitter.com/#!/learnsociology>) in your tweet and I will reshare it via my feed.

Why 140 characters?

This is a limitation of Twitter and a challenge for you. Keep in mind that your limit is 140 *characters*, not 140 *words*. Characters include letters, spaces, and punctuation. An example:

This sentence includes 37 characters.

How to determine how many characters you have used?

1. Highlight your caption.
2. Go to the Review tab in Microsoft word.
3. Click Word Count.
4. Review the fourth item on the list: characters (with spaces). This tells you how many characters you have used. If the number is 140 or less, you are good. If the number is 141 or higher, you need to cut something out of your caption.

What is a sociologically-rich description?

Your tweetable-caption should include direct references to sociological concepts. Use your course materials (i.e., readings, lectures, audio recordings, Canvas links) to help you identify the specific concept or concepts your image portrays. Be specific. Make sure it is clear to me what concept is being illustrated.

Can I write a one word caption?

Yes, but I wouldn't recommend it. Succinctly make your point, yet make sure your description is sociologically-rich. Tell me as much as you can in as few characters as possible.

Do you have any examples?

Yes, on the next two pages, you will see two examples that I made. On Canvas, you will find additional examples from other students who have completed this assignment.

Example 1



What goes in a trashcan is common sense, yet their labels imply we need to be socialized regarding environmentally-friendly norms. #seesoc @learnsociology

Photograph taken by Stephanie Medley-Rath, August 16, 2012, Denver, CO.

**Please note that #seesoc and @learnsociology are only necessary if you plan to share your photo on Twitter.

Example 2



Though American culture emphasizes a two-gender system, some cultures recognize a 3rd gender, like berdaches by Native Americans. #seesoc @learnsociology

Photograph taken by Stephanie Medley-Rath, October 26, 2012, Mattoon, IL.

What exactly will I be turning in?

You will submit a Word document that includes your image, caption, and photograph details in one file. You will complete this assignment three times, one for each unit:

- a) Seeing Sociology 1 covers chapters 1-6 and is due June 30.
- b) Seeing Sociology 2 covers chapters 7-11 and is due July 21.
- c) Seeing Sociology 3 covers chapters 12-16 and is due August 4.

What are photograph details?

Include who took the photo, the date, and location below your caption. It should look like this:

Photograph taken by Stephanie Medley-Rath, October 26, 2012, Mattoon, IL.

How much is this worth?

Each submission is worth 15 points. The total points for your Seeing Sociology submissions are 45 points (20% of your final grade).

Where will I turn in my Seeing Sociology assignments?

Seeing Sociology will only be accepted and graded through Instructure Canvas.

How do I add a photo to a word document?

1. Go to the Insert tab.
2. Click on picture.
3. Find where your photo is saved on your computer.

What if I don't have a camera?

You can use a film camera, a disposable camera, or a camera phone to take your photos. Contact me (smedleyrath@lakeland.cc.il.us) as soon as possible to make other arrangements if you do not have access to a camera.

Can I use a photo I didn't actually take?

You must take the photo yourself or have permission to use the photo. **You can not just download an image from Google images and pass it off as your own work.** This is academic dishonesty and will be dealt with accordingly. You can use a photo taken by a family member or a friend, but make sure you have permission to use the photo.

Can I use an older photo?

Yes. The photo does not have to be recent. You can use a photo you already have or you can take a brand new photo specifically for this assignment.

Do I need a reference page?

Include in-text citations and a reference page when appropriate (this means your reference page should have an APA formatted entry for the article, the textbook, and any other references you use). You should follow APA format. More information on APA format can be found at the OWL @ Purdue: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>. Your reference page does not count towards your 140 character count. If you used references and they are not cited, you will lose 2 points off the top.

Will you grade spelling and grammar?

You better believe it. Spell-check and read over your work before turning it in. You only have 140 characters to work with. There should be no spelling or grammatical errors. Any spelling or grammatical errors will result in a loss of 2 points off the top.

What else do I need to know about this assignment?

- Refrain from using photographs of nudity, pornography, or obscenity. If you went to a strip club and found the experience illustrates the concept of gender inequality, then take a photo of the sign over the strip club. Be creative, but no photos of people actually stripping.
- If you take photos of people, make sure you have their permission to use their photo in class.
- Keep a back-up copy of your work so you do not lose it. Computer crashes happen. Files get deleted. Back-up your work.
- Make sure your submission is original. What this means is that you are not using a similar photo or concept for each submission. Failure to do this could result in failure on the assignment.

Can I turn my assignment in late?

No. I will not accept any assignments late under any circumstances. Don't ask. Don't email it to me.

What is the grading rubric for this assignment?

	Possible Points	Points Earned
Is the caption 140 characters or less?	3	
Are the sociological concepts clear?	4	
Is the caption sociologically-rich?	4	
Does the caption accurately reflect the photograph?	4	
Total Earned	15	
<i>Possible Deductions:</i>		
No photograph	-15	
Spelling or grammar errors	-2	
Reference page or in-text citations needed, but not included	-2	
Reference page or in-text citations do not follow APA format	-2	
Does your submission fit within the assigned chapters?	-2	
Photo is not your own and you did not get permission to use it. (Academic Dishonesty policies will be used.)	-15	
Total Deductions		
Grand Total		

The Seeing Sociology Guide provides a general plan for the assignment; instructor deviations may be necessary.