

The sociology of care: course syllabus (draft)

I. Course information

Level: MA course (but BA students are welcome to register).

Module: 2nd module (3 November - 31 December).

Time and venue: TBC

Credits: 6.

Course convenor: Dr. Ruben Flores (rflores@hse.ru)

Office hours: by appointment.

Pre-requisites: None, but the course presupposes some familiarity with classical and contemporary social theory.

II. Course description and objectives

From cradle to grave, human beings depend on the care of others, and contemporary societies spend a significant amount of their resources sustaining institutions involved in care provision: from kindergartens to hospitals, and from social work to pension schemes. Yet neither care provision nor access to care are uniformly distributed within and across societies: the provision of and access to care is often organised alongside gender and class divisions. The aim of this course is to provide students with tools to understand, and undertake sociological research into, the multiple manifestations of care. The course will offer students the opportunity to deploy care as an analytical category in order to deepen their understanding of phenomena such as welfare, healthcare and sustainability in different regions of the world. As part of the course, students will have the chance to spend one or two weeks as volunteers, researchers, or interns in institutions, social projects or movements where care is enacted. Depending on the students' preferences, this component of the course could go from volunteering for a local NGO or

foundation, collecting data (e.g. conducting fieldwork, visiting archives), or elaborating an independent project (e.g. a short documentary).

III. Learning outcomes

The course focuses on developing critical reasoning skills, research skills, as well as the habit of thought that C. W. Mills called "sociological imagination": the ability to link everyday experience with the big picture of historical structure and change. On a more applied level, the analytical skills this course seeks to develop could be useful in fields such as social enterprise, non-governmental organisations, foundations, social care, social work, and community organising.

I expect that students who successfully complete this course will be better equipped to:

- Undertake sociological research into questions related to care.
- Critically engage with sociological theories of care.
- Link theories of care with wider debates about social solidarity, justice, democracy, and welfare.
- Be able to provide constructive criticism to fellow students.
- Be able to constructively deal with criticisms to their own work.

IV. Thematic units

1. Introduction: why care about care?
2. The ethics and politics of care.
3. Who cares? From households to civil societies to states.
4. Gendered and informal care (guest lecturer: Dr. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova).
5. Care and class.
6. Social work and the professionalization of care (guest lecturer: Dr. Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova).
7. Towards more caring societies?

V. Course Instructor

Ruben Flores (PhD, University of Kent) is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Sociology of the Higher School of Economics. In designing this syllabus, he has drawn on his past experience researching charitable activities at the University of Kent (UK), but also on his ongoing research agenda on the sociology of care.

VI. Course Assessment

Students' final marks will depend on two components: a) seminar participation; and b) a course paper. Each of these components is sub-divided as follows:

a) Seminar participation:

Attendance: 15%

Seminar participation: 20%

Weekly reports: 15%

b) Written assignments.

b.2) Research design:

Part one: Description of topic and case study = 10%

Part two: Part one (revised) + Theory, research question, and sources of data = 10%

Part three: Part one (revised) + Part two (revised) + data analysis and discussion = 30%

Each of these parts should take into account the theoretical and methodological principles discussed during seminar time, as well as the feedback provided by the module convener. This latter point is particularly important for parts two and three. Students are advised to discuss the topics of their papers *before* starting to work on them. If you would prefer to write an essay, please talk to me about this first.

Papers' length and format:

Papers should be between 2,500-4,000 words (roughly ten to fifteen pages), including footnotes and references. Please use the following format: Times New Roman, font size 12, double spaced. Harvard-style referencing.

Seminar participation

I will mark seminar participation using a four point scale:

Unjustified absence: minus one point.

Justified absence: zero points.

Attendance: one point.

Attendance and active participation: 2 points.

Attendance and active participation which demonstrates a critical engagement with the texts under discussion: 3 points.

Attendance

Attendance to the seminars is mandatory. Students with more than one unjustified absences will lose the right to receive a mark for the course. I will not count your attendance if you miss more than twenty minutes of a session.

Weekly reports

Each week students are to prepare a brief analysis of – or, rather, a reaction to – the texts to be discussed that week. This analysis, of between 100 and 200 words, is not meant to be a polished piece of work, but only a springboard for seminar discussion. The only requirement is that the student uses her/his own words to analyse and react to the texts under consideration. You are to write one report per week, regardless of the number of readings. Hint: use your weekly reports to reflect on your final paper.

Presentations

Every week a student will be asked to present a paper. After each presentation, another student will be expected to react/comment to the previous presentation, and to start a discussion with the whole group. Students will be expected to discuss their course papers on a regular basis during seminars.

How to do well on this course?

Read as widely as possible, and be ready to discuss the texts under review during seminar time. Do ask questions. Cultivate doubt, and an inquisitive attitude towards the social world. Start working early on your assignments!

How to do badly in this course?

One of the best ways to do badly in this course is through committing plagiarism – a plagiarised work will be marked zero and required to be resubmitted. Recurrent plagiarism will be reported to the dean and lead to a zero mark for the whole course. The module convener reserves the right to refuse to give a mark for the course to any student committing plagiarism.

So, please make sure to familiarise yourself with what counts as plagiarism and make sure to avoid this practice. The following are some useful websites in this regard:

"Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It" (Indiana University)

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

"How to avoid plagiarism" (The writer's center @ The University of Wisconsin – Madison).

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

Failing to work on your assignments throughout the course is another way of receiving a low mark. Since there is no final exam – not even for the second (пересдача) and third (комиссия) evaluation rounds – your final mark will depend only on the collection of those assignments you completed during term-time. During the пересдача and/or комиссия, students will have the chance only to have their term-time work reassessed.

1. Seminars

At the beginning of each seminar, the module convener will introduce the nominated topic. After this, students will discuss a particular piece of scholarly work – normally one or more journal article(s) or book chapter(s). Towards the end of each session, there will be time to discuss theoretical and methodological questions related to the students' research papers.

Questions to help you start the discussion during seminar time include the following:

- What were the paper's main findings or main argument?
- How do these findings or this argument relate to our understanding of care?
- What theoretical, epistemological, and normative presuppositions underlie the text's argument?
- What is the paper's methodology?

- What are the paper's data sources?
- How can this text be useful for your own and your colleagues' research?

VII. Reading list

Davis, H., & Erofeev, S. (2011). Reframing Society and Culture in Post-Soviet Russia. *Comparative Sociology*, 10(5), 710-734.

Graeber, David. "Caring too much. That's the curse of the working classes." [The Guardian](#), Wednesday 26 March 2014

Held, V. (2006) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Knijm, T. & Kremer, M. (1997) 'Gender and the Caring Dimension of Welfare States: Toward Inclusive Citizenship', *Social Politics*, Vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 328/61.

Sayer, A. (2011). Why things matter to people. *Social Science, Values, and Ethical Life*, Cambridge.

Sanghera, B., & Iliasov, A. (2008). Moral Sentiments and Professionalism in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan Understanding Professional Practices and Ethics. *International Sociology*, 23(3), 447-467.

Sharma, S., Sharma, J., & Devi, A. (2011). Corporate social responsibility: the key role of human resource management. *Human Resource Management: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities*, 9.

Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*.
Psychology Press.

Tronto, J. (1989). Women and caring: What can feminists learn about morality from caring. *Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstructions of being and knowing*, 172-187.

Tronto, J. C. (2010). Creating caring institutions: Politics, plurality, and purpose. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 4(2), 158-171.

Ungerson, C. (1997) 'Social Politics and the Commodification of Care', *Social Politics*, Vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 362/81.

Waerness, K. (1984b) 'The Rationality of Caring', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 185/211.

Wilson, J., & Musick, M. (1997). Who cares? Toward an integrated theory of volunteer work. *American Sociological Review*, 694-713.

Wuthnow, R. (2012). *Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves*.
Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (1995). *Learning to care: Elementary kindness in an age of indifference*.
New York: Oxford University Press.