**Journal Articles**

**Chapter 1: Taking a New Look at a Familiar World**

Discussion Questions:

1. What do the stories presented in these articles tell us about the larger sociological picture?
2. What concepts from the chapter are presented in these readings?
3. Why might it be challenging to develop one’s sociological imagination?
4. How have these readings advanced your sociological imagination?

Thomas J. Cottle

Mind Shadows: A Suicide in the Family

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Vol. 29, No. 2, 222-255 (2000)

<http://jce.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/29/2/222?ijkey=SaioIhxwi7LOw&keytype=ref&siteid=spjce>

**Abstract:**

Research on youth suicide is reviewed along with a brief recounting of family systems theory and the concepts underlying life study research. Together, these three orientations serve as a foundation for an account of a suicide of a teenage girl. The story of the young woman reveals the role of narrative thought in autoethnography as well as the nature of story-telling and the witnessing of personal accounts by the researcher. The actual account describes the life of a young woman growing up in a volatile home where there is constant fighting and tension. Her reaction to the anger surrounding her and the disapproval she feels culminates in an act of self-destruction. The account concludes with a discussion of the role of family systems, shame, and destructive relationships in the development of the self.

\*\*\*

Patricia A. Adler & Peter Adler

The Demedicalization of Self-Injury: From Psychopathology to Sociological Deviance

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Vol. 36, No. 5, 537-570 (2007)

<http://jce.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/36/5/537?ijkey=NN1pBkqJZyRnY&keytype=ref&siteid=spjce>

**Abstract:**

This article offers a glimpse into the relatively hidden practice of self-injury: cutting, burning, branding, and bone breaking. Drawing on eighty in-depth interviews, Web site postings, e-mail communications, and Internet groups, we challenge the psychomedical depiction of this phenomenon and discuss ways that the contemporary sociological practice of self-injury challenges images of the population, etiology, practice, and social meanings associated with this behavior. We conclude by suggesting that self-injury, for some, is in the process of undergoing a moral passage from the realm of medicalized to voluntarily chosen deviant behavior in which participants' actions may be understood with a greater understanding of the sociological factors that contribute to the prevalence of these actions.

\*\*\*

Charles E. Faupel

Drug Availability, Life Structure, and Situational Ethics of Heroin Addicts

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Vol. 15, No. 3-4, 395-419 (1987)

<http://jce.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/3-4/395?ijkey=AwiVgF9XhWkpw&keytype=ref&siteid=spjce>

**Abstract:**

In contrast to the conventional wisdom that a process of "moral degeneracy" inevitably ensues with increased heroin addiction, recent research has identified a distinctive set of ethical standards held in common by many "junkies" This article examines the ethical dynamics associated with distinct situations of heroin use with data obtained from extensive life history interviews with 30 hard-core criminal addicts. Addicts tended to violate the ideal norms of their own subculture under circumstances directly related to two contingencies drug availability and life structure Although novice addicts may violate subcultural standards out of ignorance, the greatest potential for deviation from these normative ideals occurs when low levels of drug availability are combined with a lack of daily routine and life structure, a combination typical of the 'street junkie" situation

\*\*\*

Joe Bailey

Some Meanings of `the Private' in Sociological Thought

Sociology, Vol. 34, 381 – 410 (2000)

<http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/34/3/381?ijkey=m4wd2xsMECGwg&keytype=ref&siteid=spsoc>

**Abstract:**

The public/private distinction has been an important, generativebut relatively unexplicated and unstable background assumptionin sociological thinking. This paper describes some of the significancesof this dualism in the context of a contemporary anxiety aboutthe public sphere and a turn to the private, the subjectiveand the individual, not least for sociology. Popular and materialisticmeanings of `the private' are distinguished from possible sociologicalanalytical uses. The increasing sociological interest in variousforms of subjectivity is taken to be one characteristic versionof the private within the current public/private dualism. Arange of well-known formative sociological theorizing is described,which provides implicit versions of the relation between theprivate and the public. These are a resource for rethinkingwhat the private might now refer to in sociology. Three dimensionsof the sociological private are proposed - intimate relationships,the self and the unconscious - as marking the sociological terrainof the private now and as directions for research. It is suggestedthat the hitherto secondary quality of the private within asociology which has traditionally privileged the public realmmay now be changing and that discourses of the private are affectingthe public agenda.

\*\*\*

John D. Brewer

The Public and Private in C.Wright Mills’s Life and Work

Sociology, Vol. 39, 661 – 677 (2005) <http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/39/4/661?ijkey=ZqTMl.GnSspHU&keytype=ref&siteid=spsoc>

**Abstract:**

Charles Wright Mills revitalized sociology’s focus onthe public–private distinction and thisarticle offers a biographical reading of thesewritings by locating them in the turmoil of his private life.The article thus looks at the public–privatedistinction as it manifested in the public writingsand private life of one of the major theorists of this theme.Its central argument is that we need to repositionMills’s intellectual biography by locatingit spatially, for his sociological writings on this theme wereheavily influenced by the ‘spaces of selfhood’within which he lived and worked. This connectsintellectual biography with the spatial turn in sociology. The purpose of such intellectual biography, however,is not merely to fill in the background of asociologist’s life, but to provide materials that take us to the centre of the sociological enterpriseitself. It is argued that Mills’s ‘spacesof selfhood’ are a medium into understandinghis whole vision of sociology.

\*\*\*

Alem Kebede

Practicing Sociological Imagination Through Writing Sociological Autobiography.

Teaching Sociology. 2009 37:353.

<http://tso.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/37/4/353?ijkey=ARmZUC9GqAi9M&keytype=ref&siteid=sptso>

**Abstract:**

Sociological imagination is a quality of mind that cannot be adopted by simply teaching students its discursive assumptions. Rather, it is a disposition, in competition with other forms of sensibility, which can be acquired only when it is practiced. Adhering to this important pedagogical assumption, students were assigned to write their sociological autobiography. While in the process of establishing a connection between their biography and social history, students were encouraged to narrate their life stories using sociological language. After completing the project, they were asked to comment on their work. Student responses show the positive dimensions involved (including unintended therapeutic consequences) and the major hurdles that they experienced in executing the assignment. In the latter case, the major problem was writing a sociological autobiography qualitatively distinct from what might be referred to as “plain autobiography.” Results reinforce the idea that sociological instruction is better handled when sociological imagination is viewed as a linguistic habitus which serves both as a medium of communication and an intellectual instrument of looking at the social world.

\*\*\*

Loo, Dennis

**Does Society Exist?**

Contexts, Feb 2012; vol. 11: pp. 84.

<http://ctx.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/11/1/84?ijkey=5mLYf77ftyIA2&keytype=ref&siteid=spctx>

**Abstract:**

Dennis Loo reflects on the existence of society. He argues that academics must become public intellectuals and that sociologists, in particular, are well-positioned to reaffirm that we are first and foremost social beings.