Introduction to Sociology, Dr. Liz Mount

Nacirema Essay Assignment

***Complete* first draft due Friday, Sept 18th (must be 4 pages to receive the full 1% of final grade)**

**Final paper due Sunday, Sept 27th (worth 16% of final grade)**

The [sociologist] has become so familiar with the diversity of ways in which different peoples behave in similar situations that [s]he is not apt to be surprised by even the most exotic of customs...the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go [Miner 1956: 503].

Your task in this first essay is to use your sociological imagination to write a 4 page, 1,000-word(ish) exploration of some strange, exotic, even inexplicable part of your own culture. You will choose a phenomenon in your culture (US or other) to describe in the style that Miner used, as though you are studying this aspect of culture as a sociologist viewing an unfamiliar culture for the first time. Your goal is to make this cultural aspect seem so abnormal, inexplicable, and extra-ordinary to the reader that someone from that cultural background reading your essay may not even recognize it as their own (the way many of you didn’t realize Miner was writing about American 1950s hygiene practices).

In order to consider which particular aspect of your culture you want to focus on, carefully (re)consider your (presumably) long exposure to and understanding of this culture. What is an aspect of your culture that most people may consider perfectly normal and ordinary, but that (upon further examination) is actually quite abnormal and extra-ordinary? If someone from a different time, culture, place, even planet, witnessed this ritual, practice, behavior, holy day, etc., what kinds of impressions might they have of the people and culture? What would be puzzling and inexplicable?

Like Miner, **do not reveal exactly what ritual, tradition, group, etc. you are analyzing**; instead, allow the reader to figure it out through **your creative and detailed description**. For instance, you could choose a football game and associated rituals, high school prom, a night out at Flagler, the Nights of Lights, a major holiday, or anything else that strikes you as a normalized part of the culture that is actually quite abnormal.

Before beginning, I strongly encourage you to re-read Miner’s article. Throughout your essay, you should employ a similar tone and word choice as Miner to describe your chosen cultural aspect. As you re-read, note the kinds of words Miner used to refer to the Nacirema, how often he referenced the “magical thinking” of the Nacirema, and how he did not refer to the audience as “you.”

**Writing the Essay**

*It is a central requirement of this assignment to grapple carefully and complexly with course readings and authors*. Your thoughtful engagement with sociological concepts and assigned readings, and how you apply them to understand your own experiences, is the key task of this essay. It is always useful to develop an outline of what you want to discuss in the paper before you start to write.

**Specifics**

Papers should be double-spaced, with 1 inch margins and a 12-point font size. This is a 4 page paper, which means that ***the maximum length is 4 pages***. The ability to communicate your ideas concisely is a very important skill to learn. You can always merge sentences, paragraphs, etc. in order to make your paper shorter and, ultimately, to make your ideas clearer to yourself. All pages must be numbered!

All essays should be accompanied by a cover page with your essay title (be creative!), your name, my name and the name of the course.

You must **reference Miner’s text at least once** in your paper. One way to do this is to present your analysis as building upon Miner’s previous work with the Nacirema (or a similarly curious cultural group if you are focusing on a group other than the Nacirema). Citations should appear in parentheses at the end of the quote, and give the last name of the author, date of publication, and page number. Example: (Miner 1956: 503).

You do not need to include a bibliography of references for this essay.

Proofread your essay (perhaps more than once)! Grammar, punctuation, and general readability of the essay require careful proofreading by you. Carve out time for this.

**Grading Criteria**

1. **Overall clarity, thoughtfulness and analytic complexity of your essay**. Do you respond directly and carefully to the assigned topic? How well do you understand and incorporate concepts from the Miner reading? How well can you apply the concept of making the familiar strange to the topic you’ve chosen? Do you construct a sociologically insightful essay?
2. **Organization, readability, and neatness of the essay**. Does the essay have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Is your writing style clear? Is the essay well-organized, with transitions between your ideas and paragraphs? Have you carefully followed the instructions under Specifics re: formatting and writing the essay? Do you use proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar?

If you need help with writing, you can contact the Flagler Writing Center. Here is the website: <https://www.flagler.edu/student-support-services/learning-resource-center/>.

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| **Criteria** | **Ratings** | **Pts** |
| This criterion is linked to a Learning Outcome Content | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **5.0 pts**  **Excellent analysis – follows prompt—full, clear explanations— original, creative, cites Miner, well written - good length** | **4.0 pts**  **Good analysis – follows prompt—original, creative but does not cite Miner and/or needs more explanation – mostly well written - good length** | **3.0 pts**  **Average – mostly follows prompt—analysis not very original or explained in depth - good length** | **2.0 pts**  **Only partially addressed prompt, analysis not original or creative, poorly written** | **1.0 pts**  **Unsatisfactory - Too brief or did not fulfill objectives of assignment.** | | 5.0 pts x 20= 100 total possible points |