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Hearing Social Structure: A Musical Exercise in Teaching Introduction to Sociology

Roxanne Gerbrandt*

Preston Gilmore

Abstract This article details employing music as a pedagogical tool to enable introductory students to relate personal experiences to larger social structures such as class, race, and gender through a creative yet rigorous exercise. The authors review earlier uses of music in the classroom, and expand on that framework, adding a number of crucial elements. The exercise includes the selection of a song by students, then a review of the sociological frameworks influencing the song, culminating in a formal research paper to enhance critical thinking and a presentation where students educate their classmates. The exercise enables the popularity of music to act as biographical proxy for students, allowing them to broach sociological topics that might be personally relevant through the medium of the song. The authors utilize two different assessment measures of student learning and their employment in relation to the objectives. The article further discusses the assignment's limitations and concludes by assessing the effectiveness of this exercise.

INTRODUCTION

As many instructors who have taught an Introduction to Sociology course can attest, persuading students to abandon individual explanations for complex social phenomena so that they might better understand the complicated relations between social structures and lived experiences can be an arduous task. The individualistic interpretations offered by many introductory students veil structural constraints. It often does not occur to them that forces and

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social relations beyond their immediate control are influencing the content of their experiences and consciousness in ways that may not be readily apparent.

In order to overcome this common problem, we introduce a lively but rigorous classroom exercise entitled Hearing Social Structure. We present our findings on students' increased awareness of social structure from this term-long exercise used in two Introduction to Sociology courses. The assignment begins with students choosing a song that they feel speaks to them, then researching the social structures that might have impacted the views expressed in the song. Students are prompted to develop critical thinking skills through the writing of a formal research paper, and share their analysis with their peers in the form of a multimedia presentation. The intent of this exercise is to leverage the popularity of music by incorporating it in a learning environment, and employ that music to expand student's personal understanding to a larger social structural context, particularly the basic sociological concepts of race, class and gender. In detailing this exercise we argue that the sociological imagination can be stimulated through a cooperative pedagogy (here defined as the inclusion of students sharing in the teaching role and exemplified by the peer-oriented presentations). This exercise encourages students to deconstruct individualized explanations of their everyday experiences, allowing them to discover relationships between biographies and social structures. These relationships are also placed within historical context through the use of music from differing eras, focused research, and taking on the role of teacher to elucidate sociological concepts for their peers.

To evaluate the success of the exercise, we utilize two different measures of analysis. First, we employ a questionnaire to capture student responses at the end of the exercise. The questionnaire consists of two parts: a fixed-response section, designed to provide a 1 to 5 rating response on specific themes relevant to our goals, and an open-ended question section, enabling the authors to capture emergent themes and concepts that might otherwise be

missed. Secondly, we evaluate students' test scores as another measure of the exercise's efficacy, and further judge the ability of this exercise to reach our stated purposes.

USING MUSIC AS A LEARNING TOOL

The merits of using music as a tool to teach sociology have been demonstrated by numerous researchers for decades. In one of the earliest published examples, Elterman (1983) chose six songs from the time period ranging from 1930 to the early 1960s to teach the topic of social class. After the publication of Elterman's article, other documented examples of music used as an instructional device to facilitate student learning in the sociology classroom appear. Walczak and Reuter (1994) commissioned popular music "song lyric packets" and had classes listen to musical selections from a discography. Homework assignments asked questions regarding song lyrics to be turned in at the next class meeting. The authors noted retrospectively that this technique could be improved by allowing students to choose the music (Walczak and Reuter 1994). Martinez (1994, 1995, and 1998) prescribed music as a pedagogical tool for teaching a variety of courses and demonstrated its success in enhancing class discussion and illustrating concepts and theories. Ahlkvist (1999) had students in introductory courses perform cultural analyses of heavy metal music from the late 1960s through the 1990s, including associated album images and artwork. Ahlkvist (2001) also used similar techniques to teach classical sociological theory in introductory courses with music from the 1970s including Yes, Pink Floyd, and Emerson Lake and Palmer (ELP). While this technique was successful, Ahlkvist (2001:481) commented that, "A more ambitious extension of the technique might include the use of popular music that emerged in the aftermath of progressive rock." Albers and Bach (2003) utilized more contemporary rock music; however, their application involved playing relevant songs prior to the beginning of class as a way to humanize the instructors and to encourage critical thinking and participation.

Muschert (2006) extended the use of music in the classroom by offering the opportunity for students to pick and analyze music that was more familiar to them. The effectiveness of this approach in advancing course goals was substantiated with student responses indicating that the technique was overwhelmingly well received and greatly enhanced rapport among students. Muschert (2006) applied the technique of using music to teach sociology in a senior level course on juvenile delinquency and thus was able to have each student present a song of their choosing at the start of each class throughout the semester. They were also asked to turn in a brief account that simply explained their musical selection (Muschert 2006).

GOALS, DEVELOPMENT, AND DETAILS OF EXERCISE

We started working on this project together, a professor and a senior sociology student, at a mid-sized university in the southern region of the United States. Class size for our Introduction to Sociology classes is normally 33 to 36 students. Our intent in developing this assignment was to construct an exercise for use in Introduction to Sociology classes that would unite the themes of the course throughout the semester and supplement traditional instruction, while allowing the students to exercise their creativity and maintain a high level of engagement in the class.

As stated earlier, our main objective was focused on the area of improving student's understanding of social structure and the basic social issues of race, class and gender. In particular, we were looking for an exercise that would enable students to bridge the gap between their own experiences and a more sociological approach to understanding the world. In short, our goal was to develop an exercise that would do more than entertain: our primary purpose was to create and implement an exercise that would cultivate the comprehension of social structure; the challenging core of developing the sociological imagination (Mills 1959).

Another important objective of the assignment was to prompt students to increase the quality of communication between themselves and the instructor and with their peers. The instructor has made one-on-one time with students a pedagogical goal for more than a decade. However, mandating additional interaction between the instructor and students does not guarantee that the communication will improve. Likewise, requiring group interaction does not necessarily improve the quality of student-to-student communication. In searching for a solution to this goal, the authors have noticed that quality of communication seems to be closely tied to the elements of creativity and personal expression. In other words, we hypothesized that by allowing the students some say in the choices made for the exercise (such as choosing which song and sociological issues to explore), it would enhance the communication process as well.

Increasing the quality of communication between students is also of particular importance in a university such as ours where our student body is racially diverse and enrolls a large number of non-traditional students. Discussions about inequalities, particularly race inequality, have occasionally triggered defensive posturing among some students, resulting in a nonproductive atmosphere. Rather than skirting these issues, we spent time deliberating how to help students from various backgrounds connect to different perspectives while minimizing reactive elements. In noticing that many students' musical tastes seemed to cross racial barriers that were not ordinarily breached, and knowing that the sharing of music has the ability to nurture symbolic rapport (Ridgeway 1976), we developed the idea of using music as a biographical proxy, where students could share something of themselves with the rest of the class in a nonthreatening way. Student's musical selections effectively stood-in for their personal experiences. This proxy effect became an important element of the exercise because as students shared a song that was meaningful but not necessarily directly experienced by the student, the risk of direct personal disclosure could be diffused.

The third objective of this assignment was to develop and enhance the students' critical thinking skills. As the level of input from media and other sources seems to expand exponentially, it becomes more important that, as instructors, we highlight and encourage critical thinking skills in our interactions with students. To this end, Mayer (1986:251) states that, "The key to developing critical thinking lies in creating conditions for participation rather than passivity, and in providing opportunities for emotional engagement with the materials." Having music as a vehicle for that emotional engagement, and requiring students to "teach" their choice of song through a presentation and discussing how that song is linked to a larger social structural issue provided both elements necessary to further a critical thinking environment.¹

Instructional Elements

The first step of the exercise required students to choose a song that symbolized a challenge, problem, or concern of everyday life. They were given both written and verbal instructions on how to find and analyze a song in which the song lyrics also held personal meaning. Students were encouraged to follow up on core lecture and reading material by considering songs that addressed a primary social issue such as race, class, and gender inequality. Students were allowed to use any song that they wished, providing that the song meant something to them on a personal level, so that they could if desired inject some of their own personal biographies. The instructor explained that the song choice made would ultimately lead to an in-class presentation intended to strengthen the comprehension of sociological issues

¹ For actual examples of the exercise instructions and associated analysis tools, refer to Appendices A – C, where the assignment handout, post-assignment survey and grading rubric are reproduced in full.

for the entire class. Students could work alone on this exercise but also had the option to work in pairs.

The analysis of the song began the research process of the exercise. After choosing their song, students were directed to meet with the professor during the first five weeks of the term, presenting their song choice and explaining the social issue it represented to them. After brief instruction on how to conduct journal searches, they were encouraged to use academic sources, including their textbook, to research their focus topic. This is the point where personalized attention in the form of a scheduled face to face meeting was crucial. During the meeting more specific guidance could be provided, therefore increasing the likelihood that each student recognized their main topic before the research process began.

Writing up their findings was another important element of the assignment. We included a requirement of a four to five page research paper, complete with citations and other hallmarks of formal research. For this paper, each student needed to summarize their topic and explain the links between their musical selection and the social structure or issue they were focused on. We believed that a formal written assignment would also aid in the development of the critical thinking that is necessary for the successful completion of this exercise. As Grauerholz (1999:310) notes, "Writing is one of the most important and useful pedagogical tools available to instructors to help students achieve a variety of goals central to sociological instruction, including critical thinking and the development of students' sociological imaginations." Earlier incarnations of the assignment did not include the written research component and subsequently lacked the rigor that a fully developed research paper added. By including the research paper, the individual elements of the exercise complemented one another, producing a more complete learning experience for the students. Finally, it was essential that once the paper was completed, students were required to deliver the paper for

final approval either via email or an additional face to face meeting before they were allowed to lead the class presentation. This gave the professor one more opportunity to offer guidance and encouragement, and verify that each presentation would be as factually accurate and instructive as possible.

Students then reserved a 15 minute instructional period during the last three weeks of the term to play their song and teach their results to the rest of the class. On their reserved date, each student or pair of students played a selected song (and accompanying music video if applicable), presented the lyrics to the song on a separate printed sheet or on screen, and gave a presentation to the class on the concepts and issues explored in the paper. The presentations, using audio, video, and other presentation aides, were limited to approximately ten minutes each. Students were asked to prepare for an additional five minutes allocated for discussion and response to questions from the class. This schedule usually allowed at least three student presentations per 55 minute class period, which accommodated a 36 student class within a three week window when about half of the students' research, writing, and presentations were done in pairs. The use of currently available presentation aides such as audio, the song's video (typically available online), overhead slide presentations, and other aides enhanced the presentation process, allowing students to become quite sophisticated in their presentations.

In summary, our intent was to design an assignment consisting of a live "teaching" presentation as well as a paper, with the objectives of challenging students to link their personal connection or biography to the larger social structures or issues, improve communication about those issues in the classroom between each other and the instructor, and enhance their critical thinking skills along the way.

EVALUATING THE APPROACH

In any learning exercise it is important to be able to gauge the efficacy of the outcomes, to ascertain whether the exercise is having the desired effect. We concur with Appling, Naumann, & Berk (2001) that the use of multiple sources in judging effectiveness (in this case the efficacy of a particular assignment within a class) is generally more accurate than a model using only a single source. By employing diverse measures of effectiveness, our goal was to minimize those biases inherent within each measure, while enhancing the accuracy of overall effectiveness measurement (Berk 2005).

We employed two tools in assessing this exercise. The first measure was a student survey, used to gain insight into the students' perspectives on the exercise and how it may have added to their understanding, comprehension and development of critical thinking. The second tool employed was an outcome measure of learning using examination scores, and the measurement of change that was evidenced by comparing student test results of comprehension-oriented questions both before and after the assignment was completed.

The university's Institutional Review Board granted us permission to solicit feedback from two sections of Introduction to Sociology at the end of the term during which this teaching exercise was implemented. The surveys were anonymous and voluntary and neither of the authors was present while the surveys were being administered. Student feedback was solicited through a two part evaluation, which included both a fixed response section and an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix B for complete derivation). Students were asked to respond to questions regarding the effectiveness of the music project. In the first section, 34 students were registered and 24 responded to the survey. The second section had 36 students registered and 27 responded to the survey. The overall response rate for both sections was 72.9 percent.

In choosing the assessment measures, student surveys can be one of most useful tools of measuring the effectiveness of a classroom exercise. There are benefits to measuring the effectiveness of an exercise versus measuring the instructor's effectiveness. Evidence suggests that gender and race influences student evaluations of an instructor (Laube, Massoni, Sprague, and Ferber 2007). However, when evaluating a classroom assignment, that bias may be minimized by having the students evaluate the exercise using multiple measures (Clare and Aschbacher 2001). We were careful to craft the questions to provide some real measure of effectiveness of the assignment itself, rather than rating questions focused on teacher effectiveness.

In designing our survey, our decision in combining a more quantitative student rating output with the more qualitatively focused open-ended questionnaire is a methodological approach to leverage the strengths of both types of student response. Biggs (1996) noted that these kinds of assessments evince a deeper student understanding, and also demonstrate student's abilities to apply that understanding in a contextual way; precisely the kind of measure that would help us accurately assess our main objectives, particularly the advancement of critical thinking skills. Using a combination of fixed response scale-rating questions in conjunction with open-ended responses enabled a more detailed understanding of students' responses and also helped to measure the assignment's effectiveness in reaching our main objectives.

The fixed response data was summarized by simply assigning an average score to each question, while the open ended questions required additional analysis. Taking the open-ended question results as a whole narrative, we utilized a simplified grounded theory technique (Gerbrandt 2007) where we coded for emergent themes within the students' responses. Unlike the formal inductive methodology introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) we utilized only the

mapping techniques to categorize the open-ended answers into themes. We detail the results of these surveys, followed by examination scores and teacher observations in the Findings and Reflections from Students section.

Comparing the test scores between the mid-term and the final was the other measurement of student learning outcomes. While test scores are not a complete measure of student learning, they do provide a separate independent evaluation that adds an important dimension to the survey results. Theall and Franklin (2001) found high correlations between the ratings that students provide (similar to the ratings from the fixed-response portion of our student survey) and their test scores, making student testing outcomes a good assessment match to the previously discussed student survey. This measure was focused to assess two of our three main objectives: improvement in comprehension of social structures and issues, and development of student's critical thinking skills. In order to develop this measure as an effective indicator of those objectives, the instructor crafted both mid-term and final examinations as a combination of knowledge-based questions and comprehension focused queries.

The completion of the research papers and the music presentations given by the students occurred in between the timing of the two exams. The mid-term was scheduled about seven to eight weeks into the term. After the mid-term, the student presentations began, and continued until approximately one week prior to the final, at the end of the term. This timing of mid-term and final exams offered an opportunity to gauge the impact these presentations and their preparation had on student learning, since the presentations occurred in between the two assessments. The final exam was designed similarly to the mid-term exam, but assessed the latter half of the text and lectures. Each exam had a series of multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and short answer essay questions. Each exam was created to reflect the same measure of cognitive challenge (Clare and Aschbacher 2001). In particular, test scores were

examined not only for overall achievement, but also by separate assessment comparison of knowledge-based questions from the book and lectures; those questions that measured comprehension, and the ability of students to apply their critical thinking.

To analyze this data, the instructor coded all the questions in both exams as either knowledge-based or structurally-oriented comprehension questions. Ten questions were part of the comprehension question group in each exam, with at least three fill in the blank or short answer essay questions included in that group. These questions were graded according to a rubric designed to focus on comprehension of the concepts, and ability of students to apply their understanding of social structures (see Appendix C).

FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS FROM STUDENTS

Ratings and Themes from the Survey

As previously elucidated, one of the components of the survey included a series of fixed-response questions. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the student teaching presentations at clarifying sociological concepts on a one to five scale (where one is least effective and five is most effective), a full 80 percent of students responded with very effective or most effective (fours and fives). Although students felt that the research paper portion of the exercise was not as effective as the presentation at clarifying sociological concepts, 69 percent still reported that this aspect of the project was very effective or most effective. Nevertheless, having a majority of students come to the realization that writing a paper was an effective means of enhancing their own education was significant. As one student recalled, "When writing the paper I learned how to relate sociological problems with how I feel but also based on fact instead of uneducated opinion."

Students were also asked to rate their conscious awareness of social structure before and after taking Introduction to Sociology on a similar one to five fixed response scale (where

one is no awareness and five is highly aware). Altogether, 57 percent of students responded that they had no awareness or very little awareness of social structure before taking Introduction to Sociology. Conversely, fully 96 percent (49 of 51 respondents) indicated that they were very aware or highly aware of social structure after engaging in this exercise.

Using the modified-grounded theory technique mentioned previously, we examined student responses to the open-ended questions from the second half of the survey, looking for emergent themes. The first theme was quite evident because of the number of students who mentioned it. Of the students sampled, 62 percent wrote that this exercise aided their comprehension of sociology. One student summarized the theme of many comments by saying, "It [the music presentation] was helpful because it allowed me to associate sociological issues with songs. This will make it easier to retain the knowledge beyond this course." This was affirmed by another student who said, "The presentations of the other students greatly reinforced many concepts that we learned in class. The presentations linked sociological concepts with actual lives - which helps me to remember."

Many students reported that they became conscious of the social problems presented by their peers. In response to the survey question "Explain the impact (if any) the teaching presentations from the other students had on you," one student replied that "This made me more aware of my peers concerns." Another student responding to the same question remarked that, "It allowed me, for five to ten minutes, to walk in the shoes of my classmates, to know what issues are of concern to them." In fact, several students mentioned that the project enabled them to relate course material beyond just their own lives to the lives and experiences of their classmates and thereby reevaluate previously held beliefs about themselves and others. As Browne and Freeman (2000:307) said, "Understanding the importance of multiple perspectives and of context is obligatory for critical thinking because it prevents premature

commitment." This effect was especially apparent and viable when detailing painful issues surrounding social inequalities. In a region such as ours, where discourse around racial inequality has been tacitly silenced, the following comment as a response to the survey question, "Is there anything else you would like to add," was noteworthy:

I believe after taking this class I am much more aware of racism. I didn't believe I was racist but now it is clear to me that I am. It showed me I was raised to be racist, expected to be racist, and frowned upon by my closest piers [sic] if I wasn't racist. Very good class! Presentations discussed important issues.

Some comments clearly point towards the presentations having a personal proxy effect, enabling students to share and discuss deeply felt issues by allowing the artist and song choice to speak for them. This was especially evident in issues of race. As one student said, "You can't talk about race around here without it getting personal, but in my song [presentation] it wasn't me, it was this cool old school rapper." As student presenters began the discussion and fielded questions immediately following the song, many seemed to feel more able to express their own personal experiences as they related to the social structure under discussion. Although there is typically reluctance among students in divulging any personal, deeply felt convictions about social issues, the students presenting exhibited very little of this reluctance when they allowed the song to initially 'speak' for them. The authors believe that the vehicle of music aides this personal proxy effect, and alleviates some of the normal reticence experienced by students.

This proxy effect also appeared in issues of gender and class as well. For example, a pair of students presented the song, "If I Were a Boy," by Beyoncé, which deals directly with gendered double standards. In response to the survey question, "Is there anything else you would like to add," one of the students remarked, "I tried talking to guys about gender stuff I learned in this class, but it was always turned back to me, like there was something wrong with me. But when Beyoncé said it, well, they listened; what guy doesn't pay attention to Beyoncé!"

Overall, student responses affirmed that the exercise aided students in the process of demystifying the dominant social relations, a process that, as Gramsci (1971) pointed out, is crucial to an inclusive pedagogy. By allowing the students to use music as a biographical proxy, the presenters created a learning environment that allowed other students to more easily connect the personal to social structure, thereby using individual empathy as a bridge for students to reach a deeper, more direct connection with the issues being addressed.

Testing

Student learning outcomes were also evidenced by the improvement in scores from mid-term to final exam among the students. As a measure of comparison, we calculated the percentage of correct scores for both knowledge-based questions and structurally-oriented comprehension focused questions from raw test scores, but particular attention was given to the answers that required awareness of social structures before and after the music exercise. After analysis, we found that the results of the knowledge based questions actually decreased slightly (-1.1 percent) from the mid-term to the final exam. However, the assessment showed a marked increase of 10.13 percent on the results of the comprehension question responses.

A comparison of their mid-term and final exam scores also showed an improvement in their ability to illustrate a clear and accurate understanding of social structure. For example, one of the midterm structurally-oriented questions asked students to "Compare and contrast social differentiation and social stratification." The students (in aggregate, N= 64) scored 54.2 percent on the question, using the rubric previously mentioned. Conversely, one of the similar final exam questions was "Provide an example of past-in present discrimination," where students scored an improved 68.8 percent on this question. On the final exam, the students were more able to provide concrete answers drawn from their own research papers and particularly from the other students' presentations. The fact that many students used concrete examples from

other students' presentations in their final exam suggests not only an improvement in comprehension, but also a recognized advancement in their critical thinking skills. While we are not permitted to expose any individual student's answer, the student's use of sociologically focused language in answering this and other final exam questions pertaining to comprehension of social structures points toward an improvement in their understanding, as well as an improvement in the student's critical thinking skills. While this increase does not identify the source of improvement, the student responses, particularly on the short essay answers on the final exam, demonstrate a heightened awareness of sociological structure, which is a primary focus of the music presentations.

Improved Communication

The authors observed a noticeable change in communication between the instructor and students, as well as the improved communication between students, upon completion of this exercise. Before this assignment was implemented, the instructor witnessed very little voluntary discussion about race, class, or gender before, during, or after class. In contrast, after this assignment was implemented the willingness to breach these sometimes difficult topics and issues was noticeably improved. In essence, this assignment helped to pave a way for the students to discuss more structural and sensitive topics in ways that were both constructive and instructive. While not used as a measure of assessment, these observations further describe the improvement in interactions between students and between student and teacher after this exercise was completed.

APPLICABILITY AND LIMITATIONS

This was an ideal exercise for relatively small Introduction to Sociology classes. Even so, the time commitment required for the teaching presentations prevents this exercise from being directly executed in large classrooms. In order to reproduce this exercise, the feasible class size

is recommended at forty students or less. However, modifications to this exercise in order to accommodate larger classes may be tenable. Large classrooms of students could, for example, be grouped into smaller heterogeneous sections.

The research paper is another element that requires additional focus. We found that at least one face to face meeting between instructor and student to discuss song choice and the social issues involved, together with the review of the student research paper before presentation, required considerable time resources from the instructor. While guiding students through research is labor intensive, one possible way to alleviate some of the time investment for both students and the instructor would be to take the students to the library early in the semester and have a librarian explain how to use academic search engines.

In earlier incarnations of this exercise, students were given the opportunity to present their findings without approving their research paper beforehand. This resulted in some students presenting personal favorites, and expounding on the song, rather than doing sociological analysis. We are convinced that the research portion of the project was vital for its overall success. As one student commented, "Just hearing it in lecture is one thing, but to have to go out and actually find the truth in the material for yourself really brings it into perspective." Even with these safeguards in effect, however, we still had three students among the two classes cited who used the opportunity of an audience to espouse their ideological opinions. Instead of stopping the student in mid-presentation, this instructor waited until after the presentation to deconstruct the difference between ideology and science. We have to admit that these were scary moments, but these are the risks an instructor takes whenever an inclusive pedagogy is initiated. These moments however did become teaching opportunities because many students admitted during those discussions that they had not really thought about the difference before learning sociology.

Additionally, there is a potential for problems at the end of the student presentations. If left unguided, we found that students would occasionally discuss their subject endlessly, and sometimes veer off topic. It is important that the professor maintain engagement during the class discussion to keep the class on topic and on schedule. While it was heartwarming to witness high levels of interactions between students, a call must be made at some point in the question and answer period to end the presentation.

Finally, there is the occasional problem of paralyzing stage fright for some students. In each class, the instructor experienced at least one student who was virtually petrified at the thought of getting up in front of the class. Although these situations were rare, and certainly not encouraged, there are some students who would ultimately elect to fail the class, rather than present in front of their peers. These students were allowed to give their presentations directly to the instructor as a stepping stone to presentations with a wider audience. This possibility, as well as the others mentioned need to be anticipated, so that the instructor has a plan before they occur.

CONCLUSION

Our goal was to create an assignment that would inspire students to grasp a greater level of understanding of social structure, to increase both the level and quality of communication between the students and the instructor, and to advance and develop their critical thinking skills, particularly in relation to sensitive social issues. At the outset, we intuitively understood through our own lived experiences that music had the potential to inspire empathy and breach boundaries. This was also the case for students. Music is emotionally compelling in ways that no textbook or lecture from an instructor can approximate. The medium can be just as important as the message. When applied in the classroom in a way that

incorporates scholarly texts with the knowledge and expertise of the instructor, the result is a dynamic introduction to sociology that substantively links everyday life to academic discourse.

We were very satisfied with the overall outcomes of the project. Using music as a biographical proxy in an exercise such as Hearing Social Structure encourages students to momentarily suspend and reconsider their possible distrust and apprehension towards a sociological approach by allowing students to learn from not only the instructor, but one another as well. This effectuates an environment where students become producers of knowledge and, by design, legitimizes their experiences and researched ideas as sociologically valuable. This proxy effect of music allows students to self-disclose as much or as little as they feel comfortable. Regardless of how much biographical content each student chose to disclose, each became an active participant in the learning process. The assignment highlights the historical and structural context of their lives through music thus making it easier for them to make the pivotal connections between lived experiences and social structures that is the crux of a sociological imagination.

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APPENDIX A Initial Written Instructions for Exercise

Hearing Social Structure: An Exercise of the Sociological Imagination

Pick a song that you feel describes or encompasses a challenge, problem, or concern of your everyday life. The song does not need to be analyzed on a literal basis. The song you choose could be a metaphor for your topic. You have creative license to interpret the song. Analyze the song with your sociological imagination: that is, link the personal issue/topic to larger social structures within society.

Meeting: Meet with me during office hours, or we can set another time during the first five weeks of the term. Bring your song choice, song lyrics, and ideas about the direction you like to take your research.

Presentation: You will have ten minutes as the teacher for this subject. An additional five minutes will be allowed after your presentation for questions and answers with the class. A maximum of five minutes should be used to play the song. Use your time wisely, (I will be keeping time for you) and use the sociological data from your book alone or in combination with outside sources to explain your topic, and how your music relates that topic. As an option, you may want to present the lyrics of the music, either as an overhead (Smart Board) or in hard copy for the class. Note: Outside sources must be from reliable articles or books. Government statistics are also acceptable. Please see me first if you have any doubt about the merits of outside readings.

Paper: You will also be required to complete a 4-5 page essay where you will discuss and analyze these issues. Include a copy of the lyrics in your paper, but do not count the lyric page(s), cover sheet, or reference page(s) in your 4-5 pages. Some possible topics to consider might include (but are certainly not limited to) your experiences with day care, police

harassment, crime, racism, sexism, classism, unemployment, low wages, experiences of education, or safety. Your biggest challenge in this paper will be distinguishing between sociological fact and uneducated opinion (hint: the majority of the grade you will earn for this assignment hinges on your ability to do this effectively). Your paper MUST be turned in to me to review for accuracy before your presentation time. The sooner you can complete and turn in your paper, the more time you will have to make any changes. A final version of your paper MUST be turned in to me at the time of your presentation. Be sure to keep track of the date you are teaching with your presentation. Due to time constraints, it will not be possible to forget and then present at another time. It is also acceptable, in fact interesting, if the same song is chosen by more than one person. A different angle and data on the same topic can be very useful to us as we are learning about the issues of interest to you.

The purpose here is not simply to describe your subjective experience but to ultimately link this experience to structural factors. However, this is your opportunity to allow your classmates to feel, through the music, the way you feel.

APPENDIX B Student Survey

1) What is your level of college education?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other (describe)_____

2) On a scale from 1 to 5 below, where 1 is least effective and 5 is most effective, rate how effective you feel that the teaching presentation exercise was at clarifying sociological concepts for you.

3) On the scale of 1 to 5 below, where 1 is least effective and 5 is most effective, rate how effective you feel the research paper was at clarifying sociological concepts for you.

4) On a scale of 1 to 5 below, where 1 is no awareness and 5 is highly aware, how would you rate your conscious awareness of social structure before taking Introduction to Sociology?

5) On a scale of 1 to 5 below, where 1 is no awareness and 5 is highly aware, how would you rate your conscious awareness of social structure after taking Introduction to Sociology?

One half of a page was given for students to answer the following questions:

6) Did the teaching presentation, writing the paper, and listening to the other student's presentations help you understand the sociological imagination?

7) Compare your conscious knowledge and awareness of social structure before taking Introduction to Sociology with your knowledge and awareness of social structure now.

- 8) Explain the impact (if any) the teaching presentations from the other students had on you.
- 9) What do you feel would make the exercises used in this class more effective at clarifying social structure and sparking a sociological imagination in future students?
- 10) Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX C Grading Rubric

Goal: To demonstrate an understanding of the link between biography, history and social structures.

4-Accomplished

- Knowledge of the subject is accurate throughout.
- Demonstrates comprehension of the Sociological Imagination and illustrates with examples.
- Demonstrates a deep understanding of theoretical frameworks in order to explain contemporary social phenomena.
- Accurately describes social structures in depth and uses more than one strong example as a framework for analysis.
- Integrates and applies basic sociological concepts.

3- Competent

- Shows clear comprehension of basic sociological concepts.
- Knowledge of the subject is accurate throughout except in minor details.
- Demonstrates comprehension of the Sociological Imagination, but uses weak examples.
- Uses theoretical frameworks to explain contemporary social phenomena, but understanding of theory is weak.
- Accurately describes social structure and using one strong example as a framework for analysis.
- Applies basic sociological concepts.

2-Developing

- Able to state basic sociological concepts.
- Knowledge of the subject is generally accurate, though flawed.
- Demonstrates understanding of the Sociological Imagination, but provides unrelated examples.
- Uses theoretical frameworks to explain contemporary social phenomena, but makes weak connections.
- Accurately describes social structure, but examples are weak.
- Does not apply basic sociological concepts.

1-Beginning

- Lacks understanding of basic scientific concepts and principles.
- Knowledge of the subject is generally inaccurate.
- Does not demonstrate an understanding of the Sociological Imagination and provides no examples.
- Does not use theoretical frameworks to explain contemporary social phenomena.
- Uses uninformed opinions or uses irrelevant facts to explain a social phenomenon.