McGill University
Fall 2023

Sociology 235: Technology and Society
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:35 am-09:55 am
Location: ENGMC 204

Section: 001

Instructor: Alessandro Giuseppe Drago
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Teaching Assistants:
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Michaela Michalopulos: Tuesday 1:30-2:30
Via Teams, use my calendly link to reserve.
Yuhou Chen: Monday 2:30-3:30
Leacock 112A

Course Description and Objectives
The objective of this course will be to introduce you to many of the debates, discussions and discourses surrounding the role, function, and influence of technology in modern society, focusing on examining inequalities and the impact of technology in reinforcing and/or mitigating contemporary disparities. The interdependencies between society and technology will be explored. Taking a critical view of these interdependencies, we will apply theoretical and empirical insights from broad swaths of sociology, covering issues of racial disparities, political power dynamics, gender inequities, surveillance practices, challenges to democracy, and the rise of extremism. By the end of this course, you will understand common sociological concepts and the sociological mindset, synthesize information from academic sources, and think critically about your social world.

Lectures
All weekly lectures will be in person in LEA 219. Slides will be posted on MyCourses before class. Lectures will be a mix of presenting/discussing the readings, class discussions and audio/visual presentations.

Readings
To enhance your understanding of the subject and to promote lively engagement during class discussions, students are expected to finish the assigned weekly readings before the beginning of the scheduled lecture. Remember that reading the assigned readings before and after a lecture

helps improve your understanding of them. Copies of reading material will be made available on MyCourses. The readings will include academic journal articles, chapters from scholarly books and news media. Beyond this, there will be recommended readings for most weeks. These are optional and not required, though very helpful.

Course requirements and grading

1. Mid-term exam – 40% of the grade **On October 12th**

The Mid-term exam will be an in-class test where you must answer 5 essay-style questions. You will have the entire class time to write and answer these questions.

2. Short Writing exercise – 10% of the grade **Due November 17th**

By November 17th, you will need to submit a 1-page report on a particular current-day event and relate it back to class content. **OR:** You can write your 1-page report as a reflection on how your use of technology and the effect of technology on your life is structured by your social/racial/gendered position in society.

3. Final paper – 40% of the grade **Due December 5th.**

For the final paper competency, you will need to write a 6–7-page essay on a topic of pre-selected themes: 1. Surveillance, 2. Repression, 3. The proliferation of fake news and its impacts on democracy, 4. the role of technology in radicalization 5. Technology and the self. You need to find and use a minimum of 8 academic sources (either books or articles) that are not required readings for the class. *Furthermore*, you must cite at least 3 of the guest lectures in your paper. On top of the 8 sources, you can use any of the literature from the class, and/or any other academic and non-academic literature you find. You will lose grades if your paper does not include the requisite number of academic sources. Late penalties will apply.

The final paper should be up to 6-7 double-spaced pages, size 12 Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins. Papers must be submitted on MyCourses.

[FAQs for students using MyCourses: Assignments](#)

4. Creative/critical media exercise - 10% of the grade. **Due November 23rd.**

This assignment can be completed and submitted at any time during the semester before the deadline. The goal is to get you to critically engage and utilize a means of communication/social media (TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, a podcast, etc.). You will need to critically reflect on how the platform you are using may reinforce inequalities and/or support emancipatory practices. Depending on the medium, you should create a 3-minute video or audio message (or about 3-5 slides if you choose another medium). Students who do not wish

to leave such a large digital footprint can instead submit a PowerPoint presentation, of about 3-5 slides, on a specific platform that they use. Late penalties will apply.

FAQs for students using MyCourses: Assignments

Course Grade

Your grade in this course will be determined by your performance on the four competencies outlined above. No extra credit will be offered. If you believe that an error has been made in the calculation of your grade, contact the individual who graded your work. If you believe that you deserved a different grade than you received, please write a one-page summary of where and why you believe you deserve the extra credit. From there, you can send the summary to the individual that graded your work. **Note:** Upon review, your grade may either increase or decrease. Please also note that in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme of this course is subject to change.

Late submissions: The consequence of submitting an assignment late is a 5% penalty for every day late.

Grade Breakdown:

A	4.0	85 – 100%
A-	3.7	80 – 84%
B+	3.3	75 – 79%
B	3.0	70 – 74%
B-	2.7	65 – 69%
C+	2.3	60 – 64%
C	2.0	55 – 59%
D	1.0	50 – 54%
F	0	0 – 49%

NOTE: There is no possibility for extra credit in this course.

McGill Policy Statements

Language of submission: *In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)*
Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté, sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue. (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 21 janvier 2009)

Academic integrity: *McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)*
L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et procédures disciplinaires. » (Énoncé approuvé par le Sénat le 29 janvier 2003).

Land Acknowledgement: *McGill University is on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.*

Course Outline

Week 1 (Thursday, August 31st): Introduction to course and review of syllabus

No required readings for today.

Week 2 (September 5th & 7th): Theory: Technological Determinism vs The Social Construction of Technology

Required Readings:

Heilbroner, Robert L. 1967. "Do Machines Make History?" *Technology and Culture* 8(3):335–45. doi: 10.2307/3101719.

Winner, Langdon. 1980. "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" *Daedalus* 109(1):121–36.

Recommended readings:

Bimber, Bruce. 1990. "Karl Marx and the Three Faces of Technological Determinism."
    Social Studies of Science 20(2):333–51.

Dafoe, Allan. 2015. "On Technological Determinism: A Typology, Scope Conditions, and a
    Mechanism." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 40(6):1047–76.

Klein, Hans K. and Daniel Lee Kleinman. 2002. "The Social Construction of Technology:
    Structural Considerations." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 27(1): 28–52.

Lepore, Jill. 2008. "Does Technology Shape History?" *The New Yorker*, May 5.
    https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/12/our-own-devices

**Week 3 (September 12th & 14th): Automation, Immaterial Labour and the Gig
Economy**

Required Readings:

Schor, Juliet B., and Steven P. Vallas. 2021. "The Sharing Economy: Rhetoric and Reality."
    Annual Review of Sociology 47(1):369–89. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-082620-031411.

Vallas, Steven, and Juliet B. Schor. 2020. "What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig
    Economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1):273–94. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-
    121919-054857.

Recommended readings:

Postigo, Hector. 2016. "The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play
    into YouTube Money." *New Media & Society* 18(2):332–49. doi:
    10.1177/1461444814541527.

Siciliano, Michael L. 2016. "Control from on High: Cloud-Computing, Skill, and Acute
    Frustration among Analytics Workers in the Digital Publishing Industry." Pp. 125–53
    in *Research in the Sociology of Work*. Vol. 29, *Research in the Sociology of Work*.
    Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Week 4 (September 19th & 21st): Gender and Technology

Note: Throughout the entirety of this course, we will be cognizant of the role that technology
plays in the continuation of violent patriarchy. This week's lectures will dive more deeply into
this.

Guest Lecture: Isabelle Flory

Required Readings:

Friedmann, Enav, and Dorit Efrat-Treister. 2023. "Gender Bias in Stem Hiring: Implicit In-Group Gender Favoritism Among Men Managers." *Gender & Society* 37(1):32–64. doi: 10.1177/08912432221137910.

Twine, France Winddance. 2018. "Technology's Invisible Women: Black Geek Girls in Silicon Valley and the Failure of Diversity Initiatives." *International Journal of Critical Diversity Studies* 1(1):58–79.

Recommended readings:

Alfrey, Lauren, and France Winddance Twine.. 2017. "GENDER-FLUID GEEK GIRLS: Negotiating Inequality Regimes in the Tech Industry." *Gender and Society* 31(1):28–50.

Barter, C., and Koulu, S. 2021. Digital technologies and gender-based violence – mechanisms for oppression, activism and recovery. Journal of Gender-Based Violence 5, 3, 367-375, available from: < https://doi.org/10.1332/239868021X16315286472556>

Craiut, Miruna-Valeria, and Ioana Raluca Iancu. 2022. "Is Technology Gender Neutral? A Systematic Literature Review on Gender Stereotypes Attached to Artificial Intelligence." *Human Technology* 18(3):297–315. doi: 10.14254/1795-6889.2022.18-3.6.

Maloney, Marcus, Steven Roberts, and Timothy Graham. 2019. *Gender, Masculinity and Video Gaming: Analysing Reddit's r/Gaming Community*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Shor, Eran. 2022. "Who Seeks Aggression in Pornography? Findings from Interviews with Viewers." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 51(2):1237–55. doi: 10.1007/s10508-021-02053-1.

Wynn, Alison T. 2020. "Pathways toward Change: Ideologies and Gender Equality in a Silicon Valley Technology Company." *Gender & Society* 34(1):106–30. doi: 10.1177/0891243219876271.

Zeno, Elissa. 2022. "Synchronizing the Biological Clock: Managing Professional and Romantic Risk through Company-Sponsored Egg Freezing." *Social Problems* 69(2):527–43. doi: 10.1093/socpro/spaa031.

Week 5 (September 26th & 28th): Race, Ethnicity, and Technology

Note: Throughout the entirety of this course, we will be cognizant of the role that the white supremacist social system plays in the continuation and maintenance of white dominance and white racial privilege. This week's lectures will dive more deeply into this.

Required Readings:

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Default Discrimination." Pp. 53–66 in *Race after technology : abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Cambridge, UK ; Polity.

Roth, Wendy D., and Biorn Ivemark. 2018. "Genetic Options: The Impact of Genetic Ancestry Testing on Consumers' Racial and Ethnic Identities." *American Journal of Sociology* 124(1):150–84. doi: 10.1086/697487.

Rosen, Eva, Philip M. E. Garboden, and Jennifer E. Cossyleon. 2021. "Racial Discrimination in Housing: How Landlords Use Algorithms and Home Visits to Screen Tenants." *American Sociological Review* 86(5):787–822. doi: 10.1177/00031224211029618.

Recommended readings:

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Engineered Inequity." Pp. 33–52 in *Race after technology : abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Cambridge, UK ; Polity.

Benjamin, Ruha. 2019. "Introduction." Pp. 1–32 in *Race after technology : abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Cambridge, UK ; Polity.

McMillan Cottom, Tressie. 2020. "Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6(4):441–49. doi: 10.1177/2332649220949473.

Ugwudike, Pamela. 2020. "Digital Prediction Technologies in the Justice System: The Implications of a 'Race-Neutral' Agenda." *Theoretical Criminology* 24(3):482–501. doi: 10.1177/1362480619896006.

Week 6 (October 3rd & 5th): Extra class (TBD) & Exam Review

Fall Reading Break: Friday, October 6 to Wednesday, October 11

Week 7 (October 12th):

Mid term, in-class exam.

Week 8 (October 17th & 19th): Technology, Surveillance, and Policing & Online Surveillance, Security and Privacy

Guest Lecture: Michaela Michalopulos

Required Readings:

Brayne, Sarah. 2017. "Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing." *American Sociological Review* 82(5):977–1008. doi: 10.1177/0003122417725865.

Brayne, Sarah, and Angèle Christin. 2020. "Technologies of Crime Prediction: The Reception of Algorithms in Policing and Criminal Courts." *Social Problems*. doi: 10.1093/socpro/spaa004.

Recommended readings:

Barnes, Liberty, and Jasmine Fledderjohann. 2020. "Reproductive Justice for the Invisible Infertile: A Critical Examination of Reproductive Surveillance and Stratification." *Sociology Compass* 14(2). doi: 10.1111/soc4.12745.

Ford, Andrea, Giulia De Togni, and Livia Miller. 2021. "Hormonal Health: Period Tracking Apps, Wellness, and Self-Management in the Era of Surveillance Capitalism." *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 7(1):48–66. doi: 10.17351/ests2021.655.

Kirk, Gabriela. 2021. "The Limits of Expectations and the Minimization of Collateral Consequences: The Experience of Electronic Home Monitoring." *Social Problems* 68(3):642–57. doi: 10.1093/socpro/spaa021.

Lyon, David. 2017. "Digital Citizenship and Surveillance| Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity." *International Journal of Communication* 11(0):19.

Martinez-Aranda, Mirian G. 2022. "Extended Punishment: Criminalising Immigrants through Surveillance Technology." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(1):74–91. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2020.1822159.

Shelby. 2020. "Techno-Physical Feminism: Anti-Rape Technology, Gender, and Corporeal Surveillance." *Feminist Media Studies* 20(8):1088–1109. doi: 10.1080/14680777.2019.1662823.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* 30(1):75–89. doi: 10.1057/jit.2015.5.

Zuboff, Shoshana, Norma Möllers, David Murakami Wood, and David Lyon. 2019. "Surveillance Capitalism: An Interview with Shoshana Zuboff." *Surveillance & Society* 17(1/2):257–66. doi: 10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.13238.

Week 9 (October 24th & 26th): Fake News and Disinformation Networks/Conspiracy Theories

Required Readings:

Bleakley, Paul. 2023. "Panic, Pizza and Mainstreaming the Alt-Right: A Social Media Analysis of Pizzagate and the Rise of the QAnon Conspiracy." *Current Sociology* 71(3):509–25. doi: 10.1177/00113921211034896.

Greve, Henrich R., Hayagreeva Rao, Paul Vicinanza, and Echo Yan Zhou. 2022. "Online Conspiracy Groups: Micro-Bloggers, Bots, and Coronavirus Conspiracy Talk on

Twitter." *American Sociological Review* 87(6):919–49. doi: 10.1177/00031224221125937.

Recommended readings:

Lee, Taeku, and Christian Hosam. 2020. "Fake News Is Real: The Significance and Sources of Disbelief in Mainstream Media in Trump's America." *Sociological Forum* 35(S1):996–1018. doi: 10.1111/socf.12603.

Monsees, Linda. 2023. "Information Disorder, Fake News and the Future of Democracy." *Globalizations* 20(1):153–68. doi: 10.1080/14747731.2021.1927470.

Munoriyarwa, Allen, and Collen Chambwera. 2020. "Who Are the Arbiters of Truth? Mainstream Journalists' Responses to Fake News during the 2017 Zimbabwe Coup." *Communicatio : South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research* 46(4):75–95. doi: 10.1080/02500167.2020.1854805.

Pyrhönen, Niko, and Gwenaëlle Bauvois. 2020. "Conspiracies beyond Fake News. Produsing Reinformation on Presidential Elections in the Transnational Hybrid Media System." *Sociological Inquiry* 90(4):705–31. doi: 10.1111/soin.12339.

Ravenelle, Alexandrea J., Abigail Newell, and Ken Cai Kowalski. 2021. "'The Looming, Crazy Stalker Coronavirus': Fear Mongering, Fake News, and the Diffusion of Distrust." *Socius* 7. doi: 10.1177/23780231211024776.

Tandoc, Edson C. 2019. "The Facts of Fake News: A Research Review." *Sociology Compass* 13(9). doi: 10.1111/soc4.12724.

Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. 2018. "The Spread of True and False News Online." Science. 359(6380):1146–51.

Week 10 (October 31st & November 2nd): Technology and Politics

We will be watching the documentary "CODED BIAS" (2020) directed by Shalini Kantayya

Required Readings:

Farrell, Henry. 2012. "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 15(1):35–52. doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-030810-110815.

Karell, Daniel, Andrew Linke, Edward Holland, and Edward Hendrickson. 2023. "'Born for a Storm': Hard-Right Social Media and Civil Unrest." *American Sociological Review* 88(2):322–49. doi: 10.1177/00031224231156190.

Recommended readings:

Week 11 (November 7th & November 9th): Populism, Authoritarianism and Digital Repression

Required Readings:

Deibert, Ron. 2015. "Authoritarianism Goes Global: Cyberspace Under Siege." *Journal of Democracy* 26(3):64–78. doi: 10.1353/jod.2015.0051.

Recommended readings:

MacKinnon, Rebecca. 2011. Liberation Technology: China's "Networked Authoritarianism". Plattner, Marc F., and Larry Diamond. 2012. *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Week 12 (November 14th & November 16th): The Presentation of Self, Social Media and Networked Communication

Required Readings:

Brensinger, Jordan, and Gil Eyal. 2021. "The Sociology of Personal Identification." *Sociological Theory* 39(4):265–92. doi: 10.1177/07352751211055771.

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears. 2006. "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades." *American Sociological Review* 71(3):353–75.

Recommended readings:

Boero, Natalie, and C. J. Pascoe. 2012. "Pro-Anorexia Communities and Online Interaction: Bringing the Pro-Ana Body Online." *Body & Society* 18(2):27–57. doi: 10.1177/1357034X12440827.

Diamant-Cohen, Alon, and Oren Golan. 2017. "Downloading Culture: Community Building in a Decentralized File-Sharing Collective." *Information, Communication & Society* 20(11):1737–55. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1244275.

Goode, Joanna. 2010. "The Digital Identity Divide: How Technology Knowledge Impacts College Students." *New Media & Society* 12(3):497–513. doi: 10.1177/1461444809343560.

Grindstaff, Laura, and Gabriella Torres Valencia. 2021. "The Filtered Self: Selfies and Gendered Media Production." *Information, Communication & Society* 24(5):733–50. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2021.1874480.

Murthy, Dhiraj. 2012. "Towards a Sociological Understanding of Social Media: Theorizing Twitter." *Sociology* 46(6):1059–73.

Rettie, Ruth. 2009a. "Mobile Phone Communication: Extending Goffman to Mediated Interaction." *Sociology* 43(3):421–38.

Rettie, Ruth. 2009b. "SMS: EXPLOITING THE INTERACTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NEAR-SYNCHRONY." *Information, Communication & Society* 12(8):1131–48. doi: 10.1080/13691180902786943.

Sanders, Rachel. 2017. "Self-Tracking in the Digital Era: Biopower, Patriarchy, and the New Biometric Body Projects." *Body & Society* 23(1):36–63. doi: 10.1177/1357034X16660366.

Week 13 (November 21st & November 23rd): Social interaction/Relationships

<u>**Guest lecture: Emma Brion**</u>

<u>**Required readings:**</u>

Potarca, Gina, and Jennifer Hook. 2023. "Does Online Dating Challenge Gendered Divisions of Household Labor?" *Social Forces*. doi: 10.1093/sf/soad080.

Rosenfeld, Michael J., and Reuben J. Thomas. 2012. "Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary." *American Sociological Review* 77(4):523–47.

<u>**Recommended readings:**</u>

Klinenberg, Eric. 2012. "Facebook Isn't Making Us Lonely." *Slate*, April 19. https://slate.com/human-interest/2012/04/is-facebook-making-us-lonely-no-the-atlantic-cover-story-is-wrong.html

Marche, Stephen. 2012. "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" *The Atlantic*. Retrieved June 22, 2023 (https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/).

Preston, Kayla, Michael Halpin, and Finlay Maguire. 2021. "The Black Pill: New Technology and the Male Supremacy of Involuntarily Celibate Men." *Men and Masculinities* 24(5):823–41. doi: 10.1177/1097184X211017954.

Week 14 (November 28th): Inequalities and Technology

Note that we will not have class on Thursday, November 30th, as the University is using it as a makeup day (follow Monday's schedule)

<u>**Required Readings:**</u>

Bender, Emily M., and Alex Hanna. 2023. "AI Causes Real Harm. Let's Focus on That over the End-of-Humanity Hype." *Scientific American*. Retrieved August 14, 2023 (https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/we-need-to-focus-on-ais-real-harms-not-imaginary-existential-risks/).

Joyce, Kelly, Laurel Smith-Doerr, Sharla Alegria, Susan Bell, Taylor Cruz, Steve G. Hoffman, Safiya Umoja Noble, and Benjamin Shestakofsky. 2021. "Toward a Sociology of Artificial Intelligence: A Call for Research on Inequalities and Structural Change." *Socius* 7:2378023121999581. doi: 10.1177/2378023121999581.

<u>**Recommended readings:**</u>

Cruz, Taylor M. 2020. "Perils of Data-Driven Equity: Safety-Net Care and Big Data's Elusive Grasp on Health Inequality." *Big Data & Society* 7(1):2053951720928097. doi: 10.1177/2053951720928097.

Halford, Susan, and Mike Savage. 2010. "RECONCEPTUALIZING DIGITAL SOCIAL INEQUALITY." *Information, Communication & Society* 13(7):937–55. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2010.499956.

Hargittai E. and Dobransky K. 2017. "Old Dogs, New Clicks: Digital Inequality in Skills and Uses among Older Adults." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42(2):195–212. doi: 10.22230/cjc.2017v42n2a3176.

van Deursen, Alexander JAM, and Jan AGM van Dijk. 2019. "The First-Level Digital Divide Shifts from Inequalities in Physical Access to Inequalities in Material Access." *New Media & Society* 21(2):354–75. doi: 10.1177/1461444818797082.

Week 15 (Tuesday, December 5th): Ethics and Technology

Recommended readings:

Burrell, Jenna, and Marion Fourcade. 2021. "The Society of Algorithms." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1):213–37. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-090820-020800.