

Jacob H. Erickson, M.A.

Ph.D. Candidate – Sociology

Interviewed by: Lindsay John Bell

He can recall the moment clearly. He had just finished his thesis at Wichita State University when a well-respected, yet often hard-to-please professor complimented Jacob on his work. That vote of confidence was enough to convince him to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology, focusing his research on deviant identity and decision-making processes.



Jacob has always been interested in ideas on morality and research on deviance seemed to be a natural fit with that interest. While his original research interests were to better understand who gets to define “crime,” he has recently been focusing on how social structure informs identity construction and decision making among drug users and dealers. Jacob believes his work can help to elucidate the ways in which deviants construct an identity around their behaviors which encourages persistence in those criminal behaviors.

Jacob hopes to become a professor at an R1 institution where he can teach and continue to conduct research and publish his work. Jacob has enjoyed his time at Iowa State University, where he believes it has a small town feel with the resources of a large university. The aspiring scholar graduated high school with a far different future in mind. He spent some time playing football as a defensive end at a small liberal arts college where he was studying to become a high school history teacher. An overly aggressive coach and an ongoing passion for sociology redirected Jacob onto his current path.

If you ask Jacob, Star Trek is better than Star Wars, and Captain Picard is clearly superior to Captain Kirk. If you do not agree, you can probably find Jacob at one of his favorite hangout spots – Café B., the Mucky Duck, or Torrent Brewing – to debate him. If you want to learn more about Jacob’s research, invite him to Fuji, where he will gladly enjoy a sushi roll and discuss the merits of his work.

Jacob believes that people make decisions and behave in a certain way because of how they see themselves. He points to broader social constructions as forces that inform people’s identity. He thinks that his research can provide a more effective means to help those who are the most susceptible to a life of drug abuse. He wants to build a better society through the creation of stronger social support mechanisms that can keep people from becoming criminalized.

“Sociology is a tool to understand ‘that which is hidden,’ and allows for us to do something from that knowledge.” – Jacob, on the value of studying Sociology

Lindsay John Bell

Ph.D. Candidate in History. I study the expansion of the state during the First World War and how it influenced the construction of baseball's hero ethos. Twitter - @LindsayJohnBell