ADAM KOTANKO

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SCHOLARLY PROFILE

I am a sociologist of morality, identity, and inequality who studies how people and institutions create, maintain, and transform moral boundaries around belonging and social worth. My current research examines moral ambassadors—people whose transformative experiences lead them to advocate for stigmatized groups. Using in-depth interviews, ethnography, and textual analysis, I connect social-psychological questions about identity and stigma to inequality, religion, social movements, and collective action.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Sociology, Purdue University, Expected May 2027
Dissertation: "We're Trying to Humanize Humans": Moral Ambassadors and the Boundaries of Moral Worth.

- Conducted and analyzed 76 in-depth life-history interviews with individuals navigating moral boundaries, stigma, and identity transformation.

M.S. Sociology, Purdue University, Spring 2020
Analytic Project: "Becoming Active Allies: The Moral Career of the Social Movement Ally."

- Conducted 10 in-depth interviews and two years of ethnographic fieldwork at an immigration clinic.

M.A. Communication Studies, Andrews University, Spring 2014
Thesis: "Becoming Khaled Said: A Burkean Rhetorical Analysis of Network Society Project Identity as Applied to the Origin of Egypt's 'We are all Khaled Said' Facebook Movement."

- Conducted content analysis of "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook page.

B.A. Journalism and Spanish Studies, Andrews University, Spring 2008 (*summa cum laude*).

PUBLICATIONS

Kotanko, Adam. 2025. "'Doing It for Yourself': Collective Action at a Personalist Blended Social Movement Organization." *Socius* 11. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231251369150

Kotanko, Adam, and Daniel Winchester. 2025. "Making a Martyr?: Scandal, Symbolic Power, and the Controversial Death of Evangelical Missionary John Chau." *Qualitative Sociology* 48(3):381–411. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-025-09593-1

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Purdue University (2020–Present)

Introductory Sociology (in-person and asynchronous online).

- Introduced students to sociological theories of solidarity, inequality, and modernity while helping them use theory to make sense of their social worlds.

Sociological Theory (in-person and synchronous online).

- Engaged students in conversation with classical and contemporary sociological perspectives and helped them apply and critically evaluate theories.

Social Problems (asynchronous online).

- Developed a theory-centered course framework and textbook concept that organizes social problems around analytical perspectives rather than substantive areas.

Intermediate Spanish (in-person).

Southwestern Michigan College (August 2012–May 2017)
Human Communication.
Introductory Composition.
ESL Grammar and Writing.
ESL Reading.
ESL Civics.

Indiana University South Bend (August 2013–December 2013)
Public Speaking.
Business Communication.

Universidad Adventista de Chile (August–December 2008)
English for Engineers and Business Majors.

TEACHING INTERESTS

Methodological Courses
Introduction to Research Methods.
Qualitative Methods (including in-depth interviewing, ethnography, and content analysis).

Core Courses
Introduction to Sociology.
Sociological Theory.
Social Problems.
Social Psychology.

Substantive Courses
Race and Ethnicity.
Social Movements and Collective Action.
Inequality and Social Stratification.
Urban Sociology / Sociology of Space, Place, and Belonging.
Crime, Deviance, Criminalization, and Social Control.
Digital Sociology / Digital Belonging.
Sociology of Law.
Cultural Sociology.
Sociology of Religion.
Gender and Sexuality.
Sociology of Morality.
Sociology of Emotions.

PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT, AWARDS, AND ASSISTANTSHIPS

Curriculum Development

Social Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives, 3rd ed. Edited by Wesley Longhofer and Daniel Winchester. New York: Routledge, 2023.

- Curated and created teaching materials and contributed to revisions for the third edition of a widely used social theory reader and accompanying website.

Introduction to Research Methods (developed for 2021; canceled during COVID-19 transition).

- Designed a course focusing on methods as ways of connecting questions about the social world with empirical evidence through survey and qualitative projects.

Training and Awards

ASA Preconference Meeting: Charting a Path Amid Uncertainty: Teaching Sociology in Times of Austerity, Backlash, Technological Change, and Political Polarization (2025)

Purdue University Teaching Academy Graduate Teaching Award (2022)

Seminar in Teaching Sociology, Purdue University (2020)

TESOL Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, Andrews University, 2014.

Teaching Assistantships

Sociological Theory.
Sociology of Law.
Religion in America.
SCLA 102: General education course on critical thinking and great readings.
Introductory Sociology.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Kotanko, Adam. "'The Shitty Human Being Test': Mapping Empathetic Identification."

- Manuscript in preparation.

Kotanko, Adam. "Conceptualizing Transcendent Framing in the Islamic State's English Language Magazine *Rumiyah."*

- Article in development.

Kotanko, Adam. "Epistemic Responsibility in Human-AI Qualitative Research."

- Project in development; planned dissertation appendix and article.

FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AND AWARDS

Bilsland Dissertation Fellowship, Purdue University, 2026–2027.

- Fellowship supporting dissertation research and writing.

PROMISE Grant, Purdue University, 2020

- Funding to attend the University of Texas at Austin Ethnography Summer School; admitted to the program, which was cancelled due to COVID-19.

PROMISE Grant, Purdue University, 2019

- Travel funding to present at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Annual Meeting.

PROMISE Grant, Purdue University, 2018

- Funding for research equipment and project expenses.

RESEARCH TRAINING AND EXPERTISE

Formal Methods Training

Qualitative Research Methods*,* Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2019 (ICPSR Summer Program)

- Training in qualitative research design, coding and analysis, memo writing, MAXQDA, interviewing, and major qualitative analytic traditions.

Core Theoretical Themes

Collective Action, Culture, and Social Transformation.
Inequality, Stigma, and Social Stratification.
Morality, Identity, and Social Boundaries.

Substantive Areas

Race and Ethnicity.
Social Movements and Collective Action.
Inequality and Social Stratification.
Urban Sociology, Space, and Place.
Social Psychology.
Crime, Deviance, Criminalization, and Social Control.
Sociology of Religion.
Gender and Sexuality.

Methodological Approaches

Participant observation and ethnography.
Narrative, rhetorical, and textual analysis.
In-depth interviewing (including life-history interviews).

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

American Sociological Association Conference

Kotanko, Adam. 2022. "Becoming Active Allies: The Moral Career of the Social Movement Ally" (Roundtable).

Kotanko, Adam. 2021. "'The Shitty Human Being Test': Mapping Empathetic Identification" (Section Presentation, Virtual).

Kotanko, Adam. 2020. "The Strength of Weak Collective Identity: Identity Verification in a Midwestern Immigration Clinic." (Roundtable, Virtual).

Association for the Sociology of Religion Conference

Kotanko, Adam. 2021. "Interpretation and Sacrifice in Missionary Death."

Kotanko, Adam. 2019. "Stories of Ordinariness: Evangelical Missionaries' Redemption Stories as Cultural Meaning-making Tools."

Kotanko, Adam. 2018. "Conceptualizing Transcendent Framing in the Islamic State's English Language Magazine *Rumiyah."*

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Conference

Kotanko, Adam. 2019. "The Stickiness of Weak Identity: Identity Convergence and Identity Hubs."

Michigan Sociological Association Conference

Karwacinski, Barbara, and Adam Kotanko. 2016. "Student Well-Being Matters: The Influence of Student-Teacher Relationships on Identity Formation."

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

Purdue University Research Assistantships

Elizabeth Hoffmann. Organized and compiled data on media depictions of German-Americans and socialist leaders during World War I and on lactation legislation in light of the Affordable Care Act (January–May 2019).

Daniel Winchester. Collected and analyzed data from books by Evangelical Christian missiologists and missionaries (June 2018–December 2019).

Spencer Headworth. Compiled data on state welfare fraud departments and residential segregation in the United States (January–April 2018).

Andrews University

Participated in an archaeological excavation in Hesban, Jordan, as a photographer and square supervisor (2007).

SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING

Department of Sociology Assistantship. Assisted with department recruitment and communication (August 2021–December 2021).

Undergraduate Committee, Department of Sociology at Purdue University (2021).

Graduate Instructor Peer Mentoring

- Shared teaching materials and course-development resources with graduate student instructors.
- Supported peers in course design and teaching practices.

Volunteer English Teacher, Universidad Adventista de Chile (August 2008–December 2009).

- Designed newsletter for the dorms.
- Created audiovisual material to promote the university.

NONACADEMIC WORK

Development Assistant, Adventist Frontier Missions (January 2012–August 2017).

- Ran queries in The Raiser's Edge and communicated with donors.
- Created a social media plan and wrote scripts for and edited promotional videos.
- Translated publications from English to Spanish.

Logistics Manager, Maranatha Volunteers International, Malawi/Mozambique (May 2010–December 2010).

- Managed construction teams in Malawi and Mozambique.
- Provided logistical support to the project.
- Shot and edited video for a monthly television show.

Script Writer, Editor, and Translator, Maranatha Volunteers International (July 2009–March 2010).

- Wrote and edited scripts, created graphics, and translated content for a television program.

Writer and Editor, Andrews University Media Education Center (Summer 2006–Fall 2007).

- Filmed, wrote, and edited a documentary film about street children in Bolivia.

LANGUAGES

English (native).
Spanish (fluent).