

SOC220

SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

Syllabus

Thomas Davidson

Spring 2021

CONTACT AND LOGISTICS

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Meetings: Asynchronous lectures with optional synchronous discussions.

Office hours: Tuesday 4-5pm or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the sociology of culture. We will begin by discussing how sociologists have defined “culture” its impact behavior and social interactions. We will then cover an array of different topics including the relationships between culture and class, politics, occupations, markets, as well as cultural change and subcultures. Students will develop a knowledge of different sociological theories and findings in the domain of culture. Students will be assessed based on participation in online discussions, three short exams, and a final paper where students apply their knowledge of the sociology of culture to a topic of their choice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will

- Be familiar with the concepts and theories sociologists have developed to understand culture
- Understand how social scientists use these theories and concepts in conjunction with empirical evidence to study culture
- Distinguish between cultural explanations and other types of sociological arguments
- Apply what they have learned to conduct their own cultural analyses

ASSESSMENT

Participation (10%) Students are expected to participate in online discussion forums. Each week one or more students will be assigned to create a discussion post based on the week’s readings. These discussion forums will allow students to discuss the materials covered in the readings and lecture recordings.

Online exams (45%) There will be *three* online exams over the course of the semester, each worth 15% of the final grade. These exams are be designed to ensure that students are familiar with key concepts covered

in the course. The exams will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true or false, and short answer questions. The exams will not be cumulative.

Final paper (45%) Students will write a final paper on a topic of their choice following consultation with Professor Davidson. The paper must relate to the materials discussed in class. It could consist of a comparison between different theories or an application of theories covered in class to a new cultural domain.

READINGS

Students are required to read the assigned readings each week. All readings will be uploaded to Canvas, students do not need to purchase any texts.

COURSE POLICIES

Diversity and inclusion

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. This class will be a space for tolerance, respect, and mutual dialogue.

Code of conduct

Students must abide by the Code of Student Conduct at all times, including during lectures and in participation online.

Academic integrity

All students must abide by the university's Academic Integrity Policy. Violations of academic integrity will result in disciplinary action.

Students with disabilities

In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, please contact me during the first week of classes. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services and must provide verification of their eligibility for such accommodations.

COVID-19

I will also be making additional accommodations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you or your family are affected in any way that impedes your ability to participate in this course, please contact me as soon as you can so that we can make necessary arrangements.

COURSE OUTLINE

This outline is tentative and subject to change.

Week 1

Introduction to the sociology of culture

Readings

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books. (excerpts)
- Berezin, Mabel. 2015. "Sociology of Culture" In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 617–21.

Recommended

- Alexander, Jeffrey, and Philip Smith. 2001. "The Strong Program in Cultural Theory: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics." In *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, 135–150. Springer.

Week 2

Towards a sociology of meaning

Readings

- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51 (April): 273–86.
- Swidler, Ann, and Iddo Tavory. 2009. "Condom Semiotics: Meaning and Condom Use in Rural Malawi." *American Sociological Review* 74 (2): 171–89.

Recommended

- Rawlings, Craig M., and Clayton Childress. 2019. "Emergent Meanings: Reconciling Dispositional and Situational Accounts of Meaning-Making from Cultural Objects." *American Journal of Sociology* 124 (6): 1763–1809. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703203>.

Week 3

Culture and behavior

Readings

- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (6): 1675–1715.
- Srivastava, Sameer B., Amir Goldberg, V. Govind Manian, and Christopher Potts. 2018. "Enculturation Trajectories: Language, Cultural Adaptation, and Individual Outcomes in Organizations." *Management Science* 64 (3): 1348–64. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2671>.

Week 4

Culture and social context

Readings

- Fine, Gary Alan. 1979. "Small Groups and Culture Creation: The Idioculture of Little League Baseball Teams." *American Sociological Review* 44 (5): 733. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094525>.
- Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in Interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (4): 735–94. <https://doi.org/10.1086/367920>.

Recommended

- Cerulo, Karen A. 2018. "Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution." *American Sociological Review* 83 (2): 361–89.

Week 5

Culture and class

Readings

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press. (excerpts)
- Kozlowski, Austin C., Matt Taddy, and James A. Evans. 2019. "The Geometry of Culture: Analyzing the Meanings of Class through Word Embeddings." *American Sociological Review*, September, 000312241987713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419877135>.

Week 6

Culture and politics

Readings

- Berezin, Mabel. 1997. "Politics and Culture: A Less Fissured Terrain." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1): 361–383.
- Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2019. "What Makes a Symbol Far Right? Co-Opted and Missed Meanings in Far-Right Iconography."

Week 7

Cultural occupations

Readings

- Faulkner, Robert R., and Andy B. Anderson. 1987. "Short-Term Projects and Emergent Careers: Evidence from Hollywood." *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (4): 879–909.
- Uzzi, Brian, and Jarrett Spiro. 2005. "Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem." *American Journal of Sociology* 111 (2): 447–504. <https://doi.org/10.1086/432782>.

Exam 1

Week 8

Cultural markets

Readings

- Salganik, Matthew J., Peter Sheridan Dodds, and Duncan J. Watts. 2006. "Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market." *Science Reports* 311: 854–56.
- Askin, Noah, and Michael Mausekapp. 2017. "What Makes Popular Culture Popular? Product Features and Optimal Differentiation in Music." *American Sociological Review* 82 (5): 910–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417728662>.

Week 9

Culture and values

Readings

- Zelizer, Viviana. 1981. "The Price and Value of Children: The Case of Children's Insurance." *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (5): 1036–56.

Week 10

Culture and conflict

Readings

- Huntington, Samuel P. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3): 22–49.
- Axelrod, Robert. 1997. "The Dissemination of Culture: A Model with Local Convergence and Global Polarization." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (2): 203–226.

Final paper proposal due

Week 11

Cultural change

Readings

- Kiley, Kevin, and Stephen Vaisey. 2020. "Measuring Stability and Change in Personal Culture Using Panel Data." *American Sociological Review*, 30.

Week 12

Culture, race, and authenticity

Guest lecture from Ali Chaudhary

Readings

- Grazian, David. 2005. *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*. University of Chicago Press. (excerpts)

Week 13

Culture and networks

Readings

- Schwarz, Ori, and Guy Shani. 2016. "Culture in Mediated Interaction: Political Defriending on Facebook and the Limits of Networked Individualism." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 4 (3): 385–421. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-016-0006-6>.
- DellaPosta, Daniel, Yongren Shi, and Michael Macy. 2015. "Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes?" *American Journal of Sociology* 120 (5): 1473–1511. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681254>.

Exam 2

Week 14

Subcultures

Readings

- Hebdige, Dick. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge. (excerpts)

Study period

Final paper due (date to be announced).