

Sociology 491:02
Fall 2009
M4:10-6:50

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Seminar in the Sociology of Culture

Once the province of anthropologists, the study of culture has increasingly become an integral part of sociological inquiry. This course considers how “culture” -- symbolic objects, social practices, belief systems, and classificatory systems -- are constitutive elements of social life and important sites of (and vehicles for) political contestation. We will survey major theoretical approaches to cultural sociology and assess the links and influences among them, and examine the ways sociologists and others research culture. Sociologists try to understand how culture is produced, circulated and consumed. They work in a variety of different fields (education, historical sociology, social movements, gender, and many others) and study a wide array of different “things” --religious beliefs, fashion, advertising, television talk shows, school practices, social movement narratives, sexual discourses, war memorials, novels, genealogy, architecture, political theater, self-help books, psychological discourse, scientific knowledge, and more. And they use a variety of different methodological approaches, including ethnography, interviews, historical archival, discourse analysis, and others. In this course, we will try to gain an understanding of what sociologists of culture do.

The course is divided into two parts. The first part explores some of the foundations of contemporary cultural sociology, looking at its lineages in classical and contemporary theory, including Durkheim, Freud, Marx, Weber, de Saussure and Foucault. How does each theoretical tradition conceive of culture? What are the commonalities and differences among them? The second part of the course focuses on selected empirical streams in the sociology of culture, including media consumption, symbolic boundaries, cultural production, narratives and social movements, and trauma and memory, to see how sociologists actually go about studying different forms of culture. A theme that runs throughout the course is the importance of individualism and therapeutic culture in late modern Western societies-- the concern of Eva Illouz’s *Saving the Modern Soul*, which we will read at different points during the semester. We will also devote considerable attention to the cultural construction of gender and sexuality. The course assumes some prior acquaintance with classical and contemporary sociological theory. Lectures will be kept to a minimum and class participation will be a central part of the course. Students will take an active part in the seminar, and will be responsible for leading at least one seminar discussion.

REQUIREMENTS

1) Participation/ Weekly Questions (40% of grade)

You are expected to attend class, read carefully and participate actively in discussion each week. On the basis of the readings, you will develop at least three analytic question that you will upload to sakai the day before class (Sunday) by noon. Everyone should read each other’s questions before class. You are exempt from this assignment if you are responsible for the week’s class presentation.

2) **Class Discussion Leader** (10% of grade)

Each student will be expected to help me lead at least one discussion during the semester. As a co-facilitator, your job is to critically introduce the material, discuss some key themes that emerge in the readings, offer a critique or appreciation of the reading(s), and put forth 4-5 well crafted questions for class discussion (which should be posted on Sakai by Saturday 6pm). Feel free to show how the articles/book reflects the themes of the course, drawing links with previous readings, discussions where appropriate. Do not summarize the readings.

3) **Paper or Research Proposal** (50% of grade)

Students taking the course for credit are expected to submit a 20-page paper on a topic related to this course. The paper can be analytical, critically reflecting on a substantive issue related to the sociology of culture. Or you may choose to write a research proposal, drawing on theoretical perspectives and existing empirical work to identify an interesting research question. In order to get approval for your topic, you must submit a 2-3 page memo describing your project, complete with a brief bibliography by **October 26**. At this time you should make an appointment to discuss this paper with me further—if you have not already spoken with me about it. Students will present their research in progress in class on **November 23**. These presentations are an opportunity to share your work with the class and to receive feedback on your project. **Final paper is due December 14**. No incomplete grades will be given.

Required books (available at Livingston Bookstore):

Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (Vintage 1990)

Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back* (Chicago, 1998)

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Routledge 1981)

Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (California 2008)

Lyn Spillman, ed. *Cultural Sociology* (Blackwell 2002) (CS)

**All other readings are posted on the course website at <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/> in the “resources” folder unless otherwise noted.

Readings are subject to change.

Sept. 8. Introductions.

“Culture,” in *New Keywords*, ed. Tony Bennett, L. Grossberg, Meaghan Morris (Wiley 2005)

Sept. 14. Sociology and the Study of Culture

What is culture? What does it have to do with sociology? How has it been studied? What are some of the important debates in the field?

L. Spillman, ed. *Cultural Sociology*, Introduction

E. Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, Introduction

J. Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back*, Introduction

D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Introduction

Part I: THEORETICAL LINEAGES

Sept 21. Culture, Values, Cohesion

Key terms: norms, values, functionalism, internalization, socialization, cohesion, solidarity, consensus, social systems, individualism

E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1997). Introduction, Origins of these Beliefs, The Negative Cult and its Functions; Conclusion

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=587580>

S. Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," excerpt

<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/freud-civ.html>

E. Shils, "Center and Periphery" (CS)

R. Bellah, et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, excerpt.

K. Cerulo, "Social Relations, Core Values, and the Polyphony of the American Experience," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 23, No. 2, June 2008

D. Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology," *American Sociological Review*, 1961, Vol. 26, No. 2.

Recommended:

K. Cerulo, *Never Saw it Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst*

Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*

T. Parsons and E. Shils, "Values and Social Systems," in S. Seidman and J. Alexander, eds. *Culture and Society*

A. Stein, *The Stranger Next Door*

Sept. 28. No class.

****A preliminary statement of your research project is due October 1. Email a short project description to me. Be as specific as possible and include citations to a few key reference works. If you are undecided about your focus, send ideas for two possible projects.**

Oct. 5. Culture, Domination and Inequality

Key Terms: class, ideology, base, superstructure, culture industry, mass culture, hegemony, domination, cultural capital, reproduction

R. Williams, "Base and Superstructure" (CS)

M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (CS)

P. Bourdieu, "Cultural Power" (CS)

P. Willis, *Learning to Labour*, excerpt.

S. Bordo, "Hunger as Ideology," in J. Schor and D. Holt, *The Consumer Society Reader*

Recommended:

J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

K. Gramsci, "Culture and Ideological Hegemony"

K. Marx, *The German Ideology*, in Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton 1978), Part I.

Oct. 12. Culture, Signification, Symbolic Structures

Key Terms: sign, signifier, signified, semiotics, style, subculture, Birmingham School

F. de Saussure, "Signs and Language," in J. Alexander and S. Seidman, eds, *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* (Cambridge 1990).

R. Barthes, "Written Clothing" p. 3-18 in *The Fashion System*

http://books.google.com/books?id=jvpwygg9i3UC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0

D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, selections.

Oct. 19. Culture, Discourse, Power

Key terms: discourse, knowledge, power, normalization, repressive hypothesis, representation

M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, selections

E. Said, *Orientalism*, excerpt

Recommended:

J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*

Oct. 26. Culture in Interaction

Key terms: civilizing, emotions, emotion work, feeling rules, identities, performance, authenticity

N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1*, excerpt.

E. Illouz, "From Homo Economicus to Homo Communicans," ch. 3 in *Saving the Modern Soul*

A. Hochschild, Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, Social Structure, *American Journal of*

Sociology, 85 (1979), 551-75.

K. Martin, "Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (August 1998), 494-511.

D. Grazian, *Blue Chicago* (Chicago 2005), excerpts.

Recommended:

H. Becker, "Becoming a Marijuana User," *American Journal of Sociology*, 1953, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 235-242.

N. Eliasoph, "Close to Home: The Work of Avoiding Politics" (CS)

N. Eliasoph and P. Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction"

E. Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,

G. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (CS)

A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Apr., 1986), pp. 273-286

Part II. EMPIRICAL STREAMS

Nov. 2. Media, Consumption and Meaning-making

Key terms: audiences, reception, oppositional readings

J. Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back*

Recommended:

L. Gelder, ed. *The Subcultures Reader*

M. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media and Queer Visibility in Rural America*

S. Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*

R. Lembo, *Thinking Through Television*

A. Press, *Women Watching Television*

J. Radway, *Reading the Romance*

**** By November 7th, email all class members with a brief overview of your final project and questions regarding your research. Are you looking for sources and need suggestions? Are you encountering problems not easily resolved? Now is the time to seek advice. On Nov. 9 everyone will briefly discuss their projects in class.**

Nov. 9. Symbolic Boundaries and Exclusion

Key terms: boundaries, distinctions, cultural capital, habitus, high/low culture

E. Zerubavel, "The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life" (CS)

P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, selection (on high culture)

M. Gladwell, "The Cool Hunt," from *The New Yorker*, March 17, 1997

http://www.gladwell.com/1997/1997_03_17_a_cool.htm

M. Lamont, "Symbolic Boundaries and Status" (CS)

A. Lareau, "Invisible Inequality" *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 5 (Oct 2002), 746-776.

Recommended:

- A. Bryson, "Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes" (CS)
- B. Mary Douglas, "Symbolic Pollution"
- M. Lamont, Or "Most of My Friends are Refined"
- Leslie McCall, "Does gender fit? Bourdieu, Feminism, and Conceptions of Social Order," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 6: 837-68 (1992).
- C. Nippert-Eng, "Boundary Work: Sculpting Home and Work" (CS)
- D. Swartz, "Culture and Power: the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu"

Nov. 16. Markets, Institutions, Economic Transformations

Key terms: organizational structures, capital, art worlds, postmodernism, reflexivity, globalization

- P. DiMaggio, "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture" (CS)
- R. Peterson, "Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music" (CS)
- H. Becker, "Art Worlds" (CS)
- F. Jameson, "Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (CS)
- A. Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 1990 2(2):1-24.

Recommended:

- C. Calhoun and R. Sennett, eds. *Practicing Culture*
- M. Davis, *City of Quartz*, excerpt.
- W. Griswold, "American Character and the American Novel" (CS)
- D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*
- A. Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*

Nov. 23. INTERLUDE. Presentations of work in progress

Nov. 30. Narratives, Publics, Social Change

Key terms: narrative, expertise, publics, credibility, political culture, frames, identities, identity politics, shame

- F. Polletta, "It Was Like a Fever: Narrative and Identity in Social Protest," *Social Problems* 45 (May 1998):137-59.
- S. Epstein, "The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials," *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Autumn 1995.

- N. Illouz, "The Tyranny of Intimacy," ch. 4 in *Saving the Modern Soul*

A. Stein, "Revenge of the Shamed: The Christian Right's Emotional Culture War," in *Passionate Politics*, ed. J. Goodwin, J. Jasper, F. Polletta (Chicago 2001).

N. Berezin, "Cultural Form and Political Meaning: State-Subsidized Theatre, Ideology, and the Language of Style in Fascist Italy" (CS)

A. Mische and P. Pattison, "Composing a Civic Arena: Publics, Projects, and Social Settings," *Poetics* 27 (2000) 163-194

Recommended:

M. Darnovsky, et al, *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*

S. Epstein, *Impure Science*

A. Mische, *Partisan Publics*

J. Goodwin, J. Jasper, and F. Polletta, eds. *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*

P. Lichterman, "The Search for Political Community" (CS)

A. Stein, "Sisters and Queers: The Decentering of Lesbian Feminism," M. Darnovsky et al, *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*

A. Stein, "Whose Memories? Whose Victimhood?" in A. Stein, *Shameless*.

Dec. 7. Trauma, Memory, Commemoration

Key terms: trauma, collective memory, commemoration, tourists, kitsch, nostalgia, diaspora, haunting

R. Wagner-Pacifici and B. Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past" (CS)

E. Ilouz, "Triumphant Suffering," ch. 5 in *Saving the Modern Soul*

K. Hackstaff, "Turning Points For Aging Genealogists: Claiming Identities And Histories In Time," *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, April 2009.

G. Cho, "Introduction: The Fabric of Erasure," *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minnesota, 2008).

M. Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Duke, 2007), excerpt.

Recommended:

J. Alexander, et al, eds. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*

S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*

A. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*

O. Fassin & R. Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma*

M. Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*

J. Prager, *Presenting the Past: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Mis-Remembering*

A. Stein, "Trauma and Origins: Post-Holocaust Genealogists and the Work of Memory"

R. Waynryb, "The Holocaust as Unspeakable: Public Ritual Versus Private Hell," *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1999.

***** Final papers due: December 12**