CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY
920: 571/703:01

Professor Karen A. Cerulo, Department of Sociology

Tuesday – 1:00PM-3:40PM
Davison Hall Seminar Room—Rm. 127

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Office Hours: Tuesday: 3:45-4:45PM … and by appointment

OBJECTIVES

Welcome to Cultural Sociology, one of the most vibrant and steadily growing subfields in sociology! This course is designed to familiarize you with the field and review the various perspectives and approaches within it.

We begin the course by asking: What is culture? The question may seem straightforward, but there is enormous variety in how scholars identify the concept of culture and its components. The same is true for the scholars who theorize and measure culture and we will discuss these varying ideas. Most importantly, we will ask: How does culture apply? By doing so, we can explore ways to productively use cultural sociology in sociological research more generally, making it relevant in fields that may not currently consider culture a core building block in research.

By examining a wide variety of approaches to cultural sociology, you will get a sense of the most important theorists, questions and debates driving the field. While the course will attend to the theoretical roots of the field, I will prioritize contemporary works to help familiarize you with the current pulse of this exciting and ever-changing subfield.

BOOKS

All readings for this course will be posted on Sakai or available on the web (link included in the syllabus). To access Sakai readings:

- Go to https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal and log in. Our course site, identified by our course number, should immediately pop up as one of your Sakai locations.
- Look at the bar on the left side of the screen and click on “Resources.”
- Look for the reading using the author’s last name. If I use an author more than once, I’ll have name and topic listed.

Note: If you have trouble accessing the Sakai site, please contact them at sakai@rutgers.edu or 848.445.8721. Sakai Help Desk representatives are available Monday through Friday 8:00AM-6:00PM. Limited evening, night, and weekend coverage is also provided by NBCS Operations Staff outside of our help desk hours. Anything that the Operations Staff cannot answer is forwarded to OIRT Staff.
CLASS ENVIRONMENT

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. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

Knowing this, our classroom should be considered a “safe place” for everyone. Students are encouraged to engage in discussion and debate related to the readings and topics scheduled for the class provided that one’s views are not intended to provoke, insult, or damage another member of the class or the instructor. To facilitate such an environment, all of us (students and instructor) must act with mutual respect and common courtesy.

Some additional things to note:

- All reading and comments must be completed prior to class. Our classes revolve around discussion. Therefore, familiarity with the material is essential.
- We are here to constructively support one another. Please take care to refrain from cruel, thoughtless or sarcastic feedback in your written or oral comments. Think of it this way … you do not enjoy thoughtless feedback, so don’t give it to others.

LEARNING GOALS

In this course, you will:

- Master various definitions and theories of culture
- Become familiar with different ways of measuring culture
- Consider ways to apply culture in sociological explanations
- Consider the ways in which cultural sociology intersects with other sociological subfields and other disciplines

ACHIEVING THE LEARNING GOALS—DESIGN OF THE CLASS

There are several requirements for the course:

1) Read the works assigned for the course. All reading and comments must be completed prior to class. Our classes revolve around discussion. Therefore, familiarity with the material is essential.

2) Each week, you must produce a 1-2 page typed, double-spaced reaction to the readings. The assignment should briefly summarize the themes of the readings and the debates the readings raise; you should also share your critiques of the readings and provide one or two questions that you will raise in class discussion. Your comments must be emailed to me by Monday at noon—again, please be on time. If you are taking the course for credit, this portion of the course will account for 20% of your grade.

Achieving the Learning Goals, on the next page
Achieving the Learning Goals, con’t

3) Each class will have an “applications” portion. Over the course of the semester, each student is expected to lead a class discussion on that week’s application reading. If you are taking the course for credit, this portion of the course will account for 20% of your grade.

4) You are expected to attend every class and fully participate in class discussions of the paper. If you are taking the course for credit, this portion of the course will account for 10% of your grade.

5) Each student must propose a research topic and write a research proposal. The topic may be in any substantive area, but the project must utilize theories/concepts from the course.

The proposal should follow this structure:

   a) State your topic and unfold its relevance to cultural sociology. What contemporary themes does your question address … what gaps in the literature does it fill … what puzzles does it solve? (This section should be about 2-3 pages in length)

   b) Discuss 6-10 relevant articles or books that inform your topic of inquiry. You may use readings we have covered in class or create a list of readings on your own. (This section of your proposal should be about 6-10 pages in length.)

   c) Explain the method you will use to study your topic—i.e. interviews, focus groups, survey method, content analysis, ethnography, etc. Explain how you will execute the project. I will be especially impressed if you can identify a viable funding source for your project. (This section should be about 2-4 pages in length)

   d) Provide a reference list at the end of your proposal.

Overall, you can see that your final product will be about 10-18 pages in length. If you are taking the course for credit, this portion of the course will account for 50% of your grade.
CLASS SCHEDULE

MTG. 1/JAN. 22: Introduction to the Class

First, we’ll do some “bookkeeping”: review the syllabus, schedule presentations, etc. Then, we will discuss some basic definitions of culture and familiarize ourselves with different types of culture: nondeclarative or “know how” culture, declarative or “know that” culture (both of which are elements of personal culture), and public culture which includes codes, contexts, and institutions.

Assignment:

✓ Make sure you are registered on the Sakai site. If you cannot access the site, please contact Sakai personnel at sakai@rutgers.edu or 848.445.8721. Sakai Help Desk representatives are available Monday through Friday 8:00AM-6:00PM.

Read the following two articles for our first meeting:


Lizardo, Omar. 2017. “Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in Its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes.” American Sociological Review 82(1): Read pages 88-100 only. (This article provides a new approach—one around which I will organize the course.)

Oh … one more thing:

✓ Friday is my birthday. Make sure to tell me how youthful I look.

Topic I: Personal Culture

MTG. 2/JAN. 29: Nondeclarative Culture—“Know How” or Procedural Knowledge

Personal Culture has two elements: nondeclarative culture and declarative culture. Nondeclarative culture is akin to procedural knowledge—that is, the skills and “know how” we acquire from our experiences. To fully understand nondeclarative culture, we have to consider the role of cognition and embodied experience in its acquisition. Today, we will explore some of the works that bring these ideas alive.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


Applications:

MTG 3/FEB. 5: Components of Nondeclarative Culture: Schemas and Distributed Cognition

What constitutes nondeclarative culture? Two answers to this question routinely emerge: schemas and distributed cognition. In this class, we will review definitions of schema and distributed cognition and then examine ways in which cultural sociologists apply these concepts in research.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


Applications:


MTG 4/FEB. 12: Declarative Culture—“Know That” Knowledge or Discursive Consciousness

Declarative culture is a component of personal culture as well; it builds on what Giddens calls “discursive consciousness”—the things that people are able to verbally express about the social world around them. The primary symbolic medium via which persons “declare” culture is spoken or written language. However, non-linguistic symbolic systems (e.g., image, sound, smell, etc.) are part of declarative culture as well.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


Applications:

**Topic II: Relationship between the Elements of Personal Culture**

**MTG. 5--FEB. 19: The Interaction between Nondeclarative and Declarative Culture: Dual Process Models**

The two elements of personal culture—nondeclarative and declarative knowledge—have been central to contemporary theories of culture. In such theories, a number of debates arise. Does nondeclarative culture, as some suggest, dominate meaning-making and subsequent behavior? Or, as competing works suggest, is there an interaction or simultaneity between nondeclarative and declarative culture in meaning-making and behavior? What role does social context play in the dominance of one cultural type versus the interaction or simultaneous operation of both types of personal culture? And when both declarative and non-declarative processes occur, what are the implications for meaning-making and behavior?

**Assignment:**

Read *(in this order)*:


**Applications:**


**Topic III: Public Culture**

**MTG. 6—FEB. 26: What is Public Culture?**

*Public Culture* is culture externalized in the form of public symbols and codes, frames and narratives, and institutions. In the first half of this class, we will review the definition of the concept. In the second half of the class, we will review work addressing the elements of culture.

**Assignment:**

Read *(in this order)*:


Assignment continued on the next page
**Application:**


**MTG. 7—MAR 5:** Individual Meetings: Talking through your proposals

**Topic IV: The Relationship between Personal and Public Culture**

**MTG. 8—MAR 12: Public Culture and Nondeclarative Culture**

*The thing that is so important about the Cultural Triangle is that it lets us view the elements of culture relationally. Today, we look at work devoted to the relationship between Public Culture and Nondecalarative Culture.*

**Assignment:**

Read *(in this order):*


**Applications:**


**Cut Loose—Spring Break!**

**MTG. 9—MAR 26: Public Culture and Declarative Culture**

*Today, we look at work devoted to the relationship between Public Culture and Declarative Culture.*

Read *(in this order):*


**Assignment continued on the next page**
Applications


MTG 10—APR. 2: Applying the Cultural Triangle in Its Totality

The Cultural Triangle presents us with multiple elements of culture. Is it possible to simultaneously apply all of these elements in analysis? Today’s readings represent people who have taken a stab at just that.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


Applications:


Topic 5: Measuring Culture

MTG. 11—APR 9: Measuring Culture

Culture is multifaceted and, often, difficult to capture. Today, we look at some very diverse ideas on how one goes about measuring it.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


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Assignment, con’t


Ging, Debbie, and Sarah Garvey. 2018. "‘Written in These Scars are the Stories I Can’t Explain’: A Content Analysis of Pro-ana and Thinspiration Image Sharing on Instagram." New Media & Society 20(3):1181-1200.

No Applications this week.

**Topic 6: Production and Reception**

**MTG 12—APR. 16: The Production and Reception of Culture**

*Much has been written on the organizations that produce culture, the collectives that receive and interpret it, and the patterns of cultural production and reception. Today, we explore a selection of this very large literature.*

**Assignment:**

*Read (in this order):*


**Applications**


**MTG 13—APR. 23: Producing What? Cultural Objects and Materialism**

*Today, we look at literature analyzing the substance of cultural objects.*

**Assignment:**

*Read (in this order):*


Assignment continued on the next page.
Assignment, con’t


Application


MTG 14—APR. 30: Culture in Action

How does culture and the context in which it resides enable or constrain action? Today’s articles are a sampling of the literature addressing this question.

Assignment:

Read (in this order):


Application