

SOC901 – The Sociology of Culture

Spring 2022

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Office Hours: Wednesday, 4:00-6:00pm, 8111 Sewell Social Science

Seminars: Monday, 3:45-6:15pm, 6314 Sewell Social Science

Credit Hours: 2-3

Course Description and Objectives

Sociologists have long studied culture and cultural processes, and the roots of cultural sociology (a phrase we will use interchangeably with the sociology of culture) extend back to the classical social theory of Emile Durkheim, Antonio Gramsci, W.E.B. DuBois, or Margaret Mead. But the last three decades have seen a flowering of scholarship in this area. What is culture made up of, and how can it be measured? How does it enter people's action and interaction? How is the meaning and worth of cultural objects constructed? How does culture change over time? This course offers an overview of recent theoretical debates and empirical advances in the sociology of culture, providing an opportunity to engage questions like these through substantively and methodologically diverse accounts of cultural phenomena. Because the concept of culture is so wide-ranging in its applications, our overview will necessarily be limited in its scope. A particularly active area of research in recent cultural sociology is the study of how cultural processes enter the production, reproduction, and legitimation of inequality in social life. In the later part of the course, we will turn our focus to how the analytical toolbox of cultural sociology has been brought to bear on these issues. Throughout, our focus will be on exploring key questions, concepts, and frameworks – and seeing them in action – so that they can later help you with your own research agenda.

Course Style and Format

The course is a discussion-based seminar, and as such participation and dialogue are essential. In each session, I will briefly set the stage by providing some context for the readings. We will then move on to a guided discussion of these readings. To facilitate participation in discussions, you will write short reaction memos ahead of each session (see below). When engaging in collective class discussions or peer-mentorship, listen carefully and courteously, respond respectfully, treat

others as you would like to be treated. Remember that the course structure means that your level of commitment will largely determine the course's success and the quality of your learning experience.

Course Requirements

Assessment for this class will be as follows:

Participation. I expect you to do the assigned readings, attend class regularly, and participate actively.

Memos. Ahead of each session, you will submit a one- to two-page, single-spaced memo. These memos are a chance for you to consolidate your thoughts on the readings, so please don't use the space for summaries. Instead, try to make connection between readings or sessions, to identify their divergences and similitudes, and to discuss their limitations, implications, or potential applications in further research. Memos are due by noon on the Sunday preceding our Monday session and will be submitted through Canvas. No memo is due for week 1, though I expect you to do the reading for this week!

Individual Research Project. You will learn cultural sociology in large part by *doing* cultural sociology in a project of yours. Depending on your advancement in the graduate program, your project will be a case study or case study proposal, based on your research interests. It will apply the concepts and approaches we covered in the course to analyze your case and reflect on the purchase and limitations of these approaches and concepts for making sense of it. Case studies, as opposed to case study proposals, will further make empirical material bear on your analysis.

By Week 8, you will submit a short project plan that will (1) provide a description and justification of your case, (2) identify and discuss the concepts and frameworks that might apply, (3) explain your research question and strategy, and (4) present a short, tentative bibliography. Week 8 will consist of a peer-mentoring session in which we will collectively workshop your pre-posted project plans. You will be expected to provide constructive feedback based on the course material and aimed at generating both theoretical and practical suggestions for your peers. In the semester's last two weeks, you will report back to class on your projects through 10- to 15-minute presentations. This will give you a final opportunity to receive feedback before submitting the paper based on your project by the end of our final week. The grade for your individual research project will be based on this paper. The final draft of the paper is due on Monday, May 9.

Grading. The grading structure for this course will be roughly as follows: 20% participation in seminar discussions and peer-mentorship; 30% weekly memos; 50% individual research project.

Reading Materials

Readings will be available from our Canvas page. Because culture is such a vast sociological sub-field, in any week there are many other readings I could have selected. My selection often focuses on readings published in the field's leading journals, as they tend to be foundational or

particularly well executed. If you are particularly interested in a specific topic or type of reading, please let me know and I will point you to more readings.

Citizenship

You are expected to show good citizenship in the classroom. When engaging in collective class discussions or peer-mentorship, listen carefully and courteously, respond respectfully, treat others as you would like to be treated.

Technology Policy

Please turn off your cell phone and store it during class. When using a laptop, please use it only for note-taking or consulting electronic copies of our readings.

Weekly Schedule¹

Week 1 (Mon. 01/31) – Introduction: Why Study Culture?

- Sewell, William H. 1999. “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in Victoria Bonnell and Lynn E. Hunt (eds.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 35-61.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *American Sociological Review* 51: 273-286.
- Lamont, Michèle, Stefan Beljean, and Matthew Clair. 2014. “What is Missing? Cultural Processes and Causal Pathways to Inequality.” *Socioeconomic Review* 12: 573-608.

Week 2 (Mon. 02/07) – Culture and Social Behavior

- Pattillo, Mary. 1998. “Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community.” *American Sociological Review* 63: 767-784.
- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. “Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114: 1675-1715.
- Jerolmack, Colin, and Shamus Khan. 2014. “Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy.” *Sociological Methods and Research* 43: 178-209.
- Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. “Culture in Interaction.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 735-794.
- Becker, Howard S. 1953. “Becoming a Marihuana User.” *American Journal of Sociology* 59: 235-242.

Week 3 (Mon. 02/14) – Elements of Culture: Frames, Schemas, Narratives, Understandings

- Paul DiMaggio. 1997. “Culture and Cognition.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 263-287.
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 2003. “Resonance and Radicalism: Feminist Framing in the Abortion Debate in the United States and Germany.” *American Journal of Sociology* 109: 304-44.
- Fligstein, Neil, Jonah Stuart Brundage, Michael Schultz. 2017. “Seeing Like the Fed: Culture, Cognition, and Framing in the Failure to Anticipate the Financial Crisis of 2008.” *American Sociological Review* 82: 879-909.
- Frye, Margaret. 2017. “Cultural Meanings and the Aggregation of Action: the Case of Sex and Schooling in Malawi.” *American Sociological Review* 82: 945-976.
- Boutilyne, Andrei, and Laura K. Soter. 2021. “Cultural Schemas: What They Are, How to Find Them, and What to Do Once You’ve Caught One.” *American Sociological Review* 86: 728-758.

¹ The schedule and readings are subject to modification to allow for flexibility in the specific content and timing of the course.

- Goldberg, Amir. 2011. "Mapping Shared Understandings Using Relational Class Analysis: The Case of the Cultural Omnivore Reexamined." *American Journal of Sociology* 116: 1397-1436.

Week 4 (Mon. 02/21) – Measuring Culture

- Jepperson, Ronald and Ann Swidler. 1994. "What Properties of Culture Should We Measure?" *Poetics* 22: 350-371.
- John W. Mohr, Christopher A. Bail, Margaret Frye, Jennifer C. Lena, Omar Lizardo, Terence E. McDonnell, Ann Mische, Iddo Tavory, and Frederick F. Wherry. 2021. *Measuring Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press. "Pivots and Choices in the Process of Research," pp. 120-143.
- Hunzaker, M. B. Fallin, and Lauren Valentino. 2019. "Mapping Cultural Schemas: From Theory to Method." *American Sociological Review* 84: 950-981.
- 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* 84: 905-949.
- Bail, Christopher. 2014. "The Cultural Environment: Measuring Culture with Big Data." *Theory & Society* 43: 465-482.

Week 5 (Mon. 02/28) – The Production and Reception of Culture: Social Worlds and Meaning-Making

- Becker, Howard. 1974. "Art as Collective Action." *American Sociological Review* 39: 767-776.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press. "The Field of Cultural Production, or the Economic World Reversed.", pp. 29-73.
- Griswold, Wendy. 1987. "The Fabrication of Meaning: Literary Interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies." *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 1077-1117.
- Cerulo, Karen A. 2018. "Scents and Sensibility: Olfaction, Sense-Making, and Meaning Attribution." *American Sociological Review* 83: 361-389.
- 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: 1763-1809.

Week 6 (Mon. 03/07) – Cultural Change

- Kaufman, Jason, and Orlando Patterson. 2005. "Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket." *American Sociological Review* 70: 82-110.
- Hunzaker, M. B. Fallin. 2016. "Cultural Sentiments and Schema-Consistency Bias in Information Transmission." *American Sociological Review* 81: 1223-1250.
- Hallett, Tim, Michael Sauder, and Orla Stapleton. 2019. "Public Ideas: Their Varieties and Career." *American Sociological Review* 84: 545-576.

- DellaPosta, Daniel. 2020. "Pluralistic Collapse: The 'Oil Spill' Model of Mass Opinion Polarization." *American Sociological Review* 85: 507-536.
- Kiley, Kevin, and Stephen Vaisey. 2020. "Measuring Stability and Change in Personal Culture Using Panel Data." *American Sociological Review* 85: 477-506.

Week 7 (Mon. 03/14) – No Class this Week (Spring Break)

Week 8 (Mon. 03/21) – Peer-Mentoring Session

This week, we will start collectively workshopping your projects in a peer-mentoring session. You will provide live feedback on each other's pre-posted project plans, with the hope that your projects can also grow from their exposure to one another. You should frame your comments as constructive feedback based on your understanding of the course material, and aimed at generating theoretical ideas and/or practical suggestions for your peers.

Week 9 (Mon. 03/28) – Symbolic Boundaries and Categories

- Lamont, Michèle, and Virág Molnár. 2002. "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167-195.
- Brubaker, Rogers, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov. 2004. "Ethnicity as Cognition." *Theory & Society*, 33: 31-64.
- Bail, Christopher A. 2008. "The Configuration of Symbolic Boundaries Against Immigrants in Europe." *American Sociological Review* 73: 37-59.
- Goldberg, Amir, Michael T. Hannan and Balázs Kovács. 2016. "What Does it Mean to Span Cultural Boundaries? Variety and Atypicality in Cultural Consumption." *American Sociological Review* 81: 215-241.

Week 10 (Mon. 04/04) – Worth, Valuation, and Evaluation

- Fourcade, Marion. 2011. "Cents and Sensibility: Economic Valuation and the Nature of 'Nature'." *American Journal of Sociology*, 116: 1721-1777.
- Rivera, Lauren A., and András Tilcsik. 2019. "Scaling Down Inequality: Rating Scales, Gender Bias, and the Architecture of Evaluation." *American Sociological Review* 84: 248-274.
- Musto, Michela. 2019. "Brilliant or Bad: The Gendered Social Construction of Exceptionalism in Early Adolescence." *American Sociological Review* 84: 369-393.
- Correll, Shelley J., Cecilia L. Ridgeway, and Ezra W. Zuckerman. 2017. "It's the Conventional Thought that Counts: How Third-Order Inference Produces Status Advantage." *American Sociological Review* 82: 297-327.
- Gidron, Noam, and Peter A. Hall. 2017. "The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68: 57-84.

Week 11 (Mon. 04/11) – *Cultural Capital: Tastes, Reproduction, and Legitimacy*

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987 [1979]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. “Introduction,” pp. 1-7; “Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles,” pp. 165-222.
- Rivera, Lauren. 2012. “Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms.” *American Sociological Review* 77: 999-1022.
- Accominotti, Fabien, Shamus R. Khan, and Adam Storer. 2018. “How Cultural Capital Emerged in Gilded Age America: Musical Purification and Cross-Class Inclusion at the New York Philharmonic.” *American Journal of Sociology* 123: 1743-1783.
- Hahl, Oliver, Ezra W. Zuckerman, and Minjae Kim. 2017. “Why Elites Love Authentic Lowbrow Culture: Overcoming High-Status Denigration with Outsider Art.” *American Sociological Review* 82: 828-856.
- Lizardo, Omar. 2006. “How Cultural Tastes Shape Personal Networks.” *American Sociological Review* 71: 778-807.

Week 12 (Mon. 04/18) – *Rituals, Hierarchy, and Inequality*

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991[1982]. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press. “Rites of Institution,” pp. 117-128.
- Martin, John Levi. 2000. “What Do Animals Do All Day? The Division of Labor, Class Bodies, and Totemic Thinking in the Popular Imagination.” *Poetics* 27: 195-231.
- Lynn, Freda B. and George Ellerbach. 2017. “A Position with a View: Educational Status and the Construction of the Occupational Hierarchy.” *American Sociological Review* 82: 32–58.
- Espeland, Wendy N., and Michael Sauder. 2007. “Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds.” *American Journal of Sociology* 113: 1–40.
- Accominotti, Fabien. 2021. “Consecration as a Population-Level Phenomenon.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 65: 9-24.

Week 13 (Mon. 04/25) – *In-class Project Presentations (1)*

Week 14 (Mon. 05/02) – *In-class Project Presentations (2)*